

Title: **EZRA**
“Our God hath not forsaken us.”

Text: Ezra 9:1-15

Subject: *Preservation and Restoration*

Date: Tuesday Evening—May 13, 2003

Tape # X-60a

Readings: *Lindsay Campbell and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther cover the history of Israel immediately following their return from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem. There was only a remnant that returned, a remnant “*whose spirit God had raised,*” who returned to Jerusalem. Though there were probably three million Jews in Babylon at the time, only 50,000 returned.

The Jews had gone down into Babylon as shepherds. But while they were there they learned the ways of Babylon and became successful businessmen, merchants and shop keepers. They became so prosperous, so lost to materialism, that they did not want to go back to Jerusalem even though they were still slaves in exile from their own land. They preferred the drudgery of Babylonian bondage, with its wealth, to the liberty of worshipping God in Jerusalem.

Some have suggested that they became a different people while in Babylon. But that was not the case at all. The Lord sent them into captivity to prove them; and there they proved what they really were. So it is with all trials. Trials do not change us. They simply prove what we are.

There was an elect remnant in Babylon whom the Lord reserved, whose spirit he revived, whose seventy year trial in Babylon made them pine for liberty and the worship of God in Jerusalem. Many of them refused to return when God opened the door. But

the Spirit of God stirred up the hearts of some and made them willing in the day of his power. The message of this Book is found in chapter 9 verse 9.—“***OUR GOD HATH NOT FORSAKEN US.***”

Proposition: The Book is all about God’s great grace in keeping, reviving, and restoring his people.

Actually, the Book of Ezra speaks of two returns from Babylon. First, in chapters 1-5. Zerubbabel led about 50,000 back to Jerusalem. After building again the altar of God and laying the foundation of the temple, there was another long period of languishing. This is the period covered by the Book of Esther. Then, in chapters 6-10, Ezra led another group, even smaller than the first, out of Babylon and back to Jerusalem.

Chapter 9 records Ezra’s prayer, one of the most remarkable prayers of repentance found in the Bible. In this prayer, we see the whole of Israel’s problem and the bounteous, indestructible grace of God set forth in this Book. Let’s read chapter 9. Then, I will show you the message of the Book of Ezra.

(Ezra 9:1-4) "Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. {2} For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

That was the cause of Israel’s trouble.

(Ezra 9:3-4) And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. {4} Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

EZRA'S PRAYER

(Ezra 9:5-15) And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, {6} And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over *our* head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. {7} Since the days of our fathers *have we been* in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, *and* our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as *it is* this day. {8} And now for a little space grace hath been *showed* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. {9} For we *were* bondmen; **yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage**, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. {10} And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, {11} Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. {12} Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor

seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* for an inheritance to your children for ever. {13} And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this; {14} Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed *us*, so that *there should be* no remnant nor escaping? {15} O LORD God of Israel, thou *art* righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as *it is* this day: behold, we *are* before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this."

DIVINE FAITHFULNESS

First, let's go back to chapter 1 and learn something about the character of our great God. As Cyrus put it in verse 3, "*The Lord God of Israel, he is the God!*"

(Ezra 1:1-3) "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, {2} Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. {3} Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem."

- A Display of Divine Inspiration—Isaiah's Prophecy and Jeremiah's
- A Display of Divine Sovereignty—The king's heart is in his hand.

- A Display of Divine Faithfulness—Our God is always faithful. He promised to bring Judah out of Babylon after 70 years; and he did. They had forsaken him; but he would not forsake them.

Here is a picture lesson in divine chastisement. When God sends chastisement, it is not to destroy us, but to refine us. Judah fell captive to Babylon because Israel had fallen captive to their own lusts. But the Lord did not destroy them, he restored them. And in their restoration, he used even the very thing that had threatened to destroy them to enrich them. Ultimately, all the expenses needed for their restoration were given out of the king's house in Babylon (6:4).

But, learn this too, we must—Once we have fallen into a state of spiritual declension from our God, once we have been drawn away from him, we will never return to him, except he return us. The only ones who came back to Jerusalem were those “*whose spirit the Lord had raised.*”

When Zerubbabel brought Israel back to Jerusalem, **his first act was the building of God's altar.** That is always the very first thing that takes place when God restores our souls. He causes us to turn again to Christ and his great sacrifice for us, acknowledging with renewed consecration that we are his (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The second thing they did was to lay the foundation of the temple. The work was met with mixed feeling (3:1-3, 11-13).

(Ezra 3:1-3) "And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. {2} Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the

altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as *it is* written in the law of Moses the man of God. {3} And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt offerings morning and evening."

(Ezra 3:11-13) "And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. {12} But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: {13} So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."

What a picture this is of the bitter sweetness of true repentance. When the Lord graciously grants us a little reviving in our souls, we weep because of our horrible offenses and rejoice because of his great goodness.

Then, a third thing happened. In chapter four, the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin tried to turn them away from God again. These adversaries were Samaritans. They pretended to be friends, wanting to help rebuild the house of God. When Zerubbabel and the men of Judah refused to allow them to help, they turned on them fiercely, and (for a time) delayed the work.

- These men were like our flesh. Everything in us, by nature, would turn us from our God.

- Judah could not allow these Samaritans to have any part in the work, because they had no part in the worship of God.—We must never lean to the flesh to do God’s work and will!

GOD’S METHOD OF GRACE

There is another lesson here that we must not miss. God always accomplishes his purpose of grace. But he uses human means to do it.

- Cyrus issued his decree because God put it in his heart to do so (1:1); but Cyrus issued the decree.
- Those who returned returned because God raised their hearts to return; but they returned.
- Ezra succeed because the good hand of the Lord was upon him; but he succeeded (7:9).
- Artaxerxes supported the work of rebuilding the temple because the Lord put it in his heart to do so (7:27); but he supported the work.
- God favored the nation with repentance because of Ezra’s prayer (9-10). The Lord put the prayer in his heart, but Ezra prayed.
- God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to prophesy to his people and move them to the work (5).
- And deliverance came at exactly the time God had purposed and promised.

GRACE ALL-SUFFICIENT

The last thing I want you to see is this.—God’s grace is sufficient.

- To Supply all Our Need

- To Preserve and Keep Us
- To Enable us to Do His Will

(Ezra 9:8-9) "And now for a little space grace hath been *showed* from the LORD our God, to leave us **a remnant** to escape, and to give us **a nail** in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us **a little reviving** in our bondage. {9} For we *were* bondmen; yet **our God hath not forsaken us** in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, **to set up the house** of our God, and **to repair the desolations** thereof, and to give us **a wall** in Judah and in Jerusalem."