

2019 Through the Bible Reading: Bible Study Support

The Book of Ezra	
<p>Background (Who, what, why, when)</p>	<p>The generally accepted view is that Ezra is the author of the book (along with 1 and 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah) although it cannot be one hundred percent confirmed. Ezra himself was a “priest, scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD” (Ezra 7:11). He led the second of three groups of Israelites returning to Jerusalem from Babylon. He was a devout man, firmly established in the Law as the basis of his faith.</p> <p>The book of Ezra covers an overall timeframe of more than eighty years (538-457 B.C) which can be divided into two segments. The first segment (chapters 1-6), covers approximately twenty-three years and includes the first postexilic return under Zerubbabel and includes the reconstruction of the temple. Around 538 B.C., God moved on the heart of King Cyrus of Persia who was the ruler in Babylon at the time of the first events in the book of Ezra. As a result, after over sixty years in Babylonian captivity, King Cyrus issued an edict stating that willing Jews could return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and city. Through opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of the region, God raised up the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah who call the people to complete the task despite the opposition. The rebuilt temple was completed and dedicated in 515 B.C.</p> <p>The second segment (chapters 7-10) occurs approximately sixty years later (458 B.C.), as another group of exiles returns to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra. This group, who was sent by a different Persian king, Artaxerxes, came with additional finances and valuables that would enhance the temple worship. Ezra was also commissioned to appoint leaders in Jerusalem to oversee the people.</p> <p>In Jerusalem, Ezra assumed a revivalist type of ministry for the period of approximately one year. After that, it is believed that he likely lived as an influential private citizen into the time of Nehemiah. A devout priest, Ezra finds an Israel nation that had adopted many of the pagan inhabitants’ practices and he calls Israel to repentance and to a renewed submission to the Law, even to the point of calling the Israelite men to divorce their pagan wives.</p> <p><u>Outline of Ezra</u> The return under Zerubbabel 1:1-2:70 The temple reconstruction process 3:1-6:22 The return under Ezra 7:1-8:36 Ezra’s reform 9:1-10:44</p>
<p>Major Themes in Ezra</p>	<p>Two major themes emerge from the book of Ezra: God’s faithfulness and humanity’s unfaithfulness.</p> <p>It was the unfaithfulness of God’s people that led the Israelites into the Babylonian captivity in the first place. But the book of Ezra reveals God’s faithfulness, in that, He kept His promise found in Jeremiah 25:12 that the Babylonian captivity would eventually end. God then faithfully provides leadership (Zerubbabel and Ezra) for the Israelites to follow. Once back in Jerusalem, the Israelites become discouraged because of the opposition they received from the pagan inhabitants in the surrounding area. In response, God faithfully raised up Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to complete the task.</p>

	<p>Finally, the people prove unfaithful in that they strayed from the truth of God's Word and God responds by sending Ezra to call the people to repentance and renew to their faith and trust in the Word of God. Throughout the book of Ezra, God's faithfulness is contrasted with the people's unfaithfulness. The good news is that in every occasion, God's faithfulness triumphs!</p>
Personal Application	<p>The book of Ezra provides us with a reminder of how easily God's people can lose heart and depart from the truth. Even as we witness God fulfilling His promises, believers can easily forget or loosen the belt on the spiritual and moral distinctives that characterize and set us apart as a royal priesthood. God calls us to walk in obedience to His word in every area of our lives and the sooner we assume that role, the better positioned we are to participate in what God is doing.</p>
Memory Verse	<p><i>"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"</i> (Ezra 7:10 NKJV).</p>
Practical Application to memory verse	<p>Ezra exemplifies a heart that avoids that which is displeasing to God. He also was committed to upholding a Kingdom mindset in all of his dealings. Be challenged each morning to <i>prepare your heart to seek the Law of the Lord and to do it.</i></p>