

Now we are in a better position to write a summary of Ezra, bringing in Haggai, Zechariah and Nehemiah, all placed in the reign of Darius I.

- Chapter 1
  - Cyrus II decree allowing Jews to return from any locality also fostered a generosity from people to the Jews. A similar action can be seen in Exodus when Pharaoh releases the Israelites to go into the desert and worship God. The reaction then was to the fear of God following the plagues – to the naïve Egyptians their thinking was to placate an angry god. Yet for Cyrus, this perhaps was an acknowledgement of the one true God and therefore tributes should be directed to God.
  - It was Cyrus who brought out the previously plundered precious temple articles now entrusted them to Sheshbazzar (prince of Judah). Sheshbazzar was one of the provincial governors, called satraps, in the Persian administration – they are mentioned in the books of Daniel and Esther. It is not beyond reason to believe that Daniel helped organise this transfer, secure its transport and storage in the province of Judah. From Ezra 5:15 we know that it was Cyrus' intention that Sheshbazzar was to build the temple for him.
  - We are aware of the opposition to the Jews had from other peoples living in the land in Ezra 4:5. But the opposition had no option but regard the authority of the king given to Sheshbazzar and the empire had to obey his authority. A decree by the king was nothing to be messed with – add to this Cyrus own offering of gold and silver (even though it was God's already) was a compulsion for others to do likewise. John Lennox likens the returning of the precious temple articles to the glory of God, in his book Daniel (Against the Flow).
  - Even though Cyrus did not live past 530 BC, the decree was law of the Persian empire and still stood. But for the tyrannical Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, the lure of such wealth was overwhelming and he said to himself **"I will invade a land of unwallled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people—all of them living without walls and without gates and bars. I will plunder and loot and turn my hand against the resettled ruins and the people gathered from the nations, rich in livestock and goods, living at the centre of the land"** (Ezekiel 38:11-12) – scripture is curiously cryptic about this time, so extrabiblical study is essential for its interpretation. Cambyses met his end, which now leads us on to Ezra Chapter 2.
- Chapter 2
  - Ezra lists the Jews who came back from back Babylon. This seems to be a record made in about July 522 BC in the reign of Darius I, the record is found again later by Nehemiah. Nehemiah 7 and Ezra 2 therefore indicate how the start of this record begins in the bible (*"these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles"*) and may confirm that the temple articles mentioned in Ezra 1 (but not Ezra 2) were brought back by Sheshbazzar in the time of Cyrus. Yet the return of the articles, could not be considered as brought back to the temple as it had not been built and Jerusalem laid in ruins. We could assume that a similar guard and fortified palace that was provided to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:9; 5:17-18) was also afforded to Sheshbazzar and used to house the temple articles. The letter (we later read of in Ezra 7) to Ezra received from **Artaxerxes** (that is Darius I) instructed him to deliver the entrusted temple articles back to the temple, that when it had been built (Ezra 7:13-19).

- The record of 42,360 people listed in Ezra 2 arriving just after Cambyses died, represents the first return to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:5) from Babylon. It is important to note again that these aren't the only Jews living in the land for we read that in Ezekiel 5:12 at the destruction of Jerusalem, in 586 BC, a third of the people were to be scattered to the four winds - some had returned from areas other than Babylon. It was the cream of the crop that had been taken to Babylon (Daniel 1:3) and were to prosper (Jeremiah 29:4-7) and so we see the returnees from Babylon listed by Ezra contains some important names:
  - Zerrubbabel (meaning 'Seed of Babylon' i.e. born in Babylon, note similarities to Abraham)
  - Joshua (the priest)
  - Nehemiah (if this is Nehemiah, of the book by the same name, then he may be too early to be cupbearer to Artaxerxes I; we can speculate that he might have seen the temple going up, but returned to Susa to serve as cupbearer to Darius I until the 20th year of the king's reign)
  - Seraiah (not Ezra's father, he was executed in when the Jews went into exile)
  - Reelaiah
  - Mordecai is listed (may be the same one from the book of Esther)
  - Bilshan, Mispar, Rehum and Baanah
- Chapter 3
  - In the 7th month (Tishri) after the Jews had settled in their towns came to Jerusalem. They came to observe the head of the civil year, the Day of Trumpets (Yom Teruah); the Israelites were called together by the blowing trumpets (shofar, a ram's horn), so as to repent collectively - for 10 days later was the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Yom Teruah hinted at the future coming of the Messiah.
  - Joshua and the priests, together with Zerrubbabel built an altar on the altar's foundations and started again to offer the morning and evening sacrifices. The foundations of temple at large had not been built yet.
  - In the 2nd month of the 2nd year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem. (i.e. 17 months after the altar being built). Work began on the temple. Fortunately, we have Haggai 1:1,14 to inform us that this was on second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month. There was no absolute time then like we have today – dates were given relative to a king's reign (*second year of King Darius*) and the Hebrew civic month (*on the first day of the sixth month*, that is the month of Elul). But today we know that Darius I reign began in September 521 BC and therefore the first return of the Jews from Babylon was about July 522 BC. A jubilee where they would resume ownership of their land.
  - Ezra 3:10-13 With older Jews remembering the grander former temple; this would have made them aged 70 years and older.
- Chapter 4
  - Other peoples want to help in the building of the temple, but Joshua & Zerubbabel and the Jews were to do it alone. This point is important to labour as the consequence of mixing with other peoples became a big issue as it contravened the Law (Deuteronomy 7). The other peoples would surely be enticed by the riches flooding into Jerusalem and wanted to be part of this empire sanctioned building project.
  - So, the peoples around tried to discourage, bribe and frustrate the plans during reigns of Cyrus II and down to Darius I king of Persia. In verses 6 – 23 Ezra

provides other times in Darius I reign (under the appellations of **Xerxes** and **Artaxerxes**) translated from the lingua franca, Aramaic.

- An accusation against the Jews was lodged under **Xerxes** (that is Darius I) – it does not necessarily mean a letter was sent by means of the authorities in Jerusalem and Judah to the king.
- An attempt to restore walls and repairing foundations was brought to a quick halt after a letter was sent to **Artaxerxes** (that is Darius I) by Rehum (commanding officer), Shimshai (secretary) and associates from Samaria (an administrative centre set up when Assyrians conquered) and Trans-Euphrates. They make out the that recently returned Jewish people had a history of being rebellious. Ezra access to the memoed letters and the responses to stop the building are a prelude to Ezra's own arrival. Ezra potentially had access to **Artaxerxes** archives and then in the locale of Jerusalem.
- The Aramaic memo show the opposition once made the work on house of God come to a standstill in the 2nd year of Darius king of Persia (and as we've read already and will continue to read, resume)
- Chapter 5
  - The Aramaic memo continues: Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea to work to rebuild the house of God (verse 1):
  - The people built up by this begin working on the house of God. [2nd year of Darius I (Ezra 5v24)]
  - The Aramaic memo continues: Governor of Trans-Euphrates gets wind of what the Jews are doing, asked "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?", a letter is then sent to Darius I asking for a search to be made for the Cyrus decree.
- Chapter 6
  - Darius I orders a search for the decree, it is found and re-issued (say a year after building actually commenced).
  - The temple is completed in the 6th year of Darius I.
  - Ezra calls Darius I. 'king of Assyria' a reference to **Artaxerxes** throne name meaning 'king of Kings'
- Chapter 7
  - Ezra arrives from the Babylon in the 7th year of **Artaxerxes** "*After these things*", during the reign of **Artaxerxes** king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah [an extensive descendance back to Aaron]...came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of king **Artaxerxes**" (verses 1-7)
- Chapter 8
  - Ezra lists the families that had arrived from Babylon with Ezra. Gave sacrifices to God.
- Chapter 9
  - "After these things had been done" – Has Ezra again slipped back into his chronicling habit; sort of saying "Now I've got that out of the way, this is what happened next". Ezra skips **Nehemiah's entrance after enquiring of the exiles that survived the exile and the state of Jerusalem and the wall being built in Artaxerxes 20th year (Nehemiah 1-7:5 see below)**. The rest of Nehemiah 7 finds the record in Ezra 2 of the first return with the last verse as segue to Ezra reading the Law at the head of the year in Nehemiah 8. Here Nehemiah continues closely with Ezra.
  - Ezra finds out the true state of affair of intermarriage with neighbouring peoples. "*But now, for a brief moment, the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God*

*gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem."*

- Chapter 10
  - Ezra continual intercession before the house of God, provokes repentance amongst those gathered around (distress because of the rain also); they agree to send the foreign women and children away.
  - Then Ezra calls for all the people to gather together, otherwise they would forfeit their property. Those guilty confess their sin.

[Nehemiah Chapter 9 begin to fit in with Ezra Chapter 9]

Moving onto the book of Nehemiah:

- Chapter 1-4
  - In the 20th Year of **Artaxerxes** that is Darius I, Nehemiah, cupbearer to the king, hears of the exiles that have returned, that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and gates burned down and is released to rebuild them. About 13 years from Darius I 7th to 20th year seems a suitable period to be upset at the continued state of Jerusalem, together with the trouble and disgrace that it brings. The state of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 1:3 is bemoaning over the desolation that the Babylonians brought, would be too long in the tooth in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC) ~ 94 years after Babylonian empire ends.
- Chapter 5
  - [Nehemiah is made governor of Jerusalem from 20th – 32nd Year of Darius I]
- Chapter 6
  - Wall was completed in 52 days despite opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of the enemies. Tobiah was a son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Aariah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshuallam son of Berkiah... Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me. (6v16-17). Nehemiah refers to a record in which a Tobiah is mentioned but not legitimised as of Israel (7v6). Nehemiah reports trouble from those who have been given a foothold through intermarriage. Nehemiah contains no more dates by reference to the kings of Persia.
- Chapter 7
  - 7v4 Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt [inside the wall]. There must have been a flurry of building some houses now the wall offered protection, for temporary shelters on roofs and courtyards (Chapter 8), although new residents were still to be chosen (Chapter 11).
  - Genealogical record of list of Jews who first returned from Babylon earlier– same as Ezra 2
- Chapter 8
  - Ezra reads from the Law to the people. Nehemiah (in the third person) is mentioned together with the Levites who were instructing the people. And they constructed temporary shelters on roofs and courtyards for the festival of the tabernacles – those who came in from outside Jerusalem would also have shelter
- Chapter 9

- Sin of intermarriage with neighbouring peoples is made known. Those guilty confess their sin. Plea; Still slaves and abundant harvest goes to a king placed over them (9v36)
- Chapter 10
  - Agreement made by the people.
- Chapter 11
  - New residents of Jerusalem by casting lots. Naturally those who are chosen for Jerusalem continued to build houses there.
- Chapter 12
  - Priests & Levites recognised and sought out
  - Dedication of the wall.