

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 1 Lecture

Ezra 1 - 3

- Who wrote Ezra and Nehemiah?
 - Scholars do not agree on this topic.
 - There are 3 main theories:
 - Ezra and Nehemiah each authored their own book.
 - Ezra wrote both books.
 - The author of 1 and 2 Chronicles wrote both books. He is referred to as “the Chronicler”, as his name is unknown.
 - There is good evidence to suggest that Ezra and Nehemiah each authored portions of their own book.
 - In his commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, H. G. M. Williamson labels the primary content of the 2 books as “the Ezra Memoir” and “the Nehemiah Memoir.”
 - Ezra was written in both Hebrew and Aramaic.
 - Nehemiah was written in Hebrew.
 - The lists of the exiles who returned to Judah, as recounted in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, would be redundant if they were the work of 1 author.
 - Scholarly analysis of the books also indicates the hands of editors on both books, possibly creating Ezra 1-6, which relates the story of the exiles prior to Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem and adding material to Nehemiah as well (Nehemiah 9 and 10).
 - There appear to be at least 3 editorial efforts on the 2 books, and this has created some disharmony among the lists and the arrival / overlap of the key figures Ezra and Nehemiah.
- When were the books written?
 - Just as there is disagreement over the authorship of the 2 books, so is there also disagreement on the date(s) of their creation.

- The traditional view is that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 458 BC. His memoir is dated circa 440 BC.
- The traditional view is that Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 BC and his memoir is dated circa 430 BC.
- In the earliest Hebrew texts, Ezra and Nehemiah were combined into 1 book circa 400 BC.
- Williamson dates the later editorial additions to the books to circa 300 BC.
- What are the themes of Ezra?
 - First, we see the clear indication of the religious tolerance practiced by the Persians, beginning with the founder of their empire, Cyrus the Great.
 - God is faithful to his word and keeps his promises.
 - God is in control of history.
 - These 3 themes are readily evident with Ezra 1:1-4 and Ezra 6:1-11.
 - God moved the heart of Cyrus the Great to permit the Jews to return home to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple.
 - God's word in Jeremiah 25: 11-12 and Jeremiah 29:10 stated that the Jews would be in exile in Babylon for 70 years and then God would bring them home to Judah.
 - Jeremiah 25:11-12: This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever."
 - Jeremiah 29:10: This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place."
 - Isaiah 44:28 states that God will use Cyrus as his shepherd to rebuild Jerusalem and lay the foundations to his Temple.
 - Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."

- Cyrus recognizes that Yahweh is the God of heaven, the Creator God, who is the God of his chosen people, the Israelites.
 - The term “God of heaven” occurs 9 times in the Old Testament and always refers to Yahweh.
 - The Persians also used this term to refer to their god, Ahura Mazda.
 - In Ezra 1:1-4, it is clear that Cyrus is referring to Yahweh.
- The Israelites deserve a place to worship their God in Jerusalem.
- God directs Darius’ heart (Ezra 6:1-11) to permit the rebuilding of the Temple to continue and to provide resources for the work.
- Other themes throughout the book include:
 - God is a just God who must punish sin.
 - God shows grace and love to his people, even when they sin.
 - God has not abandoned his people and will not do so.
- Let’s focus next on a few other key points in Ezra 1 – 3.
 - Ezra 1:5 says, “Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.”
 - The words “everyone whose heart God had moved” is key. This phrase demonstrates that God, who was in control of history, was also in control of the hearts of the Jews, just as he was in control of Cyrus’ heart.
 - Ezra 1:6 says, “All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.”
 - Certainly, we can expect that those Jews who did not want to return to Jerusalem would have contributed these items.
 - It is also possible that, just as the Egyptians gave the Jews material items on their way out of Egypt, some Persians contributed to the Jews on their way out of Persia.

- Important names and people groups we should note:
 - Ezra 1:8 mentions that Cyrus' treasurer, Mithredath, counted out the Temple goods to Shesbazzar the prince of Judah.
 - The title "prince" used here comes from a Hebrew word which can be translated as either prince or chief.
 - Ezra 5:14 tells us later that Cyrus made Shesbazzar the governor of Judah.
 - In Ezra 2:2, we see listed Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, and Seraiah.
 - According to Haggai 1:1, Zerubbabel, grandson of Shealtiel, was the governor of Judah after Sheshbazzar.
 - Both Shealtiel and Zerubbabel are listed as descendants of David in 1 Chronicles 3:17-19 and in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27. Shealtiel was the son of Jehoiachin, the king of Judah taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and kept imprisoned there for 37 years before being released from prison by the Babylonian king Awel-Marduk.
 - The Temple rebuilt at the command of Cyrus is often referred to as Zerubbabel's Temple.
 - Joshua/Jeshua was the grandson of the last officiating high priest prior to the exile. Zechariah 3:1-10 tells us that Joshua was selected as the first high priest after the return from the exile.
 - Nehemiah, as we shall study, was appointed governor to Judah by Artaxerxes.
 - Seraiah was Ezra's ancestor. 2 Kings 25:18-21 tells us that Seraiah, the high priest of Judah, was executed by Nebuchadnezzar. The Seraiah listed in Ezra 2:2 is a likely descendant.
 - Ezra 2:42 mentions that the gatekeepers of the Temple returned.
 - The gatekeepers were responsible for ensuring the ritual purity and protection of the Temple as noted in the following verses:
 - He also stationed gatekeepers at the gates of the LORD's temple so that no one who was in any way unclean might enter. 2 Chronicles 23:19

- But the four principal gatekeepers, who were Levites, were entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. ²⁷ They would spend the night stationed around the house of God, because they had to guard it; and they had charge of the key for opening it each morning. 1 Chronicles 9:26-27
- We should not overlook Ezra 3:2.
 - Then Joshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, **in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.**
 - Failing to follow God’s laws and commands resulted in the exile. The exiles who returned wanted a clean slate in obeying God.
- Ezra 3:3 indicates the returning Jews feared the peoples around them.
 - During the exile, the people groups who lived in Judah were both Jews (“the poorest of the poor” of 2 Kings 25:12) and non-Jews.
 - In 550 BC the Nabatean Arabs had begun subjugating the Edomites.
 - The Ammonites were still in existence and had a caretaker governor installed by the Persian kings.
 - We will see in Ezra 4 that the exiles’ neighbors included people groups transplanted into the Northern Kingdom by the king of Assyria after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. These are the predecessors of the Samaritans of the New Testament.
- Ezra 3:4 tells us that the exiles celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths after the new Temple altar had been erected.
 - The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the 3 most important religious festivals for the Jews, along with Passover and the Day of Atonement.
 - The Feast of Tabernacles was a thanksgiving festival which showed gratitude for God’s provisions and Leviticus 23:40 tells us that this was the only Jewish festival in which the Jews were commanded to rejoice in the Lord.
 - Certainly, the exiles had much to be thankful for before God.

- The building of the 2nd Temple parallels the building of Solomon's Temple in several ways.
 - Both Temples were built from the cedar trees of Lebanon. Cedar wood is naturally resistant to decay, insects, and fungi.
 - Construction on both temples began in the 2nd month of the Jewish year (April-May).
 - Stonecutters and carpenters were engaged for building.
 - After Solomon's Temple was built and the foundation of the second Temple was laid, there was a joyous celebration.

- Ezra 3:12 gives us these words:
 - But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.
 - Certainly there was great joy when the foundation of the 2nd Temple was laid.
 - Why did some weep?
 - Haggai 2:2-3 gives us some insight.
 - Ask them, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?'
 - In his Ezra and Nehemiah commentary, Charles Fensham suggests that the blocks used to build the 2nd Temple were smaller in size and far less impressive than those used in Solomon's Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had burned completely.

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 1

Ezra 1 - 3

**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for
Isaiah 40:1-2**

1. Read Ezra 1:1-4, 2 Chronicles 36:20-23, and 2 Kings 25: 3-12.
 - a. Ezra 1:2-4 is called The Edict of Cyrus. What are the key points of this edict?
 - God gave all the kingdoms of earth to Cyrus, king of Persia.
 - God appointed Cyrus to build a temple to God in Jerusalem.
 - Any of God's people who wanted to return to Jerusalem to build the temple could do so.
 - The survivors, wherever they live, should provide the returning Jews with silver, gold, goods, livestock, and freewill offerings for the temple.
 - b. What credit does Cyrus give to God?
God has given all the kingdoms of earth to Cyrus.
 - c. Based on your reading of the edict, do you believe that Cyrus worshipped God? Why or why not?
No. Cyrus refers to Yahweh as the God who is in Jerusalem and their God, meaning the God of the Jews. To Cyrus, Yahweh is just another god.
 - d. From the passage from 2 Kings 25, what was the physical state of Judah?
 - The city wall had been destroyed.
 - All buildings in Jerusalem had been destroyed by fire.
 - Only the poorest people were left in Judah to tend to the vineyards and the fields.

- e. Understanding the physical state of Judah and the contents of the edict, what do you think might be missing from the edict? What problems might this cause?
 - Building houses
 - Repairing the wall
 - The returning Jews would have no place to live.
 - The broken city wall would make the people easy prey for warring neighbors and thieves.
- f. The 2 Chronicles 36 passage references the land having its “Sabbath rest.” How does Leviticus 25:4 add context?
 - But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards Leviticus 25:4
- g. What would a Sabbath rest do for the land in Judah?
 - With only the poorest of the poor left in Judah to tend the fields and vineyards, most of the land would have been left fallow, with nothing planted and very little harvesting. The 67+ years in exile would have given the land time to recover from repeated plantings and harvestings which can strip nutrients from the soil.

2. Read Ezra 1:5-11.

- a. Which people went back to Judah?
 - Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. Ezra 1:5
- b. Did all the Jews return to Judah?
 - No. Ezra 1:6 indicates some neighbors gave them items for the journey and for the Temple.
- c. What did the people take with them to Judah?
 - All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. Ezra 1:6

- d. What did King Cyrus of Persia give to the Jews to take to Judah?
- Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. ⁸ Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.
⁹ This was the inventory:
gold dishes — 30
silver dishes — 1,000
silver pans — 29
¹⁰ gold bowls — 30
matching silver bowls — 410
other articles — 1,000
¹¹ In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Ezra 1:7-11

3. Read Ezra 2:1-58. What types of people returned to Judah?

- Descendants of people from Judah
- Priests
- Levites
- Musicians
- Gatekeepers of the Temple
- Temple servants
- Descendants of the servants of Solomon

4. Reread 2 Kings 25:12. How do you think this group of people reacted to the people of Judah who returned from Babylon?

The poor people who had been left behind in Judah may have had mixed reactions to the returning exiles. They might have been angry at having been left behind. They might have been grateful that the returning Jews were there with money to live in Judah and rebuild the Temple.

5. Read Ezra 2: 59-63.

- a. What is unusual about this group of people?
 - And from among the priests: The descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name). ⁶² These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ⁶³ The governor ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there was a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim. Ezra 2:61-63
 - They did not have family records to prove their lineages.
- b. From what Jewish line would someone have to prove descendency to serve as a priest? (Hint: see Numbers 3:10 and Numbers 16:39-40.)

Aaron
- c. What was the purpose of the Urim and Thummim? (See Exodus 28:30.)
 - Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD. Exodus 28:30
 - The Urim and Thummim were sacred stones used in casting lots to display God's answer to problems/questions.
- d. How might the Urim and Thummim help with this group of people?

When the lots were cast with the Urim and Thummim, the decision was "yes", then these descendants could serve as priests.
- e. What is the difference between a Jewish priest and a Levite? (See Numbers 1:50 as an example.)
 - Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law —over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. Numbers 1:50
 - The Levites were descendants of Jacob's son Levi. Aaron, Moses' brother, was a Levite, as was Moses. All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests, only those descended from Aaron.
 - The Levites performed Temple duties.

6. From Ezra 2:64-66, how many people in total returned?
The whole company numbered 42,360, ⁶⁵ besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers. ⁶⁶ They had 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷ 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys. Ezra 2:64-67
7. Read Ezra 2:68-70.
- What was the first act of the heads of the returning families?
They gave freewill offerings for rebuilding the Temple.
 - Estimate how much gold and silver was given to the treasury.
 - (1 drachma was about 4.3 grams. 70 drachmas made 1 mina.)
 - 61,000 darics of gold (or 61,000 gold drachmas) would be the equivalent to about 578 pounds of gold.
 - 5,000 minas of silver would be equivalent to 3318 pounds of silver.
 - What else was given to the treasury?
 - 100 priestly garments
 - Where did the returning people groups settle?
 - The priests, the Levites, the musicians, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns. Ezra 2:70
8. Read Ezra 3: 1-6.
- How much time elapsed before the people began work on the Temple?
They began to rebuild the Temple in the 7th month of the year of their return, about 3 months after their arrival, circa 537 BC. (The Edict of Cyrus dates to 538 BC.)
 - What was the first thing constructed? Why?
 - The first thing they constructed was the altar so that they could sacrifice burnt offerings for their sins.
 - What do you think is meant by Ezra 3:3a?
 - Despite their fear of the peoples around them Ezra 3:3a
 - The returning exiles were fearful of the people in the surrounding nations as well as the non-Jews who inhabited Judah. They were unsure about the

reaction of these people groups to the restoration of Jerusalem. Further, they had no city wall to protect them.

- d. What was the first festival celebrated in Judah by the returnees?
The Festival of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths)
- e. According to the Jewish calendar, when is this festival supposed to be celebrated?
See Numbers 29: 12-40.
On the 15th day of the 7th month
- f. What type of offerings / sacrifices were made in total?
Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles with the **required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day.** ⁵ After that, they presented **the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the LORD.** ⁶ **On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD,** though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid. Ezra 3:4-6
- g. Why was this important at this time?
The people of Judah had not been able to offer any sacrifices since the destruction of the Temple at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
- h. What does Numbers 28:1-8 tell you about the morning and evening sacrifices?
This is the food offering you are to present to the LORD: two lambs a year old without defect, as a regular burnt offering each day. ⁴ Offer one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight, ⁵ together with a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of the finest flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives. ⁶ This is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a pleasing aroma, a food offering presented to the LORD. ⁷ The accompanying drink offering is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb. Pour out the drink offering to the LORD at the sanctuary. ⁸ Offer the second lamb at twilight, along with the same kind of grain offering and drink offering that you offer in the morning. This is a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. Numbers 28:3-8
- i. Read Leviticus 1:3-17. What different types of living things could be offered as part of a burnt offering? What is unique about the burnt offering versus other offerings? (Hint: See Leviticus 6 and 7.)
- A male bull without defect
 - A male sheep or goat without defect

- A dove or a young pigeon
- The burnt offering was burned completely. For other offerings, the priests were able to eat a portion of the offering, unless it was a grain offering made by the priests, which had to be burned completely.

9. Read Ezra 3:7-13.

- What was the next phase of construction?
Building the Temple itself
- When did it start?
In the 2nd month of the second year after their arrival in Jerusalem (536 BC)
- What was one of the building materials and where did it come from?
Cedar logs from Lebanon
- Who was appointed to supervise this phase of construction?
They appointed Levites twenty years old and older to supervise the building of the house of the LORD. ⁹ Joshua and his sons and brothers and Kadmiel and his sons (descendants of Hodaviah) and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers—all Levites—joined together in supervising those working on the house of God.
Ezra 3:8-9
- What happened when the foundation was laid?
When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. ¹¹ With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: “He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.” And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.
Ezra 3:10-11
- How did the various groups of people react?
Some shouted for joy. Some of those who had seen the former Temple wept aloud.

Ezra 1 - 3



Ezra; copyright: Dura-Europos Synagogue, Syria (3rd Century AD)

Who Wrote Ezra and Nehemiah?

- Scholars Do Not Agree
- There are 3 Main Theories:
 - Ezra and Nehemiah Each Authored Their Own Book
 - Ezra Wrote Both Books
 - The Author of 1 and 2 Chronicles Wrote Book Books. He is Referred to as “the Chronicler”, as His Name is Unknown

Who Wrote Ezra and Nehemiah?

- There is Good Evidence to Suggest That Ezra and Nehemiah Each Authored Portions of Their Own Book
 - H. G. Williamson Labels the Primary Content of the 2 Books as “the Ezra Memoir” and “the Nehemiah Memoir”
 - Ezra Written in Hebrew and Aramaic
 - Nehemiah Written in Hebrew
 - The List of Exiles in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 Would Be Redundant If the Work of 1 Author

Who Wrote Ezra and Nehemiah?

- Scholarly Analysis Indicates the Hands of Editors on Both Books
 - Possibly Creating Ezra 1-6
 - Adding Material to Nehemiah (Chapters 9 and 10)
 - There Appear to be at Least 3 Editorial Efforts on the 2 Books
 - This Has Created Some Disharmony Among the Lists and the Arrival/Overlap of the Key Figures of Ezra and Nehemiah

When Were the Books Written?

- There is Disagreement on Their Creation Dates
- The Traditional View is That Ezra Arrived in Jerusalem in 458 BC. His Memoir is Dated Circa 440 BC.
- The Traditional View is That Nehemiah Arrived in Jerusalem in 445 BC. His Memoir is Dated Circa 430 BC.
- In the Earliest Hebrew Texts, Ezra and Nehemiah Were Combined Into 1 Book Circa 400 BC
- Williamson Dates the Later Editorial Additions to the Books to Circa 300 BC

What Are the Themes of Ezra?

- A Clear Indication of the Religious Tolerance Practiced by the Persians, Beginning With Cyrus the Great
- God is Faithful to His Word and Keeps His Promises
- God is in Control of History
- These 3 Themes are Evident in Ezra 1:1-4 and 6:1-11
 - God Moved the Heart of Cyrus the Great to Permit the Jews to Return Home and Rebuild the Temple
 - God's Word in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and Jeremiah 29:10 Stated That the Jews Would Be in Exile for 70 Years and Then God Would Bring Them Home to Judah

What Are the Themes of Ezra?

- Isaiah 44:28 States That God Will Use Cyrus as His Shepherd to Rebuild Jerusalem and Lay the Foundations of His Temple
- Cyrus Recognizes Yahweh as the God of Heaven, the Creator God, Who is the God of His Chosen People, the Israelites
 - The Term “God of Heaven” Occurs 9 Times in the Old Testament and Always Refers to Yahweh
 - The Persians Also Used this Term to Refer to Their God, Ahura Mazda
 - In Ezra 1:1-4, Cyrus is Referring to Yahweh

What Are the Themes of Ezra?

- The Israelites Deserve a Place to Worship Their God in Jerusalem
- God Directs Darius' Heart (Ezra 6:1-11) to Permit the Rebuilding of the Temple to Continue and To Provide Resources For the Work
- Other Themes:
 - God is a Just God Who Must Punish Sin
 - God Shows Grace and Love to His People, Even When They Sin
 - God Has Not Abandoned His People and Will Not Do So

Key Points in Ezra 1 - 3

- Ezra 1:5
 - The Words “Everyone Whose Heart God Had Moved” is Key. This Phrase Demonstrates That God Was in Control of the Hearts of the Jews, Just as He Controlled Cyrus’ Heart
- Ezra 1:6
 - Certainly, We Can Expect Those Jews Who Did Not Want to Return Would Have Contributed These Items
 - It is Also Possible, Just Like the Egyptians Gave the Jews Material Items on Their Way Out of Egypt, Some Persians Contributed to the Jews on Their Way Out of Persia

Key Points in Ezra 1 - 3

- Important Names and People Groups:
 - Ezra 1:8 Mentions That Cyrus' Treasurer, Mithredath, Counted Out the Temple Goods to Sheshbazzar the Prince of Judah
 - The Title "Prince" Used Here Comes From a Hebrew Word Which Can Be Translated as Either Prince or Chief
 - Ezra 5:14 Tells Us Later That Cyrus Made Sheshbazzar the Governor of Judah

Key Points in Ezra 1 – 3

- Important Names and People Groups:
 - Ezra 2:2 Lists Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, and Seraiah
 - Per Haggai 1:1, Zerubbabel, Grandson of Shealtiel, Was the Governor of Judah After Sheshbazzar
 - Both Shealtiel and Zerubbabel Are Listed as Descendants of David in 1 Chronicles 3:17-19 and in Jesus' Genealogy in Matthew 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27
 - Shealtiel Was the Son of Jehoiachin, King of Judah Taken Captive by Nebuchadnezzar and Kept Imprisoned in Babylon for 37 Years

Key Points in Ezra 1 – 3

- Important Names and People Groups:
 - Ezra 2:2 Lists Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, and Seraiah
 - The Rebuilt Temple is Often Referred to as Zerubbabel's Temple
 - Joshua/Jeshua Was the Grandson of the Last Officiating High Priest Prior to the Exile; Zechariah 3:1-10 Tells Us That Joshua Was the First High Priest After the Exile
 - Nehemiah Was Appointed Governor to Judah by Artaxerxes
 - Seraiah, Last High Priest of Judah, Was Ezra's Ancestor; Nebuchadnezzar Executed Him; The Seraiah Listed Here is a Likely Descendant

Key Points in Ezra 1 - 3

- Ezra 2:42 Mentions the Temple Gatekeepers
 - Responsible for Ensuring the Ritual Purity and Protection of the Temple
 - 2 Chronicles 23:19
 - 1 Chronicles 9: 26-27
- Do Not Overlook Ezra 3:2
 - Failing to Follow God's Laws and Commands Resulted in the Exile
 - The Exiles Who Returned Wanted a Clean Slate in Obeying God

Key Points in Ezra 1 - 3

- Ezra 3:3 Indicates the Jews Feared the Peoples Around Them
 - During the Exile, Both Jews and Non-Jews Lived in Judah
 - In 550 BC, the Nabatean Arabs Began Subjugating the Edomites
 - The Ammonites Still Existed and Had a Caretaker Governor Installed by the Persian Kings
 - In Ezra 4, the Exiles' Neighbors Included the People Groups Transplanted into the Northern Kingdom by the King of Assyria After 722 BC; the Predecessors of the Samaritans of the New Testament



Life in Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt

7:6; 18.11; 24.11-16; 25; Ezra 2.59; 8.17; 10.1; 11.1; 12.1; Jeremiah 29; 42-46; 52; Ezekiel 1.1-3; 3.15-21, marking the beginning of the Jewish diaspora, from the deportations of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C., the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 597, 587 and 582 B.C., and the return of the remaining population of Judah to the land of Israel after an unsuccessful uprising against the Babylonians in Mizpah in 582 B.C.

Life in the Post-Exilic Period

1:1-35; Nehemiah 3.1-32; 7.26-38
 The Persian king Cyrus II (550-529 B.C.) conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. with hardly a battle, Judah became the Persian province Yahud.
 The whole of Palestine was part of the 5th Persian satrapy (the "Euphrates River"); cf. map 19. The satrapy was divided into provinces, two of which were Samaria and Yahud.
 The capital of Samaria was Shechem, with the holy city of Gerizim. In Nehemiah's time the governor of Samaria was Sanballat, and the governor of Ammon was Tobiah. Both governors together with the provinces of Judah and Edom were opposed to Nehemiah and his plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
 Nehemiah 11.25-35 is a list of Jewish cities in Nehemiah 11.25-35, which probably reflects a different period, possibly the return of the inhabitants of the provinces to the places where the inhabitants escaped deportation in 587 B.C. The places Lod, Hadid and Ono which are mentioned in Ezra 2.33 and Nehemiah 7.37 must have been in the province of Yahud.



The Middle East in the Post-Exilic Period copyright: Holman Bible Atlas

Key Points in Ezra 1 - 3

- Ezra 3:4: the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths Was Celebrated
 - The Feast of Tabernacles Was One of the 3 Most Important Religious Festivals for the Jews, Along with Passover and the Day of Atonement
 - The Feast of Tabernacles Was a Thanksgiving Festival Which Showed Gratitude for God's Provisions
 - Leviticus 23:40 Tells Us This Was the Only Jewish Festival in Which the Jews Were Commanded to Rejoice in the Lord
 - Certainly, the Exiles Had Much to be Thankful for Before God

The 2nd Temple

- Parallels the Building of Solomon's Temple
 - Both Temples Were Built From Lebanese Cedar Trees, Which Are Naturally Resistant to Decay, Insects, and Fungi
 - Construction on Both Temples Began in the 2nd Month of the Jewish Year (April-May)
 - Stonecutters and Carpenters Were Engaged for Building
 - After Solomon's Temple Was Built and the Foundation of the Second Temple Was Laid, There Was a Joyous Celebration

The 2nd Temple

- Ezra 3:12
- Certainly, There Was Great Joy When the Foundation of the 2nd Temple Was Laid
- Why Did Some Weep
- Haggai 2:2-3
- In His Ezra/Nehemiah Commentary, Charles Fensham Suggests the Blocks Used to Build the 2nd Temple Were Smaller in Size and Less Impressive Than Those Used in Solomon's Temple

Old Testament Priests & Priesthood

- Definition: A priest is one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion, especially a mediator between man and God.” (Webster)
- The origin of dedicated priests is uncertain.
- Melchizedek, King of Salem was a priest of God (Gen. 14:18)
- Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, was priest of Midian. (Exodus 4:1)
- There were priests among the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. (Exodus 19:22, 24)
- There were false priests who served false gods:
 - Priest of Midian (Exodus 18:1)
 - Priests of On (Genesis 41:45)
 - Priests of Dagon (1 Samuel 5:5)
 - Priests of the high places (1 Kings 12:32)
 - Priests “of them that are no gods.” (2 Chronicles 13:9)
- At Mount Sinai, God designated Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests. (Exodus 28:1, 44; 30:30; 40:13-15; Numbers 3:3)
- All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.
- Only those designated could perform priestly duties.
 - Not other Levites (Numbers 16:1-3; 1-10; 10:1-3)
 - Not even Moses or his descendants (1 Chronicles 23:13)
 - Not anyone other than Aaron and his descendants (Numbers 16:40)
- QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRIESTLY SERVICE:
 - Must be a male (Exodus 28:1)
 - Must be a descendant of Aaron (Exodus 28:1) with a documented lineage.
 - Must be between 30 and 50 years old. (Numbers 4:3)
 - Must be unblemished (not lame or blond). (Lev. 21:16-23)
 - Must have a proper marriage. (Leviticus 21:9, 14)
 - Not married to a harlot.
 - Not married to a divorced woman.
 - Not married to a widow other than a priest’s widow. (Ezekiel 44:22)
 - The high priest must marry a virgin of his own people.
 - Must have no uncleanness (leprosy, etc.). (Lev. 22:3-9)



- Must have an untrimmed beard with well trimmed (but unshaved) hair. (Ezekiel 4:20; Leviticus 21:5)
- Must be properly dressed. (Exo. 28:1-4; Ezekiel 44:17-19)

■ DUTIES OF THE PRIEST

- Teach the people. (Leviticus 10:8-11)
- Serve as judges to resolve controversy. (Deut. 21:5)
- Offer sacrifices. (Exodus 29:38-42)
- Assess impurity. (Leviticus 13-15)
- Burn incense. (Exodus 30:7-8)
- Bless the people. (Numbers 6:22-27)
- Bless God (Deuteronomy 10:8)
- Keep the tabernacle. (Numbers 3:38; 4:16)
- Take care of the altar (Leviticus 6:8-13), the lamps, and the showbread (Leviticus 24:1-9)
- Prepare the holy things for each days journey. (Num. 4:5-15)
- Continue the sacred fire. (Leviticus 6:12-13)
- Blow the trumpets. (Numbers 10:1-10)

■ THE HIGH PRIESTS

- Also called the chief priest. (2 Chronicles 19:11)
- God’s leader over the priests.
- Aaron served as the first High Priest. (Exodus 40:12-13)
- Aaron’s son, Eleazer, replaced him as High Priest when he died. (Numbers 20:26-28)
- The position of high priests continued through the time of Christ (Matthew 26:3 and apparently to the time of the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.)

■ DUTIES OF THE HIGH PRIEST

- Direct the work of the priests & Levites. (Numbers 3:4)
- Inquire of the Lord. (Judges 20:28)
- Consecration of the priests. (Exodus 29:1-37)
- Maintain the golden candlestand with its fire. (Lev. 24:1-4)
- Burning incense daily (Exodus 30:7-8), and in a special way on the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16:2, 12-13)
- Offering sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. (Hebrews 5:1; Leviticus 23:6, 11, 15, 20)