



# Metropolis

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# EZRA

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**Series:** History of Israel – Back in the Land

**References:** Ezra 1-6

**Today's Theme Verse:** <sup>1</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! <sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble <sup>3</sup> and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. (*Psalm 107:1-3*)

**Last Week's Theme Verse:** <sup>44</sup> *But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup> *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.* (*Matthew 5:44-45a*)

**Theme:** God Keeps His Promises

**Objectives:**

1. The children will know that God does what He said He will do.
  2. The children will learn that God completes what He starts.
  3. The children will realize that God will complete the good work He began in us.
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**Introduction:** We are setting aside some time to think about some of the heroes of the faith we read about in the Bible. As we look at these heroes we want to see that what makes them heroes is that they trusted in the Lord and they pointed us to Jesus; the greatest of all heroes. Today we are thinking about Ezra. Ezra was a priest and a scribe and the writer of the Old Testament book of Ezra. Ezra loved God and His Word.

**Background:** In 687 B.C. Manasseh became king of Judah and proved to be the most wicked of all of Judah's kings (*Second Kings 21:1-9*). Because of his wickedness, the Lord declared by His prophets that Judah would be judged and fall to their enemies (*Second Kings 21:10-18*). And, although Manasseh wonderfully repented (*Second Chronicles 33:10-20*), the judgment would not be averted. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah were sent to proclaim a message of the coming judgment of the Lord on Judah for its idolatry. Jeremiah prophesied for 65 years, from the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah to the time when the Babylonians carried Judah and Jerusalem into captivity (*Jeremiah 1:1-3*). In 605 B.C., the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand..." (*Daniel 1:2*). Nebuchadnezzar ordered that some of the youths of Israel be brought to Babylon to be taught the Babylonian culture and to serve in the king's palace. Among these were Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (*Daniel 1:3-7*). In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem and destroyed it. He killed men and women old and young, broke down the city wall, burned down the Temple, took away the treasure from the house of the Lord, and he took away into captivity all that he had not killed (*Second Chronicles 36:17-20*). This had all been prophesied by Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 25:8-11*).

The Lord also said through Jeremiah that, after 70 years, He would punish the king of Babylon (*Jeremiah 25:8-11*). This was fulfilled when King Belshazzar saw the hand writing on the wall (*Daniel 5*). Daniel interpreted the meaning of the writing as, "God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end...you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting...your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians" (*Daniel 5:26-28*). "That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom..." (*Daniel 5:30-31*).

Again, Jeremiah wrote by the word of the Lord concerning the 70 years. He said that at the end of the 70 years He would bring Judah back into the land, back to Jerusalem, and they would call upon the Lord (*Jeremiah 29:10-14*). What an awesome promise. God promised that after 70 years He would bring His exiled people back and reestablish them in Judah and at Jerusalem. Remember, **God Keeps His Promises**.

**Summary:** Today we begin our final series of studies in the Old Testament. We will study three books: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. All three books are concerned with events that occurred around the same time (within a century). Ezra and Nehemiah recount the return of Jewish exiles from Persian ruled Babylon, while Esther is a story about Jews who were living in Susa, the Persian capital during the reign of Ahasuerus.

The book of Ezra is the account of the first wave of Jewish exiles returning from Babylon. The Lord worked in Cyrus, the king of Persia, so that he allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, just like the Lord said through Jeremiah (*Ezra 1:1*). God does what He said He will do. The Lord also caused Cyrus to allow the Jews to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (*Ezra 1:2-11*). Although they faced many challenges, they were able to complete the Temple (*Ezra 6:13-16*). God completes what He starts. The building of the Temple in Jerusalem is a picture. It illustrates God's work of building His Church and growing His people (*Ephesians 2:19-22; First Peter 2:4-5*). God will complete the good work He began in you (*Philippians 1:6*).

## Lesson:

### Ezra the Scribe<sup>1</sup>

Ezra was the head of one of the twenty-two divisions of priests that came up from exile with Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Neh. 10:2—8; 12:1, 13). He was a famous scribe and priest. He descended from Hilkiah the high priest. Ezra was the son of Seraiah, the high priest who was slain after the taking of Jerusalem (II Kings 25: 18, 21). As a priest, he was descended from Zadok and from Phinehas. Ezra was a capable scribe (Ezra 7:6, II, 12, 20). As a scribe he was a student and he studied the will of God as revealed in His Word, that he might hide it in his own heart (Ezra 7:10). He was an interpreter with a duty to his own generation in teaching his fellow exiles what he had learned. In this way he gave the "sense" of the Word (Neh. 8:2—8). He was a copyist, which meant that this learned man had a duty to his people to make copies of God's Word (Ezra 7:10, 11). Ezra was also an able administrator. He led the Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem in peace and safety, and establishing himself as their leader. Looking at his life and work we can see that Ezra was:

- I. A man of deep humility and self-denial (Ezra 7: 10—15; 10:6).
- II. A man of great learning with a fervent zeal for God's honor (Ezra 7:10; 8:21-23).
- III. A man of great trustworthiness (Ezra 7: 13, 26).
- IV. A man anxious to commend his cause to others (Ezra 8:2-20)
- V. A man who knew how to pray (Ezra 8:21; 10: 1).
- VI. A man deeply grieved over the sins of the people (Ezra 9:3; 10:6).
- VII. A man who spared no pains to bring the people to repentance.

Ezra was a studious, prayerful leader who set his heart to know the Law of Yahweh. What a passion he had to learn, explain and administer that Law. Ezra not only taught the Law but urged the people to serve the Lord with heart, mouth and mind. The key words of the Book of Ezra are Restoration, Reorganization, Reformation.

### Ezra the Book

for further study

#### **I. The Fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians (*Second Chronicles 36:17-21*)**

- A. The fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians was the result of Judah's persistent sin in the face of God's continual call for repentance (*Second Chronicles 36:15-16*).
- B. The Lord brought Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem and he killed men and women old and young, broke down the city wall, burned down the Temple, took away the treasure from the house of the Lord, and he took away into captivity all that he had not killed.
- C. The Lord had promised this over and over again (*Deuteronomy 28:47-51; Second Kings 21:10-15; 22:15-17; Jeremiah 19; 25:8-11*). **God Keeps His Promises.** God does what He said He will do.
- D. God even declared how long their captivity would be (*Jeremiah 25:11*).

#### **II. God Promised to Return the Jews to Judah (*Jeremiah 29:3-14*)**

- A. Jeremiah 29 is a letter from Jeremiah in Jerusalem to captive Jews in Babylon (*vv. 1-3*).
- B. This was after Nebuchadnezzar took the first group of exiles to Babylon in 605 B.C. (*Daniel 1:1-3*), and before he killed or exiled the rest in 586 B.C. (*Second Chronicles 36:17-20*).

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<sup>1</sup> This section is adapted from, All the Men of the Bible, by Herbert Lockyer

- C. Read verses *4-9*. The Lord encouraged them to settle down and live their lives in Babylon. Have children, have them get married and multiply. Build homes and plant gardens. He told them to pray for the city they were living in, because if it went well for the city it would be good for them. And the Lord told them not to listen to the false prophets among them because He did not send them.
- D. Read verse *10-14*. In these verses the Lord made a truly amazing promise. He said that after seventy years in captivity, He was going to return the Jews to Judah and Jerusalem. He said He had a plan for them, a plan that included a future and a hope. He said they would call on Him, and that they would find Him when they sought for Him. God said that He would restore their fortunes and gather them from all the places where He had scattered them.
- E. Note again that there was a time frame set. The Lord made a promise and He put a date on its fulfillment; 70 years.

### III. God Keeps His Promises (*Ezra 1*)

- A. Read verse *1*. This verse tells us that Cyrus king of Persia made a proclamation and put it in writing. But the driving force behind the proclamation was the Lord. It was the Lord who stirred the heart of Cyrus to make a proclamation. And this proclamation was a fulfillment of the word of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah. God does what He said He will do.
- B. Read verse *2*. In his proclamation, Cyrus acknowledged that the Lord is the God of heaven and that it was the Lord who made him king. Cyrus said God charged him to build a house for the Lord in Jerusalem. This would not be a house for the Lord to live in like you and I live in a house. The Temple was the place for God's people to go to worship God and for God to meet with His people.
- C. Read verses *3-4*. Cyrus told the Jews that they were free to go back to Judah and build a Temple there for God. All of this was promised by the Lord through Isaiah the prophet; even calling Cyrus by name 150 years before he became king (*Isaiah 44:24-45:5, 13*). Because the Lord is God, He is sovereign over the events of history. He does His will and no one can stop Him (*Isaiah 46:8-11; Daniel 2:20-21; Proverbs 21:1*). God's word is sure. God does what He said He will do.
- D. Read verses *5-11*. Just as God had said, Cyrus sent the Jews back to Judah to build a house for the Lord. Cyrus brought out the things that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the treasury and sent it back with them. This first group of returning exiles was led by Zerubbabel the prince (called Sheshbazzar, his Babylonian name, in verse 11). He was a descendent of King David and the legal heir to the throne.

### IV. Rebuilding the Altar

- A. After they arrived and settled into the towns of Judah, the returned exiles "gathered as one man to Jerusalem" during the seventh month (*Ezra 3:1*).
- B. It was time for the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths which celebrated the time when God delivered Israel from Egypt (*Leviticus 23:26-44*). The Feast of Booths was one of three feasts that Jews were required to celebrate in Jerusalem (*Deuteronomy 16:16*).
- C. Led by Jeshua and the priest and Zerubbabel, they built the altar on the very spot where Solomon's Temple had been, and offered burnt offerings to the Lord according to the Law of Moses (*Ezra 3:2-5*).
- D. The Lord had promised that He would bring them back into the land and that they would call on Him (*Jeremiah 29:10-12*). **God Keeps His Promises.** God does what He said He will do.
- E. Although they built the altar and began making sacrifices, the foundation of the Temple had not yet been laid, so they began to raise money and gather material to build the Temple (*Ezra 3:6-7*).

### V. The Rebuilding of the Temple Begins

- A. During the second month of the second year they began to build the Temple (*Ezra 3:8-9*).

- B. When they laid the foundation they celebrated according to the instruction of King David (*First Chronicles 16*). “And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, ““For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid” (*Ezra 3:10-11*).
- C. Many who had seen the original Temple wept because they feared that the rebuilt Temple would not be as glorious as the original, but most people shouted for joy (*Ezra 3:12-13*).

## VI. Opposition to the Work

- A. The land was inhabited when the exiles returned. These people were put there by the king of Assyria after the Assyrians carried the northern kingdom of Israel away. And although they were familiar with the true God, they were worshippers of other gods . (*Second Kings 17:24-41 esp. 33*).
- B. When the Jews began rebuilding the Temple, these idol worshippers asked to help. One thing the Jews learned by being exiled was to never tolerate idolatry. So they refused to let them help (*Ezra 4:1-3*).
- C. While Cyrus was king, these people tried to discourage the Jews from building. When Artaxerxes (Ahasuerus) became king, they sent a letter accusing the Jews of being rebellious. They said that if the city is rebuilt the Jews will rebel and stop paying taxes (*Ezra 4:4-16*).
- D. Artaxerxes responded by ordering the building to stop and it did for about 15 years (*Ezra 4:17-24*).
- E. Sometimes it seems that the Lord is unable to accomplish His work. But remember, God is always in control. He will accomplish His work in His time. God completes what He starts.

## VII. The Rebuilding of the Temple Continues

- A. In the second year of King Darius, the Lord sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to tell the Jews to continue building the Temple (*Ezra 5:1*).
- B. Because of the opposition from their adversaries, and because of the letter from King Artaxerxes, they had stopped work on the Temple, but that didn’t keep them from building their own houses (*Haggai 1:1-11*).
- C. As a result of the prophetic ministry, Zerubbabel and Jeshua began again to rebuild the house of the Lord (*Ezra 5:2; Haggai 1:12-15*).
- D. They again faced opposition. Tattenai, the Persian governor questioned them about the building. But the Lord was with them and they did not stop working while they waited for a reply from Darius the king (*Ezra 5:3-17*).
- E. Darius’ reply was that the work should continue according to the decree of Cyrus, and that Tattenai should fund the construction out of the royal revenue and that all the animals the Jews needed should be supplied for them (*Ezra 6:1-12*).
- F. Nothing can stop God from accomplishing His purpose. God completes what He starts.

## VIII. The Rebuilding of the Temple Completed

- A. As Haggai and Zechariah prophesied, the people worked until the building was complete. Their success was related to the Word of the Lord (*Ezra 6:13-15*).
- B. This was by decree of God. God accomplishes His decree. God completes what He starts.
- C. God accomplished it through human means. He did it by the decrees of Cyrus Darius and Artaxerxes. He did it by the money from the royal revenue. He did it by the work of men. And He did it by the prophetic Word.
- D. They dedicated the new Temple and put the priestly service in order according to the Book of Moses (*Ezra 6:16-18*).
- E. When the time came, they celebrated the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Ezra 6:19-22*).
- F. **God Keeps His Promises.** God does what He said He will do. God completes what He starts.

## **IX. God's Good Work in Us**

- A. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus as Lord and Savior and turned from your sin, then God is at work in you. The Bible says that you as a believer in Jesus are the Temple of God's Spirit (*First Corinthians 6:19-20*). B. God is at work in you to make you like Jesus (*Romans 8:29*). When God finishes His work in you, you will be like Jesus (*Philippians 3:20-21; First John 3:1-3*).
- C. God is at work building His Church (*Matthew 16:18*). The Church is made up of all those who have believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- D. The Church is also a spiritual Temple that God is building (*First Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; First Peter 2:4-5*).
- E. You may get discouraged about the progress of God's work in you. Or unbelievers may try to hinder your growth in the Lord. Be encouraged, God completes what He starts. And, God will complete the good work He began in you (*Philippians 1:6*).
- F. Just like God caused the work on the Temple in Jerusalem to continue to completion, He will certainly continue His work in you and in His Church. God will complete the good work He began in you.
- G. If you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, you need to know that you have sinned by breaking God's law (*Romans 3:23*). God must punish sin. But God loves sinners. Because of God's great love, He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross in the place of sinners. And then God raised Jesus from the dead. Everyone who believes in Jesus and repents (turn from sinning) is forgiven of their sin and receives the free gift of eternal life. When you believe in Jesus, God begins His work in you. God will complete the good work He began in us.

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Listen to the Lesson! Make a Mark For each time you hear:

BIBLE	GOD	JESUS	LOVE
Christian	Faith	Heaven	Pray

Lesson Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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MEMORY VERSE

QUESTIONS I HAVE?

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PRAYER REQUESTS

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POINTS OF THE MESSAGE

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