

Background to Ezra

Historical Context

See below: “Kingdom of Israel Overview”

King Cyrus “the Great” of Persia conquered Babylon in 539

Scriptural Context

Ezra is one of eleven books in The Writings, which is one of the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible – see **Luke 24:44** where Jesus mentions the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or Writings)

The Writings are divided into three sections:

Poetry: Psalms ~ Proverbs ~ Job

Scrolls: Song of Songs ~ Ruth ~ Lamentations ~ Ecclesiastes ~ Esther

History: Chronicles ~ Ezra-Nehemiah ~ Daniel

Nehemiah 7 repeats the list found in Ezra 2 of those who returned in the first wave (538)

1 Esdras, an apocryphal book (not part of the Biblical canon), contains much of Ezra

2 Chronicles 36:22-23 is repeated in **Ezra 1:1-3a**

Ezra is not quoted in the New Testament (1 of 9 Old Testament books not quoted in the New Testament).

Author

Unknown ~ Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Ezra ~ Ezra may have written 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah

Date of Writing

The exact date is unknown, but Ezra was most likely written between 450-445 B.C.

Dates of Events Described

The events described are from the first return in 538 until about 450, a period of close to 90 years.

The Return from Exile Was Prophesied Before the Exile

70 years of Babylonian Captivity was prophesied: **Jeremiah 25:1-12 and 29:10**

Also, **Habakkuk 1:5-11** where the Babylonians are called Chaldeans

Cyrus, King of Persia, was named 150 years in advance as the one God would use to overthrow the Babylonians in 539 and allow His people to return to their land: **Isaiah 44:28-45:7**.

Who Was Ezra?

He was a priest and a scribe who returned to Jerusalem in the second wave of returnees who were allowed to return by the decree of King Artaxerxes I in 458 (**See 7:6, 9-11**).

Major Themes

God's covenant faithfulness to His people, Israel.

God restores and revives His people after judgment.

The Word of God is central to the life of the people of God.

The people of God are identified by their true worship and true obedience as defined by the Word of God.

God's work of lovingly restoring and purifying His people is a perpetual work.

God knows His people and their families even in the midst of upheaval among nations on earth and sweeping, disruptive change taking place in their lives.

Kingdom of Israel Overview

United Kingdom

Saul ~ David ~ Solomon
1050-931

Divided Kingdom

Southern Kingdom (Judah)		Northern Kingdom (Israel)
<p>931-586 (345 years)</p> <p><u>20 Rulers</u> 12 did evil ~ 8 did right</p> <p><u>Prophets</u> Joel Micah Isaiah Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk</p> <p>Taken Captive by Babylonia in 586</p>		<p>931-722 (209 years)</p> <p><u>19 Rulers</u> All did evil ~ 1 did some good</p> <p><u>Prophets</u> Amos Hosea</p> <p>Taken Captive by Assyria in 722</p>

Judah in Exile

586-516
70 years

Prophets

Daniel 605-530
Ezekiel 593-571

Post Exile

1st Wave Allowed to Return – 538 (Sheshbazzar & Zerubbabel)

2nd Wave Allowed to Return – 458 (Ezra)

3rd Wave Allowed to Return – 445 (Nehemiah)

Prophets

Haggai 520
Zechariah 520
Malachi 432