



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020

EZRA



**REACHING
BACK TO GOD**

Friday October 23: Ezra 1-4

God is in charge and does what He says!

Today Liz Nixon writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

I love that the Bible has so many repetitions of ideas, images and events. In Ezra, the exiles are given silver and gold, livestock and goods to help them return and start afresh, which is reminiscent of the Israelites back in Exodus. They left their life of slavery in Egypt, laden down with gifts from the Egyptian people and headed to the land God had promised them and into covenant relationship with Him. I'm sure the exiles would have had this firmly in their minds as they left Persia and made their way back to Jerusalem, full of hope for a fresh start with God in His land.

I really appreciate the effort they made to enable worship to happen by rebuilding the altar first. This was essential for their sacrifices and worship of God and shows that worship was a priority to them. After the altar was rebuilt and worship was happening regularly, then they started the work of rebuilding the temple.

It's also touching to see that once the temple was complete, they wanted to bring back worship in line with how King David had prescribed it, even using his famous refrain of "He is good; His love to Israel endures for ever". It seems that the people had high hopes for their return to Jerusalem, their rebuilding of the altar and temple and their new routine of worship and sacrifice, back in the land of their God. However, it did not bring about the heart change and devotion to God that they wanted. This points to a time coming where men would be given new hearts and a new temple would arise, one which would not be made of brick and mortar but one with Jesus as the Cornerstone. Men would not need to worship God in a specific place, but anywhere they wanted in spirit and truth. A new kind of altar and temple and worship was needed – and it was coming in Jesus!

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God keeps His word and does what He says. He announced in Jeremiah that He would bring His people back into the land, and this book sees this happen.

It also shows me that God can move the heart of anyone. In Ezra, we see him moving the heart of Persian Kings, which enabled His plan of returning His people to His land.

We also see the tribes and clans who returned from exile to Jerusalem named in lists in chapter 2. God chooses to take up space in His word to honour the people who made the journey back and so the least we can do is read them, rather than skip over them!

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Aim to make worship of God a priority in my life.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family.

Monday October 26: Ezra 5-7

Men rule on earth whilst God reigns in heaven

Today Liz Nixon writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

Today's verses remind me of the book of Esther, where records kept by the King enable God's good plans to be fulfilled (even if there is a delay as seen in Ezra).

I really like Ezra. He is a descendant of Aaron and worship and prayer are a priority for him. He is known as a great teacher of the Law (even King Artaxerxes knows this!) and the chapter shows he was devoted to God's Word - studying, practising and teaching it. He leads a time of fasting for the people, to be humble before God and to seek His blessing on their journey.

Ezra has integrity, seen when he makes sure the precious goods for the temple are weighed out carefully, both on leaving and on arrival to ensure accountability. This shows good stewardship of the articles that belonged to the Lord.

Ezra walked closely with God, and God certainly loved being gracious towards him! We see Ezra fully credits God with the favour he receives and knows he's not simply had good luck. It was God who put it into the heart of the King to send Ezra to Jerusalem and God's hand was on him constantly.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

I love seeing the way God works! He is sovereign, able to turn the hearts of gentile, faithless kings and use their record keeping to rebuild His temple! Chapter 7 is incredible as we see King Artaxerxes tell Ezra that he can ask for whatever he might need financially and that he can set up judges and magistrates to administer God's justice to the people. Wow! God has worked through three Persian Kings – Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes – resulting in the return of His people to His land, the rebuilding of the Temple and worship recommencing, and preventing the annihilation of His people (see Esther!). So often the Bible focuses on random unknown and insignificant people, but God is showing His sovereignty by working through and with three powerful Kings.

God is worthy of our praise and adoration, as seen in Ezra's prayer in 7 v 27 – 29. I can imagine his joy and excitement as he reads the letter from the king, being more and more in awe of God as the King bestows more and more favour on Ezra! It's mentioned several times in the book that God's gracious hand was upon Ezra and it's obvious that God poured out favour and made the path pretty smooth for him! Ezra's name means God helps and we see that God certainly did help Ezra and His people.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want to choose to believe that God can and is at work through the Kings of our time – whether our own Prime Minister, the American President or even atheist leaders like Kim Jong Un. Is there anyone through whom God cannot work His good purposes?!

Who am I going to share this with?

My husband.

Tuesday October 27: Ezra 8-10

Our merciful Father

Today Liz Nixon writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

I admire Ezra more and more! His prayer on behalf of the people is amazing! He identifies with them and asks God for forgiveness of their sins. It is easy to make these chapters all about who we should or shouldn't marry. But Ezra puts it more simply (several times throughout these chapters) and gets to the heart of the matter: unfaithfulness. The people have been unfaithful to God, again, and this is their sin. Sadly, it is not just the people but also the leaders and the priests who have been unfaithful. The act of intermarriage is just an outworking of the heart, a symptom of the unfaithfulness. They have not prioritised God and what He wants, but prioritised self and what they want.

God's word is clear about how He would love us to live our lives and what His best is for us, but we ignore His heart and pursue our own agendas. The actions of our lives reflect the reality of our hearts and so when we lie, harbour jealousy, fudge our accounts, date people who don't love Jesus, refuse to forgive, have sex outside of marriage, remain bitter, choose not to be kind – these behaviours come from a heart that is removed from the Father's heart and His intentions for our lives.

It's good to see that the people respond to Ezra's "praying, confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God". They recognize that they have been unfaithful to their merciful and loving God and want to make things right. However, we sadly read in the book of Nehemiah, some 25 years later, that Israel was still wandering away from her God.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

We see in Ezra a man who understands the gravity of our sin and the deep mercy God has for us. It can be helpful to understand the difference between justice, mercy and grace:

- Justice is getting what you deserve
- Mercy is not getting what you deserve
- Grace is getting what you don't deserve. ([Read more here!](#))

Mercy means we don't get what we deserve and Ezra comments in 9 v 13: "Our evil deeds and our great guilt . . . yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved..."

Justice demands punishment for our sins, but the mercy of God means God punishes us much less than we deserve – in fact not at all! On the cross, Jesus takes our place of punishment and pays the debt we owe. God's grace means our account isn't back to zero, but He credits us with righteousness, Jesus' righteousness, and we are once more sons of a loving Father. We are welcomed back into His home, His presence and His arms. Isn't that amazing?

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Be more mindful of the mercy of God – that He does not treat me as my sins deserve, but He treats me as His beloved daughter.

Who am I going to share this with?

My friend Abi.