

Jerusalem Re-Established (539-516 BC) Ezra 1-6

Review

- Time span represented in Ezra
 - Ezra 1-6 are Ezra's review of history prior to his being "on site" (539-516 BC)
 - Ezra 7-10 reflect his own involvement (ca. 460-445 BC)
- Immediate Persian context: Cyrus the Great (559-530)
 - conquered Babylon
 - issued edict prompting the return
- Subsequent Persian kings
 - Cambyses (530-522 BC)
 - Darius I (522-486 BC) – after tumult surrounding Cambyses' death, Darius took the throne; favorable toward Judah on his SW border → Temple completed
 - Xerxes I (486-465 BC) – called Ahasuerus in Esther
 - Artaxerxes I (464-425 BC)

Overview - Nature of Material in Ezra 1-6

- Narratives, lists (temple vessels, those who returned, genealogies, residents), and archived letters and decrees (which have parallels with official Persian documents)
- Language shift – sections with the "archived" documents are in Aramaic (4:8-6:18)
- Chapter 4 – summary of ongoing opposition from reign of Cyrus until Artaxerxes I (Ezra's time)—narrative shift from initial attempts to rebuild the **Temple** to later work on the **Wall** and back to the **Temple**

Geopolitics – Ethnic Groups "Beyond the River" (Trans-Euphrates) after the Temple's Destruction

- "People of the land" (3:3, 4:4) – why were they a threat? Identity(ies)?
- Edomites (Idumeans) moved into Negev and southern Judah
- Samaritans (or Samaritans)
- Ammonites
- Moabites and Edomites
- Philistines / Arabians
- Judah was small and surrounded by antagonistic neighbors – satrapy called "beyond the river" whose governor was Tattenai (name shows up in cuneiform sources – 486 BC)

Focus – Re-Establishing the Lord's House

- Edict to return – echoes of the Exodus (neighbors providing silver, gold, offerings)
- Temple articles returned—entrusted to Sheshbazzar
- Emphasis on Temple personnel—priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants
- Urim and Thummim
- Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 31—they were commanded to gather and read Torah)
- Altar built and requisite offerings for the festival and daily sacrifice
- Preparations for building—acquired materials from Phoenicia and laid the Temple foundation

Encountering Opposition [3:3; 4:1-24; and a subtler version in 5:3-17]

- From what quarters did the opposition come?
- How were the attempts “launched”? What strategies did the opponents use?
- How did the Jews initially deal with it? And later? Why might their response have changed?
- What lessons can we learn?

Completion of the Second Temple

- The roles of Haggai, Zechariah, Jeshua, and Zerubbabel
- The roles of the “layers of government,” the value of archives, and Darius’ likely motives
- Sixth year of Darius (516/515 BC)
- What is noticeable about the dedication ceremony and the Passover celebration?

Appendix: Overview of Ezra 1-6 with Specific References

- 1:1-4 - Edict of Cyrus –build the temple of the Lord
- 1:8-11 - Family heads from Judah, Benjamin, priests and Levites went up – echoes of leaving Egypt wealthy (and subsequent building of Tabernacle); temple articles returned
- 2:1-70 - Lists of names and locations; details on offerings
- 3:1-6 - Built altar for sacrifices (morning and evening); celebrated Feast of Tabernacles – foundation not yet laid
- 3:7- Materials gathered – second month, second year
- 3:8-9 - Mention of Zerubbabel and Jeshua
- 3:10-13 -Foundation laid – celebration; older priests who had seen the former temple wept
- 4:1-4 – Initial opposition – “enemies of Judah and Benjamin,” self-described as seeking “your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon [680-669 BC – son of Sennacherib], king of Assyria, who brought us here” (4:2) → i.e., several generations after the population exchange (2 Kings 17); “help” refused
- 4:5-24 - Summary of opposition from the time of Cyrus all the way through Ezra’s own time (through reigns of Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes I) and circling back at end to Darius—when the Temple was completed. Complete with later exchange of letters during the time of Artaxerxes accusing Jews of rebuilding walls
- 5:1-2 –Haggai and Zechariah enter the scene and prod Zerubbabel and Jeshua to restart work on the Temple
- 5:3-17 - Tattenai (governor) and Shethar-Bozenai questioned authorization; sent letter to Darius detailing the rebuilding effort, the query posed to the Jews, the response about the edict of Cyrus, and a request that search be made to determine if there really was an edict
- 6:1-12 – search of archives; abbreviated version of Cyrus decree (structure described, Temple articles returned); response of Darius to Tattenai—don’t harass the Jews; provide for sacrifices so the Jews would pray for well-being of king and his family; don’t change the decree or else!
- 6:13-18 – Temple completed; dedication celebration (offerings for all 12 tribes)
- 6:19-22 –celebrated Passover (ref to “king of Assyria”)