

# **A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EZRA**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A thorough understanding of this book is necessary to Seventh Day Adventist, for in the seventh chapter a detailed account of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem is given. Ezra. 7:11-26. This marks the beginning of the 70 weeks or 490 days/years of Daniel chapter nine and also the beginning of the 2300 days/years of Daniel chapter eight.

At what time does this judgement begins? In the second chapter of the book of Daniel the beginning and ending of the investigative judgement is identified as the setting up of "a kingdom" by "the God of heaven" verse 44, but the time of this work is not specified. The words "in the days of these kings" of verse 44 (the feet and toes of clay and iron of the image) do not speak specifically of a date but implies that, in the previous parts of the image - the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass and the legs of iron in verses 32, 33. The kingdom was not set up as yet nor had it begun to be set up.

Also in the seventh chapter of Daniel the investigative judgement in which the ancient of days sits, angels minister unto him and to whom the son of man is brought before to be given "dominion and glory and a kingdom" verses 9, 10,13,14. It begins sometime after the little horn that was speaking great things arises which means that in the time of the lion (Babylon), the Bear (Medio-Persia), the leopard (Greece) the dreadful and terrible beast (Rome) the judgement had not yet begun, but after.

At the end of the 2300 days/ysr. the investigative judgement (the blotting out of sins, cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary) commences. This is the unique contribution of Seventh-Day Adventism to Christian theology as discovered and developed by the reformation. It is also the final part of the protestant reformation.

### **FACTS ABOUT THE BOOK OF EZRA:**

1. The book of Ezra could be divided into three parts. They are:
  - a. Ezra chapters 1-6
  - b. Ezra chapter 7
  - c. Ezra chapters 8-10
2. Ezra chapters 1-6 begins with the Lord initiative upon Cyrus to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which Cyrus put in writing. Ezra. 1:1-4.
3. Ezra chapters 1-6 ends with the completion of the work on the house and its dedication. Ezra. 6:14, 15, 16-18.
4. Ezra chapter 7 begins with the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia to show us the decree to restore and to build Jerusalem that he made. Ezra. 7:1, 11, 12.
5. Ezra chapter 7 ends with Ezra's thanksgiving to God for the king's decree. Ezra. 7:27, 28.
6. Ezra chapters 8 -10 begins with a moral reform at the river Ahava for a prosperous journey to Jerusalem. Ezra. 8:21-23.

7. Ezra chapters 8-10 ends with social reforms amongst the children of Israel, from the priest to the common people. Ezra. 10:16, 17; Ezra. 10:18-44.

### **THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF EZRA**

The theology of the book of Ezra is the restoration of the people of God.

"If they sin against thee (for there is no man that sinneth not) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captive unto the land of the enemy far or near: yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whether they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carry them captive, saying, we have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so returned unto thee with all their hearts, and with all their souls, in the land of the enemy, which led them away captive, and prayed unto thee towards their land, which thou givest unto their fathers, the city which thou has chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name then hear thou their pray and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carry them captive, that they may have compassion on them: for they be thy people, and thy inheritance, which thou broughtest forth from the midst of the furnace of iron:" 1 Kings 8:46-51.

"For thus saith the Lord of Host, God of Israel; let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesied falsely in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord. For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and performed my good word towards you in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whether I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again in the place whence I cause you to be carried away captive." Jer. 29:8-14.

#### Ezra Chapter One

1. Yahweh's conviction upon Cyrus to build Him a house: Ezra. 1:1
2. The proclamation he (Cyrus) made as a result of Yahweh's conviction: Vs. 2-4.
3. The response of the people of Yahweh. Vs. 5, 6.
4. The vessels of Yahweh's house is brought forth by Cyrus; they are by numbered unto Shesh-bazzar who brought them to Jerusalem. Ezra. 1:7-11.

## Ezra Chapter Two

1. Introduction information about Yahweh's people. Ezra. 2:1,2a
2. Yahweh's people identified by family relationship: Vs. 2 b-20.
3. Yahweh's people identified by place names: Vs 21-35.
4. The priests of Yahweh: Ezra. 2:36-39. (for further information see: 1 Chr. 23:12, 13; 1 Chr 6:49-53; 1 Chr 6:1-15; 1 Chr 24:1-19).
5. The Levites of Yahweh: Vs. 40. (For further information see: 1 Chr. 23).
6. The singers of Yahweh: Vs. 41 (for further information see: 1 Chr. 25).
7. The children of the porters gate keepers of Yahweh: Vs. 42; (for further information see: 1 Chr. 26:1-19).
8. The Nethinims temple servants of Yahweh's house: Vs. 43-54; Ezra 8:20
9. The children of Solomon's servants: Vs. 55-58.
10. Those who could not prove their historical ancestry with the people of Yahweh. Vs. 59-63.
11. The total of the whole congregation their servants, maids and others; their animals also. Vs. 64-67

### **Explanation on Vs. 64-67**

*"The total in Vs. 64 leaves us with an insoluble problem. If we add up the figures for the different families, we arrive at a total of 29,818. Some have proposed that women and children are left out in the totals of the families, but this leaves us with 12,542 women and children, much too low a figure. This total of 42,360, however, occurs also in Neh. 7 and must be regarded as correct. Somehow, through textual corruption or by the omission of certain families, this discrepancy happened." F. C. Fensham the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, pg. 56-57.*

*"The whole congregation together was forty-two thousand three hundred and threescore - this gross amount is 12,000 more than the particular numbers given in the catalogue, when added together, come to reckoning up the smaller numbers, we shall find that they amount to 29,818 in this chapter, and to 31,089 in the parallel chapter of Nehemiah. Ezra also mentions 494 persons omitted by Nehemiah, and Nehemiah mentions 1,765 not noticed by Ezra. If, therefore, Ezra's surplus be added to the sum in Nehemiah, and Nehemiah's surplus to the number in Ezra, they will both become 31,583. Subtracting this from 42,360, there will be a deficiency of 10,777. These are omitted because they did not belong to Judah and Benjamin or to the priest, but to the other tribes. The servants and singers, male and female, are reckoned separately (Vs. 65), so that putting all these items together, the number of all who went up with Zerubbabel amounted to 50,000, with 8,000 beasts of burden." Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible, pg. 339.*

12. Voluntary contributions offered for the house of Yahweh: Vs. 68, 69
13. Location of the returnees of Yahweh. Vs. 70

**Notes:** The purpose for this extensive genealogical list is twofold in nature.

- i. To legitimize the returnees by identifying them with their tribal ancestry.
- ii. To demonstrate by that linkage that the exile, though it had been traumatic and terribly disruptive, had not severed the line of promise that originated in Abraham and would continue forever.

### Ezra Chapter Three

1. Partial re-institution of the ceremonial system of Yahwehism: Ezra. 3:1-6 (a).
2. Interpolation, information about the temple and preparatory work for it. Vs. 6 (b), 7.
3. The laying of the foundation of the temple of Yahweh and the response of the people Vs. 8-13.

### Ezra Chapter Four

#### Hindering and suspension of work on the temple

1. A summary of the tactics by the adversaries (the Samaritans) of the people of Yahweh in the reign of Cyrus king of Persia until Darius (Hystapes) king of Persia. Vs. 1-5.  
**Note:** The events summarized in Vs. 1-5, is explained in Vs. 6-24.
2. The Samaritans accusative letter to Ahasuerus (Cambyses) against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. Vs. 6.
3. The names of certain persons and of non-Jewish tribes who wrote a letter to Artaxerxes (Smerdis) the king of Persia against Jerusalem. Vs. 7-10.
4. A detailed account of the content of the Samaritans letter to Artaxerxes (Smerdis) the king. Vs. 11-16.
5. The reply of king Artaxerxes (Smerdis) to the Samaritans' letter. He gave commandments to these men to stop the city from being built. Vs. 17-22.
6. The Samaritans quickly responded to Artaxerxes` (Smerdis) command by forcing the Jews to stop building their temple. Vs. 23
7. "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius (Hystapes) king of Persia." Vs. 24

### Ezra Chapter Five

1. The resumption of work on the house of Yahweh, encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah: Vs. 1, 2

2. Inquiries by Tatnai the governor and Shethar-boznai and their companions about the work being done on the house of Yahweh. Vs. 3-5.
3. A detailed account of the content of Tatnai and his companions' letter to Darius (Hystapes) the king of Persia. Vs. 6-17.

**Note:** Footnotes on Haggai and Zechariah according to Vs. 1, 2.

### Ezra Chapter Six

1. Darius' (Hystapes) investigations into the accusations against the Jews by Tatnai and his companions and his discoveries. Vs. 1-5.
2. Darius' (Hystapes) written response to Tatnai and his companions, in favor of the Jews and the temple of Yahweh based upon his search and findings Vs. 6-12.
3. Tatnai the governor and his companions speedy compliance with the command of Darius (Hystapes) Vs. 13.
3. Completion of the temple of Yahweh Vs. 14, 15.

**Note:** Date of the completion:

4. The dedication of the temple of Yahweh. 16-18.
5. The first Passover and the feast of unleavened bread kept in the new temple of Yahweh. Vs. 19-22.

### Ezra Chapter Seven

1. The king of Persia in whose time the events transpired is named - Artaxerxes (Longimanus). Vs. 1a.
2. Ezra's genealogy is traced from him back to Aaron the brother of Moses, the first high priest. Vs. 1b-5.
3. Ezra 7:6
  - (a) This Ezra went up from Babylon;
  - (b) And he was a ready scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given;
  - (c) And the king granted him all his requests, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.
4. The laity and religious functionaries who went up with Ezra.
5. The time of Ezra and his companions departure from Babylon and arrival to Jerusalem is mentioned.

Vs. 8, 9.

6. Ezra's purpose in coming to Jerusalem is revealed. Vs. 10
7. The letter which Artaxerxes (Longimanus) give to Ezra. Vs. 11-26.

**Note:** An analysis of the decree of Artaxerxes

i. Vs. 13 - legal migration to Jerusalem.

ii. Vs. 14-23 - gifts for temple and services at Jerusalem.

iii. Vs. 24 - Yahweh's religion exempt from taxation.

iv. 25, 26 - civil judicial autonomy.

8. Ezra's thanksgiving to God for the king's authoritative decree in favor of the Jews. Vs. 27, 28.