

Ezra

Author

The Book of Ezra was written by Ezra. Ezra was a priest (see Nehemiah 8:2) and a scribe (Nehemiah 8:1). Some argue that Ezra, Nehemiah and 2 Chronicles were originally one book, but this view is unlikely. However, note the present Hebrew Bible treat Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Even if it was true, they were one book note Ezra 7:27-8:34 and 9:1-15 were obviously written by Ezra and Nehemiah Chapters 1, 2, 4:1-7:5, 12:27-43 and 13:4-31 by Nehemiah. This is because these passages were all written in the first person.

Date

The Book of Ezra was written approximately 450 B.C.

Background

The Jews were taken into exile in three successive stages – in roughly 605, 597 and 586 B.C. Similarly, they returned in three stages:

1. The first stage occurred under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel in about 538 B.C. This resulted in the rebuilding of the temple in about 520-516 B.C. This rebuilding was encouraged by the prophets Haggi and Zechariah.
2. The second stage of the return occurred in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I – the Persian king. This stage of the return was led by Ezra in about 458 B.C. (see Ezra 7:1 and 8).
3. Nehemiah led the final stage of the return from exile. This occurred in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, about 445 B.C. (see Nehemiah 2:1-11).

In the Book of Ezra, Ezra describes the *first two stages* of the return from exile.

The main teachings of the Book of Ezra

Here are the main teachings of the Book of Ezra:

1. The Sovereignty of God

On this key topic, the Book of Ezra teaches:

- a) God is God of heaven and earth (Ezra 5:11). This is even though his people had gone into exile as slaves of people who worshipped pagan gods.
- b) God raises up kings and grants them their authority (Ezra 1:2).
- c) God is able to stir up political leaders' hearts to do His will (Ezra 1:1).

- d) The mighty King Artaxerxes who was an absolute ruler of many conquered nations, cannot refuse the request of a lowly scribe on whom is God's powerful hand (see Ezra 7:6 and 12).
- e) Even though God's enemies try to stop His plans which are working through His people (see Ezra Chapters 4 and 5), God sovereignly has non-Israelite kings to support God's work. One of these kings even commands the enemies of God's work to pay all the expenses of God's work (see Ezra 6:6-7). Anyone who hinders the work was threatened with death (see Ezra 6:11). *God's grace* towards His people cannot be stopped by any enemy.
- f) Even though people cannot see God, He is *continually working behind the scenes*.
- g) God predicted the Jews would be 70 years in exile (see Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10). Ezra 1:1 records how God fulfilled this Word through Cyrus the Persian king. Cyrus had been even *mentioned by name* by Isaiah the prophet *about 250 years* earlier in 700 B.C. This is recorded in Isaiah 44:28-45:13. (Part of the liberal theologians attempts to split Isaiah into a number of different books is because they do not believe that God miraculously gives such predictions so long before events.)

2. The grace of God

- a) Ezra 9:6 reveals how large was the guilt of the people of Israel. Ezra 9:15 emphasises that such guilt made it impossible for the Israelites to have a righteous standing before God as Supreme Ruler and Judge.
- b) But despite this, God was still gracious to them (see Ezra 9:13).
- c) Ezra 8:22 refers to God's goodness being upon those who seek Him and His wrath upon those who forsake Him. The expression "*those who seek Him*" here does not refer to those who were perfectly obedient to the Mosaic Law.
- d) The Hebrew word "hesed" meaning "lovingkindness, grace, mercy or goodness" is used in Ezra 3:11, 7:28 and 9:9.
- e) The Hebrew word "techinnah" meaning "grace" is used in Ezra 9:8.

The emphasis on the Scriptures

The Book of Ezra has an enormous emphasis on the written Word of God and obedience to it. Refer to Ezra 3:2, 7:6 and 7:10.

This emphasis on the written Word is so great that we see in Ezra Chapters 9 and 10, the people sent away their foreign pagan wives because their original marriages had been done in disobedience to God (see Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4). This was a drastic step to take. It is possible those foreign wives had become devoted followers of God and turned from idols were not sent away.

The New Testament also teaches Christians should only marry believers (see 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). 1 Corinthians 9:5 speaks of Paul saying he and Barnabus having the right to have a *believing* wife. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 refers to people who married unbelievers before becoming believers themselves.

