

# Through the Bible Book by Book

## Old Testament

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### **Ezra**

#### **Introduction**

Since the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are closely connected and deal with the same period, we give here the principal events covered by those books, in order that the student may see at a glance the history of the period following the captivity.

1. The exiles return under Zerubbabel. 536 B. C.
2. The rebuilding of the temple. 535 B. C.
3. The ministry of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. 520 B. C.
4. The dedication of the temple. 515 B. C.
5. The events related in the book of Esther 478-473 B. C.
6. Ezra visits Jerusalem. 458 B. C.
7. Nehemiah sent to Jerusalem as governor. He rebuilds the wall. 446 B. C.
8. Malachi prophesies.

**Theme:** The keynote of Ezra is restoration.

A comparison with Kings and Chronicles will bear this out:

- Kings and Chronicles record Israel's destruction of the temple; the latter, its rebuilding.
- The one gives a dark picture of a nation corrupt with idolatry; the other shows us a nation completely cleansed from idol worship.
- The one records the neglect of the law; the other, its restoration to its rightful place in the hearts of the people.
- The one records the mingling of Israel with the heathen; the other, the complete separation of Israel from heathen influence and custom.

Ezra conveys a wonderful lesson of GOD's faithfulness. True to His promise (Jeremiah 29:10-14), He lifts His hand to restore His people to their land, and in so doing, He uses heathen kings:

- Cyrus,
- Darius,

- Artaxerxes

As His instruments.

**Author:** The fact that the book is written in the first person by Ezra (Chaps. 7 and 9) indicates that he was the Author: Ezra was the first of that class known as the scribes, who were the official copyists and interpreters of the Scriptures.

We read that Ezra gave himself to the study of GOD's Word with a view to expounding it to the people (7:10). To him has been attributed the work of settling the canon of the Old Testament; i.e., of gathering together into one book those writings that were inspired.

**Scope:** From the return from Babylon to the establishment in Palestine, covering a period of 79 years from about 536-457 B. C.

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I. The Return under Zerubbabel (1-6).

II. The Return under Ezra (7-10).

### I. The Return under Zerubbabel

1. Cyrus' decree (chapter 1).
2. The returning remnant (chapter 2).
3. The foundation of the temple laid and ancient worship restored (chapter 3).
4. The opposition of the Samaritans (chapters 4.5).
5. The dedication of the temple (chapter 6).

Cyrus was the Persian king who overthrew the Babylonian empire, in fulfillment of divine prophecy (Isaiah 14:22; Jeremiah 27:7; Daniel 5:28). His decree permitting the Jews' return had been foretold by Isaiah, who called Cyrus by name 200 years before the birth of the latter, referring to him as the deliverer of GOD's people and the builder of the temple (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-4). Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that Daniel showed Cyrus these prophecies, and the monarch was so affected by them and so well disposed to the captive people that he issued a decree permitting them to return to their country.

Whom did GOD use to effect the return of His people (1:1)?

Whose command did Cyrus say he was obeying (1:2)?

Where did he find this command (Isaiah 44:28)?

Which tribes returned (1:5)?

Who was their leader (1:8)?

By what other name is he known (2:2 Zerubbabel)?

How many returned at this time (2:64)?

What was the first thing the remnant did (3:1-3)?

How soon after their return was the building of the temple commenced (3:8)?

What effect did this have on the people (3:10-13)?  
Who desired to help in the building of the temple (4:2; compare II Kings 17:24-41)?  
Did the Governor accept the help of these half-heathen people?  
What did this refusal lead to (4:4)?  
How long did the enmity thus incurred last (John 4:9)?  
What active form did their opposition take at this time?  
What was the result of this opposition?  
Which two prophets encouraged the people to continue the building of the temple (5:1)?  
What made it sure that the temple would be finished (5:5)?  
What did the enemies of the Jews then do (5:7-17)?  
What was the result of this opposition (6:1-14)?  
How was the dedication of the temple celebrated (6:17)?  
How many of the tribes were represented at this time (6:17)?

## **II. The Return under Ezra**

1. Ezra's commission (7:1-28).
2. Ezra's companions in the return (ch.8).
3. Sin confessed (ch.9).
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In whose reign did Ezra return to Jerusalem?  
From whom was Ezra descended (7:5)?  
How is he described (7:6, 12)?  
What was his purpose in going to Jerusalem (7:10)?  
What commission was he given (7:25, 26)?  
With what did Ezra begin his return (8:21)?  
How did he show his absolute faith in GOD (8:22)?  
What law concerning their relations with heathen people had the Jews broken (9:1. Compare Exodus 34:15, 16; Deuteronomy 7:3)?  
What did the violation of that law always lead to (I Kings 11:4)?  
What effect did this violation of the law have on Ezra?  
What were the feelings of the people upon realizing their sin (10:1)?  
What covenant did they make with GOD? What proclamation did Ezra make (10:7)?  
How great was the conviction of the people?

Note that the action of the Jews in putting away their heathen wives and children was rather a stringent one, but it should be remembered that in the past, intermarriage with the heathen had led to sin and idolatry, and it was necessary that the tribe of Judah should remain pure for through them was to come the Messiah.

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