

A PERSONAL
VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY

EZRA

By
Sharon Cravens

Following are some interesting introductory notes about the book and the man for whom it is named.

Easton Bible Dictionary: "He was much more of a teacher than a priest. We learn from the account of his labours in the book of Nehemiah that he was careful to have the whole people instructed in the law of Moses; and there is no reason to reject the constant tradition of the Jews which connects his name with the collecting and editing of the Old Testament canon. The final completion of the canon may have been, and probably was, the work of a later generation; but Ezra seems to have put it much into the shape in which it is still found in the Hebrew Bible."

NIV Commentary: "Certain characteristics common to both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah have led many to hold that the author of Chronicles was also the author/compiler of Ezra-Nehemiah."

The New Bible Commentary notes: "The first six chapters of Ezra cover a period of just over twenty years (538—515 BC), during which time a number of the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon and, after some delay, rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem which had been destroyed by the Babylonians fifty years before."

John Gill: "...that he was a priest is clear, since he was the son of Seraiah the high priest, who was slain by Nebuchadnezzar, and the younger brother of Josedech, who succeeded his father as high priest, and uncle to Joshua that succeeded him; and he was also a ready scribe in the law of Moses, see [Ezra 7:1](#). That Ezra was the writer of this book is believed by the Jews^a, and by the generality of Christians...."

Adam Clarke concerning Cyrus: "This prince, so eminent in antiquity, is said to have been the son of Cambyses king of Persia, and Mandane, daughter of Astyages king of the Medes; and was born about six hundred years before Christ."

Ezra 1:1 ¶ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying,
Ezra 1:2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah.

It should be noted that these verses are identical to the last two verses of 2Chronicles, a possible clue that one man authored both books.

The book opens with a time marker referencing the 1st year of Cyrus king of Persia in reference to his reign over Babylon—around 536-538 BC. The king made a proclamation ending the 70 years of captivity of the Jewish people, an event that was prophesied by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:10 "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."

King Cyrus also publicly recognized that "The LORD God of heaven" had given him his kingdom and had charged him to build a house in His honor in Jerusalem. This was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah 44:24 & 28 "Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself...That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."

JFB notes: "The phraseology of this proclamation, independently of the express testimony of JOSEPHUS, affords indisputable evidence that Cyrus had seen (probably through means of Daniel, his venerable prime minister and favorite) those prophecies in which, two hundred years before he was born, his name, his victorious career, and the important services he should render to the Jews were distinctly foretold. The existence of predictions so remarkable led him to acknowledge that all his kingdoms were gifts bestowed on him by 'the Lord God of heaven,' and prompted him to fulfil the duty which had been laid upon him long before his birth."

The Cyrus cylinder was discovered in 1879 and provides archaeological support for the biblical record. Quote from www.truthmagazine.com: "...this is consistent with Cyrus' behavior as described on his cylinder. 'I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries.' Though there is no reference on the cylinder of king Cyrus specifically doing such for the Jewish nation, this quote clearly establishes the fact that the actions of Cyrus, as recorded by the Scriptures, are consistent with his dealings with conquered nations."

Ezra 1:3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

The king called for those who were willing to go back to Jerusalem and build the house of the "LORD God of Israel." He recognized the God of Israel as powerful and as acting on his behalf, but he does not go so far as to recognize God as the god he worshipped. He also called for those who did not want to return to Israel to make donations of silver, gold, goods and animals to support the returning remnant in addition to other freewill offerings to provide for the rebuilding of the house of God.

Ezra 1:5 ¶ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:6 And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered.

The recognized leaders of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, and the Levites responded to the king's call, as well as others "whose spirit God had raised" to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The people had lived in Babylon for 70 years and many had grown comfortable in their new homes. Many had also been born there and knew no other home. It seems that a special touch of the LORD was required to get a chosen remnant to decide to uproot once again and return to Israel with the heart to rebuild the temple and retake possession of their homeland.

Evidently, the people (and maybe even some of their Chaldean friends) responded generously with donations to provide for the returning remnant.

Ezra 1:7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

Ezra 1:8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Ezra 1:9 And this *is* the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

Ezra 1:10 Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second *sort* four hundred and ten, *and* other vessels a thousand.

Ezra 1:11 All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them* of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

King Cyrus also brought out the temple vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon and put in the house of his gods. Mithredath (named after the Persian god Mithras), the king's treasurer, made an accounting as he gave the vessels into the care of Sheshbazzar (Persian name of Zerubbabel), the recognized leader of the returning remnant. Included were:

- 30 chargers (basins or dishes) of gold
- 1000 chargers of silver
- 29 knives
- 30 basons (a tankard or covered goblet) of gold
- 410 basons of silver
- 1000 other vessels

In total there were 5,400 vessels of gold and silver that Zerubbabel took back to Jerusalem with him. The NIV Commentary notes: "The actual figures in the

Hebrew text add up to 2,499 rather than 5,400, perhaps because only the larger and more valuable vessels were specified."