

Life Group Questions w/b Sunday 10 January 2021

Ezra – a Story of Rebuilding Week 2

Chapters 1-2

Historical Background

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are set in the time of rebuilding following the return of God's people from exile in Babylon. Seven decades earlier, Nebuchadnezzar had come to Jerusalem, sacked the city, looted the Temple and destroyed it, taking all of the gold and silver, along with almost all the people. Only a remnant remained.

At the start of the return in 538/9 BC, there were a million Jews living in Babylon.

Less than 50,000 returned in the first wave.

This is where the book of Ezra begins.

Read: Ezra 1:1-11

- What evidence do we have here that God is sovereign, and works out his purposes according to his own methods and timing? See also Jeremiah 25:8-14; 29:10-14 and Isaiah 44:24-45:7.
- How do you think the sovereignty of God is operating in today's world? How does faith in a sovereign God make sense in the face of a global pandemic, the persecuted Church, political oppression, or poverty and social injustice?
- What does this passage teach us about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human free will?
- Twice in chapter 1 (1:1 and 1:5) we hear about how God 'moved people's hearts'. What do you think this means, and in what ways did it affect the future? See also Haggai 2:13-15. Look at both the people's sense of calling, and at the practical outcomes.
- Can you think of any examples in your own life – times when you have felt 'stirred' by the Spirit of God? What happened, and was the outcome?

Prayer Focus Suggestions

You might like to wait in silence on the Lord and ask God to fill you all afresh with his Holy Spirit, and see how he moves amongst you.

Further Material – only if time!

Read: Ezra 2:1-70

It might be an idea to read it silently to yourselves, skimming over the long lists of names!

- Why do you think so many people are mentioned, and in such detail?
- What do you notice about the different groups? Why do you think they were documented in this way? (There is no mention of the twelve tribes, for instance.)
- What is the message of verses 62 and 63? What is the importance of holiness in corporate worship? Can you think of any modern parallels?
- Look at the range of gifts to be found in this chapter. What might some modern equivalents be?
- Do you know what your gifts are?
- At the present time, you may feel that you have lost the opportunities to serve that you once had. How can we all make the best use of this 'time of sabbatical'?
- In planning for rebuilding, can you suggest ways in which in the future we can enable everyone at church to flourish in using the gifts that God has given them?

For Prayer

Take some time to listen to God regarding the different gifts given to different people in your group: how are these shaping up at the moment? And what might God's plans be for the future?