



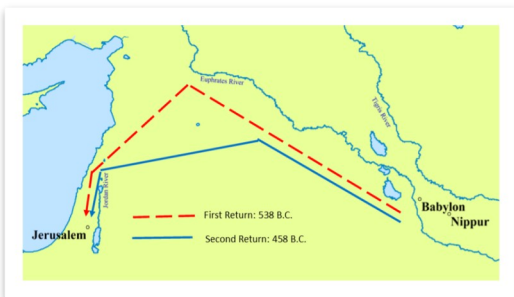
Ezra: A Quiet Giant of Faith

When we talk about great Bible heroes, Ezra is not a name that immediately comes to mind. He is surrounded by other great men of faith that often overshadow him. This is somewhat true regarding secular history as well. During the lifetime of Ezra, Gautama Buddha was in India; Confucius was in China; and Socrates was in Greece. These men shaped and influenced philosophy and religion in such a way that it is still felt in much of the world today. The truth, however, is Ezra stood above even these men. Much of Ezra's work is not specifically recorded, but Jewish tradition and general consensus of Biblical scholars tells us he accomplished a great deal. Ezra is credited with the formation of the synagogue style worship that became a way of life for the Jews and was prevalent during the time of Jesus. Ezra is probably the author of the book that bears his name, the book of Nehemiah, and likely the books of Chronicles; making him one of the most prolific Old Testament writers next to Moses. Further, it is believed that Ezra was responsible for the final collection and arrangement of the Psalms, and it was probably Ezra that compiled and put together the various books and writings into the official canon of the Old Testament. That's a pretty amazing resumé!

One of the greatest attributes and accomplishments of Ezra, however, is recorded directly in the Bible. Ezra 7:10 says, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." What a great commendation, and what an example to follow! Ezra became a skilled scribe because he set his heart to studying God's Word. He wasn't content with just knowing God's Word though. He studied it so that he might live it and teach it. Ezra truly is a Bible hero worth knowing and learning from today.

Questions

1. Cyrus declared the Jews could return to Jerusalem, fulfilling the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet _____.
2. Which feast did the Jews observe when they returned to Jerusalem and built an altar? _____
3. When the temple foundation was laid, how did the elderly who had seen the previous temple respond? _____
4. Which prophets served the Jewish people during the time of Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the temple? _____
5. The temple was completed during the reign of which Persian king? _____
6. Did Ezra ask for a band of soldiers to travel with them for protection? Why or why not? _____
7. What major problem did Ezra have to deal with when he arrived in Jerusalem, and how was it handled? _____



Ezra

Returning, Rebuilding, and Restoring

Overview

Seventy years had passed since the Jewish people were first carried off into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah had prophesied that the captivity would last seventy years, and he was right! In 539 B.C. the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon, and in 538 B.C. (seventy years after the first wave of exile in 608 B.C.) Cyrus issued a decree that all Jews who desired to could return to Jerusalem. Not only could they return and begin rebuilding, they would be aided in doing so! Thus the book of Ezra begins the story of the Jewish people during the return era of their history. The books of Nehemiah and Esther also take place during this period. Ezra tells of the first two waves of return. One led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple, and a second wave some 60 years later led by Ezra himself. While Jerusalem is not restored to her former glory, the people are back in the promised land, the temple is rebuilt, and the stage is being set for God's greatest promises of a Messiah to eventually unfold!

Suggested Reading Schedule

- Monday: Ezra 1-2
- Tuesday: Ezra 3-4
- Wednesday: Ezra 5-6
- Thursday: Ezra 7-8
- Friday: Ezra 9-10

Kings and Leaders

Below is a brief outline of the Persian rulers that reigned during this time, as well as the prominent Jewish leaders we read about.

Cyrus the Great (559—530 B.C.) Issued decree allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem

Cambyses (530—522 B.C.)

Smerdis/Bardiya (522 B.C.)

Darius I (522 B.C.—486 B.C.) Reinstated Cyrus decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple

Ahasuerus/Xerxes (486—464 B.C.) Married Esther

Artaxerxes I (464—423 B.C.) Sent Ezra and Nehemiah back to Jerusalem in two final waves of return.

Zerubbabel: Jehoiachin's grandson and rightful heir to the Jewish throne. Main leader behind first return wave and rebuilding the temple

Jeshua: High priest during the first wave of return

Haggai & Zechariah: Prophets during the rebuilding of the Temple

Ezra: Direct descendant of Aaron and a skilled scribe. Led the second wave of return and restored proper worship and living conditions

Outline of Ezra

The book of Ezra covers a period of roughly 80 years. It is divided into two main sections, each of which tells the story of a return to Jerusalem. The first wave is told in the third person about Zerubbabel and the first return. The second wave is recounted in the first person, an indication that Ezra is also the author of this book. A period of some 60 years lies between the two waves, and thus between chapters 6 and 7 in the book of Ezra.

The First Return (Ezra 1-6)

Cyrus' Decree and Census (1-2)

Return and Rebuilding of Temple (3-6)

The Second Return (Ezra 7-10)

Trip to Jerusalem (7-8)

Restoring the Nation's Purity (9-10)



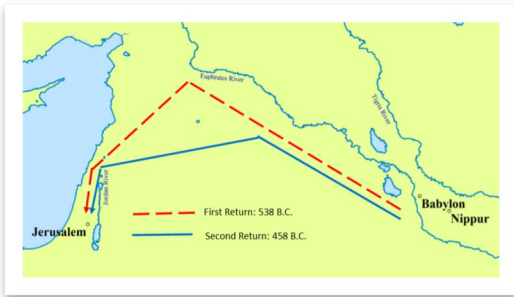
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