

EZRA – A BOOK OF HOPE AND CERTAINTY IN GOD’S WORD

Information about Ezra:

- He was of priestly descent, of the tribe of Levi, a descendant of Aaron
- He was a scholar in the word of God, the scrolls, specifically the Torah
- He had a heart for worship and teaching
- His name in Hebrew means “ _____ ”

His writings certainly are a fulfilling of prophecy.

Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 name Cyrus specifically,

It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.

*This is what the Lord says to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand,
To subdue nations before him and to undo the weapons belt on the waist of kings;
To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:*

Ezra 1:1 records the end of 70 years of exile as prophesied in Daniel and Jeremiah.

Ezra loved recording details and genealogy. He is believed to have written 1st and 2nd Chronicles as well.

Parallel 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 with Ezra 1:1-3

There are some scholars who believe he also wrote Psalm _____.

I. God is always faithful to His Word! Chapter 1

1:1, “in order to fulfill the word of the Lord...”

God is sovereign, and He uses leaders - lost and saved - for His purposes in His own ways!

Verses 5-6 show us it is only a small group who plan to go back to the promised land. Doing the math in chapter 2, we see that it is just under 50,000 Jews that returned. There were several million Jews living in exile at that time. (Even when Ezra returned, it was only a few thousand.)

- The group described in verse 5 would have been the meekest and probably poorer of all the Jews. Not all Jews at this time would the spirit of God have “stirred” to go up.
- They had multiplied and even been blessed to be fruitful.

Verse 4 shows that the people of Israel in captivity had been blessed with making good homes and good livings in Babylon.

How did they get the resources to do so? Look at verses 7 and 8.

A tremendous amount of wealth went with those who went up to Jerusalem!

Two schools of thought about those who did not go up:

- 1) Many, if not most, had settled down, having been younger generations, and made it good there.
 - a. Perhaps they were simply happy to be living in “exile”, and out of the will of God. Things were definitely not in their favor, as we see in the story of _____!
 - b. There, however, was no spirit of enmity between those who went and those who stayed, as generosity reigned.
- 2) Perhaps those who stayed were strictly in the will of God and were left behind in His will to be “missionaries” in that land. They were sending missionaries out with resources and blessings. Not everyone is called to be on the mission field, but most people do not go and can support missionaries by prayer and gifts.

(from Bible.org): We should realize the courage and faith of those who chose to return. We know that some of those who made this trek were elderly (see 3:12). The trip was approximately 800 miles, taking several months (see 7:8-9). There were grave dangers involved in such a journey, especially for a group carrying many valuable objects with them.

As we live on this side of the resurrection of Jesus and His payment of our sin, we can:

- Be freed from the slavery of sin, Romans 6:17-18,
 - o *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and after being freed from sin, you became slaves to righteousness.*
- Be unified with God, Galatians 2:20:
 - o *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,"*
- Use our resources to worship and serve the Lord freely, 1 Peter 4:10,
 - o *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

We are never too _____, too weak, or too _____ to be in God's will for sending out His love and light to a world that needs it so!

II. God is blessed, and blesses us, when we worship Him! Chapters 2 and 3

God Prepares Us for His Work

Two names may stick out in verse 2:

Nehemiah, and Mordecai. Not the same ones we know. These men are of different time periods.

Look at verse 23, "*the men of Anathoth, 128*". Since these are not "*sons*" as listed many other times, Anathoth, and others like it listed as "*men*", are cities (see v. 21, Bethlehem).

- See Jer. 32, emphasis 15, "*For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Houses an fields and vineyards will again be bought in the land.'*".

There were 128 "_____" who returned, see v. 41. These totaled more than even the Levites - the temple musicians, gate keepers, guardians, officials, judges, and craftsmen.

There was a spirit of praise and worship in the return to Jerusalem!

Some were permitted to return who did not have the "pedigree" as a Jew. They were children of those who had intermarried, and they could not locate their genealogical records, therefore, they were considered unclean and excluded from priesthood. See 2:61-62. However, they are included in the lists of those allowed to go to Jerusalem. This is a picture of the Gospel, that *anyone* can be saved and go to their eternal life prepared for them in heaven! 2 Peter 3:9, "*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all the come to repentance.*"

They Put First Things First

Read Ezra 3:1-3a. Like we should today, our purpose is to worship and bring glory to God. John Piper said, "Missions exists because worship doesn't."

This Perpetuated a Life of Worship

Ezra 3:4-6.

1 Corinthians 10:31 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

Our "whatever", church programs, events, etc., are to bring people to worship.

A Result of Unity

Ezra 3:8 says that *"...all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem began the work"*

Verse 9 says *"...the sons and brothers stood united"*

Verse 11 says *"They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord... and all the people shouted with a great shout..."*

When God's people "gather" (Ezra 3:1) and stand together and work together and praise the Lord together:

- Goals can be accomplished (rebuilding the foundation)
- God is glorified, Romans 15:5-6, *"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, *"...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."* Phil. 2:2

An Unusual Response

While praise was going on (Ezra 3:12) there was also:

- Weeping and wailing by *"many of the old men who had seen the first temple"*.

"The past must be a rudder to guide us and not an anchor to hold us back." W. Wiersbe

U _____ – Z _____ – O _____ – W _____ !!

III. God is faithful even through opposition and fear! Chapters 4,5,6

Opportunity and Opposition Usually Go Together

The people of Israel started out right! (Ezra 4:1-3)

If we cooperate with the world (its systems and ideals) it usually leads to compromise of our Biblical values.

- It may sound good and even "help" us
- We must maintain a separated position and not hinder God's work
- Separation must, however, never become isolation. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5 that if we did not go out to, or associate with the people of the world, we'd have to leave the world. They're everywhere.

We cannot let accusations lead to fear, and fear lead to our being more interested in our own self-interest rather than what God has commanded us to do.

- Even when it seems to make more sense to follow the world, (Ezra 4:4-5)
- Even when we have a past of other failures, Jerusalem seen as a *"rebellious city"*, in Ezra 4:12, 15

Thus, the people of Israel stopped the work! (Ezra 4:24)

Our Response to Worldly People is Important

Temple work began again, Ezra 5:1-2

Opposition began as well, Ezra 5:4-5

- We must respond toward lost people with wisdom, peace and graciousness, Colossians 4:5, *"Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity."*
- We must submit to governing authorities, Rom. 13:1, *"Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."*
- God even uses kings and laws to allow us to do His work, Ezra 6:1-12
- Darius' response, Ezra 6:7, 11, 12

Dedicating Ourselves and Remembering His Faithfulness

In their success there was reason to celebrate to give glory to God, Ezra 6:13-22

- Their worship was as God had _____ in His word, Ezra 6:18
 - o It was worship that included the word and music.
- Remembering His faithfulness, their celebration of Passover, 6:19-22. They had not been able to do this in their Holy City for over 70 years!

IV. A Godly Man Takes a Journey of Faith – Chapters 7 and 8

Now fast-forward sixty years...

All the previous information (chapters 1-6) had been written down by Ezra as historical fact, given to him by the Lord, through others perhaps, in accurate detail. At the times of these occurrences, Ezra was living in Babylon, more than likely born during this time. There was a part of the remnant still living in Babylon (exile).

Knowing there was a need in Israel among the Jewish people, the Lord raised up a godly leader. Ezra was found successful, as we read six times in chapters 7 and 8, *"The good hand of the Lord was upon me"*. Despite any and all skills, abilities, charisma, etc. a person has, if God's hand is not upon us, He will not accomplish His will through us. Jesus said in John 15:5, *"...apart from Me you can do nothing."*

But what about when you have no godly heritage? As believers in Jesus, we must rely on the fact that we are new creations, (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the past does not hold us down or keep us from being who God wants us to be. (Colossians 3:9-11)

Why was the Hand of God Upon Ezra?

His Careful Study of the Word – Ezra 7:6, 10a

- He was a "scribe skilled in the law of Moses"
- This led to his strong faith in God to approach the king and ask for the resources to go back to the land of Israel

His Character Lived by the Word

- He was granted his request for resources and people to return to Israel by another king, Artaxerxes; (Ezra 7:21, 25)
- About fifteen hundred men, plus women and children, returned with him, (Ezra 8:1-20)

His Cherished Teaching of the Word

- His heart was set on teaching God's Word to the people (Ezra 7:10b)
- It obviously began in Babylon/Persia, but his goal was to teach it in Israel!

How Will the Hand of God be Upon Us?

We must have a P _____ heart

- Agree with the Psalmist, *"Oh, now I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day."* (119:97)

We must P _____ God's concepts

- Obeying God's word is living it out in our daily lives, James 1:22-25, *"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves."*

We must live in the P _____ of the Holy Spirit

- We have the gift of the Spirit to help us understand and live God's word, 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, *"Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God. We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."*

V. God calls for recognition and repentance of sin, and acts of obedience in our lives – Chapters 9 and 10

The Value of an Instructor

It helps to have an instructor, someone to sit right there and teach us.

One of the values of books like Ezra and Nehemiah is that they let us in to observe how they petitioned and prayed to the Lord. These prayers, like others in God word, are not showing off their spirituality by including the text of their prayers for all to see (See Matt. 6:5-6). They are teaching us how to beseech our Heavenly Father.

The Description of God's Grace

Ezra knew how to pray in times of crisis because he was familiar with the path to the throne of grace. He was on "speaking terms" with God at all times. In this chapter, the major theme of his prayer is _____. It was the condition of the nation which prompted him.

The widespread moral failure of Christians and unbelievers should not result in paralyzing despair, but in sincere supplication to Almighty God. (See 2 Chronicles 7:14) Only He can heal our wounds, restore our standing with Him, and save us from inevitable judgment.

The Purpose of Not Intermarrying

Many Christians, and Jews alike, have misinterpreted today's passage to say that God is against people of different nationalities intermarrying. We know from the Bible that God is not against His children intermarrying of the "peoples", any other "race". How would the book of _____ be explained? God orchestrated a Moabitess woman to marry into the Jewish line and gave us our Savior from it.

Consider as well other Gentile women listed in the genealogy of Messiah Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba (Uriah's wife). If we read closely, it was not the "NATIONALITY", but the "MORALITY" that God was concerned with. Notice, He was against marriage with people who are ungodly, (Ezra 9:11, 14).

Never underestimate the power of prayers of one believer!

Ezra's prayers of confession impacted other people. In fact, they "wept bitterly". This response wasn't something that Ezra worked up; it was something that he prayed down.

Shecaniah became a spokesman for the people, maybe because he was humble and included himself in the sins of the people (Ezra 10:2-4). But he had hope in God even as this sin was prevalent. His hope became a plan, but he also was willing to follow Ezra's lead and be a part of the solution.

Ezra fasted and prayed (Ezra 10:6), as is the best way for a godly leader to go into a critical decision and how it should be carried out. He also let the men he formed together do the work and make decisions best to do this.

Sometimes the best-laid plans must shift or change (Summarize 10:7-14).

_____ foiled Ezra's plans.

The number of offenders was small compared to the actual population (50,000 earlier, 5000 with Ezra, plus growth in 80 years), but sin, no matter the size, must be dealt with strictly. It must become a change of the heart and not just deeds.

Sin affects the lives of others, as many women and children had to return to their foreign lands by themselves.