



**EZRA**  
**RESTORATION OF WORSHIP**

## EZRA

### Argument

*The book is literally separated by two decrees; the first by Cyrus (1:1) and the second by Artaxerxes (7:1). This, of course, details the sections of the book into the first return (1-6) and the second return (7-10).*

I. The First Return results in the building of the foundation and then the temple (1—6)

*The first return (1-6) deals with the building of the temple. It is broken into two sections. These are the building of the foundation of the temple (1-3) and the building of the temple (4-6). Each of these sections is concluded with the finishing of their portion of the temple, and the subsequent joy and praise of the people. (Compare (3:10-13) with 6:15-22.)*

A. The foundation of the temple is laid following the meticulous instructions of the covenant (1—3).

*The first three chapters are a record of the movement toward the building of the foundation. It is totally positive, with everything going well for those who would participate in this building effort.*

*First, Cyrus, a Gentile king, is led by God to, not only release the exiles (1:1-4), but to give them the gold and silver (1:5-11), which was brought from the temple at the beginning of the exile.*

*Then Ezra listed the heads of households, and the numbers of those who accompanied them (2:1-70). This is to demonstrate the totality and the thoroughness with which the nation was represented. There are the general Israelite, the Levites, the temple servants, the sons of Solomon's servants, the temple servants, and those who could not locate their ancestral records (and thus were considered unclean).*

*Chapter 3 basically points out the fact that the people were concentrating on doing things the proper way, for they first built the altar so that they could offer burnt offerings during the building, for they were afraid of the people. Then as the foundation is complete, they weep and rejoice demonstrating the blessing of God in their unity of purpose; that of building the temple.*

B. The temple building is frustrated by Gentile opposition but reversed as it is completed with their support (4—6)

*Phase one begins. First the bad news; while the people of Israel were rejoicing, their enemies, the unclean Gentiles, sought deceitfully to join them, and being refused sought to frustrate them (4:1-5). The section 4:8-6:18 (also 7:12-26) are in Aramaic (the standard language of official correspondence).*

*It is here that Ezra inserts a parenthesis (4:6-23). This parenthesis describes the opposition that the Gentiles gave 80 years later during the reign of Ahasuerus (4:6-7) and in the reign of Artaxerxes (4:8-23). Here is detailed a letter, which demonstrates this opposition was to continue throughout the effort by the Jews. Ezra continues in 4:24 to tell how the work stopped due to the Gentile opposition.*

*Now the good news; it is here that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned. They encourage the people to start again (5:1-2).*

*Phase two begins. First the bad news; the Gentiles are not to be beaten, and they fire off a letter to Darius to question whether Cyrus indeed did issue this command to rebuild as the Jews so adamantly use as their legal right to rebuild (5:6-17).*

*But here is the good news; not only does Darius find the decree (6:1-5), but issues his own decree that these opposers should not only cease from their opposition (6:6-7), but that they should aid in provision for their building (6:8-12).*

*Thus with the aid of Gentile kings, the Jews finish the temple, and are found rejoicing as they celebrate the passover. The point is that this building of the temple came about as God moved in the heart of Gentile rulers to overcome circumstantial opposition by Gentiles to His house of worship.*

- II. The temple worship begins in covenant faithfulness but continues with Covenant violation as in Israel's past history(7--10)

*As the first section of the book (1-6) dealt with the building of the temple for temple worship, the second deals with the preparation of the people for that temple worship.*

*The second section of the book is broken up into two sections. These deal with two specific areas as did the first section of the book (1-6). The first (7-8) is the detail of the journey demonstrating the positiveness and carefulness toward Levitical instruction with which the group returned to Jerusalem. The second (9-10) deals with a problem which interrupts the purity of the people who would involve themselves in temple worship.*

- A. In the Second Return Ezra is faithful to insure the proper Levitical priesthood for the services and God insures their safe journey (7—8)

*These chapters will point out that attention to the Levitical instruction regarding the temple is of utmost importance to the exiles who return in this second wave. The first explanation is that of the qualifications of Ezra, and his intentions as leader of this group (7:1-10). He is a Levite, but one descended from Aaron. He is a scribe, and a godly man. Ezra was particularly interested in, not only the study of the law, but the practice and the teaching of it.*

*Following this introduction Artaxerxes, another Gentile king led by God, gives Ezra leave and also power to have the Gentile neighbors contribute to the cause (7:11-26). Ezra makes sure that the reader has understood the inclusion of this section in the text, but declaring that God has put these things in these Gentile kings' hearts (7:27-28).*

*In chapter 8, Ezra details those who came with him (8:1-14), however, finds that there are not Levites among them, and sends to rectify the situation (8:15-20). This demonstrates the fastidiousness with which Ezra was intent on following proper temple worship upon their arrival.*

*The rest of the chapter (8:21-36) is basically recorded to demonstrate Ezra's faith in the Lord for protection on the journey. He calls on the Lord for safety during the journey (8:21-23), gives the priests responsibility for the gold and silver (8:24-34), and offers sacrifices on arrival at Jerusalem (8:35-36).*

- B. The Proper Covenantal Temple worship is frustrated by the violations of the people in intermarrying (and bearing children) with Gentiles (as Solomon in his downfall) (9--10)

*Now comes the bad news. As Ezra settles in the land, he is confronted by the fact that the people have intermarried with the unclean Gentiles, polluting themselves for temple worship (9:1-4). Ezra turns to God in repentance (9:5-15).*

*The people come to Ezra and desire to repent, divorcing the foreign women (10:1-4). Ezra calls all the exiles to Jerusalem (10:5-15), and Ezra investigates (10:16-44). He finds that those who have intermarried, are sons of priests (10:18-22), Levites (10:23), singers (10:24), and of Israel (10:25-43). Further, they had even been so far entangled that they had already had children (10:44).*

### Conclusion

*The book is almost unique in its ending. While the decline of Israel recorded in Kings ends on an upnote (the continuation of the Godly line in Jehoiakin), and Chronicles leaves the reader hope (it mentions the decree of Cyrus in its conclusion), Ezra leaves the reader wondering what happened. No follow through is recorded regarding the peoples' repentance.*

*The questions that arise then might be, is the nation ready for return of the glory which left in Ezekiel 8-10? Are they ready for the ultimate in the Levitical priesthood? What was the writer intending for the reader to feel? Through hindsight he entered a period of 400 years of silence, broken by the sound of a "voice crying in the wilderness." Another Elijah came forth.*