



Important Events

Year	Event
539 BC	Cyrus II conquers Babylon and establishes the Achaemenid Empire (Persia).
538 BC	The Judahites are allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple under the governor Zerubbabel.
515 BC	The Temple is completed after the people are reprimanded by the prophets Haggai and Zephaniah.
458 BC	Ezra the priest arrives and leads a reformation and revival, restoring feasts and levitical purity.
445 BC	Jerusalem is refortified under Nehemiah, who was appointed governor by the king Artaxerxes

Language and Style

- Although they are two books in our Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah have historically been viewed as a single, continuous book.
- The source material dates from 538 to 445 BC, but the book itself was probably composed later.
- The author(s) are unnamed, which is typical of this kind of book. Passages within the book are clearly from Ezra, Nehemiah and others.
- Ezra-Nehemiah is considered a historical memoir because of the number of additional sources quoted in the book and the style of writing.

Theme

- Ezra-Nehemiah revolves around the idea of God's restoration of Judah as *something new from something old*. The book contains no prophecy, but functions as a proof of the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Judahites in Achaemenid Courts

The Achaemenid period is the source of many well-known books of the Bible, including the latter parts of Daniel and the book of Esther. Additionally, Chronicles and a number of the prophetic books date from this period.

Achaemenid Government

- It is important to realize that the politics serve only as a backdrop for the story of Ezra-Nehemiah. Nonetheless, this has real influence on how the story unfolds.
- The Achaemenid Empire was overseen by appointed leaders called *satraps*, literally "protectors." These men were autonomous military and civil leaders who were accountable only to the *shah* (king).
- Within a *satrap's* region, there were provinces, each overseen by a *tirshatha* (governor). While a *satrap* was usually a Persian, the *tirshatha* was usually from the same stock as the people they led, which is why Cyrus chose Zerubbabel, a descendant of David.
- Yehud (the Aramaic version of Judah) was a province in the satrapi of Eber-Nari ("beyond the river", Ezra 4:11), which stretched from Babylon to the Mediterranean. The word of the satrap was law, unless it contradicted the word of the shah.



Coins from Yehud

The top coin is an Achaemenid era depiction of YHWH, in violation of the prohibition against making idols. The other also includes what may be Greek iconography.