

Bible Study Notes and Questions on the Book of Ezra

Introduction: The study of this little book has been shown in two sections.

1) **Chapters 1-6:** Fulfilling God's call and work as shown by God stirring up his people, Israel, to rebuild the temple after the 70-year period of exile.

2) **Chapters 7-10:** Ezra, an example of service to God.

Some notes have been produced to help you study each section followed by questions. Each section may take more than one session depending on how deeply the bible study group intend to go. It may be helpful if the group leader/coordinator can give out the notes and questions before the bible study sessions to enable everyone attending time to prepare beforehand if each person so wishes. It is important to read the entire book of Ezra where possible beforehand and to read the relevant scriptures during the group sessions. It is hoped the notes will help you to answer the questions and to provoke further study of this book.

Section 1: Fulfilling God's call and work (A study of Ezra chapters 1-6)

1.1) The response to God's call to do his work.

Some of the children of Israel (See register in **Ezra Chapter 2**) return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple as decreed by Cyrus, king of Persia (**2Chronicles ch36:22-23; Ezra ch1:1-5**). God had stirred up his people to do HIS WORK (**Ezra ch1:1-5**). We should be ready to do God's work not our own. The word 'stirred' in Hebrew is 'uwr'. It gives the meaning of opening the eyes, to wake up, to lift up, to stir up, to raise up. Do we need to wake up to what God requires us to do? Only a small remnant of about 50000 Jews returned from exile.

1.2) Being separated/set apart to do God's work.

The children of Israel re-erected and dedicated the altar of the Lord as shown by the daily burnt offerings (**Ezra ch3:1-7** and see **1Thess ch4:3-7**). Where there has been repentance for sin and faith in receiving Jesus Christ as your Saviour you can dedicate or rededicate your life to God. You should become aware of what God wants you to do in HIS WORK (**Ephesians 2:10**).

1.3) A fresh start in serving the Lord in doing his work and in being his witnesses.

There was joy when the foundations of the temple were laid in place in Jerusalem (**Ezra ch3:10-13**). When we begin to really serve the Lord, as he wants us to, there is joy when you see the foundations to that work established. Is your life built on Christ?

1.4) Opposition comes to test the faith of a believer.

The leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua had been wise enough to discern who should rebuild the temple. They refused to have alien builders (**Ezra ch4:1-3**). Opposition had appeared where the enemy gains a victory, albeit temporary, in stopping God's work to rebuild the temple as shown by the letter of King Artaxerxes authorising stoppage of this work (**Ezra ch4:19-24**) by the enemies of the children of Israel (**Ezra ch4:1**). There can be delays when carrying out God's work.

1.5) A further word from the Lord to continue his work.

The children of Israel receive a further word from God through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to rise up and continue to rebuild the temple (**Ezra ch5:1,2**). As believers we need a further word from the Lord to rebuke, exhort, encourage and edify us to continue that work God has given us. We will be able to continue with confidence to do God's work.

When the children of Israel experienced further opposition (**Ezra ch5:3-5**) they continued the work knowing God had called them to finish his work on rebuilding the temple. When the enemies of the children of Israel had taken the matter to Darius, king of Persia, the decree of King Cyrus was found regarding authorisation to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Darius provided every need for the children of Israel to complete the work of rebuilding the temple (**Ezra ch6:6-14**).

1.6 The believer finishes the work God wants him/her to do

The temple has been completed (**Ezra ch6:15-22**). The dedication of the temple is with joy. There is a deep sense of victory, blessing, praise and adoration to God in completing his work. We may well know this experience when we see the completion of God's work at certain times in our lives.

Questions on Section 1: Ezra chapters 1-6

Q.1 Show how God is at work amongst his people Israel.

Read **Ezra ch1:1-11; ch2:61-63; ch3:10-13; ch4:1-3; ch5:1-5; ch6:16-22.**

Q.2 How aware of the God of Israel is Cyrus, king of Persia? Is it possible that he is a believer?

Read **Ezra ch1:1-4; ch4:3; ch5:13-17; ch6:3-5.** Read also **2Chron ch36:22-23** and **Isa ch44:28** and **ch45:1-13** (New King James Version of the Bible could be helpful here)

Q.3 Why were the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin temporarily successful in stopping the work of the temple? Read **Ezra ch4:6-24.**

Q.4 How did the Jews show courage in continuing to rebuild the temple regardless of the opposition? Read **Ezra ch5:1-17.**

Q.5 Discuss how much understanding Darius, king of Persia, had of the God of Israel when he sent a decree back to Tatnai, governor beyond the river. Read **Ezra ch6:6-12.**

Q.6 What evidence do we see of the children of Israel seeking God at the time of the dedication of the temple and after that time? Read **Ezra ch6:16-22.**

Ezra, an example of service to God (A study of Ezra chapters 7 to10)

God wishes all of us who know him to be a living example of service. Ezra was such a good example of service in responding to God's call to go to Jerusalem. Ezra's role in leadership teaches us the spiritual qualities that we must have to fulfil God's calling to effective service. Service to the Lord requires our willingness to dedicate ourselves totally to the Lord alone if we want to see Him at work in us and other people. No matter what we are called to do we should consider ourselves in full time service to the Lord.

Looking at Ezra we are told that he was a priest who was descended from the Aaronic priesthood, a descendant of Aaron (**Ezra ch7:1-5**). The name, 'Ezra', means 'help', 'assistance', or 'my helper'. Ezra only appears in the last four chapters of the book of Ezra.

We shall consider six qualities of Ezra's calling to service.

1) Ezra had made preparation so that he was ready to serve the Lord in Jerusalem.

He had studied the law of God so that he was ready to do the law and to teach it to other people (**Ezra ch7:6,10**). God was with him to go to Jerusalem. We must make preparation to seek the Lord (**Psalms 105:4**); put God's word into practice (**James ch1:21-27**) and be ready to teach others the word of God (**1 Peter ch3:15-16**). Ezra's service was recognized by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who wrote in a letter to Ezra that he was sent by him to Jerusalem (**Ezra ch7:12-26**). The king writes in his letter twice that Ezra is 'the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven' (**Ezra ch7:12,21**). When God calls us to serve him others will encourage us to fulfil our service to the Lord (**Ezra ch7:27,28**).

2) Ezra was dependent on God to do the work the right way.

He sought God in prayer with fasting before setting out to Jerusalem (**Ezra ch8:21-23**). Ezra knew there were dangers of enemy attacks. His faithfulness in waiting on God enabled him and the Jews who accompanied him (**Ezra ch8:1-20**) to come to Jerusalem safely (**Ezra ch8:31**).

When we trust in God, taking time through prayer and possibly fasting to know the right way to do his work, God will preserve us and never leave us (**Psalms 121:8; Hebrews ch13:5**).

3) Ezra was thorough in doing God's work correctly.

Ezra was thorough in his preparations to go to Jerusalem. What we should see here is Ezra's faithful stewardship with possessions. He was meticulous in seeing the silver, gold and vessels for the temple were weighed before and after the journey to Jerusalem to ensure that nothing was missing (**Ezra ch8:25-30,33-34**).

Likewise, we must be found faithful stewards of all that we possess (**1 Cor ch4:1-2**).

4) Ezra was a man of prayer – an intercessor.

Being an intercessor requires considerable time in prayer in seeking to know God and in knowing what his will is. Ezra must have spent time in seeking God to become a bible teacher (**Ezra ch7:10**), secondly in preparation before setting out to go to Jerusalem (**Ezra ch8:21-23**) and thirdly in dealing with the serious problem of intermarriage amongst the children of Israel (**Ezra ch9:5-15; ch10:1**). The prayer in **Ezra ch9:5-15** teaches us how to pray earnestly for God to show us what to do in a serious situation. The prayer shows recognition of what God has done and faces up to the sins committed.

Please bear in mind that intermarriage was forbidden by God when a wife or husband was an idol worshipper. This was why it was clearly sinful to marry an idol worshipper. If a foreigner/stranger or Gentile who was not a Jew became a believer in worshipping the God of Israel then it was not sinful to marry a believing Gentile as shown in the example of Boaz who married Ruth a Moabite (**Ruth ch4:13**).

5) Ezra had a hatred for sin.

Ezra knew the need for holiness. He did not compromise with sin having a love for God's word (**Ezra ch10:3**). He knew the consequences of the sin of Israel had brought God's judgment on previous generations. Ezra's example of grieving deeply over such wickedness of intermarriage amongst the children of Israel led to a great company of people recognising their offences against God.

Do we have such a hatred for sin? Being an example of holiness leads you to face up to exposing wickedness around as well as being an influence to others to seek holiness. The call to holiness is very clear in scripture (**Lev ch11:44-45; 2Cor ch6:14-18; ch7:1; 1Thess ch4:3-7; 1Peter ch1:15-16**).

6) Ezra puts right what was wrong.

The problem of intermarriage was not just acknowledged but dealt with immediately. All men who had taken strange/foreign wives were told to confess their wickedness and to put their wives away (**Ezra ch10:10-11**). There is a list of the men who had strange/foreign wives (**Ezra ch10:18-44**). They separated from them.

Like Ezra we must deal with sin with urgency. God will respond in giving greater blessing to our lives.

In summarising, may we seek to show effective service to God.

- 1) Being well prepared to serve God in a specific area of work (**Ezra ch7:10**).
- 2) Being dependent on God to do things his way (**Ezra ch8:21-23**).
- 3) Being thorough in our stewardship especially in taking care of material possessions (**Ezra ch8:25-30,33-34**).
- 4) Being a man or woman of prayer – an intercessor (**Ezra ch7:10; ch8:21-23; ch9:5-15**).
- 5) Having a hatred of sin seeking holiness (**Ezra ch9:1-4**).
- 6) Able to put right what is wrong by removing sin from our lives (**Ezra ch10:10-11,16-17**).

May we be faithful servants to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions on Section 2: Ezra Chapters 7 to 10

Q.1) Show how God is at work in using Ezra.

Read **Ezra ch7:6-15,27-28; ch8:21-23,31-32; ch9:1-15; ch10:1-17**

Q.2) Discuss the letter of king Artaxerxes who gave support to Ezra being sent to Jerusalem. How much understanding does king Artaxerxes have of God and of his purposes for his people, Israel? Read **Ezra ch7:11-28; ch8:22**.

Q.3) There were three important practical things that Ezra did before leaving to go to Jerusalem. Show what they are in reading a) **Ezra ch8:15-20** b) **Ezra ch8:21-23** c) **Ezra ch8:24-30**. Show how God responds in a) and b).

Q.4) What evidence tells us that Ezra and company were brought safely to Jerusalem?

Read **Ezra ch8:31-32**.

Q.5) Did the city of Jerusalem benefit by the arrival of Ezra and company? Read **Ezra ch8:33-36**.

Q.6) Show in what way the children of Israel had sinned grievously against God?

Read **Ezra ch9:1-4**.

Q.7) Look carefully at the content of the prayer of Ezra recorded in **Ezra ch9:5-15**. What lessons does this prayer teach regarding intercession?

Q.8) What action did Ezra take to remove the sin of intermarriage? Read **Ezra ch10:1-17**.

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