

Ezra Seeks God's Law

Bible Background: Ezra 7:1-26
Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Aim for Change (Page 259):

1. UNDERSTAND the historical and spiritual significance of Ezra's return to Jerusalem
 2. VALUE how God works through various types of people to bring His plan to fruition
 3. THANK local leaders and teachers of God's Word.
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Has there been a time when you have been put in a position of authority/leadership? Were you bold or timid? Did you have the backing from those who put you in that position? Was the group that you led supportive or hostile? Did your actions provoke confrontations or promote peace?

The People, Places, and Times (Page 262):

- Ezra and Nehemiah both chronicle (record of a related series of events in a factual/detailed way) the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the return from exile
 - The new King Artaxerxes was warned about rebuilding the walls to prevent rebellion (Ezra 4:12-16)
 - Nehemiah was distraught about the condition of Jerusalem after the Babylonian Empire fell and convinced the king that he needed resources to rebuild it (Nehemiah 2:2-8)
 - Once Nehemiah finished building the walls, Ezra began his mission in trying to get the people to rededicate themselves back to honoring God's commands (*Deuteronomy 31:11-12; Nehemiah 8:2-3*)
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Background (Page 262-263):

- King Cyrus of Persia in 539 BC finally defeated the Babylonian Empire allowing many of the conquered people to return to their homelands and religion
 - Strategic move to gain loyalty from the people just exiled and to prevent uprising
 - The captured Israelites returned to the demolished city of Jerusalem and started to put the pieces of their city and heritage back together
 - A second major group arrived from Babylon led by Ezra in 458 BC
 - Ezra was set on returning the people back to the laws found in the Torah (Five books of the OT)
 - By establishing the Torah as the governing laws for daily living would re-emerge the city
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What are some reasons people give for returning to places of devastation and loss and deciding to rebuild?

In Depth (Page 263):

1. Godly Heritage (Ezra 7:1-5)

- a. (v. 1-5) Ezra had a priestly pedigree going back to Aaron, the first high priest and Moses' brother
- b. His heritage inspired him, and his occupation as a scribe (a member of a learned class in ancient Israel through New Testament times studying the Scriptures and serving as copyists, editors, teachers, and jurists) educated him
- c. Not all 24 generations listed, but only those famous for reforms in the late Israelite monarchy, and establishing correct worship at Sinai and in the Promise Land (1 Chronicles 6 details more)
 - i. (v. 5) Phinehas famous for stopping a plague that was ravishing Israel because of their disobedience (Numbers 25:7-13)
 1. Phinehas deed and love for God, was also mentioned in the Psalms, and that his line would be forever priests (Psalm 106:30-31)
 - ii. (v. 5) Eleazar, Aaron's 3rd son becomes his heir (Leviticus 10) and helped purify Israel after the rebellion of the sons of Korah (Numbers 16) – Nadab/Abihu killed for making improper sacrifice
 1. Worked closely with Moses during their 40 years in the wilderness and appointed by God to work with Joshua to divide the land of Canaan fairly among the Israelites (Numbers 34:17)

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2. Personal Commitment (Ezra 7:6-10)

- a. (v. 6) From his studies, he wanted to bring his people to a greater understanding of and obedience to God's Law
 - i. Ezra states the hand of the Lord is upon them; meaning success comes from doing the will of God regardless of what anyone else thinks (**Ezra 8:22-23**)
- b. (v. 8-9) The Bible is not based on a single self-proclaimed prophet. It's the cultural history of God's people, written down over a course of a thousand years, from the Exodus from Egypt to the return from Babylon
 - i. This time was of the Jewish Calendar so it was more correspondent to our March/April so the fifth month would be our July/August
- c. (v. 10) Ezra has firmly fixated his mind on doing three things:
 - i. **Seek God's Law** – study it diligently, to inquire how one should act (**Joshua 1:1-9 – Tuesday**; Psalm 1:2, 19:14; 105:4; Isaiah 55:6; Jeremiah 29:13)
 - ii. **To do it** – not just knowing His word but actually living it out (Matthew 7:21; Romans 2:13; James 1:22; **1 John 3:18-24 - Wednesday**)
 - iii. **To teach** – with gentleness and wisdom of God's Law (Exodus 18:20; Deuteronomy 4:9; **Psalm 119:1-16 - Thursday**)

3. The Favor of God and Man (Ezra 7:23-26)

- a. (v. 23-24) God honored the desire of Ezra's heart, giving him favor with the king, which showed a holy reverence for the Laws of God, even though he wasn't a believer (**Ezra 6:8, 10**)
 - i. The king noticed that God's Laws gave Ezra wisdom, making him a person of integrity
- b. The king gave a decree (letter) granting Ezra the resources and not to impose toll, tribute, or tax throughout their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (4-months) from all his reigning provinces
 - i. These resources were to be used to support the people who wished to join him, beautify the Temple, and make sacrifices once he got there
- c. (v. 25-26) The king also set some guidelines for Ezra to set up government, to judge by the Law of God, then the king (**Exodus 18:21-22**; Deuteronomy 16:18)
- d. Believers are given more latitude from unbelievers as even they know that those who walk in His ways are people of good, honest, and wise character

How might your knowledge of the Scripture or lack thereof influence those around you to include your community, nation, or world?

For some people, we are the only Bible they may read, so what version/translation are you?