

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-26-12 PM NOTES  
"EZRA"  
#16 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

1050 BC	Saul is anointed as Israel's first King
1010 BC	David becomes the King of Israel
970 BC	Solomon becomes the last King of a united Israel
931 BC	The nation is divided into the northern and southern kingdoms
722 BC	The northern kingdom (called Israel) falls to Assyria
606 BC	Babylon begins invading and deporting people from the southern kingdom (called Judah)
587 BC*	The southern kingdom falls to Babylon and the temple is destroyed
539 BC	Babylon falls to Cyrus and the Media-Persian Empire begins
538 BC	Cyrus permits the Jews to return to Judah and about 50,000 return under Zerubbabel
535 BC	The Jews begin to rebuild the temple, but trouble causes the work to stop
520 BC	The work on the temple begins again
515 BC	The temple is completed and dedicated
476 BC	Esther becomes Queen of Persia
458 BC	Ezra returns to Judah with about 2,000 people
445 BC	Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls around the city

\*Some date the final fall of Jerusalem at 586 BC

A prophesy about Cyrus—Isaiah 44:28-45:3

**Acts 26:7a (NKJV)** "To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain."

**James 1:1b (NKJV)** "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings."

I. The Return Under Zerubbabel (Chapter 1-6)

A. The Remnant's Emancipation From Babylon (Chapter 1-2)

**Ezra 1:1b (HCSB)** "The Lord put it into the mind of King Cyrus to issue a proclamation..."

**Ezra 1:1b (NIV)** "...the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation..."

**Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)** "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

B. The Rebuilding of the Temple (Chapter 3)

C. Resisting the Enemy (Chapter 4-6)

1. The Building Ceases (Chapter 4)

2. The Prophets Begin Their Ministry (Chapter 5)

3. The Building Is Completed (Chapter 6)

II. The Return Under Ezra (Chapter 7-10)

A. Ezra Comes to Jerusalem (Chapter 7-8)

B. Ezra Confesses the Sins of the People (Chapter 9)

**1 Kings 11:1-2 (NKJV)** “<sup>1</sup> But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites-- <sup>2</sup> from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love.”

**1 Kings 11:4-5 (NKJV)** “<sup>4</sup> For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. <sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.”

**2 Corinthians 6:14 (NKJV)** “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”

C. Ezra Cleanses the Nation (Chapter 10)

## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-26-12 PM

### “EZRA”

#### #16 in Series, “The Glory of God in the Old Testament”

In the Hebrew canon Ezra and Nehemiah were one book. It is likely that Ezra was the human author of 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. There are many scholars who also believe that Ezra was also the human author of Psalm 119, the longest chapter of the Bible (176 verses) that focuses on the Word of God. The book of Ezra is the first of three historical books of the Bible that are called “post-exilic books”. That means that these three books (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) give an historical account of what happened to Judah after they were taken into exile by Babylon. There are several books of the prophets that deal with this same period, but it is these three books that give us the history. If you are new to a study of the 12 historical books of the Old Testament (Joshua through Esther), it can get a little confusing since the books overlap and are not always in chronological order. Let me share a brief chronological summary with approximate dates of the history of Israel beginning with the time of the Kings.

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You will notice that the last verse of 2 Chronicles is identical with the first verse and part of the second verse of Ezra. Who is Cyrus and what happened to Babylon? Almost 50 years after Babylon took Israel captive, the Persian Empire ate up the Babylonian Empire mostly after the Babylonian Empire crumbled from within. The King over the Persian Empire (sometimes called the Media-Persian Empire because the Meds were allied with the Persians) was a man named Cyrus. It is interesting that long before Cyrus was born the prophet Isaiah prophesied that a king named Cyrus would be God’s instrument in allowing the Jews to go back to Judah and rebuild the temple (Isaiah 44:28 - 45:3). The Persian’s policy was the opposite of Babylon’s. Whereas the Babylonians would bring the people of the lands they defeated back to Babylon, the Persians allowed the defeated people to go back home. That allowed the Persians to seem like liberators of the people in contrast to the brutal Babylonian captors.

For about 70 years the defeated Jews had been in Babylon. It is estimated that by the time Cyrus makes his decree of their being allowed to go back to their homeland that there were 2-3 million Jews in the Persian Empire. There was included in that 2-3 million people many from the tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel since the Persians had defeated the Assyrians also. There are all sorts of theories about the lost tribes of Israel. One cult says that Americans are the lost tribes. That’s laughable. There are no lost tribes of Israel. The New Testament makes that clear in a couple of places. **Acts 26:7a (NKJV)** “To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain.” **James 1:1 (NKJV)**

“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.”

## I. The Return under Zerubbabel (Chapter 1-6)

We know very little about Zerubbabel. He is also called Sheshbazzar (his Babylonian name) and the Tirshatha which means governor. The Jewish people were not incarcerated in Babylon. They settled in and made a living and made Babylon their home. That is perhaps why only about 50,000 returned and the rest chose to stay in Babylon. Those that returned were certainly a remnant – a small percentage of the whole. We are told in 1 Chronicles 3:17-19 that Zerubbabel was a descendent of David, and he was chosen to lead this remnant back to Judah. In chapter three we will see His spiritual zeal in how intent he is on making sure that worship has priority and that the worship is carried out in the correct way.

### A. The Remnant’s Emancipation from Babylon (Chapter 1-2)

[Read 1:1-4] Let’s stop here and focus in on the sovereignty of God. As we mentioned earlier, before Cyrus was ever born the prophet Isaiah had prophesied that a ruler named Cyrus would allow Israel to go back to the land to build the temple. How could God know that? Did Cyrus have a will to choose whether he would allow the Jews to go back to the land? Yes, Cyrus made the choices, but in a way we cannot fully understand God is sovereign even over man’s decisions. Cyrus **chose** to let the Jews to go back to rebuild the temple, but we are told in **Ezra 1:1b** (HCSB) “The Lord **put it into the mind** of King Cyrus to issue a proclamation...” The NIV says in **Ezra 1:1b** (NIV) “...the Lord **moved the heart** of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation...” The book of Proverbs says in **Proverbs 21:1** (NKJV) “The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” This is why it is so important to pray for the leaders of the world. God can answer prayer by turning the heart of a ruler who does not walk with Him or even know Him in the way God in His sovereign will chooses. I’m sure that Cyrus thought that he thought of sending the Jews back to Judah, but it was in the plan of God and God knew what Cyrus would do before he chose to do it and God was turning his heart, moving his heart, putting into his mind what our sovereign God wanted him to do to fulfill the promises and the plan of God.

Much like the Exodus when the Egyptians gave the Jews valuables before they left for the Promised Land, the Persians and Jews who were not going back gave the Jewish remnant all sorts of valuables [Read 1:5-6]. In addition, Cyrus gave to them all of the articles of silver and gold that the Babylonians had stolen when they destroyed the temple which would be used in the rebuilt temple [Read 1:7-8].

Chapter two is not a candidate for “devotional section of the month”. This list included people who were leaving an existence in Babylon that they had no doubt grown comfortable with for a place where the living conditions would be hard and even harsh. In this genealogy, we are reminded again that Ezra is a book of history. This remnant was made up of real people with real names. The exact number was 49,897.

### B. The Rebuilding of the Temple (Chapter 3)

In 535 BC the returning remnant began the work of rebuilding the temple. The first thing that they did was to set up the altar and worship the Lord [Read 3:1-2]. The people gave offerings in addition to what the king had given them and that is what paid for the temple. After the worship they laid the foundation of the temple. The reaction to the foundation from the people was mixed [Read 3:10-13]. It had been more than 50 years since the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians, but some of those in this returning remnant were old enough to remember Solomon’s temple. They began to weep as they saw the plainness of what this temple would be compared to the splendor of the former temple. Allow me to use this as an example of a Biblical principle. God is merciful and gracious. Thank God that when we rebel and go into sin He can and will restore all who come to Him in genuine brokenness and repentance. I want to say nothing that would diminish the amazing grace and restoration of our God. But I must give the balancing principle. Rebellion always brings loss. There are scars that we bear until we die. There are ongoing

consequences that we have to live with. God restored the temple that had been taken away because of the rebellion of His people, but the new temple would not have near the splendor of the first one. I don't believe that I need to make application of that to our lives; I think that the application is obvious. Focus on His grace, His forgiveness, His mercy, His restoration, but when tempted to rebel, remember that there is a cost, a scar, a reaping here on earth of what we sow. Remember the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple.

### C. Resisting the Enemy (Chapter 4-6)

Rest assured that when God's people step up to obey Him, the enemy will step up to stop them. When God's people commit to give, to manifest life, and to build, Satan comes in as we read in **John 10:10a (NKJV)** "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."

#### 1. The Building Ceases (Chapter 4)

The enemy first comes to offer compromise [Read 4:1-2]. These were the people called the Samaritans who were half Jewish and half non-Jewish. Their religion was a hybrid of pagan religions and Judaism. Even though Jesus had compassion on the Samaritan woman in John 4, and shared about the living water with Her and led her to faith, He was clear that the Samaritan religion was wrong (John 4:22). Thankfully the Jews refused this compromise [Read 4:3].

The enemies had a "Plan B" it seems. The enemies of God and God's people hired counselors or lawyers to make a case against the Jews in a Persian Court. The opposition started during the reign of Cyrus, but it was ramped up under his successor [Read 4:6]. We read their accusation in 4:11-16 [Read]. Of course none of this was true, but it worked. The king replied in 4:17-21 [Read]. The result is that the Jew gave up rather than fight [Read 4:24].

#### 2. The Prophets Begin Their Ministry (Chapter 5)

Fifteen years pass between chapter 4 and chapter 5! God sends two prophets as His messengers to get the work started again. The prophets' names were Haggai and Zechariah [Read 5:1-2]. When we read their prophecies later, we will see how God used them to motivate His people to get back to the work that God had given them.

#### 3. The Building Is Completed (Chapter 6)

The Jews were reported to the King in Persia once again, but this was a different king and God moved in his heart on behalf of the Jews and providentially caused him to see a scroll that recounted Cyrus' permission to the Jews to go back to their land and rebuild the temple [Read 6:3]. The new King, Darius, not only allowed the Jews to continue build the temple, he commanded that they be given whatever they needed and asked that they pray for him [Read 6:7-10]. When we come to verse 14 of Chapter 6, the temple was finished [Read 6:14]. What an encouragement to God's people to pray when it seems like the doors are closed and there is no way to accomplish what God has given you to do. God changes the heart of government officials and makes a way where there is no way. That is why one of the planks of the Kingdom Challenge 2012 deals with prayer. There is nothing more important that we can do than pray.

## II. The Return under Ezra (V7-10)

About 57 years passes between chapter 6 and Chapter 7. This is where we meet Ezra for the first time. God sends Ezra to restore the Word of God to the people and to set spiritual things in order. The spiritual tide in Judah is very low. Revival is needed. We see Ezra's resume in chapter 7. He was a priest and traces his lineage all the way back to Aaron, Moses' brother. He was a Scribe, an expert in the Word of God.

### A. Ezra Comes to Jerusalem (Chapter 7-8)

The Persian King Artaxerxes gives Ezra permission to go to Jerusalem. Ezra is described in 7:6 [Read]. Ezra's mission was clear [Read 7:10]. God gave Ezra favor with the King and he also takes about 2,000 people with him to Judah. There is an interesting incident that takes place in chapter 8 that gives us insight into Ezra's character. The King has blessed Ezra with many riches to take to the temple in

Jerusalem [Read 7:15-16]. That was a lot of valuables and the families going with Ezra were not trained warriors and there were thieves and robbers on the long road to Jerusalem. What was Ezra's solution? [Read Ezra 8:21-23] Ezra was concerned about the Lord's reputation with a pagan king. If God's hand was truly upon them, then He would protect them. Verse 23 is so to the point – ask God and trust Him. They arrived safely in Jerusalem!

#### B. Ezra Confesses the Sins of the People (Chapter 9)

Ezra found things in worse shape than he imagined. It was idolatry that had gotten Judah and Israel in trouble and that was the major cause of their being defeated by their enemies. The thing that most often led them into idolatry was marrying unbelievers and eventually worshipping their Gods. That is exactly what happened to Solomon. **1 Kings 11:1-2 (NKJV)** “<sup>1</sup> But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites-- <sup>2</sup> from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love.” **1 Kings 11:4-5 (NKJV)** “<sup>4</sup> For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as *was* the heart of his father David. <sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.” That is exactly what these Jews were doing who had returned from Babylon [Read 9:1-2]. Don't misunderstand what the Scriptures are saying here. This is not speaking of interracial marriage. The focus is not on skin color or racial purity, but on who is Lord and Savior of the person a believer is marrying. This is talking about what we read in **2 Corinthians 6:14 (NKJV)** “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” The strongest human to human yoke is marriage.

Ezra was so grieved, angered and burdened by this sin of intermarrying with those who worshipped idols instead of the one true God that he was very demonstrative with his actions [Read 9:3]. Ezra didn't stop there. Everyone who took God's word seriously gathered with him [Read 9:4-5]. What follows is one of the greatest prayers of the Bible. It is very much like the prayer of Daniel in Daniel 9 and the prayer of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 9. For “Now I lay me down to sleep” prayers this prayer sounds radical. Ezra had not been involved in this sin of intermarriage with unbelievers, but he so identifies with his people that he confesses the sin as though it were his [Read 9:6-15]. That is loving intercession! May God give to us that kind of burden for Christians who act just like the world. Like the Jews, we are to be a different people. All too many of us have given up our green card for living temporarily in this world and we have taken full citizenship in the world and have begun to adopt its values and run after its delights. May God have mercy on us.

#### C. Ezra Cleanses the Nation (Chapter 10)

God's Word and Ezra's prayer had a great impact on the people [Read 10:1-3]. The solution was extreme, but these were extreme times [Read 10:10-11]. The Bible doesn't tell us the provision that was made to care for these wives but they put away these pagan wives. I will caution you that the New Testament gives instructions for when a Christian is married to a non-Christian. They are to stay with them and seek to lead them to Christ (1 Corinthians 7:12-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2). In other words, we would be making a huge blunder to do today what Ezra told these Jews to do, because we are not ethnic Jews under the old covenant. There is a principle here for non-married believers: Don't marry an unbeliever and since dating often leads to emotional attachment that short-circuits right thinking, you should not even date a non-Christian.

#### Conclusion

Here is the main message from Ezra, The word of God and the prayers of the saints are powerful. When revival is the greatest need of the church and an individual life, focus on the Word of God and prayer. (2992)