



EZRA

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Welcome to the book of Ezra!

As you approach your study of Ezra, meditate on the contents of the book represented in the overview chart below. What are the major movements of Ezra and how do they relate to the themes of reconstruction and reformation? Draw correlations in reconstruction of the temple building with that of the true building of God (1 Peter 2:4-10) and habitation of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 6:16). These Scriptures reveal the importance of the principles we will be gleaning in Ezra. The phrase "return, reform the Temple" reflects the necessity of evaluation, return to the principles of God, and reformation in our hearts.

| EZRA | Return/Reform |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| RECONSTRUCTION under Zerubbabel | REFORMATION under Ezra |
| 1:3,5; 2:1,2 | 7:25-28 |
| Return...2:1,2,68 | Return...7:6; 8:31,32 |
| Rebuild...6:15 | Reform...10:19 |
| 1-6 | 7-10 |

"For Ezra had set his heart." 7:10

Take this opportunity to examine each of the references within the overview chart. What have you learned thus far in Ezra?

A key verse of Ezra is found in 7:10. Ezra's character (as well as his contemporary, Nehemiah) is a shining example of a man who was devoted to God. As you read, look for principles of return to God, rebuilding that which has been torn down, and a reforming that which is not right.

1 Chronicles opens with historical statements through the returning genealogies and closes with the specifics of David's reign. 2 Chronicles reviews Solomon's splendor (1 Kings) and closes with the split in the kingdom and scattering of God's chosen people into captivity. Ezra begins with a re-building of Solomon's temple...and return to God-pleasing worship!

Open your heart to evaluation of your own temple-worship as you read.

Are you worshipping Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24)? In what ways do you need reconstruction? Reformation?

NAME, Date, and Author

The book of Ezra, like Ruth, Job, and Esther; is named after its principal character. Although the author is not mentioned, the use of the first and third persons indicate that Ezra himself wrote the book, probably using various official documents. The latest event recorded in the book is the reformation under Ezra, the year after his arrival at Jerusalem, 456 B.C. The book was probably written a few years after that event.

OTHER BACKGROUND

If this book were named for its subject rather than after its author, it would probably be called "The Book of the Return" or "The Book of the Remnant." The book pictures the re-establishment of the Jews in the Promised Land following the Babylonian captivity. There are two distinct returns mentioned in Ezra. The first was under Zerubbabel (chapters 1-6). Nearly 80 years later, the second return takes place under Ezra (chapters 7-10). The key phrase of the book is the much used "go up" or "went up". Another key word is "Jerusalem." The name of this city is used 47 times in the book. The story of Ezra is the account of the "going up" of the exiled Jews to "Jerusalem" to rebuild the temple. Between chapters 6 and 7 is an approximate 60-year gap during which the events of the book of Esther transpire. Esther provides a commentary on Jewish life in Persia for those who do not return to Jerusalem. From the second chapter of Ezra, we may determine that the total number of exiles who took Cyrus up on his offer to return home was about 50,000 people, a small percentage of the total Jewish population...only a "remnant".

It is also of interest to note that as the Jews were returning to their homeland under Zerubbabel and Ezra, other great individuals were having a profound impact around the world: Buddha in India, Confucius in China, and Socrates in Greece.

Why study the book of Ezra?

1. The principle of Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" is clearly seen in this book. As the captivity drew to a close, Cyrus made a startling proclamation: "You are all free to go home!" The Jews could now return to Jerusalem all expenses paid. But only a small minority accepted the offer. Why? Because after 60 years, most of the people had built houses, raised families, and established careers in Babylon. They had no desire to face the difficult and hazardous 900-mile trek back home to a destroyed city. Only those whose hearts were committed to God volunteered for the trip. In our affluent society, it is easy to come under the influence of affluence. Whatever demands your time, talents, or treasure will certainly draw your affections. Examine your investments. Is a house, car, boat, or person stealing your heart from following God? What changes do you need to make in order to identify more fully with the remnant of 50,000 Jews who returned home and the "remnant of Christians" who have set their affections on the things above, not on things of the earth (Colossians 3:2)?

2. Ezra also furnishes a Christ-follower with how to deal with a problem immediately! The mixed marriage problem of chapters 9-10, when handled prayerfully by Ezra, produced such a sense of urgency among the people that they assembled in a driving rain to deal with it - an excellent example of problem solving. Also, while their sin was front-page headlines and cause for shame, the listing of their names also documents for all time a group of men who dealt courageously and uncompromisingly with sin in their lives.



Ezra Chapter Chart

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Return to the Lord!

Read 1:1-2:7

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What was the decree of Cyrus? Who was Cyrus? What was his motivation?
2. What was the expected motivation for the returning Jews to return home?
3. Which groups actually returned? Who stirred them up?
4. Why are the returning family groups named?
5. Did they return to specific areas?
6. What happened to those who could not trace their ancestry? Why?

What about today?

1. What do the actions of Cyrus the king reveal about God's sovereignty?
2. Evaluate your own position before God. Do any of these principles of return apply to you?
3. Notice the phrase "He is the God who is in Jerusalem" repeated several times in chapter 1.
 1. God was making it clear that the return was to Him - over and above the Holy Land of the Hebrews!

Return to God is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. Let us be careful to "walk worthy" of our call. We must "pay close attention" not to drift from God's desires for our lives!

My thoughts about my personal need for return:

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 3 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What do we see that reveals the status of the people's unity?
2. What was the first thing to be accomplished and why did they do it?
3. What does the "but" in verse 6 reveal?
4. Why was there a need for overseers?

What about today?

1. How does the unity of the believers with whom you fellowship compare with lessons learned in Ezra?
2. As you survey the condition of your own life, what would be your response to rebuilding: weeping or joy? Why?
3. As you review the condition of the church around you, what is your response: weeping or joy? Why?

For a New Testament correlation of building on a foundation, read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17. How are you involved building the Temple of God?

My thoughts about building the Temple of God and myself as a builder:

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 4 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What compromise was offered? Why was it so strongly rejected?
2. How did the enemies of Judah and Benjamin try to interfere with the work?
What was the result? Why was it done?
3. What reasons were given for the Jews to stop building? Why did they stop?
Should they have stopped?

What about today?

1. What are some compromises that we can make in building our Temple that would not be pleasing to Christ? Are you involved in any? Do you know other believers who are? What should be our response?
2. What types of interference have you encountered?
3. What are some common reasons given today for delaying or stopping the work?

The world, our flesh, and the devil will always oppose building for God. We must be careful to not fall victim or falter in our efforts to rebuild! Is there any opposition you need to confront or push through today? Read Luke 9:57-62 for Jesus' expectations as we face opposition.

My thoughts about compromise in building:

Construction Resumed!

Read Chapter 5-6

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Who played a primary role in this renewal? Take the time to read the messages of these men. They are located in the last three books of the Old Testament.
2. Had there been another decree at the time of renewed building?
3. Why was the letter sent? What was the response?
4. What testimony is given regarding God's greatness?
5. What events followed the completion of the temple and why?
6. What was the reason for their rejoicing?

What about today?

What do the messages of Haggai and Zechariah reveal about the spiritual state of the Jews at this time? What are some comparisons or contrasts with today?

The Jews began rebuilding because of obedience to God that superseded obedience to kings or governors. So, too, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28,29). Do you have this same commitment to kingdom obedience?

My thoughts about obeying God when it is unpopular or difficult:

Return under Ezra!

Read Chapter 7-8

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What made Ezra effective?
2. What did Artaxerxes specifically allow Ezra to do?
3. What was Artaxerxes view of Ezra? His view of God?
4. What does 8:21-23 reveal about Ezra?
5. What did Ezra see as a primary need for the people?

What about today?

1. As you observe Ezra, what similarities do you see in your own character?
What differences to you perceive?
2. Ezra took time to humble himself before God and make specific requests of God.
We can learn much from his example!

Ezra is a good example of godly character. How do you "measure up" in devotion and insight?

My thoughts about what will make me effective spiritually:

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 9 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What was the condition of the returned exile's spiritual lives?
What was Ezra's response? His request?
2. What had the people forsaken?
3. What do we learn about Ezra's view of God and His holiness?
4. How did the Temple serve as a "peg" for the nation?
What is this image meant to convey?

What about today?

1. The repentance and confession of Ezra preceded the revival of the people. 1 John 1:9 is reflected here. Do you see a need for confession, repentance, or revival? In what way? What must you do?
2. Reread 9:15. Our guilt serves to reveal our sin and bring us to God. If we are to serve as "pegs," we must have a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5)! What is your condition? What is your confession?

My thoughts on being a peg in my sphere of influence:

| Chapter | Title | Key Verse |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| 10 | | |

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. How did the people respond to Ezra's actions?
2. What sin did they confess? What action did they take?
3. How serious was the action? Doesn't this seem somewhat harsh or unfair?
4. Note how the book closes.
(Read Nehemiah 10:30: 12 years later and Nehemiah 13:23; 30 years later).

What about today?

1. How would you feel if you were in the Jew's position? How do you think God viewed the situation?
2. This same principle is reflected in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. How does God feel about agreements and partnerships with the world?

God desires purity in His people. Along with confession and repentance comes a putting aside of the sin that so easily entangles us.

CONCLUSION

The book of Ezra deals with rebuilding the Temple. Take a parting moment to review the highlights of your study. Have you adequately confronted your own building of the Temple? Have you evaluated the quality of your lifestyle by the standards of revival and renewal in Ezra? What about the standards of the church in which you fellowship? Is the Word held high? Is repentance evident? Is "putting away" apparent? Read Romans 12:1-2 in light of God's desire for our purity.

My thoughts about spiritually healthy responses to sin:

KINGS OF THE EXILE & RETURN

605-562 BC...Nebuchadnezzar
Jeremiah 34:1; Daniel 1-4

539 BC...Belshazzar
Daniel 5:7,8

539 BC...Cyrus (Zerubbabel)
Daniel 10; Isaiah 44:28-45:1-3

522 BC...Darius the Mede
Daniel 5:31

486...Xerxes (Ahasuerus)
Esther

465 BC...Artaxerxes 1
Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

424 BC...Darius 2
404 BC...Artaxerxes 2