

- I. From the Dispersion to the close of the Old Testament.**
- 1. The Period of Captivity in Babylon. 586-516 B.C.**
- 2. The Prophets' Encouragement.**
  - A. Haggai. (Encouragement)**
  - B. Zechariah. (The Jealousy of YAHWEH)**
  - C. Malachi.**
- 3. After the return from Babylon to their land three Old Testament Books were written concerning various events in Israel's history.**
  - A. Esther. (Protection of God's People)**
  - B. Ezra. (Reconstruction of the Temple and Restoration of the People)**
  - C. Nehemiah. (Reconstruction of the City)**

**Esther:**  
**(Protection of God's People)**

**Author and Name of Book:**

The book gives no hint of who wrote it, but whoever it was very familiar with the Persian culture. The account has all the indications of a person who was there, for he described the events as an eyewitness. Therefore, he was probably a Jew. Some have suggested that Ezra or Nehemiah wrote the account but there is no specific evidence to support that view.

The book takes its name from the chief character, whose Hebrew name Hadassah (Myrtle) was changed to the Persian name "Ester," which most likely means "star." She is a "star" who was used to preserve the remnant from which would come the "star from Jacob," the Messiah (Num 24:17).

**Date of Writing: 470-465 B.C.**

The events of Esther occurred between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra, between the first return led by Zerubbabel and the second return led by Ezra. This indicates Esther was written sometime between 470 and 465 B.C., during the latter years of Xerxes' reign (10:23), or in the reign of his son Artaxerxes (464-424 B.C.).

**Theme and Purpose:**

Esther tells the story of a beautiful Jewish girl whom King Xerxes of Persia chose to be his queen. When Haman planned to murder all the Jews, Queen Esther's cousin Mordecai persuaded Esther to try to save her people. Risking her own life, she appealed to the king and rescued the Jews. Although this is the only book in the Bible which does not include the name of God, the theme and purpose of the book is to show God's providential care of His people in their trials and persecutions. Some have argued

that YAHWEH was encoded in the text four times as a Notarikon, which is an acronym, anagram, or acrostic.

**Key People:**

Esther, Haman, Mordecai, Xerxes (Ahasuerus, Hebrew form of the name of the king of Persia)

**Christ as Seen in Esther:**

Esther provides a fitting picture of Christ in that she was willing to put herself in the place of death for her people's salvation and also in that she acted as an advocate for them. In addition, we also see how God continued to providentially protect the Jews through whom He would give the Messiah.

**Outline**

1. **The Danger to the Jews (1:1–3:15)**
2. **The Deliverance of the Jews (4:1–10:3)**

**Ezra:**

**(Reconstruction of the Temple and Restoration of the People)**

**Author and Name of Book:**

Although the book of Ezra does not name its author, Jewish tradition as recorded in the Talmud recognizes Ezra as its author. Ezra wrote these books using various documents (4:7-16), genealogies (2:1-70) and personal notes (7:27–9:15) as his sources.

The fact that Ezra is the principal character of the major sections of the book lends further support to his authorship. He takes part in the events described in Chapters 110 and also in Chapters 810 of Nehemiah. In both cases, the passages are written in the first person.

Tradition holds that Ezra was the founder of the "Great Synagogue" (meaning the great assembly) where the books of Old Testament scripture were assembled. Another tradition says that he collected the Biblical books into a unit and that he originated the synagogue form of worship.

In the ancient Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah were treated as one book and called "The Book of Ezra." Modern Hebrew Bibles designate the twofold arrangement of Ezra and Nehemiah as in the English versions. Further, Josephus (an ancient Jewish historian who lived from 37-100 A.D.) and Jerome (the writer of the Latin Vulgate who lived from 347-419 A.D.) also considered the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one.

Levitical sacrifices were soon reinstated on a rebuilt altar for burnt offerings (Ezra 3:16), and in the second year of the return the foundation of the Temple was laid (Ezra 3:8-13; 5:16). However, Samaritan harassment and eventual Persian pressure brought a halt to the rebuilding of the Temple. Then spiritual apathy set in; and for about 16 more years - until the rule of the Persian king, Darius Hystaspes (521-486 B.C.) the

construction of the Temple was discontinued. In the second year of Darius (520 B.C.) God raised up Haggai the prophet to encourage the Jews in the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 5:12; Haggai 1:1), but it had not yet come (Hag 1:2), so it was a prophecy to encourage them to get ready.

**Date of Writing: 457–444 B.C.**

Theme and Purpose: From an historical standpoint, Ezra continues the narrative where 2 Chronicles ends and traces the history of the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple. From a spiritual and doctrinal standpoint, Ezra demonstrates how God fulfilled His promise to return His people to the land of promise after seventy years of exile as announced by the prophets. As in Chronicles, Ezra, as a priest, shows the importance of the Temple and its worship to the life of the nation as God's people. It begins with the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, which allowed a remnant of the people to return. The people enthusiastically began rebuilding the Temple, but were delayed for 18 years by enemies from the North. Finally a decree from Darius let them finish (Ezra 16). Chapters 7-10 tell about the return of the priest Ezra, who taught the people the law and reformed the nation's spiritual life.

The theme can be summarized as the spiritual, moral, and social restoration of the remnant of Jews who returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra.

**Key People:**

Cyrus (Persian king whose decree allowed the return), Ezra (priest and scribe), Jeshua (the high priest) and Zerubbabel.

**Christ as Seen in Ezra:**

In keeping with the Davidic Covenant and God's promises to keep the line of descendants alive for Messiah, Son of David, Ezra and Nehemiah show how God continued to keep His promises by restoring His people to their land.

**Outline**

- 1. The Restoration: The First Return to Jerusalem Under Zerubbabel (1:1–6:22)**
- 2. The Reformation of the People; the Return Under Ezra (7:1–10:44)**

**Nehemiah:  
(Reconstruction of the City)**

**Author and Name of Book:**

Although some believe Nehemiah wrote this book because of the words, "*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah*" (1:1), there are those who believe the evidence suggests Ezra is the author of Nehemiah and used Nehemiah's notes and accounts as though quoting him. Many scholars also support the belief that Nehemiah authored the book bearing his name because much of the book is presented as a personal account of the circumstances surrounding his return to Jerusalem (1:1–7:73; 12:31–13:31).

Although originally one book with Ezra, the last half of the book draws its name from Nehemiah, who was a contemporary of Ezra and cupbearer to the king of Persia. Nehemiah's name means "YAHWEH consoles or comforts."

**Date of Writing: 445-425 B.C.**

The historical setting is simply that of the last half of the ancient Hebrew book of EzraNehemiah which means it was written about 445 B.C. to 425 B.C.

**Theme and Purpose:**

The book of Nehemiah continues the history of the Jews who returned from exile. Nehemiah gave up his position as cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the Persian king, to become governor of Jerusalem and led the people in repairing the city walls. Ezra and Nehemiah lived at the same time (Neh 8:2, 9). They were both men of God but served YAHWEH in different capacities. While Ezra was a priest and more involved with the religious restoration of the returning remnant, Nehemiah was a layman and served in a political capacity as Governor in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was also written to show the obvious hand of God in the return of His people to their homeland in the years after their exile. Under the leadership of Nehemiah, they accomplished in fiftytwo days what had not been done in the ninetyfour years since the first return under Zerubbabel. By obedient faith they were able to overcome what appeared to be insurmountable and overwhelming opposition.

**Key People: Nehemiah, Artaxerxes, Sanballet, Ezra**

**Christ as Seen in Nehemiah:**

Nehemiah portrays Christ's willingness to leave His high position in order to bring about His work of restoration. Further, the decree of Artaxerxes marks the beginning point of Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks of years which, though interrupted by an unspecified time, begins the countdown for the return of Messiah (Dan 9:2527).

**Outline**

- 1. The Rebuilding of the Walls (1:1–7:73)**
- 2. The Restoration of the People (8:1–13:31)**