

## The Book of Ezra

**Cyrus II** ("Cyrus the Great", "Cyrus King of Persia" (559-530 BC)).

- He was the son of Cambyses I, king of Anshan and Mandane (the daughter of Astyages, King of Media and Imperial lord of Persia).
- Cyrus' family likely descended from highland Elamite (Elam was a region east of Mesopotamia, modern day Iran) rulers.
- He was a wise and tolerant ruler
- He was able to gain the goodwill and trust of the varied ethnic and religious groups within his large empire
- He was known for his military prowess
- He died in a battle in 530. His tomb is still in Pasargadae in southwestern Iran
- He was succeeded by his son Cambyses II
- The famous Cyrus Cylinder, containing records of his reign, revealed that Babylon's chief god, Marduk, had accepted him as "righteous prince," and had appointed him ruler "over the whole world."
- Cyrus Cylinder is a baked clay cylinder that includes an account of the conquest of the Babylonian Empire by the Persian king Cyrus the Great, written in cuneiform script.

### Persian Evidence

- Founded the Achaemenid Empire through a rapid series of conquests:
  - Media in 550 BC defeating Astyages last king of Media.
  - Lydia from 547–546 BC defeating Croesus the last king of Lydia
  - Anatolian kingdoms ca. 546–542 BC
  - Central Asia (chronology uncertain)
  - Babylon in 539 BC defeating Nabonidus last king of Neo-Babylonian Empire and Belshazzar (Daniel 5).

The Achaemenid (First Persian) Empire was an ancient Iranian empire based in Western Asia, ranging at its greatest extent from the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the west to the Indus Valley in the east.

- Larger than any previous empire in history, spanning 5.5 million square kilometers.
- Incorporated various peoples of different origins and faith
- Notable for its successful model of centralized, bureaucratic administration (through satraps (governors of provinces) under the King of Kings),
  - Building infrastructure road and postal systems
  - Use of an official language across its territories
  - The development of civil services and a large professional army.

There were 13 attested kings during the 220 years of the empire's existence. The reign of Artaxerxes II was the longest, lasting 47 years.

### Persian kings during the post exilic period of the Jews

Name	Comments	Dates (BC)
Cyrus the Great	Founder of the empire; King of the "four corners of the world"	559-530
Cambyses II	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	530-522
Smerdis/Bardiya	King of Persia, allegedly an imposter	522
Darius I	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	522-486
Xerxes I/Ahasuerus	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	486-465
Artaxerxes I	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	465-424
Xerxes II	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	424 (45 days)
Sogdianus	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	424-423
Darius II	King of Persia in addition to Pharaoh of Egypt	423-405

### Biblical Significance

- Cyrus was called by name over 100 years before he was born (Isaiah 45:1)
- He appears by name in 18 verses (2 Chronicles, Ezra, Isaiah and Daniel)
- Prophecies concerning him (Isa 13:17-22; 21:1-2; 41:1-2; 44:27-28; 45:1-4, 13; 46:10-11; 48:14-15)
- Called Jehovah's shepherd (Isa 44:28) and the Lord's anointed (Isa 45:1) "a type of Messiah"
- Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 13:7; 21:2) is confirmed by Daniel (Dan 5:31) that the Medes shared in the destruction of Babylon.
- The prophecies of Isaiah attribute the capture of Babylon to Cyrus (Isa 44:27-28; 45:1-4)
- Darius the Mede was made subordinate King by Cyrus (Dan 5:31; 9:1)
- Darius reigned as viceroy of Babylon from 538 to 536 BC, before Cyrus began to reign in Babylon.
- Daniel was a member of Cyrus' court and prospered during the reign of him and Darius (Dan 1:21; 6:28; 10:1)
- Cyrus permitted the exiles to return to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3; Prov. 21:1; Dan 2:21)
- Jeremiah's prophecy is fulfilled (Jer. 25:10-14; 27:22; 29:10-14; Dan 9:2; 2 Chron. 36:21; Ezra 1:1)
- Cyrus acknowledges that God had given him the kingdoms of the earth (Ezra 1:2)
- Cyrus ordered the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 1:3; 6:3)
- Cyrus's decree ordered the Jews to return and build the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4; 3:7; 4:3-5; 5:13-15, 17; 6:3-5, 14).
- Cyrus was generous to the Jews giving them the articles that were taken by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:7-11; 6:5)
- He allowed the temple rebuilding expenses out of the royal revenue (Ezra 6:4)

**Ezra** (short for Azariah, "God helps", "the helper")

### The book

- Named after the priest and scribe Ezra, referred to in Ezra 7–10, Nehemiah 8, 12
- Written by Ezra the priest and scribe
- Ezra describes the exiles' return, the temple's restoration, and the institution of the law during the Persian Period (550–332 BC)
- Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a single work
- Written in two different languages: Hebrew and Aramaic (Ezra 1:2-4; 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26)
- Believed to possibly be the author of the books of the Chronicles.

### The Man (Ezra 7-10)

- A priestly descendant of Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5, 10:16; Neh. 12:26)
- A scribe (Ezra 7:6, 10, 25; Neh. 12:26, 36). Expert in the words and commandments of the Lord (Ezra 7:11)
- He treasured, honoured and lived God's Word. Ezra 7:10; Job 23:12; Matt 4:4; Psalm 1; 119:11, 105). He expounded the word of God (Neh. 8:2-8)
- Trustworthy (Ezra 7:13-26)
- Prayerful (Ezra 8:21; 9:5-15; 10:1; Jam. 5:16)
- Faith. Trusted God (Ezra 8:22-23, 31; Isaiah 26:3-4; Pro. 3:5-7)
- Reformer. (Ezra 10:2-5)
- Hatred for sin (Ezra 10:6; 2 Chron. 7:14)

### Pre-Exilic

- 722 BC the Northern Kingdom (10 tribes) is deported by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:7-23; 18:9-12)
- Three deportations of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) by the Babylonians (Jer. 52:28-30; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21; sins of Manasseh 2 Kings 21:1-9, 16; 23:26-27)
  - 605 BC: Daniel and his friends
  - 597 BC: Ezekiel and Jehoiachin (Ezek 1:1-2), Mordecai (Est. 2:5-6)
  - 586 BC: Destruction of the temple and palace, the poor left behind etc
  - The book of Lamentations is written
  - Seventy years of exile began at the first deportation

### Post-Exilic after 70 years in captivity

- Babylon is conquered by Cyrus 539 BC.
- Three returns for over 10 decade span
  1. First return 538-516 BC under Zerubbabel/ Joshua the high priest (Ezra 1-6)
    - ✓ 520 BC Haggai and Zechariah
    - ✓ 483-473 BC Esther/Mordecai
  2. Second return ca. 458 BC under Ezra (Ezra 7-10)
  3. Third return 445-424 BC under Nehemiah

## The Outline of Ezra

**First Return under Zerubbabel (1:1-6:22)** about 50,000 people  
Return I (1-2)

- The decree of Cyrus to return and build the temple (1)
- Zerubbabel and company return

Rebuilding of the temple (3-6)

- Restoration of worship and laying of temple foundations (3)
- Opposition of the rebuilding of the temple (4)
- Darius correspondence: Letters are received and sent (5-6)
- Temple completed and dedicated (6)

**Second Return under Ezra (7:1-10:44)** over 2000

Return II (7-8)

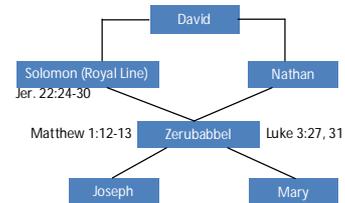
- Ezra and company return (7)
- Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra (7)
- List of company returning with Ezra: The Priests, Levites and Nethinims (8)

Reform (9-10)

- Private prayer (9)
- Public confession (10)

**Zerubbabel** ("Offspring of Babylon") son of Shealtiel. (Ezra 2:2; 3:2,8; 4:2-3; 5:2; Neh. 7:7; 12:1; Hag 1:1, 12; 2:2, 4, 20-23)

- Governor of Judah
- Royal line of David through Jehoiachin (1 Chron 3:17)
- Did not serve as king as Jehoiachin's line was cursed (Jer. 22:24-30; Matt 1:12-13)
- In the Messianic line because curse was bypassed in Luke's genealogy through David's son Nathan (Luke 3:27, 31)



**Jeshua/Joshua** ("Jehovah saves") the high priest (Ezra 2:2; 3:2, 8-9; 4:3; 5:2; Neh. 8:17; Hag 1:1 Hag 1:1, 12, 14; 2:4; Zech 3:1, 3, 8-9)

- Son of Jozadak (1 Chron. 6:15)
- From the lineage of Levi, Aaron, Eleazar and Phinehas (Num 25:10-13)

## EZRA 1

### The Proclamation of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4)

**Decree:** an official order that has the force of law. (Ezr. 6:6-12; 7:12-26; Neh. 2:1-9)

**Proclamation:** a public or official announcement dealing with a matter of great importance. This was the most common form of spoken, public communication, usually from the central administration. Proclamations were oral statements, usually made by a herald, which was often written down for recordkeeping (Ezr. 6:2-5).

The king would dispatch a herald, perhaps with a written document, into the city. In order to address the people, the messenger would either go to the city gate, where people often congregated for social discourse, or gather the people together in a square, occasionally by the blowing of a horn. The herald would then make the proclamation to the people.

### Things about the proclamation

- Made by a heathen king
- The recognition of the Almighty and Sovereign God as the only true God
- The charge by LORD God to Cyrus to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem
- God stirred up the king's spirit

### The Sovereignty of God

- History
- Kingdoms
- The hearts of kings, leaders, men, etc.  
(Ezr. 1:1-2,5; Exod. 4:21;7-4,13;9:12;10:1,20; Pro. 16:4,9,33;19:21;21:1; Est 6; Luk 2:1-6; Dan 2:21ff;4:24-25,28-34; Psalm 33:10-11;75:6-7;115:1-3;135:6; Rom 13:1; Rev. 17:17)

### The faithfulness of God

- God keeps His covenant (Gen. 12:1-3)
- God fulfilled His promise to bring Judah back from captivity after 70 years
  - His word by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10-14; Dan 9:2)
  - In the first year of Cyrus 538 BC
  - God stirred the heart of king Cyrus:

- ☞ to make a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it into writing (Pro. 21:1; Ezr. 6:2-5; Dan 2:21; Isa. 44:28; 45:1-4; 46:1-4)
- ☞ to rebuild the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Isa. 44:28; 2 Kings 25:1-9; 2 Chron. 36:17-21; Jer. 39:1-10; 52:1-30)
- ☞ to make all of His people in captivity to return to Jerusalem
- ☞ to make his heathen subjects supply the needs of the Israelites for their journey to Jerusalem (Ezr. 1:6;7:16-18; Exod. 11:2-3;12:35-36)

### Desire to Return (Ezra 1:5-11)

Three groups of people return: Priests, Levites and Lay people

- God moved the spirits of the leaders/heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites
  - Judah and Benjamin were not the only tribes exiled to Babylon.
  - Many Levites were living in Judah before the northern kingdom fell (2 Chron. 11:14-17)
  - The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh also lived in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 9:3)
  - The response to the decree to return was not encouraging as might be expected (Ezr. 2:64-65)
  - Many preferred to remain than take the long journey back
  - Many did not want to relinquish their property
- To go up and build His temple in Jerusalem
- God gave the Jews favour in the sight of their neighbours to freely give them gold, silver, goods, beasts and precious things for the journey. (Exod. 11:2-3;12:35-36)
- Also a certain number of freewill offerings were contributed for the journey.
- Cyrus restores the sacred articles/vessels carried by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:13;25:13-17; 2 Chron. 36:7,10,18; Dan 1:2;5:1-4,23)
- God preserved the sacred articles with the Chaldeans for its return after 70 years as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 27:19-22). The articles of gold and silver was 5400.

**Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah** ("may Shamash protect the son." Shamash was the Babylonian sun god")

- ☞ Probably from the royal family
- ☞ His exact identity is unknown except in Ezra (Ezr. 1:11;5:14-16)
- ☞ Most likely a political appointee/leader of Cyrus to oversee the return to Judah
- ☞ However, the Jews recognized Zerubbabel as their leader

## EZRA 2

### Zerubbabel and Company Return (Ezra 2:1-70; Nehemiah 7:6-73)

The list of those who returned from Babylon is given almost identically in Nehemiah 7:6-73

The list is organized according to:

- Lay people (vv.2-35)
- Priests (vv.36-39)
- Levites including singers, gatekeepers, Nethinims (temple servants, probably descendants of the Gibeonites (Jos. 9:27)) and the children of Solomon's servants (vv.40-58)
- Record of those who could not identify their ancestry (vv. 59-63). They were excluded from the priesthood as defiled
- Zerubbabel sought to seek the will of God concerning those who were excluded from the priesthood (v.63)
  - **Urim and Thummim:** Two objects used to discern the will of God. They were placed in the breastplate of the high priest (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:18-21; Deut 33:8; 1 Sam 28:6). The exact use and form of the Urim and Thummim are unknown.
- The whole assembly besides their servants that returned was 42,360 (Ezr. 2:64-67; Neh. 7:66-69)
  - Reckoning up the smaller numbers, they amount to 29,818 in this chapter which is 12,542 less than the number given, and to 31,089 in the parallel chapter of Nehemiah
  - Ezra also mentions 494 persons omitted by Nehemiah, and Nehemiah mentions 1,765 not noticed by Ezra
  - If, Ezra's surplus is added to the sum in Nehemiah, and Nehemiah's surplus to the number in Ezra, they will both become 31,583
  - Subtracting this from 42,360, there is a deficiency of 10,777
  - Some scholars believe these are omitted, because they did not belong to Judah and Benjamin, or to the priests, but to the other tribes.
  - It is possible not all families are listed
  - It is possible that women and children were not included in the initially. However, if only 12,542 women and children among the returned exiles, this seems quite low compared to the number of men.
  - 7,737 male and female servants returned with 200 men and women being singers
  - 8,136 beasts of burdens were brought.
- Some of the heads of the families offered freely for the building of the temple. They offered according to their ability.