

Lesson #40

PREPARATION FOR LESSON: Read the book of Ezra, chapters 1-10 Feel free to skip over the long lists of names

BACKGROUND

Author and Date: Ezra was editor of chapters 1-6; the author of chapters 7-10; written in Jerusalem c. 450 BC.

Theme: Restoration of the Temple and restoration of their spiritual lives.

Purpose: To show how Jewish people were able to leave Babylon and return to live in Jerusalem.

Scripture Background: Haggai and Zechariah for Ezra 1 - 6; the story of Esther takes place between Ezra 6 and 7.

OUTLINE

Return under Zerubbabel 1 - 6 **536 to 516 BC**

Scene in Babylon 1:1 - 2:67

Scene in Jerusalem 2:68 - 6:22

Return under Ezra 7 - 10 **458 - 457 BC**

Scene in Babylon 7:1 - 8:31

Scene in Jerusalem 8:32 - 10:44

HISTORICAL SETTING

Ezra 1-6 The return of 50,000 Jews to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel in 536 BC.

After getting started on the temple, they are hindered by opposition. With the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple is finally restored. Chapter 6 ends in April, 516 BC. Between chapters 6 and 7 is a gap of 58 years. During part of this time Esther is queen in Susa.

Ezra 7-10 The return of 5,000 Jews under Ezra in 458 BC and the restoration of their spiritual lives.

Chapter 7 begins in March 458 BC.

Important dates after the exile

536 BC Jews return under Zerubbabel

458 BC Jews return under Ezra

516 BC Temple finished

444 BC Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem

479 BC Esther chosen as queen

430 BC Malachi begins his ministry as prophet

EXPLANATIONS**How God moved the heart of Cyrus** Ezra 1:1

Persian belief: If kings protect the temples of the gods in the empire, the gods will protect them to stay in power. People within the empire should live under their own religious and cultural laws.

Jewish influence: Daniel read to Cyrus what Isaiah had said about him 150 years earlier Isa 45:1-4; 44:26

Cyrus knew he should rebuild the temple by his reading the book Isaiah left... Accordingly when Cyrus read this and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written...

100 AD, Josephus, *Antiquities of Jews* II, 1:2

How God used Ezra to protect the Jews' spiritual life**In their family**

Led 5,000 Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem in 458 BC

Corrected marriages of Jewish men who had married pagan wives

In their sacred writings

Put together the 1st group of writings (canon) believed to be God-given and divided them into law, prophets and writings.

Introduced square consonants; developed *pointings* to serve as vowels for their alphabet

200 years later, when Jews translated their Bible from Hebrew to Greek, all Hebrew manuscripts had the new form of writing. The clear letters and written vowels gave accuracy to the translation.

In their teaching

Local synagogues Developed them as a place for worship, prayer and religious instruction.

The idea of our local churches and the form of our liturgy came from Ezra's synagogues.

Great Synagogue 120 men who had oversight of the synagogues to protect Jewish culture, holy days and sacred writings. Later it was changed to 71 men and became known as the *Sanhedrin*.

Psalms 119 Wrote this Psalm to emphasize the importance of Scripture.



EXPLANATIONS *continued*

Why Ezra forced wives and children to leave Ezra 9 - to preserve the Jews as a race and protect their spiritual leadership.

The 55,000 Jews who first returned from exile, have been in the land for over 75 years. Jewish population is now over 500,000. It is their grandsons and great-grandsons who have married pagan wives. These wives worship pagan gods and are teaching the children to worship them. This involves human sacrifice and immorality.

If it continues, the Jews are in danger of being absorbed into this culture and practice.

The royal line could be lost. If Zerubbabel's family line marries into these people, the royal line of David would be gone.

Then Jesus could not be born as King of the Jews. He could not be their Messiah-King.

Spiritual leadership could be destroyed in one generation because Jewish priests are marrying these pagan women.

Their sons, who will be the next priests, are being raised to worship pagan gods. When they become priests, they will lead the people into idolatry.

The wives can choose to renounce their idols and worship Yahweh God.

If they do not want to give up their idols, they and the children are sent back to their homes and families.

They can continue in their religion and culture. They will have safety and security.

The children are sent because in those cultures, the mother always had custody of the children.

God is annulling the marriage. There is no divorce, because He never recognized the marriage.

Our instruction for "mixed marriage" is 1 Corinthians 7.

If an unbelieving spouse wants to stay, the couple should stay together.

If the unbelieving spouse wants to leave, he/she should leave; the believing spouse should not try to prevent it.

If the lives of the believing spouse/children are in danger or if their spiritual life is being endangered or destroyed, God must come first. The believing spouse should get an annulment, separation or divorce.

APPLICATION: Guard the faith in our day!

Just as Satan wants to destroy the Jews, he also wants to destroy the Christian message. To do this, he is sending clever and charming teachers who proclaim a feel-good, success-oriented gospel. They quote a phrase or verse of Scripture, but always out of context. Books and movies tell us God is love; He is not judgmental. Everyone will spend eternity with God, no matter what they believe. Today we are getting a true message by some and a false message by others about ... Jesus - why He came - why He was on the cross and about the Bible.

As believers who accept the Bible as **God's** Word, we need to know and understand what **God** has said:

About **Jesus**

False message - He is a wonderful teacher, our example, one of the great prophets, only a man.

God - He is humanity and deity, equal with the Father in character - Virgin born - the 2nd Person of the Trinity.

About **why He came**

False message - To make world a better place so we will all love each other

To save the world from poverty and self-destruction - He is one of many ways to God.

God - Jesus came because His payment is the only way we can be forgiven by God the Father

About the **cross**

False message - Jesus' death was an example; it was an accident; He was a martyr; He was misunderstood.

God - He was on the cross to make payment for our sin.

Only **His** payment could be adequate and complete.

About the **Bible**

False message - The Bible is for the past; we have new revelation from new apostles and prophets. We can decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. It's OK to take a phrase or verse out of context to make our ideas sound spiritual.

God - It is the Word of God; it is still the guidebook and authority for our lives.

Its teaching and ideas need to be in the context of the book and chapter.

We are living in spiritually dangerous times when movies, books and teachers are distorting God's truth to lead us from it.

Other movies, books and teachers are giving God's truth to build us up in the faith. We need the Holy Spirit and discernment to recognize the difference.

Ezra leaves us with the warning - **Guard - Protect the faith** that has been given to you !

