



DAILY
B I B L E G U I D E

The Book of Ezra

Days 147-149 of a Yearly Bible Reading Program

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Daily Bible Reading Plan

Day	Passage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Day 147	Ezra 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 148	Ezra 3-7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 149	Ezra 8-10	<input type="checkbox"/>

Welcome to the Book of Ezra!

The Book of Ezra is the story of how the Jews returned from their 70-year captivity to rebuild the Temple and reestablish themselves in the Promised Land. Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Assyria was in turn conquered by Babylon, Babylon conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, then the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon. The Persians treated the Jews much more favorably, and under Cyrus the Great the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland in 538 B.C. Ezra focuses not only on the rebuilding of the Temple, but also the reestablishment of the Jewish religion.

A few quick facts about Ezra:

- Ezra is the traditional author.
- This book covers events from 550 Cyrus's proclamation in 538 B.C. to religious reforms in around 457 B.C.
- The key verse is 7:10: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."
- A brief outline:
 - The Return of the Exiles – Chapters 1-2
 - The Rebuilding of the Temple – Chapters 3-6
 - The Return of Ezra – Chapters 7-8
 - The Return of the People – Chapters 9-10
- Key events:
 - The Dedication of the Second Temple – Chapter 6
 - The Arrival of Ezra – Chapter 7

Chapter 1 Notes

In this chapter we see the permission and preparation for the Jews to return to their homeland.

vs. 1-4 – The first year of Cyrus the Great is not reckoned as the first overall year of his overall reign, but rather his first year as ruler of Babylon, which is 538 B.C. History tells us that as he conquered Babylon, he allowed many displaced peoples to return to their native lands. The prophecies of Jeremiah that are referred to are Jeremiah 25:12-14, 29:10, and 33:7-13.

vs. 5-6 – The Jews very slowly began to return to the Promised Land. Here the earliest are said to be from the Kingdom of Judah and that they were stirred by God to rebuild the Temple. These were shown by support by the people, probably Gentile and Jew alike, in valuable offerings to help finance the project.

vs. 7-11 – The Persians were some of the most thorough bureaucrats the world has ever seen. Everything was documented and meticulous records kept. Cyrus instructs the treasurer to restore vessels from the Temple to the Jews. These had been kept and catalogued by the Babylonians and now are released to the Jews. We meet here Sheshbazzar (Babylonian name meaning “worshipper of fire”), who is better known by his Jewish name Zerubbabel (“born at Babylon”).

Chapter 2 Notes

In this chapter is a record of the Jews that returned to Jerusalem.

vs. 1-2 – Eleven leaders are named in vs. 2 that led the people back to the Promised Land. This passage parallels Nehemiah 7, where a twelfth leader and additional information about the building of the wall is added. Zerubbabel, who was of the royal Davidic line as a descendant of King Jeconiah, is the overall leader of the movement. He is not counted as a king, but rather as prince. There will not be another Jew that claims the title of king until the Hasmonean dynasty rose out of the Maccabean revolt in the 2nd century B.C.

vs. 3-35 – 24,144 total people are numbered here. There are a few differences between the numbers here and in Nehemiah 7, likely because not all who enlisted in the journey followed through with it.

vs. 36-39 – 4,289 priests are numbered. They are given under four family heads. Jeshua, Immer, and Harim are heads of three of the 24 courses that David established in the priesthood. Pashur is not of those courses. These could be descendants of the Pashur who is noted for his hostility against Jeremiah in see Jeremiah 20, 21, and 38.

vs. 40-42 – 74 Levites, 128 Levite singers, and 139 porters are numbered. There had been 38,000 of these in David's day in I Chronicles 23:3. Psalms were still being composed during and after the Captivity, the most famous is probably Psalm 137.

vs. 43-54 – Nethanim means "given/devoted to God". These were Temple servants who perform the most menial of tasks. Jewish tradition identifies them as the Gibeonites from Joshua 9.

vs. 55-58 – These "Solomon's servants" are believed to be descendants of the Canaanite peoples forced to work on the Temple construction in I King 5:13.

vs. 59-63 – These families could not prove their lineage and were restricted from Temple service. This was a major problem with the returning Jews. So much of their identity rested on their ancestry, and because of destroyed records and the upheaval of captivity they did not know their lineage. In vs. 63 the title Tishatha is used, which is the Persian word for governor.

vs. 64-67 – The numbers comprising the great caravan of settlers is given. 42,360 settlers, 7,337 servants (including 200 singers), 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

vs. 68-70 – The settlers gather first at the Temple site and make an offering for its construction. 1,000 drams of gold (\$730,000), 5,000 minas of silver (\$60,000), and 100 priestly garments are given out of a free will from the people.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 147

One of the greatest themes when we talk about the return from the Babylonian Captivity is God's faithfulness. He did not cast away or destroy His chosen people. He did purge them of their idolatry through this judgment. He promised that He would bring them back and He did. That same faithfulness is our hope, for our present trials and our future reward.

Hymn for Day 147

Our hymn today, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" by Thomas Chisolm, echoes the example of God's faithfulness seen in His returning the Israelites to the Promised Land after the Captivity.

*1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.*

*Refrain:
Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness,
Lord unto me.*

*2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]*

*3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside. [Refrain]*

Chapter 3 Notes

In this chapter the work of rebuilding the Temple begins.

vs. 1-4 – The seventh month of the Jewish calendar is Tisri, which correlates to our September/October. The purpose of the gathering was to begin anew the rituals of the Mosaic Law with the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. The new High Priest is Jeshua (Joshua). A new altar was constructed on the same foundation as the former had used.

vs. 5-7 – The order of daily, monthly, and yearly offerings was reestablished, but the Temple itself was not rebuilt. They chose to begin the functions of the Temple without the actual facility being completed, or rather, even started. Preparations are made for the construction of the Temple itself.

vs. 8-13 – What a scene this must have been! With all the pomp the settlers could manage, they begin work on the Temple by laying its foundation. It was a time of great joy and excitement for most that gathered, but the elderly among them that had seen Solomon's Temple before it was destroyed are not moved. They remember the grandness of the former building and weep at the inferior reconstruction that was beginning among its ruins.

Chapter 4 Notes

In this chapter the work on the Second Temple is delayed by the Samaritans.

vs. 1-6 – The enemies here are the Samaritans, whose history we read in II Kings 7:24-41. These people were of mixed race and mixed religion. It is a combination of their pride and ignorance that they work against the Jews here. At first, they want to be accepted as fellow worshippers of God. But whatever similarities there may have been, the two systems were incompatible. God seeks to be worshipped according to His revealed truth, and the Jews drew a hard line there. This put them at odds with the greater world around them, whose polytheistic mindset welcomed many gods and methods of worship without judgment. They attacked the Jews through the bureaucracy of the Persian empire. This lasted for decades. Cyrus the Great, mentioned in vs. 5, was the founder of the Achaemenid line of rulers over Persia. He began his rule in 559 B.C., issued the decree to rebuild the Temple in 538 B.C., and died in 530 B.C. The next kings, unnamed here, were Cambyses II from 530-522 and the highly debated and short reign of Bardiya/Smerdis in 522. Next, also mentioned in vs. 5 is Darius the Great, who reigned from 522-486. The construction of this Second Temple was completed during this time in 516. In vs. 6 we have Ahasuerus, which is more of a title (“king of all males” or “hero among kings”) than a name. Most think this is the aforementioned Cambyses II.

vs. 7-16 – We have another case here of debate as to whether it is a title or name with Artaxerxes (“the great warrior”). There is an Artaxerxes I that ruled from 465-424 B.C., along with three others with that name in the fourth century B.C. If it is to be taken as a name, then it extends far beyond the original construction of the Second Temple, which was dedicated in 516. It is clear according to 6:15 that the construction was completed shortly before “in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king”, who happens to be the grandfather of Artaxerxes I. The placement and subject of this demand an earlier time, therefore we must think of Artaxerxes as a title rather than name, just as we did with Ahasuerus in vs. 6. In fact, it seems to be the same person, Cambyses, or just maybe the supposed usurper Bardiya/Smerdis. It would make sense with the timing that it would trouble Cambyses, who was preparing to invade Egypt shortly after in 525. He would not want a fortified position at his rear during this expedition. The Samaritans appeal to the history of the kingdoms of Israel, who were a constant problem for the empires around them. They placed themselves as the simple, loyal subjects and the Jews as a growing threat to the expansion of Persian dominance. In vs. 16 “the river” is the Euphrates.

vs. 17-22 – The response of Cambyses is to halt the rebuilding of Jerusalem for the time being. This would allow him to proceed with his plans to invade Egypt and likely check on the situation himself while in route.

vs. 23-24 – The local leaders for the Jews to stop their work. No progress will be made on rebuilding the Temple until Darius is king in 521 B.C.

Chapter 5 Notes

In this chapter work begins again and inquiries are made as to the legality of the construction.

vs. 1-5 – The prophets Haggai and Zechariah stir up Zerubbabel and the people to begin work on the Temple again. They do so in spite of the previous order to cease the work. The territorial governor demands information. The work continues as the case is examined with an inquiry sent to the new king Darius.

vs. 6-17 – The letter is very straightforward. The Jews claim the right to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem because of the original decree of Cyrus in 1:1-4. That decree was made about 18 years prior, and the current governor had no knowledge of it. Zerubbabel is called Sheshbazzar in vs. 16.

Chapter 6 Notes

In this chapter Darius commands the work on the Temple may begin and it is finished.

vs. 1-5 – Darius made the necessary inquiries and found the record of Cyrus's proclamation. I cannot overstate how over the top the bureaucracy of the Persians was. We have so many clay tablets that have been discovered that it is impossible to translate them all. Besides, when they are translated, they are usually various forms of ledgers or contracts.

vs. 6-14 – Here is the text of the order Darius sent to the Persian governor. The full weight of his government is placed behind the rebuilding of the Temple and a death penalty pronounced on those that challenge it. The work begins again in earnest.

vs. 15 – The Second Temple, also called Zerubbabel's Temple, is completed in 517 B.C. and dedicated the following year.

vs. 16-18 – The Second Temple is dedicated in 516 B.C. It was nowhere near the architectural masterpiece that Solomon's had been, but it was standing and it was functional. Its services begin with the offering of 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and twelve goats, a far cry from the 22,000 oxen and 120,000 offered by at Solomon's dedication. Another detail is that there is no record of the Shekinah glory filling this Temple like occurred at the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. The Jews were very much aware of this and rabbis have commented on it.

vs. 19-22 – The next great celebration at the newly dedicated Temple is Passover and the following Feast of Unleavened Bread. It powerfully reflected the new start they had just as the first Passover had been in the past.

Chapter 7 Notes

In this chapter Ezra is commissioned to return to Jerusalem to see to the religious affairs there.

vs. 1-10 – We now fast forward to 458 B.C. The king of Persia is now Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes I and grandson of Darius the Great. He grants permission for Ezra to lead another group of Jews back to the Promised Land. It is interesting to note that it took four months to make the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. If they travelled up the Euphrates instead of going straight across the desert they would have covered around 800 miles. Do not overlook vs. 10 as it reveals the heart of Ezra.

vs. 11-26 – Here is a copy of the letter by Artaxerxes given to Ezra, authorizing him to return to Jerusalem and see to the religious affairs of the Jewish people there. He brings offerings with him to purchase sacrifices and other valuables for the Temple. In vs. 21-22 you will note that the king made provision for supplies to be made available for the journey. The Persians had a system of imperial supply depots on the major roads. Ezra could present such a letter and have access to the material.

vs. 27-28 – The chapter closes with Ezra bursting out in praise for His provision and care.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 148

Ezra was a man that God used mightily who is often overlooked. He is one of the key figures in the history of the Jews as he helped reestablish the Jewish religion after the Captivity. His writings helped preserve history and inspire the new generations. This all starts with his heart in 7:10. He prepared himself for the task ahead to help preserve and propagate the Jewish religion. I am reminded of the words of B.H. Carroll: “Only men of great heart, great preparation, and great power with God achieve anything worth while in the ministry.”

Hymn for Day 148

Our hymn today, “Lord, Speak to Me that I May Speak”, was written by Francis Havergal in 1872. It reflects Ezra’s spirit of desiring to be used by God.

*Lord, speak to me that I may speak
In living echoes of your tone;
As you have so't, so let me seek
Your erring children, lost and lone.*

*Oh, lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wand'ring and the wav'ring feet;
Oh, feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Your hung'ring ones with manna sweet.*

*Oh, teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things that you impart,
And wing my words, that I may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.*

*Oh, grant my spirit to renew,
That I may speak with soothing pow'r
A word in season, as from you,
To weary ones in needful hour.*

*Oh, fill me with your fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart o'erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Your love to tell, your praise to show.*

*Oh, use me, Lord, use even me
Just as you will, and when, and where,
Until your blessèd face I see,
Your rest, your joy, your glory share.*

Chapter 8 Notes

In this chapter Ezra gathers people to join him in returning to Jerusalem.

vs. 1-14 – 1,754 men accompany Ezra as he goes to Jerusalem. It is sad to note how few of the Jews embraced the opportunity to return to their homeland.

vs. 15-20 – The location of Ahava is debated but likely it is near the Euphrates and Babylon. The caravan pauses to prepare for the journey and Ezra attempts to recruit more to join them. While there are some priests among the number, there are none of the other Levite divisions. Ezra is able to recruit 258 to join them.

vs. 21-23 – Any great endeavor should be bathed in prayer before it commences. Ezra leads the people in fasting and prayer for safety for their journey.

vs. 24-30 – The valuables that they are travelling with are divided among twelve groups of priests. They are entrusted with their care for the journey. Everything is weighed and catalogued at the start so they can determine if anything is lost on their arrival in Jerusalem.

vs. 31-36 - The caravan arrives safely at Jerusalem. After three days of resting and settling in, the treasures are presented to the Temple and verified that nothing was missing. Sacrifices were made and the new arrivals set to their work.

Chapter 9 Notes

In this chapter Ezra confronts the sin of the Jews already in the land.

vs. 1-4 – It is reported to Ezra that the Jewish settlers had lapsed in their separation (see Deuteronomy 7:2-3 for an example of this command) by intermarrying with Canaanites. This was a problem for many reasons, including the association with pagan peoples and the adoption of their practices. Ezra is astonished upon hearing this and goes into mourning over the sin.

vs. 5-15 – Ezra prays to God, confessing the sins of the Jewish people. He does not ask for forgiveness but acknowledges that their actions were an affront to the One that had so graciously allowed them to return from captivity.

Chapter 10 Notes

In this chapter the problem of the pagan wives is resolved.

vs. 1-4 – Ezra’s prayer and actions move the people to repentance. Schechaniah (“dweller with Jehovah”) acts as spokesperson for the people in acknowledging their sin. His father Jehiel (“God lives”) is listed among the guilty in vs. 26. He proposes that all of the pagan women that had been taken for wives and their children be “put away”. This would be a divorce according to the Law in Deuteronomy 24:1-2.

vs. 5-8 – Ezra continues to mourn the sin of the people as a proclamation goes out that all the Jews were to gather in Jerusalem. Those that refused to come, and they are given a three-day window to arrive, would be excommunicated from the Jewish community.

vs. 9-17 – The gathering takes place on the 20th day of Chisleu, our late-November and December. It is the rainy season that is their winter. It is raining as the people gather to determine how to handle the situation of the pagan wives. It is determined that they will begin the process of removing the wives in ten days on the 1st day of Tebeth, our December. The work continues until the 1st of Nisan, the start of the Jewish religious calendar.

vs. 18-44 – Here is the roster of those men that had taken pagan wives. It is an everlasting reminder of God’s earnest desire for holiness in His people. The guilty were to put away their wives and offer sacrifices. In vs. 20-24 are the guilty priests and Levites. They are presented first because they should have led Israel better in the ways of holiness.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 149

We rarely consider the consequences of our actions in the proper scale. It was vitally important that the Jews that returned from Captivity begin right and lay a solid foundation for the nation to rebuild upon. They compromised and allowed sin to enter the nation in the taking of pagan wives. The reaction to this may seem harsh to the modern mind, but you must consider the time and the need. Having 2,500 years of perspective helps. But what of our own shortcomings? They may seem light in the moment but what about decades or centuries later? This is but one of the many reasons we are to walk as close to the Bible's instructions as we possibly can.

Hymn for Day 149

Our hymn today, "To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All", is a prayer of repentance written originally in Norwegian by M.B. Landstad. This translation is by Carl Doving.

*To thee, O Lord, the God of all,
With contrite heart I humbly call,
And view my sins against thee, Lord,
The sins of thought and deed and word;
In my distress I cry to thee,
O God, be merciful to me. A-men.*

*My Lord and God, to thee I pray,
O cast me not in wrath away;
Let thy good Spirit ne'er depart,
But draw me closer to thy heart;
That is my penitential plea,
O God, be merciful to me.*

*Let thy belovèd precious Blood
Be to my soul a cleansing flood,
To wash my sins and guilt away;
That, pardoned by thy grace, I may
Go to my house with peace from thee:
O God, be merciful to me.*