

From the Garden to Glory

Ezra

Author: Uncertain, possibly Ezra

Timeline: 539 - 457 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:22-23)

Location: Persia to Jerusalem

Category: Historical

Theme: The Return of the Jews from Captivity; The Rebuilding of the Temple

Overview:

The book of Ezra picks up where 2 Chronicles ends. The nation of Israel was allowed to leave Babylon after being in captivity for seventy years. They returned to their homeland, as was prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There were two returns; the first led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (chapters 1-6). At this time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to finish the work they had started. The second return was led by Ezra, to rebuild the spiritual condition of the people (chapters 7-10). Between chapters 6 and 7 there is a period of about fifty-eight years, during which the events of the book of Esther took place.

The book of Ezra speaks of God's faithfulness, as One who keeps His promise through the sovereign protection of His people during their captivity and the eventual return to their homeland.

Introduction:

As we begin our study of the book of Ezra, consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. The book of Ezra describes how God's promises are fulfilled; after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, God's people return to Jerusalem. Consider this quote from Henrietta Mears, "The purposes of God may sometimes seem delayed, but they are never abandoned." How do you react when you are required to wait for God's promises to be fulfilled in your own life? How are these words from Henrietta Mears an encouragement to you?
2. According to The New Open Bible, Ezra was a "godly man marked by strong trust in the Lord, moral integrity, and grief over sin." Explain why each of these characteristics would be necessary for a leader. List at least one thing that you are doing currently to nurture each of these characteristics in your own life.

Jews Return to Jerusalem

Read Ezra 1-3

1. Look at the first chapter of Ezra and note everything you learn about King Cyrus. Who stirred up the heart of King Cyrus? Look at Ezra 1:1 and Proverbs 21:1. What do you learn from these verses about the Lord's sovereignty and His perfect timing? How does this encourage you?
2. Look at 2:68-69. What have *you* offered freely to the Lord? How did you do this? What does it mean to give *according to your ability*? What does this look like in your life?
3. Look at 3:1-7, concentrating on verse 3. When have you obeyed the Lord even though you were afraid? What was the outcome?

Overcoming Opposition

Read Ezra 4-6

1. Look at 4:1-3. The enemy tried to come alongside and offered to build *with* God's people. How did Zerubbabel and Jeshua respond? Why do you think they responded as they did? When has the enemy offered to come alongside and help in your life? What did you do? What was the outcome?
2. Look at 4:4-5 and 24. What was the second tactic that the enemy used to stop the rebuilding of the temple? This tactic was temporarily successful. According to John Mac Arthur, "This caused a 16-year delay (ca. 536-520 B.C.). As a result, the people took more interest in their personal affairs than spiritual matters."

How has the enemy attempted to distract your focus *from* spiritual matters and *onto* personal affairs? How have you resisted him?

3. Look at 5:4-5. Whose "eye" was on the elders of the Jews? The Lord is faithful to protect His work and His people regardless of the opposition. How has He done this in your life?

Ezra's Expedition

Read Ezra 7-9

1. Look at 7:10. Note the pattern of Ezra's preparation: *seek...do...teach*. Why is this order important for you as you seek to follow the Lord's plan for your life? Note the way in which you do each of the following:
 - seek the Law of the Lord
 - do it
 - teach these statutes and ordinances
2. Look at 8:21-23. When have you humbled yourself before God in order to seek the *right way*? How did you do this? How did He

answer you? Why was Ezra ashamed to request an escort from the king? Have you ever been in a similar situation? What did you do and what was the outcome?

3. Look at 9:1-3. What was Ezra's reaction when he was told that God's people had intermarried with pagans? Why do you think he was so grieved? Read Deuteronomy 7:3-4. What was the danger in intermarriage? Look at 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. In addition to intermarriage, in what other ways can believers be yoked together with unbelievers? How do you avoid this?

Summary

As you conclude your study of the book of Ezra consider the following questions and write your answers:

1. What is the most important lesson you have learned from your study of this book? How can you apply this lesson in your life this week?
2. What "new insights" did you learn about the Lord and yourself from your study?
3. List one way in which your study caused you to do each of the following:

Praise and worship the Lord:

Confess an area of sin to the Lord:

Thank the Lord:

Ask for something from the Lord:

From the Garden to Glory

Haggai

Author: Haggai

Timeline: 520 B.C. (after Ezra 5)

Location: Jerusalem

Category: Prophetical, Minor Prophet

Theme: A Wake-up Call to Rebuild the Temple

Overview:

Haggai's message was simple and direct - rebuild the temple. The remnant who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple became preoccupied with their own affairs. They were more concerned with beautifying their own houses rather than the Lord's temple. For sixteen years the work of the temple stood idle. Haggai exhorted the people to reprioritize their lives, to complete the temple and restore proper worship.

Introduction:

As we begin our study of the book of Haggai, consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. Read Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. Haggai and Zechariah were working alongside of one another in ministry. With whom have you worked in ministry? What have you learned from your time with this person? How has this experience enabled you to minister more effectively?

2. According to Jeff Lasseigne, the theme of the book of Haggai is, "Putting God First". List five specific ways you put God first in your daily life.

Haggai's Message

Read Haggai 1 and 2

1. Look at 1:8. The Lord told the people to *go up* to the mountains, to *bring* (back) wood, and to *build* the temple. How is the Lord directing you today in each of these areas?
 - Where does He want you to go?
 - What does He want you to bring back?
 - What is He directing you to build?
2. Haggai 1:1-11 contains a rebuke from the Lord. Look at 1:12-15. How did the people respond to this rebuke? Think about a recent rebuke that you received from the Lord. How did you respond?
3. Look at 2:1-5. The people became discouraged as they were building the new temple. What caused them to be discouraged (verse 3)? What did the Lord say to encourage them? How has the Lord encouraged *you* during times of discouragement in your own life?

Summary

As you conclude your study of the book of Haggai consider the following questions and write your answers:

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- 3.** List one way in which your study caused you to do each of the following:

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Confess an area of sin to the Lord:

Thank the Lord:

Ask for something from the Lord:

From the Garden to Glory

Zechariah

Author: Zechariah

Timeline: 520 B.C. (Ezra 5)

Location: Jerusalem

Category: Prophetical, Minor Prophet

Theme: Future Hope of Israel

Overview:

Zechariah joined with Haggai in encouraging the remnant who had returned to Jerusalem to continue rebuilding the temple. Zechariah's approach was different from Haggai's. Rather than using strong words of exhortation, he sought to encourage the people into action by reminding them that they were not merely building a building. They were building a future as one day the Messiah's glory will inhabit the temple.

While many of the prophecies of the book had a partial application or fulfillment in Zechariah's day, there are many that are still to be fulfilled in the future.

Introduction:

As we begin our study of the book of Zechariah, consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. Zechariah, which means "Yahweh remembers", was a common name in Biblical times. Our God remembers!! He remembered the covenant He made with the children of Israel just as He remembers the promises He has made to us. Make a note of a promise that the Lord

made and remembered (fulfilled) in your life. Thank Him for His faithfulness.

2. As the book of Zechariah begins, the rebuilding of the temple, which had been started twelve years before, was still only partially completed. The Lord directed Zechariah to encourage the people to complete their task. When have you been directed by the Lord to encourage someone to complete a task? How did you do this? What was the person's response? Is there anything you might do differently in the future?

Visions

Read Zechariah 1-6

1. Look at Ezra 5:1-2 and make a note of anything you learn about Zechariah.

2. Look at 1:3. Commenting on this verse, John Mac Arthur says:

Though primarily a book of consolation, the prophet begins with a call to repentance, to preclude any false security on the part of Israel, i.e., thinking that God would bless His chosen people regardless of their spiritual condition.

Look up the word *repent* or *repentance* in a dictionary and write the definition. Why is repentance necessary for true security? What could cause you to have a sense of false security? How do you avoid this?

3. The first six chapters describe Zechariah's eight *night visions*. Look at the following verses and summarize each of these visions:

- A man among the myrtle trees (1:7-17)
- Four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-21)
- A man with a measuring line (2:1-13)
- Cleansing of the high priest (3:1-10)

- The gold lamp stand and two olive trees (4:1-14)
- The flying scroll (5:1-4)
- The woman in a basket (5:5-11)
- The four chariots (6:1-8)

Fasts

Read Zechariah 7-8

1. Summarize 7:4-7. The people seemed to be fasting more out of self-pity than from true sorrow and repentance. Look at Isaiah 58:3-9. Describe the *fast* that pleases the Lord.
2. Look at 7:8-9. How can you do each of the following on a daily basis?
 - execute true justice
 - show mercy and compassion
3. God is called "The Lord of hosts" over 50 times in the book of Zechariah; twenty-four of these instances occur in chapters 7 and 8. According to Sammy Tippit:

The Lord of hosts...is Supreme Ruler of the universe. He is the Captain of all the angelic forces in the heavenly places. There is none that can compare with Him.

Is there an area of your life where you are feeling inadequate, powerless or hopeless? Run to the Lord of hosts and tell Him all about it. Rest in the comfort and reassurance that only He can give.

The Messiah and The Kingdom

Read Zechariah 13-14.

1. Look at 13:1. "In that day" refers to the future day of the Lord when sin and uncleanness will be judged. What are you doing *today* to keep your life pure and holy? Be specific.
2. Look at 13:8-9. The Lord will bring the remnant through the fire to refine them. Think about a time when the Lord used a *fiery trial* to refine you. What *dross* was burned off? What *silver* and *gold* remained? How did this refining process cause you to call on the Lord? How did He answer you during this time?
3. In Zechariah 14, the "Day of the Lord" refers to a future time which begins when God's wrath is unleashed against sinners and ends with the Lord's millennial (thousand-year) reign on earth. Briefly summarize this chapter. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, concentrating on verses 9-10. Take some time today and thank the Lord for the fact that as a Christian, you will never experience His wrath.

Summary

As you conclude your study of the book of Zechariah consider the following questions and write your answers:

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