

The Beginnings of Restoration

Ezra explains how the Jewish people experienced restoration after they had gone into exile in Babylon. The exile was perhaps the greatest “loss” that they had ever experienced. They lost their land, their freedom and their ability to worship at the temple. And yet God promised to restore them to the land and to restore worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Restoration. That’s what the Jewish people needed and that is we often need as well. As we work our way through Ezra this summer, our prayer is that God will bring restoration to our lives in any ways that are needed. Today’s passage talks about the beginnings of the restoration the exiles experienced. May it give us some direction for discerning what the beginnings of our restoration might look like.

Some Key Dates:

931/30 – Israel divided into two kingdoms: Northern Kingdom of Israel; Southern Kingdom of Judah
722 – Northern Kingdom of Israel falls to Assyria
612 – Fall of Nineveh (End of Assyrian Empire)
587/6 – Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. Judah exiled to Babylon
539 – Fall of Babylon; Rise of Persian Empire
538 – Return of Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar and others to Jerusalem under Cyrus’s order (Ezra 1)
537 – Rebuilding of Temple begins
520 – Temple building resumed
516 – Temple completed
458 – Ezra goes to Jerusalem

1. What, if anything, do you know about the book of Ezra? What’s the background?

Read Ezra 1

2. Cyrus gives permission for the exiles to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord (v. 3). Why was there a need to rebuild the temple (Read 2 Chronicles 36:10-21)?
3. What role did the temple play in Israel’s worship of God?
4. What does this chapter reveal about God and His activity in the world and in the hearts of people to bring about restoration? Read Isaiah 44:28 (written approximately 200 years earlier) and Jeremiah 29:10. What added insights do these passage give?

5. Steve encouraged us to be open to any kind of restoration that might need to take place in our relationship with God. At this point, do you have any sense about what kind of restoration might need to take place in your life?

Steve said:

Just as God was true to His word in Ezra's day, God is true to His word today. His word explains what we should be experiencing and what we should be expecting from Him. If we aren't honestly, deeply, consistently listening to God through the Scriptures, we will be confused about what God wants to restore in our lives.

This perspective is reflected in many different Scriptures. For example, in John 8:31-32 we read: ³¹ *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* The progression is from "continuing" (or abiding) in Jesus' word to knowing the truth to experiencing freedom. If we want to experience freedom (if we want to experience restoration in our relationship with God), we have to put ourselves in a position to experience this progression; we have to be attentive to God's voice through the Scriptures.

I'd simply encourage you to be honest with yourself and honest with God. Are you abiding in Jesus' words? Do you make it your ambition each day to saturate your heart and mind with His truth, or is God's word an afterthought? Are you hungry and thirsty for the truth of Scripture? Are you desperate to hear God's voice or do you have a take-it-or-leave-it attitude? Do you listen eagerly for God's voice, or do you basically ignore Him day after day?

6. "I am regularly attentive to God's voice through the Scriptures." Agree or disagree? Explain.
7. How might you encourage someone who admits that they have has a kind of "take-it-or-leave it" attitude towards the Scriptures? What might you suggest they do to grow in their hunger for God's word?
8. Do you sense any way that God is stirring up your spirit in response to His word through the sermon or this study? If so, how?