

Tapes For Growing Christians

Study Guide for
EZRA

Growing Christians Ministries
Box 5757, River Forest, IL 60305
growingchristians.org

lesson 1

A Summary of Events that Took Place Leading Up to the Return of the Jews from Their Captivity in Babylon Ezra 1:1-11

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. God moves the hearts of kings to fulfill His good word. (Ezra 1:1)
2. God moves the hearts of His people to accomplish His good will. (Ezra 1:5)

practical applications

1. Have you returned God's stolen property?
2. Let God do more than just open the door.

questions

1. God allowed the kingdom of Judah to be conquered. By whom was the kingdom conquered?
Why did God allow the kingdom to be conquered?
2. What was the date of the destruction of Solomon's temple?
3. Where were the Jewish people held in captivity and for how long?
4. Who was Cyrus and what did he do for God's people, the Jews?
5. How many Jews returned to Jerusalem at that time? Under whose leadership did they return?
6. What was their great project upon returning to Jerusalem?
7. Why was the project delayed?
8. Name the prophets who motivated the people to resume the rebuilding of the house of the Lord.

answers

1. God allowed the kingdom to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies because of Judah's sins of idolatry and immorality.
2. 586 B.C.
3. In Babylon for seventy years.
4. Cyrus was king of Persia. He overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. King Cyrus issued a royal decree which allowed and encouraged the captive Jews to return to their homeland.
5. About 50,000 Jews returned to their homeland under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
6. To rebuild the temple of the Lord that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.
7. At first the project went well and the foundation of the new temple was laid. But then, because of discouragement and apathy and enemy threats, the work was halted for 15-16 years.
8. Haggai and Zechariah.

discuss / consider

1. *"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation through all his kingdom...."* (Ezra 1:1) The Persian Empire did not follow the one true God, but God moved the heart of this man, Cyrus the king, to fulfill the word of the Lord as spoken by Jeremiah. Read Jeremiah 29:10. More than 200 years before this time, the prophet Isaiah had predicted the rise of Cyrus by name. See Isaiah 44:28.

Can God do the same for us today? Are you facing a major difficulty or decision in your personal life right now, where someone's heart has to be moved? Trust God! God has promised in His word that He wants to bless us, and He can move even the heart of a king to fulfill His good word.

2. *"...all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord..."* (Ezra 1:5).

When God stirs the hearts of His people, it's amazing what can be accomplished. It was no small project to organize 50,000 people to travel about 900 miles on foot. And beyond that, even those who did not return to Jerusalem were moved and motivated to give generously to the project.

God moved the heart of a king to fulfill His good word. God moved the hearts of His people to accomplish His good will. God can do the same today. Recall some projects that have been blessed by God when He moved in the hearts of His people – first, as to need, then by motivation of heart to see the vision become a reality.

challenge

1. The articles mentioned in Ezra 1:7-11 were temple treasures that had been stolen from the house of the Lord by the Babylonians. Now they were being returned to Jerusalem for the rebuilt temple. What is the spiritual lesson here? If you are a believer, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:19). Before you became a Christian you used your time and talent and money for your own interests. But now, as a believer, you must ask, "How much of your time have you returned? And your talent? And your ability? And your money? All of these things have been given to you. Return them to God to glorify Him.

2. Let God do more than just open the door. *"...let them help with money and goods, besides the freewill offerings..."* (Ezra 1:4) God not only opened the door for the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but He also provided for their return. God not only moved the heart of the king, but He moved the hearts of the Persian people as well. Think of the implications for that to happen today! When God opens doors, he provides the means to go through those open doors. Wait on the Lord. Let God do more than just open the door.

memorize

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom...." Ezra 1:1

"Whoever is left, let them help him...besides the freewill offerings for the house of God..." Ezra 1:4

lesson 2

A Record of All the Jewish Captives in Babylon Who Decided to Return to Jerusalem Under the Leadership of Zerubbabel Ezra 2:1-70

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. God keeps records of the activities of His people. (Ezra 2:1-61)
2. God keeps records of the attitudes of His people. (Ezra 2:68-70)

practical application

1. Let's sing unto the Lord.

questions

1. List three categories of people who had been carried away to Babylon and then returned to Jerusalem and Judah.
2. Why did Cyrus issue his edict in 538 B.C. allowing Jewish people to return to their homeland?
3. How many Jewish captives returned to Jerusalem under the edict of Cyrus? How do we know this?
4. Which other book of Scripture is similar to Ezra 2 concerning this first return of the Jews to their land?
5. Read Ezra 2:63. What is the Urim and Thummim?

answers

1. The leaders, the families, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, the sons of Solomon's servants.
2. Cyrus was a polytheist, and he wanted to appease the gods of all the nations. But we know that God was working behind the scenes in all of this to accomplish His good purposes for Israel. *"The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus..." (Ezra 1:1)*
3. About 50,000. Add the numbers in Ezra 2:64-65.
4. The historical record in Nehemiah 10-12 is similar to Ezra 2.
5. We don't know exactly, but Exodus 28:30 says that the Urim and Thummim were associated with the breastplate of the high priest and were used for making decisions. They may have been precious stones, used like lots to determine God's will in some situations.

discuss / consider

1. Why did God include this long list of names? It was not only to show the historical importance of this event, but to show us that He keeps track of the activities of His people – then and today. God knew all about them and what they were doing, and the same is true today. God keeps records. He knows all about you. This can be both a great comfort to us, and a warning to us to live our lives for Him.
2. *"They came to the house of the Lord..." (Ezra 2:68)* This verse does not say that the people returned to the ruins of the temple, but rather to the house of the Lord. Even though the former temple was in ruins, it was still the house of the Lord in the mind of God and in the minds of the people. What a great attitude! How do you look at things? Do you look at them as already being accomplished for God?
"...they freely offered for the house of God..." (Ezra 2:68-69) The people gave willingly according to their ability. Your true heart attitude is reflected by the amount you have left after giving to the Lord, or by the amount you are using for other things. Ponder this. See 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.

challenge

1. The singers are given special mention. See Ezra 2:65, 70. These were the men and women designated to lead and promote that aspect of worship to the Lord. Singing was important then in worship and it is important now in worship. Do you thank the leaders who give great amounts of their time and ability in preparing music for worship? See Colossians 3:16.

memorize

"These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city." Ezra 2:1

"...they had two hundred men and women singers." Ezra 2:65

"...when they came to the house of the Lord, they offered freely according to their ability..." Ezra 2:68-69

lesson 3

The Jewish Captives Who Had Returned Home from Babylon First Built the Altar of the Lord and then They Laid the Foundation for the New Temple Ezra 3:1-13

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. The work of the Lord proceeds with organization. (Ezra 3:1-9)
2. The work of the Lord proceeds with emotion. (Ezra 3:10-13)

practical application

1. Go to the Lord when you are afraid.

questions

1. Who was Jeshua? Who was Zerubbabel?
2. The returned captives did first things first. What was the order they followed?
3. How can the dates of the seventy years of captivity be calculated?

answers

1. Jeshua was the high priest. Zerubbabel was the leader who brought the Jewish people back from captivity.
2. First, they built the altar of sacrifice so that they could worship and obey the Lord. Second, in obedience to the law, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Third, they began to offer all the sacrifices and keep all the feasts in accordance with the law. Fourth, they began to build the foundation of the temple of the Lord.
3. The work on the foundation of the temple began in 535 B.C. Seventy years earlier, in 605 B.C., the first phase of the fall of the kingdom of Judah took place. Another way to calculate the seventy years is from 586 B.C. when the temple was destroyed, down to 516 B.C., when the temple was completed.

discuss / consider

1. The work of the Lord proceeds with organization. This principle is illustrated in the record before us. First, the people were organized as to their priorities. The first thing they did upon returning to Jerusalem was to build the altar of the Lord, (because worship of the Lord was their top priority). Then, worship led to obedience (they obeyed the Lord as to all the offerings and feasts that were given in the law). After that, they were organized as to their preparations. And, importantly, the people were unified.

Are we organized as to our priorities? Are worship and obedience to the Lord in the number one place in your life? Review the past week. List your priorities. To organize the work of the Lord is biblical. It doesn't just happen automatically. Check out the organization of the work of the Lord both in your church gathering and in your own life. Are you, with other believers, of one mind in serving the Lord?

2. As the work of the Lord proceeded, it was a time of great emotion. The people sang and the music was loud, and the people shouted for joy. But some wept. The work of the Lord proceeds with emotion today as well. Sometimes it is with weeping, sometimes it is with celebration, and sometimes with both joy and sorrow mingling. How is it with the work of the Lord in your spheres of service?

challenge

1. When you are frightened, where do you turn, to whom do you go? *"Though fear came upon them...they turned to the Lord (in worship and obedience)..." (Ezra 3:3)* Fear comes in all shapes and sizes – physical danger, sickness, security, the unknown. Do you instinctively turn to the Lord? God loves to hear our prayers when we are afraid because it shows our dependence on Him. That's the right place to go!
See Isaiah 12:2.

memorize

"...the people gathered together as one man..." Ezra 3:1

*"Though fear had come upon them...they set the altar...they offered burnt offerings to the Lord..."
Ezra 3:3*

"...everyone willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord." Ezra 3:5

"...all those who came out of the captivity...began work on the house of the Lord." Ezra 3:8

"And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord..." Ezra 3:11

lesson 4

A Record of the Opposition that the Jews Faced from the Surrounding Foreigners Ezra 4:1-24

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. The work of the Lord is hindered by compromise. (Ezra 4:2-3)
2. The work of the Lord is hindered by opposition. (Ezra 4:4-24)

practical application

1. Don't fear the opposition.

questions

1. Most of the Jews who returned from the exile in Babylon were from the tribes of _____ and _____.
2. Who were the adversaries of Judah? Give a brief history of these enemies of Judah.
3. Why were these adversaries unwelcome into the community of the Jews?
4. How long did the "unwelcome" policy continue?
5. Refer to John 4:9. How does this relate to the "unwelcome" policy?
6. What tactics were employed by the enemies of Judah to sidetrack their temple project?

answers

1. Judah and Benjamin.
2. They were primarily Samaritans. When the Assyrians conquered the northern ten tribes of Israel in the 8th Century B.C., the Assyrian kings repopulated the land with foreign peoples. These foreign people began to intermarry with the people of northern Israel who had been left in the land. This was the beginning of the Samaritan people.
3. The Samaritans were a mixed race.
4. Right on down until the time of the Lord Jesus.
5. When the Lord Jesus asked a woman of Samaria for a drink, the woman said to Him, *“How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*
6. At first they tried the tactic of compromise, and when that didn’t work, they went to open opposition.

discuss / consider

1. *“Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do...” (Ezra 4:2).* The Samaritans did not want the Jews to prosper in the building of the temple, so they tried to infiltrate their ranks by compromise. The Samaritans said that they both sought the same God, but in effect the Samaritans practiced a syncretic form of religion, where parts of the Jewish law were mixed in with their pagan religions.

Satan practices the same tactic today when he tries to get Christians to compromise the truth. For example, some say that there are many roads to heaven, but Jesus is the only way of salvation. There is no one-world religion, as some would argue. But the truth cannot be compromised. Zerubbable stood firm (see Ezra 4:3), and so must we as believers stand firm. *“I exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith.” (Jude 3).*

2. There was a long history of opposition to the building of the Lord’s temple and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In Ezra 4:24, we read that the work ceased, and the temple project was put on hold for fifteen years because of the opposition.

The work of the Lord was hindered by opposition then, and it is hindered by opposition today. The opposition uses many of Satan’s tactics: threats, slander, intimidation, force. Try getting biblical values back into your local schools, for example, and watch the opposition come forward. Think of other biblical values that are hindered by opposition when Christians take a stand for the Lord.

challenge

1. Do you fear the opposition? Look to the Lord for strength and courage to face the opposition. Christians who stand firm in the faith know the joy of walking with the Lord. Does your joy shine forth when you are persecuted and hindered in the name of Jesus?

memorize

“When the adversaries heard... that the Jews were building the temple of the Lord, they said, ‘Let us build with you...for we seek your God as you do...’ Ezra 4:1-2

“But Zerubbabel...said, ‘You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel.’” Ezra 4:3

“The people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building.” Ezra 4:4

lesson 5

**Work Begins Again on the Temple of the Lord,
Fifteen Years after the Foundation Was Laid,
and Opposition to the Work Continues
Ezra 5:1-17**

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. The teaching of the word will motivate God's people. (Ezra 5:1-2)
2. The tactics of the enemy should challenge God's people. (Ezra 5:3-13)

practical application

1. Remember, God is in control of the opposition.

questions

1. The Lord's new rebuilt temple is sometimes called _____.
2. In 538 B.C., how many Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon? Under whose leadership did they return?
3. The foundation for the new temple was laid in 535 B.C., but the work was delayed for fifteen years, all the way down to 520 B.C. Why was the work delayed?
4. It was during the reign of Darius I of Persia that God graciously raised up two prophets. Who were these prophets, and what was the result of their ministry?
5. What was the content of the ministry of each of these prophets?

answers

1. Zerubbabel's Temple.
2. About 50,000 returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
3. Because of opposition from the surrounding foreign peoples and because of discouragement and apathy from within..
4. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. As a result of their ministries God's people were motivated to do the work of the Lord, and the rebuilt temple was completed.
5. Haggai exhorted the people based on God's word. Zechariah gave encouragement to the people based on God's word.

discuss / consider

1. The teaching of God's word will motivate God's people. Haggai gave a series of fiery sermonettes based on God's word, exhorting the people to do the work of the Lord. Zechariah gave a series of visions encouraging the people to do the work of the Lord. Exhortation and encouragement from the word of the Lord are both needed to motivate God's people – then and today.

"Is it time for you to dwell in your paneled houses, and the temple of the Lord to lie in ruins? Consider your ways!" (Haggai 1:4-5). This is an example of Haggai's ministry, and it is just as convicting today as it was then. *"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the Lord. The Lord will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem.*" (Zechariah 2:10-12). This is an example of Zechariah's ministry, a great encouragement to His people. God would dwell in their midst. The word of the Lord has promises considering the glorious future of His people. Are you both convicted and encouraged by the word of the Lord? A steady diet of expository ministry from the word of God is the key to the best kind of church (and individual) growth. Be diligent in availing yourself to such a diet.

2. Persian officials challenged and opposed God's people during the rebuilding of the Lord's Temple. Both challenge and opposition to the Lord's work and to the Lord's people should be considered as an opportunity to witness for the Lord. When such a witness is based on a presentation of the true God, the opposition cannot deny the fact that God blesses His people and they are committed to His work.

This witness was true then, and it is true today. God's people in the days of Ezra used challenges from the opposition as opportunities to witness for the Lord God. Paul used challenges from the opposition to witness for the Lord. (See 1 Corinthians 16:9). See also Paul's witness before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 25, 26, 28). Note also the response to Paul's witness by these persons. Is your faith being challenged right now by the opposition? Use it as an opportunity to share your faith!

challenge

1. Although Satan tries, he cannot make God's work cease. Why? Because God is in control of the opposition. *"No temptation (testing) has overtaken you...but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able..." (1 Corinthians 10:13).* Aren't you thankful that God has His eye on you, even as He did those in Ezra's day? (Ezra 5:5) Are you continuing faithful in the work that God has for you to do?

memorize

"The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them." Ezra 5:1

"...the leaders and the people rose up and began to build the house of God...and the prophets of God were with them, helping them." Ezra 5:2

"...the opposition challenged them." Ezra 5:3

"But the eye of their God was upon them..." Ezra 5:5

lesson 6

**An Amazing Turnaround of Events –
The Opposition’s Strategy Backfired and the
Rebuilding of the Temple Is Completed
Ezra 6:1-22**

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. God can cause the enemy’s strategy to backfire.
2. God can cause His people’s projects to sure-fire.

practical application

1. Don’t determine God’s blessing only by numbers.

questions

1. An official letter was sent to whom? By whom? What was it about?
2. What happened as a result?
3. What was the “execution” clause of King Darius’ decree?
4. We are familiar with the phrase, “The laws of the Medes and Persians.” Where did this come from?
5. When Darius issued his edict in favor of the Jews, did it mean that he had become a believer in the one true God of Israel?

answers

1. An official letter was sent to King Darius by some Persian officials to search the royal archives for the edict of Cyrus. The Persian officials wanted to stop the Jews from rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem.
2. The search was made and it proved that King Cyrus had issued the decree about twenty years before this time. The Jews had been given the authority to rebuild their temple. So King Darius issued another decree, backing up the original edict of Cyrus.
3. See Ezra 6:11-12. If someone altered King Darius' decree, his house would be pulled down, and from the timbers a scaffold would be erected upon which to hang the guilty person.
4. It came from such passages as Ezra 6:11-12. Edicts of the Persian kings were serious business, and were not to be altered under penalty of death.
5. No. Like the other kings, he was a polytheist, wanting to appease the gods of all the nations. King Darius recognized that the God of Israel was a strong God, so he thought that prayers to this God would be helpful to him and to his sons. See Ezra 6:10.

discuss / consider

1. The Persian officials thought they had won their case and that the work on the Jewish temple would be shut down, but God had other plans. Not only did King Darius issue the decree to continue the work on the temple, but He said that the cost would be paid at the king's (governor's) expense (Ezra 6:8). What a turnabout! God can cause the enemy's strategy to backfire. Note similar examples, both in history and in the present time. Note especially Christ's work on the cross where Satan thought he had triumphed.
2. God can cause His people's projects to sure-fire. Look up the meaning of this word in the dictionary. How does the concept of sure-fire relate to this account? Will your plans sure-fire? Take heart! If your plans and projects are of the Lord they will prosper. See 1 Corinthians 15:58.

challenge

1. God's blessing is not determined by numbers. Compare Ezra 6:17 with 2 Chronicles 7:5. God was just as pleased with Zerubbable's sacrifices as He was with Solomon's sacrifices. We have a tendency to think that God is blessing because of large numbers. Not necessarily so!

memorize

"King Darius issued a decree and a search was made in the archives..." Ezra 6:1

"King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem. 'Let the house be rebuilt..." Ezra 6:3

"The Jews celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy..." Ezra 6:16

"...the Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in to the work of the house of God..." Ezra 6:22

lesson 7

The Return of Ezra to Jerusalem from Babylon, along with about 2,000 more Jewish Exiles Ezra 7:1-28

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. Commitment is essential for God's blessing.
2. Discipline is essential for God's blessing.

practical application

1. Don't forget the third phase of the commitment cycle.

questions

1. The foundation of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem had been laid in 535 B.C, but the temple was not completed until 516 B.C. Why was there such a long delay?
2. Name the two prophets who motivated the people to continue the work on the temple project.
3. Zerubbabel led 50, 000 Jews from captivity in Babylon back to Jerusalem. Under whose leadership and how many was the next group of Jews to return from captivity?
4. How long was the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem?
5. What is the third phase of the commitment cycle?

answers

1. The delay in the project was because of opposition on the one hand, and a problem with priorities on the other hand. The opposition took the form of legal threat from the surrounding foreign peoples, and legal delay by the Persian officials.
2. Haggai and Zechariah.
3. Nearly sixty years later, Ezra led about 2,000 more captives back to Jerusalem.
4. The journey took four months. They walked about 900 miles.
5. Commitment is essential for blessing, and there will be blessing if there is commitment. The third phase of the commitment cycle is praise. And praise will actually result in further commitment and blessing.

discuss / consider

1. The phrase, "*The hand of God was upon him,*" is used in Chapter 7 concerning Ezra. See Ezra 7:6, 9, 28. What a great phrase to describe the blessing of God. Have you experienced the good hand of God upon you during your life as a believer (as well, of course, as in your salvation)? The key to blessing is commitment. "*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*" (Ezra 7:10) Ezra was a deeply committed believer. As you prepare your heart to seek the word of God and to do it, it will help you to focus on the Lord's call upon your life. How deep is your commitment? Commitment is essential for God's blessing.

2. "*You, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set people who may judge others, all who know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them.*" (Ezra 7:25) Ezra was given governing authority as well as authorization and funding for his mission. No matter how much blessing, a structure of authority and discipline is still needed. What was true in Ezra's day is still true today. Discipline is essential for God's blessing – in the family, in the church, in any ministry. How is this true in these spheres of your life?

challenge

1. "*Blessed be the Lord God ... He has extended mercy to me... so I was encouraged, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me.*" (Ezra 7:27-28) Commitment is essential for blessing, and if there is commitment, there will be blessing. Why is it that some Christians take blessing for granted? Listen, believer, and hear – blessings should be followed by praise. Are you a praising Christian?

memorize

"Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law... which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him."
Ezra 7:6

"Ezra began his journey from Babylon and he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him." Ezra 7:9

"Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." Ezra 7:10

"Ezra, whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God." Ezra 7:18

"I was encouraged as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me..." Ezra 7:28

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lesson 8

**The Record of Those Who Returned with Ezra to Jerusalem
and Some of the Details Concerning the Journey
Ezra 8:1-36**

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. A godly leader prays about everything.
2. A godly leader uses common sense.

practical application

1. Remember, worship comes before service.

questions

1. Name the three phases going into the captivity.
2. Name the three phases coming out of the captivity.

answers

1. Going in: Phase 1 - In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar entered Judah and took Daniel and others as captives to Babylon. Phase 2 - In 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar again entered Judah and captured Jerusalem and took Ezekiel and others, including the king as captives to Babylon.

Phase 3 - In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar completely conquered the kingdom of Judah and destroyed the beautiful temple that Solomon had built.

2. Coming out: Phase 1 - In 538 B.C., about 50,000 Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel as a result of the edict of Cyrus the Persian. Under phase 1, the temple was finally rebuilt in 516 B.C.

Phase 2 - In 458 B.C., Ezra returned with about 2,000 Jews.

Phase 3 - In 445 B.C., Nehemiah returned and motivated the people to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, walls that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

discuss / consider

1. Ezra was a godly leader. He not only had natural leadership abilities, but he had God-given spiritual ability to lead the people, as well. Ezra Chapters 7-10 are great chapters to study in reference to "Spiritual Leadership." What is the foundation necessary for being a godly leader? We learn from Ezra, "*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the lord, and to do it, and to teach it.*" (Ezra 7:10) Ezra was committed to the Lord and to His word and His work. Notice, also, how Ezra proclaimed a time of prayer and fasting before they started on their four-month journey. See Ezra 8:21. A godly leader prays about everything.

2. Read Ezra 8:24-34. Ezra sought out people and gave them responsibility, and there was accountability. The men took their responsibility seriously. Notice that Ezra as a godly leader did not handle the money himself, thus avoiding the possibility of temptation and for appearance sake. A godly leader uses common sense.

challenge

1. Read Ezra 8:35-36. When the exiles with Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, they worshiped the Lord with sacrifices. This is the divine order – worship before service. When you truly worship the Lord, it is bound to result in some kind of service. Are you too busy serving to worship?

memorize

"The good hand of our God was upon us...we were brought a man of understanding." Ezra 8:18

"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us..." Ezra 8:21

"The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him..." Ezra 8:22

"So we fasted and entreated our God...and He answered our prayer." Ezra 8:23

"You are holy to the Lord..." Ezra 8:28

"The hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us..." Ezra 8:31

"They gave support to the people and the house of God." Ezra 8:36

lesson 9

Ezra Is Informed of a Serious Problem – Some of the Men Who Had Returned from the Exile in Babylon Had Taken Wives for Themselves from the Pagan People Who Were Dwelling in the Land. As a Result, We See Ezra’s Great Concern and His Prayer of Confession Ezra 9:1-15

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. When God’s people sin there should be more remorse.
2. When God’s people sin there should be confession.

practical application

1. Don’t be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

questions

1. About how many Jews were in the first phase of the return from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon? Under whose leadership did they return?
2. During this first return, the Jewish temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, was rebuilt and finally finished in the year _____ B.C.
3. Name the two prophets who motivated the people to finish the job of rebuilding the temple.
4. Fifty-eight years after the temple was rebuilt, there was a second return of Jews from Babylon. Under whose leadership did they return?
5. Some of the Jews were in direct disobedience to God’s law stated in Deuteronomy 7:1-4. How did they disobey?

answers

1. About 50,000 under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 538 B.C.
2. In the year 516 B.C.
3. Haggai and Zechariah.
4. Under the leadership of Ezra.
5. They had intermarried with the pagan foreigners in the land.

discuss / consider

1. *“When Ezra heard of the sin of intermarriage with the foreigners, he tore his garment and robe, and plucked out some of the hair of his head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to him, because of the transgression...” (Ezra 9:3-4)*

Ezra showed the signs of his day of mourning and remorse. When he heard of the problem, he was shocked and appalled. When sin is committed, there should be a sense of guilt and remorse in the family of God. Have you found this so in your church? If so, is there also the attitude, *“There but for the grace of God, go I?”*

2. *“Ezra arose from his fasting and fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord God.” (Ezra 9:5)*

One of the great prayers of confession in the Bible is found here in Ezra 9:5-15. Notice several truths that are recognized and acknowledged in this prayer:

- 1) Sin is a serious thing
- 2) Sin has an effect on others
- 3) Several attributes of God are listed

Can you imagine what it would be like if our own nation would pray a prayer like this? What a reawakening and revival this would bring across American and in our churches. When people sin, there should be confession. Could you do anything about encouraging such praying?

challenge

1. Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. This is a practical application from Ezra 9. God’s people had married unbelievers. Make sure that you make decisions based on the truth of God’s word.

memorize

“The people of Israel have not separated themselves from the people of the lands...” Ezra 9:1

“When I heard of this sin, I tore my garment and my robe...and sat down astonished.” Ezra 9:3

“I arose from my fasting...I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God.” Ezra 9:5

“O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.” Ezra 9:6

“And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God...to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.” Ezra 9:8

“And now, O our God, what shall we say...for we have forsaken Your commandments.” Ezra 9:10

lesson 10

**The Problem of Intermarriage with the Foreign Women Who Followed the Pagan Religions
Is Investigated and the Offenders Are Disciplined
Ezra 10:1-44**

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. The discipline of God's people is demanded.
2. The discipline of God's people is difficult.

practical application

1. Let's be firm but flexible like Ezra.

questions

1. Which language was common in Ezra's day? (About one-fourth of the Book of Ezra was written in this language)
2. The first two verses of the book of Ezra are identical to the last three verses of 2 Chronicles. What does this suggest to us?
3. Ezra was confronted with a major problem. What was the problem?
4. What was the solution to the problem?
5. List a few reasons, as seen in this chapter, why the discipline of God's people is difficult

answers

1. Aramaic. The Jewish people learned to speak Aramaic while they were captives in Babylon.
2. The close connection between these books strongly suggests that Ezra was the author of both of the books of Chronicles.
3. A number of the Jews had intermarried with the heathen women of the land, who followed pagan religions. Some of these marriages produced children.
4. First, there was remorse for the sin and confession of the sin on the part of Ezra for the nation. Then disciplinary action had to be taken.
5. Not everyone is in agreement with the discipline administered, some church leaders are involved in the problem, there are family connections, and the same problem resurfaces.

discuss / consider

1. As a result of Ezra's great prayer of confession, a large number of concerned people gathered in the courts of the temple and joined him in weeping bitterly. When God's people sin, it is right that all of the fellowship be concerned to the point of prayer and weeping together. God is merciful in providing hope when there is discipline. Those who refuse to come would be excluded from the assembly of God's people. The discipline of God's people is demanded. Do you support and encourage your spiritual leaders as they exercise spiritual discipline?
2. The discipline of God's people is difficult. Re-read Ezra 10:9-44. Review the reasons why the discipline of God's people is difficult. Those Jews who had intermarried with the pagan women were to dissolve their marriages. The purity of God's covenant people was to be maintained. This directive was for Israel under the law. It was not given for Christians within the church today. Read 1 Corinthians 7.

challenge

1. Ezra was a firm disciplinarian. He did not back down from his responsibility to discipline for disobedience to God's word. But Ezra was reasonable and flexible because he was a good leader. Re-read Ezra 10:12-14. Whether it be family discipline or discipline in the church, let's be firm but flexible like Ezra.

memorize

"While Ezra was praying and confessing and weeping and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly." Ezra 10:1

"A proclamation was issued to gather at Jerusalem, and whoever would not come, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separate from the assembly of those from the captivity." Ezra 10 7-8

"You have transgressed...now therefore make confession to the Lord God...and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land. All the assembly answered and said..., 'Yes! As you have said, so we must do.'" Ezra 10:10-12