

A TIME TO BUILD

Let us rise up and build ... Nehemiah 2:18

The Book of

EZRA

Restoring The Heart of The Nation



Return from Captivity
Ezra 1-2
Lesson 1

Background Information

"The book opens with the closing words of 2 Chronicles, because God's plan was not yet finished." ^{Wiersbe} The book of Ezra is a remarkable witness of God's faithfulness to His people. God stirs up the heart of king Cyrus just as the prophet Jeremiah prophesied, to encourage the people to return and rebuild their temple. Ezra relates the story of the first two returns; the first under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple and the second under the leadership of Ezra, with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, to rebuild the spiritual condition of the people. Sandwiched between the two accounts is a gap, during which Esther lives and rules as queen of Persia. The book of Nehemiah, chronicles the third installment of the returnees, to rebuild the city walls and set in order the moral and social condition of Jerusalem. Ezra and Nehemiah were originally coupled with both Chronicles, to form one unit in the original Hebrew text. Though Ezra is not specifically recorded as the author, Jewish tradition credits him with the authorship of all three books. He was a godly man marked by strong trust in the Lord, moral integrity and grief over sin who was able to stand strong against all opposition.

God's faithfulness is seen in the way He sovereignly protects His people in the midst of a powerful ruling empire while they are in captivity. They prosper in exile, then God moves and raises up pagan kings who cause and encourage them to rebuild their homeland, faithfully fulfilling the promise He made to them by the prophet Jeremiah.

I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from you captivity: I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

Jeremiah 29:14

Treasures of the Heart

...all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord...

Ezra 1:5

What does it say?

The first step is getting the lay of the land. Carefully observe the text looking to see where you might dig to find hidden treasure. Studying a narrative requires following the key characters and paying special attention to what God says and does. Mark your text looking for repeated words, contrasts or similarities. **Does a key verse stand out in each section?** Look for answers to: Who? What? When? Where? Why or How?

Ezra 1:1-4

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:

All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

Digging Deeper

Dig deeper using other resources such as a dictionary, concordance, maps and cross-references. **Notate** where you found it to share with the group. Look for commands to obey or questions to be answered. **What does God want you to know about Himself?**

Something to think about when looking up a word or topic: *The principle of first mention teaches that the first time a word or phrase appears in Scripture often establishes a precedent, pattern, or biblical concept that occurs throughout the rest of the Bible. Be careful not to ignore the context.*

Note: When studying a census; summarize the numbers in a table (as show in the NLT). Try to identify any patterns (things that stand out or places where the pattern is broken) and consider what might be the significance. Note your observations and discover how many lessons surface.

Example: *God knows who are His.*

Ezra 2:1-58 (New Living Translation)

1 Here is the list of the Jewish exiles of the provinces who returned from their captivity. King Nebuchadnezzar had deported them to Babylon, but now they returned to Jerusalem and the other towns in Judah where they originally lived. **2** Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

This is the number of the men of Israel who returned from exile:

3	The family of Parosh	2,172
4	The family of Shephatiah	372
5	The family of Arah	775
6	The family of Pahath-moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab)	2,812
7	The family of Elam	1,254
8	The family of Zattu	945
9	The family of Zaccai	760
10	The family of Bani	642
11	The family of Bebai	623
12	The family of Azgad	1,222
13	The family of Adonikam	666
14	The family of Bigvai	2,056
15	The family of Adin	454
16	The family of Ater (descendants of Hezekiah)	98
17	The family of Bezai	323
18	The family of Jorah	112
19	The family of Hashum	223
20	The family of Gibbar	95
21	The people of Bethlehem	123
22	The people of Netophah	56
23	The people of Anathoth	128
24	The people of Beth-azmaveth	42
25	The people of Kiriath-jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth	743
26	The people of Ramah and Geba	621
27	The people of Micmash	122
28	The people of Bethel and Ai	223
29	The citizens of Nebo	52
30	The citizens of Magbish	156
31	The citizens of Elam	1,254

32	The citizens of Harim	320
33	The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono	725
34	The citizens of Jericho	345
35	The citizens of Senaah	3,630

36 These are the priests who returned from exile:

	The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua)	973
37	The family of Immer	1,052
38	The family of Pashhur	1,247
39	The family of Harim	1,017

40 These are the Levites who returned from exile:

	The families of Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah)	74
41	The singers of the family of Asaph	128
42	The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai	139

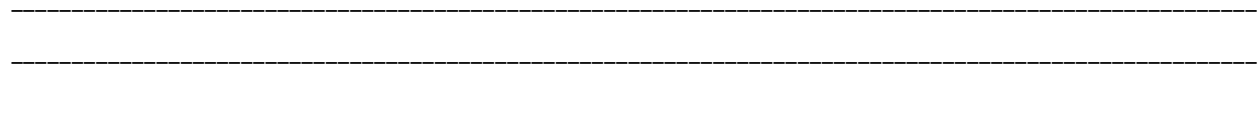
43 The descendants of the following Temple servants returned from exile:

- Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,
- 44 Keros, Siaha, Padon,
- 45 Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub,
- 46 Hagab, Shalmai, Hanan,
- 47 Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah,
- 48 Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam,
- 49 Uzza, Paseah, Besai,
- 50 Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim,
- 51 Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,
- 52 Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,
- 53 Barkos, Sisera, Temah,
- 54 Neziah, and Hatipha.

55 The descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned from exile:

- Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda,
- 56 Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel,
- 57 Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-hazzebaim, and Ami.

58 In all, the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants numbered 392.



Ezra 2:59-70 (New Living Translation)

59 Another group returned at this time from the towns of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel. **60** This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 652 people.

61 Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned. (This Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai of Gilead, and he had taken her family name.) **62** They searched for their names in the genealogical records, but they were not found, so they were disqualified from serving as priests. **63** The governor told them not to eat the priests' share of food from the sacrifices until a priest could consult the Lord about the matter by using the Urim and Thummim—the sacred lots.

64 So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, **65** in addition to 7,337 servants and 200 singers, both men and women. **66** They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, **67** 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

68 When they arrived at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders made voluntary offerings toward the rebuilding of God's Temple on its original site, **69** and

each leader gave as much as he could. The total of their gifts came to 61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for the priests.

70 So the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the Temple servants, and some of the common people settled in villages near Jerusalem. The rest of the people returned to their own towns throughout Israel.

Holy Bible, New Living Translation ®, copyright © 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

What does it mean?

What lesson can I draw from my observations? Ask yourself, "What was the intended meaning of the original author?" Is there a command to obey, a warning to heed, or an example to follow or avoid? State each lesson in a simple sentence that you could share with someone else. (aim for 10 words or less)

Ezra 1:1-4 _____

Ezra 1:5-11 _____

Ezra 2:1-58 _____

Ezra 2:59-70 _____

How can I apply it?

Ask yourself, "What course of action do I need to take to apply each lesson?" How should it change me? What does it challenge me to do? Does it point out error in my attitude or actions? (aim for 10 words or less)

Ezra 1:1-4 _____

Ezra 1:5-11 _____

Ezra 2:1-58 _____

Ezra 2:59-70 _____

What did God say?

See if you can discover what God wants us to understand about His character and His ways? Which of His attributes is He displaying? When we are questioning the circumstances that surround us, understanding Who God is helps us trust Him when we don't see Him working. Simply state what God is trying to communicate about Himself **and how it affects your thinking**.

What words or phrases are repeated? Repeated words help us discover the main point.

Getting the point!

Discover the "Big Idea" of each section. The main point of the passage is like a topic sentence in a paragraph. See if you can boil down the meaning of each section into one or two words. This helps you fully understand what the author is trying to convey. (It's fun to alliterate if you want to try) Did you find the "Big Idea"

Ezra 1:1-4 _____

Ezra 1:5-11 _____

Ezra 2:1-58 _____

Ezra 2:59-70 _____

Title

State the main point of the entire passage in the form of a title.

Flex Your Muscles

From your title Can you discover a N.T. example of this O.T. truth?

Time to build

Take note of how each challenge is met. Ask yourself: How was it responded to? How did it affect those who interacted? What building materials were used? (prayer, confrontation, standing firm, waiting etc.)

What did you learn that can help you next time you meet a similar challenge?

Radiating His Truth

When the words and actions of world leaders disturb you, just remember that God is still on the throne and has things in control.

Warren Wiersbe



