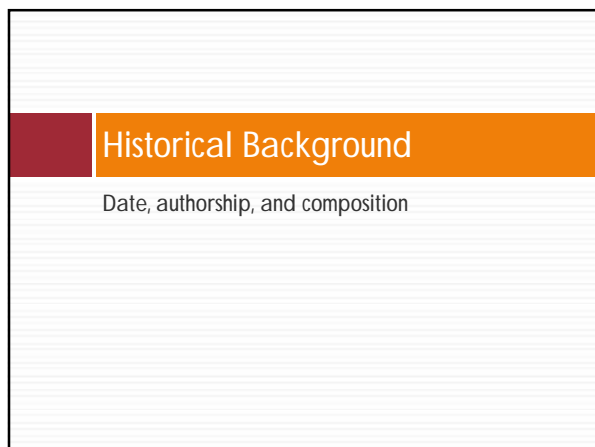




Relation with Neighboring Books

- .. Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah
 - First printed as separate books in Middle Ages
 - Masorettes make their totals as one book
 - Neh 3:32 marked as center of the book
 - Tally for total verses in book at end of Nehemiah
 - Origen (AD 185-254) is first known scholar to differentiate books
 - Jerome's Vulgate followed it (347-420)
- .. Connection with Chronicles
 - The "Chronicler" the author?
 - Overlap between the end of Chronicles and beginning of Ezra
 - Linguistic and theological similarities
 - Noncanonical 1 Esdras retells the same story as the end of 2 Chronicles and Ezra but without any break between them.
 - Some still hold this position; however, most doubt that authorship



Composition

- .. Sources
 - Major Sources
 - A historical review (Ezra 1-6)
 - Ezra's Memoirs (Ezra 7-10; Neh 8-10)
 - Nehemiah's Memoirs (Neh 1-7; 11-13)
 - Minor Sources
 - Lists (Ezra 1:9-11; 2; 7; 8:1-14; Neh 3; 10:18-43; 11:3-36; 12:1-26)
 - Letters (Ezra 1:2-4; 4:11-16; 4:17-22; 5:7-17; 6:2-5, 6-22; 7:12-26)
- .. Composition (Williamson)
 - Sources written close to time of actual events
 - Memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah assembled
 - Ezra 1-6 add as introduction to the whole book

Date and Authorship

- .. Traditional claims: Ezra himself
 - Jewish tradition (*Baba' Bathra* 15a)
 - Gleason Archer (*SOTI*, 419-20)
- .. Many have suggested "the Chronicler"
- .. Date
 - Since authorship's not established, the date is uncertain.
 - Accept the early date for Ezra's mission (438 BC)
 - All the memoirs gathered by about 400 BC?
 - Ezra 1-6 added as preface about 300 BC?

Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah

- .. Nehemiah's mission firmly fixed: "...in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year [of Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC)]" (Neh 1:1)
- .. Ezra's mission *not* firmly fixed: "...during the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra... came up from Babylon. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king" (Ezra 7:1-8).
 - Traditional order
 - Ezra preceding Nehemiah: Identifies king as Artaxerxes I, leading to a date of 458 BC
 - But the books don't show any overlap between the two leaders.
 - Alternative chronologies
 - Seventh year of Artaxerxes II, putting the mission in 398 BC
 - Emending the text to "thirty-seventh" [thirty and seven begin with the same Hebrew consonant], putting Ezra's mission at 428 BC
- .. Move back to accepting the traditional order:

Historical Period

Cyrus's edict prompts few returnees to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple

Literary Analysis

Genre, structure, and style

Cyrus's Edict (Ezra 1:1–2 = 539 BC)

- .. Cyrus of Persia gives edict allowing return to Judah (Ezra 1:1–2, 539 BC)
 - Appears to have been a widespread Persian imperial policy
 - Led many to view Persia as a liberator
 - Palestine still a part of a larger Persian satrapy called Beyond the River
 - Zerubbabel governs the Jehud district in this satrapy as Persian appointee.
 - Probably intended to keep a friendly province on their western border
 - Egypt had revolted against their Persian overlords with some success, although Persian eventually put it down and kept their stronghold in Memphis (ca. 464 BC)
 - Greeks had joined the fray, and the Athenian league was pushing Persia.

Genre: Literary history

- .. Literarily shaped historical narrative
 - Literary-theological purpose to the history
 - Doesn't diminish its accuracy, but it's not just a collection of annals
- .. Many sources
 - Letters, royal edicts, lists
 - First person narrations = "memoirs"
 - Memoirs
 - Ezra (Ezra 7–10; Neh 8 [some add Neh 9–10])
 - Nehemiah (Neh 1–7; sections of Neh 12:27–43; 13:4–41)
 - Memoirs not autobiographies
 - Memoirists writes of the great events that he has observed or participated in
 - Autobiographists writes of the self who has observed and participated in the events
 - Williamson suggests that both memoirs were official reports to the Persian court (Williamson 1985, xxviii).

Few return to the land

- .. Few follow Zerubbabel (1 Chr 3:19) and Sheshbazzar (Ezr. 1:8, 11; 5:14, 16) back to the land
- .. Priests start by rebuilding the altar and restarting sacrificial worship (Ezra 3:1–6)
- .. Temple foundation laid (3:10–13)
- .. Northern "meddling" halts temple reconstruction
 - North offers to assist, but returnees refuse their help (Ezra 4:1–3)
 - North successfully appealed to Persian authorities to stop the temple's reconstruction (Ezra 4:18–22)
- .. Temple not rebuilt until reign of Darius (ca. 515 BC).

Structure

- .. Historical Review (Ezra 1–6)
- .. Ezra's Memoirs, Part 1 (Ezra 7–10)
- .. Nehemiah's Memoirs, Part 1 (Neh 1–7)
- .. Ezra's Memoirs, Part 2 (Neh 8–10)
- .. Nehemiah's Memoirs, Part 2 (Neh 11–13)

Outline

- Goal Initiated: Cyrus's decree to rebuild temple (Ezra 1:1–4)
- Building the Temple (Ezra 1:5–Neh 7:72)
 - Introduction: Return to rebuild temple (Ezra 1:5–6)
 - Rebuilding the altar and temple in midst of opposition (Ezra 1:7–6:22)
 - Ezra and the people return to the land to rebuild the community in the midst of conflict and intermarriage (Ezra 7:1–10:44)
 - Nehemiah returns to rebuild the city wall in spite of opposition (Neh 1:1–7:5)
 - Closure: List of returnees (Neh 7:6–72, which reiterates Ezra 2)
- Goal Reached: Community celebrates completion of temple according to Torah (Neh 7:73–13:31)

Holiness no longer restricted to special places

- Temple building is the goal of the return.
 - So we almost expect to book to end when the temple's rebuilt.
 - But the "house" is not yet finished once the temple's rebuilt (Ezra 6:15).
 - Building continues and when the walls are finished, they too are consecrated (Neh 3:1)
 - They are rebuilding a "Holy City" (Neh 11:1)
 - Only when temple, city, and walls are rebuilt is there a "grand opening" ceremony (Neh 8–13).

Theological Message

Eskenazi: Three major themes
 Shift from leaders to community
 Holiness no longer restricted to special places
 Shift from oral to written authority

Shift from oral to written authority

- Written documents play a dominant role throughout Ezra–Nehemiah.
- The people dedicate themselves Torah at the end of the book (Neh 8–10)

Shift from leaders to community

- Earlier OT focus on charismatic individuals: e.g., Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel
- Ezra and Nehemiah are absorbed into the community
 - Ezra willingly
 - Nehemiah reluctantly
- It's the *community* that accomplishes the rebuilding tasks
- It's the *people* who turn to the Lord in corporate allegiance at the end.

Howard's Theological Points

Theology of Ezra–Nehemiah

God's People: At one with pre-exilic Israel

- .. A "second Exodus"
 - Neighbors gave valuables for the trip (Ezra 1:6; cf. Exod 12:35f)
 - Jews gave generous freewill offerings for rebuilding (Ezra 2:68–59, cf. Exod 35:20–29)
- .. Faithful to Mosaic law
 - Moses mentioned ten times in connection with the Torah (Ezr. 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Neh. 1:7f; 8:1, 14; 9:14; 10:29; 13:1).
 - Activities repeatedly regulated according the Law, with altars, sacred food, priests and Levites.
 - Public reading of Torah (Neh 8–10)
- .. One people of God (Ezra 2; Neh 7; cf. census counts in Numbers 1, 2, and 26)

Temple Worship

- .. Temple vessels and treasures brought back (Ezra 1:6–11; 2:68–69; 8:24–34)
- .. Sacrificial worship restarted (Ezra 3:2–3)
- .. Feasts restarted (Ezra 3:3–6; 6:19–22)
- .. Priests and Levites installed (Ezra 6:16–18)
- .. Ezra's return
 - Many temple personnel were ready to go with him (Ezra 7:7)
 - Found no Levites among the volunteers, so dealt with that before he would return (Ezra 8:15–20)
 - Brought back the rest of temple treasures (8:24–34)
- .. Reading the Law was a Feast of Tabernacles (Neh 8:10–18)

God's People: Unified

- .. Census lists are inclusive.
- .. Generosity with one another
 - Neighbors in Babylon (Ezra 1:6)
 - Providing for the needy among returnees (Neh 5)
 - Unified rebuilding efforts: temple (Ezra 3; 6:13–18), and city and walls (Neh 3–4, 6)
 - Moving in from the countryside to repopulate Jerusalem (Neh 11)

Scripture

- .. Public Reading
 - On a prominent public platform (Neh 8:4–5; cf. 2 Chr 6:13)
 - At the Water Gate rather than in front of the temple; perhaps indicating that the Torah was superior to the temple (cf. assembly in temple court, Ezra 3:1–6)
- .. Significant Date: Seventh month, the month of ...
 - Yom Kippur (Lev 16:29; 23:27; 35:9)
 - Festival of Tabernacles (Lev 23:34, 39, 41)
 - Festival of Trumpets (Lev 23:24; Num 29:1)
 - Other solemn days (Num 29:7, 12ff.)
 - Solomon's moving the ark from City of David into the temple (2 Chr 5:3)

God's People: Separated

- .. Intermarriage with foreign wives had frequently led to idolatry in Israel's past.
- .. Foreign wives meant Jewish children who couldn't even speak their own language (Neh 13:24)
- .. Don't make this mean more than it does: See Rabah, Ruth, Naaman, the message of Jonah.
- .. In postexilic period, strict observance of this was necessary for the survival of Israel's religious faith.

Scripture (cont.)

- .. Parallels to Temple Building
 - Two texts practically identical (*differences*)
 - When the seventh month came, and the people of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. (Ezra 3:1)
 - When the seventh month came, the people of Israel were in their towns. All the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. (Neh 7:73b–8:1a)
 - Prominence of rejoicing in both contexts (Ezra 3:10–13; Neh 8:6, 12, 17)

Scripture (cont.)

Understanding Scripture

- Hermeneutics, exegesis, translation, or paraphrase? Frequency of *biyn* (Neh 8:2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12) and *sakal* (Neh 8:13; 9:20)
 - They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. (Neh 8:8)
- Teaching role of Levites
 - They "taught the people" (Neh 8:7, cf. Deut 33:10)
 - They traveled to teach "all Israel" (2 Chr 17:7-9; 35:3; cf. Mal 2:6-9)

Prayer (cont.)

Short prayers

- People's prayer for help on the journey home (Ezra 8:21 - 23)
- Nehemiah's short prayers
 - Neh 4:4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.
 - Neh 5:19 Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.
 - Neh 6:9 For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.
 - Neh 6:14 Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetic Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.
 - Neh 13:14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.
 - Neh 13:22 Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.
 - Neh 13:29 Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.
 - Neh 13:31 and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Scripture (cont.)

Scripture and Celebrations

- After reading Torah, the Levites encourage the people to rejoice and not mourn (Neh 8:9 - 12)
- This was a holy day (Neh 7:9, 10, 11) for rejoicing (8:10, 12)
- They should rejoice because they "understood" the words read to them (Neh 8:12).

Grace

Persian policies are a sign of God's grace

- Ezra 7:6 this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.
- Ezra 7:28 and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.
- Neh 2:8 and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Prayer

Extended prayers

- Ezra's prayer, a model prayer for a leader (Ezra 9): confession and repentance with genuine identification with the people's sins.
- Nehemiah's prayer (Neh 1), confessing the people's sin, asking for forgiveness and for grace to deal with the Persian king.
- People's prayer for Nehemiah (Neh 9), reviewing Israel's history in praise to God (like Pss 78, 105, 106, 135, 136; Acts 7)

Grace (cont.)

- Grace visible in God's "good "or "mighty hand" (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 7:6, 28; Neh 2:8)
- The phrase "according to the hand of the LORD" (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18; Neh 2:8)
 - An adaptation of a phrase indicating royal bounty (e.g., 1 Kgs 10:13; Esth 1:7; 2:18)
 - This a "low-key reminder that God Himself is still King and that the Persian kings' bounty was in reality the bounty coming from the "King of kings" to His people" (Howard, 310).

Dillard and Longman: The "Walls" of Ezra and Nehemiah

- ∴ Story of two "walls"
 - Nehemiah's wall separating God's people from their enemies, the unclean Gentiles.
 - Ezra's "wall," the law of God, as a spiritual boundary between Israel and all other peoples.
- ∴ It's Ezra's "wall" that constitutes a people fit to live within Nehemiah's walls: At the end we have a holy people living in a holy city.

Looking to the NT

- ∴ Nehemiah ends on an open question; perfection hasn't been reached.
 - The book doesn't end after celebrating the life of a reconstituted holy people living in a reconstituted holy city.
 - It ends with problems:
 - Tobiah, a Gentile, renting spacing in the temple (Neh 13:4–9)
 - City officials' failing to provide for the Levites (vv. 14–22)
 - Recurrence of intermarriage with Gentiles (vv. 26–27)
 - Are the people going to survive only to repeat all the sins of the past; is the postexilic community just going to restart the cycle of sins?

Looking to the NT (cont.)

- ∴ Ezra–Nehemiah
 - On the one hand they attest to expansion of holiness beyond the confines of the temple, to include the entire city.
 - A strong line of demarcation between holy and unclean remains.
- ∴ Jesus tears down the "wall of separation"
 - He tears down the veil separating the Holiest Place from the rest of creation.
 - He demolishes the division that separated Jew from Gentile (Eph 2:14–18)