

Ezra: Return from Exile

University Baptist Church – Online Bible Study

Session 4: September 27, 2020

To prepare: During the month of September, we have been studying the return of the Hebrew people from exile, as recounted in the book of Ezra. This Sunday we conclude our study with an examination of Ezra's prayer in chapter 9. To prepare for our session, please read through Ezra 9, paying particular attention to Ezra's prayer in verses 6-15. Note the depth of his emotion and shame in this public lament.

Sunday morning session outline:

Ezra 9:1-4

- What is the nature of the people's unfaithfulness?
- How does Ezra respond?

Ezra 8:5-15

- How do you hear this spoken, communal prayer: primarily as a prayer to God, or as a sermon to Ezra's listeners?
- Ezra's public expression of mourning and sorrow has a profound effect on those who listen. Where might we need to create space for expressing grief and regret in our own lives? Do we have enough opportunity to mourn publicly for all the losses we are experiencing in this pandemic season?
- What is the role of communal confession in our context? How does confession lead us into action?

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