

Ezra 1, 3-7; Nehemiah Quotes and Notes

Important dates:

Destruction of the First Israelite Temple: 586 BCE

Cyrus reigns as Persian leader: 559-530¹

Media and Persia unified under Cyrus: 550²

Cyrus conquers Babylon: 539

Return of the Jews from the Exile: 537

The Second Temple Completed: 515³

Ezra obtained an edict to take all exiles back to Jerusalem: 458⁴

Ezra – Nehemiah

Ezra-Nehemiah, which begins where Chronicles ends, is written as a continuation of Chronicles. It contains historical traditions, records significant liturgical developments in the newly reconstituted Second Temple community, and preserves important genealogical lists of returnees, priests, Levites, and other leadership and Temple personnel. In presenting this material concerning the early postexilic period, Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes repeatedly their continuity with the Israelite preexilic past. Ezra explicitly appropriates Mosaic authority as he is represented as regiving the Torah in a kind of repetition of the Sinai event. Indeed, Ezra and Nehemiah insist that their legal innovations are already part of Mosaic Torah, i.e., that they are accurate applications of Mosaic Torah and have authoritative Mosaic status. Furthermore, the narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah repeatedly invokes and identifies with the "conquest" of the land of Israel during the time of Joshua as a way of authorizing the returnees' appropriation of Judah and their insistence on rebuilding the Temple and the wall of Jerusalem. The narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah thus represents the self-understanding of the reconstituted Second Temple

¹ According to the legend, Astyages, the king of the Medes and overlord of the Persians, gave his daughter in marriage to his vassal in Persis, a prince called Cambyses. From this marriage Cyrus was born. Astyages, having had a dream that the baby Cyrus would grow up to overthrow him, ordered his own grandson to be slain. His chief adviser, however, instead gave the baby to a shepherd to raise. When he was 10 years old, Cyrus' true identity was revealed and he was returned to his biological parents. When Cyrus he reached manhood he revolted against his maternal grandfather. Astyages marched against Cyrus, but his army deserted him and surrendered to Cyrus in 550 BCE. [Cyrus the Great, Britannica](#), accessed 6.20.2022.

² In 553 BCE, Cyrus led an army against Astyages' kingdom of Media, which he conquered by 550. With the merging of the kingdoms of Persia and Media, the Achaemenid Empire, also known as the First Persian Empire, was born. See: [Achaemenid Empire](#), Wikipedia, accessed 6.28.2022.

³ Cyrus, founder of the Achaemenian dynasty of Persia and conqueror of Babylonia, in 538 BCE issued an order allowing exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Work was completed in 515 BCE. There is no known detailed plan of the Second Temple, which was constructed as a modest version of the original building. It was surrounded by two courtyards with chambers, gates, and a public square. It did not include the ritual objects of the First Temple; of special significance was the loss of the Ark itself. Ritual, however, was elaborate and was conducted by well-organized families of priests and Levites. [Britannica, Temple of Jerusalem](#). Accessed 6.28.2022.

⁴ In 458 B.C. he obtained from Artaxerxes an edict allowing him to take to Jerusalem any Jewish exiles who wanted to go. Artaxerxes also gave Ezra money, animals for offerings, silver and gold, and "the vessels" for the temple that was to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. (See Ezra 7:12-19.) [Church News, 28 Nov 1998](#), accessed 6.28.2022.

community as fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant of promised land, a land which, in their textual memory, had been violently torn from them by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Ezra-Nehemiah also repeatedly invokes the prophetic traditions of promise for return after the exile. They see themselves as part of the divine fulfillment of earlier prophecies for return and hope uttered by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. This identification was meant, in part, to encourage the returnees to identify with and revere their past textual history and overcome the profound disappointment that must have overwhelmed the exiles in Babylonia.

During the reign of Cyrus II (559-530 BCE), the king issued a proclamation encouraging nations to establish their own temples in their indigenous lands. At this time Sheshbazzar was the appointed governor (or leader) of Judah, now a province in the Persian empire, known as Yehud. As a result of Cyrus's decree of 538, known in different forms in Ezra 1 . 1-4 (see 2 Chron. 36.22-23) and Ezra 6.1-5, some Judean exiles returned to Israel. Returnees began to reconstruct the Jerusalem Temple and resettle in Judah and surrounding environs. During the reign of Cambyses (530-522), Zerubbabel was governor of Judah and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple continued. During the reign of Darius I (522-486) Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem Temple was rebuilt and dedicated in 516. The rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall and surrounding areas continued under Xerxes I (486-465) and Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465-424). Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 458. Nehemiah, governor of Judah, was sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the city in 445 and served under both Artaxerxes I and Darius II (423-405), who, following the general Persian policy of religious tolerance, continued to support Judah during his reign.⁵

Authorship

There is significant ancient debate surrounding the question of the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah. In rabbinic tradition Ezra-Nehemiah was recognized as a single work authored by Ezra (b. B. Bat. 15 a). Ezra-Nehemiah is considered a single unified work in early Hebrew biblical manuscripts, in the Greek version of the Bible (the Septuagint), and in later Jewish traditions.⁶

Division of Ezra-Nehemiah

The first formal division of Ezra-Nehemiah into two separate works appears in the 3rd century CE, among Christians, in the work of the early church father, Origen. This division is also reflected in Jerome's extremely influential Latin translation, the Vulgate, which was completed in the 4th century CE. The division of the book into Ezra and Nehemiah among Jews appears in the first printed editions of the Heb text in the 15th century CE.⁷

The Importance of Ezra to the Jews

The importance of Ezra for the creation and formation of what came to be known as rabbinic Judaism cannot be overestimated. According to the Bible, Ezra was the one who brought the Torah to the returning exiles, read and interpreted it publicly, and oversaw the people's solemn recommitment to its teachings (Neh. chapters 8-10). Thus **Ezra is like a second Moses. The Rabbis imply this by stating: "Ezra was sufficiently worthy that the Torah could have been given through him if Moses had not preceded**

⁵ Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1666-1667.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

him" (t. Sanh. 4.4). A number of ordinances called the ten *takanot* (regulations) are attributed to Ezra, although they are nowhere mentioned in the text of Ezra-Nehemiah... **Ezra is received and embraced by rabbinic Judaism. Ezra is both an authoritative scribe and priest, as well as a kind of proto-Rabbi who also has the authority of a prophet.** His legal innovations are not seen as such, but are depicted as proper interpretation of eternally binding Mosaic law (see Ezra 7.10; Neh. 8.1). This principle is at the heart of rabbinic interpretation, and his authenticity is never called into question within rabbinic Judaism⁸

A reminder of the Time Periods

1. The Creation
2. The Abrahamic Covenant and the Patriarchs
3. Egypt and Bondage
4. Deliverance from Egypt and the Desert
5. Coming out of the Desert and into Canaan
6. The Unified Kingdom of Israel
7. The Divided Kingdom
8. The Captivity
9. Coming out of Captivity and the Second Temple Period
10. The Intertestamental Period and the Dawn of the Apocalyptic

Ezra 1-2: The Exiles Return

1. Cyrus allows the Jewish exiles to return and restore the temple (Ezra 1.1-4).
2. Exiles prepare to return (Ezra 1.5-6).
3. Cyrus returns the temple vessels to the returnees (Ezra 1.7-11).
4. List of returnees who came up out of the captivity (Ezra 2.1-70).
 - a. Ezra identifies certain individuals who are prevented from exercising priesthood due to the lack of **genealogical records** (Ezra 2.62).⁹

⁸ Ibid, p. 1669-1670.

⁹ The search for accurate and convincing genealogical connection is a theme throughout Ezra-Nehemiah, reflecting the growing concern for preserving hierarchy and lineage that persisted throughout the exilic and postexilic periods. Ibid., p. 1673. Richard Draper put it this way: "All of us have encountered numerous genealogies when we have read the Old Testament. We even read in Ezra and Nehemiah how genealogies were used to forbid some men access to the priesthood because they had married unfaithfully among the heathen: "These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood." (Neh. 7.64; see also Ezra 6.22.) The importance of keeping an accurate genealogy in our day is underscored in a letter from Joseph Smith in Doctrine and Covenants 85.11-12: "And they who are of the High Priesthood, whose names are not found written in the book of the law, or that are found to have apostatized, or to have been cut off from the church, as well as the lesser priesthood, or the members, in that day shall not find an inheritance among the saints of the Most High; therefore, it shall be done unto them as unto the children of the priest, as will be found recorded in the second chapter and sixty-first and second verses of Ezra." Richard D. Draper, ed., *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, Deseret Book, 1990, p. 262. While I appreciate Richard Draper's remarks here, I would argue that these are not the same thing. It is entirely a different matter to keep a record of the faithful and not allow our enemies to officiate in sacred things as opposed to what is going on in Ezra 2.62. In Ezra, those that do not have proof of heredity are disallowed from priesthood office. So to me (Mike Day), these two things are not the same.

- b. The Urim and Thummim is no longer with the returning Jews (Ezra 2.63).¹⁰

Ezra 3: Jeshua and Zerubbabel Restore Temple Rituals

1. Temple sacrifice restored at Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3.1-7).
 - a. "Jeshua and Zerubbabel" (Ezra 3.2).¹¹
2. Priests and Levites appointed supervisors (Ezra 3.8-9).
3. Temple Foundations Laid (Ezra 3.10-13).
 - a. "Many... wept with a loud voice" (Ezra 3.12).¹²

¹⁰ Berlin and Brettler offer the following, "The Urim and Thummim were used to divine the opinion of God and were consulted on a variety of matters. See, e.g., Exod. 28.30; Lev. 8.8; Num. 27.21; Deut. 33.8; 1 Sam. 28.6. **Rabbinic tradition does not understand Ezra 2.63 to suggest actual postexilic use of the Urim and Thummim. It is unclear why this system of lot setting was not reestablished in this period, though the Rabbis suggest that the Urim and Thummim are akin to prophecy and are thus considered to have become unusable once prophecy ceased**, after the latter prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), or perhaps even after the former prophets (*b. Sot.* 48a). Although Ezra lived after the time of prophecy, he is nevertheless said by the Rabbis to have been worthy of receiving divine inspiration "ruah hakodesh," the holy spirit (*t. Sot.* 13.3). Nevertheless, in rabbinic interpretation, even Ezra could not resolve genealogical questions about all those who claimed to be priests. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1674, emphasis added.

Orson Pratt offered the following commentary:

We know that such an instrument [as the Urim and Thummim] existed in ancient times among the Jews, and among the Israelites in the wilderness, and that it was used to inquire of the Lord, and so sacred was that instrument in the days of Moses, that Aaron, the chief priest of the whole house of Israel, was commanded to place it within his breastplate, that when he should judge the tribes of the house of Israel, he should not judge by his own wisdom, **but should inquire of the Lord by means of this instrument, and whatever decision the Lord, by aid of the Urim and Thummim, should give, all Israel should give heed to it.** (Ex. 28:30) The same instrument was in use, many hundred years after the days of Aaron, by the Prophets of Israel...

But it seems that, before the coming of Christ, for some reason, probably through wickedness, the Urim and Thummim were taken away from the children of Israel, and a prophecy was uttered by one of the ancient Prophets, before Christ, that they should be many days without a Priest, (2 Chr. 15:3) without the Urim and Thummim, without the ephod, and without many things that God blessed them with in the days of their righteousness; but that in the latter days God would again restore all his blessings to the people of Israel, (Ezra 2:61-63; Hosea 3:4-5) including their counselors and their judges as at the first." Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 18:156, emphasis added. See also: Keith H. Meservy, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Oct. 1973, 61.

¹¹ Texts from the period of the Return to Zion repeatedly cite, as this one does, two leaders, one of priestly lineage and the other a secular figure. It is generally concluded that Zerubbabel was a descendent of the Davidic line. One should note, however, as a reflection of the extensive acculturation of the exiles in Babylonia that he bears an eminently Babylonian name, which means "seed of Babylonia." Alter, p. 6106. The combination of Jeshua, the priest, and Zerubbabel, a governor of Davidic descent, **establishes an authoritative link to preexilic times**, though in preexilic texts such close cooperation between the Davidic king and the Aaronide (high) priest is rarely recorded. **There is no king because Judah remained under Persian sovereignty.** *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1674, emphasis added.

¹² Although continuity with preexilic practices is emphasized, the loss of the First Temple and its glory is still mourned. Compare the returnees' response to the dedication of the walls in Neh. 12.43. Josephus emphasizes the irrevocable loss of the First Temple by interpreting this verse to mean that the sound of the elders and priests wailing was louder than the sound of joy and trumpets (*Antiquities* 11.4.2). Similarly, the Rabbis interpret these verses to suggest that the majority of the returnees could recall the First Temple and its glory. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1675.

- b. “Many shouted for joy!” (Ezra 3.12).¹³

Ezra 4: Conflict with the Adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, the people of the land

1. Locals¹⁴ offer to help with construction and are rejected (Ezra 4.1-3).

James E. Talmage explained it this way:

In many respects the Temple of Zerubbabel appeared poor in comparison with its splendid predecessor and in certain particulars, indeed, it ranked lower than the ancient Tabernacle of the Congregation—the sanctuary of the nomadic tribes. Critical scholars specify the following features characteristic of the Temple of Solomon and lacking in the Temple of Zerubbabel: (1) the Ark of the Covenant; (2) the sacred fire; (3) the Shekinah, or glory of the Lord, manifested of old as the Divine Presence; (4) the Urim and Thummim, by which Jehovah made plain His will to the priests of the Aaronic order; (5) the genius or spirit of prophecy, indicative of the closest communion between mortals and their God. Notwithstanding these differences the Temple of Zerubbabel was recognized of God and was undoubtedly the site or seat of Divine revelation to duly constituted prophets. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, Deseret Book, 1968, 42-3. The argument can be made on both sides of this, however. For example, the glory of God was promised to be at the temple as recorded in Haggai 2.7 “I will fill the house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” The argument that prophecy was not associated with the second temple is countered by those that emphasize that Haggai and Zechariah were proponents of this temple and that they were prophets at this time. Others disagree, and I am still on the fence regarding many of these points, but will add that it seems to be that the Ark and the Urim and Thummim were absent from the Second Temple, and at least by Jesus’ day, he refers to the house as the sanctuary of God, but also as having been defiled (see: Kelly Ogden, [Jesus and the Temple, Ensign 1991](#), accessed 6.20.2022. Ogden’s article emphasizes the positive statements of the Savior regarding the Second Temple, however, he also made the following statements: “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matt 21.13, Mark 11.17, Luke 19.46. See also John 2.16)

¹³ The principal concern of the exiles returning in the sixth century before Christ was the Temple. Upon arriving in Jerusalem they immediately rebuilt the Temple altar and resumed morning and evening sacrifices (see Ezra 3:1-5). They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles. They employed Phoenicians to import cedar from Lebanon and engaged masons and carpenters to begin rebuilding the Temple. The workers laid the stone foundation, and the congregation of Israel sang and shouted for joy, though many of the older generation also wept aloud as they stood among the ruins and recalled the glorious structure that had previously graced the Temple Hill of Jerusalem. We reflect again on the statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith that **the main object of gathering the people of God in any age of the world was ‘to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation.’** David B. Galbraith, D. Kelly Ogden, and Andrew C. Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City*, Deseret Book, 1996, p. 121.

¹⁴ Ezra 4.4 calls these individuals “the people of the land” עַמ־הָאָרֶץ. Who are these “foes”? Robert Alter gives this answer: “Judah and Benjamin being the two tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah, the designation here is of the returning exiles, represented as the autochthonous inhabitants of the land. **The “foes” would be the Samaritans—perhaps in part a remnant of Israelites, but here represented as foreigners who had adopted the local cult—living in the region to the north**, where the vanished kingdom of Israel once was located. Their declaration is that they “would seek out your God” (verse 2), and that they had been sacrificing to him reflects their embrace of the worship of YHWH because it was the local cult.” Robert Alter, [The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary](#), W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, p. 6111, electronic version, emphasis added. The adversaries are presumably the same peoples of the land who are harassing and intimidating the returnees. This seems to reflect the resettlement of people from elsewhere in the Assyrian empire by Esarhaddon, after the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrian empire in 722, when Shalmaneser V was king. In subsequent Assyrian campaigns, foreign nations were resettled in northern Israel by Esarhaddon. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1675. It is important to note that the Samaritans also had a temple in Gerizim in the north which stood from the 5th century BC until it was destroyed in 112-111 BCE on the orders of John Hyrcanus (Ancient Greek: Ἰωάννης Ὑρκανός, Hebrew: יוחנן הרקנוס Hurqanōs, Jewish High Priest. This is evidence of a deep and abiding rift between those in the north and the Jews in Jerusalem, a rift that was intense in the days of Jesus. See: Jonathan Bourgel, [The Destruction of the Samaritan Temple by John Hyrcanus: A Reconsideration, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol.](#)

2. Locals try to undermine the construction of the temple restoration (Ezra 4.4-7).
 - a. "The people of the land troubled them..." (Ezra 4.4).¹⁵
 - b. "written in the Syrian tongue" (Ezra 4.7).¹⁶
3. The locals write a letter to Artaxerxes to halt construction (Ezra 4.8-16).
 - a. They tell the king that the Jews will not pay tribute if they are allowed to build the temple (Ezra 4.12-13).
4. Artaxerxes replies that construction should cease (Ezra 4.17-22).
5. Temple construction interrupted (Ezra 4.23-24).
6. Bryce's list of the oppositional strategy of the enemies of Judah:
 - a. The enemies "weakened the hands of the people of Judah" (Ezra 4.4).
 - b. They "troubled them in building" (Ezra 4.4).
 - c. They wrote out an accusation to the leaders of Persia (Ezra 4.6).
 - d. They stated that the Jews would not pay their tribute (Ezra 4.13).
 - e. They stated that Jerusalem was "rebellious" and a "bad city" (Ezra 4.12).
 - f. The enemies mocked them (Nehemiah 2.19).
 - g. They were angry (Neh. 4.1).
 - h. They conspired against the Jews (Neh. 4.8).
 - i. They request the workers to come down (Neh. 6.2).
7. The Judean response:

[135, No. 3 \(Fall 2016\), p. 505-523](#). In his article, (p. 517) **Bourgel argues that the destruction of the temple at Gerizim, though read as an act of hatred on one account, can also be seen as "an act of integration of the Samaritans into the Hasmonean state."** He argues that this action of hostility was "a radical but entirely logical attempt to rally them to his authority as high priest of the Jerusalem temple... as John Hyrcanus considered the Samaritans to be genuine Israelites."

¹⁵ John Young taught, "There never has been a time when we have commenced to build a Temple but **the Devil has called upon his servants to prevent us from doing the work, if possible**. It was so in Kirtland; it was so in Far West and in Illinois; and I expect it will be so here; but it will all tend to roll on the work of God. *Journal of Discourses*, 5.26-27. Ezra T. Benson taught, "We are going to build a temple, we are now laying the foundation, and when it is completed we expect to receive our blessings, and do you think the devil knows this? Yes, he knows all about it, and he stirs up the wicked, and why does he do this? To hinder the people of God from obtaining the blessings they desire." *Journal of Discourses*, 2.359. James E. Faust taught, "I now come to some even milder forms of trying to serve the Lord without offending the devil. Having a temple recommend and not using it seems mild enough. However, if we live close to a temple, perhaps having a temple recommend but not using it may not offend the devil. Satan is offended when we use that recommend, going to the temple to partake of the spiritual protection it affords. How often do we plan to go to the temple only to have all kinds of hindrances arise to stop us from going? The devil always has been offended by our temple worship. As President Brigham Young once said about the building of temples, there are Saints who say, "I do not like to do it, for we never began to build a temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring." His answer was, "I want to hear them ring again. All the tribes of hell will be on the move, if we uncover the walls of this temple." *Finding Light in a Dark World*, Deseret Book Co, 1995, p. 75.

¹⁶ The text seems to say "and translated into Aramaic," which makes no sense (the Septuagint lacks the second verb here). This could be a scribal error, but there are some grounds for concluding that the verb targem (a loanword related to "turkemen") meant not only "to translate" but also "to read out in public," which is precisely what the turgeman in the early synagogues did as he rendered the Hebrew of the Torah into Aramaic. At this point, the language of Ezra switches from Hebrew to Aramaic. Aramaic, in fact, was the common official language of the Persian empire, so a letter to the emperor such as this would have been written in Aramaic. It is unclear whether the actual original Aramaic document has been inserted in the text or whether—perhaps more likely—the author has composed an Aramaic letter conveying the substance of the original document. Alter, p. 6111-6112 electronic version.

- a. "I cannot come down!" (Neh. 6.3).
- b. "Let us rise up and build" (Neh. 2.18).
- c. "The God of heaven will prosper us" (Neh. 2.20).
- d. "The people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4.6).
- e. They set a watch day and night (Neh. 4.9).
- f. "Be not afraid... remember the Lord" (Neh. 4.14).
- g. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah get involved in the rebuilding effort (Ezra 5.1-2).

Ezra 5-6: The Temple Construction is Resumed and Completed

1. Temple restoration is resumed (Ezra 5.1-2) and Haggai and Zechariah prophesy.
 - a. The work will go forward! – Joseph Smith.¹⁷
2. Tattenai's inquiry and God's protection (Ezra 5.3-5).¹⁸
 - a. "Shethar-bozenai" (Ezra 5.3).¹⁹
3. Tattenai's letter to Darius (Ezra 5.6-17).²⁰
4. Darius finds Cyrus' decree in Ecbatana (Ezra 6.1-2).
5. Letter from Darius to Tattenai ordering the Temple to be completed (Ezra 6.3-12).
6. Temple restoration is completed (Ezra 6.13-15).
7. The Temple dedication (Ezra 6.16-18).
8. The Celebration of the Passover (Ezra 6.19-22).
 - a. "The children of the captivity kept the Passover" (Ezra 6.19).²¹
 - b. Ezra 6.21 "And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the

¹⁷ The standard of truth has been erected. No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say the work is done. Joseph Smith, 1842. See: [Saints, Volume 1](#). Accessed 6.20.2022.

¹⁸ Who was Tattenai? Tattenai was a Biblical character and a Persian governor of the province west of the Euphrates River during the time of Zerubbabel and the reign of Darius I. He is best known for questioning King Darius in regard to the rebuilding of a temple for the Lord, God of Israel. **He was generally friendly to the Jews.** The rebuilding was being led by Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and had been issued by King Cyrus I. Tattenai wrote a letter to King Darius to ask if these statements were true, and then King Darius wrote a letter confirming that the statements were true. In the letter, Darius asked that the people do everything they can to support this rebuilding financially, and that they do nothing to impede it lest they suffer harsh punishment. A number of cuneiform tablets bearing the name Tattenai have survived as part of what may have been a family archive. The tablet that links one member of this family to the Bible character is a promissory note dated to the 20th year of Darius I, 502 BC. It identifies a witness to the transaction as a servant of "Tattannu, governor of Across-the-River". The clay tablet can be dated to June 5, 502 B.C. exactly. [Tattenai, Wikipedia](#), accessed 6.29.2022.

¹⁹ Shethar-bozenai: This name always appears just after Tattenai. Some scholars suggest that this is an official title of Tattenai; others suggest that it was the name of Tattenai's official scribe. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1677.

²⁰ King Darius: Darius I ruled the Persian empire 522-486 BCE. He is highly regarded for extending Cyrus's generous policy toward non-Persian peoples. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1677.

²¹ Of the three pilgrim festivals, **it is the Passover that confirms national identity** (as in the celebration of Passover at the beginning of Joshua), and so it is appropriately celebrated here. The phrase "performed the Passover" refers specifically to the Passover sacrifice, as is made explicit in the next verse. Alter, p. 6121 electronic version, emphasis added.

land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat.” (Ezra 6.21). This verse has some provocative possibilities regarding the visionaries like Isaiah and Lehi. It has been argued that there was a rift between two groups of people within the community at this time: the visionaries and hierocratic faction. This verse has been read to demonstrate that with the completion of the temple and with the approval of Haggai and Zechariah, that **many of the visionaries switched over to the hierocratic faction, and that this text is a polemic against the visionaries of this time period.**²²

Ezra 7-10: Ezra’s mission to Jerusalem

²² When read in conjunction with Zechariah 13.2-5, it can be argued that there was a push in this time period away from the visionary prophets like Lehi, Nephi, and Isaiah. With this push came a view that true orthodoxy lie in the keeping of the law and the focus on outward behaviors that manifested loyalty to the law. Paul Hanson argues that the standoff between the priests who worked to control the religion of the returnees and the visionaries came to a head right around 522-521 (p. 244), as he argues, “Into this potentially volatile situation stepped two prophetic figures, Haggai and Zechariah, announcing that the long awaited eschaton was about to arrive. But these two figures did not throw in their lot with the visionary followers of Second Isaiah, who had been announcing Yahweh's return to deliver his faithful followers for years. For Haggai and Zechariah did not cast their prophecies in the elevated language of the visionaries; they did not portray a cosmic redemption by Yahweh alone unrelated to the particulars of historical events. Instead they tied their eschatological predictions to the specific details of the hierocratic program. Theirs was no dream limited to a vision of Yahweh's coming to redeem his remnant amidst the trembling of the foundations of the earth and clamor of the thunderstorm, but above all a detailed plan of rebuilding the temple community... **The defection of many people from the prophetic to the hierocratic cause is perhaps attested in the note in Ezra 6.21 concerning the Passover celebration at the dedication of the newly built temple, a note which obviously expresses the partisan view of the hierocratic party that every Jew, until such time that he joined their ranks, was given to "the pollutions of the peoples of the land": "it was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the pollutions of the peoples of the land to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel."** Haggai and Zechariah, by injecting prophetic fervor into the hierocratic program, made that program appealing to the masses, and their accomplishments played no mean role in the ultimate victory of the hierocratic tradition over rival claimants to community leadership. It can therefore be maintained that the hierocratic party entered the last two decades of the sixth century as the dominant power in the Jewish community largely due to the infusion of the prophetic spirit into their languishing cause by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.” Paul D. Hanson, [*The Dawn of the Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*](#), Fortress Press, 1979, p. 244-6. Whatever validity Hanson’s argument may or may not have, it can be argued that after the Exile the prophetic visionary status of the prophets seem to have been in decline. At least from the record that we have in canon. Interestingly enough, there was an underground network of visionaries that kept the tradition alive, and their works, while not always making it into Jewish canon (Daniel is in the Hebrew Bible and does fit in this tradition), were read by the early Christians. For example, the writings of Enoch, [4 Ezra](#), [The Apocalypse of Abraham](#), and [3 Baruch](#). A short introduction to apocalyptic texts, further examples, as well as where these texts fit in history can be read [here](#). I will argue that one of the main ideas of apocalypticism is that there are two forces in the cosmos: good and evil, and that these forces will one day come to a head, with the forces of good overcoming the forces of darkness. Oftentimes this literature has a negative outlook on the present age and is looking forward to the coming age when peace will reign supreme. These texts focus on a life after death, especially the resurrection of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked, as well as the appearance of the Son of Man, who will come and make things right. To me (Mike Day), much of the New Testament teachings of Jesus fit squarely into an apocalyptic framework. I would also argue that the Book of Mormon fits into this as well. Not all of these ideas were emphasized by the Jews who returned from the Exile, indeed, the focus seems to have been more on the preserving and keeping the Law, and less focus on visionaries or apocalyptic ideas. The Sadducees fit into this, as they rejected the notion of a resurrection, something that the visionaries of the apocalyptic tradition held so tightly.

1. Ezra joins the returnees (Ezra 7.1-10).
 - a. Ezra, a scribe “expert in the teaching of Moses” came up from Babylon (Ezra 7.6).²³
 - b. The importance of the scribal tradition at this period of history.²⁴
2. Artaxerxes’ letter commissioning Ezra’s mission (Ezra 7.11-26).
3. Ezra’s memoir (Ezra 7.27-9.15).
4. Ezra’s prayer (Ezra 7.27-28).
 - a. “Nethinims” נְתִינִים (Ezra 7.24).²⁵
5. List of returnees who accompany Ezra (Ezra 8.1-14).
6. Ezra’s preparations for the journey to Jerusalem (Ezra 8.15-30).
7. Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem (Ezra 8.31-36).
8. The Intermarriage Crisis (Ezra 9.1-2).²⁶

²³ The introduction to Ezra's mission illustrates what was considered necessary to preserve and perpetuate the newly reconstituted Jerusalem community. The information that is included is intended to demonstrate that Ezra possessed the required authority and sufficient preparation for the job. First, Ezra is included in the Aaronide line of priests and is therefore a priest with the **highest pedigree**, authorized to conduct Temple sacrifice and ritual, perhaps even a high priest himself. (It is odd, however, that Ezra is never included in any of the high priestly lineages.) Second, **Ezra is a scribe who is an expert in the Teaching of Moses**. He therefore provides an authoritative link to the returnees' preexilic past. Third, **Ezra is said to have dedicated himself to study** the Teaching of the Lord. Thus, Ezra is prepared for the task of interpreting, explaining, and applying the ancient law to a new context in which Israel is ruled, not by a Davidic monarch, but by a Persian king. Finally, Ezra is said to be in the favor of the Lord (v. 6) and of God (v. 9). Ezra continues to be celebrated in later Jewish traditions, and is often compared to Ezekiel and Moses. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1680, emphasis added.

²⁴ “In retrospect, the reading of the Law before the congregation by Ezra, the ‘ready scribe in the law of Moses’ (Ezra 7:6), was a very important event in Jewish history. This event and the attitudes that grew out of it are considered the beginning of a new and stronger affinity for the Law of Moses and the establishment of a strong scribal tradition among the Jews. Although there is little information about this period, from either secular or scriptural sources, historians believe that the scribal tradition, in turn, brought to the Holy Land a synagogue form of worship that had its roots in the Babylonian captivity. It appears that before the captivity, the people of Judah had been careless in keeping track of their holy writings. **At times the scriptures were even lost from public knowledge, as in the days preceding King Josiah.** (See 2 Kgs. 22–24.) But in the years of the captivity, the Jews engaged in a kind of ‘operation salvage’ as their scribes began to gather, preserve, and proliferate the works of the dead prophets. The Torah (the first five books of the Bible, containing the Law of Moses) was felt to be the key to reestablishing Israel’s special relationship with the Lord; and in bringing about a reformation in the hearts of the people of Israel, **Ezra and other leaders resolved that never again would the people be ignorant of the Law.** The scribes were originally **educated men who made their livelihood as copyists of the scriptures.** They studied the holy writings diligently—not only as a way to detect copyists’ errors, but also to understand the meaning of the scriptures. Thus, in the Holy Land the role of the scribes expanded. They became teachers of the Law, explaining its meaning and offering advice on how the details of the Law could be faithfully carried out. The titles these men took upon themselves reflected their growing prominence: lawyers, doctors, elders, and rabbis.” Richard D. Draper, [“Judah between the Testaments,”](#) *Ensign*, Oct. 1982, 37-38, emphasis added.

²⁵ Temple servants assigned to the Levites. Corresponding to the Hebrew verb נתן “give, put, set, or grant.”

²⁶ The Intermarriage crisis: According to rabbinic tradition ... and many modern scholars, the prohibition of intermarriage is rooted in Deut. 7.3: "Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons." However, Ezra insists on two points that are not explicit in any earlier text. First, intermarriage with any non-Israelite people is prohibited, not only intermarriage with the Canaanite nations referred to in Deuteronomy (see also Deut. 20.16-18). Second, **if one has intermarried, one must divorce one's foreign wife and expel any children resulting from the prohibited marriage.** When Ezra says that the prohibition including the aforementioned two points- is from the Teaching ("torah") and the commandment of our God (10.3), he seems to presuppose that Mosaic authority should be ascribed not only to the law explicitly stated in Deut. 7.3, but also to its interpretation

9. Ezra's public confession and prayer (Ezra 9.3-15).
10. The Jews covenant to renounce all intermarriages (Ezra 10.1-14).
11. List of returnees who have intermarried (Ezra 10.15-44).

Nehemiah 1-7: Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem

1. Nehemiah hears that the walls of Jerusalem have been destroyed (Neh. 1.1-3).
2. Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. 1.4-11).
3. Artaxerxes authorizes Nehemiah to return to the land and rebuild the walls (Neh. 1.11-2.10).
4. Nehemiah inspects the walls at night (Neh. 2.11-15).
5. Nehemiah encourages the rebuilding of the walls (Neh. 2.16-18).
6. Nehemiah's rebuilding is opposed by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Neh. 2.19-20).
7. List of returnees who help with the construction of the walls (Neh. 3.1-32).
8. Sanballat tries to interfere with the rebuilding, but is unsuccessful (Neh. 3.33-38).
9. The faithful work on and guard the walls (Neh. 4.1-17).
 - a. George Q. Cannon on the construction of the temple, one hand on a weapon, the other on a tool.²⁷
10. Nehemiah works to resolve an economic crisis (Neh. 5.1-13).
 - a. "What you are doing is not right. You ought to act in a God-fearing way so as to not give our enemies, the nations, room to reproach us." (Neh. 5.9 JPS translation).²⁸
11. Nehemiah refrains from taking the governor's allowance (Neh. 5.14-19).
12. Nehemiah avoids murderous plots to interfere with the completion of the walls (Neh. 6.1-14).
13. The walls are completed, despite Tobiah's constant interference (Neh. 6.15-19).

or elaboration. This is similar to 1 Kings 11.1-2, an exilic text which suggests that Solomon's marriage to various foreign wives is a violation of Torah law. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1684. To me (Mike Day), this seems to go against other parts of the scriptures, and therefore I see much of these passages as later interpolations or as uninspired texts. For example, Paul counsels the exact opposite of this course of action (see: 1 Corinthians 7.14-17). Paul also counsels against creating interfaith marriages (2 Corinthians 6.14-18). Nowhere other than in Ezra 10 do individuals command or counsel divorcing foreign wives. Ruth is an example of a foreigner not only allowed into the inner circle of faith, but as the matriarch of the Davidic dynasty! So I see many problems with Ezra 9-10. Robert Alter puts it this way: "The traditional reason for avoiding intermarrying was to keep apart from pagan practices. Although Ezra still has this rationale in mind, **here he adds what amounts to a racist view**: the people of Israel are a "holy seed" and hence should avoid contamination by alien genetic stock." Alter, p. 6135/6509 electronic version.

²⁷ Consider what President George Q. Cannon, who was a member of the First Presidency, said of the persecution in Utah around 1884: "It is very encouraging to think that, in the midst of the assaults which are being made upon the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the threats that are in circulation concerning us and our future fate, there is faith enough found in the midst of the people to pursue, without discouragement and without cessation, the great work which we feel that our Father has laid upon us. We have not been situated as **we were** in Nauvoo, when we finished our temple there, for then the workmen who labored upon it, were **like the Jews in the days of Nehemiah**, when they undertook to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and had to labor a portion of the time at least, and a great portion of it too, with their instruments of labor in one hand, and weapons to defend themselves in the other. **We were surrounded by mobs, and living in a constant state, it may be said of fear, because of the threats which were made and the combinations which were formed**, and the attacks upon our outlying settlements in the burning of houses, in the destruction of grain, in the shooting down of cattle, and in the driving out of the people from their homes." In *Journal of Discourses*, 25:167, emphasis added.

²⁸ Berlin and Brettler take this to mean that Nehemiah takes matters into his own hands and declares a [Jubilee](#). See *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1694-1695.

14. Nehemiah appoints guardians for the gates of the city (Neh. 7.1-3).
15. Nehemiah plans for the repopulation of Jerusalem (Neh. 7.4-5).
16. List of those that have returned from Babylon (Neh. 7.6-72).

Nehemiah 8-10: Liturgical Practices of the Returnees to Jerusalem

1. Ezra reads from the Torah and the people celebrate (Neh. 8.1-12).
2. Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8.13-18).
3. Public confession of sins (Neh. 9.1-5).
4. Confessional prayer (Neh. 9.6-37).
5. Nehemiah's covenant (Neh. 10.1-40).

Nehemiah 11-13: Legislative Acts of Nehemiah

1. List of settlers in Jerusalem (Neh. 11.1-24).
2. List of distribution of village settlers in Judah (Neh. 11.26-36).
3. List of priests, Levites, and gatekeepers of the Temple (Neh. 12.1-26).
4. The dedication of the wall (Neh. 12.27-43).
5. Support of the clergy through the tithes (Neh. 12.44-47).
6. Prohibition against intermarriage (Neh. 13.1-3).
7. Threat to the purity of the Temple is resolved by Nehemiah (Neh. 13.4-9).
8. Nehemiah reinstates the Temple tithes (Neh. 13.10-14).
9. Observance of the Sabbath laws (Neh. 13.15-22).
10. Prohibition of intermarriage (Neh. 13.23-27).
11. Purification of the returnees and prayer (Neh. 13.28-31).