EZRA

*The temple is rebuilt*

SETTING

The first period after returning from the exile (539 - 458 BC)

KEY VERSE

*"So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius."*

6:14-15

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The book of Ezra begins as 2 Chronicles ends - with Cyrus of Persia giving the Jews permission to return to their land and rebuild the temple. We can structure the book in this way:

* Chs. 1-2: Return from exile. The names of those who returned are listed here (539 BC).
* Ch. 3: The foundation of the temple is laid (536 BC).
* Ch. 4: The work was delayed due to opposition from the surrounding peoples for 16 years, including a halt for 10 years (536-520 BC).
* Ch. 5: The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to continue building (520 BC).
* Ch. 6: The Temple is completed (516 BC).
* Chs. 7-8: Ezra himself comes from Babylon with gold, silver, and equipment for the temple (458 BC).
* Chs. 9-10: Ezra dissolves mixed marriages. God is not fundamentally opposed to this since His purpose is for all nations to become part of His people. But in this phase, it was critical that the Jews retain their identity so that the Messiah could bring salvation to all. These marriages also do not lead to the incorporation of Gentiles into God's people but instead to sin (9:1-2, Neh 13:23-24).

In the book of Ezra, we find Jesus in the big story: the temple and the sacrifices point towards the Messiah, who was to fulfill all of this.