

## EZRA

### Introduction

Author/Title. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were considered one work by the earliest Hebrew manuscripts, early rabbis, and Josephus. The near duplication of Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7 would however militate against the two books being one. Many similarities also exist between the book of Ezra and the Chronicles corpus. A fondness for lists, for the phrases "heads of families" and "house of God" and for the words "singers, gatekeepers," and "temple servants," in both 1 & 2 Chronicles and Ezra has caused many to posit that both works had one author.

Date. The book of Ezra covers two distinct time periods: chapters 1-6 dealing with the first return of Zerubbabel, 536-516 B. C., and chapters 7-10 with the second return under Ezra circa 458 B. C. A short portion, 4:6-23, deals with a later time in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B. C.) which leaves the terminus a quo around 445 B. C.

Occasion. The audience of this book was some 70 or 80 years removed from the first return from Babylon. During this time period the hand of God was not as direct or obvious as it had been during the divided monarchy. Supernatural acts of deliverance or provision are missing during this era. It is not that God is not at work, but that his action is more providential than miraculous. The work of God is described in these books (including Nehemiah) in the causal chain leading up to certain human acts. God works in the hearts of kings and believers (cf. Ezra 1:1, 5; 5:5; 6:22; 7:6, 26; 8:22, 31).

This fact can be put in perspective when Ezra is compared with Chronicles. The presence of God in the life of his people in Ezra is just as real as in Chronicles but the manipulative aspect of God's control of historical events is missing. For example, in Chronicles the detailed plans of the temple are given directly to David. No mention of any such direct revelation occurs with Zerubbabel. The hand of the Lord is with Ezra (7:6), but the continued injection of the word of God either through prophetic mediation

or direct revelation is not granted to Ezra. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem because of God's movement in his heart (Neh 2:12). God's immediacy to him and to the affairs of the community is of the same subtle quality as his immediacy to Ezra. For a people familiar with God's saving acts in the monarchy, the relatively undramatic state of affairs in the postexilic period must have compounded the doubts which were already present about God's relationship to His people. This fact along with the lack of independence of the nation and of the modest gains of the people was enough to discourage the best.

The purpose of the work then is to encourage the people to worship the Lord at the temple in the midst of personal pain because God is supporting them.

Message Statement. *Worship of Yahweh at the temple ought to continue in the midst of personal pain because God is with the people.*

### Argument

- 1A THE HAND OF GOD IN TEMPLE RESTORATION 1:1--6:22  
 The first two verses of this book are virtually identical with the last two verses of Chronicles. This deliberate device teaches that the work of God here in Ezra is a continuation of His work in Chronicles of building a temple and preserving the line of David. God is at work among his people--in a less conspicuous way than in Chronicles; nevertheless, He is at work among his people. The rebuilding of the temple is not an event of chance which occurs without the permission or participation of a distant God; it is the result of His design just as surely as the Solomonic temple. Therefore the remnant should respond to Him in pure temple worship and obedience.
- 1B Background 1:1--3:6  
 This section details the return of the people to the land and their return to worship.
- 1C The return to the land 1:1--2:70  
 In the first verse the author points out that it was the providential work of God in the heart of the King of Persia which initiated this rebuilding program. That this is not simply an emphasis of the Chronicler alone which the writer of Ezra has inadvertently included in his zeal of copying the last two verses in Chronicles to show a connection between the books, he continues the emphasis in 1:5 where he notes that the people who returned, did so because of God's work in their hearts. Each of the neighbors assist the returnees as well.
- The record of the people is also provided. The list is divided into two groups: those of known descent and unknown descent. This serves to provide for a pure priesthood and also racial purity.
- 2C The return to worship 3:1-6  
 In this section the people evidence the proper response of worship for God's deliverance and safe journey. In this way they serve as a model for the audience.
- 2B The Work 3:7--6:22

God moved providentially to bring the people back to the land so that they could build the temple and now that they have returned He providentially smooths their path so that the temple can be constructed.

- 1C Its beginning 3:7-13  
 True to the pattern established by God in his covenant with David and its record as found in Chronicles, the work of temple building is led by a "son of David," Zerubbabel. The reactions of the people mimic those of David (when the ark was brought up to Jerusalem, 1 Chron 16:34) and of the people at the dedication of the Solomonic temple (2 Chron 5:13). Nevertheless, the reaction was also mixed because of the modest dimensions of the foundation when compared with Solomon's. The rest of the story teaches that God does approve of this meager temple and demonstrates his endorsement by actively working to bring its construction to completion.
- 2C Its opposition 4:1-24  
 The enemies of the Jews considered this temple a threat and sought to thwart its erection through compromise, discouragement and accusations.
- 3C Its resumption 4:24--6:12  
 In this section the author is careful to note that the relief from opposition was again not coincidence but rather because "the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews . . ." (5:5). The resumption of the building is seen as a victory accomplished by God's deliberate, albeit masked to the natural eye, design.
- 4C Its completion 6:13-22  
 This narrative ends (6:22) as it began (1:1) with a notation as to the ultimate cause for the work, the mediate hand of God. The people celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread "because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel" (6:22).
- 2A THE HAND OF GOD IN PERSONAL REVIVAL 7:1--10:44  
 The events of this section occur approximately 60 years after the celebration of chapter 6. The thrust here, as in chapters one through six, is to show the work of God in preparing his people for worship. Whereas the first six chapters focused upon the temple, this section focuses upon the preparation of the people.
- 1B The Background: Ezra's Return 7:1--8:36  
 This section begins with the notation that Ezra, the leader in the revival, returns only because of God's providential work in the heart of the king (7:6). After a detailed account of his interaction with king Artaxerxes, the author reiterates the fact that it was God who put this generosity into the heart of the king (7:27) and that Ezra's success can only be attributed to the fact that God's hand was upon him (7:28).
- The author then lists the people and provisions which returned as a result of God's hand and gives praise for their safe return. His point is clear, "The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way" (8:31).
- 2B The Work 9:1--10:44  
 The work of purifying the people concerns the dissolution of mixed marriages. That which is at stake is nothing less than the continuance of the nation as a distinctive covenant people. It was this sin of marrying foreign women that resulted in God's disapproval of Solomon and the dissolution of the unified nation. In order to obey the covenant and keep the remnant ra-

cially and religiously pure the people endure great hardship (standing in the rain to hear the proclamations of Ezra and the breaking up of families). Thus these people stand as an example of obedience to the covenant despite personal pain.

## Outline

1A	THE HAND OF GOD IN TEMPLE RESTORATION	1:1--6:22
1B	<u>Background</u>	1:1--3:6
1C	The return to the land	1:1--2:70
1D	God's work in the hearts of God's people	1:1-11
1E	the king: his decree	1:1-4
2E	the returnees	1:5
3E	the neighbors	1:6
4E	the king: his provision of temple furnishings	1:7-11
1F	the statement	1:7-8
2F	the listing	1:9-10
3F	the summary	1:11
2D	The record of the people	2:1-63
1E	of known descent	2:1-58
1F	the leaders	2:1-2a
2F	the men of Israel	2:2b-35
3F	the priests	2:36-39
4F	the levites	2:40
5F	the singers	2:41
6F	the gatekeepers	2:42
7F	the temple servants	2:43-54
8F	the servants of solomon	2:55-58
2E	of unknown descent	2:59-63
1F	the men	2:59-60
2F	the priests	2:61-63
3E	the summary	2:64-70
2C	The return to worship	3:1-6
2B	<u>The Work</u>	3:7--6:22
1C	Its beginning	3:7-13
1D	The supervisors	3:7-9
2D	The reactions	3:10-13
2C	Its opposition	4:1-24
1D	Through compromise	4:1-3
2D	Through discouragement	4:4-5
3D	Through accusations	4:6-23
1E	in the reign of Xerxes	4:6
2E	in the reign of Artaxerxes	4:7-23
3C	Its resumption	4:24--6:12
1D	The exhortation of the prophets	4:24--5:2
2D	The decree of the king	5:3--6:12
1E	the question of Tattenai	5:3-5
2E	the inquiry of Tattenai	5:6-17
3E	The response of the king	6:1-12
1F	his search	6:1-5

2F	his instructions	6:6-12
4C	Its completion	6:13-22
1D	The end of construction	6:13-15
2D	The dedication	6:16-18
3D	The utilization: passover celebration	6:19-22
2A	THE HAND OF GOD IN PERSONAL REVIVAL	7:1--10:44
1B	<u>The Background: Ezra's Return</u>	7:1--8:36
1C	The summary	7:1-10
2C	The means: God's work in the heart of the King	7:11-28
1D	The letter	7:11-26
2D	The response	7:27-28
3C	The companions	8:1-14
4C	The account	8:15-36
1D	The gathering of Temple workers	8:15-20
2D	The request to God for safety	8:21-23
3D	The provision for honesty	8:24-30
4D	The journey & arrival	8:31-32
5D	The delivery of Temple items	8:33-34
6D	The praise for the trip	8:35-36
2B	<u>The Work</u>	9:1--10:44
1C	Ezra's prayer to God	9:1-15
1D	The report of the sin	9:1-2
2D	Ezra's repentance	9:3-4
3D	Ezra's confession to God	9:5-15
2C	The people's confession of sin	10:1-4
3C	The correction of the sin	10:5-44
1D	The pledge	10:5-6
2D	The proposal	10:7-15
3D	The action	10:16-17
4D	The findings	10:18-44