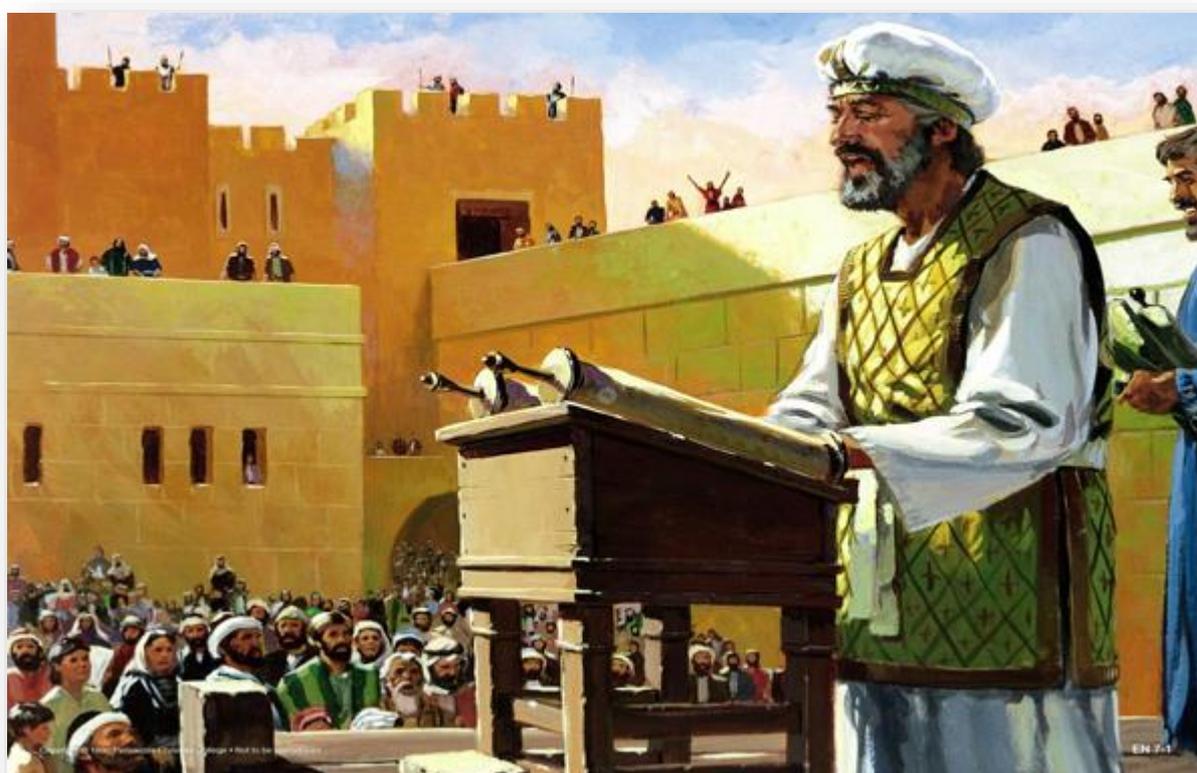


Book of Ezra

Synopsis



Introduction

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| Book No | 15 |
| Name | Ezra |
| Written By | Ezra |
| Testament | Old |
| Category | History |
| Date Written | Approx. 450 BC |
| Place Written | Jerusalem |
| Audience | To the people of Israel |
| Purpose | To show God's faithfulness and the way he kept his promise to restore his people to their land |
| History Covered | 538 - 450 BC |
| Chapters | 10 |
| Verses | 280 |
| Key Verse | <p>And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,</p> <p>And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. (6:21, 22)</p> |
| Key People | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Cyrus ❖ Zerubbabel |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Haggai ❖ Zechariah ❖ Darius I ❖ Artaxerxes I ❖ Ezra |
| Key Places | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Medo Persia ❖ Jerusalem |

Purpose of the Book

Ezra was a priest, a scribe, and a great leader. His name means “help,” and his whole life was dedicated to serving God and God’s people. Tradition says that Ezra wrote most of 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Psalm 119 and that he led the council of 120 men who formed the Old Testament canon. The narrative of the book of Ezra is centered on God and his promise that the Jews would return to their land, as prophesied by Jeremiah. This message formed the core of Ezra’s life. The last half of the book gives a very personal glimpse of Ezra. His knowledge of Scripture and his God-given wisdom were so obvious to the king that he appointed Ezra to lead the second emigration to Jerusalem, to teach the people God’s Word, and to administer national life (7:14-26).

Ezra not only knew God’s Word, he believed and obeyed it. Upon learning of the Israelites’ sins of intermarriage and idolatry, Ezra fell in humility before God and prayed for the nation (9:1-15). Their disobedience touched him deeply (10:1). His response helped lead the people back to God.

Second Chronicles ends with Cyrus, king of Persia, asking for volunteers to return to Jerusalem to build a house for God. Ezra continues this account (1:1-3 is almost identical to 2 Chronicles 36:22-23) as two caravans of God’s people were returning to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, the leader of the first trip, was joined by 42,360 pilgrims who journeyed homeward (chapter 2). After arriving, they began to build the altar and the Temple foundations (chapter 3). But opposition arose from the local inhabitants, and a campaign of accusations and rumors temporarily halted the project (chapter 4).

During this time, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people (chapter 5). Finally, Darius decreed that the work should proceed unhindered (chapter 6).

After a 58-year gap, Ezra led a group of Jews from Persia. Armed with decrees and authority from Artaxerxes I, Ezra's task was to administer the affairs of the land (chapters 7–8). Upon arriving, he learned of intermarriage between God's people and their pagan neighbors. He wept and prayed for the nation (chapter 9). Ezra's example of humble confession led to national revival (chapter 10). Ezra, a man of God and a true hero, was a model for Israel, and he is a fitting model for us.

When the people become discouraged because of the enemies' mockings, God faithfully raises up Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to complete the task. Their encouragement proves successful (5:1, 2).

Finally, when the people stray from the truths of God's word, He faithfully sends a devout priest who artfully instructs the people in the truth, calling them to confession of sin and repentance from their evil ways (chs. 9; 10).

God's faithfulness is contrasted with the people's unfaithfulness. In spite of their return and divine promises, they allow their enemies to discourage them and they temporarily give up (4:24). Then, having completed their task so they can worship in their own temple (6:16–18), the people become faithless to the commandments of God; an entire generation is raised up whose "iniquities have risen higher than *our* heads" (9:6). However, as noted above, God's faithfulness triumphs in each situation.

The messages of Ezra are a constant reminder of how easily God's people can lose heart and their distinctives. God is fulfilling His promises. In spite of this, covenant people easily forget His promises and the moral distinctives that are to characterize "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Pet. 2:9). When this happens God's plans are delayed. Erring saints cannot totally thwart God's sovereign plans, but they can delay or frustrate them. God is greater than we, and He does have ways of transcending our shortcomings. However, He wants us to walk in obedience so that His plans can be fulfilled as originally revealed.

Read Ezra, the book, and remember Ezra, the man—a humble, obedient helper. Commit yourself to serving God as he did, with your whole life.

Overview

- ❖ 15th book of the BIBLE, Old Testament and 10 of the 12 historical books
- ❖ Ezra follows 2 Chronicles as a history of the Jewish people, recording their return to the land after the Captivity

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- ❖ Ezra himself was a “priest, [a] scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD”
 - ❖ He led the second of three groups returning to Jerusalem from Babylon.
 - ❖ The events in Ezra cover slightly more than eighty years.
 - ❖ Chapters 1 to 6 covers 23 years
 - ❖ The return from Babylon to Judea has been called Israel’s “Second Exodus.”
 - ❖ Two major messages emerge from Ezra: God’s *faithfulness* and man’s *unfaithfulness*.
 - ❖ Out of perhaps 2 to 3 million people, only some 49,897 choose to return to Judea.
 - ❖ The distance covered in the returns was about 900 miles.
 - ❖ Fewer than 2,000 men accompanying Ezra to Judea.
 - ❖ Between chapters 6 and 7 is a period of nearly six decades (60 years), during which Esther lives and rules in Persia, and the events in the Book of Esther take place.
 - ❖ Ezra was a godly man characterized by:
 - A strong trust in God.
 - Moral integrity.
 - Grief over sin.
 - ❖ Ezra was a contemporary of Nehemiah who arrived in Jerusalem in 444 B.C.
 - ❖ During the period covered by the Book of Ezra:
 - Gautama Buddha (560-480 B.C.) lived in India.
 - Confucius (551-479 B.C.) lived in China.
 - Socrates (470-399) lived in Greece
 - ❖ Two centuries before the Temple was rebuilt, Isaiah had recorded in Isaiah 44:28 - “Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid.”
 - ❖ King Darius found the decree of Cyrus and carried it out.
 - ❖ Those who return from the exile are from the tribes of:
 - Judah
 - Benjamin
 - Levi
 - ❖ Chronology of the rebuilding of the Temple.
 - Completed 21 years after the foundations were laid.
 - 2 years the work was underway. 536-534 B.C.
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- Opposition stopped the work for 14 years. 534-520 B.C.
- Work was resumed in 520 B.C.
- Temple was completed 5 years later in 515 B.C.
- Actual work on the Temple took 7 years

Hebrew Names of GOD used in Ezra

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Revelation of JESUS CHRIST

Ezra himself foreshadows Christ by the life he lives and the roles he fulfills. Three particulars stand out:

- 1) As one who “had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do *it*” (7:10), Ezra reminds us of Christ’s description of Himself as the One who ardently obeys the Father (John 5:19).
- 2) As “the priest” (7:11), Ezra foreshadows Christ’s role as the “great High Priest” (Heb. 4:14).
- 3) As the great spiritual reformer who calls Israel to repentance (ch. 10), Ezra typifies Christ’s messianic role as the reshaper of Israel’s spiritual perspectives, including a call away from dead traditionalism and moral impurity (Matt. 11:20–24; 23).

Work of THE HOLY SPIRIT

The working of the Holy Spirit in Ezra is clearly seen in the providential moving of God to fulfill His promises. This is indicated by the phrase “the hand of the LORD,” which occurs six times.

It would have been by His Spirit that “the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” (1:1) and “turned the heart of the king of Assyria” (6:22). It would also have been by the Holy Spirit that “Haggai and Zechariah . . . prophesied to the Jews” (5:1).

The work of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen in Ezra’s personal life, both in terms of working in him, “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD” (7:10), and on his behalf, “the king granted him all his request” (7:6).

Mega Themes of Ezra

THE JEWS RETURN

By returning to the land of Israel from Babylon, the Jews showed their faith in God's promise to restore them as a people. They returned not only to their homeland but also to the place where their forefathers had promised to follow God.

God shows his mercy to every generation. He compassionately restores his people. No matter how difficult our present "captivity," we are never far from his love and mercy. He restores us when we return to him.

REDEDICATION

In 536 B.C., Zerubbabel led the people in rebuilding the altar and laying the Temple foundation. They reinstated daily sacrifices and annual festivals, and rededicated themselves to a new spiritual worship of God.

In rededicating the altar, the people were recommitting themselves to God and his service. To grow spiritually, our commitment must be reviewed and renewed often. As we rededicate ourselves to God, our lives become altars to him.

OPPOSITION

Opposition came soon after the altar was built and the Temple foundation laid. Enemies of the Jews used deceit to hinder the building for over six years. Finally, there was a decree to stop the building altogether. This opposition severely tested their wavering faith.

There will always be adversaries who oppose God's work. The life of faith is never easy. But God can overrule all opposition to his service. When we face opposition, we must not falter or withdraw, but keep active and patient.

GOD'S WORD

When the people returned to the land, they were also returning to the influence of God's Word. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped encourage them, while Ezra's preaching of Scripture built them up. God's Word gave them what they needed to do God's work.

We also need the encouragement and direction of God's Word. We must make it the basis for our faith and actions to finish God's work and fulfill our obligations. We must never waver in our commitment to hear and obey his Word.

FAITH AND ACTION

The urging of Israel's leaders motivated the people to complete the Temple. Over the years they had intermarried with idol-worshippers and adopted their pagan practices. Their faith, tested and revived, also led them to remove these sins from their lives.

Faith led them to complete the Temple and to remove sin from their society. As we trust God with our hearts and minds, we must also act by completing our daily responsibilities. It is not enough to say we believe; we must make the changes God requires.

Life Lessons in Ezra

| Truth | Lesson |
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| <p>Growing in Godliness</p> <p>Godly living involves taking a stand for what we believe and for tasks God has called us to accomplish, even in the face of fear and opposition.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Persevere in your faithfulness to God and His call. Though you feel fearful of circumstances, trust God's faithfulness and strength (2 Tim.1:7). ❖ Be prepared for opposition from the enemy when you are accomplishing the Lord's work. ❖ Set yourself to pray, and fix your eyes on the Lord. Be vigilant, and watch so that the enemy cannot block God's work through discouragement and false accusation. |
| <p>Cultivating Dynamic Devotion</p> <p>It is important to remember that when the Lord accomplishes His word, everyone involved should come together to give praise and thanks to God.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Gather other believers and celebrate with joy all that God has accomplished in, for, and through you. ❖ Worship the Lord for the great mercy and favor He has shown you in bringing about His plans and purposes. |

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| <p>Pursuing Holiness</p> <p>Sin occurs when we do things that God has said not to do, and it separates us from Him. The picture of restoration in Ezra sends a message of hope and redemption to all, for all of us sin and fall short of His glory (Rom. 3:23).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take comfort knowing that in spite of Israel’s disobedience, defiance, and unfaithfulness, God compassionately forgave, saved, and restored them. He took those held captive and brought them back into their inheritance. He is still our Redeemer! ❖ Ask the Lord to give you His perspective on sin—yours and your city’s and nation’s. ❖ Earnestly desire to gain God’s perspective on sin and to grow in understanding both His justice and His mercy. ❖ Let us mourn over our sin as Ezra and God’s people did. To mourn over sin is to experience a deep sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). ❖ Make restitution for sin whenever possible. ❖ Take steps to right the wrong that sin has caused. ❖ Be advised that the world seeks to discourage and frustrate the purposes of GOD’s people ❖ Seek counsel from GOD and shun the advice of the ungodly |
| <p>The Walk of Faith</p> <p>God is able to accomplish His plans and purposes on behalf of His people either through or in spite of ungodly or even hostile government authorities.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Have faith even when things seem impossible. ❖ God was able to use an ungodly king (about whom Isaiah prophesied by name hundreds of years before his |

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| <p>Our faith walk often requires that we trust and rely on God to make a way where there is no way.</p> | <p>birth) to accomplish His purposes for His people (Is. 44:28).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Believe that you will be able to “build,” or accomplish, what God has asked and that He will cause you to prosper in the work. He can turn the hearts of kings toward you (Prov. 21:1). ❖ Be encouraged, and praise the Lord for His sovereign ability to establish His Word even through the help and actions of nonbelieving leaders and governments. ❖ Submit to all authority knowing that it comes from GOD. ❖ Trust GOD to work through any authority to which you must respond |
| <p>Lessons for leaders</p> <p>The Biblical model for leaders is that of the servant leader. The servant leader does not boss, dominate or dictate to GOD’s people. He goes before them. To lead as a servant is to do it first avoiding the way of the Pharisees who instructed people to do things they themselves would not do. The servant leader asks GOD’s people to do what he himself has established in his own life. This should first be evident in the way he deals with sin and be manifest in his spirit of repentance</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Leaders ask the LORD to send others to help you in your assigned place of ministry. Do not try to accomplish the job alone ❖ Leaders employ corporate fasting when you undertake a major project or enter a significant season in your church life. ❖ Be assured that GOD regards the self humbling that accompanies prayer and fasting ❖ Leaders pursue excellence in your stewardship of material things. ❖ Keep all financial dealings in the light ❖ Leaders choose to intercede for GOD’s people rather than become upset with them. Identify with their sin and confess it as your own. |

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| | ❖ Leaders learn to lead in the confession of sin as a model for your people. |
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Praise Points in Ezra

- ❖ Stirring hearts to do his work (1:1)
- ❖ Protecting his people during difficult journeys (2:1-58)
- ❖ Preserving a remnant of faithful followers during hard times (2:64)
- ❖ Providing skilled workers, artists, and musicians, who can help us turn our heart to god by their work (3:7-11)
- ❖ Giving us faithful leaders who refuse to compromise the purity of worship (4:3)
- ❖ Working through powerful rulers and officials to accomplish his will (6:1-11; 7:28)
- ❖ Granting us opportunities for celebration (6:16)
- ❖ Showing favor to us despite our sin (9:8).

Worship Insights in Ezra

In Christianity, the uniting of a man and woman in marriage is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. The marriage bond should be taken seriously, and most Christians believe it should not be dissolved except in cases of desertion or infidelity by one of the partners. Christians, then, must find Ezra's command to divorce as one of the Bible's saddest incidents.

Perhaps it is hard for us to appreciate the choice Ezra placed before the people of Israel. Culture today caters to the individual, and the question of whom and how to worship is usually considered a personal matter, as is the question of whom to marry. But this was not so in ancient Israel; worship was just as much a public matter as it was a private one, and the covenant God established with Israel strictly forbade them to intermarry with their heathen neighbors. To marry a pagan, then, called into question a person's commitment to God. And since Judah's exile to Babylon, the traditions of Israelite worship had been hanging by a thread, so every effort needed to be made to restore organized worship in Judah.

The decision to divorce their non-Jewish wives was an agonizing one for the men of Jerusalem. The Bible records the names of a few leaders who opposed Ezra, but most of the men agreed to do what he asked. They may have loved their wives, but they loved their God more and were willing to obey him. The obedience of these men helped maintain the purity of Israel's worship.

- ❖ The Lord himself stirs people's hearts to bring about revival and great movements of faith (1:1, 5).
- ❖ God can restore what evil has taken away (1:7).
- ❖ God's people should give generously of their resources (2:68).
- ❖ We can turn to the Lord when we fear those around us (3:3).
- ❖ Praising God for his goodness is a fitting celebration for the things he helps us accomplish (3:11-12).
- ❖ The Lord watches over us as we face opposition for his sake (5:5).
- ❖ God can use leaders to do his will, even though they may not realize it (6:6-10).
- ❖ Those who are well versed in Scripture should use their gifts to help others in worship (7:6-10).
- ❖ God requires purity in worship; we cannot willingly continue in sin and please God (9:1-4).
- ❖ True repentance calls us to the difficult task of righting past wrongs, but God rewards obedience (10:12-14).

An Outline of Ezra

I. Restoration of the Temple (Ezra 1:1-6:22)

A. God Begins to Restore Through Cyrus (Ezr_1:1-11)

1. The Proclamation of Cyrus (Ezr_1:1-4)
2. Response to the Proclamation (Ezra 1:5-5:11)

B. The People Who Returned to Jerusalem (Ezr_2:1-70)

1. Introduction to the List (Ezra 2:1-1:2)
2. The List of People (Ezr_2:3-63)
3. Conclusion to the List (Ezr_2:64-70)

C. Establishing the Foundations (Ezr_3:1-13)

1. Laying the Spiritual Foundation (Ezr_3:1-7)
2. Laying the Material Foundation (Ezr_3:8-13)

D. Opposition to Restoration (Ezr_4:1-24)

1. The Opposition Begins (Ezr_4:1-5)
2. Other Examples of Opposition (Ezr_4:6-23)
3. The Opposition Succeeds (Ezr_4:24)

E. Resumption of Restoration (Ezra 5:1-6:12)

1. Help from God's Prophets (Ezr_5:1-2)
2. Official Inquiry and Response (Ezra 5:3-6:12)
 - a. Questions from Officials (Ezr_5:3-5)
 - b. Letter from Tattenai to Darius (Ezr_5:6-17)
 - c. Response of Darius (Ezr_6:1-12)

F. Completion and Celebration (Ezr_6:13-22)

1. Completion of the Temple (Ezr_6:13-15)
2. The People Celebrate the Dedication (Ezr_6:16-18)
3. The People Celebrate the Passover (Ezr_6:19-22)

II. Restoration of Covenant Life, Phase One: The Work of Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10:44)**A. The King Commissions Ezra (Ezr_7:1-28)**

1. Introduction to Ezra (Ezr_7:1-10)
2. Ezra's Commission (Ezr_7:11-26)
3. Ezra's Response to the Commission (Ezr_7:27-28)

B. Ezra Returns to Jerusalem (Ezr_8:1-36)

1. Those Who Accompany Ezra (Ezr_8:1-14)
2. Ezra Recruits Levites and Temple Servants (Ezr_8:15-20)
3. Seeking God's Protection (Ezr_8:21-23)
4. Holy Gifts for the Temple (Ezr_8:24-30)
5. Arrival in Jerusalem (Ezr_8:31-36)

C. Ezra Confronts Jewish Intermarriage (Ezra 9:1-10:44)

1. Ezra's Response to an Appalling Report (Ezr_9:1-4)
2. Ezra's Prayer of Confession (Ezr_9:5-15)
3. A Proposal to Solve the Problem (Ezr_10:1-8)
4. National Consensus and Action (Ezr_10:9-17)
5. Those Who Put Away Pagan Wives (Ezr_10:18-44)