

# SESSION 1

## The Book of Ezra

### I. PRAYER

### II. PANORAMA MOVEMENTS 1-9 (Old Testament)

PANORAMA: MOVEMENTS 1-9	
Movement	Biblical Books
#1 Prologue #2 Patriarchs #3 Redemption and Wanderings  #4 Conquest #5 Apostasy #6 Kingship: United Monarchy  #7 Kingship: Divided Monarchy  #8 Exile <b>#9 Return from Exile and 400 Silent Years</b>	Genesis 1-11 Genesis 12-50; Job Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy Joshua Judges, Ruth 1-2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-11 (Pss, Prov, Eccl, Song of Solomon) 1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings (Prophets - selected) Ezekiel, Daniel (Jeremiah) Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

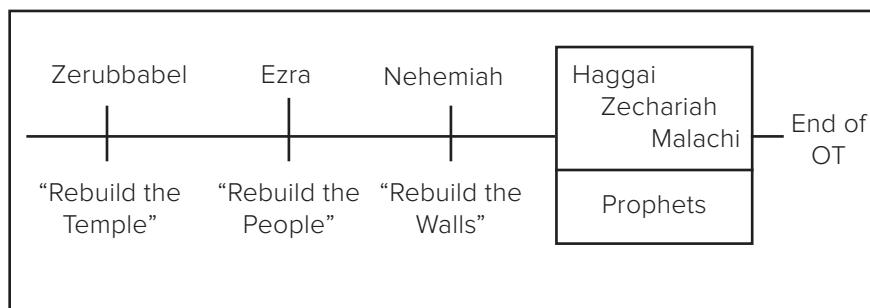
**Note:**  
Movements 1-9 comprise the Old Testament. Between Movement 9 and Movement 10 (Life of Christ) lie the four hundred years of silence (no revelations from God through angels, prophets, or other means).

### III. CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING

The post-exilic historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are related. The following chart (Wilkinson and Boa, 118) shows the interrelatedness of these books.

538-515 BC	483-473 BC	457 BC	444-425 BC
Zerubbabel	Esther	Ezra	Nehemiah
Ezra 1-6	Book of Esther	Ezra 7-10	Book of Nehemiah
First Return	In Persia	Second Return	Third Return
	Haggai (520 BC) Zechariah (520 <sup>ff</sup> BC)		Malachi (ca 433-31 BC)

### IV. PANORAMA PLUS 9 TIMELINE



## **V. BOOK OF EZRA**

### **A. Author**

The book does not specifically ascribe authorship to any individual but Jewish tradition attributes the Book to Ezra, the scribe (see *Ezr 7:28-9:15* and note the 1st person point of view, i.e. Ezra). Constable notes,

As a scribe (7:21), Ezra had the qualifications needed to write this book. He was a general contemporary of Nehemiah (*Neh 8:1-9, 12:36*). Another reference in the Talmud claimed that Ezra was a disciple of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. (Constable, *Ezra*, 2).

### **B. Theme of Ezra**

The Book of Ezra chronicles the first return of certain ones of the Jews in captivity. With the defeat of Babylon by Persia, a royal edict allowed any of the Jews to return to their homeland, rebuild their temple and settle back in their land. The task would not prove to be an easy one. Opposition mounted but a further decree from Darius provided political and material support to complete the temple project. Also, Ezra led a second return to the land during the reign of Artaxerxes (*Ezr 7-10*) and sparked a spiritual renewal with the reading and exposition of the Law (cf. *Neh 8-9*).

### **C. Interrelatedness of Ezra-Nehemiah**

While scholars continue to debate whether Ezra-Nehemiah was one book or two, chiastic studies have noted the following pattern that would seem to suggest that the books were originally one. Eugene Merrill (*Nelson's OT Survey*, 342) notes the following chiastic structure.

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- A Zerubbabel's return and list of returnees (Ezr 1-2)
- B Building of the temple and opposition (Ezr 3-6)
- C Return of Ezra (Ezr 7-8)
- D Center: Purification of the people (Ezra 9-10)
- C' Return of Nehemiah (Neh 1-2)
- B' Building of walls and opposition (Neh 3:1-7:3)
- A' Zerubbabel's return and list of returnees;  
final reforms (Neh 7:4-13:31)

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#### **D. Book of Ezra**

##### 1. Charted

<b>The Book of Ezra</b>			
Rebuild the Temple 1	6	Rebuild the People 7	10
(Zerubbabel)		(Ezra)	
First Return to Jerusalem 1	2	Second Return to Jerusalem 7	8
Rebuilding of the Temple 3		Rebuilding of the People 9	
About 22 years (538-516 or 15 BC)		About 1 Year (458-457 BC)	

2. Outlined: **Book of Ezra**

Note that this broad outline will be the basis of the Biblical Development section to follow.

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**I. FIRST RETURN TO JERUSALEM:  
ZERUBBABEL (Chs 1-2)**

- A. Proclamation (ch 1)**
- B. List of Returnees (ch 2)**

**II. REBUILDING THE TEMPLE (Chs 3-6)**

- A. Initial Projects (ch 3)**
  - 1. Rebuilding the altar (3:1-6)
  - 2. Beginning the Temple (3:7-13)
- B. Opposition to the Project (ch 4)**
- C. Delaying of the Project (ch 5)**
- D. Completion of the Project (ch 6)**
  - 1. Decree of Darius (6:1-12)
  - 2. Dedication of the Temple (6:13-18)
  - 3. Passover celebrated (6:19-22)

**III. SECOND RETURN TO JERUSALEM: EZRA  
(chs 7-10)**

- A. Proclamation (and Return) (ch 7)**
- B. List of returnees (ch 8)**
- C. Rebuilding the People (chs 9-10)**
  - 1. Sin of the people (9:1-4)
  - 2. Prayer of Ezra (9:5-15)
  - 3. People's confession (10:1-6)
  - 4. Proclamation issued (10:7-17)
  - 5. Guilty listed (10:18-44)

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## VI. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT

### A. First Return to Jerusalem: Zerubbabel (Ezr 1-2)

#### 1. Proclamation (Ezr 1)

##### a. Background insight

As far back as Moses' words in Deuteronomy 28-30, the Israelites were promised blessing for obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and cursings (discipline) for disobedience. The ultimate act of discipline would be temporary forfeiture of the privilege of living in the Abrahamic, covenantally-promised land.

Historically these warnings became facts with the Assyrian Captivity for Israel (north) and eventually Babylonian Captivity for Judah. The people of God were under divine discipline and nothing short of confession and repentance would allow restoration to the homeland.

While Jeremiah prophesied a captivity of 70 years (Jer 25, 30), perhaps it was Daniel's bold decision to act as national intercessor for his captive people that initiated the "Return from Captivity" (Movement 9).

#### Daniel 9:17-19

*"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. <sup>18</sup> Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. <sup>19</sup> Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."*

b. Biblical insight

Ezra 1:1

*In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:*

c. The decree of Cyrus

Ezra 1:2-4

*"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.<sup>3</sup> Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.<sup>4</sup> And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem."*

- (1) The date of the decree was 538 BC.
- (2) The Persians conquered Babylon in 539 BC.
- (3) The decree is an evidence of the Persian leniency over conquered nations. Note the following comparison.

Treatment By Ancient Conquerors

* Assyrian Captivity .....	Deportation plus harsh treatment
* Babylonian Captivity .....	Deportation plus lenient treatment
* Persian Domination .....	Repatriation plus lenient treatment

d. The result

Ezra 1:5,7

*Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem...<sup>7</sup> Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.*

#### **B. List of Returnees (Ezr 2)**

This chapter records the families that made the decision to return to the land. The list included notable leaders (2:2), family descendants (2:2-35) and of great interest, certain religious leaders - priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants and others. With plans to rebuild the temple, these religious leaders would be indispensable. Upon arrival, first steps for rebuilding the temple were initiated.

Ezra 2:68

*When they arrived at the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site.*

### **VII. REBUILDING THE TEMPLE (Ezr 3-6)**

When a covenant people have returned to the land God promised to Father Abraham and his descendants, what should a repentant people do? The answer, of course, was to restore proper worship in a manner consistent with Mosaic Covenant stipulations. The First Temple (the glorious Temple of Solomon) had been destroyed. Now the challenge was to build the Second Temple.

## A. Initial Projects (3:1-13)

### 1. Rebuilding the altar (1-6)

After the return the Israelites began to settle throughout the land. On the seventh month (Tishri - Sept/Oct) the people gathered in Jerusalem to commence the project (1).

Ezra 3:2-3

*Then Joshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.<sup>3</sup> Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices.*

- a. Jeshua was a priestly leader (high priest; cf. Hag 1:1, 12, 14 et al.; in some translations, spelled Joshua).
- b. Zerubbabel was a civil leader, a descendant of David and a later governor under Persian rule (cf. Hag 1:1; 2:2).
- c. Building the “altar of God” indicated a desire to resume sacrificial offerings in accordance with the Law of Moses. The altar was of first importance.

### Insight:

The seventh month was a highly religious month in the Israelite calendar. Three feasts or festivals occurred in this Hebrew month of Tishri: on the 1st, Feast of Trumpets; on the 10th, the Day of Atonement; on the 15th-21st, the Feast of Tabernacles.

Ezra 3:6

*On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid.*

## 2. Beginning the Temple (7-13)

In order to rebuild the appropriate materials were needed. As Solomon before had done, the Jewish returnees turned to the Phoenicians to supply wood for the temple (7).

Ezra 3:8

*In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak and the rest of the people (the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem) began the work. They appointed Levites twenty years old and older to supervise the building of the house of the LORD.*

Ezra 3:10-13

*When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel.<sup>11</sup> With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.*

*<sup>12</sup> But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. <sup>13</sup> No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.*

- a. Completion of the foundation was accompanied by a celebration of praise.
- b. The pattern for this service of dedication mirrored that of David when he brought the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chron 16:5-6).
- c. Seeing the foundations laid, the joy of some was in contrast to the weeping of others. The dimensions of the foundation foretold of a smaller, more modest temple than that of the splendor of Solomon's. The contemporary prophet, Haggai, would later write this to the Jewish people who saw this later, lesser temple.

Haggai 2:2-3

*“Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, <sup>3</sup> ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?’*

## **B. Opposition to the Project (4:1-24)**

Any noble enterprise that aims to honor and glorify the God of Heaven will bound to encounter opposition. In Ezra, the issue was external. In the Book of Haggai, the issues were internal, spiritual recalcitrance. Taken together the resistance slowed the completion of the temple.

### 1. Personal opposition (1-5)

- a. Phase #1: spurious offer to help

Ezra 4:3

*When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, <sup>2</sup> they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, “Let us help you build because, like*

*you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.”*

- b. Reply #1: no part with us

Ezra 4:3

*But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.”*

- c. Phase #2: sowing discouragement

Ezra 4:4-5

*Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.<sup>5</sup> They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

- 2. Legal opposition (6-23):

This section is an editorial insert demonstrating that opposition to rebuilding the temple (or opposition to any worthy project for Yahweh’s glory) is nothing new. It occurred during the later reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus - ca 496-464 BC). Letters were sent to the king complaining about building projects in Jerusalem and criticizing the Jews as rebellious and the city as wicked. The king did in fact stop the projects but later during the time of Nehemiah this same king reversed his position and commissioned Nehemiah to return and rebuild the walls (defense and security) of Jerusalem.

- 3. Result of opposition (24)

After the editorial insertion and the out-of-chronological-time sequence, the story resumes concerning the rebuilding of the temple. And the effect of the opposition was devastating.

Ezra 4:24

*Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

- (a) The stoppage occurred in 536 BC.
- (b) Only the foundation has been completed.
- (c) Construction would not commence until 520 BC (16 years later).

**Insight** (W. Kaiser, *Toward an OT Theology*, 250)

Even when they [the restoration Jews] strove to again lay the foundations of that most important symbol of the presence of God, their sanctuary, discouragement took its toll; and the whole project came to a complete stop for sixteen long years (Ezra 4:24). Everything was wrong: they lacked the means then the inclination, and finally even the will to build the temple; for their every attempt met with constant opposition both from within the small group and from the outside (Ezra 3:12-13; 4:1-22). So it would have remained had not God graciously sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1).

### **C. Delaying of the Project (5:1-17)**

The work stoppage ended with only the foundation of the temple completed. With the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the work recommenced in 520 BC after a delay of 16 years.

1. The work begins (again) (1-2)

Ezra 5:1-2

*Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name*

*of the God of Israel, who was over them.<sup>2</sup> Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*

2. The opposition resumes (again) (3-17)

The governor of the Persian region which included Jerusalem approached the Jews and questioned their authority to rebuild the temple.

a. The questioning by Tattenai (3-5)

The governor's main inquiry was simple, "who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?" (3). Further, Tattenai demanded to know "the names of the men constructing this building" (4).

Ezra 5:5

*But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.*

b. The letter sent to King Darius (6-17)

- (1) The governor (Tattenai) related his questioning of the Jews (6-10)
  - By what authority
  - Give the names
- (2) The Jews' reply included in the letter (11-19)
  - We are servants of the God of heaven and earth (11)
  - We are rebuilding the temple Nebuchadnezzar destroyed (because of our sin before our God) (12)
  - We have authority to rebuild due to a decree of Cyrus (13-16)
  - We also have a request:

Ezra 5:17

*Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter.*

<b>OPPOSITION TO TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION EZRA 4-5</b>			
<b>Scripture</b>	<b>The form it took</b>	<b>What it tested</b>	<b>How they reacted</b>
4:1-2 (cf. 2 Cor 6:14)	Israel's enemies offered to help.	Their wisdom	Zerubbabel declined the offer.
4:4-5 (cf. 2 Tim 1:7)	They discouraged and frightened the builders.	Their faith	The Jews trusted God and pressed on.
4:6-23 (cf. Matt 16:18)	They tried legal action and red tape.	Their patience	God gave a favorable decision through Artaxerxes, and Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the Jews.
5:3 (cf. Matt 28:19-20)	They demanded proof of authority to build.	Their perseverance	The builders kept on working.

(\*\* Taken from Constable, *Notes on Ezra*, 28)

#### **D. Completion of the Project (6:1-22)**

1. Decree of Darius (1-12)
  - a. Darius orders a search (1-2)

Ezra 6:1-2

*King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon.<sup>2</sup> A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:*

- b. Decree of Cyrus found (3-5)

The found decree supported exactly what the Jews replied when questioned by Tattenai the governor.

- c. Darius issues new orders (6-12)

- (1) Do not interfere (6-7)

Ezra 6:7

*Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you other officials of that province, stay away from there.<sup>7</sup> Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.*

- (2) Do provide materially for the temple project (8-12)

Ezra 6:8<sup>b</sup>-10

*Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop.<sup>9</sup> Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them daily without fail,<sup>10</sup> so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.*

Ezra 6:12

*May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.*

2. Dedication of the Temple (6:13-18)

a. The Temple was completed (13-15)

Note the following decisive factors that overcame opposition and provided the way to complete the project.

- (1) Darius issued a decree and Tattenai diligently carried it out (13).
- (2) Haggai and Zechariah's preaching aided in finishing the job (14).
- (3) Non-Jewish decrees paved the way (14).  
Note that Artaxerxes' decree comes later in the time of Nehemiah and the "wall project." The Biblical writer reminds the reader that God's sovereign hand has guided these leaders to accomplish God's greater purposes.

Proverbs 21:1

*In the LORD's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.*

- (4) The Temple was completed in 515 BC (though some scholars note 516 BC), some four years or so after resuming the delayed project.

b. The Temple was dedicated

Ezra 6:16, 18

*Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated*

*the dedication of the house of God with joy...*

*<sup>18</sup> And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.*

- c. Passover celebrated (19-22)

Ezra 6:19

*On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover.*

### **III. SECOND RETURN TO JERUSALEM (chs 7-10)**

#### **A. Proclamation (and Return) (7:1-28)**

538-515 BC	483-473 BC	457 BC	444-425 BC
Zerubbabel	Esther	Ezra	Nehemiah
Ezra 1-6	Book of Esther	Ezra 7-10	Book of Nehemiah
First Return	In Persia	Second Return	Third Return

Haggai (520)  
Zechariah (520<sup>ff</sup>)

Malachi  
(ca 433-31)

About 58 years separates Ezra 1-6 from 7-10 as seen in the above diagram. In the intervening time, the events of the Book of Esther have occurred (see Session 3: “The Book of Esther”). Also, there have been changes in the kings of Persia. Below is a helpful listing of the Persian kings (dates suggested by E. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 478).

- Cyrus II 559-530 BC
- Cambyses II 530-522
- Gaumata 522
- Darius Hystaspes 522-486
- Xerxes 486-465
- Artaxerxes I 464-424
- Darius II 423-404
- Artaxerxes II 404-358

1. Ezra returns to Jerusalem (1-10)

Ezra returns under the reign of Artaxerxes I (464-424 BC). By listing his rather lengthy genealogy (credentials), the Biblical text highlights the importance of this man.

Note the following facts about Ezra:

- a. His impressive pedigree tracing back to Aaron, the first chief priest (1-5).
- b. His reputation as a scholar-teacher of the Law (6).
- c. His deep devotion to the Law (i.e. the Word of God).

Ezra 7:10

*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

Note four principles of a Bible-centered believer.

For the serious student of the Word, note these steps:

- Commitment (devotion)
- Observation-Interpretation (study)
- Application (observance)
- Communication (teaching)

2. Ezra returns with Artaxerxes' letter (11-26)
  - a. Prelude to the letter (11)
  - b. Contents of the letter (12-26)

The letter (decree) is written in Aramaic, the official language of the Persian empire. The letter contains several important guarantees:

- (1) Jews who wish to return with Ezra may do so (12-13).
- (2) The king granted the right to take wealth, animals, produce and all necessary to properly worship (sacrifice) at the temple of the God of Ezra/Jews in Jerusalem (14-20).
- (3) The king instructed the treasurers of the Trans-Euphrates to also provide material support and not to tax those who ministered in the Temple (21-24).
- (4) The king further instructed Ezra (25-26)

Ezra 7:25-26

*And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them.<sup>26</sup> Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.*

### 3. Ezra's thanksgiving (27-28)

Ezra 7:27-28

*Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way<sup>28</sup> and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.*

## B. List of Returnees (8:1-36)

1. Family heads who returned with Ezra (1-14)
2. Recruited Levites who returned with Ezra (15-20)
  - a. The problem (15)

Ezra 8:15

*I assembled them at the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there three days. When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there.*

- b. The solution (16-20)

Finding no Levites in the returnees, Ezra summoned several key leaders to recruit Levites. Due to the recruitment efforts, some 38 Levites and 220 temple servants joined the returning peoples.
3. Spiritual preparation for the return with Ezra (21-23)

Ezra 8:21-23

*There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.<sup>22</sup> I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, “The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.”<sup>23</sup> So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.*

4. Delegation of responsibilities to leading priests (24-30)

The group returning with Ezra had in their possession the silver and gold, worship utensils and other articles needed for the temple. Ezra delegated the care and protection to key leaders.

5. Safe arrival of those who returned with Ezra (31-36)

### **C. Rebuilding the People (Ezr 9-10)**

1. Sin of the people (9:1-4)

- a. Related (by the leaders) to Ezra (1-2)

Ezra 9:1-2

*After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites.<sup>2</sup> They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."*

- b. Response of Ezra (3-4)

Ezra 9:3-4

*When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.<sup>4</sup> Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.*

- c. Comments

- (1) Mosaic Law forbade Israelite marriages to Canaanites (Ex 34:11-16; Deut 7:1-5).
    - (2) Ezra's response indicated outrage, indignation, anger and grief. The moral (and legal) failure was of no small consequence.

2. The prayer of Ezra (9:5-15)

Around the time of the evening sacrifice (ca. 2:30-3:30pm), the grieving, humbled Ezra fell on his knees before God and prayed. The lengthy prayer included:

- Confession (6-7) ... “ashamed and disgraced” ... “our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens”
- Gratitude (8-9) ... “God has been gracious” ... “shown us kindness”
- Acknowledgment (10-12) ... “we have disregarded the commands” ... “do not give your daughters”
- Resignation (13-15) ... “Here we are before you in our guilt ... not one of us can stand in your presence”

3. The people’s confession (10:1-6)

a. Ezra and the crowd (1)

Ezra 10:1

*While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.*

b. Shecaniah and his proposal (2-4)

Ezra 10:3-4

*Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. <sup>4</sup> Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it.”*

c. Ezra and leaders’ vow (5-6)

Ezra 10:5

*So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and*

*Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath.*

4. Proclamation issued (10:7-17)
  - a. All exiles were required to assemble in Jerusalem within 3 days (7-8).
  - b. Ezra addressed the assembly:
    - “You have been unfaithful” (10).
    - “You have married foreign women” (10).
    - “you must confess your sins” (11).
    - “You must separate from your foreign wives” (11).
  - c. People’s response was agreement (12-17).
5. Guilty listed (10:18-44)

A list of some 113 Israelite men had married and now divorced their wives. Their sin of disobedience would not only affect them but others as well. Constable notes, “This reformation resulted in the continued racial, and more significantly, spiritual purity of Abraham’s descendants for another generation. However, Nehemiah faced the problem of mixed marriages again only a few years later (Neh 10:30; 13:23)  
(Notes on Ezra, 43).

### “Historical and Theological Overview”

- The Jews in exile had returned from their deportation and captivity (deportation and defeat because of sin).
- Certain Jews had intermarried with foreign wives (forbidden in the Law of Moses).
- The rebellious attitude that had led to the captivity could now lead to further problems (and divine discipline).
- God cannot bless rebellion without repentance (confession precedes restoration and blessing).
- Disobedience to the Law carries divine consequences (Deut 28).
- Therefore, an extreme remedy was needed for an extreme situation.

## POINTS TO PONDER

### A. Confession

Confession of national/personal sin (cf. Dan 9) led to the return from exile. Confession and repentance always precedes restoration and blessing.

### B. Zerubbabel’s Call

God raised up the man Zerubbabel to begin the process of rebuilding the temple. When God purposed to accomplish something, He often uses people to effect His will. E.M. Bounds was quoted as saying, “men (i.e. people) are God’s method.”

### C. Ezra’s Call

God will raise up Ezra to rebuild the people by the recovery and teaching of the Word of God.

Ezra 7:10

*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

Psalm 119:33-34 (tradition asserts Ezra as author of Ps 119)

*Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees,  
that I may follow it to the end.*

<sup>34</sup> *Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law  
and obey it with all my heart.*

Psalm 119:165-68

*Great peace have those who love your law,  
and nothing can make them stumble.*

<sup>166</sup> *I wait for your salvation, LORD,  
and I follow your commands.*

<sup>167</sup> *I obey your statutes,  
for I love them greatly.*

<sup>168</sup> *I obey your precepts and your statutes,  
for all my ways are known to you.*