

Book 15: Ezra

Returning to Jerusalem

- The two books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book.
- Jewish tradition says Ezra was the author.
- These books give us the story of the return of the Jewish people from captivity and the work that awaited them in Jerusalem.

Background:

- Babylon conquered Judah and took many from the nation captive.
- During the time of captivity the Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire.
- The Persians then began allowing the Jews to return to their own land.

Ezra: Overview

- The book begins with the declaration of Cyrus, king of Persia, which allowed the Jews to return to rebuild their temple.
- The first six chapters follow Zerubbabel, and the group that returned with him.
- This section shows the difficulties they encountered as they began to do the work of rebuilding.
- Chapters 7 – 10 focus on Ezra and the group that returned with him some time later.
- Ezra led the nation in a much-needed spiritual renewal.
- He was a great leader who led by example in obedience to God's word.

Ezra: A Few Facts

- The book of Ezra does not record any miracles.
- The book of Ezra is not quoted in the New Testament.
- Ezra is one of two books (with Daniel) to contain a significant amount of Aramaic language in its original form.
- In the book of Ezra there is a 58-year break between chapters 6 & 7, dividing the book into two distinct parts.
- The Talmud states that:
 - Ezra was a disciple of Baruch, the scribe and assistant to the prophet Jeremiah.
 - Ezra wrote the Chronicles as well as Ezra-Nehemiah.

Ezra: Key People

- **Cyrus:** The Persian ruler who allows the Jews to return.
- **Sheshbazzar** or **Zerubbabel:** Governor of Judea who led the first group of Jews back to the land.
 - He was an ancestor of both Mary and Joseph, so appears in both of Christ's genealogies. See Matthew 1 & Luke 3.

- **Haggai & Zechariah:** Prophets, who encouraged the people to complete the temple after the work had stopped for 18 years.
 - We have their sermons and visions in the Old Testament books that go by their names: Haggai & Zechariah.
- **Ezra:** The priest and scribe – the Bible teacher who led a small group back to Jerusalem some 80 years after the first group returned.
 - His commitment to study, practice, and teach God’s Word provided the needed stimulus for revival among the group living in the land.

Ezra: Key Events

- **Ezra 1:** The Decree of Cyrus.
- **Ezra 2:** Zerubbabel returns along with 42,360 Jews.
- **Ezra 3:** Altar built, Temple foundations laid, worship reestablished.
- **Ezra 4:** Opposition stops building of the temple for 18 years.
- **Ezra 5 – 6:** The Temple is completed as the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people.
- **58 year break**
- **Ezra 7 – 10:** Ezra returns to find the people in a state of spiritual compromise. He brings about needed correction and leads the nation in repentance.

1st Key Verse

Ezra 1:3

“Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.”

2nd Key Verse

Ezra 7:10

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Key Passage: Ezra 9:1 – 10:4

Ezra Leads the People in Repentance

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| 9:1-4 | Ezra’s Astonishment |
| 9:5-15 | Ezra’s Prayer of Repentance |
| 10:1-4 | The People Respond |