

Key to EZRA

1. STATISTICS:

Writer is Ezra, great-grandson of Hilkiah, an Aaronic priest-scribe (7:1; II Kings 22:8); time of writing about 450 B.C.; time covered, 93 years; key thought, restoration; key verse, 7:10; type of book, history; Josephus and Jerome and others have considered Ezra and Nehemiah as one work.

2. THEME:

The return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon as led first by Zerubbabel, and second by Ezra constituting, along with Nehemiah, the closing section of Old Testament history. Activities include the restoration of the temple, and the reorganization of national life.

3. OUTLINE:

Cyrus' decree (1) Ezra's expedition (7-10)
Zerubbabel's expedition (2-6)

4. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS:

Important genealogical lists constituted legal records.

Record of two returns: Zerubbabel, 536 B.C.; Ezra, 457 B.C. This period of restoration is direct result of Daniel 9:1-19. Between chapters 6 and 7 is a period of 60 silent years. Possibly the events of the book of Esther took place then.

Cyrus fulfilled prophecy spoken 200 years before (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

Prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah fit into this period.

In world history this was Greece's golden age; the lifetime of Buddha, 563-483; the lifetime of Confucius, 551-479.

The term "Jews" for all the 12 tribes began here.

5. OUTSTANDING TEACHINGS:

In contrast to Assyrian and Babylonian kings, the Persians had a national policy (no doubt GOD's direction) to repatriate deported people. Thus the way was opened for Israel to return to her land.

The first step in re-establishing the nation was to begin rebuilding the temple and observing national religious feasts. This was wise, and GOD gave joy in this (chapter 3).

Opposition inevitably developed when GOD's work began (4:1-22). But with the leadership of

the patriots and the encouragement of the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, the work of the temple was completed.

King Artaxerxes (7:1) was the stepson of Queen Esther. Some 59 years after the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, Ezra the priest-scribe led another expedition under the King's favorable commandment (7:11-26). Thus Queen Esther may have been responsible under GOD for the impetus given to the work of the restoration. Ezra took with him 1754 men.

The section of chapters 7-10 shows a period of reform. Ezra found a rather sad situation in Jerusalem. The very thing which GOD had forbidden was happening without restraint; intermarriage with the peoples of the land. Ezra was astounded.

Ezra's prayer is one of the Bible's great ones (9:5-15). He confessed the sins of the people and they became deeply moved, promising before GOD to rectify the abuses, especially the unlawful marriages.

The greatest accomplishments of Ezra occurred when GOD sent another great man to aid him, in the person of Nehemiah. Here are two whose gifts beautifully supplemented each other, supplying to each what the other lacked.

The key to Ezra's character is the statement, **"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments"** (7:10).

6. INTERESTING FEATURES:

From the largest deportation into exile in 606 B.C. to decree of Cyrus in 536 is just 70 years. From the destruction of the temple (586) to the rebuilding and dedication of the new temple (516) is exactly 70 years.

Jeremiah definitely fixed the period of exile at 70 years in his prophetic words in 25:11 and 29:10.

7. KEY TO UNDERSTANDING:

GOD is behind all that happens to the Jew, opening the way, encouraging hearts, giving victories. Yet this captivity was but a sample of the world-wide dispersion that was yet to come. Most of the people of GOD had not learned what GOD was trying to teach.

~ end of Ezra ~

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