**Ezra**

The combined work Ezra-Nehemiah is our most important literary source for the formation of the Jewish religious community in the province of Judah after the Babylonian exile. This is known as the period of the Restoration, and the two men most responsible for the reorganization of Jewish life at this time were Ezra and Nehemiah.

The last four books of the Hebrew canon are Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, in that order. At one time, however, Ezra and Nehemiah followed 1 and 2 Chronicles and were generally considered to be the work of one and the same author known as “the Chronicler.” In recent years, however, the question of the authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah is seen to be more complex. While some scholars still maintain unity of authorship, others prefer to speak of the influence of a “Chronistic school” on the formation of Ezra-Nehemiah as a single book. The treatment of Ezra-Nehemiah as a single book by the earliest editors was undoubtedly due to the fact that in ancient times the two books were put under the one name, Ezra. What is known of Ezra and his work is derived almost exclusively from Ezr 7– 10 (the “Ezra Memoirs”) and Neh 8– 9. Strictly speaking, the term “Ezra Memoirs” should be used only of that section in which Ezra speaks in the first person, i.e., Ezr 7: 27– 9: 15.

Ezra is sometimes accused of having been a legalist who gave excessive attention to the letter of the law. His work, however, should be seen and judged within a specific historical context. He gave to his people a cohesion and spiritual unity which helped to prevent the disintegration of the small Jewish community settled in the province of Judah.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are products of the Persian period and tell a remarkable story. In the Babylonian Exile (587– 539 bc), lost were all the important legacies of ancient Israel: the Temple, the monarchy, and the city of Jerusalem itself. Undoubtedly some Judeans wondered whether their covenant with God had been broken, perhaps permanently. After roughly fifty years, however, waves of returnees from exile along with Judeans who had remained in the land began to create a new future by rebuilding the city of Jerusalem along with its Temple. Indeed virtually all the legacies of ancient Israel— the Jerusalem Temple, the monarchy, the covenant, and the law— were reconsidered and recast to form the foundation of Judean life after the exile.

The Book of Ezra is divided as follows:

1. The Return from Exile (1: 1– 6: 22)
2. The Work of Ezra (7: 1– 10: 44)

The following is a list of the Persian kings, with the dates of their reigns, which will be useful for dating the events mentioned in Ezra-Nehemiah:

Cyrus 539– 530 b.c.

Cambyses 530– 522 b.c.

Darius I 522– 486 b.c.

Xerxes I 486– 465 b.c.

Artaxerxes I 465– 424 b.c.

Darius II 423– 404 b.c.

Artaxerxes II 404– 358 b.c.

Artaxerxes III 358– 337 b.c.

End of the Persian Empire (Defeat of Darius III)

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (pp. 2833-2835). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*