

Some questions to be answered in coming to Ezra are these: What was the relationship between the Chronicler, Ezra, and Nehemiah? Was Cyrus a believer in the true God, or was his edict propaganda? Why was intermarriage so strongly decried?

Regarding archaeology it was once thought the title "king of Persia" (Ezra 1:1-2) was not historical. By the beginning of this century, however, nineteen documents had been found which used this title eighteen times for at least six different Persian kings. An objection to the Aramaic sections of Ezra (4:9-6:12; 7:12-26) was that its grammar and style showed the influence of later Aramaic, and the book was, therefore, a product of the fourth or third century. The Elephantine papyri (found on the Nile island of Elephantine which housed a small colony of expatriate Jews) shows that the Aramaic of Ezra is, in both grammar and style, a perfect example of the Royal Aramaic of the fifth century BC.

The letters concerning the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-12) were once called Jewish forgeries because, it was thought, no Persian king would have written letters with such tone or content. The Cyrus Cylinder and the Nabonidus Chronicle (both cuneiform documents) exemplify Cyrus' desire to win the approval of various peoples in his empire by proclaiming political amnesty for those who had been deported by Babylon and by reinstating their gods in their local temples. This would have been especially important to him in Judah which would then serve as a loyal buffer against Egyptian imperialism.

Keys to understanding Ezra begin with Ezra 1:1-4, the decree of Cyrus which sets the stage for the rest of the book and the rebuilding of the temple.

Study tips: Read through both books at one sitting. Begin with the last chapter of II Chronicles to see how they fit together historically. Read Haggai and Zechariah for the background...they were prophesying at the time of the rebuilding. Compare and Contrast Ezra and Nehemiah: Ezra the man of prayer, Nehemiah the man of action.

For further study and reading see EZRA AND NEHEMIAH, by Derek Kidner (IVP)...a good brief commentary on both books.

b. For further study in Ezra

- note the conditions of travel and the care of God on the returnees (8:21-22)
- study Ezra's intention as given in 7:10
- and note the character of opposition to the return and the continuance of the work in chapter 4.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah are practically oriented books in that they show us something of the immediacy of doing the Lord's work and instructing His people. They contain real life settings and problems and indicate how God will help us deal with these.

3. A Survey Study of Nehemiah...("God's Builder")

a. An overview

The events of Nehemiah follow Ezra by about 25 years (approximate) and show the continuance of the work at Jerusalem. The burden is for the building of the wall and the author is Nehemiah.