

## Ezra

<b>Where We Are in the History</b>	With the exception of the Wisdom Literature, the OT fits within the framework of a narrative. (1) <u>The Patriarchs</u> (Gen 12-50). (2) <u>Egyptian Bondage</u> (Exodus 1-18) (3) <u>Out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai</u> (Exodus 19-Numbers 10) (4) <u>Preparing to and Conquering the Promised Land</u> (Numbers 11-Joshua) (5) <u>In the Promised Land</u> (Judges – 1-2 Kings) (6) <u>Babylonian Captivity</u> (Daniel) (7) Post-Exile, Back in the Promised Land (Post-Exilic Biblical Literature)
<b>The Post-Exile is the Final Historical Chapter of the OT</b>	The Post-Exile began 70 years after the Babylonian Captivity when the Persian King, Cyrus the Great, gave the people of God permission to return to the Promised Land. Ezra, the scribe, restored worship. Nehemiah, the layman, rebuilt the walls. Zerubbabel laid the foundations for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> temple. Esther saved the Jews from Haman. The writer 1-2 Chronicles pointed towards a Davidic Messiah. And Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi prophesied. As a result, the Post-Exilic literature in your OT is: 1-2 Chronicles; Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther; Haggai; Zechariah; and Malachi.
<b>Who Was Ezra?</b>	Ezra was the second of 3 key leaders to leave Babylon in order to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah; Zerubbabel were the others). He's a scribe who was responsible for the revival in the land. Ezra collected "the books." He initiated reforms. He restored Israel's worship. When he did, revival broke out in the land.
<b>The Most Controversial Figure in the Bible</b>	However, how Ezra goes about doing that makes him <u>the</u> most controversial biblical figure for our day. He condemns mixed marriages and encourages the Jews to divorce and banish their foreign wives. Then, he renews the celebration of festivals and supports Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls and Zerubbabel's rebuild of the temple. Why? From Ezra's perspective, they were God's holy people and were called to build a holy place, without corruption from "foreign" pagan influence. Idolatry/Foreign Worship/Existence of High Places within the land were the primary reasons Israel was removed from the land. Ezra didn't want it to happen again.
<b>A Book of Hope and Restoration</b>	In a nutshell, the Book of Ezra is about hope and restoration. <u>Hope and restoration depends on the forgiveness of God.</u> Ezra tells us that he is a God who will not turn his back on us when we seek him in repentance and brokenness. <u>It's a book about rebuilding.</u> The images of rebuilding the Temple are repeated in the lives of everyone who returns from the captivity of sin and rebellion against God and finds in Christ a loving welcome home. <u>It's a book about a remnant.</u> Whenever disaster or judgment falls in the Bible, God always saves a remnant for himself (ex: Noah). Those who returned were that remnant. They entered by the "narrow gate" quite literally and God blessed them immensely for their faithfulness.
<b>A Practical Application</b>	How Revival in the land is achieved. We'll take this approach as we examine the contents of Ezra.
<b>Key Verse</b>	"With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love to 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." (Ezra
<b>How the Book Flows</b>	The book of Ezra divides into 2 distinct time periods. Chapters 1-6 chronicles the first wave of return under Zerubbabel and the building of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Temple. Chapters 7-10 chronicle the ministry of Ezra. He, along with Nehemiah, came in the second wave of return, after Zerubbabel had died.

### How Revival in the Land Was Achieved in the First Wave of Return (Ezra 1-6)

#### 1. An Opportunity from God (1:1-4)

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: <sup>2</sup> "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.<sup>3</sup> Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. <sup>4</sup> And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem."

#### 2. Marching On To Zion, Unsure of What We Face (1:5-6)

<sup>5</sup> Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

#### 3. We've Got to Have a High Priest. If Not, It's Merely a Human Effort (2:36-39)

<sup>36</sup> The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua) 973. <sup>37</sup> of Immer 1,052. <sup>38</sup> of Pashhur 1,247. <sup>39</sup> of Harim 1,017.

#### 4. Altar First...Without Blood, There is No Remission of Sins (3:1-2)

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Then Joshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

### **5. Then Temple (3:10-11)**

<sup>10</sup> When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. <sup>11</sup> 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.

### **6. Endurance Through Opposition (4:1-5)**

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, <sup>2</sup> they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." <sup>3</sup> But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us." <sup>4</sup> Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup> They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

### **7. God With Us (5:1-2)**

Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. <sup>2</sup> Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

### **8. Divine Help in Unexpected Places (6:1, 8, 11)**

King Darius then issued an order... Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop... <sup>11</sup> Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. (one of my favorite Bible verses).

## **How Revival in the Land Was Achieved in the Second Wave of Return: Ezra's Ministry (Ezra 7-10)**

### **1. The Word of God Became Central (7:8-10)**

<sup>8</sup> Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king.<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.

### **2. Appalled at Being Married to the World (9:1-4)**

After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. <sup>2</sup> They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness." <sup>3</sup> When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. <sup>4</sup> Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

\*\* Old Covenant: Promised Land can't be defiled so divorce your pagan wives and remarry Jews. New Covenant: Promised Land is here (in you) and not yet (heaven). And can't be married to the world and Jesus to experience it in its fullness. You have to divorce yourself from it.  
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### **3. Renewal and Rededication (10:10-11)**

<sup>10</sup> Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. <sup>11</sup> Now honor the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives."