



Series: Bible Survey

Lesson: 20–21. Ezra

- **Introduction**

- Author: Most likely Ezra
- Date: Covers the decree for the first exiles to return to Jerusalem (538 BC) until the rebuilding of the Temple (516 BC), plus Ezra's return and following events (458 BC); most likely written late 5th Century BC
- Ezra and Nehemiah are closely related but should still be viewed as two separate books instead of one.
- Context:
 - King Cyrus allowed many conquered peoples to return to their homeland in order to maintain peace after he defeated Babylon.
 - Simultaneously, Israel came to the end of the Exile God brought upon them for breaking the Old Covenant.
 - Ezra would have been a reminder of what Israel's priorities should have been when they had been back in the Land for a while.
- Ezra deals primarily with what needed to be done by the people to begin to restore their _____ relationship with YHWH

- Main themes:
 - The return to the Land
 - The rebuilding of the Temple
 - The purity of the people
 - God's protection and provision

- **The First Return from Exile (ch's 1–3)**

- Cyrus's decree encouraged God's people that this was His faithfulness (and not just coincidence) by fulfilling _____ (cf. Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10; Is. 44:24–45:7).
 - The 70-year judgment refers to either from the first deportation (605 BC) until the establishment of the altar (~536 BC) or from the destruction of the Temple (586 BC) until the completion of its rebuilding (516 BC).
- Sending the Temple articles back with them gave them some dignity and (Cyrus hoped) loyalty, but it also encouraged and enabled them to go back to worshipping God the way He prescribed more quickly.
- The concern for lineage, especially for Temple service, was to honor God's selection and avoid the sins of _____.

- Rebuilding the altar, observing festivals, and laying the foundation of the Temple are all recorded first to show Israel's priority in reestablishing worship practices to focus on their relationship with God.
- Even though God was taking care of them, they were still not in the same kind of position as before.

Hag. 2:3 – Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?

- **Opposition to Rebuilding (ch's 4–6)**

- The current inhabitants of the Land were those who had replaced the Israelites deported by Assyria and learned syncretistic worship (cf. 2 Kings 17); they were threatened by the prospect of Israelites moving back and competing with them for power, resources, etc.
- Timelines are collapsed in ch4 to demonstrate a theme.
 - The Israelites were opposed in every major phase of rebuilding after the Exile (not just the Temple).
 - God was providing despite adversity across multiple reigns and generations.

- God doesn't just remove the persecution: He sends prophets to spurn the people to act in faith and *then* provides for them through a benevolent king when they are challenged again.
- The dedicated Temple has a grand celebration and the reinstitution of the _____ to show that Israel is blessed and in relationship with God, even if not all parts of their covenants are back in place.

- **The Second Return (ch's 7–10)**

- Ezra is introduced.
 - He is of the high priestly line (7:1–5).
 - He is a “scribe skilled in the Law of Moses (7:6).
 - He is a priest (7:11–12).
 - His mission is to study, practice, and teach God's Law (7:10)
- The king decides to show incredible favor toward Ezra and Israel, but Ezra recognizes God's hand of blessing and protection each step of the way.
- Ezra demonstrates a balance of _____ and _____.

- He relies on fasting and prayer in place of protection from the king's soldiers for the journey because he recognizes the witnessing opportunity in front of him.
 - He entrusts priests with charge over a great deal of valuables, but there is still an accountability structure in place.
- The major issue Ezra deals with upon his return is _____
- _____.
- This was one of the primary warnings from God to protect Israel from pagan influences, but it was frequently ignored and directly tied to Israel's downfall (e.g., Lev. 18; Num. 25; 1 Kings 11; etc.).
 - This made it a major concern when it reappeared after the Exile (cf. Neh. 13; Mal. 2).
 - The response is handled in a deliberate manner for the sake of a thorough and true reaction instead of a knee-jerk one driven by emotion and possibly lacking depth.
 - It is important to note that Israel's expected response as a holy nation is different than how we would respond to something similar in the Church today (cp. 1 Cor. 7:12–16; 1 Pet. 3:1).

2 Cor. 6:14 – 16a – Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

Discussion:

1. Why is it so valuable for us to see God working through pagan kings in the Old Testament instead of just blessing Israel directly?
2. How is Ezra a good example for us in the Church today?

FOR REFLECTION: What are some areas you can apply a healthy balance between faith and prudence in your life today?

Blanks: covenant, prophecy, Jeroboam, Passover, faith, prudence, mixed marriages