

Who was Ezra in the Bible?

Ezra was the second of three key leaders to leave Babylon for the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel reconstructed the temple (Ezra 3:8), Nehemiah rebuilt the walls (Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2), and Ezra restored the worship. Ezra was a scribe and priest sent with religious and political powers by the Persian King Artaxerxes to lead a group of Jewish exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:8, 12). Ezra condemned mixed marriages and encouraged Jews to divorce and banish their foreign wives. Ezra renewed the celebration of festivals and supported the rededication of the temple and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall. Ezra 7:10 describes a shaping of the community in accordance with the Torah. Ezra's goal was to implement the Torah, and his impeccable priestly and scribal credentials allowed him to remain the model leader.

The book of Ezra continues from where 2 Chronicles ends, with Cyrus, king of Persia, issuing a decree that permitted the Jews of his kingdom to return to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity. God is universally sovereign and can use a polytheistic king of Persia to make possible His people's release. He used Artaxerxes, another Persian king, to authorize and finance the trip and Ezra to teach God's people His Law. This same king also helped Nehemiah restore some measure of respectability to God's holy city.

Ezra's effective ministry included teaching the Word of God, initiating reforms, restoring worship, and leading spiritual revival in Jerusalem. These reforms magnified the need for a genuine concern for reputation and for public image. What must the world think of God's people with dilapidated city walls? What would distinguish God's people who were guilty of intermarriage with those not in proper covenant relationship with the one true God? Nehemiah and Ezra were then, and are now, an encouragement to God's people

to magnify worship as their top priority, to emphasize the need for and use of God's Word as the only authoritative rule for living, and to be concerned about the image God's people show to the world.

Ezra came back from captivity in Babylon expecting to find the people serving the Lord with gladness, but upon his return to Jerusalem, he found the opposite. He was frustrated and sorrowful. His heart ached, but he still trusted the Lord. He wanted the Lord to change the situation and blamed himself for not being able to change the people's hearts. He wanted the people to know how important and essential the Word of God was. Nothing must supersede worship of God, and obedience is not optional. The sovereign God looks over and protects His children, always keeping His promises and providing encouragement through those He sends (Ezra 5:1-2). Even when His plan seems to be interrupted, as with the rebuilding of Jerusalem, God steps in at the appropriate time to continue His plan.

God is as intimately involved in our lives as He was in Ezra's life, and like Ezra we are sometimes enabled to do the impossible. Ezra did the impossible, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him (Ezra 7:9). Every believer is a living temple (1 Corinthians 6:19) in which the Holy Spirit dwells. The opposing forces in Ezra's day were people with evil in their hearts. The opposing force in our Christian lives today is evil himself, Satan, who has come to destroy us and in turn destroy God's temple (John 10:10). Our goals should be worthy in God's eyes as well as our own. Yesterday's sorrows can be today's successes if the hand of the Lord is upon us. Ezra's goal was worthy in God's eyes, and he effectively used the returning Jews' sorrows for the success of rebuilding God's city and restoring worship.