

Ezra: Return from Exile

University Baptist Church – Online Bible Study
Session 3: September 20, 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 turn to the eighth chapter, where we discover the sort of passage we often skip over: Ezra 8:1-14 gives a long list of names and numbers. To prepare for our session, read through these verses—or at least skim them. Such a passage can feel dry and distant, yet I'd like for us to consider the significance of these ancient names for us. Are these merely a relic from the past? Or might they have something to teach us about the power of memory and the importance of being remembered?

Sunday morning session outline:

Contemporary case study (I'll share pictures)

- What is the significance of specific names being inscribed on a memorial?
- What feelings are evoked by the partial names, missing names, and functional titles in place of names?

Ezra 8:1-14

- Why do you think this long list of names was recorded and passed down in the Biblical text? Even if the specific names are unfamiliar, what are some of the lessons you take away from the presence of such a list?
- Are there ways in which the book of Ezra is itself a “memorial”? If so, why was it designed the way it was? What is its design and construction intended to convey?

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