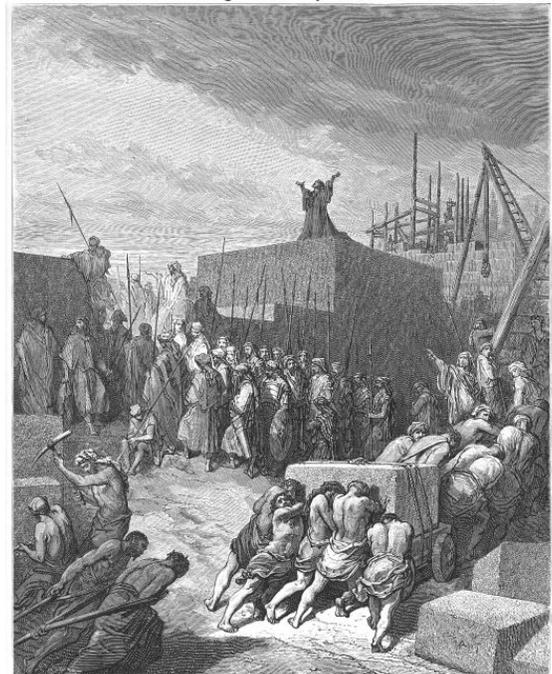


15 – Ezra: Return from Captivity, Rebuilding the Temple

- **Ezra is the writer of this book.** He has not received enough recognition. He was a descendant of Hilkiah, the high priest (Ezra 7:1), who found a copy of the Law during the reign of Josiah (2 Chron. 34:14). Ezra, as a priest, was unable to serve during the Captivity. There was no temple. He study the Word of God. Ezra 7:6 tells us that he was “a ready scribe in the law of Moses.” Ezra was also a great revivalist and reformer. The revival began with the reading of the Word of God by Ezra (Nehemiah 8). Also, Ezra was probably the writer of 1 and 2 Chronicles. Ezra organized the synagogue, was the founder of the order of scribes, helped settle the canon of Scripture and arranged the Psalms. Some even think he wrote Psalm 119, the longest.
- The **theme of the Book of Ezra is The Word of the Lord.** There are *ten* direct references to God’s Word in this little book: Ezra 1:1; 3:2; 6:14, 18; 7:6, 10, 14; 9:4; 10:3, 5. The place of the Word of God is seen in the total lives of these people: religious, social, business, and political. Is it in ours??
- The **key to this book** is found in Ezra 9:4 and 10:3: they “*trembled at the words of the God of Israel.*”
- At the end of 2 Chronicles, the southern kingdom of Judah went into captivity for 70 years. Ezra picks up their history. There are three *historical* books that are called “post captivity” (or post exilic) books: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. There are also 3 *prophetic* “post captivity” books: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- It is too easy to skip over a book like Ezra, filled with lists of people’s names we can’t pronounce and wordy decrees of dead kings. But we would miss the internal message of this book. This is a book about:
 - **RETURN** of the Jews to their land after 70 years of captivity, and a return to God’s fellowship after the discipline forced by sin.
 - **REBUILDING** the Temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, a result of the people’s own rebellion, and the rebuilding of lives shattered by sin.
 - **RESISTANCE** of the enemies of God and the Jews who did not want them to succeed, and resistance of the enemy who seeks our demise.
 - **RENEWAL** of forgotten covenants and of courage and hope, and the renewal of things lost, now found.
 - **REJOICING**, true celebration that the people are once more in fellowship with God.
 - **RESTORATION** of a lost people back with their God and His place set aside for them, and restoration of things destroyed by sin.
 - **REPENTANCE** of a truly sorry group of Jews who had become discouraged and sinned again, and the repentance and turning away from sin into a true walk with God.
 - **REDEDICATION** of the temple, and the rededication of the people’s lives to God.
 - **REMOVAL** of things, even cherished things (like foreign wives in their case), that either cause or are the result of sin, and the removal, the separation of God’s people from the world.
- **This little book of Ezra is a book about life with God. It is a book well worth paying attention to, and applying the lessons to our lives.**

“The Rebuilding of the Temple” by Gustave Doré



Highlights

1	Decree to Rebuild the Temple: The Proclamation, reason, content, fulfillment (1:1-6); Temple Articles (deliverance, definition, description, transportation) (1:7-11)
2	Returning Exiles: Men of Israel (2:1-35), Men of priesthood and temple service (2:36-38), Men of unconfirmed household (2:39-63), Summary (2:64-67), Return to Judah (2:68-70)
3	Temple Restoration Begins: Rebuilding of the Altar (after Law of Moses, purpose, 7 th month) (3:1-2); Reinstating of Worship (3:3-6); Rebuilding Temple First Time (3:7-13)
4	Adversaries Halt Restoration: Israel and Enemies meet (4:1-5); Enemies Advance evil plans to stop construction (4:6-16); The King's Decree (4:17-22); Enemies Submit to Decree (4:23-24)
5	Resumption of the Temple Restoration: Continuing of Temple rebuilding (5:1-5) (Word of God, questioned, rebuilding continues with challenges) Letter to King Darius (5:6-17)
6	Temple Completed: Finding of King Cyrus' decree (6:1-5); Darius' Decree (6:6-12); Completion of Temple (6:13-15); Celebration and Dedication (6:16-18); Observance of Feasts (6:19-22)
7	Ezra Appointed by King Artaxerxes: Ezra Goes to Jerusalem (7:1-10); Artaxerxes' Decree to Ezra (7:11-26); Ezra's Exaltation of God (7:27-28)
8	Ezra Leads the Exiles to Jerusalem: List of returnees (8:1-14); Delay to get priests (8:15-20); Fast before the journey (8:21-23); Priests' to guard valuables (8:29-30); Journey to Jerusalem (8:31-36)
9	Ezra Intercedes on Behalf of Israel: Ezra hears about Israel's sin (9:1-4); Ezra's prayer to God (confesses sins, acknowledges God's love, broken commandments, Israel's guilt) (9:5-15)
10	Ezra Purifies the People: Shecaniah suggests a plan of action (10:1-4); Ezra's proclamation and warning (10:5-8); Big Conference (10:9-15); Issue of foreign wives settled (10:16-44)

- The Books of **Haggai and Zechariah** should be read and studied with the Book of Ezra, for all three books were written in the shadow of the rebuilt temple, and were given to encourage the people in building. *“Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of God of Israel, even unto them”* (Ezra 5:1).
- God used a **Gentile king, Cyrus, to return His people to the land of Israel.** God spoke to the prophet Isaiah, and named Cyrus more than 150 years before he was born, telling him to let His people go. God tells in this “letter” that he has anointed Cyrus for this time and work, and that He is the One who prepared Cyrus’ way in battle and in His work for the Jewish people. Cyrus’ decree is written in the first part of chapter 1 of Ezra, and God’s personal letter to him can be found in Isaiah 45. **Cyrus II (“the Great,” 559-530 BC)** was the founder of the Persian Empire. Cyrus succeeded in uniting the Medes and Persians into one nation, which continued for two centuries until Alexander the Great (331 BC).
- Very **few Jews actually returned to the land of Israel from Persia.** Somewhere between 50-60,000 total, mostly the Levites and the poor. Over the past 70 years the Jews became quite settled and comfortable in Persia, with families, businesses and roots over seven decades. They didn’t want to return. The book of Esther is the story of those Jews who remained behind in Persia.
- Notice that the **focus on rebuilding at this time is on the Temple, not the city.** The city and its walls of protection will be Nehemiah’s concern.
- **“the Lord God of heaven...”** this is a phrase peculiar to Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel – POST exile books. This expression does not occur *before* these books. After the fall of Jerusalem God could no longer be identified with the temple (destroyed) as the One who dwelt between the cherubim. The glory (Shekinah) had departed and returned to heaven (Ezekiel 10). Ezekiel had the vision of the departure of the Shekinah glory. For this reason in the post-captivity books He is “the Lord God of heaven.” The Shekinah glory returned in the body of Jesus of Nazareth over 500 years later, and also returned to heaven after His resurrection from the dead. But He will return in His complete and visible glory!
- *“Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel.”* (6:21) We should pay attention to this verse. Ezra is about being separated from the world, to God. The people not only returned to the land, they also returned to the Law of Moses. They were excited and eager to return to the ways of God.
- Another great prayer is contained in Ezra 9. There are three wonderful noteworthy prayers in chapter 9s of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

