

Old Testament Survey

Ezra and Nehemiah

General Outline of Ezra

- I. The Return of the Jews from Babylon Under Zerubbabel - Ezra 1-6
 - A. The Edict of Cyrus, Departure from Babylon, the Restitution of the Sacred Vessels - Ezra 1
 - B. The List of the Returnees - Ezra 2
 - C. The Alter of Burnt Offering Erected, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Foundations of the Temple Laid - Ezra 3
 - D. Hindrances to the Building of the Temple, Accusations Regarding the Walls of Jerusalem - Ezra 4
 - E. The Building of the Temple Continues - Ezra 5
 - F. The Royal Decree to Build The Temple Confirmed by Darius - Ezra 6
- II. The Return of Ezra From Babylon to Jerusalem - Ezra 7-10
 - A. Ezra's Return and Comission - Ezra 7
 - B. The List of Returnee's With Ezra - Ezra 8
 - C. Ezra's Proceedings in Separating Foreign Wives - Ezra 9-10

General Outline of Nehemiah

- I. Nehemiah's Journey to Jerusalem - Nehemiah 1-6
 - A. Nehemiah's Prayer for Jerusalem - Nehemiah 1
 - B. Nehemiah Journeys to Jerusalem, His Survey of the Walls - Nehemiah 2
 - C. The Building of the Walls and Gates of Jerusalem - Nehemiah 3-4
 - D. The Abolition of Usury - Nehemiah 5
 - E. Traps for Nehemiah, The Wall is Finished - Nehemiah 6
- II. Nehemiah's Further Work - Nehemiah 7-12:43
 - A. The Watching of the City, Returnees with Zerubbabel - Nehemiah 7
 - B. Public Reading of the Law, the Feast of Tabernacles, A Covenant Made to Keep the Law - Nehemiah 8-10
 - C. The Increase of the Inhabitants of Jerusalem - Nehemiah 11
 - D. Lists of Priests and Levites, Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem - Nehemiah 12:1-43
- III. Nehemiah's Tasks During His Second Stay in Jerusalem - Nehemiah 12:44-13:31

Three Decrees

1. The decree of Cyrus in 536 B.C. - Ezra 1:1-4

This decree only referred to the rebuilding of the Temple, not the city walls. Under this edict Zerubbabel and Joshua returned and rebuilt the Temple.

2. The decree of Artaxerxes in 458 B.C. - Ezra 7:11-26

This decree allowed any Jews who so desired to return to Jerusalem. It gave specific privileges to Ezra and the Levites as well as gave them free reign to establish a limited form of self-governance.

3. The second decree of Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. - Nehemiah 2:1.

This gave Nehemiah the right to rebuild and fortify the city walls of Jerusalem.

Authorship and Date

1. Assuming the Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 7:1 was Artaxerxes I Longimanus, Ezra would have arrived in Jerusalem in the year 457 B.C. (the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes). Thus, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem 12 years before Nehemiah who did not come until the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes.
2. William F. Albright, however, placed Ezra during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.). The problems with this date are:
 - a. Nehemiah 8:1 mentions that Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries.
 - b. It would conflict with the Elephantine Papyri which mention the high priest Johanan and Sanballat, the Governor of Samaria. Johanan was a grandson of Elisahib who in turn was a contemporary of Nehemiah. This means that the Artaxerxes mentioned in Nehemiah 1:1 and 13:6 is Artaxerxes I Longimanus, and the dates are 445 and 433 respectively. If the Artaxerxes mentioned in these two verses is Artaxerxes II, then the dates would be 384 and 372, far too late for Johanan.
3. A later view by William Albright places Ezra's mission in the thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes or 428 B.C. This view has been defended by John Bright on the following grounds:
 - a. If Ezra had arrived in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, then thirteen years would have elapsed before he got around to reading the law as recorded in Nehemiah 8:1-8.

However, Nehemiah 8:1-8 mentions the reading of the law during the Feast of Tabernacles. It does not say that this is the first reading of the law by Ezra.
 - b. If Ezra's reforms in Ezra 9-10 preceded those of Nehemiah, then Ezra's reforms failed.

Just because Ezra (ca. 457) and Nehemiah (ca. 434) dealt with the same issue of the intermarriage with foreign wives does not mean that in the twenty-three intervening years the problem could not have risen again.
 - c. When Ezra came to Jerusalem, he found the city "inhabited and relatively secure" whereas Nehemiah found it "in ruins."

However, Nehemiah does not say that Jerusalem was uninhabited or in ruins, only that its walls were in ruins. Nehemiah's reaction regarding the news of Jerusalem's walls was in response to the fact that the walls had not been rebuilt, due most likely to the hostilities with Israel's enemies.
 - d. Since Nehemiah 12:26 lists Nehemiah before Ezra, he must have preceded Ezra.

Most likely the reason his name is mentioned first is that he is the head of state whereas Ezra is merely the spiritual leader.
 - e. Ezra 7:7 should read "thirty-seventh year" instead of "seventh year".

However, it would then mean that the reforms against the intermarriage with foreign wives instigated by Nehemiah five years before (thirty-second year of Artaxerxes), would have had to be repeated by Ezra (thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes).

4. The only view which does justice to the Biblical text is that Ezra returned in 458 or 457 B.C., and Nehemiah's first governorship began in 445 B.C. and his second in 433 B.C.

Critical Objections to the Historicity and Authenticity of Ezra/Nehemiah

1. The Names Jaddua (Nehemiah 12:11) and Johanan (Ezra 10:6) are used to point to a late date.
 - a. The issue with Jaddua can be explained by seeing him as the grandson of Eliashab and not as his son (the Hebrew word *ben* can be used to refer to three generations).
 - b. The problem with Jaddua is more difficult as Josephus mentions the fact that it was Jaddua who met Alexander the Great in in 330 B.C. Since Nehemiah 12:11 mentions Jaddua, it is contested that Nehemiah was actually composed much later.

However, Josephus could have been wrong in his statement regarding Jaddua as he mistakenly reports Saballat and Manasseh (fifth century figures) as being with Jaddua.

2. The use of the name "Darius the Persian" points to the author as living in the time of the Greek Empire.

Archaeology has shown that the title "King of Persia" was used many times to refer to kings during the time of the Medo-Persian Empire. This argument has been soundly refuted by the archaeologist's spade.

3. Variations in the two copies of Cyrus' Decree in Ezra 1 and Ezra 6 are used to raise questions.

It is best to see, however, that the decree in Ezra 1 (Hebrew version) was from Babylon and was the original decree. The decree recorded in Ezra 6 (Aramaic version) was an abstract put into the official archives.

4. The Aramaic portions of Ezra (Ezra 4-7) reflect a later period of Aramaic than that which a fifth-century writer would have used.

The Elephantine Papyri show that the Aramaic used in Ezra is characteristic of that of the fifth century B.C.

5. It is asserted the author of Ezra forgot the true order of Persian Kings. In Ezra 4 we see references passed from Cyrus the Great (558-529) to Xerxes (485-464), Artaxerxes I (464-424), and then Darius I (522-485).

The problem with this apparent mixup of kings is resolved when one sees that Ezra is writing about the history of opposition of the building of the walls of Jerusalem, and not a strictly chronological rendering of events. Also, Ezra 4:5 shows that the author was aware that Darius I reigned in-between Cyrus and Xerxes.

6. The reference to Greek *drachmas* in Nehemiah 7:71 point to an authorship during the Greek period.

Greek drachmas have been discovered during the Persian era. Additionally, the Elephantine Papyri show that the Greek drachma was a standard of exchange in the fifth century B.C.

Kings of Medo-Persia

King	Date
Cyrus II	558-529
Cambyses II	529-523
Pseudo-Smerdis	523-522
Darius I	522-485
Xerxes I	485-464
Artaxerxes I Longimanus	464-424
Darius II	423-406
Artaxerxes II	404-359