



Christ
Church
W4

The Book of Ezra

A Study Guide

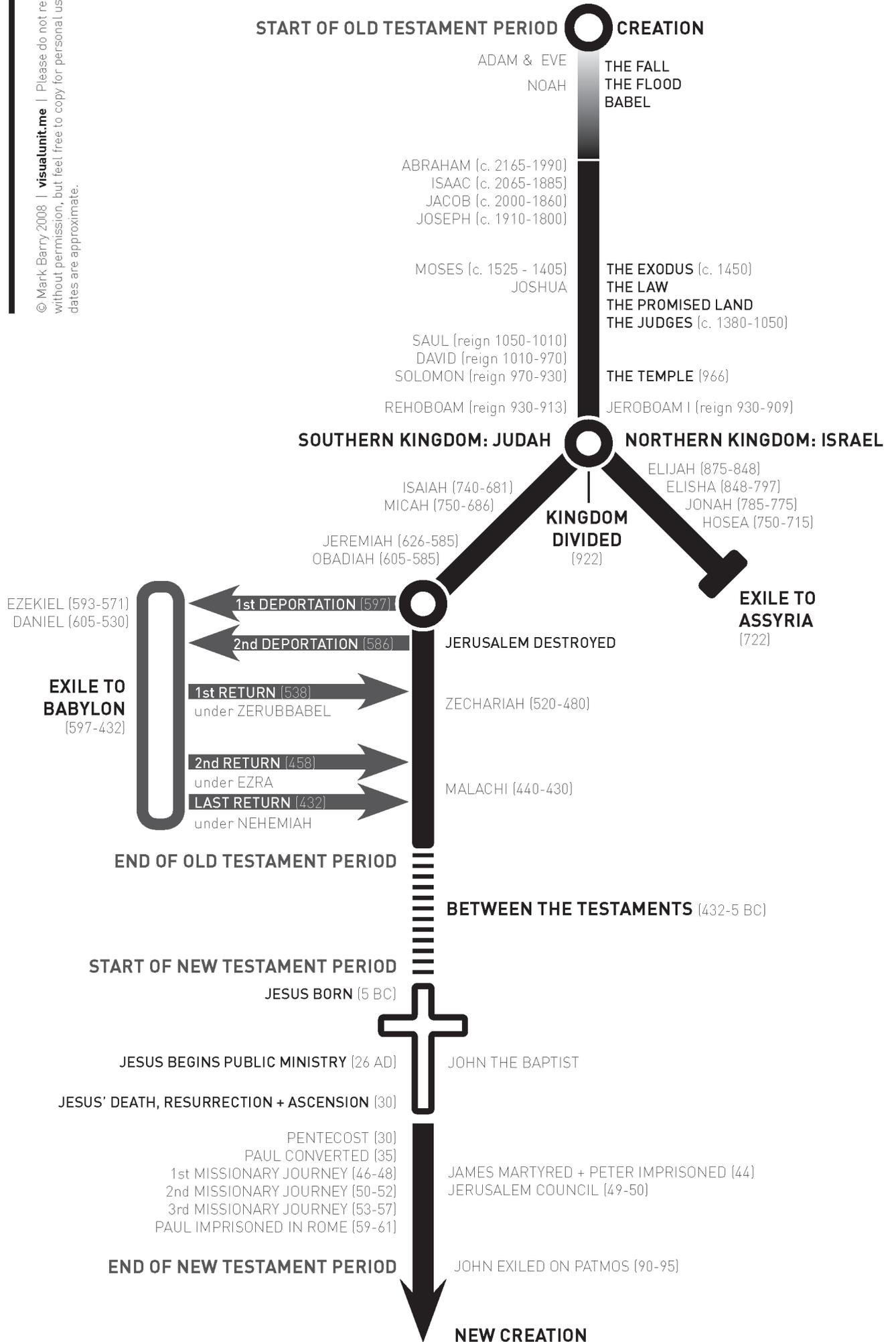
THE GRACIOUS HAND OF
OUR GOD IS ON EVERYONE
WHO LOOKS TO HIM.

EZRA 8:22



BIBLE TIMELINE

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Session 1: God Is Sovereign

Icebreaker

If you had a time machine that would only work once, what point in the future or in history would you visit?

Worship Suggestion:

Reflect on God being sovereign through history. That God knows what He is doing and is with us. Put on some quiet instrumental music and read Psalm 106 slowly as a reflective act of worship.

Word

Read Ezra 1:1-11

- The book of Ezra is set in history and in order to understand it a little better, let's look at its context. In smaller groups of two or three, look up the passages below and note any information they provide on people, places or events. Then share together what you've learnt
 - 2 Chronicles 36:15-23
 - Jeremiah 25:1-12
 - Jeremiah 29:4,10-14
 - Isaiah 44:24-45:7,13
- So what's the situation of God's people as we begin to look at Ezra?
- How is God at work in people in verses 1, 2-4 & 5? What are God's purposes?
- Why do you think God worked in Cyrus and brought about what happened in verses 6-8?

- Is there anything God has stirred up in your heart? Have you responded to this stirring in some way? If not, what holds you back from responding? If so, what have you seen as a result of responding to God's stirring in your heart?
- How do you think God's people viewed their situation now in verse 11 – back in the land with the resources they need for their task?
- God has been at work – we see that God has a plan, he moves in people and moves people physically too. He gives them what they need to live as His people. Have a look at these passages and see the same themes:
 - Acts 1:8
 - Acts 2:22-24
 - Hebrews 9:11-14
 - Peter 1:3-11
 - Revelation 22:1-5
- *In Western Europe we live in a pretty tough time spiritually. Nations that seemingly once held more firmly to Christian teachings no longer do. There's much to be very sad about as we see folk turn their backs on Gods ways and all the consequences of that. It's interesting though in a book called 'God is Back' written jointly by an atheist and a Catholic – they document the story of faith around the globe and essentially note that faith is alive everywhere and actually it's only really Western Europe and Harvard that seem to think God is not alive. The truth is that God is at work all over the world and still in Western Europe too – but there's much of our current situation that is similar to those we'll find in Ezra. Bishop Richard Chartres who retired from being the Bishop of London helpfully said something along the lines of 'hang in there' and 'be ready' through all the changing*

years of life, eventually our society, with its vacant philosophies, will likely implode and once again find itself drawn to the enduring themes of the Gospel, which have proven to stand the test of history, whilst Kingdoms come and wane.

- What are some of the things you've seen or heard God doing in our world today?

At first glance, Chapter 2 might not seem very exciting, just a list of boring old names, but you might want to take a closer look sometime on your own:

The people who returned did not make up everyone in Israel – some people stayed behind, comfortable now in Babylon. Those that returned faced hardship, they had to work extremely hard in the rebuilding, they were concerned for the personal holiness and they gave generously to the work God called them to. They'd been stirred by God and these were the people who acted.

- With that in mind, is it easy to see why they were recorded?
- How could we follow their good example? (see also Hebrews 6:7-12)
- How will Ezra 2 shape us today? Our citizenship is in heaven after all and we're heading home – what should be our concerns, how are we to give ourselves to the mission God calls us to?

Witness

What can we take from this passage to live as God's people in West London today? How might reflecting on God's sovereignty impact your outlook this week? Pray for one another in our work and life spaces.

Session 2: I Won't Be Overwhelmed

Icebreaker

Ask everyone to write on a piece of paper **three** things about themselves which may not be known to the others in the group. Two are true and one is not. Taking turns, they read out the three 'facts' about themselves and the rest of the group votes which are true and false. There are always surprises!

Worship Suggestion:

Watch/listen to 'God I Look To You' by Jenn Johnson (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CR5loWH9Oil>).

Use this song to orientate your focus onto God and to worship God in your hearts and minds.

Word

Read Ezra 3

- Come up with a couple of sentences to summarise the passage.
- What happens in verse 1? What does it tell us about the exiles who have returned?
- What is significant about these things:
 - The seventh month (Leviticus 16:29-34)
 - The morning and evening sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-46)
 - The Festival of Tabernacle (Leviticus 23:33-43)
- Why was the rebuilding the alter such a priority for them?

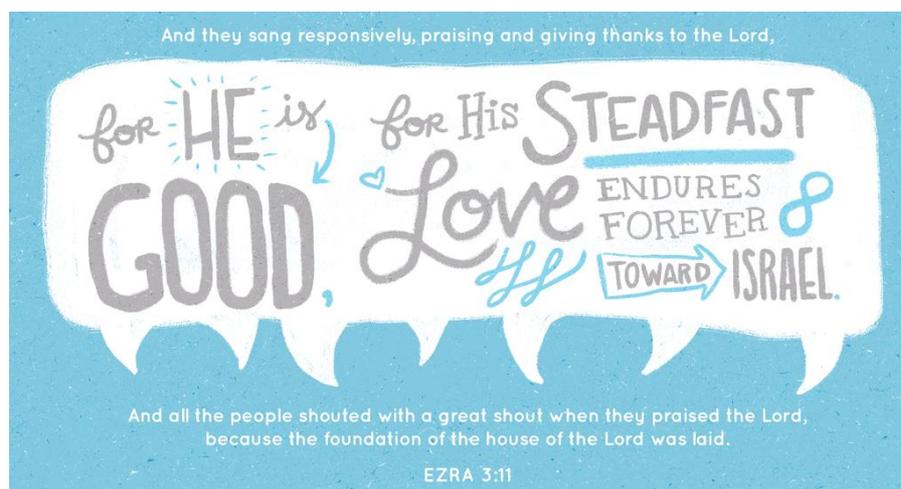
- In verse 3 we see that they feared the people around them. How might that fear have connected with their emphasis on building the altar?
- In verses 8-13, after 13 months they start to rebuild the foundations. What is significant about the song of praise in verse 11?
- Looking at verses 12-13, what are the different emotions being expressed by the young and the old? Why is this?
- The prophet Haggai speaks to them. Read Haggai 2:4-9. How would this encourage them?
- How do we hold both joy and sorrow and not get overwhelmed? What are we to do when things don't seem as good as they once did? What might it mean for you to work for God in your life today?

Witness

Think about what hope we have in God and how we might bring that hope into our everyday lives.

Pray for one another to carry the knowledge that God is in charge with us this week.

Pray for breakthrough for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed.



Session 3: Living With Opposition

Icebreaker

Divide into two teams. Give each person a blank piece of card. Ask them to write five little known facts about themselves on their card. Include all leaders in this game too. For example, I have a pet Iguana, I was born in Iceland, my favourite food is spinach, my grandmother is called Doris and my favourite colour is vermillion. Collect the cards into two team piles. Draw one card from the opposing team pile. Each team tries to name the person in as few clues as possible. Five points if they get it on the first clue, then 4, 3, 2, 1, 0. The team with the most points wins. (Note: put the most obscure facts first, it will increase the level of competition and general head scratching!)

Worship Suggestion:

You may want to do this at the end of your session.

Why not use compline and say evening prayer together, or find morning prayer if you're meeting at an earlier time. In the prayer time – pray for those living with oppositions or persecution.

www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/daily-prayer/night-prayer-compline

Word

Read Ezra 4:1-5, 24. Then, fast forwarding 20 years, read 6:14-18

- What situation develops in Chapter 4? What seems to bring it on?
- Why doesn't Zerubbabel let others help with the rebuilding?

- Verses 6-23 in Chapter 4 could be in brackets as they chronologically don't really belong there, but why has the author included them – what do they tell us?
- Looking at Ezra 4, what methods are used by their enemies to stop them working on the temple?
- How do God's people respond to opposition in Chapter 4?
- How might John 15:18-20 and Ephesians 6:10-13 help us think about the opposition God's people face?
- How can we stand firm in the face of opposition?
- So at the end of Chapter 4 the work comes to a stop. Looking at Ezra 5:1-5, what prompts Israel to start building again?
- As opposition arises again (5:3-5) what stands out in verse 5? What does this teach us?
- Ultimately the rebuilding of God's temple happens and is resourced abundantly. Looking at verses 13-15, who is involved in the rebuilding? What parts did they play?
- What help can we find from Ezra 4-6 when the work of God appears to be hindered?

Witness

Pray for those that persecute you – pray for those that oppose God's ways in the world.

Session 4: God's Hand & Our Hands

Icebreaker

Try and pair up with someone you don't know very well. Find out what each other do in the week and briefly pray for one another.

Worship Suggestion:

Chose a Psalm (i.e. 103). Read it aloud and then ask the Small Group to imagine they are going to a desert island. They are only to take a verse or a few words of the Psalm with them for the rest of their lives, for their encouragement or to remind them of one aspect of God etc. Write it down on a piece of paper and place it on the floor in the centre of the room. Take some time out (perhaps with background music) to look at all the contributions. When everyone is finished, thank God for all those things on the paper.

Word

Read Ezra 7:1-10

- In this chapter we meet Ezra – make a list of all the things we find out about him. What indicates that God has called him for this task?
- As God rebuilds His people, why do you think His gracious hand was on Ezra? (verses 9-10)
- Read 7:11-28. What happens in these verses?
- Does verse 23 seem unusual or unexpected? How does Ezra respond? What does it give him confidence to do?

- Have you ever sensed God giving you favour with people in authority over you?
- Has God given you favour, gifts, skills or opportunities to do something for Him with your life? How did/would/will you respond?
- What does Ezra teach us about the qualities needed to serve and lead?
- What has God given us in Jesus? (John 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-4)
- What has God given us, His people? Why? (Ephesians 4:11-13, Hebrews 13:7-8,17)
- How does Ezra 7:10 shape what we look for in a leader? (Titus 2:11-14)
- How will Ezra's example shape you?

Witness

Pray for God's favour that we might shine like stars wherever He places us.

Pray for anyone with a difficult boss and for each other's workplaces, schools and social clubs.

Session 5: Our God's Gracious Hand

Icebreaker

Have everyone form a circle. Instruct the participants to put one piece of information about themselves on a small slip of paper, fold it, and put it in a blown up balloon. Throw the balloons in the middle of the circle and then have people take turns to pop a balloon, read the piece of paper aloud and guess to whom the information applies

Worship Suggestion:

Make a list of all God's characteristics that you can remember from the Bible or images of God (i.e. He is compassionate and slow to anger, He is the Good Shepherd, etc.). Then put on some worship music and have some quiet time to reflect upon God's awesome nature.

Word

Read Ezra 8:15-36

- What is the issue discovered in verse 15? Why is it an issue?
- In verses 21-23 we see Ezra take one approach. Interestingly Nehemiah takes a different approach (see Nehemiah 2:7-9). What can we learn from these different approaches? How could they help us in our decision making?
- At what points can you clearly see God's hand directing and helping them?

- How is verse 31 a clear answer to the prayer of verse 21?
- What do they do when they arrive in Jerusalem (verse 32)? Are you good at doing this?
- For Ezra, the presence of God with his people is what he sought. How do you pursue God's presence?
- If you were preaching on this chapter – what would you say? What applications stand out to you?

Witness

Take time to prayer for another's needs and for people you know who you'd love to see come to know our amazing God.



Session 6: The Cost of Revival

Icebreaker & Worship Suggestion:

It's the end of the series so why not take some time to do something social together. Or seeing as our worship to God isn't just in our singing and prayer – it's also in our washing each other's feet. Why not as a group do an act of service for someone else in the group – perhaps someone needs a room painting, or a spot of gardening etc.

Word

This is a challenging passage and one where we want to be careful in what we say and how we approach it – it is worth checking out the sermons.

Read Ezra 9:15-10:17

- In the Bible, revival and confession go hand in hand. The presence of God highlights sin. Holiness sparks a freer channel by which God's power and presence can flow. You don't get Joel 3:28-29 without Joel 2:12-13. What might this mean for our lives today?
- What is the sin in this passage of Ezra? (See Deuteronomy 7:1-7). Why was this something God didn't want for His people Israel? What was God trying to do through Israel for the sake of the whole world?
- What's Ezra's response to the sin? Are there any aspects of his prayer that stand out to you?

- Looking at 10:1, where was Ezra praying? Why was that significant? In light of this, where should we turn when we discover sin?
- What's Israel's response to it all?
- What might need to go from our lives today that threatens Jesus being our Lord?
- 10:2 highlights that some leaders led the people into sin. Ezra on the other hand led the nation to repentance. What does this teach us about the type of leadership we need?
- Ezra, though not guilty of the sin, identifies himself with the people. In what way does that bring to mind what Jesus came to do? (Hebrews 2:14-18)
- The book of Ezra ends in a rather deflated way – but we know it's not the end of the story. What is the end of the story? What has Jesus won for us?

Witness

Take some time to reflect together upon some of the lessons of Ezra.

Think about how you might apply them to your daily lives. Pray for each other and those who we seek to share God with.

Notes



Missed A Service?

Why not catch up using our Podcast? We record the talk from each of our Friday and Sunday services.

You can access them through iTunes (search Christ Church W4), our website under 'Talks', and ChurchSuite under 'My Podcasts'.