



Ezra: An Overview

Context

From the very beginning of the bible we see that it is God's plan to have His people with him in His land of blessing. In Eden Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God. They walked with Him in the land that he has given. However Adam and Eve sinned and humanity is cast out. Away from the land where they are present with God.

If we zoom forward to just over 70 years before Ezra. We find the people of God living in the land of blessing and that through the temple God is dwelling with them again. However in 2 Chronicles 36:15-23 we read what is possibly one of the lowest points of the bible story. We are told that God sent messengers again and again to call the people to repentance. But the people mocked the prophets and despised God's words. The consequence is that God raised up Babylon to take the people into exile and to destroy the temple. God's people are now no longer in the land of blessing. The temple, the place where God dwelt with his people, has been burnt to the ground.

Around this time God sent the prophets to speak to the people. In particular importance for the book of Ezra is the prophet Jeremiah. He spoke a word of hope to the people: That after a generation or 70 years God would act to graciously restore and revive His people. The book of Ezra is the story of that prophesy becoming reality.

Content

The book of Ezra is about God graciously restoring, reforming and reviving his people. As we look closely at the book there are many different themes that are highlighted:

- God is Sovereign
 - Throughout the book we see time and again that it is God acting to restore His people. The opening line of the book speaks of God moving the heart of Cyrus in order to fulfil his own word. God is over history, unbelieving kings and his own people. He acts to ensure there is a remnant of his people.
- Temple - People with God through sacrifice
 - An important theme that runs through in the background of this book is the importance of the temple. As the people are sent back to the land the focus is on the temple. We need to bear in mind that the temple

was the way that people could be with God through sacrifice. It was so important because it was how they had access to God.

- Tension of progress and longing
 - In many ways Ezra is a positive book. We see many responding to the word of the Lord. The people of God return to the land. The temple is rebuilt. However there is always tension. There is sin present. There is a mixture of joy and weeping. There is restoration but it leaves us looking for true restoration.
- The word forms the people, the people depend on God through prayer
 - The authority for how and what the people of God do is God's voice. In Ezra we see active response and obedience to the word. There is a seriousness to studying, obeying and teaching the word of God. This leads them to conviction, repentance, joy, praise and obedience. Prayer is also highlighted in the book. The people express their dependence on God through their prayer.
- Costly discipleship and joyful praise
 - Although the people are returning to their own land and rebuilding the temple we must not overlook the cost that they people faced. They were returning to a land that had been completely destroyed. There was a lot of work to do. Through the book we see there is opposition of many kinds. While also facing temptation, that they give in to. The cost and the battle is paralleled with praise and worship. There is much joyful praise and worship in the book.
- How does this get us to Jesus?
 - Jesus say in John 5 that the scriptures testify about him. So as with any book of the bible we should be asking how does Ezra lead us to Jesus. There are several answers to this. Let me suggest just a few.
 - God is sustaining a people of God that will lead to Jesus. If Judah had been wiped out as the northern kingdom was the line to Jesus would have been destroyed.
 - Despite all of the restoration and revival that occurs in Ezra the tension remains. The problem of sin remains. They wait for the one who can truly be faithful. They wait for the one who will bring complete restoration. They wait for Jesus.
 - The people long to be with God. The way they do that is at the temple through sacrifice. Jesus is the true temple and sacrifice. Now we come to God by coming to Jesus through his own sacrifice.

Date	Text	Title
19/4/20	Ezra 1	God controls reform
26/4/20	Ezra 2	God moves his people
3/5/20	Ezra 3:1-6	Foundational living
10/5/20	Ezra 3:7-13	Build, Praise and weep
17/5/20	Ezra 4	Opposition to restoration
24/5/20	Ezra 5:1 Haggai 1	Whose House?
31/5/20	Ezra 5:1 Haggai 2	Faithfulness and future
7/6/20	Ezra 5:1-6:12	Flourishing under opposition
14/6/20	Ezra 6:13-22	Work and Worship
21/6/20	Ezra 7	True Teacher of the people
28/6/20	Ezra 8	All you need for the journey
5/7/20	Ezra 9	Repentance and Restoration
12/7/20	Ezra 10	Response