



EZRA *Rebuilding God's House*
Restoring God's People

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EZRA

Lesson 1 Introduction

Ezra stands out in the biblical canon as one of the least disputed books. Certainly, there are some who challenge the authorship and date of the book. However, because it contains no record of miraculous events and no prophecy that gives liberal scholars fits, most are content with the traditional views about the book.

While **Ezra** is a book of history, it is certainly not intended to give us a detailed historical account. Rather, it is a book with a purpose. The discussion in this lesson will look at the book as a whole as we strive to determine that purpose so it can guide us through the rest of our study.

To prepare for this lesson, I encourage you to read through **Ezra** in its entirety at least once in one sitting. Then answer the questions below to be ready for class discussion.

Discussion Questions:

1. Having read the book through at least once, list any keywords in the space below. Keywords are the important words used in the book. Any words whose meaning seem to have significant impact on the book or that are used repeatedly can give us insight into the purpose of the book.
2. List any key passages in the space below and explain why you believe they are key passages.
3. Who is the author of this book? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Based on the content of the book, when was it likely written?
5. What is the historical background of God's people leading up to the book of **Ezra**?

6. What other books in the Bible deal with the same general historical period as **Ezra**?

7. **Ezra 1:1-2** is an almost exact repeat of **II Chronicles 36:22-23**. Clearly, **Ezra** is intended as a sequel to **Chronicles**. What insight does this give you regarding the purpose of **Ezra**?

8. **Ezra** is clearly divided into two major sections. What are they?

9. The two major sections follow parallel outlines. List the parallels between the two major sections of the book of **Ezra** in the space below.

10. What themes do you see in the book?

11. What do you believe was the author's purpose in writing this book?

12. What other interesting information, facts, or points do you believe need to be addressed before entering our focused study on **Ezra**?

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Lesson 2

God Keeps His Promise

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled...” (**Ezra 1:1a**).

Ezra begins with this statement. If we are not careful, we will move right past it and miss one of the greatest lessons found in this book. God keeps His promises. God’s house was rebuilt and His people restored not because of the greatness of the Jews or the specialness of the Temple. Rather, this happened to fulfill God’s promise.

As we learn this lesson from **Ezra**, let’s make sure we bridge the gap into our own lives. We need to remember the promises God has given us and hang on to them. God will keep those promises too.

Discussion Questions:

1. What did God promise would happen to Samaria in **Isaiah 8:4**? When was that promise fulfilled?
2. What did God promise would happen to Judah in **Isaiah 39:5-7**? When was that promise fulfilled?
3. What did God promise would happen to Judah and Jerusalem in **Jeremiah 20:4-6; 21:7-10**? When was that promise fulfilled?
4. What did God promise would happen to the captive Israelites in **Ezekiel 20:33-44**?
5. What did God promise would happen to Judah and then to Babylon in **Jeremiah 25:1-14**?

6. How long did God promise the captivity in Babylon would last in **Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10**? What did God say the Israelites must do for the captivity to end?

7. What did Daniel do as a representative of Israel in **Daniel 9** based on the promise found in **Jeremiah 25 & 29**?

8. According to **Isaiah 44:21-45:7**, who did God promise to use to release the captive Israelites and rebuild the temple?

9. According to **Ezra 1:1**, what does God do about His promises?

10. Consider how many times God has demonstrated His faithfulness. What do passages like **Joshua 23:14; I Kings 8:56; Matthew 24:35; II Timothy 2:13; and Hebrews 6:13-20** say about God and His word and promises?

11. What are some of the promises God has made to us? Make sure to list actual scriptures to support the promises?

12. What causes us to doubt these promises sometimes?

13. Why can we trust God to keep these promises? How can we maintain faith in these promises?

EZRA

Lesson 3 God Uses Cyrus

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (**Ezra 1:2**).

What an amazing statement. While this particular decree has not been unearthed through archaeology, historians have seen enough documentation to know this corresponds with Cyrus's general policy. He granted all captured nations the opportunity to return to their original homes. No doubt, his seeming claim of obeisance to God in this passage was the same kind of homage he would pay to any and all gods as he sought to be protected by them all.

As we examine this verse and the rest of **Ezra 1**, we must not miss the most important tree in this forest. God used Cyrus. God used a pagan king to accomplish His will. If God can use a pagan enemy to accomplish His will, imagine what He can do with those of us who want to honor and glorify Him.

Discussion Questions:

1. What did God say about Cyrus in **Isaiah 44:28**? What would Cyrus accomplish?
2. What did God do for Cyrus according to **Isaiah 45:2-3**?
3. While Cyrus gave lip service to Jehovah God in his proclamation recorded in **II Chronicles 36:23** and **Ezra 1:2**, what does **Isaiah 45:4-5** say about Cyrus and his relationship with the one true God?
4. Why did God use Cyrus according to **Isaiah 45:5-6**?
5. Can you think of any other pagans God used to accomplish His will throughout biblical history? How did God use them?

6. Consider **Matthew 25:14-30**. What often makes us think God cannot use us?

7. What do we need to learn from Cyrus about how well God can use even us?

8. What hope and comfort does **Ephesians 3:20** give us regarding God's ability to use us to His glory?

9. Considering your answers to the previous few questions, how should we live today?

10. What charge did Cyrus give the returning Jews in **Ezra 1:3**?

11. What charge did Cyrus give those who would not be going to Jerusalem in **Ezra 1:4**? How does this parallel the exodus from Egypt centuries earlier?

12. What desecration of Nebuchadnezzar did Cyrus set aright in **Ezra 1:7-11**? Considering **Daniel 5**, why is this correction so appropriate?

13. How does this re-sanctification of the temple vessels foreshadow what God can do with us when we are set free from our captivity of sin?