

Ezra

March 5, 2023

Ezra - The Faithful Scribe

Summary:

We see Zerubbabel bringing back a remnant of about 50,000 Jews with some of the sacred vessels for the temple, at the beginning of the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 1 - 6).

We see Ezra, a priestly scribe, bringing back a second remnant of about 2,000, with additional sacred vessels for the temple, and the reformation of religious, social, and civil life (Ezra 7 - 10).

Note: The restoration of Judah to the land and the rebuilding of the temple was not only a fulfillment of the prophetic word; it was also designed to hold the Jews in the land until the birth of Messiah according to Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:24-27).

Christ Seen: Christ is seen as our governor (Zerubbabel) who rebuilds the temple.

Zerubbabel plays an important role in the story of redemption. His historical contribution, his bloodline, and his salvation, foreshadows the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God promised King David that one of his own descendants would be the Messianic ruler of God's kingdom (2Sam 7:12-16). Almost five hundred years later the royal line was jeopardized when Babylon captured Jerusalem and hauled off King Jehoiachin, David's offspring, into captivity (2Ki 24:15). It would have been customary for the king of Babylon to kill Jehoiachin as a sign of victory, but for some reason, he didn't. He threw him in prison instead, and after 37 years of imprisonment, Jehoiachin was mysteriously freed by the new king of Babylon. He was treated kindly, and was given a place of honor, and he was taken care of for the rest of life (2Ki 25:27-30).

Jehoiachin went on to have a son named Shealtiel, and Shealtiel had a son named Zerubbabel. He carried the royalty of Israel, and the hope of the entire world. King Cyrus allowed Israel to return to their homeland, Zerubbabel leading the way. Zechariah proclaimed that God would use Zerubbabel to lay low the mountains (Zech 4:6-8). Haggai announced that God would vanquish the kingdoms of the world and Zerubbabel was the "signet ring", the chosen sign, of this promise (Hag 2:21-23). Zerubbabel carried the torch of God's covenant. God was about to do a great work in Israel, one that would ripple through all mankind, and He would use Zerubbabel to play a vital part.

Many years later, when the promised King of kings was finally born, the Gospel writers provided the genealogies of both His biological mother and legal father, both of whom were descended from David. And there on both sides, smack dab in the middle of the Messianic family tree, blazes a name we should now be very familiar with, Zerubbabel (Mt 1:12-13; Lk 3:27).

God's people had been dispersed through Babylon, and then Medo-Persia. Their sin and rebellion had separated them from the land, city and temple. They were no longer a people. They were slaves. But in God's perfect timing He raised up Zerubbabel to lead them back to the Promised Land (Ezra 2:2; 3:1-2). He was the conquering hero who led the captives back into their heritage as God's people.

Similarly, all mankind has broken God's law (Rom 3:9-20), has been banished from the land of paradise (Gen 3:23-24), and has gone into the captivity of sin and Satan (Jn 8:34; Titus 3:3). We are not a people (1Pt 2:10), but a fractured, scattered, desolate race of rebels who are cut off from the presence and holiness of God. But in God's perfect timing (Gal 4:4) He sent the offspring of Zerubbabel, Jesus Christ, to free the captives (Lk 4:18), reassemble them as a people (1Pt 2:10), and lead them as a conquering hero (Eph 4:8) away from the spiritual whoredom of Babylon (Rev 17:4-6) and into the freedom of the true Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22).

The first priority of Zerubbabel's mission was to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:8; 5:2; Hag 1:1-11). This new temple couldn't measure up to the glory of Solomon's original temple (Ezra 3:12-13; Hag 2:2-3), so God promised that another, better temple was still to come (Hag 2:6-9).

Jesus also came to repair the temple, the middle ground between man and God. But He surpassed Zerubbabel by establishing the true temple that had been promised: Himself. In His broken body, Christ offered a once-and-for-all sacrifice to atone for the sins of men by shedding His own blood (Heb 9:11-14). The pierced, slaughtered temple was raised again in His resurrection (Jn 2:19-21) so that man can once again fellowship with the Creator through the living temple of the risen Christ. For all eternity, the earthly temple is done away with and is replaced by Jesus Himself, mediating God's glory and God's presence to us (Rev 21:22).

In Ezra 4, as Israel began to work on the temple, they were approached by the people who had taken up residency in the land during their captivity. These residents seemed friendly at first, professing to worship the God of Israel and offering to help build the temple (Ezra 4:2). Yet Zerubbabel quickly declined the offer and ran them off (4:3). Why the harsh response?

Because even though these inhabitants had indeed learned to worship the Lord (2Ki 17:24-28), they had also continued in their former idolatry (2Ki 17:29-41). They didn't repent of their false religion and turn to the living God; they simply incorporated Him into their diet as one of many gods. If Zerubbabel had accepted their offer, he would have put Israel into an alliance with the very idolatry, paganism and false doctrine that had gotten them exiled in the first place. By driving them away, Zerubbabel protected the flock of God from spiritual and moral compromise.

Similarly, Jesus is the great Shepherd who drives away the wolves in sheepskin. The church has been historically bombarded with an onslaught of teachers, sects, cults, and religions that try to claim an alliance with Christianity. Jesus is the one who not only builds His church but protects it from the volleys of hell (Mt 16:18). It's through His lordship, teaching, Spirit, doctrine, and discipline that all imposters are called out and chased away (Acts 8:18-23; 20:28-30; Rom 16:17-19; 1Cor 5:1-13; 2Cor 11:3-4, 12-15; Gal 1:6-9; 2Pt 2:1-3; Jude 4-23) in order to present the church to Himself as a pure and spotless bride (Eph 5:25-27).

When we read about Zerubbabel in the Old Testament we're not just learning a dry history lesson; we're seeing a picture of God's story for mankind, which finds its climax in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the descendent of David who brings back the rebellious exiles, who establishes the temple where the sacrifice is made to reconcile God and man, and who protects His people until the very end. He is our King, our Savior, our Mediator, and our Shepherd. (from Mark Narankevicius; <https://marksofthekingdom.wordpress.com/2017/03/23/zerubbabel-a-picture-of-christ/>)

Christ Seen: Christ is seen as our priest (Ezra), who restores the people.

There are four similarities between Ezra's life and Jesus.

1) Ezra sought the Word of God and obeyed it. He devoted himself to studying and observing the Law of the Lord and teaching its decrees and laws to Israel (Ezra 7:10).

Likewise, Jesus also sought the Word of God and obeyed it. Jesus did nothing unless he saw the Father doing it first (John 5:19).

2) Ezra was a priest (Ezra 7:11), and a scribe devoted to the law of Moses.

Jesus came as the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 4:14). Like Ezra, he countered temptation and those who challenged him in debate with appeals to Scripture.

3) Ezra was a great spiritual reformer who called Israel to repentance (Ezra 7:10).

Jesus also called us to repent (Mt 4:17; Rev 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19).

4) Both Ezra and Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Ezra 9:5-15, Luke 19:41-44).

This aspect of what we see in Ezra and Jesus is comforting...Jesus loves people, Jesus wants what is good for people. Jesus is saddened by rebellion and disobedience.