

God Ordains Restoration | Ezra 1-3 | 4/8/2018

- Ezra - Author and date
 - The book of Ezra was named after its author Ezra. He was a scribe-priest that had a very high ranking in the kingdom of Persia and also had the hand of God upon him.
 - Ezra 7:6
 - “this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the god of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked for, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.”
 - The book of Ezra was written between 457-444 B.C.
 - Ezra is also the author of Nehemiah and likely 1 and 2 Chronicles.
 - **The events recorded in Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai and Zechariah are the last of the biblical events recorded in Scripture before the Old Testament canon was closed. These events are just prior to the 400-year intertestamental period before the Scriptures resumed in Luke.**
- Chronology Handout
 - The correlation between Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah and the minor prophets of Haggai and Zechariah.
- Important events leading up to Ezra
 - In the years after God delivered the Israelites from Egypt (1445 B.C), God warned them on several occasions through His prophets that they needed to obey God.
 - That they must not turn away otherwise they would be punished.
 - They however continued to disobey God, so He allowed them to be conquered and subsequently exiled from their homeland of Israel and Judah (including Jerusalem).
 - God warned the Jewish people of what would happen if they turned from Him.
 - However, they disobeyed God and now they would receive God’s holy and just punishment. They will be in exile for 70 years. | Jeremiah 25:3-11
 - Jeremiah 2:17
 - “Have you not brought this on yourself by abandoning the LORD your God while He was leading you along the way?”
 - God is patient and merciful God. However, there are limits and God was aware that punishment was the only way that the Jews would listen.
 - **Read Jeremiah 25:3-11**
 - God declares His responsibility for their exile
 - Jeremiah 29:4
 - “This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to Babylon:”
 - **Does this description of the Israelites remind you of modern day Christians? In what way?**
 - **Do you think God deals with Christians today as he did with the Israelites?**
 - Assyrians take Israel (Northern Kingdom) the 10 tribes are dispersed (dispersion) – 722 B.C.
 - Babylonians take Judah (Southern Kingdom) including Jerusalem – 605-586 B.C.
 - Solomon’s Temple (1st Temple) was destroyed in 587-586 B.C.
 - Cyrus (Persian) conquers Babylon – 539 B.C.
 - Ezra begins with the return of the Jews from their 70-year captivity (exile) by the Babylonians.
 - Postexilic returns to Jerusalem in Ezra

- The first wave of Jews who returned to Jerusalem did so on 538 B.C (Ezra 1-6) and were led by Zerubbabel, Jeshua and were under the Persian ruler Cyrus.
 - The 2nd wave returned in 458 B.C. (Ezra 7-10) led by Ezra under the Persian ruler Artaxerxes.
- Overall purpose
 - Ezra shows us how God’s providence and His invisible hand is at work even among the greatest kings that rule the world.
 - That these great earthly kings are guided by God to fulfill His great purpose.
 - **Ezra and Nehemiah show us a return of the Israelites to Jerusalem and also a return to God and His commands.**
 - The Jewish people after having been punished by God are now seemingly given a second chance.
 - God will allow them to once again return to their homeland.
 - The rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of sacrifices
 - In Ezra we see the Jews return to God and begin to rebuild the Temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians.
 - They also restored their prior rituals of making sacrifices to God and the observance of holy occasions.
 - **This is the image of what happens when Christians return to God.**
 - The fall and return of the Israelites to God also paints a picture of what happens to Christians today.
 - Christians will find themselves in the same situations of disobedience and punishment, but God is also the same. God is there to show His love and forgiveness.
- The return from Exile | Ezra 1-2
 - **Read Ezra 1:1-4**
 - Cyrus the Persian king was motivated by God to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.
 - God has put this declaration in the mind of Cyrus and he has given the royal decree or law so that the Jews would have the approval of the king to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.
 - **We can see that Cyrus was clearly motivated by God to make this decree. It wasn’t something that he randomly decided to do.**
 - Cyrus believed in the God of Israel but likely believed in “other” god’s as well (polytheism)
 - While Cyrus acknowledges the God of Israel he has also acknowledged “other” gods.
 - Cyrus shows in Scripture and other places that he likely believed in multiple gods that each person or group of people had their own particular God.
 - This was prophesized in Isaiah and Jerimiah.
 - As we have seen in other passages of Scripture these events were foretold some 200 years before in the book of Isaiah.
 - Isaiah 44:28
 - “who says to Cyrus, “My shepherd, he will fulfill all My pleasure” and says to Jerusalem, “She will be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Its foundation will be laid.”
 - Isaiah 45:1

- “The LORD says this to Cyrus, His anointed, who’s right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before Him, to disarm kings, to open the doors before him and the gates will not be shut:
 - Isaiah 45:13
 - “I have raised him up in righteousness, and will level all roads for him. He will rebuild My city, and set My exiles free, not for a price or a bribe, says the LORD of Hosts.
- **What does this tell us about God’s influence in the world even among earthly kingdoms of great power?**
- The Word of God spoken through the prophet Jeremiah will now be fulfilled | Jeremiah 29:10-14
 - **Read Jeremiah 29:10-14**
 - God will confirm His promise
 - God had promised them that they would be restored, and their moment had come.
 - God does not plan disaster but restoration and forgiveness
 - While the people caused their exile and captivity we see that God will forgive them.
 - While punishment was deserved (and needed) forgiveness and mercy will always be given by God.
 - God will be there if we seek Him
 - **God made it clear that if the Israelites would seek God, if they would pray to Him and search for Him in their hearts that He would be found.**
 - This passage isn’t only for the Israelites, but also for everyone who believes in Him.
 - No matter how dark our situation regardless if it is self-inflicted or circumstantial, God will always be there.
- **What does this tell us about God’s plans for our lives?**
- God motivates the Jews to return to Jerusalem. | Ezra 1:5-8
 - **Read Ezra 1:5**
 - So not only has God put it on the mind of king Cyrus to allow the Jews to return, but God has awoken the Jews.
 - They likely needed to be motivated by God because they had been exiled for 70 years, that would have been a life time for many of them and others had never known anything different.
 - God made it known to them that this was their appointed time to return, where God was going to fulfill his prior promises.
 - Many gifts were then provided to assist with the restoration of the temple.
 - **Ezra 1:6-8**
 - Gifts were now provided by both Jews and Persians alike for the restoration of the temple.
 - In addition, Cyrus commanded that the articles that were essentially stolen by Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians from the original temple to be returned.
- The exiles begin the first return to their homeland | Ezra 2
 - **Read Ezra 2:1**
 - Now that the commands have been given and the supplies are gathered the first wave of the Jews set out to return to their homeland after being exiled for 70 years.
 - The whole assembly including the slaves and singers was 49,897.

- Ezra 2:64-67
 - They are led out by the leader of Judah Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua
 - While in the previous passage in chapter 1 we see a reference to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. However, he was not the true God ordained leader of Judah.
 - He was likely a Persian appointed by Cyrus.
 - The Jews were technically still just a province of Persia they were not “truly” free yet.
 - Zerubbabel never served as king, but he was still the rightful leader and he came from the lineage of David and was also in the messianic line.
 - 1 Chronicles 3:17
 - Matthew 1:12
 - Jeshua/Joshua was the high priest
 - He is called Joshua in the book of Haggai and Zechariah
 - He came from the priestly line of Levi.
- The Israelites return not only to Jerusalem, but they also return to God and rebuild the altar. | Ezra 3:1-9
 - **Read Ezra 3:1-7**
 - Seven months into their return they gather together in Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.
 - **It would be important to point out that the first priority that the Israelites had in the restoration of the temple was to first build the altar.**
 - There was not even a foundation yet, they simply cleared away the rubble and began with the altar.
 - The significance of their priority with the altar.
 - This is significant because as we have seen clearly in Scripture that the Israelites had turned away from God and had ceased to obey Him.
 - Now that God has restored them and given them a second chance we see that the first thing they do is rebuild the altar of sacrifice.
 - **The Israelites are now putting God FIRST.**
 - **God desired for the Israelites to return to Him.**
 - Zechariah 1-3
 - “In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo: “The LORD was extremely angry with your ancestors. So tell the people: This is what the LORD of Hosts says: **Return to Me**”—this is the declaration of the LORD of Hosts—**“and I will return to you,** says the LORD of Hosts.”
 - God desired for his people to return to Him even though they were disobedient, and they had sinned against God.
 - God never gave up on them, **He of course punished them** when they needed it, but He never turned His back on them.
 - God desired their repentance and their obedience and to once again make Him their focus.
 - **God desires for the Christian to return to Him. We must have our own “rebuilding of the altar” moment.**
 - We are not unlike the Israelite people at all.
 - We too as Christians have seen God’s promises and His truths revealed to us.
 - However, we like the Israelites may have at times in our life turned away from God.

- We have experienced and fully understood the power of God. We feared God and respected Him.
 - We truly believed in who He is, the Almighty God
- But we have at times neglected this truth and perhaps no longer feared God and turned to disobedience.
 - Perhaps we have ignored what God has done previously in our lives and have chosen our own roads.
- The Christian too has allowed the temple and altar to be torn down.
- **In doing this we too have experienced the discipline of God. He punishes us not out of spite but because He loves us.**
 - **Hebrews tells us that God disciplines the ones He loves.**
 - He does this to change us so that we can get off of our path of destruction and instead return the path of light.
- **God desires that we to return to Him, and He will return to us.**
 - God makes a promise that he will never leave us or forsake us, He is always there to take us back even if we have wandered off the path of righteousness.
 - ***Return to Me*—this is the declaration of the LORD of Hosts—*“and I will return to you, says the LORD of Hosts.”***
- **If we have fallen away we too need to rebuild the altar first.**
 - If we have fallen away from God as the Israelites have, we too need to rebuild our altar to God.
 - This is not a physical altar but one that resides in our hearts and in our minds.
 - We must re-establish God as a priority in our lives and worship Him and repent for the sins that we have committed.
- **Have you ever experienced your own “rebuilding of the altar” moment?**
- Rejoicing once the foundation of the temple was completed. | Ezra 3:10-12
 - ***Read Ezra 3:10-12***
 - There was great joy once the foundation to the temple had been completed.
 - **The Israelites had finally returned to God and they could now see that the temple was coming together.**
 - The Israelites gave praise and thanksgiving to God. – Ezra 3:11a
 - In verse 11 we see the proof that the Israelites have finally returned to God.
 - After completing the foundation, they gave praise and thanks to God who truly was responsible for what had been completed.
 - They acknowledged the promises of God, that He is truly faithful and that nothing would remove the love that God has for his people.
 - **This is the same praise that we give to God when we realize the He is faithful to us regardless of what we have done.**
 - That moment when we realize that God loves us even when we fall away because God will always take us back with loving arms.
 - The tears of the elders
 - It had been at least 50 years since the original temple was destroyed.
 - Many who were there at the rebuilding had never seen the original and their reactions were joyfully shouting!
 - But we see the elders, those who had seen the original temple instead of joyful shouting they cried tears.
 - The elders had seen the splendor of the original temple built by King Solomon. And this new temple wasn’t looking anything like the original.

- However, we will see later that the prophets rebuke this and God actually states that this new temple will be greater than the first.