



Ezra: God of Restoration

Memory Verse: Ezra 3:11 "With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

Background

Ezra is the 15th book of the Bible and the 10th book of history in the Old Testament. Although not directly stated, Jewish tradition attributes Ezra the priest as the author. This authorship is supported by portions of the book with first-person references as told from Ezra's point of view. The name of the book means "help" or possibly, "Jehovah helps." Ezra was likely written between 457 and 444 BC.

The events in the book of Ezra cover the time period from 538 BC to 457 BC and describes two returns of Jews from Babylonia to the Promised Land. In 539 BC, Cyrus the Persian overthrew the Babylonians. In 538 BC, he issues a decree that the Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of God fulfilling the prophecy given over 200 years earlier in Isaiah 44:28-45:6. The first six chapters of Ezra covers a time period of 22 years and records the first return led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. The last four chapters covers a time period of one year (458-457 BC) when the second wave of Jews returns under the leadership of Ezra in order to rebuild the people's spiritual condition. Of the 2-3 million Jews in exile, only about 50,000 chose to return with Zerubbabel and less than 2,000 with Ezra. Between chapters six and seven of Ezra there is a sixty year gap during which time Esther lives as queen of Persia and the events of the book of Esther take place.

The Short Story

A remnant of Jews return from exile, rebuild the Temple, and experience spiritual revival and reformation.

What's the Big Idea?

The theme of Ezra is all about restoration. It is about restoration of the Temple and restoration of the returned Remnant spiritually, socially, and morally. Restoration was needed for this people who had experienced destruction of their nation and captivity in a foreign land. Ezra shows how the Jews worked to survive and rebuild what had previously been destroyed. The first group of Jews returning to the Promised Land had the task and challenge of working together to rebuild the Temple, which is finally completed in 515 BC. During the almost 60 year gap between Ezra 6 and 7, the people fall into spiritual apathy and confusion. Ezra returns with the second wave of Jewish exiles in order to bring spiritual renewal and revival. He intercedes for the people (Ezra 9) and his prayer and the people's response to God's Word brings about great spiritual revival, commitment, and obedience to the Lord.

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

God is the God of restoration. He desires a close relationship with His people and He provides a way for this to happen. In Ezra, we see God's great faithfulness in keeping His promises yet again. Through the prophets, He declared that He would bring the people back to their land (Jeremiah 29:14). He was still their God and they His people. God protected and provided for His people during their captivity and raised up pagan kings who would encourage and even help the Jews to return home and rebuild. He also provided strong spiritual leaders in Zerubbabel and Ezra to guide the people in renewing their worship, fellowship, and commitment to the Lord. God is still in the business of restoration today. He has provided a way for restoration with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. He desires that all would accept the gift of His Son and His work on the cross, repent, and walk in obedience to Him. For those who know Christ and need restoration in their lives, God can do that too. He is a great and awesome God who loves His children. God is the God of restoration.

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

Ezra 7:8-10, “Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, **for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.**”

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Why is it so important to learn lessons about God from history?
- In the first half of Ezra, God empowered Zerubbabel to build what? What does this mean for us?
- What does it mean to have the gracious hand of the Lord on your life? What does anointing mean?
- What does it mean to be devoted to something? How hard is it to find time to totally focus on God?
- What is more important, to **study** the teachings of God or to **observe** the teachings of God?

Practical Application

- Why is it so hard to center everything about our lives around our worship of God?
- How do you need to apply Zechariah 4:6, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” ?
- What area of your life needs the gracious hand of God upon it? Where do you need His help?
- What is God asking you to learn about Him and how He relates to you? What should you do with that knowledge? Where do you need to apply Ezra’s Process of Restoration in your life?

Hitting the Highpoints

- Ezra 1:1- 4 “...go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord “
- Ezra 3:11-13 “He is good. His faithful love for Israel endures forever!”
- Ezra 6:3-5 “Let the Temple be rebuilt on the site where Jews used to offer their sacrifices...”
- Ezra 6:13-18 “The Temple of God was then dedicated with great joy...”
- Ezra 9:1-3 “..the leaders and officials have led the way in this outrage.”

Bonus Features

Where is Jesus? The restoration of the temple in Jerusalem foreshadows the words of Christ 500 years later in John chapter two: The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body. Traits of Christ are personified in Zerubbabel and Ezra when they show spiritual leadership as rebuilders and restorers of the Jewish people.

Personal Takeaways and Notes