

## EZRA – NEHEMIAH: INTRODUCTION

The Books, Ezra and Nehemiah, were formerly accepted as one book covering the 120-year history of Israel’s restoration in Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile. They were called First and Second Ezra (Esdras – Greek). The Second Book was called “Nehemiah” by Jerome (385-405 A.D.).

This Post-Exile Period begins with the rising of the Persian Empire and Cyrus’ decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The Old Testament Books, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi have the Persian rule as their background. Review the following chart of Persian rulers as they relate to the history of Ezra and Nehemiah:

RULER	EVENTS	SCRIPTURE
1. Cyrus (536-529 B.C.)	Jews return to Palestine- build temple	Ezra 1:1-4, 2 Chronicles 36:22-33
2. Cambyses (Ahasuerus) (529- 522 B.C.)	Letters of opposition; Death by suicide	Ezra 4:6
3. Smerdis (Artaxerxes) (522 B.C.)	Letters of opposition	Ezra 4:7
4. Darius (522- 485 B.C.)	Shushan becomes main capital; temple in Jerusalem completed – 520-516 B.C.	Esther 1:2; Zech. 1:1; Haggai 1:14-15; Ezra 6:15
5. Ahasuerus (Xerxes) (485-465 B.C.)	Esther’s husband; a 58-year gap (516- 458 B.C.) exists between Ezra 6 and 7	Esther 1:1; 2:17
6. Artaxerxes (Longimanus) (465-424 B.C.)	Ezra leads group to Jerusalem (458 B.C.); Nehemiah leads group to rebuild walls (445- 444 B.C.)	Ezra 7:1-7; Neh. 2:1, 5:14
7. Xerxes II (424 B.C.)		
8. Darius II (Nothus) (423– 404 B.C.)		Neh. 12:22; 13:23-27; Malachi 2:13-16
9. Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.)		
10. Artaxerxes III (358-338 B.C.)		
11. Arses (338 -336 B.C.)		
12. Darius III (336-331 B.C.)	Persian Empire conquered by Alexander the Great	

**I. THE BOOKS:**

- A. **Ezra-** “*Help*” – so named because of the author and principal character (7:28-8:1, 15, 21, 24, 31)
1. **Theme:** The faithfulness of God seen in restoring Judah and Jerusalem following punitive exile (Jeremiah 29:10, Ezra 7:27-28, 9:13, 15).
  2. **Date written:** between 457- 444 B. C.
- B. **Nehemiah** – “*Comforted of Jehovah*” – receives name from author and principal character (Neh. 1:1, 2:1, 4:1 etc.)
1. **Theme:** The success of the dedicated work of God’s people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (2:17, 4:6, 6:3)
  2. **Date written:** After 432 B.C. – Nehemiah’s second trip to Jerusalem (Neh. 13:6)

**II. THE MEN:**

- A. **Ezra**
1. Priestly descent – “son of Seraiah” the chief priest, Eleazer the son of Aaron (Ezra 7:1,5; I Chronicles 6:14-15; 2 Kings 25:18)
  2. Scribe of the Law of God – instructor in the law (7:10-12)
  3. Received favor from Persian King (7:6, 16-26)
  4. Deep humility (9:10-15)
  5. Reformer of people (Chapter 10)
- B. **Nehemiah**
1. Knowledge and trust in God (1:8-11, 2:20)
  2. Interest and compassion for God’s people (1:2, 4)
  3. Courageous (4:10-14)
  4. Cautious (2:12-13, 4:16-23)
  5. Totally dedicated to God’s cause:
    - a. Unselfishness (chapter 5)
    - b. No Compromise (6:12-13, 13:23-27)

**III. THE FEATURES OF THE BOOKS:**

- A. The “*Nethinim*” – seventeen times mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah; only mentioned elsewhere in I Chronicles 9:2; word means: “the given ones.”
1. Ezra 8:20 – David appointed for service of the Levites
  2. Nehemiah 7:60; 2 Chronicles 2:17-18 – numbered with servants of Solomon- descendants of Canaanites Solomon used in building his temple.
  3. Nehemiah 11:21 – organized with leader for their special work.

- B. Overcoming obstacles in building temple and wall with trust and diligent action.
  - 1. Building of temple – Ezra 4:5, 23-24; 6:15
  - 2. Building of wall:
    - a. Obstacles without: Scorn (Neh. 4:1-6), Force (Neh. 4:7-23)  
Craftiness (Neh. 6:1-19)
    - b. Obstacles within: Debris (4:10), Fear (4:11-14), Greed (5:1-13)
  
- C. Reforming the character of the people in light of God’s Law is a constant need:
  - 1. Turn away from marrying foreigners (Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 13)
  - 2. Covenant made when Law read (Nehemiah 8-10)

**LESSONS:**

- 1. Ezra – Nehemiah: Introduction
- 2. Ezra: Return under Zerubbabel (Chapters 1-3)
- 3. Ezra: Overcoming opposition in building temple (Chapters 4-6)
- 4. Ezra: Return under Ezra (Chapters 7-8)
- 5. Ezra: Ministry of Reform (Chapters 9-10)
- 6. Nehemiah: Return under Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls (Chapters 1-3)
- 7. Nehemiah: Overcoming opposition in building Jerusalem’s walls (Chapters 4-7)
- 8. Nehemiah: Consecrating the people with the Law (Chapters 8-10)
- 9. Nehemiah: Census – Dedication – Correction (Chapters 11-13)