

Ezra & Nehemiah

Latest book in terms of chronology of the narrative

Both of them together are historical books, although they are not one book like Samuel-Kings is.

They tell the story of the return to the land after the Persians under Cyrus conquer the Babylonians and let everyone go back.

Lots of genealogical records, and lists of people.

They lay the foundation for the Temple, and the locals want to help. Zerubbabel says no. He is the governor, the best candidate for King.

They make all sorts of trouble, engineering a letter to the Persian Emperor saying that Jerusalem is always a hotbed of trouble. The Persian Emperor, Atraxerxes, stops the rebuilding.

It restarts under his successor, Darius 1. He was busy elsewhere, fighting Greeks.

We don't meet Ezra until chapter 7.

7:6 Ezra came up from Babylon, a scribe expert in the Teaching of Moses which the LORD God of Israel had given, whose request the king had granted in its entirety, thanks to the benevolence of the LORD toward him.

7:7 Some of the Israelites, the priests and Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants set out for Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes,

7:8 arriving in Jerusalem in the fifth month in the seventh year of the king.)

7:9 On the first day of the first month the journey up from Babylon was started, and on the first day of the fifth month he arrived in Jerusalem, thanks to the benevolent care of his God for him.

7:10 For Ezra had dedicated himself to study the Teaching of the LORD so as to observe it, and to teach laws and rules to Israel.

7:12 "Artaxerxes king of kings, to Ezra the priest, scholar in the law of the God of heaven, and so forth. And now,

7:13 I hereby issue an order that anyone in my kingdom who is of the people of Israel and its priests and Levites who feels impelled to go to Jerusalem may go with you.

7:14 For you are commissioned by the king and his seven advisers to regulate Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your care,

7:15 and to bring the freewill offering of silver and gold, which the king and his advisers made to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,

7:16 and whatever silver and gold that you find throughout the province of Babylon, together with the freewill offerings that the people and the priests will give for the House of their God, which is in Jerusalem.

7:17 You shall, therefore, with dispatch acquire with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their meal offerings and libations, and offer them on the altar of the House of your God in Jerusalem.

7:18 And whatever you wish to do with the leftover silver and gold, you and your kinsmen may do, in accord with the will of your God.

7:19 The vessels for the service of the House of your God that are given to you, deliver to God in Jerusalem,

7:20 and any other needs of the House of your God that it falls to you to supply, do so from the royal treasury.

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

7:21 I, King Artaxerxes, for my part, hereby issue an order to all the treasurers in the province of Beyond the River that whatever request Ezra the priest, scholar in the law of the God of Heaven, makes of you is to be fulfilled with dispatch

7:22 up to the sum of one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kor of wheat, one hundred bath of oil, and salt without limit.

7:23 Whatever is by order of the God of Heaven must be carried out diligently for the House of the God of Heaven, else wrath will come upon the king and his sons.

7:24 We further advise you that it is not permissible to impose tribute, poll tax, or land tax on any priest, Levite, singer, gatekeeper, temple servant, or other servant of this House of God.

7:25 And you, Ezra, by the divine wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to judge all the people in the province of Beyond the River who know the laws of your God, and to teach those who do not know them.

7:26 Let anyone who does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king be punished with dispatch, whether by death, corporal punishment, confiscation of possessions, or imprisonment."

7:27 Blessed is the LORD God of our fathers, who put it into the mind of the king to glorify the House of the LORD in Jerusalem,

7:28 and who inclined the king and his counselors and the king's military officers to be favorably disposed toward me. For my part, thanks to the care of the LORD for me, I summoned up courage and assembled leading men in Israel to go with me.

So Ezra is basically given a wide berth to establish the Torah as the Law.

Complaints the the people are mingling with the local caananites and such. Ezra makes a big speech and says that the nation must repent and separate themselves from the foreign women. Ezra ends.

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

Nehemiah begins.

Nehemiah is the cup-bearer to Artaxerxes, who gives him power to go back and rebuild Jerusalem.

Long lists of the names of the builders. Nehemiah deals with all kinds of tsuris and administrative red tape.

Nehemiah 8- the big dedication. The scroll is read, with translators, in front of everyone.

8:1 the entire people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which the LORD had charged Israel.

8:2 On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding.

8:3 He read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from the first light until midday, to the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were given to the scroll of the Teaching.

8:4 Ezra the scribe stood upon a wooden tower made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah at his right, and at his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, Meshullam.

8:5 Ezra opened the scroll in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; as he opened it, all the people stood up.

8:6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," with hands upraised. Then they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

8:7 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Teaching to the people, while the people stood in their places.

8:8 They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.

8:9 Nehemiah the Tirshatha, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining to the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God: you must not mourn or weep," for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching.

8:10 He further said to them, "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the LORD is the source of your strength."

8:11 The Levites were quieting the people, saying, "Hush, for the day is holy; do not be sad."

8:12 Then all the people went to eat and drink and send portions and make great merriment, for they understood the things they were told.

This goes on for several days

This is the Torah scroll. People renew their pledges to the Torah, re-covenant themselves, and promise to obey it. People draw lots for who gets to live in Jerusalem proper and who in the surrounding towns.

The book ends with more descriptions of observances, and then more of Nehemiah fulminating about intermarriage; the book ends thusly:

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

13:23 Also at that time, I saw that Jews had married Ashdodite, Ammonite, and Moabite women;

13:24 a good number of their children spoke the language of Ashdod and the language of those various peoples, and did not know how to speak Judean.

13:25 I censured them, cursed them, flogged them, tore out their hair, and adjured them by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, or take any of their daughters for your sons or yourselves.

13:26 It was just in such things that King Solomon of Israel sinned! Among the many nations there was not a king like him, and so well loved was he by his God that God made him king of all Israel, yet foreign wives caused even him to sin.

13:27 How, then, can we acquiesce in your doing this great wrong, breaking faith with our God by marrying foreign women?"

13:28 One of the sons of Joiada son of the high priest Eliashib was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I drove him away from me.

13:29 Remember to their discredit, O my God, how they polluted the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and Levites.

13:30 I purged them of every foreign element, and arranged for the priests and the Levites to work each at his task by shifts,

13:31 and for the wood offering [to be brought] at fixed times and for the first fruits. O my God, remember it to my credit!

So this is harsh, but remember that at the same time you are getting books like Esther, Ruth, and Jonah which stress the value of converts, and of God's caring for all peoples.