

# Ezra

## Original Historical Setting

**Author:** Ezra

**Written:** Perhaps around 425 B.C.

**Audience:** Probably Israelites living in Jerusalem who have returned after being exiled.

**Occasion:** To record the events occurring in the land of Israel at the time of the return from captivity and subsequent years, covering a period of almost 100 years, beginning in 538 B.C.

### **Timeline:**

538 BC – Zerubbabel leads first wave of returning exiles

516 BC – Temple rebuilt

458 BC – Ezra leads second wave of returning exiles

## World Events that occur simultaneously

551 BC – Confucius born

521 BC – Buddha in India preaches his first sermon

470 BC – Socrates born

## Genre/Literary style

Court documents, lists and narratives written in Hebrew, with some Aramaic sections

## Features and Structure

Ezra can be divided into **2 sections:**

**Ch 1-6 1<sup>st</sup> return and rebuilding of Temple**

**Ch 7-10 2<sup>nd</sup> return under Ezra and his ministry**

## Key text(s)

3:11 – Israel praises God in dedication of Temple foundation

6:3 – Persian King Cyrus decrees the Temple should be built

7:10 – Ezra's "walk" described

## What to look for

- Notice that the author says the Temple was rebuilt because of the support of three pagan kings (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes) showing that God even works through people who don't worship Him in order to fulfill His purposes.
- Ezra has preserved seven official documents and letters similar to non-biblical Persian records that have survived. These are "Cyrus's Decree" **1:2-4**; "Letters of Rehum to Artaxerxes" **4:8-16**; "Artaxerxes' Reply to Rehum" **4:17-22**; "Letter of Tattenai to Darius" **5:6-17**; "Memorandum Concerning Cyrus's Decree" **6:1-5**; "Darius's Letter to Tattenai" **6:6-12**; "Letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra" **7:11-26**. All are preserved in Aramaic except the first, which was copied from the end of 2 Chronicles.

## Interesting facts

- In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book called Ezra. English Bibles follow the Latin translator Jerome, who named the two parts Ezra and Nehemiah. Others have used the title 1 and 2 Ezra.
- Between chapters 6 and 7 there is a period of 58 years. The story of Queen Esther occurs during this time.
- While in Babylonian captivity, Daniel makes one of the most amazing prophecies ever. He prophesies (Dan 9:25) that there will be 483 years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah the Prince shows up. In Ezra 7:11-28 we have that decree from Artaxerxes given in 457 B.C. Count 483 years and you end up at the time of Jesus, The Messiah.
- In Ezra 7:21 you'll find every letter of the English alphabet except the letter "j".
- The return from Babylon has been called Israel's "2<sup>nd</sup> Exodus" and covered about 900 miles.

## Memory Verse: Ezra 7:10