

Lesson 1: Return to Me: Lessons from Ezra on Rebuilding our Lives

Welcome and Prayer

Introduce the Study: Welcome to the Bible Study! In this study, I teach six lessons from the book of Ezra, and relate the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem with the rebuilding of our lives, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Pick up your tool box and come along, joining the building project! This bible study will also teach you how to minister to those in your circle who are rebuilding their lives.

Introduce Lesson 1: Ask the women to share what they already know about Ezra. Review the timeline of dates. Noting the fall of Jerusalem, and the positioning of the three prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. As they watch the video, have them take notes or follow along the note page if they wish. Before beginning, read the end of Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra. Ponder the question: What stands out to you the most about this teaching?

Play Video: (13:03) and Building Blocks Video: (5:53) optional: Cylinder of Cyrus (4:00)

Discussion/Journaling Questions:

1. What do you think God means by “prisoner of hope?”
2. Why do you think Cyrus chose to let the Israelites go back to rebuild the temple?
3. Is God stirring your heart to fully return to Him? How do you know?
4. Do you have a friend in the faith that is currently rebuilding their life? How could what we studied today encourage them? What would you say to them to help them along that path?

Closure and Final Prayer: Play the “Lord Have Mercy” song by Michael W Smith. Have the ladies fill out the prayer and talk to God. Close with group prayer.

Today’s Scriptures: Ezra 1 and 2

Going Deeper: Zechariah 9:12, and Zech 1:3, Isaiah 45, Deuteronomy 30: 1-16, Daniel 5

Building Blocks Activity: The Blessings of Returning to God. What exactly does God require from us when we return to Him? How does that look from God’s point of view? In the Book of Deuteronomy 30:1-16 God tells us just that.

Part 1: Read Deut. 30: 1-16

Part 2: Reread the scriptures, and fill out the included worksheet or simply journal the following questions:

What is God saying? If you do this..... (write what you have to do under here)

God will promise to do this:

Lesson 1 Notes for Return to Me: Lessons from Ezra on Rebuilding our Lives

Ezra 1 and 2, Zechariah 1:1-2

- We are told in the book of Hebrews that we are to run the race that is set before us.
- In book of Ezra, Jews in captivity in Babylon for 70 years, Jerusalem and temple destroyed in 587 BC
- Now we will see a group of Jews led by Joshua and Zerubbabel of 50,000 people return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, sole purpose, not the city the temple
- Jesus spoke about the temple of his body, John 2:19 When he said, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. He was not talking about the literal temple, but the temple of His body.
- We are the temple of the Holy spirit 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20
- Do you not know, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own?
- Sometimes we get off the path, and God is calling us to rebuild our lives, too.
- If you are in the process of rebuilding your life, or you are mentoring someone who is this study is for you.
- In this study there will be steps to practically and fully return to God
- So God is calling you and has made a way to return to him!
- There are many ways to return, we are going to follow the lessons he has laid out for us in the book of Ezra.

Characters, Setting and Plot

- Who was Ezra? Scribe, priest, historian, teacher of the law
- Zerubbabel, son of Jehoiachin, the governor and leader of the group
- Joshua, Yeshua, son of high priest at captivity
- Nation of Judah fell to Babylonians in 587 BC, Israel in the north had fallen to Assyrians in 722, 135 years earlier
- There were three actual deportations of captives sent to Babylon, starting in 605 BC, with first deportation which took Daniel, the second some years later, a group went with Ezekiel, and the final fall of Jerusalem
- In 587 BC we see Jeremiah prophesying to the remainder of the people of Judah during the siege of Jerusalem and the final destruction of the city and the temple. The entire city of Jerusalem is destroyed and for seventy years, from the first deportation of the period of the captivity passed 70 years, as was prophesied by Jeremiah.
- This 70 years is called the Servitude of the Nation.
- The writing on the wall!!! See Daniel!

- Cyrus was prophesied to release the people to return to Judah and go for the sole purpose of rebuilding their temple. Isaiah 45
- Exciting time for the people of Israel.
- Let's take a look in this lesson at Ezra 1 and 2

Who will Return?

- Picture the scene, they are in servitude to Babylon, but they have established lives and homes there. They have extended families, children, and jobs.
- God issues the call to his remnant: Return to ME!
- God calls them all but they did not all choose to go.
- Zechariah, a prophet at that same time period, echoes the call! And the promises that go with it.

Zechariah 1: 3 “Return to Me,” says the Lord of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts. ⁴

Zechariah 9:12 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹² Return to the stronghold,
You prisoners of hope.
Even today I declare
That I will restore double to you.

Key Point #1- God tugs at our hearts and calls us to Return to Him to fully engage in rebuilding the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple he is building in you and me.

⁷Cyrus also provides resources and also the Gold and silver articles from original temple,

- As you rebuild, God will bring back to you, the “Jewels” of your first temple, he will return to you also. Spiritual Gifts that may have been dormant he is now restoring to you!.

Point 2: God will provide for you all the resources you need going forward for your building project.

- The next chapter, Chapter 2 of Ezra is mostly just a list of the people who decided to go. If we add it up, there are about 50,000 people.

- We see in the text they do take the trip and they return all the way to Judah and Jerusalem. They return to their homeland, it says that they return back to the cities and lands that they came from.
- Ezra 2:70⁷⁰ So the priests and the Levites, *some* of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.
- In other words, they went HOME! Back to their original land holdings. Back to their first love, back to Yahweh, the land he had promised them.
- For us, it's back to Jesus, our first love. They are willing to change the routines and comforts in their lives to volunteer to help God with a building project that he directs.
- So today, we have the Call Return to Me, God promises he will return to us and restore to us double if we answer his call. He will restore to us the jewels or spiritual giftings that have been unused in our lives, and he will point us back home, to our first love, Jesus Christ! We will once again surrender all of our life to him!
- If God is stirring up your spirit, "return to me!" You must answer the call, You see, you must willfully choose to return. Just like the Israelites had to choose to return to Jerusalem.

Have you strayed from God's full purpose for your life? He is calling Return to ME!