



The book of Ezra

DID YOU KNOW?

1. According to the current canonical order, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are the last historical books. Ezra and Nehemiah record the events that took place in Israel after the return from captivity and in the following years. These two books cover a period of about a century, beginning in 538 B.C.
2. The book of Ezra opens with the return of the exiles to a ruined city – a shattered city, all covered with brush, burned and plundered for nearly 50 years by a powerful Babylonian army. These Jews returning from captivity were a minority who, after decades of exile, had not been forgotten. They valued their spiritual heritage more than their possessions in Babylon.
3. It was during the reign of Emperor Cyrus of the Persian Empire, who had defeated the mighty Babylon, that the Jews were given the chance to return to their country. It was a situation too good to be true. Psalm 126 expresses the feelings of these exiles returning from captivity: “we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.”
4. The Urim and Thummim were objects that the Old Testament priests used to determine the will of God (Ezra 2:63). But before these objects began to be used, families whose records were lost were disqualified from serving the priesthood. (Ezra 2:62)
5. The peculiarity of the enumeration in the book of Ezra lies in the fact that it takes into account only the lineage of the priests, i.e. those of the tribe of Levi.
6. When the Jews returned from exile, their first instinct was to rebuild the Temple, the house of God. For it was the symbol of a new beginning with God. The tolerant Persians had even brought silver and gold objects for the rebuilding of the Temple. They had carefully stored them in a Babylonian temple, as if they were only waiting for God’s time. When the returning exiles laid the foundation of the new Temple, shouts of joy and weeping could be heard in the distance. (Ezra 3 :13)
7. Despite the fact that the Israelites had opponents who did not want them to rebuild the Temple, God touched the hearts of kings Cyrus and Darius who gave orders to undertake the work until it was completed. Furthermore, the elders of Judah did not want the support of the other inhabitants of the region in rebuilding the Temple, despite their offer, for fear of falling back into idolatry (Ezra 4:1-6).

8. More than half a century passed between the events of chapters 6 and 7; the people who played a role in the first part of the book had died before Ezra's ministry in Jerusalem began. The latter is the dominant figure in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Both writings end with prayers of confession (Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9) and the resulting decisions to renounce the sinful practices in which the people were engaged.
9. In Ezra's prayer of repentance, two aspects stand out: a) as the spiritual leader of the people, he condemned himself with the people before God; b) he prayed according to the scriptures. (Ezra 9 - 10)
2. Ezra focuses on the rebuilding of the Temple, while Nehemiah reports on the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Both books contain genealogical tables whose main purpose is to establish the rights of Aaron's descendants to the priesthood.