

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA-NEHEMIAH

EZRA 1-2

Introduction

- A) One continuous book in Hebrew Bible
- B) Date of history recorded: **538 – 430 BC**
- C) Main divisions:
 - 1) Return of exiles and rebuilding of temple – Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6; 538 BC)
 - 2) Second group of exiles return with Ezra (Ezra 7-10; 457 BC)
 - 3) Rebuilding walls of Jerusalem – Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-7; 445 BC)
 - 4) Reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8-13; 445-400 BC)
- D) Exiles returned to land with chief physical and spiritual structures rebuilt, with the law and separate nation status reconfirmed

Rulers of Persian Empire and History of Ezra-Nehemiah

Cyrus the Great (558-530 BC)

- 539 BC Defeats Babylon
- 538 BC Sends exiles in captivity back to homelands
- Cyrus Cylinder quote:
“I am Cyrus...the great king, the powerful king...I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements...May all the gods that I returned to their sanctuaries...ask for a long life for me, and mention my good deeds”

(https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1880-0617-1941)

Cambyses (530-522 BC)

Darius I (521-486 BC)

- Haggai and Zechariah (520 BC)
- Temple completed (515 BC)

Xerxes I [Ahasuerus] (486-464 BC)

- Story of Esther

Artaxerxes I (464-423 BC)

- Ezra returns with exiles (457 BC Ezra 7:8)
- Nehemiah returns as governor (445 BC Neh. 5:14)
- Nehemiah's second return (433 BC Neh. 13:6-7)

Darius II (423-406 BC)

Artaxerxes II (404-359 BC)

Ezra 1-2 – Edict of Cyrus and the Exiles Prepare to Return

I) Edict of Cyrus – 538 BC (1:1-4)

- A) Lord “stirred up” the spirit of Cyrus - providence (cf. v. 5)
- B) Fulfill Jeremiah 25:12-14; 29:10-13; cf. Dan. 9:2 (70 years 605-538 BC)
- C) Fulfill Isaiah 44:24-45:13 – Prophecy about Cyrus more than a century before he was born
- D) Proclamation/edict throughout the kingdom (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23)
 - 1) “God commanded me” – did he know about Isaiah’s prophecy?

- II) ***Jewish exiles prepare to return and build the house of the Lord (1:5-11)***
- A) Goods given to them by those around them
 - 1) Marks of a second “exodus” (see Ex. 12:35-36; Isa. 48:20-21)
 - B) Cyrus returns temple items that Nebuchadnezzar had taken (cf. 2 Chron. 36:7, 18)
 - 1) List of temple items a witness to God’s care and continued covenant
 - 2) “From Babylon to Jerusalem” – Bible history milestone
- III) ***Listing of exiles who returned to Jerusalem and Judah (2:1-70)***
- A) Continued memory of places and genealogies needed for replanting of nation
 - B) Similar list used by Nehemiah (Neh. 7)
 - C) Zerubbabel – grandson of Jehoiachin, king of Judah (Hag. 2:23; Matt. 1:12)
 - D) Joshua – High Priest (Zech. 3:1)
 - E) Careful handling of those who could not confirm their genealogy (vv. 59-63)
 - F) Totals in first return of exiles (vv. 64-67)
 - G) Exiles settle down in land to renew lives and the worship of God (v. 70)

Questions

- 1) What does it mean that the Lord “stirred up” Cyrus and the exiles?

- 2) What does God’s use of Cyrus to accomplish His will teach us about God?

- 3) What did the return to the land of promise teach the remnant of Israel about God’s promises?

- 4) Why were genealogies so important to the Jews?

- 5) What is the first task to be started by the returning Jews?