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Ezra: A Study Outline

Old Testament Digest, Volume 2

From the *Old Testament Digest* of William MacDonald

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Ezra

A study outline from William MacDonald's *Old Testament Digest, Volume 2* · online: kee-ministry-library.netlify.app/.../outline/ezra

Overview of Ezra

Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book in the Hebrew Scriptures. MacDonald explains that Ezra records the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of the end of the captivity (Jeremiah 29:10–14) and two expeditions back to the land: the first under Zerubbabel, who rebuilt the altar and the temple in spite of opposition, and the second, almost eighty years later, under Ezra the scribe, who brought sweeping reform through God's Word. Between chapters 6 and 7 lies a gap of about 58 years, in which the events of Esther took place. MacDonald calls the book a study in revival.

Key themes

- God moving the hearts of heathen kings to fulfill His word
- Restoring worship: the altar first, then the house
- Opposition from those who offer false partnership
- Revival through the preaching of the prophets (Zechariah 4:6)
- A man who set his heart to seek, to do and to teach God's law (Ezra 7:10)
- Trusting God rather than an armed escort
- Separation from the unequal yoke

Christ in Ezra. MacDonald does not draw an explicit type of Christ from Ezra, but he shows God at work for His people: naming Cyrus long before his birth (Isaiah 44:28), caring for details as small as twenty-nine knives, and turning kings' hearts to send and supply His people. He notes that the separation enforced in Ezra's day protected the nation destined to produce the Messiah. Read with the prophets of the time (Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1), Ezra shows the Holy Spirit, not the king's decree, as the power behind the work.

Read Ezra in the NET Bible: Ezra 1 · MacDonald's full commentary: Ezra in the Digest

MacDonald's Outline of Ezra

I. Return of Captives to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6)
- A. Decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–4)
- B. Preparations and provisions (Ezra 1:5–11)
- C. Register of those who returned (Ezra 2)
- D. Construction of altar and temple foundations (Ezra 3)
- E. Opposition to rebuilding of temple (Ezra 4)
  1. In reign of Cyrus (Ezra 4:1–5, 24)
  2. In reign of Ahasuerus (Ezra 4:6)
  3. In reign of Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:7–23)
- F. Encouragement to rebuild by Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1–2)
- G. Opposition during the reign of Darius (Ezra 5:3–17)
- H. Completion of temple through favorable decree of Darius (Ezra 6)

II. Return of Captives under Ezra (Ezra 7–10)
- A. Generous authorization by Artaxerxes (Ezra 7)
- B. Register of those who returned (Ezra 8:1–14)
- C. Account of the trip to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:15–36)
- D. Mixed marriages, and Ezra's prayer of confession (Ezra 9)
- E. Covenant of Jews to put away foreign wives and children (Ezra 10)

I · The Decree of Cyrus

Ezra 1

MacDonald shows God moving Cyrus to let the Jews return and rebuild, ending the seventy years of captivity.

I. The decree of Cyrus — Ezra 1:1–4
- A. Named by God before his birth (Isaiah 44:28–45:13)

II. Two ways to count the seventy years
- A. 605 to 535 BC, or 586 to 516 BC

III. Gifts from neighbors — Ezra 1:5–6

IV. The temple vessels returned — Ezra 1:7–11
- A. Sheshbazzar is Zerubbabel's Babylonian name
- B. Twenty-nine knives counted — Ezra 1:9

CROSS REFERENCES

2 Chronicles 36:22–23 Isaiah 44:28 Jeremiah 29:10–14

LESSONS

- If God cares for such details as knives, how much more does He care for His people!

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 1–2
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 1–2

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Confirming Accuracy* (Jean Gibson)
- *Notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Studies in 2 Timothy* (Dan Snaddon)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 1 →

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2 · Those Who Returned

Ezra 2

MacDonald explains the register of the first returning exiles and the gifts given for the house of God.

I. The returning families by parentage and town — Ezra 2:1–35

II. Priests, Levites, singers, porters and Nethinim — Ezra 2:36–58

III. Those who could not prove their descent — Ezra 2:59–63

  A. Barred from the priesthood until the Urim and Thummim

IV. About 50,000 in all — Ezra 2:64–67

  A. Compare — Nehemiah 7

V. Freewill offerings for the house — Ezra 2:68–70

CROSS REFERENCES

Nehemiah 7

LESSONS

- Only a small fraction of those carried away chose to return.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 1–2
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 1–2

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *The Epistle of James* (James Gunn)
- *Life of Christ* (Gordon Franz)
- *The Kings of Judah and Israel* (Christopher Knapp)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 2 →

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3 · The Altar and the Foundation

Ezra 3

MacDonald describes the altar rebuilt, the Feast of Tabernacles kept, and the temple foundation laid amid shouting and weeping.

I. The altar set up in the seventh month — Ezra 3:1–3

II. The Feast of Tabernacles and the offerings — Ezra 3:4–6

III. Materials from Tyre and Sidon — Ezra 3:7

IV. The foundation laid — Ezra 3:8–11

V. Shouts of joy and the old men's weeping — Ezra 3:12–13

  A. Compare — Haggai 2:3

CROSS REFERENCES

Haggai 2:3

LESSONS

- Honoring the Lord first is the best protection against enemies.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 3–4
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 3

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Notes on the Minor Prophets* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume 1: Genesis to 2 Chronicles* (John Nelson Darby)
- *Articles by John Boyd* (John Boyd)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 3 →

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4 · Opposition to the Work

Ezra 4

MacDonald explains the Samaritans' offer and their opposition, and the later letters that are placed here out of order.

I. The adversaries' offer refused — Ezra 4:1–3
  A. Mixed worshipers whose Jehovah was one god among many

II. Discouragement and hired counselors — Ezra 4:4–5

III. Letters in later reigns, against the walls — Ezra 4:6–23
  A. Ahasuerus Ezra 4:6; Artaxerxes — Ezra 4:7–23

IV. Work on the house stopped until Darius — Ezra 4:24

V. Aramaic, the language of Persian decrees, from Ezra 4:6 to — Ezra 6:8

LESSONS

- God's work must not be shared with those who do not truly belong to Him.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 3–4
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 4

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Confirming Accuracy* (Jean Gibson)
- *Messianic Passages* (Gordon Franz)
- *Papers on Daniel* (William Kelly)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 4 →

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5 · The Work Resumed

Ezra 5

MacDonald shows Haggai and Zechariah stirring the people to build again and Tatnai's letter to Darius.

I. Haggai and Zechariah prophesy — Ezra 5:1
  A. See — Haggai 1:4

II. Zerubbabel and Jeshua begin to build — Ezra 5:2
  A. Not by the king's decree but by the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6)

III. Tatnai's questions — Ezra 5:3–5
  A. "The eye of their God was upon the elders" — Ezra 5:5

IV. The letter to Darius — Ezra 5:6–17
  A. Divine authority and the decree of Cyrus

CROSS REFERENCES

Haggai 1:1–4 Zechariah 1:1 Zechariah 4:6

LESSONS

- When God's people start to obey His word, His eye is upon them to fulfill it.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 5–6
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 5–6

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *From the Editor's Notebook: The Minor Prophets* (W. Ross Rainey)
- *Through the Scriptures: Sunday School Lesson Outlines* (Alfred P. Gibbs)
- *Introduction to a Study in Church Truth* (Alfred P. Gibbs)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 5 →

6 · The Temple Finished

Ezra 6

MacDonald describes Darius's search for the decree, his order to support the work, and the dedication and Passover.

I. The decree of Cyrus found at Achmetha — Ezra 6:1–5

II. Darius's order: do not hinder, but pay — Ezra 6:6–12

III. The house finished — Ezra 6:13–15

IV. The dedication — Ezra 6:16–18

V. The Passover kept with joy — Ezra 6:19–22

A. The Lord had turned the king's heart

LESSONS

- God was pleased with a smaller offering given according to the people's ability.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 5–6
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 5–6

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *The Book of Genesis* (James Gunn)
- *Daniel in the Critics' Den* (Sir Robert Anderson)
- *Isaiah* (F. C. Jennings)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 6 →

7 · Ezra the Scribe

Ezra 7

MacDonald introduces Ezra, a ready scribe in the law, and the sweeping authority Artaxerxes gave him for the second return.

I. A gap of about 58 years; Esther's story falls here

II. Ezra's priestly line — Ezra 7:1–5

III. A ready scribe; the hand of the Lord upon him — Ezra 7:6–9

IV. "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek … to do … to teach" — Ezra 7:10

V. Artaxerxes' letter — Ezra 7:11–26

VI. Ezra blesses God — Ezra 7:27–28

CROSS REFERENCES

Psalm 1:1–3

LESSONS

- Ezra is a living illustration of Psalm 1: he meditated on the law and prospered.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 7–8
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 7

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Confirming Accuracy* (Jean Gibson)
- *Proverbs* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Notes on Daniel* (William Kelly)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 7 →

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8 · The Journey to Jerusalem

Ezra 8

MacDonald follows Ezra's company, the search for Levites, the fast at Ahava, and the safe arrival with the treasure.

I. Those who went up with Ezra — Ezra 8:1–14

II. No Levites; a call sent to Casiphia — Ezra 8:15–20

III. A fast at Ahava instead of an escort — Ezra 8:21–23

  A. "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him"

IV. Holy treasure kept by holy men — Ezra 8:24–30

V. The journey and arrival — Ezra 8:31–34

VI. Offerings for all Israel — Ezra 8:35–36

LESSONS

- Ezra put his faith on the line, trusting the God who delights to save those who lean hard on Him.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 7–8
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 8

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Lecture on the Book of Ezra* (William Kelly)
- *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume 2: Ezra to Malachi* (John Nelson Darby)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 8 →

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9 · Ezra's Prayer of Confession

Ezra 9

MacDonald shows Ezra's grief over mixed marriages and his prayer identifying himself with the people's sin.

I. The report of mixed marriages — Ezra 9:1–2

  A. Forbidden by the law (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3)

II. Ezra astonished until the evening sacrifice — Ezra 9:3–4

III. His prayer — Ezra 9:5–15

A. He makes the people's sin his own

B. Grace had preserved them; now they had sinned again

C. "We are before thee in our trespasses"

CROSS REFERENCES

Exodus 34:16 Deuteronomy 7:3

LESSONS

- True intercession takes the people's sin as its own.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 9–10
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 9–10

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Through the Scriptures: Sunday School Lesson Outlines* (Alfred P. Gibbs)
- *Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Dan Snaddon)
- *Notes on the Minor Prophets* (H. A. Ironside)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 9 →

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10 · The Covenant to Separate

Ezra 10

MacDonald describes the people's repentance, the assembly in the rain, and the putting away of foreign wives, with the New Testament rule for today.

I. Shechaniah: "There is hope in Israel" — Ezra 10:1–4

II. The covenant made — Ezra 10:5

III. The assembly in the rain — Ezra 10:6–15

IV. The inquiry and the list of offenders — Ezra 10:16–44

V. The unequal yoke still forbidden (2 Corinthians 6:14–18)

A. But under grace the believer does not put away an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12–13)

CROSS REFERENCES

2 Corinthians 6:14–18 1 Corinthians 7:12–13

LESSONS

- When men read God's Word, pray for the saints, and confess and separate from known sin, there is power to do great things for God.

RELATED READING

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon) — Snaddon on Ezra 9–10
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier) — Rossier on Ezra 9–10

ALSO DISCUSSED IN THE LIBRARY

- *Through the Scriptures: Sunday School Lesson Outlines* (Alfred P. Gibbs)
- *Robert Cleaver Chapman of Barnstaple* (W. H. Bennet)
- *The Kings of Judah and Israel* (Christopher Knapp)

Read MacDonald on Chapter 10 →

Further reading on Ezra

In the Faithful Men Library

- *The Book of Ezra* (Dan Snaddon)
- *Meditations on the Book of Ezra* (H. L. Rossier)
- *Lecture on the Book of Ezra* (William Kelly)
- *Notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (H. A. Ironside)
- *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume 2: Ezra to Malachi* (John Nelson Darby)
- *Articles by Leslie S. Rainey* (Leslie S. Rainey)

On plymouthbrethren.org

- "Lecture on the book of Ezra" (William Kelly, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra" (John Nelson Darby, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 1-2" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 3" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 4" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 5-6" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 7" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 8" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)
- "Ezra 9-10" (H. L. Rossier, plymouthbrethren.org)

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