

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

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Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"

Session 2: Ezra 1-6

Introduction:

The British-Somali poet, Warsan Shire, ends her poem "Home" with:

*no one leaves home until home
is a damp voice in your ear saying
leave, run now, i don't know what
i've become.*

If this is home, how does one ever go back? That is a question that surely went through the minds of the Jews living in exile. Many who once called the prosperous and great nation of Judah home, spent seventy years in captivity. Yet, now they have been given the opportunity to return home.

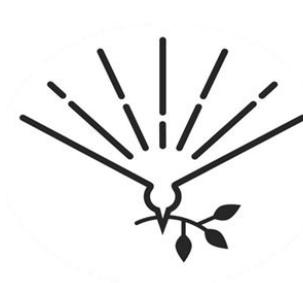
Should they stay as an oppressed people in a foreign land, which they now call home? Or should they return to the unknown and decimated home of their fathers and their God? Caught between two homes, this decision must have been a hard one to make. Yet, many of the remnant chose to return home to Judah, specifically Jerusalem.

This week, we will focus on the first of the three returns back to Judah. During the first wave, Zerubbabel led the largest group of exiles back to Judah. We will see how they had to start from scratch and quickly began work on building the altar.

Questions:

What characteristics make home truly "home" for you?

Psalm 91:1-2 says "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust." What can be said about the relationship between home and God?



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Day One: Decree to Return

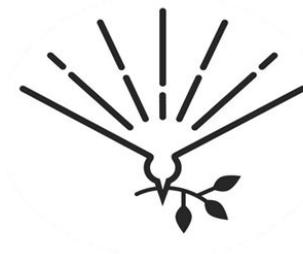
Read Ezra Chapter 1: 1-11

See Ezra 1:1. Cyrus made a proclamation in order for the prophecy of Jeremiah to be fulfilled. How was the Lord involved? What was Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 29:10)?

Read Jeremiah 29:11. It is one of the most mentioned verses in our current Christian culture. How does this understanding of the context of Jeremiah and the Jewish people amplify your understanding of this passage?

What did God compel Cyrus to do? See Ezra 1:2. Why would He choose to not go to the remnant directly?

Read Ezra 1: 7-11. King Cyrus doesn't just make a proclamation in order for the Israelites to return to Jerusalem, he also demonstrates his conviction by his actions and gives back 5,400 articles of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple (see 2 Kings 24:13). Leadership is not just lip service, it requires follow-through. Read Colossians 3:17. How can you **proclaim and demonstrate** the gospel to further the Kingdom of God?



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Day Two: The People

Ezra 1-2

Read Ezra 1:5. Who is “stirred” and “moved” to go up to Jerusalem? What is significant about who is mentioned here?

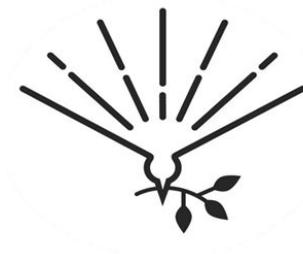
Ezra first mentions Zerubbabel in Ezra 2:1. What do we know about Zerubbabel from the following texts?

1. Matthew 1:12 _____
2. Haggai 1:1 _____
3. Zechariah 4: 9,11-14 _____

Read Ezra 2:2-64 and scan Ezra’s list of returning exiles. What conclusions can you make about who returned? What does it tell you about what they value?

See Ezra 2:64, How many people in total returned during the first wave?

Read Ezra 2: 68-70. The people gave freewill offerings according to their ability, and they returned back to their respective towns with a purpose and a mission. How is committing our time and talents to God an act of trust? See 2 Corinthians 9:7-12, in what particular areas of your life do you need to work on being a cheerful giver?



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Day Three: Building the Altar and Foundation

Read Ezra 3

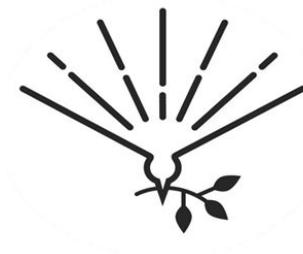
See Ezra 3:1-5. What is the first thing they do when they settled in Jerusalem, and how do they gather? What does this tell us about the position of their hearts?

In verse 4 we read that the Jews kept the Feast of Booths. See Leviticus 23:34-42. What did this observance entail?

See Ezra 3:8. Why is it important to mention that the foundation was not yet laid? What does this say about the motivation of the returned people?

See Ezra 3:11. What caused the Jews to praise God? Why was the completion of the foundation a cause for praise?

Not everyone was filled with joy. We read in verse 12 that those who had seen the former temple wept. The prophet Haggai says in Haggai 2:3, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" Why were they weeping while others were shouting with joy?



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Day Four: Opposition

Read Ezra 4

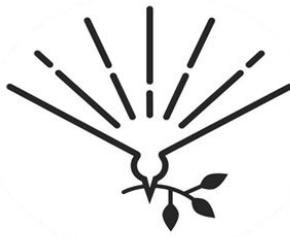
See Ezra 4:1-6. What 5 tactics did those opposed to the returned exiles employ?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

A letter sent to the king Artaxerxes was finally successful in halting work on the temple. Read through the letter (Ezra 4:11-16) and the king's response (4:17-22). How is this attempt successful where other appeals failed? What was the result?

The temple work was halted in 534 BC and began again in 520 BC. Imagine the discouragement that Zerubbabel, Jeshua and returned exiles must have faced. God provided two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them to complete the temple. Read Haggai 2:4-9. How were they being encouraged?

See 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Has God placed people in your life who encourage you toward obedience to Him? What qualities do they possess, how can you be an encouragement to someone today?



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Day Five: Joy

Read Ezra 5 and 6

God urged his people to start rebuilding again. See Ezra 5:1-2. For background see Haggai 1 and Zechariah 1:1-17 and 4:1-10. What can we learn about God in these passages?

During this time, leadership came from three sources. What leadership is God providing to the people at this time? How do these three elements point to the future perfect leadership?

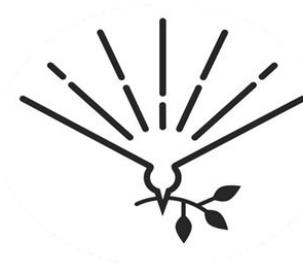
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The decree from Cyrus is found. What does king Darius tell the governor Tattenai?

Read Ezra 6:16-18. How did the completion of the rebuilt temple compare and contrast to the completion of the first temple under King Solomon (1 Kings 8: 62-66)? When the temple was finished, what did the returned exiles do?

The people then celebrate the Feast of Passover in Ezra 6:19-22. What did they do, and why would it have been especially significant considering what they are going through (Exodus 12:1-20)?

See Ezra 6: 22, then lookup the definition of joy. What does it mean to you that the "Lord had made them joyful". What reasons do you have to be joyful?



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Day 6: Reflection

What have you learned about the character of God this week?

What about His character helps you respond to God with renewed trust?