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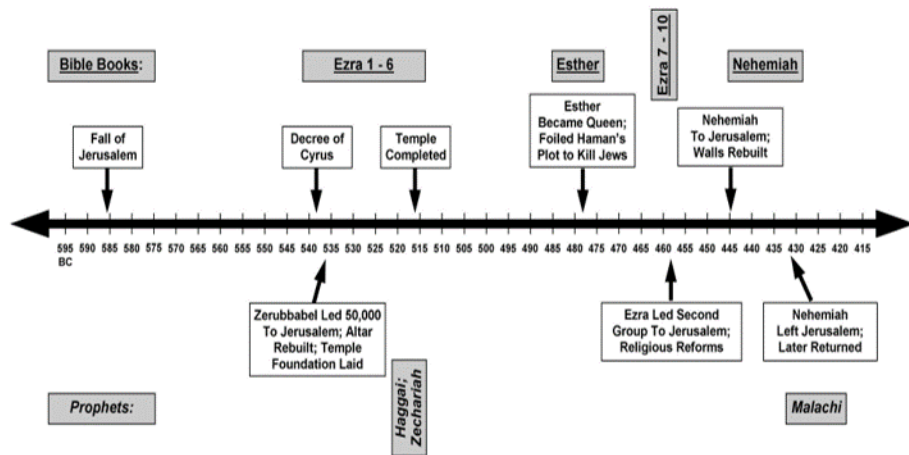
God's Good News Story

Ezra & Nehemiah

God's Good News Story continues today with a look at the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Our modern bibles separate these as two separate books, but in the original Jewish Old Testament they were one book. As a point of reference the events of the book of Esther take place between the Chapter 6 and 7 of Ezra. There are gaps of several years in all three of these books.

Timeline of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther



Chapters	Topic
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Ezra Chapters 1-6 (Approx. 23 years)	*King Cyrus of Persia passes a decree that the Jews be allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. (537bc) *Zerubbabel leads about 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem.(537bc) *The foundation of the temple is laid. The people renew their commitment to follow the Law of God. (535bc) *Enemies oppose the building project and convince King Artaxerxes to stop the building. *King Darius issues a decree that the temple building can resume. Haggai and Zechariah lead the people to finish the temple. Two important feasts, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, are observed in the new temple. (515bc)
Esther (@483-472bc)	Esther and Mordecai work together to protect the Jewish people from destruction and thus protect the blood line of Jesus Christ according to prophecy.
Ezra Chap. 7-10 (@458-456bc) (Approx. 60 years after chapter 6)	*King Artaxerxes sends Ezra with a group of Jews, including priests, to Jerusalem. Artaxerxes also sends gifts to the temple. *Ezra laments that he finds many of the returned exiles living contrary to the Law of God. A time of prayer and fasting follows. *The Israelites repent and separate from their non-Jewish wives.
Nehemiah Chapters 1-7 (Approx. 445-444bc)	*Nehemiah, steward to King Artaxerxes, finds out that Jerusalem has no walls and people are suffering. He is visibly saddened. When Artaxerxes asks what troubles Nehemiah, Nehemiah asks permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Permission is granted. *Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem and organizes people to rebuild the city walls and gates. *The builders face opposition from neighboring people. Nehemiah has them build with weapons nearby, ready to defend themselves. *Nehemiah addresses some injustice to the poor people of Jerusalem.*The walls are finished.
Nehemiah Chapters 8-13 (@444-430bc)	*Ezra reads the Law to the people. Levites help explain it to them. *The people celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. *The people confess their failures to obey the Law and resolve to change their ways. *The rules determine who will live inside Jerusalem and who will live in the surrounding area. *Temple worship and sacrifices are resumed. *Nehemiah, who had left Jerusalem, returns. He institutes various reforms, such as enforcing the observance of the Sabbath,

Key Lesson Points:

1. God is Faithful – He fulfills His Promises

- Despite Opposition
- Despite Our Weaknesses

2. God Wants His People to Be Faithful and Obey His Word. (From Ezra)

1. Steadfastly Set Your Heart
2. Intensely Study The Law of Yahweh
3. Personally Obey It
4. Faithfully Teach It To Others

2. God is Still In the Restoration and Rebuilding Business. (From Nehemiah)

1. Turn to God in prayer for help
2. Repent of all personal & corporate sins
3. Claim the promises of God
4. Request God's help to take the proper action

Let's close with a pinpoint focus on the Lessons from Ezra....

Ezra 7:6 -10

⁶ Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything

he asked, **for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.** ⁷ Some of the Israelites, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants accompanied [him] to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸ Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, during the seventh year of the king. ⁹ He began the journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. **The gracious hand of his God was on him,** ¹⁰ because Ezra had steadfastly set his heart to **STUDY THE LAW** of the LORD, to **OBEY IT**, and to **TEACH IT**, the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

It is noteworthy to see that the phrase “**for the hand of the LORD his God was on him**” appears three times in this chapter (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) then three more times in the next chapter (8:18, 22, 31). This is very significant as this is the source of the Blessings that Ezra received in his life and it is the key for us to secure the blessing of God. Without the “**hand of the Lord**” in our life there is no hope of receiving God's blessing, and no hope of us achieving our mission of “a right relationship with God and one another”. It is interesting and no coincidence that Ezra's name means ‘help’ **<05830> עֲזָרָא** Ezra (740d) **Meaning:** 'help,' Ezra received the ‘help’ of the Lord and therefore enjoyed the blessings and guidance of God. Let's look at verse 9, 10 in detail and see what we can learn from Ezra that will “help” us in our goal of being Faithful and Obedient.

⁹. ... The gracious hand of his God was on him,
¹⁰ because Ezra had **STEADFASTLY SET HIS HEART** to study the Law of Yahweh, to obey it, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

1 . He Steadfastly Set His Heart:

<03559> כּוֹן *kun* (465c) **Meaning:** *to be firm*

Usage: certain(2), confirm(2), determined(1), establish (15 +52 “ed”)), get yourself ready(1), made...preparations(1), prepare(21+37+5)), set(10), steadfast(6),

3824> לֵבָב *lebab* (523b) **Meaning:** *inner man, mind, will, heart*

Usage: heart(185), intelligence(1), mind(8), purpose(1), thought(1), understanding(2), wholehearted\
Ezra made a steadfast determination to set his heart and prepare for the establishment of truth from God’s Word. He prepared his heart to listen for and receive what God wanted to say to him each day. He was open to believe what God told him.

This was a wholehearted, purposeful, and intellectual commitment of his whole being. This was not a half-hearted, ‘if it is convenient’ attitude. Ezra was ‘dead serious’, completely passionate about his Covenant Relationship with God.

Sometimes we do receive the blessings of God because we are daydreaming, distracted or talking in church and not paying attention when the Word is being taught, and we miss what God is trying to tell us. Sometimes we are thinking about what we are going to

do later in the day, or what we are going to have for lunch. Ezra made sure that his heart was prepared first to receive so that not anything would be lost. Ezra made sure that he prepared his heart so that no sin would block him from receiving from God. When our hearts are prepared and cleansed ahead of time, a lot of work can be done quickly. Do you make sure that your heart is prepared to receive from God?

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¹⁰ because Ezra had steadfastly set his heart to **STUDY THE LAW OF YAHWEH**, to obey it, and to teach its statutes & ordinances in Israel.

2. Study The Law of Yahweh

Ezra - Steadfastly Set His Heart...to Study the Law of YHWH

<01875> דָּרַשׁ *darash* (205a) **Meaning:** *to resort to, seek*
Usage: ask(1), inquire(33), investigate(3), searched carefully(1), seek after(1), studied(1),

<08451> תּוֹרָה *torah* (435d) **Meaning:** *direction, instruction, law*

Usage: custom(1), instruction(10), instructions(1), law(188), laws(10), ruling(1), teaching(7), teachings(1).

<03068> יְהוָה *Yhvh* (i.e. יְהוָה *Yehovah* or יְהִיָּה *Yahveh*)
217d

Meaning: the proper name of the God of Israel

Did you ever get a new magazine and just flip through the pages of it? Sometimes the subscription cards fall out of it. We are just skimming through to see what's in it. We are not reading it. We may be just looking at the pictures and something catches our eye. We stop and read some and then go on. This is not "mining." We are told that Ezra sought the law of the Lord. He made it his business to check into what the Scripture said. He searched the Scriptures and sought the knowledge of God. What was God trying to say in this verse? How could he apply it to himself? He spent time reading the Word, thinking about it, clarifying what it meant. He was doing more than merely "flipping the pages."

It is said that the Chaldeans were people who studied many writings-- astrology, magic, and other writings of the times. What Ezra chose to study was the law of the Lord. He could have studied anything he wanted to, but he selected the Word of God as his priority. Ezra was saddened to see that the Jewish people had not studied like they should have.

Listen to what the Bible has to say in the New Testament about the Word of God...

Romans 15:4... *For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.*

II Timothy 2:15... *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth."*

It requires study in order to do this and Timothy also studied to do this well just as Ezra did.

What do you choose to study? Is it worthwhile? Will it make you a better person? Will it help you to grow in the Lord or will it turn you away from Him. Is what you are studying a productive use of your time? Are you just wasting your time? Ezra made sure that he was selective in what he studied. There are many books we could read. Let us be like Ezra and to select them wisely.

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¹⁰ because Ezra had steadfastly set his heart to study the Law of Yahweh, **TO OBEY IT**, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

3. He Personally Obeyed The Law

**The "Gracious Hand of the Lord" was on Ezra.
Ezra - Steadfastly Set His Heart...to Study the Law of YHWH...and He Personally Obeyed the Law....**

> עָשָׂה *asah* (793c) **Meaning:** *do, make*

Usage: act(22), acted(12), celebrate(19), commits and does(1), doing(63), executes (24), made(369), make(200), obey(1), observe carefully(2), perform(31), practice(9),

Do you obey and apply what you learn in Sunday school and church to your life? If you don't, then it is not causing changes to take place in your life. God wants the Word to transform you and to help you grow.

Romans 12:2... ¹ *Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.* ² *Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*

Ezra made use of the knowledge of the Scriptures in his life first.

We must measure our life by the Word of God, be so thoroughly acquainted with it, and resolve to conform to it. Make it your way of

Life. Most scholars agree that Ezra is the most likely candidate for the writer of Psalm 119. If you are familiar with this chapter it happens to be the longest chapter in Psalms and its central theme is the Word of God. Listen to a few of these verses and see if you don't agree that they fit perfectly with the character of Ezra:

Some portions Adapted from Marilyn Murphree <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=106231&page=2>
And THE LIFE AT GOD BLESSES - Flagstaff Christian Fellowship! www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/092902M.pdf

Psalm 119:

Aleph

¹ Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. ² Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. ³ They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. ⁴ You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. ⁵ Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! ⁶ Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. ⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. ⁸ I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

Beth

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. ¹¹ Thy word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you. ¹² Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.

He

³³ Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall keep it to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. ³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it. ³⁶ Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness.

Nun

¹⁰³ How sweet are Your words to my taste, *Sweeter* than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴ Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. ¹⁰⁵ Thy word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

⁹. ... **The gracious hand of his God was on him,**
¹⁰ because Ezra had determined and prepared his heart to study the law of the LORD, to obey it, and to **teach** its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

4. He Taught the People the Law:

Ezra - Steadfastly Set His Heart...to Study the Law of YHWH...and He Personally Obeyed the Law....He Taught the People the Law

<03925> לָמַד *lamad* (540c) *to exercise in, learn*

Usage: instruct(1), teach(30), train(1),

<02706> חֹק *choq* (349b) *something prescribed or owed, a statutes... Usage:* allotment(5), boundary(2), conditions(1), custom(1), decree(5), due(5), fixed order(1), what is owed – required, ordinance(4), resolves(1), statute(9),

<04941> מִשְׁפָּט *mishpat* (1048b) **Meaning:** judgment

Usage: arrangements(1), case(5), cause(7), charge(1), claim(1), court(2), crimes(1), custom(11), decision(2), decisions(1), judgment(62), judgments(40), just(4), justice(118), justly(3), ordinance(29), ordinances(79), plan(1), plans(1), practice(1), procedure(4), regulation(1), right(8), rightful place(1), rights(2), rule(1), way prescribed(2), what is right(2), worthy(1).

Ezra steadfastly and earnestly STUDIED God's Word, mining out the 'nuggets of truth' and then he applied to his own life through faithful OBEDIENCE, and to communicate them to others by TEACHING IT for their good. Since he studied the Word, Obeyed the

Word he developed a reliable and good testimony in his personal life . That made him a credible and believable witness to TEACH others to follow his example.

Ezra was called in **Ezra 7:6...a “ready scribe- a teacher well versed ”** in the law of Moses. He was able to discuss the Scriptures and explain them to others at a moments notice because he had already studied them. He knew them and was comfortable with them. He had the words ready and was able to speak out just the right “nugget” of truth to the people that God brought to him.

II Timothy 4:2 says to *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.*

We must grow in our Christian lives so that we can teach others what we have learned. It must be a part of us, not just something tacked on.

CONCLUSION: In conclusion,

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