

Ezra #1: Introduction to the Book of Ezra

by Ed Miller

The book of Ezra is a remnant book that introduces the last century of Old Testament history, focusing on the themes of grace, revival, and stability.

Duration: 59:46

Scripture: Ezra 1:1

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of studying the word of God in order to see Jesus and produce fruit in our lives. He mentions that there is limited time to cover all the lessons in the Bible, so he chooses to focus on the book of Ezra. The preacher highlights that Ezra is about revival and God's desire for His people to live again. He outlines the three revivals in the book: getting out of Babylon and returning to Jerusalem, the neglected period of the last 100 years of the Old Testament, and the recovery. The preacher encourages the audience to study the book of Ezra and be transformed by its marvelous pictures and the grace of God.

Transcript

Well, good evening, brothers. It's a joy to be back again with you, and I'm sure if your heart is like my heart, you've come for the same reason I've come, and that's to see the Lord. And as we come to look into God's Word, there is a principle of Bible study that is absolutely indispensable, a principle that we can never take for granted, and that is total reliance upon God's Holy Spirit.

It's God's book, it's God's Son, and only God can reveal God. Only the Lord can show Himself, and He is delighted to do that. Now, a lot of what I'll share this weekend is in the backdrop of the great restoration out of Babylonian captivity.

And so, to get us beginning before we pray, I'm going to ask you to look, or at least listen, to a verse from Jeremiah, chapter 50. A couple of verses, actually, and we'll use this to prepare our hearts, and then we'll look in His Word. This is describing the day when Israel, after their chastening, is finally delivered out of Babylon.

Beginning in verse 4, "...in those days, and at that time, declares the LORD, the sons of Israel will come, both they, and the sons of Judah as well. And they will go along, weeping as they go." See, they're getting out of Babylon to bring us to that. "...It will be the LORD their God that they seek.

And they'll ask for the way to Zion, turning their faces in its direction. And they will come that they might join themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant." Finally, does it take Babylon to work that in us? That it's the Lord we seek, that it's union with Him that we desire based on the everlasting covenant? Verse 6, a sad verse, "...My people have become lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray.

They've made them turn aside on the mountains. They've gone along from mountain to hill. They have forgotten their resting place." So sad to see God's children going from mountain to hill, forgetting their resting place.

It's my prayer this weekend that God will put this in our hearts that it's the Lord, our God that we seek, that it's union with Him based on the new covenant that we seek. And that He would remind us again of our resting place so we don't have to run to every mountain and hill for this experience and that, that we could have Him. So let's bow and just commit our time unto the Lord.

Our Heavenly Father, once again this evening, we bless Thy name. You've given us Your Word. You've put Your Holy Spirit in our heart.

You've already given us a measure of light, the unveiling of our Lord Jesus, life and union with Him. Now as we pause this weekend to look again into a precious portion of Your Word, we would ask that Your Holy Spirit would unveil the Lord Jesus in a fresh way. Minister life unto us.

Take us again, we pray, to our resting place. And we thank You in advance that You're going to over-answer this prayer because we offer it up in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I think it's been announced to you already that we'll be looking a little bit in the marvelous book of Ezra. Many of the verses that I'll be quoting are from the American Standard Version of 1901. And you say, why are you using that version this time? My computer broke, that's why.

And I lost my copy and paste. And so I lost the New American Standard easy way to do it. So that was as close as I could come with that.

Well, we're going to look at Ezra. Now Ezra is a wonderful saint of the Lord. Wonderful, wonderful brother.

Anybody come here this weekend to see Ezra? I hope not. He's a wonderful saint, but you didn't come here to see Ezra. The book he wrote, the book of Ezra, wonderful, wonderful book.

I hope you didn't come to learn the book of Ezra. That's not why you're here, that's not why I'm here. I hope when we're finished, you know a little bit more about Ezra the man and Ezra the book than you did when you walked in.

But that's not why we're here. The purpose for this weekend, in fact, every time we gather in the name of the Lord, is to behold him, to behold the Lord himself. Praise God for Ezra and praise God for his book.

But we want to see Jesus. And I believe with all my heart that Ezra the man and Ezra the book gives us another opportunity to see our Lord Jesus Christ in a living way. Now in order to prepare your heart and my heart for the revelation of the Lord in Ezra, this first lesson needs to be an introduction lesson.

That's the nature of the beast. And the problem with that is it's not in one place. I can't say turn to chapter 1 and look at verses 5 to 11.

We're sort of all over the place because it's our purpose to get a taste, to get a hunger for God's heart in this book. Why did God put Ezra in your Bible? And if tonight he took it out of your Bible, what would you lose? What would you miss? What's the revelation of the Lord that God gives in Ezra that he does not give any place else in the Bible in the same way? Every book in the Bible has a distinctive revelation of the Lord. We need every book.

We need the revelation of the Lord. You say, well what if I don't have a revelation of the Lord? Say in one of those little books, say in Zephaniah or Haggai or something like that. Are you open to the Lord? Then you're open to the message of Zephaniah whether you know what it is or not.

And I'm open to the message of Zephaniah whether I know what it is or not. I hope someday God opens up all of those books. There's a lot of closed books, a lot of dark places in my soul in the Bible.

But I'm open to every message in every book in the Bible even though I don't know what it is. There's certain books that are very, very dark to my soul. Do I despise those books? No, I don't.

I love those books. I study them all the time even though I haven't seen the Lord yet. And I know I'm already open to the message of Christ in those books.

And Ezra is like that. So we need to see the Lord in the book of Ezra. Now to give you just a little taste, I'm going to ask you to turn to Ezra chapter 9 please.

There's a wonderful verse in chapter 9. Quite apart from how this verse fits into the history. Quite apart from the background of what was going on here. I just want you to look at the verse and the wonderful realities, the spiritual realities that he just lays out one right after another.

Chapter 9 verse 8, Now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in his holy place that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. That's one of those plaque verses. That should be on the wall.

That's a wonderful, wonderful verse. Now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God. The present truth of the grace of God for a brief moment is shown.

This is my key verse for this weekend and I've been praying the various parts of this verse and I'm praying that God will fill the brief moments of this weekend with his grace. The second expression, an escaped remnant. I love that.

Of course in the context you know it was the escape from Babylonian captivity. The remnant, the escaped remnant was that handful, that part of God's people that said yes to God's invitation through Cyrus. See the invitation by Cyrus, we won't get into all the details, but basically it said everyone's invited, everything's provided.

You can all come out. But not all came out. It wasn't a command, it was an invitation.

And only a small handful, relatively speaking. There were several million and only about 50,000 came out in that first group. Now we can't say that none of the remnants stayed behind because we know Daniel stayed behind and some others like him.

But we also know that he opened his window and prayed toward the holy city. So he had a remnant heart, no matter where his body was, he had a remnant heart. And no doubt there were many that stayed back

with remnant hearts.

But in the main, those who remained behind, remained behind because they were not saying yes to the Lord. There were exceptions. Those that left said yes to the Lord.

Those that remained behind in the main, they didn't want to give up a comfortable lifestyle. To go back to what? To a destroyed temple and a destroyed wall and a ransacked city? Now at first, if you read the book of Lamentations, because that describes what happened, why they lamented after that captivity, the captivity was a terrible time. Time of suffering and grief and agony.

When Nebuchadnezzar came in, he was very, very cruel. The people of God became slaves and they had to do hard labor. They even had to pay for their drinking water.

If you read Lamentations, you see how terrible it was. They got so hungry, some women were eating their newborn babies. A terrible, terrible time.

You can read about it. They'd been uprooted from their culture, from their families. Everything they knew, everything they were familiar with, in many cases their names were changed so that the old would be forgotten.

And they were given heathen names. The Bible tells us, Lamentations tells us that the holy women that were taken as prisoners of war, it's in Lamentations, they were raped every day. Every day they were raped.

Terrible, terrible time. But as the years rolled on and the pressure was lifted, they got used to life in Babylon. They began to take up positions.

By the time of Cyrus's declaration that you could leave and go free, they got comfortable. They'd become captive colonists by that time. And they had settled in.

They owned land. They got involved in the government. They had their own houses, their own property, their own business.

You know, there's a lot of jokes about the Jewish person and how he handles money. And many trace it back to the Babylonian captivity. That's where they learned to be business savvy.

It was in captivity. They learned how to handle it. I don't know if that's true or not, but at this time it was a lot easier to stay in Babylon than to take that 700-mile journey through the trackless desert, identify with the poor remnant and go back to a devastated land.

I like what Ezra calls it, an escaped remnant. The decree goes out, you can leave. You can escape.

They said, that's not an escape, that'd be a sacrifice. To leave Babylon would be a sacrifice, not an escape. I don't want to give up all this.

We've now settled in. In your Bible, there are five books that are called remnant books. In other words, they follow the remnant.

That came back. There are actually six post-exilic, post-after-exilic exile, after the captivity. There are six books that cover that, but only five of those are remnant books.

One of them is not a remnant book. The two history books are Ezra and Nehemiah. Those are remnant books.

And then the last three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. The only post-exilic book that's not a remnant book, and on the side, if you want to know why I think that's so, we can discuss it, is the book of Esther. That's a post-exilic book, but it's not a remnant book.

And so, we're going to use the word escape remnant this weekend to mean the cream of the crop. When we're talking about the remnant, the escape remnant, those who heard the invitation. Everything's provided.

Everyone's invited, and they said yes. We want to follow the Lord. We want to identify with the Lord.

It's not something we have to give up. It's a deliverance. It's an escape.

And so, we want to be liberated. You know, that's the almost the opposite way the world uses the word remnant. When the world uses the word remnant, they talk about the remnant of the cloth.

And what they mean by that is that's what's left over after you make the curtain. We make the curtain, and then there's the remnant. That's the cloth.

Throw the remnant away. Use the remnant to wash the car or to dust the furniture. The remnant is the leftover.

The remnant is, there's the remnant of the wood. We've already built the shed. There's the remnant.

Throw the remnant away. But when you see it in the Bible, that's not how God uses it. God doesn't say throw the remnant away.

The remnant's the part he treasures. The remnant is the cream of the crop. That's the part that is true.

And so, when we're going to look at that, we're not only going to see the grace of God for a brief season, but the escaped remnant. Then chapter 9, verse 8 again, a peg in a holy place. The American Standard says a nail in a holy place following the King James.

Another translation says a firm place. Another says a foothold in a firm place. Another says a refuge.

Another says secure hold. What's the principle? The peg, the nail, the firm place, the secure place, the refuge, the foothold, the stronghold, the secure place. It's stability.

It's fixity. A nail puts something. The Orientals used to use nails to pin down their tents and to put things on the wall.

It's God's promise to make it secure, to nail it down. Sometime in my life, Bible truth. I love principles.

I love Bible truth. But sometime they just sort of fly around like when I, the other day, my wife opened the window and I had papers on my desk. They just went everywhere.

And I wish they were nailed down. Yesterday, you're glad you weren't there. Yesterday in the shower, I decided I would sing because I sound better in the shower, at least to myself.

And so early in the morning, I was singing in the shower. And I was singing that song, Complete In Thee. You know that song? Yeah, those wonderful, wonderful words.

But I started it like I heard one time someone start the Star Spangled Banner. Oh, say can you? Now, you know, where's it going from there? And there's no way that I could reach the words. I started on a pitch, unbelievable.

And so I got into this falsetto. And I was way up in this, completing it. But the words were wonderful.

Complete in thee, no work of mine can take, dear Lord, the place of thine. And I was taking a shower and the Lord was convicting me. So easy to know the words.

And sometime you just can't reach the notes. You can't sing it. There's no music.

And you've got all the words. You know all the words. You can recite the words.

But the music's not there. And you just sort of want that nail in a firm place. You want God to nail it down so that my experience and my knowledge are together.

And God just brings those things together. And so in Ezra, you've got that grace of God for a brief moment. In the book of Ezra, you've got this nail in a firm place so that we can have security.

You have the escape remnant. A couple more things in that verse. Verse 8, that our God may enlighten our eyes.

What a prayer this. This is more than a happy face and bright eyes after a shameful, disgraceful departure from the Lord. That's part of it.

But it's also what we pray for revelation. That God will enlighten our eyes. And then finally in verse 8, grant us a little reviving in our bondage.

Not too much to expect of the Lord this weekend. That for a brief moment, God would give us grace. Show us that we are an escape remnant.

Give us a nail in a firm place. Nail some things down for us. Give us a little reviving in our bondage.

The word revive, and we're getting close to Ezra now. Actually, the way we use the word comes from two words. Vival, to live, re, again, to live again.

That's revival. That's revive. To live again.

Anybody who's studied Ezra knows that this is one of the greatest books in the Bible on revival. To live again. And I believe with all my heart that God wants to give some revival this weekend.

You say, I already have life. Yeah, but how about some re-life? Revival. You can't have revival if you haven't had Bible.

You got to have Bible and then God wants us to live again. A lot of people don't need revival. They need repentance.

That's another thing altogether. But revival is when the coals have sort of gone cold, and we just need God to blow again on the coals and to give us life. A little reviving in our bondage.

That's the reality of this book. Revival is what Ezra's all about. God wants us to live again.

And by the time we're done with this introduction, I hope you see how God develops that great truth. Chapter 9, verse 8, that's one verse that sort of takes the heart of the book. It's about the grace of God, and it's about the escaped remnant, and it's about God giving a nail in a firm place, and God enlightening our eyes, and God giving us a little life in our bondage.

So where do we begin? Introducing the book of Ezra. I want to begin by trying to show you how Ezra fits in the canon of Scripture. I know some of you could stand up here probably and walk circles around me concerning the facts of Ezra.

I'm not pretending I know all about the book and you don't know about it. But I know years ago I began to learn that you don't take anything for granted. And so I'm going to pretend that you've never even heard the book, never heard the name, that you know nothing.

And so I know a little bit because I've studied, and you know nothing. So I'm just going to say it as if you've never heard anything, in order that we might all be on the same page. How does Ezra fit into the Bible story? Ezra is an introduction to a great section in the Bible.

I think if I can show you that you can begin to see God's heart. And after we see that big picture, then we can home in on the book and the distinctive message. And then I'll try to show you tonight, this is what I want us to look at.

And God hopefully will prepare our hearts. The book of Ezra introduces us to the last century of Old Testament history. In other words, the last 100 years.

This is nothing new, studying the Bible in terms of blocks of time. We do it all the time. Say, let's study the 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham.

Or let's study the 400 years in Egypt. Or let's study the 40 years in the wilderness. Or let's study the seven-year war for Canaan.

Or let's study the 350 dark years of the judges. Or let's study the 500 years of the king. Or let's study the 70-year captivity.

We study the Bible in terms of blocks of time. And every block of time has to do with the redemptive history. And every block of time talks about our spiritual history.

And so behind this history is this marvelous spiritual reality. Well, there's another block of time that Christians have neglected. It's not as famous as the 40 years in the wilderness.

Go up to the average Christian and say, what do you know about the 40 years in the wilderness? Well, they could sit down and talk to you. And they'd tell you about God's provision in the cloud and the rock opening and the water and so on. They could talk about the 40 years in the wilderness.

Or maybe the days of the judges, they could talk about that. But how does God close the Old Testament? What's the last 100 years about? It's a block. It belongs together.

What's God's final word? After this, we have to wait for Bethlehem. What does God say as He comes to the end? What's His final message? Well, some have studied it. And they gave it a name.

And so in some books, you open up the book and say, the recovery. And so you take those last 100 years and you study the recovery. Most commentators don't call it the recovery.

They call it the restoration period. Let's study the restoration period. The time, the period after they were restored out of Babylonian captivity, post-exilic period, the last 100 years.

Why is Ezra important? Because Ezra introduces us. It's the first book that deals with that 100 years. And Ezra lays out God's heart.

And Ezra says, this is what God wants to show you in the last century. This is what God's heart is all about. Here is what God wants you to know.

And so the book of Ezra introduces and summarizes God's heart, clenches the entire Old Testament message, and lays out before us in story form God's final burdens, God's final heart. And so we come to the book of Ezra. Now, there's a reason scholars have called it the restoration.

And I need to get a spiritual principle before your heart because we're going to be looking at the spiritual side. We'll see the physical side, but we can't miss God's heart. We've got to see the spiritual side if we're going to live again this weekend, if he's going to give us a little reviving in our bondage.

It's because this final 100 years follows the escaped remnant as they leave the captivity. God revives his people. They had sinned against God.

They'd gone into chastening, gone into captivity. They left Jerusalem, city of peace. They went into Babylon, city of confusion.

That happens. You know, the Old Testament ends before it ends. You know what I mean by that? You say, well, where's the end? And you go to the end.

But the end is not the end. The end is in the middle. The Old Testament ends just before Job.

As far as the chronology is concerned, see, God tells a story, and he gives a history, and that story ends with Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. That's the end of the Old Testament. Then God takes the next books, the poetry section and the major prophets and the minor prophets, and goes back and talks about the history.

But it ends with Esther. And then he goes back and he explains that history. Well, that's how Ezra fits into the canon of Scripture.

It stands right at the doorway of that great section, that last 100 years of Bible, Old Testament history. Now, we say restoration. A nation is released after a 70-year captivity, allowed to go back to its homeland, rebuild the temple, rebuild the wall.

Those are the big things that happened in that period. I'm not going to develop this side, but just in one sentence, the temple was ever, always God's illustration of the spiritual condition of His people. God said, you need to come back.

I want a temple. They said, let's have a wall. Makes more sense to build a wall first.

Then you can build a temple. We need protection. God says, no, you don't build a wall first.

I'll be a wall around about you. You build the temple first. Temple right with God.

The wall has to do with the knowledge of God. God is always one of the people who were right with Him and surrounded with the knowledge of God. It's what that restoration is all about.

What good is it, brothers, to be able to recite all of this biblical history? Really? Say, well, I know Nebuchadnezzar reigned, and you want to hear me recite the three sons that reigned after him? Who cares? You say, yeah, but I know the arrangement. I know when Cyrus appeared, and I know when Darius appeared, and I know when Xerxes appeared, and I know when Artaxerxes appeared, and I know when House Herod appeared, and I know the ones in between. Who cares? That's not why God, God is not trying to give us information.

That's not why He tells us these things. What I want to do is sort of lay before your heart the spiritual message, because the restoration is after the captivity. But let's just look at the captivity for one moment in order to show you God's heart in the restoration.

If you go up to the average Christian, even the most uninstructed Christian, and you ask them this question, the Babylonian captivity, how long was Israel in captivity? All right, I'm asking, how long? Say it. Seventy years. Everybody knows, 70 years.

Turn, if you would, to Jeremiah 25. Jeremiah 25. Begin at verse 11, please.

This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment. These nations shall serve the King of Babylon 70 years, and it shall come to pass when 70 years are accomplished, I will punish the King of Babylon and that nation, says Jehovah, for their iniquities, and the land of the Chaldeans I will make it desolate forever. Notice Jeremiah the prophet predicted the exact time of the captivity.

Not 50 years. Not 60 years. Not 68 years.

Not 71 years. 70. Turn to Jeremiah 29, please.

Chapter 29, beginning at verse 10. Thus says Jehovah, after 70 years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, perform my good word toward you in causing you to return to this place. I know the thoughts I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace, not of evil, to give you hope in the latter end.

You shall call upon me and shall go and pray unto me and I will hearken unto you. You shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all of your heart. There it is again.

70 years. Not 65 years. Not 68 or 69 years.

Not 71 or 72 years. 70. Now, if you read through the Old Testament and the history, you'll see there were many occasions for captivity.

In other words, they got what they asked for. They deserved it. Say, why'd they go into captivity? Say, idolatry.

They turned to idolatry. Is that true? The answer is yes, indeed it is. That was an occasion of going in.

Say, well, I saw a verse that says the reason they went in is they made unholy alliances with the heathen nations and that's why they went in. Is that true? Sure it is. They did that.

That's one of the occasions for their going in. Someone says, well, I read that Manasseh, that was the point of no return. And God said, after Manasseh, even if you repent, you're still going into captivity.

That man went too far. He passed the line of no return. Secular scholarship tells us that he's the one that cut Isaiah in half with a wooden saw.

God said, that's enough. Is that why they went in? Another one says, well, they just didn't listen to the prophets. Prophets got up every day.

Prophets warned them to return and to repent, and they wouldn't repent. That's why they went in. Another says, well, they become materialistic.

That's why they went in. Those were the occasions. But God isolates His heart.

The reason. I'm going to ask you to turn to 2 Chronicles, chapter 36, please. If you can stick with me, Ezra will become a mighty factor in your life.

2 Chronicles 36, verse 20, Then that had escaped from the sword, he carried away to Babylon. And they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land enjoyed its sabbaths. For as long as it lay desolate, it kept sabbath to fulfill three score ten years.

Mark that, brothers. Here it is in a nutshell, right from the beginning of your Bible. God has had a heart that His people trust Him, is rest in Him.

And so that they would rest, He set one day aside and called it rest, called it sabbath. He said, trust me today. I'll meet your needs.

I'll provide. Spend the day just enjoying me. Worship me.

Take that day and set it aside. And then as He laid out their calendar, He took that seventh month and made that a special month for the Jews. We won't get into that on another occasion as we go through this weekend.

I'll show you a little about that seventh month. But it began with a trumpet sound and an announcement of rest, rest, rest. And then God said, every seven years, listen, take a whole year off.

We call that a sabbatical year. Take the whole year off and you'll see that I am faithful and I'll provide and I'll be your God and I'll take care of you. But they didn't get it.

They didn't get the weekly rest. They neglected that. They didn't get the monthly rest.

They neglected that. They didn't get the annual rest. They neglected that.

So the seventh year came by. Somebody might have said, hey, Jake, you going to take off? God said, take the whole year off. That's not too practical, you know.

Things are a little tough with the kids right now. Tractor broke down. And so they didn't take it off.

They had it as any other year. And they went out and they pulled stumps and they plowed the land and they planted seed and they reaped just like another year. God was patient.

Seven more years rolled by. Another sabbatical came. Did they rest? Did they trust the Lord and say, God's faithful.

He's going to take care of us. He wants the land to rest. He wants us to rest.

We'll just trust Him. No, they didn't take it off. Thirty-five years went by.

Seven times five, thirty-five. Five sabbatical years. Did they rest? Say no.

Well, who's counting? I'll tell you who's counting. Seventy years went by. Ten opportunities, these ten sabbatical years.

And they didn't rest. A hundred years passed. God just sat up there taking notes.

And they didn't rest. Two hundred years went by. Three hundred years went by.

Four hundred years went by. They never took a Sabbath year off. Never did.

Four hundred ninety years. And God said, that's enough. That's it.

That's it. How many Sabbaths in 490? Seventy. And God says, listen, you wouldn't rest.

Seventy times, 490 years, I've been waiting for you to rest. And now you will go into captivity one year for every year you refuse to rest. That's what Babylon's about.

That's the spiritual significance of Babylon. And that's why you need to study Lamentations and you need to study the Babylonian captivity. Because that experience is the experience of all those who refuse to rest in the Lord.

And if you don't want to know what it's like, what I can experience if I don't rest in Him, then you read Lamentations and you look at the principles, because this describes the consequences of not resting in the Lord. Many occasions. But that was the reason that they went into captivity.

Every Christian and every Christian group that fails to rest in the Lord will experience Babylonian captivity, the principles of Babylonian captivity. All right, now let's come to God's heart. Is there any hope? Is there any life? Can those who have heard so much so many times and been invited rest in the Lord, and they haven't done it, and they have tasted the bitterness of not resting, can they live again? After not resting in the Lord maybe for years.

God says, yes, study Ezra. I'm going to show you how you can live again, even if you haven't rested in the Lord up to this moment. No matter how much you've heard, no matter how much you've known, no matter how much you have tried to apply, if you haven't rested in the Lord, you've experienced Babylon.

That's what you've experienced. I know that that's true. And in this segment of time, this hundred years, God is saying to every person, you do not have to live that way.

You can live again. You can return to the city of peace. The temple can be rebuilt.

The wall can be rebuilt. And I can have a name and a testimony again. Ezra offers hope to all those who have failed to rest in the Lord and desire now to live again.

So that's what we're looking at. Let me home in on the theme of the book, the prevailing theme, and then focus exactly what I'd like us to look at. And then, God willing, we'll begin looking at that.

Now, we know Ezra wrote this book. Scholars believe he also wrote Chronicles. Some think he also wrote Nehemiah and Esther.

Some think God used him to arrange all the books in the Old Testament. But here's a strange thing. The book that bears his name is not about him.

In fact, when you open chapter one of Ezra, you don't see Ezra. He doesn't show up in the book for 80 years. You won't see Ezra for 80 years.

And then finally you'll see him. He'll come up in chapter six and seven and so on. So what's the book about? And the answer is the book of Ezra is a book of revival.

Ezra contains three revivals. It's the record of three revivals. And those three revivals took place during those hundred years.

God said to those who were born again, you can live again. And he said to those who were born again, you can live again and you must live again. God said, I want you to live again here, revival number one.

I want you to live again here, revival number two. And I want you to live again here, revival number three. Ezra lays it all out in story form.

The three times that God's people can live again. The book of Ezra contains the greatest summary of revival in the entire Bible. I think anyone who studies revival has an obligation before the Lord to study the book of Ezra.

Now we use the word. It's just sort of la la la. We sing, revive us again, revive us again and so on.

Speak about revival meetings. Revival is often the burden of our prayer. And we just sort of pray all the time, Lord send an old time revival.

We read books on revival by Finney or Torrey or somebody like that. We're just studying all the old revivals. The reformation of the 16th century and the Puritan revival of the 17th century and the Methodist revival of the 18th century and so on.

The missionary revival and the evangelical revival. And some would say, we're in a revival now. A revival of worship and so on.

But the Bible doesn't use the word restoration and revival in the way that we use it. We just sort of la la la, you know, send an old time revival. I was surprised in my study to discover this.

In all the remnant books, and I read all of them very carefully. I combed through the five remnant books plus the one non-remnant post-exilic book. And as far as I could see, there was no illustration of a direct miracle in any of those books.

Now what I mean by a direct miracle, you know, like in the days of Moses. You know what I mean by a miracle. When God opened the sea or made water come out of a rock or sent special plagues or something like that.

Or in the days of Elijah when a leper is healed or food is multiplied or the dead are raised up or something like that. No direct miracle. And then I noticed this.

Though there was no direct miracle mentioned, the remnant books are full of the supernatural. You know what I mean by that. Behind the scenes, you read a book like Esther and you see God on the throne.

You see God controlling things. He's on the throne. He is there.

You say, well that's not a miracle. In a sense it is. But I'm making a difference between that which is supernatural and that which is miraculous.

There's no direct miracle. But always the supernatural there in every page. Now I call attention to this.

Let me give you two verses. One from the New. One from the Old Testament.

Because I want you to understand God wants us to live again. But what is restoration? What is revival? How does the Bible use the word restoration? My passage is Matthew 12. Matthew 12, 10 and 13.

It's the story of the man with a withered hand. And picture it is all withered up, all dried up, all shriveled up, useless, dead, paralyzed. Jesus said in Matthew 12, 13, stretch forth your hand.

Can't. It's all withered up, dried up, paralyzed, dead. Stretch forth your hand.

Matthew 12, 13 says he stretched it forth and it was restored. That's restoration. That's how the Bible uses restoration.

It was restored. And when you come to Ezra, we're going to talk about restoration. And we're talking about that supernatural restoration.

Every time my shepherd restores my soul, he does for my soul what the Lord Jesus did for the man with the withered hand. It was restored. Supernaturally.

The second word is not restored, but it's the word revived. 1 Kings 17. 1 Kings 17, 17 to 24 is a story about the widow, the son of the widow of Zarephath.

And you remember the story. The boy died in his mother's arms. And then Elijah the prophet prayed, 1 Kings 18, 21, Oh Lord, my God, I pray you, let this child's life return.

What a prayer that. In verse 22, we read this. The Lord heard the voice of Elijah and the life of the child returned and he revived.

That's revival. He revived. And so when we talk about restoration, we're talking about the supernatural work.

When my hand and my life is withered, I need more than a command to stretch it forth. I need power to stretch it forth. You need more than a command.

You need power to stretch it forth. Say, what's revival? It's what God did to that little boy. When his life returned, he lived again and he revived.

And so I'm talking about that kind of a supernatural thing. Let me suggest an outline to the book. Then you'll know where my heart is and where we're going.

The book is outlined in terms of the three great revivals. Revival number one, chapters one and two. Chapters one and two, under the illustration of getting out of Babylon and coming back to Jerusalem, to the holy city.

When a person, Christian, any group of Christians, when God dawns on him how to get out of captivity, how to get out of bondage and how to live free, he lives again. Say, well, a person might be saved for many, many years, not be free. You know, probably many Christians are not free.

They're not free. They need to live again. And the first revival that God gives, and he spells it all out.

All of the principles are illustrated in these first two chapters. He just gives illustration after illustration, laying out all the principles in seed form, because it's Old Testament, but it's all laid out in picture form. How God sets us free.

We need to be free. And then the second revival begins in chapter three and goes to chapter six. And he changes pictures.

It's not now getting out of captivity, but now it's a new picture. Build a temple. Build a temple to completion, that I might be honored, that I might be glorified, says the Lord.

The rebuilding of the temple. Thousands of Christians have been set free, but they don't know how to build a temple. Building the temple has to do with going forward.

It has to do with growing. It has to do with advancing. It has to do with putting on to the superstructure.

It has to do with maturity. God lays it all out, how to have a complete temple that God might have his dwelling place. I'll tell you, if God would dawn on you how to build a temple, you would live again.

You'd live again. Every Christian knows how to live, needs to know how to live free. Every Christian needs to know how to build a temple.

Now after chapter six, between chapter six and chapter seven, about 56 years go by. In that, in between six and seven, you can just write the word Esther. That's where that takes place, right in between chapter six and chapter seven.

Chapter seven starts the next revival, and it goes all the way through the book of Ezra, and it picks up in Nehemiah and continues, and then Ezra shows up again in chapter eight and nine and so on, all the way to chapter ten. Ezra chapter seven, all the way to Nehemiah chapter ten. And God has a different picture now.

It's rebuilding the wall. Rebuilding the wall. Getting out of captivity, rebuilding the temple, rebuilding the wall.

That's the hundred years. And God says, My people need to live again. And that whole section on rebuilding the wall is all about the Word of God.

And Ezra comes forth as a Bible expositor, and he begins to give light and show how to study the book and how to see the Lord. They make vows that they can't keep, and God begins to show how to produce fruit. How to, through the study of the Word of God, marvelous revelation.

And I suggest to you, when you learn how to see Jesus in this book, so that you produce fruit, you live again. You know, on a weekend like this, there's no time. You wouldn't allow it.

You couldn't take it. I can't stand up here and say, All right, let's look at all three revivals. Let's look at too many lessons.

And so I had to choose. And I'll tell you, that was not an easy thing before the Lord. What shall I share? Maybe some need to know how to live free.

Maybe I should share that. Maybe some need to know how to build a temple. Maybe some need to know how to study this book in order to see the Lord and be transformed into His likeness.

We need to live again. And Ezra lays it all out. Ezra spells it all out in picture form.

When you leave this place, I pray God will burn in your heart to study this book. Marvelous picture. Such a neglected section of Scripture.

This last hundred years, who studies it? And so, because we can't look at everything, and because we must look at something, I trust God has guided me. I've suggested I'm going to share with you Revival Number 2. We're going to look together at Ezra chapter 3 to chapter 6. How to have a complete temple. How to build a temple.

How to grow. How to advance. How to move on.

And may God help us. That's what we want to look at. That's what Ezra's about.

And may God give us a little reviving in our bondage. Somebody needs to live again. May the Lord touch our hearts.

Let's pray. Our Father, how we thank You for this book. Certainly, Lord, we need to know how to live free.

And we live again when You teach us that. We need to know how to grow. We need to know how to produce fruit.

As we focus this weekend on Revival Number 2, will You give us a little reviving in our bondage? Cause some brother to live again. Teach us Your heart, Your ways. Teach us how to build a temple.

We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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