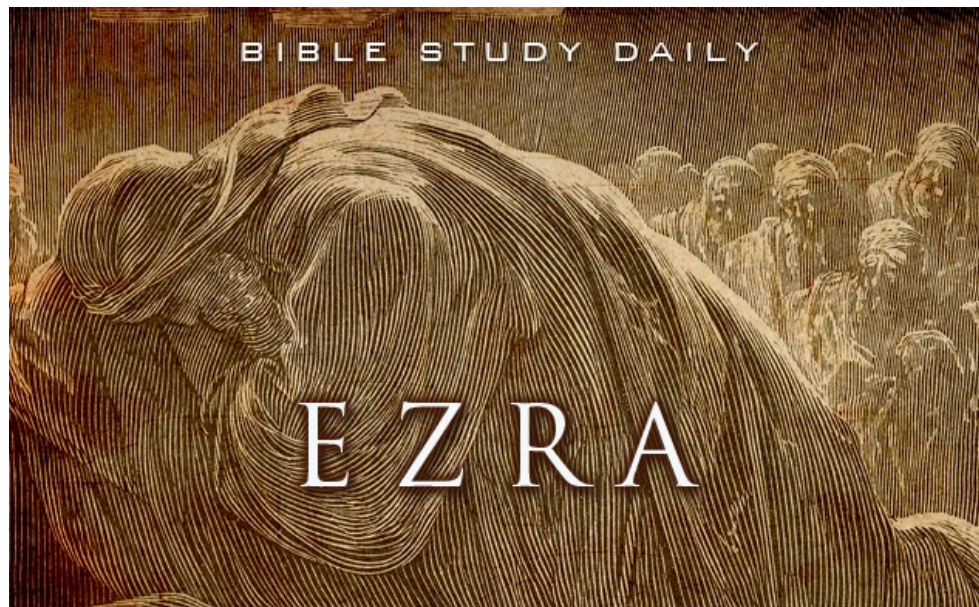




BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of Ezra as well as my study notes for the book.

Name

The book of Ezra is named for Ezra, the central character of the second half of the book. The Talmud and the Hebrew Bible combine the books of Ezra and Nehemiah into a single volume. However, there is evidence that they were originally written and intended to be separate books. The lists in [Ezra 2](#) and [Nehemiah 7](#) are basically the same and it would be unusual to include to of the same lists in the same book.

Author

Authorship of Ezra is attributed to Ezra himself based on the second half of the book ([Ezra 7-10](#)) being written in first person with Ezra referring to himself.

Genre

History

Literary Form

Narrative

Time Frame

The book of Ezra includes two distinct time periods. Chapter 1-6 cover a 23 year period between the first decree of Cyrus, King of Persia, for the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple (538-515 b.c.). There is a gap of 57 years between the end of chapter 6 and the start of chapter 7. Chapters 7-10 covers the events of Ezra's return and his reforms that began in 458 B.C.

Emphasis

The emphasis of Ezra is on:

- God's presence in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem.
- The people's renewed covenant relationship with God.
- The importance of the Law and its teaching in the lives of God's people.
- The importance of the role of the worship of God.
- The importance of the role of prayer in the people's lives.

Outline

- Israelites return from exile 1:1 – 6:22
- Ezra's return and reforms 7:1-10:44

What I Noticed Today (Ezra 1-2)

Ezra 1-2

The return of the exiles to Judah.

Ezra 1

In verses 1-6 the book of Ezra opens by repeating the closing verses of 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.

- The Lord stirred the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia so that he allowed the return of the Jewish exiles to Judah, specifically to rebuild the house of the Lord.
- Every Israelite survivor who returned to Judah was to be assisted by the people where he lived with gifts of silver, gold, livestock, and a freewill offering for the Lord.

Note: Cyrus did not return the exiles because he believed in God. His purpose in returning exiles to their home countries was to have the gods of the people pray for his gods Bel and Nebo to give him a long life. The Cyrus cylinder (538 B.C.) says, *“May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities daily ask Bel and Nebo for a long life for me.”*

Note: The title for God, “The God of heaven” is used 9 times in Ezra. It is used only four other times in the Old Testament (Genesis 24:3, Genesis 24:7, Psalms 136:26, and Jonah 1:9).

In verses 7-11 Cyrus gave back all the treasures of the temple taken by Nebuchadnezzar.

- These treasures were given to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.
- Sheshbazzar is a Babylonian name meaning, “May Shamash protect the father.” The name occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament.

Ezra 2

In verses 1-67 the list of exiles taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar that returned to Judah included ordinary men, the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants.

Note: In all likelihood the list includes people who returned over a period of time in waves.

- The total number of exiles who returned numbered 42,360, plus 7,337 slaves for a total of 49,897 people.
- They represented three tribes: Judah, Benjamin, and the Levi (both the

priests and Levites).

- All of the people returned to their own cities.

In verses 68-70 after they arrived in Jerusalem, the people gave of their riches to help rebuild the temple of the Lord.

Note: The people had been in exile approximately 70 years when Cyrus issued the decree to return and rebuild the house of the Lord. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 44:28, and Jeremiah 29:10.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

Since the people had been in exile for 70 years nearly all of the original exiles died in Persia, so that most of the people that returned were seeing their homeland for the first time.

Despite the people's rejection of God that led up to the exile, God watched over them in Persia. He protected the family lines and prospered the people as evidenced by the wealth they were able to contribute to the rebuilding of the temple.

It is comforting to know that God is always with us, protecting us, even when we have been less than faithful to Him! He will never leave or forsake us!

What I Noticed Today (Ezra 3-5)

Ezra 3-6

The rebuilding of the temple.

Ezra 3

In verses 1-7 in the seventh month after their return, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem.

- Jeshua, the priest, along with other priests built an altar to God and began offering sacrifices according to the instructions in the Law given to Moses.
- They celebrated the Festival of booths.
- They offered daily and monthly sacrifices as prescribed by the Law.
- They began to offer burnt sacrifices to the Lord.
- They paid stonecutters and artisans and gave food, drink, and oil to the people of Tyre and Sidon to bring cedar from Lebanon.

In verses 8-9 in the second month of the second year (536 B.C., 70 years after the first deportation in 605 B.C.) Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the Levites and priests came together to begin the process of rebuilding the temple.

In verses 10-13 when the foundation of the temple of the Lord had been laid the singers and the people came forward singing praises to the Lord.

- The older people who had seen the first temple cried, but the younger people shouted with joy.


Ezra 4

In verses 1-5 when enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that they were rebuilding the temple they offered to help.

Note: The people in the area claimed to worship the Lord and they may have, but they also worshiped other gods.

- Zerubbabel rejected their help saying the temple must be completed by those who had returned from exile.
- Being rejected the people tried to bribe officials and interfere with the building of the temple throughout the time of Cyrus, king of Persia.

In verses 6-16 the people already in the land (the enemies described in verse 1) sent a letter to King Artaxerxes of Persia, claiming falsities about the Jews in an effort to get the king to stop the rebuilding.



Note: This section (vv. 6-23) is not in chronological order but demonstrates the opposition to the rebuilding of the temple. The opposition continued through the time of the reign of Xerxes and on to the reign of Artaxerxes. These letters were probably written some 80 years after the rebuilding of the temple began.

In verses 17-23 Artaxerxes replied with a letter calling for the building of the temple to stop until the matter could be investigated further.

- As soon as the letter was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and others they went to Jerusalem and forced the people from rebuilding on the temple.

In verse 24 the construction of the temple stopped until Darius became king of Persia.

Note: The delay in rebuilding continued for approximately 15 years until the reign of Darius (520 B.C.). The gap (535 B.C. to 520 B.C.) is between the close of chapter 4 and the opening of chapter 5.

Ezra 5

In verses 1-5 the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in Jerusalem, and Shealtiel and Jeshua started rebuilding the house of the Lord once again.

- Tattenai the governor of the region, Shetharbozenai, and others confronted the Jews asking who gave them permission to rebuilt the temple.
- Despite Tattenai's interference, the people did not stop their work on the temple.

In verses 6-17 Tattenai sent a letter to Darius, the king of Persia advising him that the rebuilding had resumed and asked him to check the king's records to verify if authorization to rebuild had been written by the former King Cyrus.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

What a great witness it is to see the people coming together united in purpose to rebuild the Lord's house. The priests and Levites, who had neglected their duties in previous generations, were the first to step forward to build the altar and begin worshipping the Lord. This led the people to also worship the Lord.

Despite the hardships and oppression, they came together in unified worship to God! They put the worship of God first, celebrated His goodness to them, and then began the process of building the foundation for the temple.

As soon as they got started they faced opposition from adversaries. But ultimately, God's purpose was fulfilled and the rebuilding continued. God's purposes cannot be thwarted!

What I Noticed Today (Ezra 6-7)

Ezra 6

In verses 1-5 Darius, king of Persia, received the letter from Tattenai, the Persian governor of the area west of the Euphrates river.

- Darius ordered a search of the records in the Babylon library. The records were eventually found in the fortress of Ecbatana.

Note: The fortress of Ecbatana is located in the city modern day Hamadan which is 300 miles northeast of Babylon. Ecbatana was the capital of Media. King Cyrus had spent the summer there in 538 B.C., the year he wrote the decree for the rebuilding of the temple.

In verses 6-12 King Darius issued his own decree that confirmed the decree by Cyrus, ordering the repairs to be paid for out of the royal treasury.

- Additionally, Darius warned anyone that might consider interfering with the rebuilding of the temple that they would be killed.
- Tattenai, the governor of the region, Shethar-bozenai, and their colleagues carried out the commands of King Darius.
- The Jews continued to work on the temple and completed it on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (515 B.C.).

In verses 16-22 once the temple rebuilding was finished, the Israelites celebrated the dedication of the temple.

- Then they celebrated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with great joy.

Ezra 7-10

The second return of exiles from Babylon under the leadership of Ezra in 458 B.C.)

Ezra 7

Note: Ezra 7 begins with a reference to King Artaxerxes of Persia. Artaxerxes' reign was 57 years after King Darius, so there is a substantial gap between the close of Ezra 6 and the beginning of Ezra 7.

Note: Also, Ezra 1-6 records the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple, while Ezra 7-10 contains primarily a memoir of Ezra's return and his reforms. Ezra was a scribe and an expert in the Law of Moses.

In verses 1-5 the genealogy of Ezra, the scribe is listed.

In verses 6-10 in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, Ezra made a request to the king to return to Jerusalem.

- Ezra gathered together a number of priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants, and other Israelites to accompany him back to Jerusalem.
- The trip from Babylon to Jerusalem took four months (they left on the first day of the first month and arrived on the first day of the fifth month).

Note: Verse 6 refers to the “hand of God” being on Ezra. This is the first of six times the hand of God is mentioned in the book of Ezra (Ezra 7:6, &9, 8:18, 8:21, 8:22, and 8:31).

In verses 11-26 Artaxerxes issued a decree granting permission for the trip, including the payment of silver and gold as needed to be paid out of the royal treasury.

- Additionally, Artaxerxes decree included an order for Ezra to appoint judges and magistrates who know the Law of Moses to govern the people.
- Artaxerxes even order the Law be taught to those who did not know it.

In verses 27-28 begins the memoir of Ezra. Ezra gives praise to God for putting it into the king’s mind to glorify the house of the Lord.

Note: Ezra was clearly a man a dedicated man of God with great skills and passion (Ezra 7:10). But Ezra recognized that what he was able to accomplish, he accomplished because God’s hand was on him (Ezra 7:6). This sentiment is restated in Ezra 7:28 when Ezra recognizes that God’s steadfast love gave him the courage to face the great challenge that was before him.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

How amazing that God worked through a series of Persian kings to support and pay for the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord! It shows that God can and will use non-believers to accomplish His purposes.

Ezra seems to have been overwhelmed by the prospect of returning to Jerusalem as King Artaxerxes ordered to appoint judges and teach the Law to the people. Yet being a student of the Law he realized that God’s hand was on him, and that gave him the confidence and courage he needed to follow God.

Sometimes the Lord gives us a grand vision of what He wants to accomplish in our lives. I pray that Like Ezra we will recognize God’s hand on us when we do the work that God has called us to, and that will give us the confidence to follow him in faith.

What I Noticed Today (Ezra 8-9)

Ezra 8

In verses 1-14, Ezra provides a listing of the heads of the families that made the 900-mile journey from Persia back to Jerusalem with Ezra. A total of 1,514 men, plus 258 Levites, for a grand total of 1,772 men.

Note: With women and children the group may have been 4,000-5,000 people, which is a much smaller group than those who returned first (Ezra 2:64-65).

In verses 15-20 when Ezra gathered the people together, he realized there were no Levites so he sent for 38 Levites to join the group (18 from Sherebiah's family, and 20 from Jeshaiiah's family).

In verses 21-30 once the Levites had joined the returning exiles, Ezra proclaimed a fast asking God to give them safe passage to Jerusalem.

- He then set apart a group of 12 of the leading priests who were given the responsibility of carrying the holy vessels and treasures to Jerusalem.
- Ezra weighed out 24 tons of silver, 7,500 pounds of silver articles, 7500 pounds of gold, 20 gold bowls, and two articles of bronze as offerings to the temple of the Lord. He gave them to the Levites and commanded them to care for the articles on the trip to Jerusalem.

In verses 31-36 the hand of God was on them giving them safe passage.

- After arriving in Jerusalem they waited three days and on the fourth day offered burnt offerings to the Lord.
- They also delivered King Darius' edicts to the officials and governor of the region so they would support God's people.


Ezra 9-10

Ezra enacts reforms in the land.

Ezra 9

In verses 1-4 officials let Ezra know that there was a major problem among the Israelites that had returned previously.

- They had begun to intermarry with women from Canaanite tribes in direct violation of Deuteronomy 20:18.
- To make matters worse the people's leaders, officials, and priests were among the worst offenders!
- Ezra tore his garments (a sign of repentance).

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- He sat in the presence of the Lord fasting until evening when he then bowed down and prayed for the people and the great sin they had committed.

In verses 5-15 after the evening sacrifice, Ezra knelt before the Lord and prayed.

- Verses 6-7 Ezra, ashamed and disgraced, confessed the sin of the people.
- Verses 8-9 Ezra acknowledged God's grace in allowing the people to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.
- Verses 10-12 Ezra confessed the men's sin of intermarrying with foreign women.
- Verses 13-14 Ezra admitted God would be justified in destroying the people because of their guilt before the Lord.
- Verse 15 Ezra prayed for God to be merciful to them even though no one in the community was worthy to stand before the Lord.

Note: Ezra's prayer is a powerful appeal to God. He recognizes the goodness of God in allowing them to return to Jerusalem and is ashamed at how the people had responded to God's goodness by violating His law.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

The first group of exiles to return had gotten off to a good start with the leaders and priests dedicating the temple, rebuilding it, and celebrating Passover. But somewhere along the way they drifted away from God, with even the priests and leaders violating God's commands about intermarriage.

We tend to be so much like these returned exiles. God shows great favor and blesses us. We begin by acknowledging Him, but slowly we drift away allowing sin to enter into our lives. Beware, a little leaven leavens the whole lump!

What I Noticed Today

(Ezra 10)

Today we close out the book of Ezra. Ezra dealt with the foreign wives and the men who married them.

Ezra 10

In verses 1-4 Ezra is distraught over the sin of the people.

Note: The word “confessing” (or some translations “made confession”) comes from a Hebrew word that means to praise, but the root word means to confess. God is praised when His people confess their sins!

- As Ezra was praying many of the people gathered around him weeping.
- Shecaniah, a priest, suggested that all the men who had married foreign wives send them away in order to preserve the purity of the Israelites.
- The people agreed, entering into a covenant with God to put away the foreign wives.

In verses 5-8 a proclamation was made for all the men to gather in Jerusalem in three days.

Note: Since the area occupied by the exiles was fairly small it was an easy three-day journey to Jerusalem.


In verses 9-15 the people assembled in Jerusalem on the twelfth day of the third month (457 B.C.).

- Ezra addressed the people calling out their sin in marrying foreign women.
- The people agreed to send away the foreign wives but asked that elders and judges oversee each case.
- The people couldn't look to the priests and Levites as impartial judges because many of them had also married foreign wives.
- The exiles did as proposed over a period of three months, they convened on the first day of the tenth month and by the first day of the first month they had dealt with all the men who had married foreign women.

Verses 18-44 is a listing of all the men who agreed to put away their foreign wives.

Note: It is a “top-down” list starting with the high priest's family.

Note: A total of 113 men are listed. Given the estimated population of 30,000 returned exiles, this is a fairly small percentage of the population. Scholars suggest that the small number may not include



everyone, that only those found guilty are listed, or that only those found guilty and who followed through with sending away their wives are listed.

Note: The book of Ezra ends somewhat abruptly with no conclusions or summary.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- It is disheartening to see that the high priest who certainly knew marrying foreign women was a direct violation of God's law did it anyway. Other priests followed in his sinful example. Ultimately, many of the men among the returned exiles also turned away from God by marrying foreign women.
- Had Ezra not intervened with strong corrective action that was agreed to by the people it is likely the nation would have quickly fallen even further away from God.