



Wednesday Bible Education  
*Biblical Theology*  
Lesson 16: Ezra

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## REVIEW

*Questions from last week's lesson:*

1. What is in the book of 2 Chronicles?
2. How does 2 Chronicles help us today?

*Answers:*

1. 2 Chronicles The book has the account of Solomon building the temple, the dividing of the kingdom, the death of Ahab, and the Babylonian captivity.

**Book Summary:** 2 Chronicles continues the account of the Davidic line in Judah to recount the reasons for the exile and highlight God's faithfulness in preserving his people and his promises to David. It is written to guide the returning exiles in repentance and faith.

2. Understanding 2 Chronicles helps us to see the sovereign supremacy of God in his ordering the affairs of men for blessing or punishment. These histories make clear that God uses nations to come against nations as a punishment for sin. It encourages us to look at our own circumstances and quit blaming others.

Understanding 2 Chronicles helps us understand the hope we have in God. The book ends on the note of hope because of God's promises and his faithfulness. God alone should be trusted and he alone should be worshiped. He will not fail to keep all his promises.

Understanding 2 Chronicles helps us understand promise fulfillment. It encourages us to keep praying through dry and difficult times.

Understanding 2 Chronicles helps us persevere. The returned exiles reading this book were not under godly rule. They were not surrounded by the blessings of righteous rule. God's word had not failed, because he had long promised just such an exile and return because of the people's sins and lack of faith and repentance. The book teaches perseverance to the better things to come.

## INTRODUCTION

**W**hat is in the book of Ezra? The book has the account of the exiles return to Jerusalem from Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple, opposition to rebuilding the temple, including letters from Tattenai and Darius about the Jews' authority to rebuild the temple.

### **Book Summary**

Ezra demonstrates that God can bring life from death as descendants of Jacob return to Jerusalem and re-establish worship there, like a down payment for God's promises.

### **Lesson Objective**

This lesson covers the book of Ezra. The lesson considers the structure and content of the book, along with major themes and practical applications to modern readers. We will consider what Ezra reveals about Christ and his kingdom as it fits into the Bible's main story.

## OBSERVATION

Ezra is the tenth book of history in the Old Testament. In the Tanak, Ezra was together with Nehemiah as one book. Ezra is one of six Old Testament books that are after the exile to Babylon. There are three historical books—Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and three prophetic books—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Ezra is historical narrative and is semi-autobiographical of Ezra. The book contains lists, such as genealogy lists and inventories of temple vessels. The book also contains archival documents of the Persian Empire, such as letters, decrees, etc.

Ezra covers about 80 years of history beginning with Cyrus' decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Around 722 BC, the Assyrians carried away the ten northern tribes and scattered them (2 Kings 17:6). About 701 BC, God delivered Jerusalem and King Hezekiah from the army of Sennacherib. However, the prophet Jeremiah foretold Judah would go into exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:8-10) and would be in exile for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). He also prophesied they would return to the land (Jeremiah 29:10-14). The Babylonian captivity took place in three stages. King Nebuchadnezzar invaded and carried away captives in 605 BC and 597 BC. He invaded the third time and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The Babylonian Empire was actually overthrown by the Persian Empire and King Cyrus in 539 BC. The next year, 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This return was prophesied by Jeremiah more than 70 years prior (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10). It was 170 years before this that Isaiah prophesied Cyrus would do this (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-6).

The return took place in stages. Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, led

the first return. They built the altar and restarted the sacrifices. They laid the foundation for the temple. Opposition arose from the other inhabitants of the land and the work stopped. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached at this time and the work restarted after about 15 years of cessation. Once they restarted the work, the temple was finished after 4 years, around 516 BC.

The book of Ezra then skips forward about 50 years to the second return led by Ezra the scribe. He brought the golden vessels for the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken when he destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 586 BC. Ezra found the people in disarray and primarily through violating the law regarding intermarriage with Canaanites. Ezra led the people in confession, repentance, and return to God's word, which closes the book.

### ***A brief outline of Ezra:***

1. Chapters 1-6 The first return to Jerusalem
2. Chapters 7-10 The second return to Jerusalem

## **INTERPRETATION**

What does Ezra teach?

### ***A Second Exodus***

Ezra has a number of parallels with the exodus from Egypt. Israel is in captivity and there is a return to the land of Israel. The return also involves the building of a tabernacle/temple, institution/reinstitution of the law, opposition from the inhabitants of the land, temptations of intermarriage leading to idolatry. Both accounts feature a pagan king prominently in the story. Here we have a contrast between these kings. Pharaoh was hardened and destroyed in judgment so that God's name would be declared in all the earth (Exodus 9:16). Cyrus was moved to do God's will (Ezra 1:1; Proverbs 21:1). He authorized and financed the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple, which was an unthinkable scenario. This was also done so that God's name would be made known (Isaiah 45:6; Zechariah 4:1-6).

### ***The Character of God***

The historical books that close the Old Testament remarkably display God's sovereignty and providence. They also show God's steadfast, unfailing faithfulness. God is true to his word and keeps his promises. The faithful people in these books are committed to God's word and hope in his word. Ezra does give us literal fulfillment of God's promises, no matter how extraordinary that seems.

### ***Minor Themes***

Ezra shares some minor themes with other Old Testament books. Ezra highlights opposition from God's enemies. They use various tactics to oppose God's people and their work, such as scorn, mockery, feigned cooperation, compromise, and governmental force. The book also highlights the surety of judgment, even to the point of recording the names of sin-

ners judged (Ezra 10:18-24).

### ***The Messiah and His Kingdom***

Ezra contributes to the expectation of the Messiah and his kingdom with the fulfillment of prophetic promises. Only a small number of Jews returned and they are in the land without a king, but the book ends with hope (Ezra 10:2). The book shows us that the return was only a lesser fulfillment and the Israel's true restoration is still future with the coming of their Messiah.

Ezra ends with a hopeful note, but also a sober note. Ezra records lists of sinners, which demonstrates that having an altar, temple, and being in the land is not enough. They need the Prophet Priest King to bring the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David to fulfillment.

## **APPLICATION**

How does Ezra help us as modern readers?

Understanding Ezra should help us understand that God is wise (Ezra 7:25), good (Ezra 8:8), powerful (Ezra 8:22), gracious, kind, merciful, and righteous (Ezra 9:8-9, 13, 15).

Understanding Ezra in light of the Old Testament history should give us strong confidence in God's sovereignty.

Understanding Ezra helps us see the centrality of God's word and prayer, both in our lives and in the worship of God.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ezra shows the hope of the Jews realized in returning to Jerusalem. Even with the law, altar, and temple, they are still unable to walk in God's ways. The reality of being in the land is far less than the full redemption expected from the promises. So Ezra demonstrates the continued need for the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah, to come and redeem Israel and restore her to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology going book by book through the entire Bible. Each lesson typically covers one book of the Bible, though occasionally covers more than one book when the books are short. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

### **Harmony Baptist Church**

3012 W Delmar Ave  
Godfrey, IL 62035

618-466-2631

Harmonybaptist3014@gmail.com

[www.hbcgodfrey.com](http://www.hbcgodfrey.com)

[www.facebook.com/HarmonyBaptistGodfrey](https://www.facebook.com/HarmonyBaptistGodfrey)