



## Overview for Ezra

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**Purpose:** While the author's purpose in writing the Book of Ezra is not explicitly stated, it clearly was to record the resettlement of the Hebrew people in their homeland after their exile in Babylon, in fulfillment of God's promise to restore His people to their land.

**Author:** According to Jewish tradition, the books of both Ezra and Nehemiah were written by Ezra, the priest, scholar, and scribe who led the second group of Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

**Time Period Covered:** Chapters 1-6 occurred from 538-516 B.C. After an interval of about sixty years, Ezra 7-10 likely took place around 458 B.C.

**Date Written:** Uncertain, but likely around 450 B.C.

**History:** Because of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, the nation had been judged. The Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah and exiled most of its people. After Nebuchadnezzar died, Babylon was overthrown by Persia in 539 B.C.

During the time of Ezra, the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great encompassed nearly the entire Near East. Cyrus reorganized his realm into administrative provinces and adopted a lenient policy toward conquered nations, allowing the people to return to their homelands and maintain their local identities. This policy may have been intended to win the loyalty of the conquered peoples, and thus provide a protective buffer zone around the borders of his kingdom.

God used Cyrus and his ruling policy to fulfill His promise to restore the Jewish people to their own land. After living for seventy years in Babylon, nearly fifty thousand exiles made the journey back under the leadership of Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus appointed as governor of Judah.

**Setting:** The events in Ezra took place primarily in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The returning exiles were able to populate only a tiny portion of their former homeland.

The prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were contemporaries of Ezra, and also played key roles in encouraging the people and leaders of Judah to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

**Unique Features:** The Book of Ezra continues the historical narrative of the Chronicles; the final two verses of 2 Chronicles are repeated in the first two verses of Ezra.

Jeremiah had foretold that exile of the Jewish people would end after seventy years (see Jeremiah 29:10). Isaiah prophesied in chapter 45 of his writings that a ruler named Cyrus would capture Babylon and end the Jewish captivity. The fulfillments of both these prophecies are recorded in the Book of Ezra and verified by archaeological findings that reference the return of the Judean exiles and the freedom of worship they were given by Cyrus. The language and content of the Cyrus Cylinder, an ancient clay cylinder discovered in the ruins of Babylon in 1879, is very close to the decree recorded in Ezra 1:2-4.

In ancient manuscripts, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah appear as one document. Several sources seemingly were used in compiling the books. These include personal accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah; quotations from letters and official documents, such as royal decrees presented in their original form; Temple annals; and lists of names likely derived from public records. Ezra's background as a priest and scribe would have allowed him access to such documents.

Another unique feature of this book is the fact that although most of it was written in Hebrew, portions were written in Aramaic, the language of the Persian Empire (see Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26).

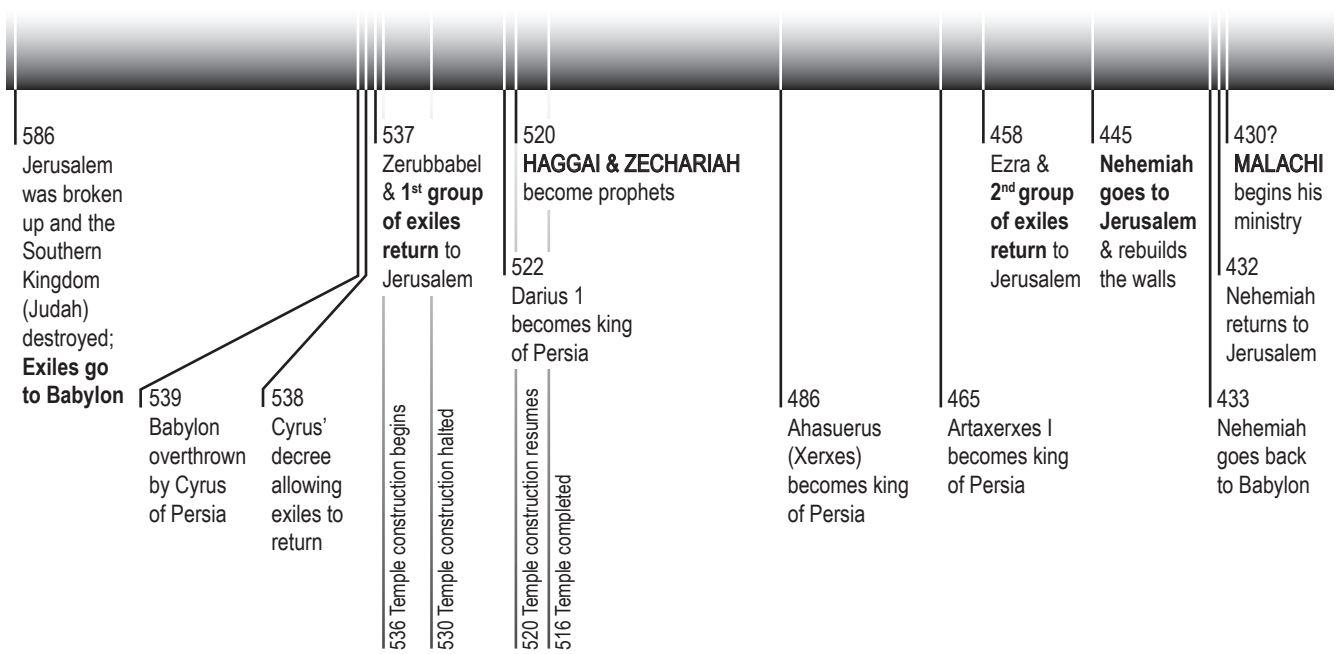
**Key People:** Ezra, Cyrus, Jeshua (Joshua), Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, Darius, Artaxerxes I

**Summary:** The Book of Ezra can be divided into two parts that are separated chronologically by nearly sixty years. The first section, chapters 1-6, relates how King Cyrus of Persia authorized the first return of the exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was appointed by Cyrus to serve as governor of Judah. The book documents the people's resettling in their homeland, their work of rebuilding the Temple, the opposition to their efforts, and the eventual completion of the Temple.

The events in chapters 7-10 likely took place over a period of about one year. This section describes the return of a second group of exiles, these under the leadership of Ezra the scribe, about sixty years after the completion of the rebuilt Temple. While Zerubbabel had led the people in physically rebuilding God's house, Ezra led the people in reforms to rebuild the law of God in their hearts and resumed the worship ceremonies. After learning that some had intermarried with their idolatrous neighbors, Ezra wept and prayed for his nation, leading the people to repentance and national revival.

# Timeline

*Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.*



# Outline

*Hannah's Bible Outlines used by permission per WORDsearch.*

*A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at [www.apostolicfaith.org](http://www.apostolicfaith.org).*

- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel (1:1 — 6:22)
  - A. The return under Zerubbabel (1:1 — 2:70)
  - B. The rebuilding under Zerubbabel (3:1 — 6:22)
- II. The reformation under Ezra (7:1 — 10:44)
  - A. The return under Ezra (7:1 — 8:36)
  - B. The reform under Ezra (9:1 — 10:44)