

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 17

GOD IN THE RESTORATION



EZRA, ESTHER, ZECHARIAH



MEMORY VERSES

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph,
Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to
you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and
riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse
from Jerusalem. The bow of war will be removed,
and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His
dominion will extend from sea to sea, from the
Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.”

—Zechariah 9:9-10



THE PEOPLE RESTORED

CORE PASSAGE: EZRA 1:5-8; 3:1-7

CONTEXT

After decades of disobedience and defeat, God's covenant people were a threadbare bunch. The best and brightest had been deported to Babylon, while the poor, the worn out, and the weak were left behind to work the land for the benefit of another nation. But after seventy years, a new power arrived on the scene to crush Babylon for their excesses, just as the Lord had promised. And King Cyrus of Persia then issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. God's people now held onto a thread of hope that restoration might come to their ragtag remnant.

KEY CONCEPT

God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.

As you examine Ezra 1:5-8; 3:1-7:

- Recognize that even through discipline, God desires to restore His people.
- Highlight how King Cyrus recognized God's power and gave Him the praise He deserved.



TIMELINE

King Nebuchadnezzar Takes the First Exiles to Babylon, Beginning the 70 Years of Exile (2 Kings 24; Daniel 1)

King Evil-Merodach Pardons King Jehoiachin of Judah in Babylon (2 Kings 25)

King Cyrus Issues Decree Allowing the Jews to Return to Judah (Ezra 1)

Nebuchadnezzar Destroys Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Kings 25)

Babylon Is Conquered by Medo-Persia (Daniel 5)

SESSION STUDY: The First Group of Jews Returns and Lays the Foundation for the Temple (Ezra 1–3)

Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Joel 1:1–3:21

☐ **Day 2:** 2 Chronicles 36:22–23

☐ **Day 3:** Ezra 1:1–11

☐ **Day 4:** Ezra 2:1–70

☐ **Day 5:** Ezra 3:1–13

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 126



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

EZRA 1:5-8

GOD WANTS TO RESTORE US BACK INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

Underline all the people or groups mentioned in this passage.

5 So the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites—everyone whose spirit God had roused—prepared to go up and rebuild the LORD's house in Jerusalem. **6** All their neighbors supported them with silver articles, gold, goods, livestock, and valuables, in addition to all that was given as a freewill offering. **7** King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the LORD's house that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and had placed in the house of his gods. **8** King Cyrus of Persia had them brought out under the supervision of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though God's people had been exiled, God had a plan for restoration, to bring them back in relationship with Him and back to a place of worship. Many years later, the ultimate restorative work of God is found in Jesus's sacrifice through His crucifixion, allowing forgiveness of sin to restore our relationship with God forever and saving us from death and separation from Him.

Key Concept: God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.

Not long after creation, the sin of Adam changed everything and messed it all up with dire consequences for his sin. Yet God did not give up on humankind. Instead of starting all over, He initiated a plan of redemption—and God has been pursuing His people ever since. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of this redemptive work. God initiated covenants, instituted laws, provided systems, sent prophets, ordained rulers, and even moved hearts to go rebuild His house, all to pursue and provide for His people.

The author of Ezra clearly recognized God's providential hand in the Jews' return to Jerusalem (see Ezra 1:1-4). It often can be difficult to see such things in the moment, but with hindsight and, of course, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer saw it clearly that God moved massive mountains to bring His people home.

As you look back, where can you see God's providential hand at work over your own life?

From start to finish, the book of Ezra is a testimony of God's faithful work of restoration. God roused hearts, provided goods, returned articles, and more. God is always working, even when it seems all hope is lost.

This is a theme throughout the Old Testament. Just as the Lord worked to deliver His people from Egypt in His perfect timing, we can trust that He works in our lives in the same providential way. Just as He raised up the right ruler to send His people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, we can wait on His faithful care to lead the movements of our lives. We may not know or understand His timing. We may not like or enjoy His means. But God's work is sure and steadfast because it flows from His good and faithful character.

How have you seen God's providential and restorative hand at work through the storyline of the Old Testament?



EZRA 3:1-7

SACRIFICE IS NEEDED AS PART OF OUR RESTORATION WITH GOD.

Circle all the references to offerings to the Lord in this passage.

1 When the seventh month arrived, and the Israelites were in their towns, the people gathered as one in Jerusalem. **2** Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers began to build the altar of Israel's God in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. **3** They set up the altar on its foundation and offered burnt offerings for the morning and evening on it to the LORD even though they feared the surrounding peoples. **4** They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed, and offered burnt offerings each day, based on the number specified by ordinance for each festival day. **5** After that, they offered the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the beginning of each month and for all the LORD's appointed holy occasions, as well as the freewill offerings brought to the LORD. **6** On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, even though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid. **7** They gave money to the stonecutters and artisans, and gave food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so they would bring cedar wood from Lebanon to Joppa by sea, according to the authorization given them by King Cyrus of Persia.

Key Concept: God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.

After many months, God's people gathered to continue their process of settling in. No longer chained by the oppression of regimes, they were free to return to their homeland, resettle into ancestral rhythms, and rebuild their central place of worship. Ezra 3 records a major milestone in the history of their big move.

It is not an insignificant detail that they started with building the altar. It might have been a temptation to start building walls, ceilings, and corridors. But they started with the altar, "even though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid" (3:6). The worship of God demanded sacrifice, and sacrifice required an altar. God's people could not resume worshiping the Lord as He had instituted long ago without an altar.

Why might the Jews who returned to Jerusalem have been so focused on setting up the altar, offering sacrifices, and celebrating prescribed festivals?

How easy it is to get sidetracked by what seems the most logical, practical, or economical. But we must follow in the footsteps of our spiritual forefathers and go with what is most worshipful. Through the final sacrifice of Christ, our worship as believers under the new covenant is no longer dependent on a physical altar, but we are still called to worship.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS SACRIFICE: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

We too are in the middle of a move—a spiritual journey out of bondage into our new life with Christ. However, we do not need to build an altar to worship God. Instead, we must rely on the sufficiency of our Savior's sacrifice and respond to this grace through obedience-filled worship (Romans 12:1-2).

What does worship and sacrifice look like today if there is no altar or physical sacrifice?

GOD'S PROVISION AND OUR RESPONSE

Read Ezra 1:5-8; 3:1-7. Record what God provided for the returning exiles and how they responded. Then apply this pattern to yourself.

WHAT GOD PROVIDED

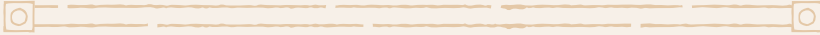
HOW THE PEOPLE RESPONDED

WHAT GOD PROVIDES FOR ME

HOW I RESPOND

What do these passages reveal about God's desire for restoration?

Key Concept: God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.



HEAD

What keeps you from trusting that God is for you and not against you?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

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Read Psalm 126. Praise the Lord for the ways He has restored your fortunes and joy, and pray for ways to honor the Lord in sharing this good news with others, especially sharing the gospel of God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.



HEART

What do you need to focus on in order to worship God with all your heart?

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

What can you do this week to worship God as a living sacrifice?

