

## **Ezra, Book Study**

### **Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2**

The last four books of the Hebrew canon are Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, in that order. At one time, however, Ezra and Nehemiah followed 1 and 2 Chronicles and were generally considered to be the work of one and the same author known as “the Chronicler.” In recent years, however, the question of the authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah is seen to be more complex... The combined work Ezra-Nehemiah is our most important literary source for the formation of the Jewish religious community in the province of Judah after the Babylonian exile. This is known as the period of the Restoration, and the two men most responsible for the reorganization of Jewish life at this time were Ezra and Nehemiah.

What is known of Ezra and his work is derived almost exclusively from Ezr 7–10 (the “Ezra Memoirs”) and Neh 8–9. Strictly speaking, the term “Ezra Memoirs” should be used only of that section in which Ezra speaks in the first person, i.e., Ezr 7:27–9:15. The personality of Ezra is not so well-known as that of Nehemiah. The genealogy of Ezra (7:1–5) traces his priesthood back to Aaron, brother of Moses. This was the accepted way of establishing the legality of one’s priestly office. He is also called a scribe, well-versed in the law of Moses (7:6), indicating Ezra’s dedication to the study of the Torah, which he sought to make the basic rule of life in the restored community. It was in religious and cultic reform rather than in political affairs that Ezra made his mark as a postexilic leader. Jewish tradition holds him in great esteem. The apocryphal 2 Esdras, sometimes included as an appendix to the Vulgate, where it is known as 4 Esdras, transforms him into a prophet and visionary. The Talmud regards him as a second Moses, claiming that the Torah would have been given to Israel through Ezra had not Moses preceded him.

Ezra is sometimes accused of having been a legalist who gave excessive attention to the letter of the law. His work, however, should be seen and judged within a specific historical context. He gave to his people a cohesion and spiritual unity which helped to prevent the disintegration of the small Jewish community settled in the province of Judah. Had it not been for the intransigence of Ezra and of those who adopted his ideal, it is doubtful that Judaism would have so effectively resisted Hellenism in later centuries. Ezra set the tone of the postexilic community, and it was characterized by fidelity to the Torah, Judaism’s authentic way of life. It is in this light that we can judge most fairly the work of Ezra during the Restoration.

- *Taken from the Bible Gateway.com summary introduction of Ezra, NABRE*

#### **The Book of Ezra is divided as follows:**

I. The Return from Exile (1:1–6:22)

II. The Work of Ezra (7:1–10:44)

The following list of the kings of Persia, with the dates of their reigns, will be useful for dating the events mentioned in Ezra-Nehemiah:

**Cyrus 539–530 B.C.** - Daniel was in city of Babylon during Cyrus' ascension

**Cambyses 530–522 B.C.**

**Darius I 522–486 B.C.**

**Xerxes I 486–465 B.C.** – Believed to be the King whom Queen Esther wed.

**Artaxerxes I 465–424 B.C.** – Ezra and Nehemiah were sent to Judah and Jerusalem.

**Darius II 423–404 B.C.**

**Artaxerxes II 404–358 B.C.**

**Artaxerxes III 358–337 B.C.**

**End of the Persian Empire** (Defeat of Darius III) **331 B.C.**

### **Ezra Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 with Notes:**

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:

All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

- Cyrus was a Persian king and founder of the Persian Empire; his reign lasted twenty-nine to thirty-one years. His name in Hebrew is *kurash*, which means "to bestow care". In Hebrew prophetic writings, Cyrus is featured prominently. In one instance during Cyrus reign in Babylon, Daniel fasted for three weeks, seeking understanding of a prophetic revelation he had received (see Dan. 10:1-13). Jeremiah predicted that Israel would be captive in Babylon for seventy years (see Jer. 25:11-12), then return to Israel. Cyrus was the king who fulfilled

Jeremiah's prophecy by allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and the city. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 699*

- The prophet Isaiah predicted that a man named Cyrus would be God's "shepherd" who would build Jerusalem and the temple, laying its foundation (see Isa. 44:28). Isaiah also prophesied that God would open two double gates to Cyrus and help him cut the bars of brass and iron (see Isa. 45:1-2). The amazing fact is that these predictions were made **140 years before Cyrus ascended the throne**. Isaiah's prophecy came to pass when the Persians diverted the Euphrates River into a canal, causing the water level to drop to the height of the middle of a man's thigh and allowing the Persian army to pass through the riverbed at night (source: Herodotus the historian; Herodotus, History 1.189-191, fifth century, BC). It is not impossible for God to name a king in advance, as He has the foreknowledge of all people before their births (see Jer. 1:5; Ps. 139:15-16). Note that on several occasions God named a person before he or she was born; for example: Isaac (see Gen. 17:19), John the Baptist (see Luke 1:13), and Jesus (see Luke 1:31). – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 699*
- In his book of Jewish history, Josephus records a statement made by Cyrus and reveals his understanding of the Hebraic prophet's prediction of his rule, many years prior:

"Thus saith Cyrus the king: Since God Almighty has appointed me to be king of the inhabited earth, I believe He is that God of which the nation of the Israelites worship: for indeed He fore. told my name by the prophets and that I should build an house in Jerusalem in the country of Judea." (Josephus, Antiquities, Book XI)

Josephus tells us that Cyrus understood his destiny was to assist the Jews. Cyrus had most likely come to that conclusion by reading the book of Isaiah, which had been left for the Jews in Babylon. According to Josephus, this amazing prediction about Cyrus took place 140 years before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. When Cyrus read this, he determined with great desire and ambition to seize the opportunity to fulfill what was written of him. After calling prominent Jews for advice, Cyrus gave a decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem (Josephus, Antiquities, Book XI, chapter 1). Cyrus began his military campaigns in 549 BC but did not overtake Babylon until 539 BC; he reigned for about nine years until 530 BC. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 700*

5 Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, **with all whose spirits God had moved**, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. 6 And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.

7 King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; 8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9 This is

the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, 10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. 11 All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

- The final invasion of Nebuchadnezzar had enslaved men from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, thus these two tribes, along with the priests and Levites, were the first to return to Israel and Jerusalem to help restore the temple and the city. It is amazing that King Cyrus commanded that gold, silver, and animals be given to the Jews to help finance their efforts. Cyrus also restored the temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar had seized seventy years earlier (v. 7-10). – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 699*
- The odd name *Sheshbazzar* is believed to be the Chaldean name of Zerubbabel, meaning "joy in affliction"; the Hebrew name Zerubbabel means "stranger in Babylon." When foreign nations conquered other nations, they often renamed the captured leaders and slaves after their gods. We see an example of this when the four Hebrew young men were given Babylonian names in Daniel 1:7. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 699*

**Chapter 2** Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city.

2 Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, **Nehemiah**, Seraiah, Reelaiah, **Mordecai**, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3 the people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; 4 the people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; 5 the people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five; 6 the people of Pahath-Moab, of the people of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve; 7 the people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; 8 the people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five; 9 the people of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty; 10 the people of Bani, six hundred and forty-two; 11 the people of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three; 12 the people of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two; 13 the people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six; 14 the people of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six; 15 the people of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four; 16 the people of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; 17 the people of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three; 18 the people of Jorah, one hundred and twelve; 19 the people of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three; 20 the people of Gibbar, ninety-five; 21 the people of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three; 22 the men of

Netophah, fifty-six; 23 the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight; 24 the people of Azmaveth, forty-two; 25 the people of Kirjath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three; 26 the people of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; 27 the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two; 28 the men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three; 29 the people of Nebo, fifty-two; 30 the people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six; 31 the people of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; 32 the people of Harim, three hundred and twenty; 33 the people of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five; 34 the people of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five; 35 the people of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty.

36 **The priests:** the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; 37 the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; 38 the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; 39 the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.

40 **The Levites:** the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four.

41 **The singers: the sons of Asaph,** one hundred and twenty-eight.

42 **The sons of the gatekeepers:** the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine in all.

43 The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, 44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon, 45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, 46 the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmi, the sons of Hanan, 47 the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, 48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, 49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, 50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim, 51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, 52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, 53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah, 54 the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha.

55 **The sons of Solomon's servants:** the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda, 56 the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, 57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Ami. 58 All the Nethinim and the children of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two.

59 And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel: 60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of

Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two; 61 and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. 62 These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. 63 And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. 66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

- This is a detailed list of those returning from Babylon to the cities and towns of Israel. The numbers who returned in this "Babylonian exodus" were: 42,360 from Judah and Benjamin, besides 7,337 servants and 200 male and female singers, totaling 49,897 people in all. – Perry Stone *Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 700*

68 Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: 69 **According to their ability, they gave to the treasury** for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.

- The leaders gave according to their ability. This was not equal amounts of giving *but equal sacrifice*, just as our financial gifts for the work of God today are based upon the principle of giving according to our ability (see Acts 11:29; 1 Pet. 4:11). – Perry Stone *Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 702*

70 So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.