

LITERARY OVERVIEW

Title: Named after main character **Ezra** who is the dominate human character in the 2nd unit of the book. This unit is written in the 1st person. According to Jewish sources, Ezra/Nehemiah were consider a single book.

Author: Unknown, but strong connection between the Chronicles and Nehemiah as “**priestly**” **perspective**. It is likely that the final editor for all three books is the same, thus putting a final compilation date after the events took place.

Period Covered: The book covers almost 100 years. **Samaria** (the capital of the Northern Kingdom) had fallen to Assyria in 722 B.C. **Jerusalem** (the capital of the Southern Kingdom) had fallen to Babylon (under Nebuchadnezzar) in 586 B.C. In 539 B.C. Babylon (under Nabonidus) fell to Persia (under Cyrus), and thus control of the land of Israel was under his dominion. The **1st unit** of the book takes place long before Ezra, and has as its main focus the 1st return of the Jews from 537 B.C. to 515 B.C. It is during this period, 516 B.C. that the temple is rebuilt. There is a **intervening period** of 57 years. The **2nd unit** of the book focuses on the 2nd return taking place in 458 B.C. and goes through to 433 B.C. We should keep in mind that the trip itself would take from several months to a year.

Main Characters: God, Zerubbabel and the priest Jeshua (1st return) Ezra (2nd return).

Form/Genre: Mostly **narrative** in the form of a “**return story**”, as well as extended lists of names, giving a sense of literary “realism.”

Challenges: Not getting bogged down in the lists and inventories. Entering sympathetically into the story of a displaced people.

Lessons

1. A demonstration of **the Lord’s faithfulness and sovereignty** over His people, demonstrated by moving the hearts of Pagan kings and giving help in the midst of difficulty (1:1)
2. Though it looked as if God was finished with Israel with the destruction of the national form, He shows great **longsuffering and mercy** toward the next generations.
3. The need for **faithfulness to the Lord** in worship (3:2 6:6:16, 19) and in return to obedience to God’s Word (7:7). The importance of making **God’s worship** a priority.
4. The need for **radical separation** from those committed to God’s Kingdom, and those not. This meant the corruption of religion, the loss of language, higher allegiance to family than God’s law.
5. The need to recognize and **repent from sins** which have been adopted from the culture (chs.9-10).
6. The example of God’s people **re-covenanting** as an affirmation of their commitment to Him (10:3).
7. When God brings restoration to His people, it is often through **leaders** He raises up to re-teach the Scriptures which reveal God and His will (7:10).

Creation (Fall)
Tower of Babel
The Flood
The Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
The 12 Tribes
Joseph (Into Egypt)
Egyptian Bondage
The Exodus from Egypt (Moses)
In the Wilderness (40 years)
Into the Promised Land (Joshua)
Living in the Land (Judges)
The Monarchy (Saul, David and Solomon)
The Divided Kingdom N. Kingdom (Israel) S. Kingdom (Judah)
The Fall and Exile of Israel (Assyria)
The Fall and Exile of Judah (Babylon)
The 1st Return (Cyrus of Persia)
The 2nd Return (Artaxerxes of Persia)

UNIT 1 – THE FIRST RETURN¹I. **Cyrus’s Decree and the Return of Exiles from Babylon (1:1–2:70)**

- A. The decree (1:1–4)
- B. The exiles respond to the decree (1:5–11)
- C. The exiles live again in their ancestral homes (2:1–70)

II. **The Returned Exiles Rebuild the Temple on Its Original Site (3:1–6:22)**

- A. The foundations of the temple are laid (3:1–13)
- B. Enemies stall the project by conspiring against it (4:1–24)
- C. The work is resumed, and local officials seek confirmation of Cyrus’s decree (5:1–17)
- D. King Darius discovers and reaffirms Cyrus’s decree, and the work is completed (6:1–22)

UNIT 2 – THE SECOND RETURN

III. **Ezra the Priest Comes to Jerusalem to Establish the Law of Moses (7:1–8:36)**

- A. King Artaxerxes gives Ezra authority to establish the Mosaic law (7:1–28)
- B. Ezra journeys to Jerusalem with a new wave of returnees, bearing royal gifts for the temple (8:1–36)

IV. **Ezra Discovers and Confronts the Problem of Intermarriage (9:1–10:44)**

- A. Ezra discovers the problem of marriage to idolaters, and prays (9:1–15)
- B. The people agree to dissolve the marriages (10:1–17)
- C. List of those who were implicated (10:18–44)

¹ Outline from the *ESV Study Bible*, Crossway Publishers.