

The Book of Ezra

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Studies in Ezra 1

Ezra was a descendant of Hilkiah, the high priest who found a copy of the law during King Josiah's reign. (See Ezra 7:1 and 2 Chronicles 34:4) Ezra could not serve as a priest during the captivity because there had not been a temple since the exile, but he studied the Word of God and became "a skilled scribe in the law of Moses." (Ezra 7:6) Ezra was also a great revivalist and reformer; in fact, revival among the returned exiles was initiated as Ezra read the Word of God. (See Nehemiah 8)

There is evidence to support the fact that Ezra likely wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as Psalm 119. A great lesson learned from the book of Ezra is that revival often begins with a revival in the study of the Scriptures. The Word of the Lord is mentioned ten times in Ezra, and the people show extremely strong reactions upon hearing the Word of the Lord and remembering the Lord's deliverance. (See Ezra 9:4-10:3) Ezra reports: "everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice." (Ezra 9:4) The prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah are helpful to read in conjunction with Ezra since these prophets were among those Jews who were allowed to return from their exile to rebuild the temple in the late sixth century B.C. (See Ezra 6:14) Esther also records the situation of the Jews in the Persian Empire immediately preceding Ezra and Nehemiah's ministries to the exiles upon returning to their land. (See Esther 1:1-9 and Ezra 1)

There are two major divisions in the book of Ezra, with chapters 1-6 recording the first wave of fifty thousand immigrants under Zerubbabel's leadership returning to their land, and chapters 7-10 covering the story of the two thousand exiles that returned to their land with Ezra a half a century later. First, in chapter 1, we notice that Ezra immediately puts an emphasis on "the Word of the Lord." (Ezra 1:1) King Cyrus of Persia is introduced as being the king in the first year of his reign. We can imagine that God probably stirred the king's spirit, possibly through the ministry of Daniel. (See Daniel 6:28 and 10:1)

King Cyrus was the most powerful ruler of his day. Yet in Isaiah 44:28 the prophet reports the Lord as saying, "... Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." It is clear from these words and through the events we see in Daniel and Ezra that the Lord used Cyrus as His instrument to accomplish His purposes. Daniel was the prime minister in the court of Cyrus and no doubt instructed Cyrus in God's Word, and it was during Cyrus' reign that Daniel gave some of his greatest prophecies, including the seventy weeks prophecy concerning Israel. (See Daniel 9)

In Ezra 1:2 we see that in King Cyrus' decree he uses the phrase, "The Lord God of heaven." The use of this phrase is particular to the writing in Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel, and is not mentioned prior to these books. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and destroyed the city and the temple in 586 B.C., God removed his presence from between the Cherubim. Notice how Ezekiel describes this through a metaphor in

Ezekiel 10 and 11 of his writings. He says, "Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim." (Ezekiel 10:18) This recalls another experience in 1 Samuel when the ark was captured and Phinehas' daughter-in-law gives birth in distress upon learning of these tragedies. She names her baby "Ichabod," meaning "the glory has departed from Israel." (See 1 Samuel 4:19-22) In Ezekiel, predicting judgment on Israel through the Babylonian destruction and captivity, the Shekinah glory lifts from the temple and pauses to see the reaction of an idolatrous nation, yet there is none. It goes over the city and passes again, but the people do not respond. Then, the Shekinah glory lifts to the top of the Mount of Olives and waits again, yet there is no concern expressed by Israel, so the glory is caught up into heaven and is not seen again. For this reason, the post-captivity books like Ezra and Nehemiah refer to God as "The Lord God of Heaven" since the glory of the Lord had departed and gone up to Him during this time. Many years later, however, we know that there walked into the rebuilt temple a holy one who cleansed it. God returned in His Son, Jesus Christ; however, the Shekinah glory was not visible, it was hidden behind His human flesh. Those privileged disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration saw his unveiled glory. (See Matthew 17:1-13) Yet men despised, rejected, and ultimately crucified him. Despite all of this, Matthew's gospel continually affirms the Lord Jesus' kingship. He presents Jesus as one who was born as a king, lived like a king, performed miracles like a king, taught as a king, was arrested as a king, tried as a king, died as a king, buried as a king, rose as a king and returned to heaven as a king. He is indeed coming soon as the King of kings and

Lord of lords. He is “The Lord God of heaven” just as Ezra identifies Him.

When the Shekinah glory was removed from the earth, God gave his people into the hands of the Gentiles, ushering in “The Times of the Gentiles.” This era will remain until the Lord returns forever, when Jerusalem will then become the city of the great king. We read in Ezra 1:2 that God later commands Cyrus to “build him a house in Jerusalem.” Next, Cyrus indeed grants permission to the exiles to return to Jerusalem, and asks that those who choose to stay in Babylon will help those who return. (See Ezra 1:3-4) Unfortunately, it appears from Ezra 1:5-6 that the response to return was disappointing, because many who had settled down in Babylon had been enjoying the affluence of a prosperous society. Why did they not go? We can conjecture that these people were probably the Jews who nearly lost their lives during the events instigated by Haman that are recorded in the book of Esther. (See Esther 3) So in Cyrus’ command to help those Jews who decide to give up their lives in Babylon to go back to the Lord’s given land, the principle involved here is similar to supporting the Lord’s work and His mission involving the people of Israel. This is comparable to warfare, where it is estimated that for every soldier on the front lines it takes ten support troops to bring supplies. The supporting work for those who are to return to the land is just as important as those who would go back.

Lastly, let us examine the Lord’s use of Cyrus to preserve not only the people of Israel, but also the temple of the Jews. In Ezra 1:7, Cyrus hands the temple’s vessels and dedicated items over to the prince of Judah, Sheshbazzar, restoring these items to their

rightful owners, the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar had captured these sacred temple ornaments from the fall of the Judah when Babylon destroys Judah, and then his son Belshazzar desecrates these vessels in drunkenness in his own palace in Babylon, drawing God's judgment through the writing on the wall. (See Daniel 5) In Ezra 1:9-11, we can understand that these temple vessels represent tremendous wealth and importance for the people of Israel and the restoration of them as a holy people, consecrated to God.

Ezra 1 & 2

Date: 5th century B.C.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are the last of the historical books.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah write of events in Palestine which took place after some of the exiles returned from the Babylonian captivity.

Both books cover a period of approximately 100 years. The emphasis of Ezra is on the building of the Temple. In Nehemiah the emphasis is on the building of the wall of Jerusalem.

Between chapters 6 and 7 there is a gap of 50-60 years. During this period the events depicted in Esther took place.

This time lapse also accounts for the change in characters in the second part of the book. Some evidently had died.

Zerubbabel led the first return from exile in chapters 1-6. Ezra led the second in chapters 7-10.

The Jews were in Babylon. They hung their harps on the willow trees—how did they get there? See 2 Chronicles 36:14-21.

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the city, the walls and the Temple. He took the sacred vessels/prisoners.

Jeremiah foretold that the captivity would last 70 years. See 25:12 and 29:10.

Daniel was reading this (9:2) and he began to pray for his people and for their return to their own land. Here we have a picture of a man of God on his knees pouring over the Word of God. What a lovely sight.

“Prayer moves the hand of Him Who moves the Universe.”

Through the prayer of Daniel God stirred the heart of the king; and God’s program was set in motion.

v. 1—“The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia.”

200 years before this Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus would build Jerusalem (44:28). “Cyrus is My shepherd, he shall perform My pleasure; even saying Jerusalem shall be built, he shall lay the foundation of the temple.”

No room for coincidence or the arrangement of man, this revival was the work of God. Revival comes down, it is not worked up.

This whole movement was deeply spiritual. “The Lord stirred the spirit of Cyrus.” “Those who returned were raised/called up by God.”

This was a work of God. (This work soon lost its power to cold intellectualism. Counted the words and letters—guard against legalism.

v. 3—Those whom God had stirred were asked to go to Jerusalem.

There was nothing at Jerusalem for the flesh. It was burned, ruined, desolate.

But for faith, it was the city of God the place of the Name.

These spiritual men and women were so inspired to return to Jerusalem they gave up their homes and possessions.

What a price they paid, what a sacrifice they made to rebuild God's house. Christ loved the church, and we should love the church in the same manner.

v. 4—Those that remained in Babylon were instructed to support those who returned. They were to give gifts of gold, goods, beasts, free-will offerings. This was to support the work and the workers of the church at Antioch.

v. 5-6—These give us the response to the proclamation. Volunteers.

The fathers of Judah and Benjamin were priests: Levites. "All those whose spirit God had raised."

Those who could not go strengthened the hands of those who did, with precious things, all done willingly.

v. 7—The vessels of the Lord were separated. They were separated from the vessels of the king devoted to heathen deities. Before they could be used by God they had to be separated. Israel was never stronger or more blessed than when she was separated from the nations around here. "In the world but not of it."

God's promise through Malachi. "Bring in all the tithes and offerings and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that you will not be able to contain."

Saints on their knees is the prelude to blessing. Note the three ninth chapters of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. Three men on their knees, confessing their own sins and

the sins of the people. The result is blessing. These men recognized the need of their time.

On for holy men today who recognize the advancing apostasy and the growing insubjection to the Word. Those who will teach the sovereignty and holiness of God, the lordship and headship of Christ, the presidency of the Holy Spirit, and the authority of the Word of God. Describe the sanctified man.

The church is looking for better methods. God is looking for better men. What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, or more novel methods. The church needs holy, spiritual men whom God the Spirit can use. Men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit's power does not flow through methods or machinery but through holy men.

Daniel was a student of the Word. He saw that the time was approaching for the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, the liberation of Israel. He also realized the total unpreparedness of his people for this event. He fell on his knees in confession and prayer.

The result of his prayer was that (1) many hearts of his people were prepared; (2) there was a movement of God in the heart of the king Cyrus. In fact, Daniel's prayer set in motion one of the most important events in the history of Israel.

Chapter 2 is a sample page out of the eternal book. A look at God's Hall of Fame.

Similar lists are given in other parts of the Word. In Genesis 49 we have the record of Jacob's sons. In 2 Samuel 23 and 1 Chronicles 11 there is set forth for posterity the names of David's mighty men.

In Nehemiah 3 and also in chapter 7 the list is almost identical with that in Ezra 2. These are the names of faithful men whom God has honored by keeping an eternal record of their names.

This reminds us of 2 Timothy 2 where the vessels of honor and dishonor were separated. "Separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

In God's service today, those whom He uses are separated from evil and purged from all sin.

Ephesians 5:26—"That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

The priest could not serve God without first using the brazen altar and the brazen laver.

To serve God effectively we must be clean.

Some texts to express the importance of unity.

Romans 15:5-6—Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus. That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:10—Now I beseech you brethren by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

2 Corinthians 13:11—Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Ephesians 4:3—Endeavoring to keep the unity created by the Spirit in the bond of peace. Jew and Gentile have been united by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has made all true believers one in Christ Jesus. We each must keep this unity intact by living at peace with one another.

Note the characteristics of the great revival under Ezra (Nehemiah 8-10).

1. They gathered themselves as one man.
2. Bring the book.
3. Men, women and all who could hear with understanding.
4. The Word was read from morning till midday (6 hours).
5. The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book.
6. When Ezra opened the book the people stood up.
7. Ezra worshiped the Lord.
8. The people said “Amen, Amen” and lifted up their hands.
9. They in turn worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

The result: The joy of the Lord was their strength. There was very great gladness—revival.

Consecration

Missionary Day in the church in Scotland.

“Give me thine ordinances,” says the god of Phariseeism.

“Give me thy personality,” said the God of Hegel.

“Give me thy reason,” says the god of Kent.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus says, “My Son, give me thy heart.”

Ezra 2

This chapter contains the names of families who went up out of the captivity.

Little did they realize at the time that their names would be recorded for posterity.

Nothing escapes the eye of God, and any effort will be rewarded by Him. Judgment Seat of Christ.

One of the significant things that happened is found in verses 61-63. There were some who claimed to be priests, but no record was found to substantiate their claim.

Consequently their names were removed from the priestly register, all support was withdrawn, and they were treated as unworthy of the office of a priest, until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummin.

This means that they were excluded from the priesthood, until an inspired priest, who was given light on this subject from God, could verify their claim.

v. 68-69—When some of the leaders came to the site of the Temple, their hearts were further stirred.

“They offered freely”—“They gave after their ability”.

This is an example for us. See 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7; Acts 11:27-30.

Ezra 3 & 4

Ezra 3

There is an unspecified period of time between chapters 2 and 3. During which time the people built temporary shelters for themselves. They built three things: an altar, a temple, and a wall.

The first thing they did corporately was to build an altar.

v. 1—“They gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.” Note the phrase “as one man.”

Compare Acts:

1. Pentecost—“one accord”, “one place”. Acts 2:44.
2. All that believed were together, they continued steadfastly.
3. When they prayed together the place was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 4:31.
4. Moody’s experience. Acts 4:32-33.
5. Acts 5:42—“And daily together in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

Note also Psalm 133—“There the Lord commanded the blessing.”

Psalm 126—“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”
Striving together for the faith of the Gospel.

What I like about the whole movement is that they gave God His place. They put Him first, and He blessed them.

Matthew 6:33 is as true today as the day it was spoken.

So then, they were a united people and the first thing that this returning remnant did was to build an altar and re-establish the God-given ceremonies, ordinances, feasts and truths written in the holy Law of God.

I like the idea that they never thought of substituting human expediency for what God had spoken to Moses in the past. They did not ask for ideas or suggestions. They simply searched the Scriptures and when they “found it written” they practiced it. The Bible was their authority.

The seventh month was a great religious month for Israel.

1. In this month they built the altar.
2. They re-established the worship of God.
3. They re-discovered and practiced the old truths.

Subsequent events proved that this was the basis of their blessing.

There never was a day in the history of the Church when we need to build an altar more than today. “That I might win Christ.”

1. We need to return to Christ. Christ alone, Who is our “altar”—Hebrews 13.
2. We need to be established in the fundamental truths relative to the Person and work of Christ. Describe some.

True revival and blessing can never come to an individual or local church if Christ is not the soul’s object.

Christ—Center; God—Circumference; Spirit—Controlled.

v. 4—The first feast which they kept was the Feast of Tabernacles. This is very suggestive! This feast was memorial and prophetic. It looked back to deliverance and forward to ultimate blessing. This would remind us of the Lord's Supper. We look back to Calvary and look forward to our Savior's coming.

Verses 8-10 describe for us the laying of the foundation of the Temple. This was a great day for this godly remnant.

The laying of the foundation was entrusted to carefully chosen men. See verses 8-9. Twenty years upward, "not a novice."

The laying of the foundation was important work. It was entrusted to separated, approved, devoted, and holy men. See Hebrews 12:14. God will only entrust His work to holy men.

Filled with the Holy Spirit

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is a further step than being "indwelt" or "sealed". Every believer should seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We are filled when we yield unreservedly to His control. We are not filled from the outside, but from the inside. Transfiguration.

As we allow the Spirit to have undisputed control of every department of our life:

1. We become unworldly in our thoughts.
2. We become self-sacrificing in our lives.
3. We become devoted in our efforts to bring others to Christ.
4. We possess a new power in prayer

5. Christ fills our vision.
6. Our eyes are filled with His glory.
7. Our lips are filled with His praise.
8. Our hearts are filled with His love.
9. Christ is paramount in our affliction.
10. He is prominent in our life.

First, we should desire above all else to be filled with the Spirit. Secondly, we should pay earnestly that many believers would become Christ-possessed and Holy-Spirit dominated in the days of coldness and declension.

Description of the way God's altar was to be built—see Exodus 20.

The altar was to be built of earth. The awesome, majestic, glorious God was to be approached and met at an altar of earth. The God who revealed Himself at Sinai. The heathen gods were gods of silver and gold. If the altar was made of stone, these stones were natural. No human tool was to be used to shape or build it. If this happened the altar was polluted. There had to be no steps, that man might be displayed.

Even the altar of the Tabernacle was plain, especially in contrast to the items of furniture inside the tent. Man was not allowed to beautify it by his skill.

God desires to do His work in this way.

Paul says that "the household of God" is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." Ephesians 2:20.

When men were needed in the early church to serve and aid in its expansion.

They were chosen with clearly defined qualifications.

1. Good testimony within and without the church.

2. Full of the Holy Spirit.

3. Full of wisdom.

4. Full of faith.

Is God any less demanding today? O for a return to these pristine days. Days of revival, blessing, and power.

The church was holy, God's servants were holy, and the Holy Spirit was in control. But where are the men with such qualifications?

Just a passing reference to a very significant word.

v. 1—themselves “together.”

v. 9—the sons of Judah “together.”

v. 11—they sang “together.”

4:3—they built “together.”

This reminds us that we are “laborers together.”

v. 10-13—In these verses we see how the people were stirred as the foundation was laid. The “younger folks” “shouted for joy.” This was a wonderful day for them. The “old men” who had seen the first house in all its glory “wept with a loud voice.”

It is a fortunate assembly where there is the blend of maturity and enthusiasm. Older people need to be exposed to and inspired by youthful exuberance. Younger people need the experience and wisdom of godly older men.

Ezra 4

Opposition by their adversaries causes suspension of the work. V. 1-6.

This is the first discordant note in this vast spiritual movement.

The song of chapter 3 is silenced. The opposition came from without. In the early life of the church the devil opposed from without.

The various persecutions only served to drive the saints together. Illustrate by flock of sheep.

What Satan failed to do from without, he attempted to do from within. The first sin was hypocrisy, the second was grumbling.

“Let us build with you; for we seek your God, and sacrifice unto Him”—v. 2.

While outwardly pretending to be friendly and cooperative, in reality they were adversaries.

These adversaries were largely of the same character as thousands today. These make a profession of Christianity but do not own Christ as Lord. They know nothing of the saving blood of Christ. They too, like the enemies of Israel, fear God but serve their own gods.

Christendom is full of such people. To fellowship with and seek their assistance in spiritual matters would be a grave mistake.

It was the mixed multitude who caused most of the hindrances and heartaches in Israel's wilderness journey.

v. 3—the men of God dealt firmly with these people. Because of their relationship with God they saw the inevitable, Israel being led back into sin and idolatry. To compromise with the world is spiritual disaster.

“The man of God sees more on his knees that the worldling sees on his tiptoes.”

Peter compromised and it led to spiritual disaster. Peter never ever forgot this tragic experience.

Thank God for spiritual men today:

1. Whose eyes are anointed.
2. Whose spiritual perception is sharpened through communion with God.
3. Who have the care and welfare of God’s people at heart.
4. Who will stand forth courageously in this day of compromise and say “Come out from among them.”

Elders should do this.

In that discourse Paul asks, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”

In this portion we are also told not to be “unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

This includes such things as marriage, business partnerships, and lodges and secret societies.

The proposition made by their adversaries was in some ways very attractive. The remnant was small and weak. To have received them would have made them numerically stronger, but spiritually much weaker. We should always remember, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord.”

After the open rebuff, the real character of the adversaries came to the surface. They opposed the work in various ways. See verses 4-5.

v. 4—They weakened the hands of the builders. By discouragement they hindered the work. They caused them endless trouble. They hired counselors against them.

Their persistence was unreal. Ephesians 6:12. Their opposition continued through the reign of three kings. Verses 5-6.

Then finally they sent a letter to the king. When all else had failed.

The contents of the letter is written. V. 11-16.

They accused the Jews of “building the rebellious and bad city.” V. 12.

They claimed that they had built upon the walls. Which was a lie. V. 12.

The letter was clever, but false, nevertheless it brought forth the desired results.

The king’s answer is found in v. 17-22.

In essence it was, the work must cease.

The chapter ends with a depressing view of the cessation of the work. V. 24.

They were forced to stop building the temple.

The books of Haggai and Zechariah cover the events of this time. From these books we find that the Jews enthusiasm for the work had waned.

Also, there is no evidence that they carried the matter further, either by prayer to God or petition to the king.

We are forced to the conclusion that they capitulated too easily.

Their first love had waned. Apathy had taken over.

For a good while the work had been progressing at a slow pace due to opposition.

Finally the work ceased, and no voice of protest was raised.

Brethren and sisters your first love is very important to you and God.

When first love wanes the work of God suffers.
Spirituality plummets.

They still had love but their first love was gone.

Do all in your power to preserve your first love.
Remember from where you have fallen. Repent, return to your first love, or I will remove the lampstand.

Assembly appeared to be functioning normally. The work ceased for about 18 months.

During this time the people's energies were turned to their own comfort and that of their families.

They built their own ceiled houses, they stored up goods and attended their own interests.

Haggai informs us of this. There is no record of any opposition from their enemies as long as they were attending to their own interests.

Opposition comes when God's work is being attended to, and is prospering. Acts 13:6-13—Satan's opposition to God's work.

The devil is always busy too, either from without or within, to disrupt or stop any movement of the Spirit.

Ezra 5 & 6

Ezra 5

God raised up two prophets at this time: Haggai and Zechariah. These servants of God stood in the midst of confession and exhorted the remnant to consider their ways, to be strong and recommence the word.

Haggai dealt with the consciences of the people, his are cutting, stirring words. Consider your ways. You have sown much but reaped little. You earn wages but it is like putting your money in a bag with holes. Consider your ways. My judgment fell on you because you are dwelling in your own houses while mine is unfinished. I have withheld My blessing, the earth withholds its fruit.

Matthew 6:33 is valid in every generation.

Zechariah spoke more to the heart, encouraging them to endeavor, speaking of the glorious future.

Both lines of ministry were needed and it produced the desired results.

v. 2—There was an immediate awakening. The result was Spirit-filled ministry.

v. 3—Immediately the work was commenced and opposition began. “Who has commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?”

v. 4—The adversaries wanted to single out the leaders, but they were loyal to each other. Satan is always after the leaders.

v. 5—"The eye of the Lord was upon them." Realizing this, these men could not be stopped from building. They realized God was with them.

v. 6-17—These contain the text of the letter from Tatnai to Darius. This letter is considerably fairer to the Jews than that of the Samaritans in the previous chapter.

v. 8—Note what he called the temple, "the house of the great God." His report was factual, not fabricated like the Samaritans. The work goes on fast and prospers.

v. 9-10—Consider the courage and purpose of these men. They seem to be transformed. They had received a new vision. They had a mind to build. Who gave you permission to build this house? And walls? They also asked the names of the leaders to inform the king.

v. 11—These men evidently must have been put under considerable pressure. They affirmed that they had been given permission to build. They had the vessels of the temple to prove it. While the discussions were going on, the building never stopped.

They were inspired by the prophets—Isaiah 40:28-31. The persecutions of the early church could not deter them. So then Tatnai sent his letter to the king. Upon receipt of this letter Darius moved into action.

"All that is needed is faith that fears not the face of man."

Ezra 6

Chapter 6 opens with the king making a search for the document granting permission to build.

It was not found in Babylon, but it was located in Achmetha, in the palace there. V. 2—The law of the Medes and Persians.

This document not only gave the authority to build, but also gave certain instructions how the temple was to be built—v. 4.

Expenses were to be paid out of the king's revenue. The gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple were to be restored—v. 5.

Having substantiated the decree to build, Darius sends forth his instructions or decree—v. 6.

v. 7-9—Leave them alone in their work. Let them build this house. Supply funds for the expenses that the work be not hindered. Give them animals for sacrifices, wheat, salt, oil also.

v. 10—The king requests prayer for himself and his sons.

v. 11—Anyone not abiding by these commandments was to suffer a humiliating death and his house was to be made a dunghill.

v. 12—Darius commanded these instructions to be initiated with all speed.

Furthermore, the king called upon God to destroy anyone, either ruler or individual, who shall put forth their hand to alter or destroy this house. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

This curse was fulfilled in three instances:

1. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple during the Maccabean period.

2. Herod the Great altered it with a view to glorifying himself.

3. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. Later their own empire was destroyed.

Both Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod the Great were smitten with a sudden, awful disease.

No one can spurn the law of God without repercussion. No one can hinder the work of God without incurring serious consequences.

v. 13—Tatnia did speedily what the king commanded.

v. 14—The revival, interest and enthusiasm at this time were the result of the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. Thank God for faithful ministers of the Word, the gifts to the Church, and gifts of the Spirit.

v. 15—The work was finished, the temple was built. It took 4.5 years to finish after the new start was made. The total time from start to finish was 22 years approximately.

v. 16-18—The house is dedicated with joy, but not with tears. The sacrifices offered seem a lot, but when compared with the sacrifices Solomon offered they are as nothing. Yet God accepted them. They brought offerings commensurate with their ability—1 Corinthians 16:2.

v. 19—They kept the Passover. This reminded them of salvation through the blood.

v. 20—The priests and Levites were pure, holy.

This is an example for all God's servants in every age. If we expect God's blessing then we must be clean,

sanctified and cleansed by the washing of water by the Word—Ephesians 5:26.

1 John 1—Confession cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

v. 21—Not only did they purify themselves but they separated themselves from the worldly nations around. Those who were in this condition kept the Passover and ate the feast.

v. 22—During the seven days of the feast all leaven was cast out. This was strictly enforced and adhered to. This celebration typifies the holy life that ought to follow the receiving of Christ. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. “Purge out the old leaven.”

The Lord made them joyful. He turned the heart of the king toward them. He strengthened their hands for the work of the Lord.

Ezra 7 & 8

Ezra 7

Summary of Ezra thus far:

1—The Lord moving in the heart of the king. He also stirred the hearts of many people.

2—The list of those returning. Certain men disqualified from the priesthood. A description of the offerings for the building of the temple.

3—There was unity of purpose, they gathered as one man.

4—Opposition from adversaries. The work of building is stopped.

5—The prophecy or ministry of Haggai and Zechariah inspired the people to recommence building.

6—The work goes on and the temple is completed. Notice the spiritual condition of the nation: pure, separated, obedient, joyful, strong.

Chapter 7 describes the beginning of a second awakening. Ezra leads the returning exiles, and through his ministry restores and revives the backsliders and discouraged at Jerusalem.

Between chapters 6 and 7 there is a gap of some 57 years. In this period the events recorded in Esther transpired.

At this time no reference is made to Zerubbabel or Joshua. These leaders no doubt had died. This contributed to and accentuated the backsliding and

despondency of those in Judea. At this crisis God raised up Ezra.

There were many who were rejected from the priesthood because they could not prove their genealogy. Not so Ezra. His is affirmed in verses 1-5.

It is interesting to note the phrase, “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest.” V. 5. Phinehas is an interesting character. See Numbers 25. Israel (the men) in their lust and passion began marrying the women of Moab. God was angry and demanded their death. While the people were mourning and weeping a young Israelite brought one of these women to camp and brazenly showed her off before Moses and the weeping congregation. When Phinehas, one of the priests, saw this he took his javelin and followed the pair to their tent, where he killed them. By this time 24,000 people had died in the plague. God told Moses that the action of Phinehas had turned His wrath away. His zealousness for national purity and his obedience to God’s law had been rewarded. But note the promise, “God would grant him and his seed an everlasting priesthood.”

Centuries later, here is Ezra, the seed of Phinehas, rising up under God to lead another remnant back to the place of the Name.

Note Ezra’s character:

1. He was a skilled scribe—v. 6.
2. The hand of the Lord was upon him—v. 6 and 9.

All studies may more or less prosper independently of the state of the student’s heart. Language, law, medicine, science, philosophy, etc. But to find God’s will and to find the secrets of God’s heart we must have a

devout, humble, penitent, clean heart. It is a clean heart rather than a clear head that makes a man an expositor of the Word. “Son give me thy heart.”

3. He prepared his heart to seek God’s will—v. 10.

4. He was determined to carry out God’s will—v. 10.

5. He would teach Israel God’s will—v. 10. The good hand of the Lord was upon him. In other words, he got his ministry from God.

6. He was a mighty man in the Scriptures. He was a gifted and able instructor of his brethren.

Note the qualifications of the men whom God used: Bezaleel, the deacons of Acts 5, Gideon, Paul, Peter, etc.

Neither did he teach what had not touched his own heart and controlled his life. His ministry was the result of his heart preparation. He prepared his heart, not his head.

Ezra, having learned the mind and will of God in the secret place, practiced it in his daily life. He undertook to do it.

The result of all this was glory to God and blessing to God’s people.

Describe Ezra as a pastor/teacher. Note the NT pastor/teacher.

One reason that there is so little power with much of the preaching today is that those who preach do not live the message they preach. Example: The Lord’s coming is preached, but it makes little difference to the life of many preachers. The pathway to real blessing is first “doing” then “teaching”.

It was this way with Jesus. Luke says of Him in Acts 1:1, “Of all that Jesus began to do and to teach.”

There were three things which were objectives in Ezra’s life:

1. The first was to seek the law of the Lord. In other words, to study and to learn God’s law.
2. His second goal was to put it into practice.
3. His third objective was to teach it.

Look back now at verse 7—“And there went up some of the children of Israel,” etc. God appears to be at work again. He begins to revive the spirits of many. He fills their heart with the desire to go up to Jerusalem.

The Letter of Artaxerxes, v. 12-26

Notice how Artaxerxes describes himself as “king of kings.” Notice also how he describes Ezra, “the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven.”

What a contrast between the two humanly speaking. Contrary to human assessment, in God’s sight, Ezra was much higher in rank than the self-styled “king of kings.”

While it may be true that this ruler had other kings under him, this designated title is reserved for the Lord Jesus. “Who is that blessed and only Potentate, king of kings and Lord of lords.”

Christ will rule the world. This title and place is reserved for Christ alone. Not many today have even heard of Artaxerxes! See how many know of Ezra the scribe. Not many have heard of King Ahasuerus, but Mordecai is known wherever the Word of God is taught. The Pharaoh of Exodus has been taken to be one of half

a dozen monarchs, but no one makes a mistake as to Moses. Gamaliel is only remembered as the teacher of the great apostle Paul. Hudson Taylor's brother was known as such, although a fine lawyer. It is much better to be a humble child of God and to walk with Him, than to wear earth's proudest diadem and not know Him.

Look now at verse 24. The priests and anyone employed in any way with the temple were to be exempt from taxation. In many countries today religious work and buildings are exempt from taxation.

Note Ezra's thanksgiving in verses 27-28. Ezra praised God because he realized that He had moved the heart of the king. Then he speaks again of "the hand of the Lord." Behind human instrumentality, he saw the guiding and controlling hand of the Lord.

v. 28—"I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me."

Of the going up to Jerusalem we have a brief description in verses 6-9.

In the next chapter we have a fuller account of the difficulties, the perils, the testings of faith and praise for God, the glorious triumph.

Every work of God will be tried. Every servant of God will be tried. Paul, centuries later, said, "None of these things move me." Of such a spirit was Ezra. Every true, faithful servant who counts for God is possessed by the same spirit as these godly men of old.

Ezra 8

The chapter opens with a list of all those who accompanied Ezra in this migration in verses 1-14.

The total number involved was 1496 people plus 18 heads of families. However it is stated that this number included only adult males, so with women and children added the grand total would be 6 or 7 thousand.

This company was much smaller than the one described in chapter 2, led by Zerubbabel and Joshua.

The reason for this could be that the first migration offered a release from captivity and a journey to the motherland.

This was no longer a novel project, for many years the Jews had been in Palestine, and although the Temple had been built, the work there was in a depressed and discouraging condition.

Despite these discouraging conditions, these faithful ones returned to the place where God had promised to dwell, where God had promised to put His name.

Surely we are gathered unto the Name. Matthew 18.

v. 15-20—Ezra gathered the whole company. He was shocked to find there were no Levites in the company.

v. 16—Notice the commendation of the men mentioned —“men of understanding.” NT qualification.

These were sent to find some Levites to accompany them. The Levites were servants of the house of God. It is sad that none had volunteered for service. The Levites were probably comfortably settled in Babylon. Although the need in Jerusalem was great, these men did not respond.

This reminds us of the words of the Lord.

John 4:35—“Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already unto harvest.”

Matthew 9:36-37—“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray you, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.”

He may deplore the lack of response by the Levites, but are we any better? Women, not men, are going.

v. 21—Before the journey commenced, Ezra called the people to fasting and prayer. Isaiah 40:29-31; Ephesians 3:20.

They afflicted themselves, they sought a right way.

Let us review the situation: The way was long and lonely. There were perils of robbers and wild beasts. Then add to these the fact that they were carrying a tremendous amount of treasure for God’s house.

Thousands of dollars in silver and in gold. This treasure was committed to holy men. 2 Peter 1:21.

This should help us to understand Ezra’s concern.

Moses and the Israelites had the pillar of fire and cloud. Ezra had no visible signs from God. The priests bearing the ark of the covenant.

To compound the situation, despite the king’s offer of a band of soldiers to guard them on the way, Ezra had refused this, and said in effect, “God was able to look after them on the way.”

The moment of truth has arrived, so Ezra called for fasting and prayer and besought God for His help. Romans 8.

v. 31—The four month journey is covered in this verse. Note the glowing testimony. “He delivered us from the hand of the enemy.” “He delivered us from those that lay in wait by the way.”

Is God less able to take care of His own today? Psalm 34:7.

Illustrate this by telling missionary story.

Elisha at Dothan—2 Kings 6. “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” Elisha answered, “Fear not; for they who are with us are more than they who are with them.” “Lord I pray you, open his eyes, that he may see.” And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, etc.

The God who lived in Ezra’s time is just the same today.

v. 32—At last Jerusalem was reached. They rested three days.

v. 33—Then came the day of reckoning when account had to be made of the treasure committed to them.

The gold and the silver were weighed, the test is made.

Praise God the priests were found faithful. 12 priests.

Their godly character was vindicated. Verse 28 says that they were “holy men” engaged in “holy business.”

We Christians today have delivered into our keeping veritable treasures:

1. The faith which was once delivered unto the saints—Jude 3.

2. We are stewards of the mysteries of God.

3. An elder is a steward of God in a special way.

4. Every one of us has a fight from God and we have to use this as a good steward.

Beloved the day of reckoning is coming. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10.

2 Corinthians 3:12-15—Every man's work will be manifest.

The fire will consume the wood, hay and stubble. The gold, silver and precious stones will remain. For our work that stands the fire we will be rewarded. For that which the fire consumes we will suffer loss. Picture a person standing in heaven, saved but denuded of all blessing or reward.

Consider Matthew 25:14-30. Parable of the talents.

Ezra 9 & 10

Ezra 9

At the end of chapter 8 we see a separated people rejoicing in God.

This was the day they had prayed for.

In Babylon they had “sat down and wept when they remembered Zion.” Psalm 137.

How can we sing the Lord’s song in captivity? Hung their harps on trees.

Now their dreams and aspirations were fulfilled, they were in the land, the Temple had been built, they were praising and worshipping God, the odor of their sacrifices filled the air.

When they had been in the land for some time Ezra was given some very disturbing news. See verses 1-2.

Some of the chief men reported the grievous lack of separation.

The people were involved, also the priests and Levites, who should have been the spiritual leaders.

Further, in disobedience to God’s command (Deuteronomy 7:1-6) some of the men had married heathen wives.

This resulted in the “holy seed” becoming unholy.

It also created a mixed multitude, which God abhors.

This “holy seed” was set apart for and to God.

Sad to say it had mixed with wicked, idolatrous people, had lost its holy character and was no different from the wicked nations around them. The unfortunate thing was that the princes and rulers were the first to sin. They ought to have known better.

This situation was very grievous to Ezra, as it must have been to God. See v. 3-4.

Note the rending of the garment and the pulling of the hair. The rending of the garment was a common oriental way of manifesting sorrow it is mentioned frequently in the Bible. The plucking out of the hair by the roots was not so common.

This possibly shows evidence of unusual grief and great moral indignation. Ezra was appalled.

Let us pause here and consider what brought about this outward outburst of grief:

1. Amalgamation with the world, including worshipping at the world's shrine.
2. Open disobedience to the Word of God.
3. The holy character of the holy seed was lost.
4. This rebellion against God was led by the leaders of the nation.

Can the same situation arise today? Without a doubt. The whole situation could be brought under the banner of "backsliding."

Solomon's description of backsliding is, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Proverbs 14:14.

How does it all begin? Usually it is a gradual thing.

1. Neglect of prayer and Bible study is usually the first thing.

2. Keeping the wrong company and going to wrong places lure us away from the Lord.

3. Compromise with the world spells spiritual disaster.

The end result is that there is no difference between the backslider and the unsaved around.

While this condition in any believer brings sorrow to God's heart, yet there is always a welcome to the repentant one.

The prodigal son—1 John 1.

While these people were out of Babylon, Babylon was still in them.

Ezra remained in this attitude of sorrow for several hours.

"Until the time of the evening sacrifice." The sacrifice speaks of atonement.

He then "fell on his knees and spread out his hands."

His prayer is a confession. Vs. 5-15. In its entirety it is a confession of sin.

No request of any kind is to be found in it.

Ezra also identifies himself with his people.

Verse 6:

1. He compared their sins to a flood that had risen to cover them, and which had grown to the heavens.

2. He openly confessed that they had disobeyed God's Word—Deuteronomy 7:3.

3. He also said that the afflictions that had come to the nation were far less than they deserved.

4. Total annihilation was what they deserved.

5. Finally Ezra threw himself and the nation on the mercy of God.

Ezra 10 The Beginning of Revival

v. 1—Note Ezra's humiliation.

He prayed, confessed, wept, and cast himself down.

As he sat there in his misery and abject humiliation for several hours, many of the spiritually minded people gathered around him.

They too were smitten with grief and they joined Ezra in his bitter weeping.

v. 2-4—Shechaniah became the spokesman for the people. He confessed their wrongdoing, then suggested a remedy: "He says, 'There is hope for Israel.'" He made a covenant with God to put away all heathen wives and children.

Ezra was asked to supervise this matter.

v. 6—Note again the grief of Ezra. Prayer and fasting.

This is what is lacking in our day. So many make light of sin and worldliness. There is little heart-searching, true humiliation, and self-judgment.

Beloved brethren, this is the spirit of Laodicea.

This is the way to revival, the only way.

The prelude to all revival, whether individually or collectively, is confession and repentance of sin, a return to the Word and intense prayer and weeping. Psalm 126.

May each of us say, "Lord, send a revival and let it begin in me."

v. 10—Within three days the people had assembled. The king's business demands haste. They trembled with emotion and it was very wet.

This was a traumatic experience, families were about to be broken up.

Arrangements were no doubt made for the care of those concerned.

"The dearest idol I have known," etc.

Ezra reminded them that they must go through with this thing.

Not only were the foreign wives to go but there was to be no fraternizing with the heathen. (Absolute separation)

This was the only thing which would turn God's wrath away and ensure His blessing.

See verse 15 this point. Note marginal reference.

v. 17—The matter was completed in 3 months.

The final feature of Ezra's book is a list of men who had taken "strange wives."

One has divided the list as follows.

Seventeen priests, of these, four were in the family of the high priest. Ten Levites. Eighty-six people.

Total 113. 25% of the offenders were religious leaders.

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."

Some of these men's names appear on the first list commended for their faithfulness.

God took note of this and made a record.

He also made public a record of those who had miserably failed. The judgment seat of Christ.

The book of Ezra records real spiritual advances on the part of the people of God.

The temple had been built.

Spiritual revival had come to the people as they realized the importance of living separate lives.