

King Cyrus Permits the Jews to Return from Captivity in Babylon
Ezra 1

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. God moves the hearts of kings to fulfill His good word. Ezra 1:1**
- 2. God moves the hearts of His people to accomplish His good will. Ezra 1:5**

Practical Application

- 1. Have you returned God's stolen property?**
- 2. Let God do more than just open the door.**

Questions

1. God allowed Judah to be conquered. By whom was it conquered? Why did God allow the kingdom to be conquered?
2. Where were the Jewish people held in captivity and for how long?
3. Who was Cyrus and what did he do for God's people, the Jews?
4. How many Jews returned to Jerusalem at that time? Under whose leadership did they return?
5. Why was the project of rebuilding the Temple delayed?
6. Name the prophets who motivated the people to resume the rebuilding of the house of the Lord.

Answers

1. God allowed the kingdom to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies because of Judah's sins of idolatry and immorality.
2. In Babylon for seventy years.
3. Cyrus was king of Persia. He overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. King Cyrus issued a royal decree which allowed and encouraged the captive Jews to return to their homeland.
4. About 50,000 Jews returned to their homeland under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
5. At first the project went well and the foundation of the new temple was laid. But then, because of discouragement and apathy and enemy threats, the work was halted for 15-16 years.
6. Haggai and Zechariah.

Discuss / Consider

1. Though Persia did not follow God, He moved King Cyrus to fulfill His word—just as He had foretold. Can God do the same for us today? Are you facing a major difficulty or decision in your personal life right now, where someone's heart has to be moved?

2. When God stirs the hearts of His people, it's amazing what can be accomplished. Recall some projects that have been blessed by God when He moved in the hearts of His people – first, as to need, then by motivation of heart to see the vision become a reality.

Challenge

1. Before you became a Christian you used your time and talent and money for your own interests. But now, as a believer, you must ask, "How much of what's been given to you have you returned?" Return them to God to glorify Him.

2. God not only opened the door for the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but He also provided for their return. God not only moved the heart of the king, but He moved the hearts of the Persian people as well. Think of the implications for that to happen today! Let God do more than just open the door.

The Jewish Captives in Babylon Who Returned to Jerusalem Ezra 2

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. God keeps records of the activities of His people. Ezra 2:1-61**

- 2. God keeps records of the attitudes of His people. Ezra 2:68-70**

Practical Application

- 1. Let's sing unto the Lord**

Questions

1. List three categories of people who had been carried away to Babylon and then returned to Jerusalem and Judah.
2. Why did Cyrus issue his edict in 538 B.C. allowing Jewish people to return to their homeland?
3. How many Jewish captives returned to Jerusalem under the edict of Cyrus? How do we know this?
4. Which other book of Scripture is similar to Ezra 2 concerning this first return of the Jews to their land?
5. Read Ezra 2:63. What is the Urim and Thummim?

The Jews Build an Altar and Begin the New Temple Ezra 3

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. The work of the Lord proceeds with organization. Ezra 3:1-9**

- 2. The work of the Lord proceeds with emotion. Ezra 3:10-13**

Practical Application

- 1. Go to the Lord when you are afraid.**

Questions

1. Who was Jeshua? Who was Zerubbabel?

2. The returned captives did first things first. What was the order they followed?

3. How can the dates of the seventy years of captivity be calculated?

Answers

1. Jeshua was the high priest. Zerubbabel was the leader who brought the Jewish people back from captivity.
2. First, they built the altar of sacrifice so that they could worship and obey the Lord. Second, in obedience to the law, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Third, they began to offer all the sacrifices and keep all the feasts in accordance with the law. Fourth, they began to build the foundation of the temple of the Lord.
3. The work on the foundation of the temple began in 535 B.C. Seventy years earlier, in 605 B.C., the first phase of the fall of the kingdom of Judah took place. Another way to calculate the seventy years is from 586 B.C. when the temple was destroyed, down to 516 B.C., when the temple was completed.

Discuss / Consider

1. The work of the Lord proceeds with organization. Are we organized as to our priorities? Are worship and obedience to the Lord in the number one place in your life? Review the past week. List your priorities.

2. As the work of the Lord proceeded, it was a time of great emotion. The work of the Lord proceeds with emotion today as well. When do you get emotional about the work of the Lord?

Challenge

1. When you are frightened, where do you turn, to whom do you go? Do you instinctively turn to the Lord? God loves to hear our prayers when we are afraid because it shows our dependence on Him.

The Jews Face Opposition From the Surrounding Foreigners Ezra 4

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. The work of the Lord is hindered by compromise. Ezra 4:2-3

2. The work of the Lord is hindered by opposition. Ezra 4:4-24

Practical Application

1. Don't fear the opposition.

Questions

1. Most of the Jews who returned from the exile in Babylon were from the tribes of _____ and _____.
2. Who were the adversaries of Judah? Give a brief history of these enemies of Judah.
3. Why were these adversaries unwelcome into the community of the Jews?
4. How long did the "unwelcome" policy continue?
5. Refer to John 4:9. How does this relate to the "unwelcome" policy?
6. What tactics were employed by the enemies of Judah to sidetrack their temple project?

Answers

1. Judah and Benjamin
2. They were primarily Samaritans. When the Assyrians conquered the northern ten tribes of Israel in the 8th Century B.C., the Assyrian kings repopulated the land with foreign peoples. These foreign people began to intermarry with the people of northern Israel who had been left in the land. This was the beginning of the Samaritan people.
3. The Samaritans were a mixed race.
4. Right on down until the time of the Lord Jesus.
5. When the Lord Jesus asked a woman of Samaria for a drink, the woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."
6. At first, they tried the tactic of compromise, and when that didn't work, they went to open opposition.

Discuss / Consider

1. The Samaritans didn't want the Jews to prosper in the building of the temple, so they tried to infiltrate their ranks by compromise. Satan practices the same tactic today when he tries to get Christians to compromise the truth. Where do you see this in our culture?

2. In Ezra 4:24, we read that the work ceased, and the temple project was put on hold for fifteen years because of the opposition. The work of the Lord was hindered by opposition then, and it is hindered by opposition today. Where do you see biblical values being hindered by opposition?

Challenge

1. Do you fear the opposition? Look to the Lord for strength and courage to face the opposition. Christians who stand firm in the faith know the joy of walking with the Lord. Does your joy shine forth when you are persecuted and hindered in the name of Jesus?

Work Resumes on the Temple and Opposition Continues Ezra 5

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. The teaching of the word will motivate God's people. Ezra 5:1-2**

- 2. The tactics of the enemy should challenge God's people. Ezra 5:3-13**

Practical Application

- 1. Remember, God is in control of the opposition.**

Questions

1. The Lord's new rebuilt temple is sometimes called _____.
2. In 538 B.C., how many Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon? Under whose leadership did they return?
3. The foundation for the new temple was laid in 535 B.C., but the work was delayed for fifteen years, all the way down to 520 B.C. Why was the work delayed?
4. During the reign of Darius I God graciously raised up two prophets. Who were they, and what did they do?
5. What was the content of the ministry of each of these prophets?

Answers

1. Zerubbabel's Temple.
2. About 50,000 returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
3. Because of opposition from the surrounding foreign peoples and because of discouragement and apathy from within.
4. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. As a result of their ministries God's people were motivated to do the work of the Lord, and the rebuilt temple was completed.
5. Haggai exhorted the people based on God's word. Zechariah gave encouragement to the people based on God's word.

Discuss / Consider

1. The teaching of God's word will motivate God's people. A steady diet of expository ministry from the word of God is the key to the best kind of church (and individual) growth. Are you both convicted and encouraged by the word of the Lord?

2. Persian officials challenged and opposed God's people during the rebuilding of the Lord's Temple. Both challenge and opposition to the Lord's work and to the Lord's people should be considered as an opportunity to witness for the Lord. Is your faith being challenged right now by the opposition? Use it as an opportunity to share your faith!

Challenge

1. Although Satan tries, he cannot make God's work cease. Why? Because God is in control of the opposition. Aren't you thankful that God has His eye on you? Are you continuing faithful in the work that God has for you to do?

The Opposition's Strategy Backfires and the Temple Is Completed **Ezra 6**

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. God can cause the enemy's strategy to backfire.

2. God can cause His people's projects to sure-fire.

Practical Application

1. Don't determine God's blessing only by numbers.

Question

1. An official letter was sent to whom? By whom? What was it about?

2. What happened as a result?

3. What was the "execution" clause of King Darius' decree?

4. We are familiar with the phrase, "The laws of the Medes and Persians." Where did this come from?

5. When Darius issued his edict in favor of the Jews, did it mean he became a believer in the one true God of Israel?

Answers

1. An official letter was sent to King Darius by some Persian officials to search the royal archives for the edict of Cyrus. The Persian officials wanted to stop the Jews from rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem.
2. The search was made and it proved that King Cyrus had issued the decree about twenty years before this time. The Jews had been given the authority to rebuild their temple. So, King Darius issued another decree, backing up the original edict of Cyrus.
3. See Ezra 6:11-12. If someone altered King Darius' decree, his house would be pulled down, and from the timbers a scaffold would be erected upon which to hang the guilty person.
4. It came from such passages as Ezra 6:11-12. Edicts of the Persian kings were serious business, and were not to be altered under penalty of death.
5. No. Like the other kings, he was a polytheist, wanting to appease the gods of all the nations. King Darius recognized that the God of Israel was a strong God, so he thought that prayers to this God would be helpful to him and to his sons. See Ezra 6:10.

Discuss / Consider

1. The Persian officials thought they had won their case and that the work on the Jewish temple would be shut down, but God had other plans. What a turnaround! Have you seen a something like this happen in your life?

2. God can cause His people's projects to sure-fire. Look up the meaning of this word in the dictionary. How does the concept of sure-fire relate to this account? Will your plans sure-fire?

Challenge

1. God's blessing is not determined by numbers. Compare Ezra 6:17 with 2 Chronicles 7:5. God was just as pleased with Zerubbabel's sacrifices as He was with Solomon's sacrifices. Do you have a tendency to think that God is blessing because of large numbers?

Ezra and 2,000 more Jewish Exiles Return to Jerusalem

Ezra 7

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. Commitment is essential for God's blessing.

2. Discipline is essential for God's blessing.

Practical Application

1. Don't forget the third phase of the commitment cycle.

Questions

1. The foundation temple in Jerusalem was laid in 535 B.C, but was not completed until 516 B.C. Why the delay?
2. Name the two prophets who motivated the people to continue the work on the temple project
3. Zerubbabel led 50, 000 Jews from captivity in Babylon back to Jerusalem. Under whose leadership and how many was the next group of Jews to return from captivity?
4. How long was the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem?
5. What is the third phase of the commitment cycle?

Answers

1. The delay in the project was because of opposition on the one hand, and a problem with priorities on the other hand. The opposition took the form of legal threat from the surrounding foreign peoples, and legal delay by the Persian officials.
2. Haggai and Zechariah.
3. Nearly sixty years later, Ezra led about 2,000 more captives back to Jerusalem.
4. The journey took four months. They walked about 900 miles.
5. Commitment is essential for blessing, and there will be blessing if there is commitment. The third phase of the commitment cycle is praise. And praise will actually result in further commitment and blessing.

Discuss / Consider

1. The phrase, "The hand of God was upon him," is used in Chapter 7. Have you experienced the good hand of God upon you during your life as a believer?

2. Ezra was given governing authority as well as authorization and funding for his mission. No matter how much blessing, a structure of authority and discipline is still needed. Discipline is essential for God's blessing - in the family, in the church, in any ministry. How is this true in these spheres of your life?

Challenge

1. Commitment is essential for blessing. Why is it that some Christians take blessing for granted?

The Jews Who Returned to Jerusalem with Ezra
Ezra 8

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. A godly leader prays about everything

2. A godly leader uses common sense.

Practical Application

1. Remember, worship comes before service.

Questions

1. Name the three phases going into the captivity.

2. Name the three phases coming out of the captivity.

Answers

1. Going in: Phase 1 – In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar entered Judah and took Daniel and others as captives to Babylon. Phase 2 – In 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar again entered Judah and captured Jerusalem and took Ezekiel and others, including the king as captives to Babylon. Phase 3 – In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar completely conquered the kingdom of Judah and destroyed the beautiful temple that Solomon had built.

2. Coming out: Phase 1 – In 538 B.C., about 50,000 Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel as a result of the edict of Cyrus the Persian. Under phase 1, the temple was finally rebuilt in 516 B.C. Phase 2 – In 458 B.C., Ezra returned with about 2,000 Jews. Phase 3 – In 445 B.C., Nehemiah returned and motivated the people to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, walls that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Discuss / Consider

1. Ezra was a godly leader. He not only had natural leadership abilities, but he had God-given spiritual ability to lead the people, as well. What is the foundation necessary for being a godly leader?

2. Ezra sought out people and gave them responsibility, and there was accountability. The men took their responsibility seriously. How can you take your responsibilities seriously?

Challenge

1. When the exiles with Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, they worshiped the Lord with sacrifices. This is the divine order – worship before service. When you truly worship the Lord, it is bound to result in some kind of service. Are you too busy serving to worship?

Ezra's Great Concern and Prayer of Confession

Ezra 9

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. When God's people sin there should be more remorse.**

- 2. When God's people sin there should be confession.**

Practical Application

- 1. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers.**

Questions

1. How many Jews were in the 1st phase of the return from their 70-year captivity in Babylon? Under whose leadership?

2. During this first return, the Jewish temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, was rebuilt and finally finished in the year ____ B.C. Name the two prophets who motivated the people to finish the job of rebuilding the temple.

3. Name the two prophets who motivated the people to finish the job of rebuilding the temple.

4. Fifty-eight years after the temple was rebuilt, there was a second return of Jews from Babylon. Under whose leadership did they return?

5. Some of the Jews were in direct disobedience to God's law stated in Deuteronomy 7:1-How did they disobey?

Answers

1. About 50,000 under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 538 B.C.
2. In the year 516 B.C.
3. Haggai and Zechariah.
4. Under the leadership of Ezra.
5. They had intermarried with the pagan foreigners in the land.

Discuss / Consider

1. Ezra showed the signs of his day of mourning and remorse. When he heard of the problem, he was shocked and appalled. When sin is committed, there should be a sense of guilt and remorse in the family of God. Have you found this so in your church?

2. One of the great prayers of confession in the Bible is found here in Ezra 9:5-15. Can you imagine what it would be like if our own nation would pray a prayer like this? What a reawakening and revival this would bring across American and in our churches. Could you do anything about encouraging such praying?

Challenge

1. Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. This is a practical application from Ezra 9. God's people had married unbelievers. Make sure that you make decisions based on the truth of God's word.

The Problem of Intermarriage with Foreign Women **Ezra 10:1-44**

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. The discipline of God's people is demanded.**

- 2. The discipline of God's people is difficult.**

Practical Application

- 1. Let's be firm but flexible like Ezra.**

Questions

1. Which language was common in Ezra's day? (About one-fourth of the Book of Ezra was written in this language)
2. The first two verses of Ezra are identical to the last three verses of 2 Chronicles. What does this suggest to us?"
3. Ezra was confronted with a major problem. What was the problem
4. What was the solution to the problem?
5. List a few reasons, as seen in this chapter, why the discipline of God's people is difficult

Answers

1. Aramaic. The Jewish people learned to speak Aramaic while they were captives in Babylon.
2. The close connection between these books strongly suggests that Ezra was the author of both of the books of Chronicles.
3. A number of the Jews had intermarried with the heathen women of the land, who followed pagan religions. Some of these marriages produced children.
4. First, there was remorse for the sin and confession of the sin on the part of Ezra for the nation. Then disciplinary action had to be taken.
5. Not everyone is in agreement with the discipline administered, some church leaders are involved in the problem, there are family connections, and the same problem resurfaces.

Discuss / Consider

1. The discipline of God's people is difficult. Do you support and encourage your spiritual leaders as they exercise spiritual discipline?

Challenge

1. Ezra was a firm disciplinarian. He did not back down from his responsibility to discipline for disobedience to God's word. But Ezra was reasonable and flexible because he was a good leader. Re-read Ezra 10:12-14. Whether it be family discipline or discipline in the church, how can we be firm but flexible like Ezra?