

Ezra

The Exiles Return



# The Historical Books of the Old Testament

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6 – 8. Joshua, Judges, Ruth

9 – 14. 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

15. Ezra    **The Exiles Return**

16. Nehemiah

17. Esther

# The Historical Books of the Old Testament

- Jewish tradition says that **Ezra the scribe** wrote **1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra** and **Nehemiah**.
- **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** were originally one book.
- The same goes for **1 & 2 Chronicles**.

# Ezra The Exiles Return

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- The Temple was destroyed.
- Jerusalem was conquered.
- Many Jews were taken off into exile.

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- He gave them a land, but then sent them out of it.
- He promised them a king from the line of David, but now they had no king of their own.
- They were supposed to be a blessing, but now they were an object of ridicule.

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- Where were God's promises?
- He gave them a land, but then took it from them.
- He promised them a king from the line of David, but now they had no king of their own.
- They were supposed to be a blessing, but now they were the object of other people's jokes.
- In the book of Ezra the exiles return.

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## Some Background:

- Assyria conquered **Israel (the northern tribes)** and scattered them throughout their empire.
- Babylon conquered Assyria and then conquered **Judah**, bringing many of the Jews to Babylon.
- The Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire.
- They also allowed the Jews to return to their own land.

# Ezra    The Exiles Return

- **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** tell us about the return of the Jewish people from captivity.
- They recall the work that awaited them in Jerusalem.
- Their royal city, its temple and its walls had been destroyed.

# Ezra The Exiles Return

- Some parts of **Ezra** are written in **Aramaic**, a language similar to Hebrew.
- This was the language spoken **in Babylon** and later in Israel.
- It was the language spoken **by Jesus and the disciples**.
- The return of the exiles, therefore, sets the stage for **Jesus**.

# Ezra    The Exiles Return

- The book begins with **the declaration of Cyrus**, king of Persia, which allowed the Jews to return.
- There is a **58-year break** between **Chapters 6 & 7**, dividing the book into two distinct parts.

# Ezra    The Exiles Return

- **Chapters 1 – 6** follow **Zerubbabel**, and the group that returned with him.
- This section shows the difficulties they faced as they began the work of rebuilding.

# Ezra    The Exiles Return

- **Chapters 7 – 10** focus on **Ezra** and the group that returned with him some time later.
- **The Talmud** tells us that Ezra was a disciple of Baruch, the scribe and assistant to the prophet **Jeremiah**.
- He led the nation in a much-needed spiritual renewal.

# Ezra    The Exiles Return

- **Ezra 1:** The Decree of Cyrus.
- **Ezra 2:** Zerubbabel returns along with 42,360 Jews.
- **Ezra 3:** Altar built, Temple foundations laid, the activity of worship is renewed.
- **Ezra 4:** Opposition stops the building of the temple for 18 years.

# Ezra    The Exiles Return

- **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.

## A Key Passage    Ezra 1:1-4

- We can compare this to the final passage in **2 Chronicles**.

## A Key Passage      Ezra 1:1-4

- The prophecies of **Jeremiah 25** and **29** limited the exile to **seventy years**.
- He prophesied at the beginning of the exile.
- The prophecies of **Isaiah 44** and **45** name **Cyrus** as the king who will allow the exiles to return to rebuild Jerusalem.
- He prophesied long before Jerusalem was destroyed.

## A Key Passage      Ezra 1:1-4

- We can compare this to the final passage in **2 Chronicles**.
- God's authority extends to all nations.
- He can and will use pagan kings to fulfill his plans and promises when he desires.

## Key Verse    Ezra 7:10

- Ezra 7:10 (ESV)

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

## Key Verse    Ezra 7:10

- How important to simply teach the Bible and let the Word of God do its part.

## Key Verse Ezra 7:10

- Echoing Spurgeon, Tim Keller says, *The Bible is like a lion ... , so you must not spend too much of your breath describing it, defending it, or arguing about why it should be believed. Instead, put your energy into simply preaching it— into actually exposing people to it in its clearest and most vivid form ...*



## Key Verse Ezra 7:10

- Echoing Spurgeon, Tim Keller declares, *Then the extraordinary power and authority of the Word will become self-evident— even in the most antiauthoritarian settings, among the most skeptical people. I know this to be true.*



## Key Verse    Ezra 7:10

- Build your life around an acute interest in the Bible.
- Let God transform you through it.
- When we see our story as part of his story, and his story as the story of Jesus, life begins to make sense.

# Key Chapter Ezra 9 (and a bit of 10)

9:1-5 Ezra's Astonishment

9:6-15 Ezra's Prayer of Repentance

10:1-5 The People Respond

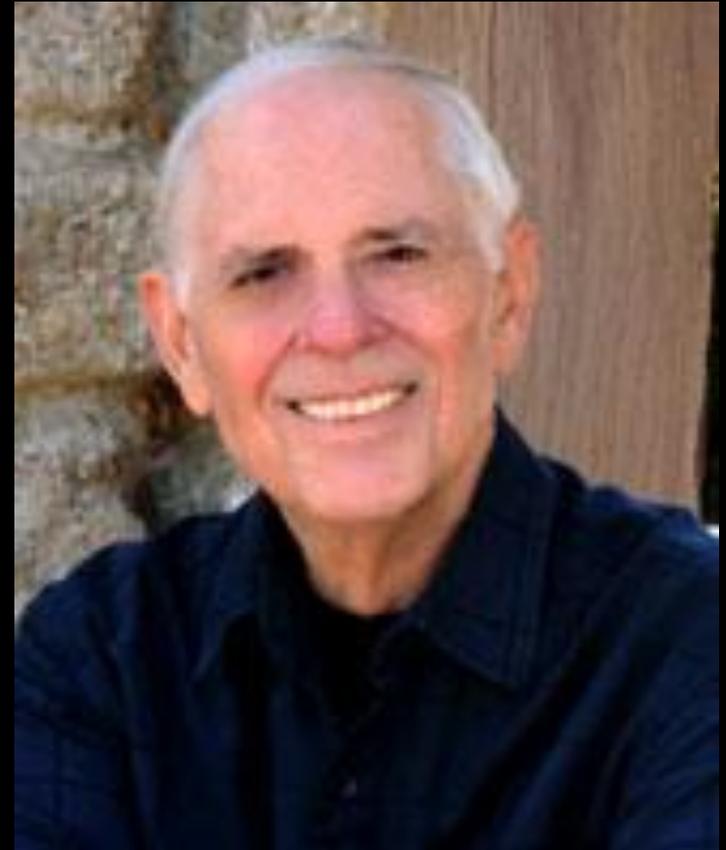
## Key Chapter    Ezra 9 (and a bit of 10)

- Ezra's prayer may be the real key passage in the book.
- He is sensitive to the nation's difficulties, but also to the nation's guilt.
- He leads the nation to a revival by initiating this repentance before God.
- After this point, the Jews no longer struggled with abandoning their own God for idols.

## Key Chapter    Ezra 9 (and a bit of 10)

*The grace of repentance awakens the earnest desire for salvation from sin ... It acknowledges the radical need of the alienated for a new birth to a new life.*

– *Thomas Oden, in Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*



## Key Chapter    Ezra 9 (and a bit of 10)

- For us, **repentance** means turning from sin and turning to faith in Jesus Christ – crucified and risen from the grave.
- God expresses his love toward us in a very costly way.
- **Repentance** is our way of expressing that we love him back.

# Key Chapter Ezra 9 (and a bit of 10)

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- But what about those divorces?
- These were not wives like Ruth who married into the Jewish faith as well as the Jewish people.
- They worshiped idols and were teaching their children to do the same.
- Malachi 2 gives us evidence that these men had divorced their Jewish wives to marry pagan women.
- The identity of the nation was at stake.

## 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> [I]f any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

## Key Chapter Ezra 9 (and a bit of 10)

- But what about those divorces?
- We live in different times.
- We should certainly avoid marriage to people who do not share our faith.
- If we are already married to a non-Christian, then Paul recommends letting the non-Christian decide.

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- **God's authority extends to all nations.** He will use pagan kings to accomplish his will when he sees fit.
- **Our faith needs to be Bible-centered.** The Bible has both truth to believe and power to transform.
- **Revival begins with repentance.** Ezra set the example by praying for the nation, especially those who returned.

# Ezra Conclusions



*Ezra had remarkable skills, a deep commitment to God's word and the discipline to practise what he taught ... Mediocrity plagues our churches. It is time we woke up and looked for the Ezras we need.*

*– Augustine Pagolu, Hyderabad Institute of Theology and Apologetics*

# Ezra Conclusions

- I would agree that we need more Ezras and that we should look for them.
- We should also become more like Ezra ourselves.
- The world has enough mediocre Christians.
- Let's not be those.

# Ezra Conclusions

- Look for places you can bow to God's authority – in both your personal and public life.
- Look for ways to make your faith more Bible-centered. For some of us this may start with a commitment to read it daily.
- Look for areas of your life that need repentance. This is how we respond to the exorbitant love God in Christ.