
QT Questions—for Ezra

(Here's a short introduction to the book of Ezra from my Study Bibles.)

- Approximately 50 years before the narrative of Ezra begins (in 586 BC), the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and took the residents of Judah into exile. By the time the book of Ezra opens in 538 BC, the balance of world power had shifted from the Babylonians to the Persians. A year after conquering Babylon, Cyrus, the king of Persia, issued a decree that any Jews who wished to return to Judah and rebuild the temple would not only be allowed to do so, but would receive government support (Ezra 1:2-4).
- The book of Ezra shows God's faithfulness and emphasizes the loyalty He rightfully deserves. The narrative begins with the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. After 70 years of exile in Babylon, God's people would return to their homeland (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10-14; Ezra 1:1). Upon their return, the people began rebuilding the Jerusalem temple—the symbol of God's presence among them. The book of Ezra depicts the difficulties of rebuilding a community based on faithfulness to God.

Ezra 1 (8/22/23)

1. In 1:1-4, what was the proclamation from a pagan king of Persia, Cyrus; how was God's sovereignty displayed through all these; (please read—Jer 25:12; 29:10; Isa 44:28; 45:13); what do you learn?
 2. In 1:5-11, who responded to Cyrus' proclamation and why; how did Cyrus help and bless God's people return; how is this applicable to you?
- In v. 5, we are told, "everyone whose heart God had moved prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem." We would think, every Israelite would want to return back home and help rebuild God's temple in their beloved city of Jerusalem. So, while many went, it also meant, many did not go, either. Why wouldn't they? By this time, it was already about 50 years after the exile of God's people from Jerusalem. So, by this time, many of the first generation of God's people were probably dead. Now, their children, mostly, if not all, were born in this foreign land. For them, they only heard about their parent's homeland, but never been there. Because of their parents and heritage, many of these children probably had great interest in their homeland, but probably also, not enough to uproot their whole lifestyle and familiarity and comfort to their now living conditions. For many of them, where they lived was their home. And in order to go to Jerusalem, it meant, they had to leave everything they were familiar, everything they were comfortable with, everything they knew and loved. To go to Jerusalem, they had to travel-walk about a thousand miles, carrying and pushing what little they could take. It meant, starting over, literally from burnt grounds. It meant, a lot of hard work, without the comfort of a house they were familiar, without the safety of their civilized society, without the convenience of many modern goods they could easily have from a powerful ruling empire. So, to return to Jerusalem, was actually far more difficult than to stay. So, many of God's people naturally chose to stay, because it was the easier decision. That is why, the stirring of God in their hearts would be the people who would return, despite the hardship it awaited them, despite the leaving all the good things they knew, to have a new beginning with not many good things they could have enjoyed by staying. The stirring in their hearts by God was what gave them the courage to make a difficult decision to return to

Jerusalem and rebuild God's temple, because God's glory matter to them more than their comfort and convenience. God's glory matter to them more. May His glory matter to us more.

Ezra 2 (8/23/23)

1. In 2, in v. 1, why list all these names; why should the listing of these people here be impossible (please read Ps 126:1-3; Deut 30:4-5); what do you learn about God?
2. In 2, why the emphasis of the priests and temple servants; why couldn't some people serve (Ex 29:44; Num 3:3); what does that say about God; what do you learn?

- In chapter 2, a miracle is happening. This return from captivity is nothing short of a miracle. This never happens, but here, it did. However, not much information is given to us, so while seeing a miracle, we understand very little. Psalm 126 explains about their hearts, their laughters, because they understand how impossible all this was, and yet, here they were, returning from captivity, which never happened to any other nation, but here they were. I am elated and sad. Elated because God's people were experiencing His miracle in their lives. But sad, because it seems that this miracle is hidden in plain sight because I don't understand very much. I feel that happens quite a lot in our days, with most of the people today. God is still doing amazing miracles in our world and in our lives, but we don't see it so well, so we live as if God is not actively moving and doing His wonderful work. Our hearts are rarely filled with joy and laughters because we are not seeing God doing His miracle. He works but we are blind and deaf. Oh Lord, we pray, please open our hearts, our eyes, our ears, our minds to see, to experience Your moving among us, so that we can experience Your amazing work, Your miracles, even today, even in our lives today.

Ezra 3 (8/24/23)

1. In 3:1-6, what were the people doing even before the temple's foundation was laid and why was that significant; why would the people be afraid; how were they to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-44); what do you learn?
2. In 3:7-13, what did they begin to do in the second month of the second year after their arrival and why was that significant; what different sounds were the people making and why; what do you learn?

- (I thought this note from my Bible would be helpful to you).
- How did the temple of the exiles compare to Solomon's temple? Solomon's temple was a magnificent, richly adorned building that towered over the structures in the walled city and could be seen for miles. The rebuilt temple was even taller, but it did not match the grandeur of Solomon's temple. The returning exiled had fewer financial resources and did not have access to such gifted artisans or fine materials as Solomon did . The priests, Levites and family heads who were old enough to remember the first temple wept aloud when they saw the differences between the two temples.
- Despite this, the prophet Haggai encouraged the construction, citing God's promise: The Glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house... And in this place I will grant peace (Hag 2:9). The temple's glory would be evident not only in its construction but also because the Lord would fill it—which would be its ultimate beauty and grace. Once people saw that glory, they would no longer weep.
- Haggai's prophecy was ultimately fulfilled when Jesus Christ came to the temple. Even after the temple was destroyed in AD 70, the kingdom of God continued to gain glory as it spread

among the nations of the world through Christian believers, who are God's temple (1Cor 3:16). The glorification of God's kingdom will be completed at the end of this world—not by the erection of a new and more splendid temple in Jerusalem but in the descent of the new Jerusalem from heaven to the new earth (Rev 21:2). That city will have the glory of God, but no temple, because the Lord Almighty will be its temple (Rev 21:22).

Ezra 4 (8/25/23)

1. In 4:1-5, why would the enemies want to help God's people and why wouldn't (and shouldn't) God's people accept such a generous offer; according to vv. 4-5, in what ways did they oppose; what do you learn about your adversary's tactics and how must you learn to live?
2. In 4:6-24, how exactly did the enemy stop God's people from doing God's work; why did God's people stop doing God's work and should they; what do you learn about God, about the adversary, about yourself?

- Reading this chapter, I was struck how often and how strong the opposition was. Listen to the words that jumped out to me: the enemy - set out to discourage - make them afraid - they bribed - frustrate their plans - lodged an accusation - wrote a letter against Jerusalem - that rebellious and wicked city - to see the king dishonored - rebellious city - troublesome to kings - a long history of sedition - will be left with nothing - a long history of revolt against kings - a place of rebellion and sedition - compelled them by force to stop - thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill. Wow, how are we supposed to stand up against such fierce and repeated opposition? Is that why Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble" (Jn 16:33)? Besides the simple troubles of life, the spiritual struggles are also great and many. And like this chapter, sometimes, we cease our spiritual endeavors because we feel the adversary is too strong against us. That would be absolutely true, if our battles are fought with our own strength. But, if we remember, we should know, the battle is not ours (2Chron 20:15). We should remember the full verse from Jn 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." It really is true, the problem of our lives is not the presence of troubles, but the absence of Christ in the midst of our troubles, that's the real problem. May the troubles of our lives never take our view away from seeing our Lord in our midst, for He is truly the Jehovah Shammah, the God who is there, our Immanuel.

Ezra 5 (8/26/23)

1. From 4:23 to 5:17—in 4:23-24, what did the enemy compelled God's people to do; in 5:1-2, what did God's prophets stirred God's people to do, how and why; in 5:3-17, what were the enemy trying to do; and from 5:11-15, how did God's people respond and what were their intention; what do you learn?
 2. In 5:1-2, who are these people and how were they valuable to God's people (Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Joshua); how did these four kings impact God's people (Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Artaxerxes, and Darius); what kind of God do you meet here and how does that impact your life?
- From the end of chapter 4 to the beginning in chapter 5, there's about a 15 years gap. So, for about 15 years, God's people stopped building God's temple. Yet, when God spoke through His prophets, God's people re-started to continue to build God's temple. It's very difficult to re-start something we stopped, especially after such a long stoppage. It's much easier to start

something new than to re-start something we gave up a long time ago. But, God's people began to re-start what they began a long time ago. We know, God's people resumed their work because God was working in their lives. And seeing God work in their lives, we can see, the real reason for our perseverance is because God preserves us. And since God always completes the work He began, we can see, even though His people might have given up, He didn't, He doesn't, because He who began a good work in us, will complete. What a wonderful character of our God, for He is faithful to complete what He begins, doesn't stop half-way, doesn't quit because it's difficult; doesn't halt because there's too many obstacles. He always completes what He begins. That is our Father, and we, as His children, want to grow more like our Father, and learn to complete what we began. Of course, we want to learn to complete only what brings glory to Him, for we are not talking about just completing any project we began. In fact, many times, it's better to not complete projects that are not for God's glory. The more we love our Father, the more we will delight to grow more like Him, for the Father and the Son is the exact image of each other, and the Holy Spirit guides us to glorify the Son, who delights to glorify the Father, who delights to glorify His Son. The Trinity.

Ezra 6 (8/28/23)

1. In 6:1-12, in vv. 1-5, what did King Cyrus say; in vv. 6-12, what did King Darius say; how incredible was this turn of events, for both the governor of Trans-Euphrates and for the Jews; what kind of God do you meet here and how does that impact your life?
 2. In 6:13-22, how were the prophets serving God and His people; how did the people respond; why celebrate the Passover, and why was it important to celebrate it on the fourteenth day (v. 19; Ex 12:6; Numb 9:1-3); how does this apply to you?
- In v. 15, we are told that "The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius." So, if we add the numbers, what do we get? Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem on 538 BC. The temple altar was rebuilt on 536 BC. The temple rebuilding was stopped from 535-520 BC. And finally, the temple was completed on 516 BC. So, the temple rebuilding was completed about four years after God's people restarted the project and approximately 20 years after they laid the foundation. Remember, the temple was destroyed on 586 BC by the Babylonians. So, this makes, the rebuilding of the temple, 70 years after its destruction. Remember the seventy years of the land enjoying its sabbath (2Chron 36:20-21; Jer 25:11-12)? Did you know, Solomon's temple stood for almost 400 years (959-586 BC). This temple would stand for almost 600 years (until its destruction by the Romans in AD 70).

Ezra 7 (8/29/23)

1. In 7:1-10, from Ezra to Aaron, how many generations do you see and why was this link important (even though several generations were skipped here); how is Ezra described (7:6, 10, 11, 12) and how would his life look; how is God present in his life and how is God present in your life?
2. In 7:11-28, to whom did King Artaxerxes write the letter to and what was the letter about; how did God work in this passage; how did God's presence impact Ezra; how does His presence impact your life?

- Here's a short note from my Bible notes. Ezra's mission is twofold: to lead a second major return to Jerusalem and to implement observance of the Torah, God's law, among the Jewish

people. The events of these chapters take place during the reign of Artaxerxes, 58 years after the events of chapters 1-6.

Ezra 8 (8/30/23)

1. In 8:1-30, before they set out for Jerusalem, who did they recruit and why do you think that was; what was Ezra ashamed to do, so what did he do, and why; how did God make His presence known; what do you learn?
 2. In 8:31-36, what would make their journey dangerous, yet why would they arrive safely; what did they do after their return and why; how is this applicable to you?
- This chapter ends with the governors of Trans-Euphrates giving assistance to God's people and to the house of God. But, as we know, these people were there from the beginning to oppose God's work. In fact, they even made God's people stop from building altogether for 15 years. At every turn, they were there to oppose. And yet, here we have, they were giving assistance. How strange, how amazing, to see enemies assisting God's work. This is how God's sovereignty works. Even the enemies must submit and assist, when the Lord should command them to do so. Of course, the Lord doesn't always do that. In fact, for the most part, God allows the enemies to oppose. But, as we see here today, they can only oppose when God permits, and when He should command them to assist, assist they must, for God alone has the final authority in life, for He alone is the Creator of life and the universe. So, may we be a little more emboldened to live our lives a little more courageously, even when the enemies seem many and strong, let's firmly believe that they are all under God's sovereignty.

Ezra 9 (8/31/23)

1. In 9:1-5, why was it wrong to inter-marry (or not separate) with the people around them and what would that mean for us today (Ex 34:10-16); what did Ezra do when he learned what the people were doing and why; how is this applicable to you?
 2. In 9:6-15, in Ezra's prayer, what is he ashamed about and why; what kind of God does Ezra worship; can you explain what kind of God you worship and how does that impact your life?
- Again, here's some notes from my Bible. How can we handle guilt and regret over our past decisions (9:6)? As every psychiatrist knows, unresolved guilt and brooding regret are significant blocks to healthy living. The Bible emphasizes self-analysis and awareness (Ps 139:1-24), confession and repentance (Ps 32:1-11; 51:1-19; Jas 5:16), and forgiveness (Matt 6:14) as elements of a sound spiritual lifestyle.
 - But the past cannot be altered. Therefore it is also important to accept what has happened and learn how to live with the consequences of our choices and decisions. Once the consequences are acknowledged and dealt with (Ps 51:1-19), and the lessons are learned (Ps 107:1-43), we must be able to forgive ourselves because God forgives us. We need to forgive ourselves so that we can move ahead with the hope into the future.
 - Forgiving ourselves is not always easy, nor is it a matter only of individual concern. The teachings of the Bible indicate that self-forgiveness is a spiritual journey that takes place best in community. It is often within the faith community that we come to understand that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). It is there that we find the grace, forgiveness and comfort of both God and others (2Cor 1:3-7; 2:7). It is there that we can confess our sins to God and others and be healed (Jas 5:16; 1Jn 1:9). And "community" isn't limited to church congregations.

Ezra 10 (9/1/23)

1. In 10:1-17, continuing from the previous chapter, what was Ezra still doing and why; how did the people respond to Ezra's action and why; were there any who opposed and why would they; how is this applicable to you?
 2. In 10:18-44, who is listed first in responding to right the wrong and what did they do and why would their action be really difficult for them; to right your wrong, how far are you willing to go, how far did you have to go, how was your wrong righted?
- In v. 44, the Israelites who obeyed God's leading were divorcing their foreign wives, plus giving up their children. The foreign wives likely returned to the homes of their fathers, where they would then either remarry or live as widows.
 - Normally, divorcing his wife would be a sin, yet, in this instance, to right their sin of marrying a foreign wife, now they had to go against God's law of divorcing his wife, and tear the union they had. Moreover, they had to forsake his children, his blood. As a parent, there would no more painful tear than renouncing his children, and yet, that's what will take to right their wrong. The first sin of marrying the foreign wife snowballed into such a more painful decision to straighten what went crooked. We must know, our sins bring serious and painful consequences. To right our wrong, to straighten what we twisted, to forgive our sins, He who had no sin had to suffer the greatest misery of sin because without paying the terrible price of sin, our sins would never be cleansed, forgiven, removed, to remake us. Though we are forgiven by faith, God forgave us by His most painful and costly act. It was grace for us, but our free gift came at the horrifying price that justice demanded to the fullest. And He gladly paid because He knew we couldn't. What a merciful, graceful, sacrificial, and selfless God we worship. Is He not worthy to offer our very best in our worship of Him, every time we worship Him? Let's remember, our worship of Him is only at His invitation, because He tore and sacrificed Himself, so that we can enter into His holy presence! His name is Jesus, the Christ!