

Ezra: Return from Exile

University Baptist Church – Online Bible Study

Session 2: September 13, 2020

To prepare: During the month of September, we are studying the return of the Hebrew people from exile, as recounted in the book of Ezra. This Sunday we will read the third chapter, reflecting on the theme of continuity and change. To prepare for this Sunday, we invite you to read Ezra 3, taking note of how the temple is rebuilt. How does this text emphasize continuity with the past? Why is that significant? Reflect on the ways your own faith is grounded in the past, even as you face changing times.

Sunday morning session outline:

Ezra 3:1-7

- Where in this passage do you see connections with the past? Why is this sense of continuity emphasized?

Ezra 3:8-13

- What effect does seeing the new temple's foundations have on the people in verses 10-11?
- In Ezra 3:11-12, we read that some of the older people weep upon seeing the foundations of the new temple. What do you make of this? What is the meaning of their tears?

Discussion

- As we look ahead to our own "return from exile" on the other side of this pandemic, what do you hope will return to exactly as it was before? What do you hope may take a different form, as we learn from our experience in the pandemic?
- How do we maintain continuity with the past, even as we move into a new future?

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