

Ezra-Nehemiah: Date and Setting

1. Ezra and Nehemiah are the story of the return to rebuild the Temple and the city and walls of Jerusalem as well as to reconstitute the people of God in the land, which is accomplished by recommitment to the law of God (Covenant Renewal).
2. With the turn of the page from Chronicles to Ezra we have skipped ahead roughly 70 years. In those intervening years, Judah was in captivity in Babylon, which was eventually conquered by the Persians, setting in motion Cyrus the Persian's decree that the Jews could go home and rebuild.
3. Cyrus' decree is dated to about 538 BC, and is therefore the date for the beginning of the Book of Ezra.
4. The book quickly narrates the period from 539 to 515, when the temple was completed. Then skips 57 years ahead to 458, when Ezra arrived and began to minister.
5. Nehemiah arrived about 14 years later in 445 BC to begin his ministry.
6. The Book of Nehemiah concludes in about 433 (Neh 13:6), so that these two books cover a period of about 105 years.
7. Daniel occurs in the gap between Chronicles and Ezra. Esther occurs in the gap between the temple being completed and Ezra arriving in Jerusalem, about 20 years before Ezra 7.

Narrative Outline:

Ezra 1-6	The Return and Temple Rebuilt
Ezra 7-10	Ezra's Ministry (458 BC)
Neh 1-2	Nehemiah returns (445 BC)
Neh 3-6	The Wall is Rebuilt
Neh 7-12	The Covenant Renewed
Neh 13	Final Reforms

Persian (Achaemenid) Empire:

Cyrus II the Great	550-530
Cambyses II	529-522
Bardiya/Smerdis	522
Darius I the Great	521-486
Xerxes I the Great*	485-465
Artaxerxes I	465-424

*Xerxes is "Ahasuerus" in Ezra as in Esther.

The Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah

1. These two books were almost certainly composed together.
2. The return itself is a fulfillment of God's promises to deliver his people from their enslavement in Babylon (promises found throughout the pre-exilic prophets), and as such it is further evidence of his faithfulness and love for his people.
3. However, throughout those prophets, the prophecy of this return anticipates our own return to the Garden. The return in 539 was a foreshadowing of our own redemption and glorification. Just as God was faithful in the shadow fulfillment, he will even more so be faithful in the perfect fulfillment.
4. The perfect fulfillment is realized both in Christ's first coming (in which it was inaugurated) and in his second coming (in which it is consummated).

During the period covered by Ezra 1-6 Haggai (520) and Zechariah (520-518) also ministered. Malachi is late in the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative.

Where is Christ in Ezra-Nehemiah?

Type – He is Cyrus, decreeing the return of God's people to the promised land and therefore fellowship with him (Ezra 1:1; Isaiah 44:28-45:1).
 Seed – Zerubbabel is the son of David who presides over the return and serves as governor in Judah (Ezra 2:2; 1 Chron 3:17-19).
 Type – The temple once again foreshadows Christ.

Book Recommendations:

1. *Ezra and Nehemiah* – Derek Kidner (TOTC)
2. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* – F. Charles Fensham (NICOT)
3. *The Son of David: Seeing Jesus in the Historical Books* – Nancy Guthrie

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