

Studying the Book of Ezra

Why study the Book of Ezra? The Book of Ezra describes the political, social and spiritual conditions of the people of God who returned to Jerusalem and Judah following the Babylonian captivity. The book reveals that God keeps His promises of restoring His covenant people although the conditions for these people were anything but easy or pleasant. They preserved under constant political and social pressures to accomplish that which God had intended for them.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah were likely written mostly by Ezra and completed by a later writer. The Book of Ezra describes the rebuilding of the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were used of God to exhort the returned exiles to complete the rebuilding of the temple. Following the completion of the temple in 515 BC, Ezra, who had a great understanding of the law, instituted reforms and led the people in dedicating their lives to the LORD. Zerubbabel returned in 538 BC, Ezra in 458 BC and Nehemiah in 445 BC. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were considered as one book in the Hebrew Bible and was placed before Chronicles. The text of Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26 was written in Aramaic. Also, Ezra 7:28-9:15 is written in the first- person likely indicating Ezra's intent to describe these texts as a personal journal.

Basic Outline of Ezra

The Return to Jerusalem and Judah under Zerubbabel: Chapters 1-6

The Return to Jerusalem and Judah under Ezra: Chapters 7-10

Themes of Ezra: (1) God keeps His promises of return to the land and the restoration of His people. (2) Restoration of the Covenant relationship between the repentant people and God. (3) God uses many people and situations to bring the temple rebuilding to completion.

Brief Summary of Ezra.

The Book of Ezra opens with the proclamation of Cyrus, King of Persia allowing the Jewish exiles to return to their land to rebuild the house (temple) of the LORD. Chapter 2 gives details of the first return under the leadership of Zerubbabel including the number of those who returned. Chapter 3 describes the building of the altar so that burnt offerings could be made and the reinstatement of the Feast of Booths. Also, this chapter describes the laying of the foundation of the temple. Chapter 4 recounts the opposition to the returned exiles in their rebuilding efforts by those opposed to their presence in Jerusalem. These opponents were successful in persuading king Xerxes to send a letter to have the work of rebuilding the temple halted until the king could make a definite decree concerning the rebuilding efforts.

Chapter 5 describes the exhortation to the people by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to restart the building of the temple. A letter was sent by the local governor of the Persian Province "Beyond the River" to the new king Darius to inquire into the original decree by Cyrus which allowed for the rebuilding of the temple. Chapter 6 gives the details of the subsequent decree of king Darius to allow for the rebuilding to continue and for funding for this work. The rebuilding work began again, and the temple was completed and dedicated in 515 BC. Passover was also observed as part of the celebrations of the temple completion.

Chapter 7 describes the desire of Ezra to travel to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes in 458BC and the decree issued by the king of Persia to allow Ezra to make this journey. Chapter 8 describes the people and the dangerous journey to Jerusalem. Chapters 9-10 are the account of Ezra's oversight regarding the issue of intermarriage of the Jewish men with foreign wives and the solution to this problem. The solution to preserve the genuineness of the Jewish race was the great confession of the sins of the Jewish men including some of the priests and the permission for the divorce of those men from their foreign wives.

Verses to memorize from the Book of Ezra, (ESV).

3:11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.

7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

8:23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

9:10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments.

10:4 Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.

Resources for studying the book of Ezra

See the article on how to study the Bible for suggestions on the method of Bible study and recommended resources to obtain. Suggested commentaries and studies are listed below for a more extensive study. Some are available on-line in a pdf format.

One Hour – One Book

Scroll down to video on Ezra.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSrCJNW5eUWQMvVw_2VqW_w

Commentaries

Breneman, Mervin. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. New American Commentary, Broadman & Holman, 1993.

Constable, Thomas. *Notes on Ezra*, latest edition. Online at Plano Bible Chapel.

Kidner, F. Derek. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Inter-Varsity, 1979.

Laney, J. Carl. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Everyman's Bible Commentary series. Moody Press, 1982.

Luck, G. Coleman. *Ezra and Nehemiah*. Moody press, 1961.

Martin, John A. *Ezra*. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Victor, Cook Communications, 2004.

Rata, Tiberius. *Ezra & Nehemiah: A Mentor Commentary*. Mentor. 2010.

Tucker, J. Brian. *Ezra*. The Moody Bible Commentary. Moody Publishers. 2014.

Yamauchi, Edwin. *Ezra, Nehemiah*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Vol 4. Zondervan, 1988.

Studies

Studies in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society can be found online in .pdf format.

Chisholm, Robert B., Jr. *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*. Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis series. Kregel Publications, 2006.

Dyer, Charles H., and Eugene H. Merrill. *Nelson's Old Testament Survey*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Hanna, Kenneth G. *From Moses to Malachi: Exploring the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. CrossBooks, 2014.

Harrison, Roland K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969.

Howard, David M., Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*. Moody Press, 1993.

Merrill, Eugene. H. *A Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther*. In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. Moody Press, 1991.

Sprinkle, Joe M. *Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage*. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997): 529-50.

Yap, Timothy. *The Purpose and Function of the Feast of Tabernacles in Ezra 3*. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 64.2 (2021): 253–64.