

**THE BOOK OF
EZRA: WITH NOTES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649470129

The Book of Ezra: With Notes by J. Davies

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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J. DAVIES

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BY

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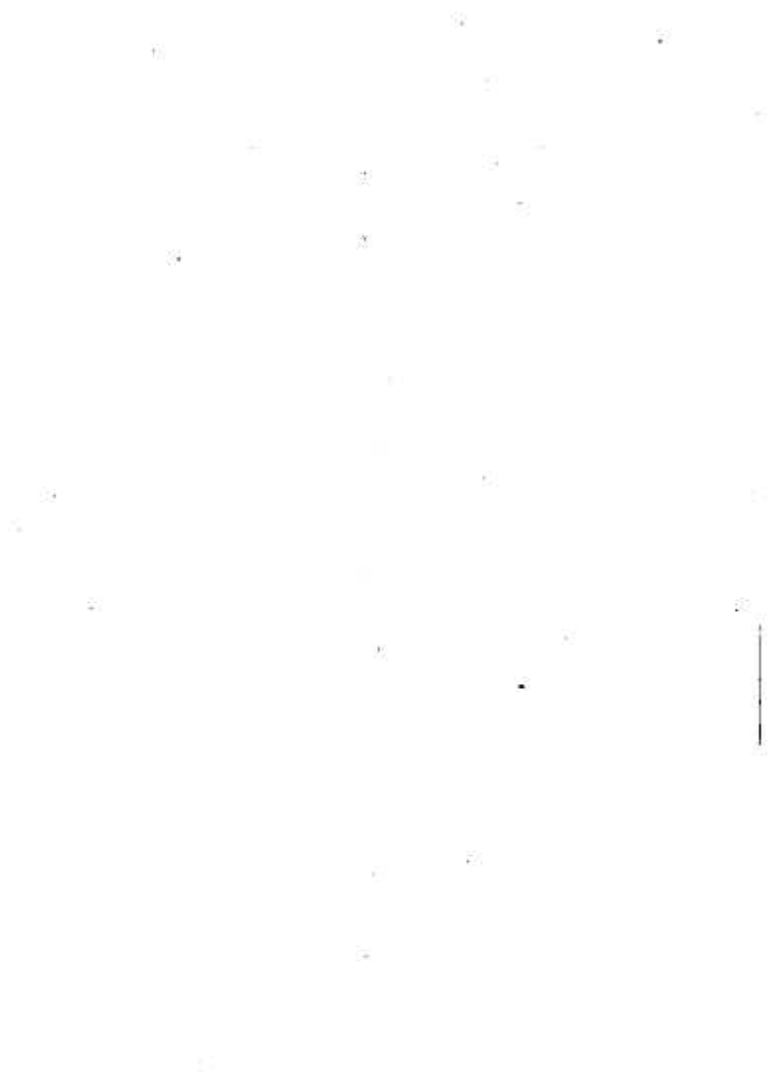
LONDON:

GEORGE PHILIP & SON, 32, FLEET STREET.

LIVERPOOL: CAXTON BUILDINGS, SOUTH JOHN STREET. AND
49 & 51, SOUTH CASTLE STREET.

1873.

101. c. 155.



NOTES ON EZRA.

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Unless otherwise indicated, all dates in these pages must be regarded as B.C.
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The title of this Book is the name of its author, *Ezra*, (an epitome of whose life will be found at the end of these "Notes").

The date of the composition of the work cannot be exactly assigned, but is generally allowed to have been posterior to the retirement of *Ezra* from public duty, in 445.

The period comprised within *Ezra* extends from 536 to 456, about 80 years.

The Book may be divided into two parts:—

1. Chaps. i.-vi., inclusive,—narrating the return, in consequence of an edict of Cyrus, of the First Caravan of Jews; and the rebuilding of the Temple. This portion of the work relates to events which occurred previously to *Ezra's* going up to Jerusalem, and is supposed to have been derived from authentic annals which he found there on his arrival.

It has been supposed by many that these first six chapters were not written by *Ezra*, because the employment of the 1st. person plural, "we," in c. v. 4, implies that the narrator was present at the incident there recorded. But *the word relates to Tatnai and his companions, not to the Jews!* The occurrence of "we" in this instance and others in ca. i.-vi. is owing to *Ezra's* having in these cases copied *verbatim* from the documents which he employed in his compilation.

2. Chaps. vii.-x., inclusive,—narrating the personal history of *Ezra's* conveyance to Jerusalem of the Second Caravan of Jews, in consequence of a decree from

Artaxerxes,—and of his reforms and regulations, after his arrival.

From c. vii. 27, to c. ix. 15, the writer speaks in the 1st. person singular, as having been an eye-witness of, and actor in, the incidents which he relates.

The book is arranged chronologically, but its parts are not intimately connected, it being a collection of detached records of remarkable events connected with the return from the Captivity, and not a complete history of the author's times.

The language of *Ezra* is Hebrew, with the exception of c. iv. 8 to vi. 18, inclusive; and vii. 22-26, which portions are in that elder form of Aramaic which is termed *Chaldee*.

SKETCH OF EVENTS LEADING TO, AND CONNECTED WITH, THE CAPTIVITIES.—Jehovah had declared again and again, from the days of Moses downwards, that, should His chosen people disobey him, and turn to serve other gods, He would bring desolation upon their land, and cause them to be carried away captive.

This punishment came upon Israel before Judah, owing to the fact that, while in the latter several pious kings, for whose sake God restrained His avenging hand, intervened between the idolatrous monarchs, the thrones of the former was occupied by an unbroken succession of wicked rulers.

The Assyrian Captivity of Israel commenced in 739, when Tiglath-Pileser carried off the tribes E. of Jordan, and a large proportion of the population in the N. of Palestine W. of Jordan, planting them in Upper Mesopotamia.

In 721, Samaria was taken by Sennacherib, and the rest of the population of the kingdom of Israel were carried away, being planted partly in Upper Mesopotamia, and partly in "the cities of the Medes."

In 674, Esarhaddon sent colonists from Babylon, &c., into Israel. (Of these settlers we shall have more to say hereafter).

(Of the exiles from the kingdom of Israel, a comparatively small number returned with their brethren of Judah. This is to be accounted for by the facts that, to the banished people of Israel, Jerusalem had never been "the centre of proud aspirations," and that they, having been so much longer in exile than the people of Judah, "had become

thoroughly naturalized in their Eastern settlements." The majority, who did not return, having become engaged in trade and banking, were, in consequence of their increased numbers and the exigencies of business, gradually spread in all directions, W. and E., so that, in St. Paul's time, Jews, their descendants, abounded in Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. Thus, instead of the Ten Tribes being lost, as is so frequently stated, the Hebrews scattered over the world belong not solely to Judah and Benjamin, but are the representatives of *all* the tribes).

Jehovah's judgments upon Judah, long delayed, were at last inflicted, being hastened more particularly by the atrocities of the reign of Manasseh, who, in prosecution of that feud between the Crown and the Priesthood which had originated under Joash, made a strong systematic effort to utterly root out the true religion, and, in developing this design, slew large numbers of the priests.

At the same time, various natural causes were, under Jehovah's overruling hand, instrumental in effecting the ruin of Judah,—*viz.*, the just-mentioned feud between king and hierarchy; the fall of Israel; the great weakening of Judah's military strength, by Pekah; the decline of patriotism and valor, owing to Manasseh's arbitrary rule, to luxury, corruption, and oppression of the poor and lowly, on the part of priests, false prophets, and princes, and to civil discord; and the unwise policy of the monarchs, who alternately defied and bought off their powerful tyrant, instead of quietly submitting until a really fair chance of regaining independence should present itself.

The Babylonian Captivity of Judah resolves itself into 4 epochs:—

The first deportation occurred in 606, when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim tributary, and carried away to Babylon many of the Temple vessels, and a number of Hebrew princes and nobles, amongst whom were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

From this date is to be reckoned the *Seventy Years' Captivity*, which Jeremiah had foretold.

The second deportation occurred in 598, when Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin having, with his mother, princes, servants, and officers, surrendered, was, with the greater portion of the re-

maining treasures of the Temple, and 18,000 nobles, rich men, soldiers, and artizans, carried away to Babylon, amongst the captives being Ezekiel and Mordecai.

The third deportation occurred in 588, when Jerusalem was, after a long siege, taken, and, with the Temple, destroyed, by Nebuzaradan, Nebuchadnezzar's generalissimo.

Zedekiah, the king, was carried to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, whence, after seeing his sons slain before him, and having his eyes put out, he was conveyed captive to Babylon, where he died. Besides him, all but the poorest of the land were also led away into exile, the remaining vessels of the Temple also being transported.

The remnant left in Judah, amongst whom was Jeremiah, were placed by Nebuchadnezzar under the satrapship of Gedaliah, their quarters being at Mizpah. Gedaliah was treacherously slain by Ishmael, of the seed-royal of Judah, who then attempted to carry away the people into the country of the Ammonites. He was, however, defeated in his design, Johanan and other "captains" pursuing him, and recovering the Jewish remnant, who were then, by their leaders, against Jeremiah's Divinely-ordered opinion, induced to flee into Egypt, lest Nebuchadnezzar should hold them responsible for the murder of Gedaliah and the Chaldee soldiers whom Ishmael had slain at the same time with him.

There were then left in Judah a very few stragglers, whom Nebuzaradan finally removed to Babylon in 583, this being the fourth deportation.

No colonists were sent to take possession of Judah. Its southern part, as far as Hebron, was, however, during the exile, taken possession of by the Edomites, who were successfully attacked by the Maccabees, and finally subdued by John Hyrcanus, who incorporated them, as far as inducing their compliance with Jewish rites could do so, with the Hebrew nation.

SKETCH OF EVENTS CONNECTED WITH JUDAH, FROM THE CAPTIVITY TO THE ISSUE OF THE DECREE OF CYRUS.

Under Nebuchadnezzar.—Daniel and his three companions were, by the king's orders, trained at court, during three years, in the Chaldean language and learning, with a

view of being employed in the royal service, their names being changed, respectively, from Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These four refused, (either because of its ceremonial uncleanness, or its having been sacrificed to the Assyrian gods), the daily allowance of food and wine sent to them from the king's table, and consumed only pulse and water, upon which diet, however, they flourished remarkably. When the period of their training was expired, they, with the other youths who had been their fellow-students, were brought before the king, were found to excel all the wise men in the kingdom, and were advanced to high Court posts.

While they held these offices, Daniel unfolded to Nebuchadnezzar his dream of the Great Image Destroyed by a Stone,—in consequence of which, the king worshipped the prophet, made him viceroy of the province of Babylon, and bestowed the highest honors on his three friends.

Determined to make all the different nations composing his vast empire acknowledge his chief god, Bel, Nebuchadnezzar set up a huge image of the deity on the plain of Dura, and ordered, on pain of being consumed in "a burning fiery furnace," that, at sound of musical instruments, all the chief men of his kingdom, assembled by edict, should fall down, and worship the image. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refusing compliance, were thrown, bound, into the furnace, where, instead of being consumed, they walked, loose, and accompanied by One whom the king discerned to be a "Son of God." Being commanded by the king to come forth, they did so, unscathed, whereupon Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that all in his dominions should, on pain of death, revere the God of the Hebrews.

Nebuchadnezzar, elated with pride at the extent of his dominions, and the beauty and strength of "great Babylon," which he had almost rebuilt, again dreamed a dream, which Daniel interpreted to mean that he should be cast down from his throne, be driven forth from amongst men, and dwell amongst the beasts of the field, after which he should come to himself, and know that all his power was but delegated to him by the mighty King of heaven and earth. Accordingly, a year after, he was, while in the very utterance of boastful words, stricken with *lycanthropy*,