

## **Lessons from the book of Ezra**

This book is named after the main character of its second part. The book of 2 Chronicles ended with an official message that King Cyrus of Persia sent in 538 B.C., which allowed the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild the Lord's temple. The first part of the book of Ezra (1-6) begins with that same message and then tells how many of the Jews returned to Jerusalem and began work on the temple. But the people in nearby areas caused a lot of trouble for them and so the work went slowly and even stopped for several years. But the temple was finally finished in 515 B.C.

The first part of the book also tells about problems at a later time, when the Jews had to stop rebuilding the city walls during the rule of Artaxerxes (4.6-23)

The second part of the (7-10) begins with Ezra arriving in Jerusalem to teach God's laws to the people of Judah. Ezra was horrified to learn that the people of Israel were committing the same sins as other nations. Israel was in serious danger of being punished or even destroyed by the Lord. So Ezra prayed and confessed Israel's sins, and the people agreed to begin obeying God's laws. The book of Nehemiah reports other things that Ezra did.

God's people were no longer an independent nation. but Ezra realized that God was in control, no matter what empire ruled over them. And so Ezra said:

Praise the Lord God our ancestors! He made sure that the king honored the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. God has told the king, his advisors and his powerful officials to treat me with kindness. The Lord God has helped me I have been able to bring many Jewish leaders back to Jerusalem. (7.27b,28)

### **Here Are 5 Lessons From The Book of Ezra**

#### **A Kept Promise**

##### **1 Short Commentary & Lesson from Ezra 1.1-4**

Many years before this time, the prophet Jeremiah had predicted that God's people would be in captivity for seventy years. Now, King Cyrus was beginning to complete that prophecy. Cyrus was not a Jew, yet God caused this ruler to be a special part of God's plan for his people. God kept his promise to return his people to their homeland.

God often uses people and events that we would not suspect of being able to help us. A teacher, boss, coach, commanding officer, judge, or government official may be God's means of speaking directly to us. Often, the person involved may not even know that God is using them in this way. But when we are open to hearing the Lord and seeing him at work, we see how vast God's reach is.

#### **The Enemy Doesn't Fight Fairly**

##### **2 Short Commentary & Lesson from Ezra 4.7-24**

In this passage, Ezra gives us a summary of the opposition to the Jews' rebuilding the temple. Israel's enemies wrote letters to king Artaxerxes, making it sound as though they the king's best interests at heart. As a result, the king ordered the Jews to halt their work on the temple.

Although the information given to the king was true, it was not fair to assume that this group of Israelites would rebel as their ancestors had done. But the enemy does not fight

fairly. We should not be discouraged when those who oppose our work try to dig up something from our past in an attempt to stop what God wants to do. When the enemy wins a temporary victory, remember that this is only a delay - not defeat.

### **God's People Find Favor**

#### **3 Short Commentary & Lesson from Ezra 6.1-15**

Not only did King Darius command Governor Tattenai to stop hindering the work on the temple, but he actually told the governor to use public taxes to pay for the work! With the help of King Darius, the temple was completed in four years.

In our day, we are often tempted to think that the government and religion should be completely separate. But God can use the state to help complete his work when and where he wants to do so.

### **Help from the World**

#### **4 Short Commentary & Lesson from Ezra 7.1-28**

What a happy time for God's people! They who had been slaves recently were now treated like royalty by the secular government. How can we account for this unusual kindness king Artaxerxes showed the Israelites? did this Persian king worship God?

We see the immense generosity of Artaxerxes and his concern that God's laws must be obeyed by everyone. In his own way, "God controls rulers" (Proverbs 21.1). What a comforting fact to keep in mind as we live in today's world.

### **A Prayer for Forgiveness**

#### **5 Short Commentary & Lesson from Ezra 9.5-15**

Ezra's prayer is one of the best examples in the Bible of how to pray when we have sinned. Even though Ezra himself had not married a foreign woman, he included himself in the Israelites' failure to obey God. By tearing his clothes, he was outwardly expressing the sorrow he felt because of the people's sins.

Ezra recognized that if God gave them what they deserved, he would have to destroy them all. Similarly, we may not have committed all the awful sins of which our society is guilty. We can, however, confess our own sins as well as the sins of society to God. We can proclaim God's loving fairness, and trust that he will be compassionate toward us.

### **Promises For Us**

When Cyrus the Persian emperor offered the Israelites in Babylon the chance to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their shattered culture, most of them stayed put in their comfortable Babylonian homes. Instead of cities and villages, those who returned found weed-choked piles of rubble and neighbours who opposed their every move.

The Israelites who went home soon grew discouraged and wanted to give up. God wouldn't let them. He sent reinforcements in the persons of Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets, and Ezra who emphasized the laws of God. The big winners in life are those who dare to keep starting over. Ezra is a straightforward record of people who seized an opportunity to make a difference for God in an indifferent world. Notice how God continually provides resources for people who dare, but he doesn't do the work for them.