

SIXTY-SIX BOOKS

Ezra & Nehemiah

Sunday, May 21 & May 28, 2023

Introduction:

Ezra & Nehemiah have been viewed throughout Jewish history as a single work. It includes sections clearly written by both Ezra and Nehemiah, which were likely incorporated together into one work sometime after 423 B.C by the final author (possibly Ezra) during or after Nehemiah's second governorship. It is not inappropriate to consider Ezra & Nehemiah as two chapters of a combined work.

Ezra-Nehemiah covers over 100 years at the end of the Old Testament period of history. The events of Nehemiah 13 likely follow the preaching of Malachi and contain the last events of Old Testament history. Although Hebrew manuscripts typically place Ezra-Nehemiah as the second-to-last book of the Old Testament, after Chronicles even though it occurs chronologically *after* Chronicles, some early manuscripts place Ezra-Nehemiah as the final book of the Old Testament.

Based upon the author's re-use of the last 2 verses of 2 Chronicles (2 Ch. 36:22-23) as the opening of Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 1:1-3), Ezra-Nehemiah appears to have been intentionally written as a sequel to Chronicles, continuing the story at the end of Chronicles as the combined accounts of Ezra-Nehemiah partially reverses the situation at the end of Chronicles which ended with the people in exile, the temple destroyed, and the gates and walls of Jerusalem in ruins (2 Ch. 36:19-21).

For these reasons, it is appropriate to consider Ezra-Nehemiah the last book of the Old Testament, meaning that when it was written and given to its original readers, it presupposes a knowledge of the rest of the Old Testament writings, especially the writings of Moses and the Prophets to best understand its message.

Purpose:

- **Ezra:** God demonstrates His faithfulness to His promises by sovereignly orchestrating Judah's return to the land to rebuild the Temple (Jer. 25:11; Jer. 29:10; Is. 44:28-45:1).
- **Nehemiah:** God demonstrates His faithfulness to His promises by sovereignly orchestrating the rebuilding of Jerusalem to prepare His people for their coming their King (Dan. 9:25).

Outline:

- I. The First Return Under Sheshbazzar & Zerubbabel - The Temple Rebuilt (Ezra 1-6)
- II. The Second Return Under Ezra (Ezra 7-10)
- III. The Third Return under Nehemiah – The Wall Rebuilt (Nehemiah 1-7)
- IV. The Reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8-13).

Chronology:¹

Color Legend:

Events described in Ezra & Nehemiah

Events recorded elsewhere in Scripture

Other historical events

Prophets ministering or Scripture given during time of Ezra-Nehemiah

Judah's Babylonian Exile

- 605 B.C. 1st Deportation - Daniel and companions, royal children exiled to Babylon (Daniel 1:1-6)
Jeremiah given first prophecy of 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12).
- 597 B.C. 2nd Deportation - The major deportation (2 Ki. 24:10-16; 2 Ch. 36:9-10).
Jeremiah given second prophecy of 70 years (Jer. 29:10).
- 586 B.C. 3rd Deportation - The destruction of Jerusalem and temple (2 Ki. 25:8-11; 2 Ch. 36:17-21; Jer. 52:12-16).

The First Return Under Sheshbazzar & Zerubbabel - The Temple Rebuilt (Ezra 1-6)

- 539 B.C. Cyrus, king of Persia, conquers Babylonian Empire. (Dan. 5:30)
Control of Babylon given to Darius the Mede, regent under Cyrus (Dan. 5:31; 6:1; 9:1).
- 538 B.C. First official year of Cyrus would be reckoned as 538 B.C.
Daniel reads Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel's return after 70 years (Dan. 9:1-2; see Jer. 25:11; 29:10).
Daniel prophesies 69 weeks of years from command to build Jerusalem until Messiah (Dan. 9:24-27).
Decree of Cyrus to return and build the temple (**Ezra 1:1-4**; also Ezra 6:2-5; see Is. 44:28-45:1).
- 537 B.C. 1st wave of exiles returns under Sheshbazzar & Zerubbabel (**Ezra 2**; also **Neh. 7**).
Altar rebuilt (**Ezra 3:1-6**).
- 536 B.C. Temple foundation laid (**Ezra 3:8-12**)
Possible fulfillment of 70 yrs. from 1st deportation in 605 B.C. (70 years includes 605 and 536).²
Temple construction stopped due to Samaritan opposition (**Ezra 4:1-5, 24**).
- 536-520 B.C. Temple construction neglected for 16 years (**Ezra 4:24**; Hag. 1-2).
Exiles faced economic hardship and drought (Hag. 1-2).
- 530 B.C. Cambyses II, son of Cyrus, begins reign over Persia.
- 522 B.C. Darius I (Hystapes) begins reign over Persia (**see Ezra 4:5, 4:24**)
- 520-515 B.C. Haggai & Zechariah minister and encourage the rebuilding efforts (**Ezra 5:1; 6:14**; Hag. 1-2; Zech. 1-8).
- 520 B.C. Temple construction resumed (**Ezra 4:24-6:12**).
- 515 B.C. Temple completed (**Ezra 6:15**)
Possible fulfillment of 70 yrs. from destruction of temple in 586 B.C. (70 years excluding 515).³

58-year gap (between Ezra 6 & 7)

- 515-458 B.C. Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah pass off scene.
Intermarriage with nations
Temple neglected.

- 486 B.C. Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) begins reign over Persia
Accusation written against the Jews (**Ezra 4:6**).⁴
- 483-473 B.C. **Book of Esther occurs in Persia. Ahasuerus weds Esther** (Esther 2:16).
- ca. 480-470 **Zechariah's later ministry and prophecies** (Zech. 9-14).
- 464 B.C. Artaxerxes begins reign over Persia

The Second Return Under Ezra (Ezra 7-10)

Mostly occurs in a 9 to 10-month period 80 years after Cyrus' decree.

- 458 B.C. Artaxerxes authorizes temple beatification (**Ezra 7:11-7:28**)
2nd wave of exiles return (**Ezra 7:1-10; 8:1-32**)
- 458-457 B.C. Intermarriage with unbelieving Gentiles dissolved (**Ezra 9-10**)
- 457 B.C. Temple repairs/beautification begins (**Ezra 6:14; 7:27**).⁵
- ca. 446 B.C. Exiles begin repairing foundations of Jerusalem and rebuilding its walls⁶
Adversaries write to Artaxerxes accusing Judah of rebellion (**Ezra 4:7-16**)⁷
Artaxerxes orders work on wall stopped (**Ezra 4:17-22**)
Adversaries stop work by force and military, tearing down walls and burning gates (**Ezra 4:23; Neh. 4:3**).

The Third Return under Nehemiah – The Wall Rebuilt (Nehemiah 1-7)

- 445 B.C. Nehemiah learns of destruction of gates and wall and work stoppage (**Neh. 1:1-11**).
- 444 B.C. Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's request to go to Judah and rebuild city (**Neh. 2:1-8**).
Beginning of Daniel's 69 weeks until Messiah (Daniel 9:24-25).⁸
3rd wave of exiles return with Nehemiah and begin rebuilding wall (**Neh. 2:9-18**).
Wall construction completed in just 52 days (**Neh. 6:15**).

The Reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8-13).

- 444-432 B.C. Nehemiah's serves his first governorship for 12 years (**Neh. 8-12**)
- ca. 444-443 B.C. The People's Repentance (**Neh. 8-9:37**)
Renewal of covenant (**Neh. 9:38-10**)
Repopulation of Jerusalem (**Neh. 11:1-19**)
Distribution of Priests in surrounding cities (**Neh. 11:20-36**)
Dedication of the Wall (**Neh. 12:27-47**).
- 432 B.C. Nehemiah returns to Persia (**Neh. 13:6-7**)
- ca. 432-431 **Malachi prophecies in Jerusalem and calls Judah and its leaders to repentance** (Mal. 1-4)
- ca. 431-424 Spiritual deterioration in Judah (see **Neh. 13:3; 4-5; 10; 15-16; 23-24**)
Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem for his 2nd governorship during reign of Artaxerxes after spiritual decline.⁹
Nehemiah's final reforms in Judah (**Neh. 13:1-3, 7-9, 11-14, 17-22, 25-31**).
- e. 423 B.C. Darius II begins reign in Persia after Artaxerxes
- f. 423- 410 Nehemiah's governorship ends no later than 410 B.C when Bagoas is governor¹⁰

g. 423-400 Ezra-Nehemiah completed sometime after reign of Darius II begins (**Neh. 12:22**)¹¹

Endnotes

¹ This chronology, while much adapted, is generally reliant upon the chronology provided by J. Carl Laney in *Ezra and Nehemiah* in the Everyman's Bible Commentary set (Moody 1982, pages 123-129). Laney's work is an excellent, brief (132 page) resource from a conservative perspective that is quite helpful in making sense of the chronology and historical background behind Ezra & Nehemiah.

² There are two possible ways of calculating the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in Jer. 25:11-12 and Jer. 29:10.

³ See endnote 2.

⁴ Ezra 4:6-4:23 is included here as part of the history of opposition against the Jews, but occurs later in chronology of Ezra. Ezra 4:6 occurred during the reign of Ahasuerus. Details of his reign occur during the 58-year gap between Ezra 6 and 7 and other than Ezra 4:6 are not included in the Ezra-Nehemiah. The biblical record of his reign is included in the book of Esther.

⁵ Artaxerxes authorized the beautification of the temple in Ezra 7:27. However, those additional building efforts in the temple are not described upon Ezra's return to Judah. The deposit of the gifts in the temple is described in Ezra 8:33-36 on the fourth day after their return. But the problem of intermarriage soon occupied the returning exiles for a period of 3 months. It is likely the temple beautification/repairs that became necessary during the last 58 years were completed during and/or after addressing intermarriage in Judah. While the temple was originally completed in 515 B.C. (with work completed during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius), this additional work on the temple after its completion during the reign of Artaxerxes helps explain Ezra 6:14 which says "So they built and completed it according to the decree of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." It is also not a coincidence that the reign of Cambyses II (who reigned between Cyrus and Darius) is not mentioned because he reigned during the period of the 16-year work stoppage on the temple.

⁶ The specific act of repairing the foundations of Jerusalem and rebuilding the walls is not stated, but the fact that it occurred providing the reason for the accusation against the Jews sent to Artaxerxes which was recorded in Ezra 4:8-16 as part of the history of opposition. Nehemiah would also mourn the destruction of whatever work had begun on the walls when he learned of the destruction caused by the Jew's adversaries after Artaxerxes orders the city building to stop (Neh. 1:3).

⁷ Ezra 4:7-23 chronologically occurred later during the reign of Artaxerxes who came to power during the 58-year gap between Ezra 6 and 7. The later details of his reign are included in the book of Nehemiah. This detail is included here in Ezra as part of the history of the opposition against the Jews. Both Ahasuerus(Xerxes) and Artaxerxes reigned *after* Darius I (Hystapes) whose reign is described in Ezra 5:24-6:22.

⁸ The date of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, calculated by Harold Hoehner as March 5, 444 B.C., marks the beginning of Daniel's Seventy Weeks. Sixty-nine of those seventy weeks (173,880 days) were literally fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem, presenting himself at the triumphal entry as Israel's Messiah on March 30, A.D. 33. The prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled to the very day in Luke 19:27-44 (also fulfilling Psalm 118:26 and Zech. 9:9) when Messiah entered Jerusalem, paving the way for the "cutting off" of the Messiah four days later as foretold in Daniel 9:26.

The seventieth week of Daniel, the Tribulation (Dt. 4; Is. 13;24; Jer. 30; Eze. 20; Dan, 7; 9; 11; 12; Joel 2;3; Amos, Zeph., Zech., Mal 4, Matt. 24:4-8; Mt. 25; Mk. 13;14; Lk. 17;21; 1 Thess, 2 Thess. Rev. 6-19), will find its fulfillment in the future (see Harold W. Hoehner, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (January-March): 64). Listen to Smedly Yates's sermon on Daniel 9:24-27 "God's Help for Israel" from June 26, 2022 for a walkthrough of the dating of the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy <https://www.gbcaz.org/sermon/daniel-924-27/>.

⁹ Nehemiah's brother Hanani may have serves as governor during his absence (Neh. 7:2; Mal. 1:8).

¹⁰ The duration of Nehemiah's second governorship is not known. But he was no longer governor in 410 B.C. as an Elephantine papyrus identifies of governor of Judah at that time as Bagoas.

¹¹ "Darius the Persian" in Neh. 12:22 is best identified as Darius II who reigned in Persia after Artaxerxes from 423-404 B.C. His mention in Neh. 12:22, although not coming into the narrative of Nehemiah itself, is in relation to the "Book of the Chronicles" in 12:23 that refers not to the biblical book of Chronicles, but to an official record that contained the names of the Levitical families up to the time of the reign of Darius II. Nehemiah wanted the read to know that these records could be substantiated elsewhere. However, Darius II's inclusion in 12:22 helps identify the completion and final compilation of Ezra-Nehemiah sometime after Darius II's reign begins in 423 B.C.