

## Ezra: Return from Exile

University Baptist Church – Online Bible Study

Session 1: September 6, 2020

**To prepare:** During the month of September, we will study the return of the Hebrew people from exile, as recounted in the book of Ezra. To prepare for this Sunday, we invite you to read the first chapter of Ezra (continue on to chapter 2 if you'd like).

You may remember our discussion last spring about how the pandemic can seem like a time of “exile” for us—displacement, loss, uncertainty about the future. As you read Ezra, what parallels do you see between the return from exile and our current situation? In what ways are we waiting in exile still, and in what ways are we gradually “returning”? If you were an Israelite in Babylon in 538 B.C.E., how would you feel about returning to Jerusalem? Why?

### Sunday morning session outline:

#### Historical Context

Read Ezra 1:1-7, 2:1

#### Discussion:

- How do you think the exiled Judeans felt about returning to Jerusalem?
- What did the return from exile mean theologically? What do the people returning to Israel learn about God?
- What echoes of “return from exile” do you find in our contemporary context?

#### Sending Prayer

### Historical Summary

- 605-586 B.C.E. – Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) defeats Israel, takes captives to Babylon
- 539 B.C.E. – Cyrus of Persia defeats Babylon, allows return to Israel

### Return from Babylon – three stages, each with a particular focus:

#### 1) Temple:

- a. 538 B.C.E. – Jewish exiles return to rebuild the Temple and worship in it
- b. Sent by edict of Cyrus, the Persian emperor
- c. Rebuilding of Temple progressed under Zerubbabel (the Jewish governor of appointed by the Persians) and Jeshua/Joshua (high priest), around 520 B.C.E.

#### 2) Jewish Community (law, worship):

- a. 458 B.C.E. (or 398?) – Ezra (priest, scribe, scholar) leads second group returning
- b. During reign of Artaxerxes (historians debate Artaxerxes I or Artaxerxes II)
- c. Ezra is to institute Jewish law, and to ensure proper worship in the Temple

#### 3) Walls:

- a. 445 B.C.E. – Nehemiah is appointed governor of Judea
- b. Rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem, enhancing its status and enlarging its population