

Ezra

Summary

After their exile in Babylon, the people of Israel needed both a physical rebuilding of Jerusalem and a spiritual rebuilding of themselves as a people who followed God unwaveringly. This book is about this rebuilding and the recommitment to the one true God of Israel. Ordained by God and under the proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, the Israelites were empowered and equipped to return to their homeland to resettle and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The accounts of their accomplishments are reported in two waves separated by some 80 years. The first wave, under Zerubbabel, reaching its goal of temple reconstruction while the second wave, under the leadership of Ezra, purified the people for proper worship of God.

Author

Most scholars conclude that Ezra, the scribe, is the author of the book of Ezra.

Date

The book of Ezra was written around 450 B.C. regarding the events of 538-450 B.C. in Jerusalem.

Primary Characters

King Cyrus (Ezra 1, 3-6)

Zerubbabel (Ezra 2-5)

Rehum (Ezra 4)

Shimshi (Ezra 4)

Darius I (Ezra 4-6)

Artaxerxes I (Ezra 4, 6-8)

Tattenai (Ezra 5-6)

Haggai (Ezra 5-6)

Zechariah (Ezra 5-6)

Ezra (Ezra 7-10)

Historical Moments

The Return from Exile in Babylon (Ezra 1-2)

The Reign of Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1-4)

The Reign of Darius of Persia (Ezra 5-6)

The Reign of Artaxerxes I of Persia (Ezra 4, 6-8)

The Prophetic Ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5-6)

The Rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3-6)

Major Theological Themes

God's Sovereignty - God has ultimate authority and sovereignty over foreign kings; His hand was upon Cyrus to move him to return the remnant to Jerusalem. God consistently used foreign powers to both judge and restore His people. God used the edict of a foreign king, Cyrus, to orchestrate the return of His people for the purpose of repopulating His promised land and rebuilding His temple. But this had been planned far in advance; Isaiah prophesied that it would happen 150 years prior (Isaiah 44:28).

Restoration and Righteousness - Restoration does not necessarily equate to righteousness. The returned remnant needed further admonishment to the purity prescribed by God. Just because God had freed His people from exile does not mean that they were instantly perfect. Through the admonition of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, as well as spiritual leaders like Ezra, the people were brought back to righteousness.

Lessons Learned from Ezra

Sometimes God's Plan Has Greater Scope than We Can Imagine - Amidst the 70 years of exile in Babylon and the temple rebuilding process, there were people who doubted if they would ever repossess Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Some people who were taken into captivity were never able to see the restoration and return of their people. However, God was still working and had a long-term plan for the people. Just like them, we must trust that God does have a greater plan and that in the end all He decrees will be fulfilled, despite how hard the present can be.

Worldly Opposition Is a Reality - Throughout the rebuilding process in Jerusalem, the people of Israel had opposition coming from multiple fronts. Even though they were doing exactly what God called them to do, they still faced struggle. As we live the Christian life, we must be ready for and expect opposition. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-26 that those who would follow Him would have to deny themselves and take up their cross daily. Throughout the New Testament, we see persecution and hardship among those who follow God, but these followers of Christ had hope, as they knew that God was with them and they were struggling towards a greater goal.