

## ~EZRA, BOOK OF (315)

.. **Writer**

.. **Authenticity**

.. **Time And Setting**

.. **Highlights Of Ezra**

· A record showing how Yehowah fulfilled his promises to restore Israel from exile in Babylon and reestablish true worship in Jerusalem. Included are the imperial orders to restore Yehowah's worship among the Jews after the 70-year desolation of Jerusalem and the account of the work done, despite obstacles, to achieve this.

· Ezra stuck closely to the above purpose throughout the book. This is apparently the reason for the omissions of what went on during certain lapses of time, such as between ([Ezra Chapters 6,7](#)) of the book, for the writer was not trying to give a complete historical account of the times.

.. **Writer**

· **Ezra**, as a priest, scholar, skilled copyist, and man who had prepared his heart to teach in Israel regulation and justice and to correct the things wanting in the worship of Yehowah that was carried on among the repatriated Israelites, was eminently qualified to write the book bearing his name.

· The royal power granted to him by the king of Persia would give him added reason and authority to do the research necessary, and it would be logical for such a man to write a record of this important segment of his nations history.

· The said **Ezra** himself went up from Babylon, and he was a skilled copyist in the Law of Moses, which Yehowah the God of Israel had given, so that the king granted him, according to the hand of Yehowah his God upon him, all his request. ([Ezra 7:6](#))

· For **Ezra** himself had prepared his heart to consult the Law of Yehowah and to do it and to teach in Israel regulation and justice. ([Ezra 7:10](#))

· And you, **Ezra**, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand appoint magistrates and judges that they may

continually judge all the people that are beyond the River, even all those knowing the laws of your God, and anyone that has not known them you men will instruct. ([Ezra 7:25](#))

- And as for everyone that does not become a doer of the Law of your God and the Law of the king, let judgment be promptly executed upon him, whether for death or for banishment, or for money fine or for imprisonment. ([Ezra 7:26](#))
- The book is honest, therefore, in its use of the first person for the writer from ([Ezra 7:27](#)), through ([Ezra Chapter 9](#)). Most scholars are in agreement that the book of **Ezra** carries on the history at the point where the Chronicles leave off, as a comparison of the following will show.
- And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, that Yehowah's word by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yehowah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia, so that he caused a cry to pass through all his kingdom, and also in writing, saying; ([2 Chronicles 36:22](#))
- This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said; All the kingdoms of the earth Yehowah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, Yehowah his God be with him. So let him go up. ([2 Chronicles 36:23](#))
- And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, that Yehowah's word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yehowah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm, and also in writing, saying; ([Ezra 1:1](#))
- This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said; All the kingdoms of the earth Yehowah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ([Ezra 1:2](#))
- Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God prove to be with him. So let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of Yehowah the God of Israel, he is the true God, which was in Jerusalem. ([Ezra 1:3](#))

- This again points to **Ezra** as the writer. Jewish tradition likewise assigns the writership to **Ezra**.

## · Authenticity

- The book of **Ezra** is included in the Hebrew canon. Originally it was combined with Nehemiah to form one scroll. The **Babylonian Talmud [Bava Batra 14b]** follows this tradition, but since the **16th century**, printed Hebrew Bibles mark a division, although they count the two books as one in the total number of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- The **Douay Version** uses the designations First and Second Esdras, following the Greek form of spelling. It notes, however, that the second book is also known as Nehemiah.

- The greater portion of **Ezra** was written in **Hebrew**. But a sizable portion is in **Aramaic**, since **Ezra** copied from the public records and official documents. These include the copies of letters sent to the Persian kings by officials beyond the Euphrates River and the royal replies and decrees imposing commands on these officials.

- Also, **Ezra** supplied a brief connecting history linking these documents. **Aramaic** was the diplomatic language and that used in international commerce of **Ezra's** day.

- The **Aramaic** portions are found in (**Ezra Chapters 4-7**). Some of **Ezra's** information was copied from Jewish archives, and this part is, of course, in **Hebrew**. These facts also strengthen the argument for the authenticity of **Ezra's** account.

- Let all that is by the order of the God of the heavens be done with zeal for the house of the God of the heavens, that there may occur no wrath against the kings realm and his sons. (**Ezra 7:23**)

- And to you men it is being made known that, as respects any of the priests and the Levites, the musicians, the doorkeepers, the Nethinim, and the workers of this house of God, no tax, tribute or toll is allowed to be imposed upon them. (**Ezra 7:24**)

- And you, **Ezra**, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand appoint magistrates and judges that they may continually judge all the people that are beyond the River, even all those knowing the laws of your God, and anyone that has not

known them you men will instruct. (**Ezra 7:25**)

- And as for everyone that does not become a doer of the Law of your God and the Law of the king, let judgment be promptly executed upon him, whether for death or for banishment, or for money fine or for imprisonment. (**Ezra 7:26**)
- Records that the Persian government approved the Law of Moses as applicable to the Jews and that the Persians thus had a hand in restoring true worship. **Ezra's** references to the Persian kings put them in their accurate order.
- Today the majority of scholars accept the accuracy of the book, **The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible** frankly saying that there is no doubt about the reliability of the historical contents. [Edited by H. Snyder, 1970, p. 291]. The record in the book is, therefore, dependable, and **Ezra** was a historical person.

### •• Time And Setting

- The book of **Ezra** was written about **460 B.C.E.**, along with the books of Chronicles. **Ezra** begins by relating the decree of Cyrus for the restoration of the Jews from Babylon. It was in the first year of Cyrus that this Persian king issued a restoration proclamation.
- And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, that Yehowah's word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yehowah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm, and also in writing, saying; (**Ezra 1:1**)
- Judah and Jerusalem had been left desolate of inhabitants, in the autumn of **607 B.C.E.**, when those left by Nebuchadnezzar moved to Egypt. The 70th year of Jerusalem's desolation, the last enforced Sabbath on the land, would end in the autumn of **537 B.C.E.**
- Cyrus decree must have been issued late in **538 B.C.E.** or early in 537 for two reasons. The desolation had to last until the 70th year ended, and the released Israelites would not be expected to travel in the winter rainy season, as would have been the case if the decree had been made a few months earlier.
- Likely it was issued in the early spring of **537 B.C.E.** in order to give the Jews a chance to travel during the dry season, arrive in

Jerusalem, and set up the altar on the first day of the seventh month or Tishri of the year **537 B.C.E**, September 29 according to the Gregorian calendar.

- And Jeshua the son of Jehozadak and his brothers the priests and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers proceeded to rise up and build the altar of the God of Israel, to offer up burnt sacrifices upon it, according to what is written in the Law of Moses the man of the true God. (**Ezra 3:2**)
- So they established the altar firmly upon its own site, for fright came upon them because of the peoples of the lands, and they began offering up burnt sacrifices to Yehowah upon it, the burnt sacrifices of the morning and of the evening. (**Ezra 3:3**)
- Then they held the festival of booths according to what is written, with the burnt sacrifices day by day in number according to the rule of what was due each day. (**Ezra 3:4**)
- And afterward there was the constant burnt offering and that for the new moons and for all the sanctified festival seasons of Yehowah and for everyone that willingly offered a voluntary offering to Yehowah. (**Ezra 3:5**)
- From the first day of the seventh month on they started to offer up burnt sacrifices to Yehowah, when the foundation of Yehowah's temple itself had not yet been laid. (**Ezra 3:6**)
- After describing the Passover and the Festival of Unfermented Cakes that were held after the temple was completed in **515 B.C.E**, Ezra passes over the subsequent period of time until the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, **468 B.C.E**, when **Ezra** personally comes into the picture.
- **Ezra** uses the first person from (**Ezra 7:27**), through to (**Ezra Chapter 9**), but changes to the third person in (**Ezra Chapter 10**), putting himself in the background to concentrate on the activities of princes, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of those who had been repatriated, especially dealing with correcting the situation of the ones who had married foreign wives.

## •• Highlights Of Ezra

- **The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and the restoration of true worship there after the Babylonian exile.**
- **Covers a period of some 70 years following the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon.**
- **Cyrus issues liberation decree, and a remnant of Jewish exiles return to Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. to rebuild the temple.**
- **And in the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia, that Yehowah's word from the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yehowah roused the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia so that he caused a cry to pass through all his realm, and also in writing, saying; (Ezra 1:1)**
- **From the first day of the seventh month on they started to offer up burnt sacrifices to Yehowah, when the foundation of Yehowah's temple itself had not yet been laid. (Ezra 3:6)**
- **Rebuilding of the temple.**
- **And they proceeded to give money to the cutters and to the craftsmen, and eatables and drink and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians, to bring cedar timbers from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission granted by Cyrus the king of Persia to them. (Ezra 3:7)**
- **And they went on to hold the festival of unfermented cakes seven days with rejoicing, for Yehowah caused them to rejoice, and he had turned the heart of the king of Assyria around toward them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of the true God, the God of Israel. (Ezra 6:22)**
- **Foundation laid in second year of the return from exile.**
- **Enemies repeatedly interfere with temple rebuilding and finally succeed in having the work stopped until the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, in the second year of Darius I, 520 B.C.E, encourage the people to resume construction.**
- **An official investigation of Persian records in Babylon and Ecbatana reveals that the temple rebuilding was authorized by Cyrus, so Darius I. decrees that the work continue without hindrance, stipulating the death penalty for violators.**

- In the sixth year of Darius I. **515 B.C.E.**, temple construction is completed, after which the building is inaugurated and the Passover observed.
- Ezra goes to Jerusalem in **468 B.C.E.** with gifts for the temple and to appoint judges.
- And after these things in the reign of Artaxerxes the king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah the son of Azariah the son of Hilkiah (**Ezra 7:1**)
- Then we gave the laws of the king to the satraps of the king and the governor's beyond the River, and they assisted the people and the house of the true God. (**Ezra 8:36**)
- Permission for the trip granted by Persian monarch Artaxerxes or Longimanus.
- **Ezra** and about 1,500 men, besides 258 Levites and Nethinim from Casiphia, depart from a point of assembly at the river Ahava with gold, silver, and utensils for the temple, they arrive in Jerusalem over three and a half months later.
- Cleansing of Israel, including the priesthood.
- And as soon as these things were finished, the princes approached me, saying; The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands as regards their detestable things, namely, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. (**Ezra 9:1**)
- These all had accepted foreign wives, and they proceeded to send away wives along with sons. (**Ezra 10:44**)
- Learning of the defilement from marriage to foreign women, **Ezra** makes public confession in prayer to Yehowah.
- Shecaniah acknowledges sin and proposes the making of a covenant to put away foreign wives and their offspring.

- **All former exiles are commanded to assemble at Jerusalem, a decision is then made to have princes investigate the individual cases of defilement progressively.**
- **Priests, Levites, and the rest of the men follow through in dismissing foreign wives and sons.**