

LUV Workbook 4, Lesson 17

Ezra Notes

See also Jon Courson's Application Commentary.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra 7:10-11

- Ezra determined in his heart to learn God's word, to live it and to teach it.

Background to Book of Ezra – rebuilding the temple

- Part 1 Chapters 1-6 Zerubbabel rebuilds the temple – rebuilding and construction.
- Part 2 Chapters 7-10 Ezra reforms the people – revival and instruction.
- Book of Nehemiah – rebuilds the wall.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-23/Jeremiah 25:4-12

For nearly 40 years Jeremiah warned the people about judgement through captivity if they did not repent. Not a single person responded to his message. He watched from a hill weeping as the Babylonian soldiers burned the temple, destroyed the city, and carried away thousands of Jews. The day is famous in Jewish history as the third captivity July 18, 586 BC

Daniel and Ezekiel were alive at this time but had been carried away to Babylon in an earlier captivity by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. Daniel was taken to Babylon in the first captivity. His ministry was to the leaders and political arena in Babylon. He became Prime Minister, second only in power to the King. Ezekiel's ministry was to the people as God used him repeatedly as an illustration sermon to portray His heart.

Why were they in captivity?

1. Because God's people had scorned God's love by continually serving false gods.

Ashtorah – goddess of sensuality

Moloch – god of prosperity

Baal – god of intellect

Mammon – god of money

2. They had not obeyed God's law which required them to let the land rest, see Leviticus 25:4. The law required they let the land rest every seventh year – not to till it or sow crops on it. But thinking that it was wasting time they ignored the law for 490 years.

Read Leviticus 25:3-7. ...in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard...for it is a year of rest for the land (v4-5). v 6 the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you

God took them into captivity for 70 years and the land rested for 70 years. 1 year for every 7 years they had disobeyed.

1st captivity 605 B.C. - Babylonians captured the crème of the young men including Daniel, Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego and took them back to Babylon but did not destroy Jerusalem.

2nd captivity 597 B.C. – Nebuchadnezzar sent the Babylonians again - took 10,000 people captives to Babylon including Ezekiel, a young priest in training.

3rd captivity 586 B.C. - Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and wiped out the people. 2 Chronicles 36:15-21.

The Babylonians were a secular prideful culture. (Originating since Babel). They wanted to impress the captives with 300 hanging gardens, incredible buildings, hundreds of impressive temples to their god Marduk, rich garments highly treasured around the world. The Babylonians seductive lifestyle seduced the Jews with carnality. The Jews grew so comfortable in Babylon that when they were allowed to go home seventy years later, only a handful chose to leave.

Ezekiel ministered to those who were carried away to Babylon, who still had hard hearts to the Lord.

God send His people to captivity in Babylon, the center of all false religions. Eventually they got burned out on idol worship, so much so that we don't see them falling prey to idolatry again.

Studying the Scriptures and realizing the seventy years were nearly expired, (Jeremiah 25), Daniel (about 9) years old, confessed the sin of the nation (Daniel 9). Then he was able to share some insights with Cyrus, King of Persia. (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-6) written by Isaiah about 170 years before Cyrus was born.

Cyrus conquered Babylon and proclaims whoever is willing to return to Jerusalem he will support them to rebuild the temple.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with rebuilding the city of Jerusalem after 70 years captivity.

Book of Ezra deals with rebuilding the temple.

Book of Nehemiah deals with rebuilding the wall.

- **Ezra 1-6:** Deals with restoration of the temple, rebuilding, and construction. The main character is Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah. Zerubbabel leads the first group to leave Babylon. They travel 900 miles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.
- **Ezra 7-10:** Deals with reformation of the people, revival, and instruction. The main character is Ezra who led the second group back to Jerusalem, sixty years after Zerubbabel.

Jesus came to rebuild the ruined temple of our lives and transform and renew our lives through His word. Ezra's story is our story.

Ezra 1:3 Cyrus asks who is willing to go back to rebuild the temple? An estimated 2 million Jews were living in Babylon. During 70 years of captivity, they had in many cases prospered well. How many were willing to return? Out of 2 million, only about 49,000 (Ezra 2:64-65) were willing to trade the Babylonian lifestyle and trade relative comfort of Babylon for the work ahead in Jerusalem.

1:4 whoever doesn't want to go has a responsibility to help those who do. If we pray and give, we are involved and as much a part of the work as if we are on the front lines.

They begin the work of building the altar (3v2), and the temple (3v8). They lay the foundations of the temple and have a praise meeting (3:10-11). When God begins to build, Satan seeks to destroy.

Ezra 4:1-3. When their adversaries hear about the building of the temple, they come to Zerubbabel and offer to do it with him. The enemy seeks to mix religion with culture and compromise, trying to infiltrate with impure worship and rituals.

Ezra 4:4-6. When Zerubbabel rejects their offer, they try discouragement and trouble them in building (4:4). They hire counselors against them to frustrate their purpose throughout the reign of Cyrus and Darius, and eventually wrote accusing letters against God's people to King Ahasuerus.

Ezra 4:7-16 The letter accuses the people building the temple of being rebellious and causing trouble in the past. The tactic of the enemy is still to find out where you failed and use it against you. Stay in the secret place of the Most High God. Perform for an audience of One!

Ezra 4:17-21 The result of the condemnation and false accusations was effective to make the king send a decree to stop the work building the city. When the enemy lies and accuses us of our past and condemns us it makes us discouraged, and we give up God's work. However, the Holy Spirit convicts and motivates us to continue in it because our past is covered by Jesus.

Ezra 4:23-24 The enemies lost no time in hurrying to Jerusalem with the Kings edict to forcibly stop the Jews building the temple, although the kings edict was to stop building the city, not the temple. So, for the work stopped for about 2 years, until the second year of King Darius of Persia.

Ezra 5:1-2. Prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesy to the Jews and motivate them to continue building. (Haggai 1:1, Zech 1:1). Haggai challenges them – how can you build your own houses but not the house of the Lord. Haggai has practical words for them to get going. Zechariah shares visions and encouraging word for Zerubbabel (Zech 4:6-7). The enemies come again to try to stop them but “the eye of God was on the elders of the Jews, so they could not make them stop until a report could go to Darius.” (v5).

Ezra 6. Darius searches the archives in Babylon and a scroll was found recording Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple. Darius issues a decree to the enemies to tell them to stay away from the rebuilding (v7). In addition, he says the costs will be paid for from the king's taxes in the region, so the work is not hindered! (v8). He also provides livestock for daily offerings to God as a sweet aroma, to pray for the king and his sons. Whoever alters the edict will be hanged! So Tattenai and his people did it diligently!

Ezra 7. About 60 years after chapter 6. Esther has taken place in between. Temple been rebuilt but it's a silent season with nothing written about it in scripture.

Ezra comes on the scene – name means “Help” or “Helper”. He was a priest descending from Aaron, who couldn't function as a priest in Babylon so became a scribe. Scholars believe Ezra wrote 1 & 2

Chronicles and Psalm 119. We are told he led the 120 men who put together the canon of scripture, and inaugurated the synagogue, a place where God's people could gather and study scripture.

Even in captivity, Ezra spent years preparing, praying, studying. He was ready when the Lord called him. Ezra 7:6 "The hand of the Lord was upon him." The king granted his request because God's hand was on him. Six times throughout, Ezra says the good hand of God was on him. He was in constant touch with the Lord. When they arrived in Jerusalem, he was prepared, v10 "Ezra had prepared in his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel."

Word for us – in times of captivity and silence, don't complain or sulk, get ready! Prepare yourself, prepare your heart, study, seek the Lord. The Spirit searches the deep things of the Lord. (1 Cor 2:y b). The Spirit tells us what to do and the Spirit empowers us to do it. Ezra &:7-10.

Ezra 7:14-18 Ezra was also a worshipper. He was charged by king Artaxerxes to take what was needed for worship in the temple. It is the Holy Spirit who enables worship (John 4:24, Eph 5:18-21, Phil 3:3).

Ezra 7:24 The king declares tax exemption for the priests and all those serving the Lord in the temple.

Ezra 7:25 Ezra is commissioned to teach the law, to establish it with those who know it, and to teach those who don't yet know it. 1 John 2:27. (The law brings us to Christ. Galatians 3:24. Then the Holy Spirit in us bears fruit. Galatians 5:22-23.)

Ezra 7:28 He is strengthened for the work ahead by God's hand on him and he gathers the leaders.

Ezra 8 Ezra gathers the people returning to Jerusalem by the river Ahava. They pray and fast for protection for the journey – they are carrying about \$5 million with no army protection. Ezra doesn't want to ask the king and belittle his testimony and God's power (v21-23) So, they fasted and entreated God for what they needed, and He answered their prayer. (v31).

Ezra 9. Arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra discovers the men of Israel had married into the Canaanites. After their long hard journey, he no doubt expected to see people worshipping and growing and serving the Lord. Instead, he hears reports they have intermarried. He sits in shock – partly from shame and grief, partly from the fear of judgement coming on the people because of their sin (v3).

Ezra 9:5-15. Ezra falls on his knees and repents and prays on behalf of the people. He confesses corporate guilt. He thanks God for His goodness and character, not punishing them as they had deserved before. He had released them from captivity, and now they were back to sinning again (v14). In humility he acknowledges God's undeserved mercy.

Ezra 10. The people see his repentance and it affects them. They realize the severity of their sin, weeping bitterly, men, women, and children. Godly sorrow leads to repentance (2 Cor 7:10.) It is declared that they should separate themselves from their wives and children who are pagan. Ezra stops eating bread & drinking water mourning their guilt. Over a period of time, everyone was interviewed including leader and many had to put away their pagan families and make a sacrifice to the Lord.