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Article 15: Ezra at a Glance

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EZRA AT A GLANCE

This book records the return decree of the Persian Emperor Cyrus which resulted in two groups of Jewish pilgrims leaving Persia and returning to Jerusalem, the first being led by a political official named Zerubbabel, and the second (some 60 years later) by a priest and scribe named Ezra. Upon Zerubbabel's return, the second temple was completed, and following Ezra's arrival, a great revival occurs.

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

TO GOD BE THE GLORY! THE HOSTAGES ARE FREE!

In Exodus God brought his people out of Egypt by a death angel (Exod. 12), but in Ezra he will bring them out of Babylon and Persia through a decree (Ezra 1). In Exodus God used Moses and Aaron to accomplish the deliverance. Here in Ezra he employed Zerubbabel and another Joshua to do the same thing. As there had been three previous trips into Babylonian bondage, there would now be three journeys back into Holy Land freedom.

- A. The three trips into Babylon:
 - 1. In the days of Daniel (606 B.C.)
 - 2. In the days of Ezekiel (597 B.C.)
 - 3. In the days of King Zedekiah (586 B.C.)

- B. The three trips into freedom:
 - 1. As led by Zerubbabel and Joshua (583 B.C.)
 - 2. As led by Ezra (456 B.C.)
 - 3. As led by Nehemiah (446 B.C.)

- C. The former and final trips as described by the Psalmist:
Psalm 137 records the sorrow of the former trips, while Psalm 126 describes the singing of the final trips

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

- 1. Who? **Ezra**. He was a gifted Bible teacher, priest and scribe (Ezra 7:1-6, 10) who led the second of three Jewish returns from Persia to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:27, 28).
- 2. What? The books of 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, and Ezra.
- 3. When and where?
 - a. 1 and 2 Chronicles: 460 B.C. from Persia (?)
 - b. Ezra: 450 B.C. from Jerusalem
- 4. Why?
 - a. 1 Chronicles: to record the genealogies of the patriarchs, the 12 sons of Jacob, the reign of David and his preparations in regards to the Temple.
 - b. 2 Chronicles: to record the reign of Solomon and the kings of Judah (only) from Rehoboam to Zedekiah.

- c. **Ezra:** to record the first two returns of the Jews from Persia back to the Holy Land.
5. To whom?
 - a. 1 and 2 Chronicles: the southern kingdom of Judah
 - b. Ezra: the returning Jewish remnant

KEY EVENTS

1. The decree return of Cyrus and the first return
2. The foundation is laid for the second temple
3. The encouraging ministry of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah
4. The completion of the second temple
5. The second return under Ezra
6. The revival under Ezra

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Cyrus:** Persian emperor who issued a decree allowing the Jews living in Persia and Babylon to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple
2. **Zerubbabel (also called Sheshbazzar):** political leader who directed and led the first return of the Jews from Persia back to Jerusalem
3. **Haggai and Zechariah:** two prophets who accompanied and greatly assisted Zerubbabel during the first return from Persia to Jerusalem
4. **Joshua (also called Jeshua):** Judah's first high priest after the return to Jerusalem following the Babylon captivity
5. **Darius the Great:** Persian king who allowed the rebuilding of Jerusalem to continue
6. **Ezra:** Israel's great prophet, scribe, and Bible teacher who directed and led in the second return from Persia to Jerusalem
7. **Artaxerxes II:** Persian king who befriended both Ezra and Nehemiah

KEY PLACES

1. **Jerusalem:** destination of the Jewish captives who were allowed by King Cyrus to leave Persia
2. **Ahava River:** a stop en route to Jerusalem from Persia where Ezra the prophet proclaimed a time of fasting and prayer

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The book of Ezra gives the account of freedom trips one and two.
 - Freedom trip number one: Ezra 1-6
 - Freedom trip number two: Ezra 7-10
2. God's opinion of history is illustrated in the book of Ezra. Between chapters 6 and 7 a period of 60 years transpires. During this time three important world battles were fought (Salamis, Thermopylae, and Marathon), and two famous religious leaders died

- (Confucius and Buddha). However, scripture makes no mention of these great events. Why? The answer is clear—in the mind of God the return of his people to their homeland was more important.
3. Ezra recorded the construction of the second temple (6:15), plus one of the strangest dedication services ever held (3:10-13).
 4. Ezra is the only Old Testament book to refer to the ministries of three writing prophets. These were:
 - Haggai and Zechariah (5:1; 6:14)
 - Ezra (7:10)
 5. The book describes the first Passover celebration since the 70-year Babylonian captivity (6:19).
 6. Ezra was one of the last Old Testament authors and one of the first of the Jewish scribes who would preserve the Old Testament canon.
 7. Ezra is one of two books in the Bible that contain a significant amount of Aramaic, a sister language to Hebrew (the other is Daniel).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Ezra—Nehemiah and 1, 2 Chronicles:

Ezra's involvement with all four books is suggested by these similarities:

- Both contain many lists
- The last two verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) are identical to the first three verses of Ezra
- Both use similar expressions, such as "the house of God"
- Levites and Temple assistants are prominent in both

Ezra—Nehemiah and Haggai:

Both compare the new Temple with the former Temple of Solomon (3:12; Hag. 2:3)

Both speak of the guidance of the Spirit of God (Neh. 9:20; Hag. 2:5)

Both speak of God instilling an enthusiasm in the returning exiles (1:5; Hag. 1:14)

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. The Lord God of Heaven (1:2)
2. The God of Israel (3:2)