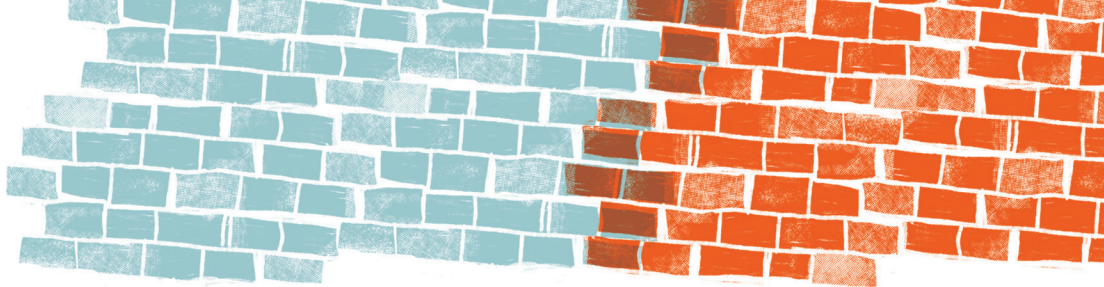


Ezra







Why study Ezra?

One of the most incredible prophecies in the Bible is found in Isaiah 44:24-45:1:

I am Yahweh... who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose"; saying of Jerusalem, "She shall be built," and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." Thus says Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed..."

Isaiah recorded those words, before Cyrus was born. Before Persia was a world power. Before Judah was sent into captivity. Before Daniel even was, Isaiah had a word from the Lord about a Persian king who would show kindness to Yahweh's people.

To appreciate how dramatic of a prophecy this is, you have to understand that when it was given, the Medo-Persian Empire was not dominant. While Israel had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, Judah—and Jerusalem along with her—was still in the land, preparing to fight the Babylonians. In modern terms, Iraq was the threat, not Iran. Jerusalem's confidence was misplaced, but high nonetheless.

In order to combat Judah's arrogant notion that she would avoid God's wrath forever, Yahweh sent Isaiah with a series of visions. Judah would fall, that much was certain. Beyond that, God would send them into exile, yet he would still send a Savior, Yahweh himself, born to a virgin, who would then suffer and die, stricken by God for the sins of his people.

But before any of that would happen, God would miraculously return Judah back to Jerusalem. Her people would come home, and dwell again in the land.

And to ensure that they didn't take the credit for their return, Yahweh told them beforehand how it would happen—the Babylonians would fall, and in their place the Persians would rule. And one Persian in particular would direct Judah back into the land, "and Jerusalem shall be rebuilt" (Isaiah 44:28).

In order to direct people away from politics and to God, Yahweh does the unprecedented—he calls out the name of the person who would rule Persia, 150 years before he was even born.

And then...150 years later, it happened. A man named Cyrus defeats Babylon, Daniel reads to him Isaiah's prophecy, and Ezra 1 came to pass: Ezra 1:1

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia...Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing...”

The proclamation is that Israel would return, and is what is fulfilled in the book of Ezra.

Ezra is worth studying because it is a full-color illustration of Yahweh's sovereignty. Nearly every chapter speaks of the meticulous application of that sovereignty for the purpose of rebuilding Israel. Nehemiah will focus on rebuilding Jerusalem's physical architecture, but before God gets to that, Ezra first describes the rebuilding of Israel's spiritual architecture, namely the temple and the priests.

The most remarkable thing about the book of Ezra is that despite their zeal in the return, and despite the miraculous nature of God's prophetic word, the return doesn't go well. In fact, it ends in failure.

In Ezra we see God answer his people's prayers, and provide them leaders. He gives them safety in their return, and shows that when Israel trusts God's power instead of military protection, God helps them. Sure there is difficulty in finding priests, but once Ezra prays, even that need is met.

Yet by the end of the book it is clear that things are not well. They are following in the steps of Solomon, and not David. The book ends with them standing in the rain, repenting, and divorcing their wives. It reads like a gut punch. All of the hope of Isaiah's fulfilled prophecy is sucked out of the sin-sick Israelites, who learned nothing from their exile.

Thus the main lesson of the book of Ezra: the Old Covenant, even when powerfully displayed through God's incredible providence, cannot change the sinner's heart. Looking backwards, Ezra points to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. But looking forward, Ezra points to the fulfillment of Jesus' words in John 3. Nicodemus asked how he could start his life over, and Jesus told him, **“You don't need a new start! You need a new heart!”**

This is precisely what was missing from Ezra's Israel. No matter how miraculous God's provision was for Israel in the Old Covenant, the remarkable end of the exile only served to illustrate that a new start would not ultimately be helpful. They didn't need the priests of Levi, the temple of Solomon, or the protection of providence. The blessings of the Old Covenant were not salvific, and thus Ezra teaches us the need for something greater.

On every page, in every chapter, in every verse of Ezra, the truth of Hebrews 8:13 is proven: In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Study the book of Ezra. As you do, let your growing awe of God's meticulous sovereignty impress upon you that for those apart from Christ, they don't need a new start. They need a new heart, which only comes through a New Covenant.

“

By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and wept when we
remembered Zion.
there we hung up our lyres on the poplar
trees,
for our captors there asked us for songs,
and our tormentors, for rejoicing:

“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

How can we sing Yahweh’s song on foreign
soil?

If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill,
may my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not exalt Jerusalem as my greatest joy!

Remember, Yahweh, what the Edomites said
that day at Jerusalem:

“Destroy it! Destroy it down to its
foundations!”

Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
happy is the one who pays you back
what you have done to us.

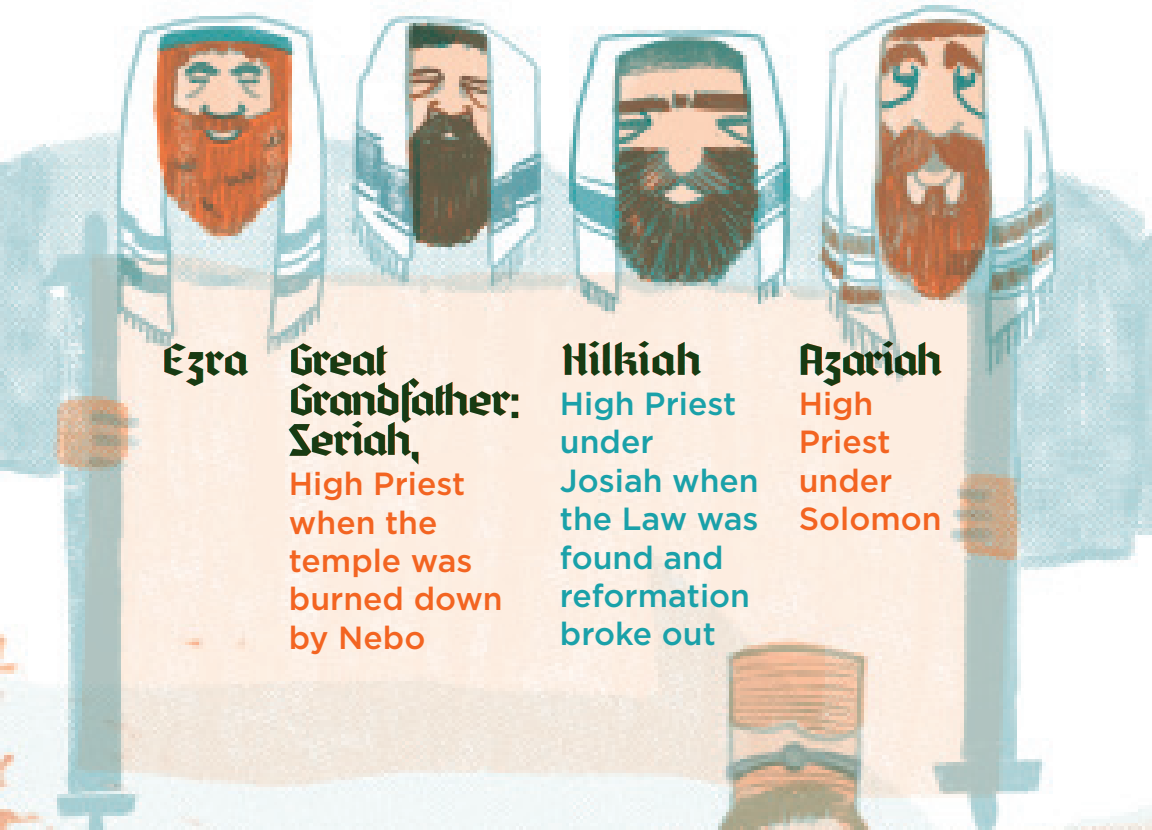
happy is he who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rocks.

”

— Psalm 137



EZRA'S HERITAGE:

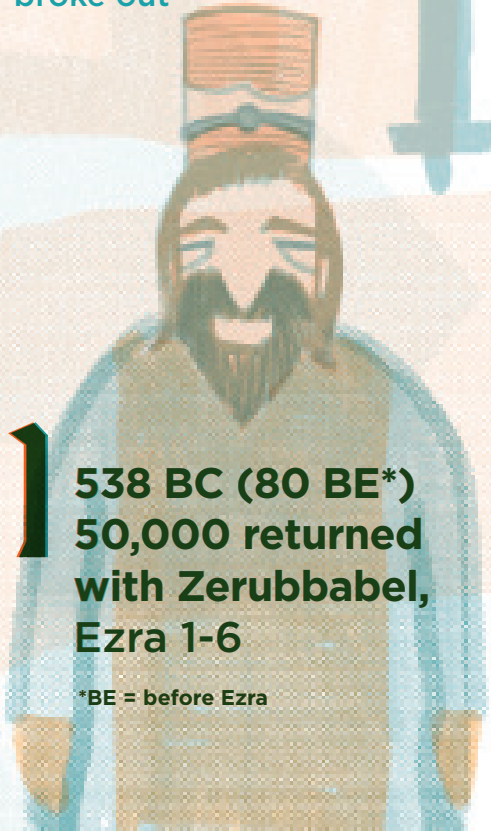


Ezra Great Grandfather: **Seriah**, High Priest when the temple was burned down by Nebo

Hilkiah High Priest under Josiah when the Law was found and reformation broke out

Azariah High Priest under Solomon

JUDAH'S THREE RETURNS:



1 538 BC (80 BE*) 50,000 returned with Zerubbabel, Ezra 1-6

*BE = before Ezra



Zadok

High Priest when temple was built under Solomon



Phineas

Son of Eleazer, High Priest during conquest, God made a covenant with him to send Messiah through him



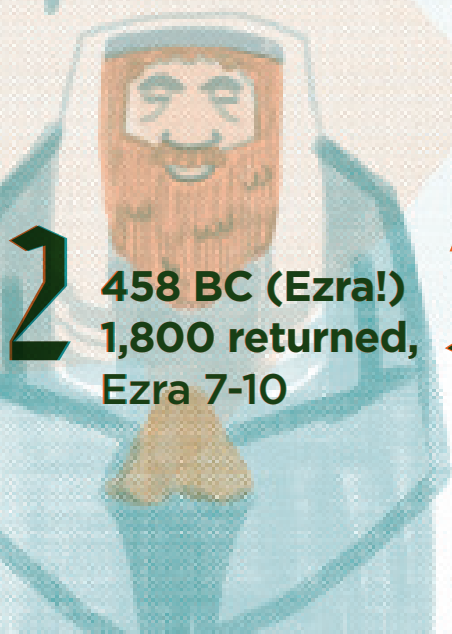
Eleazer

High Priest after Aaron, led Israel to Promise Land



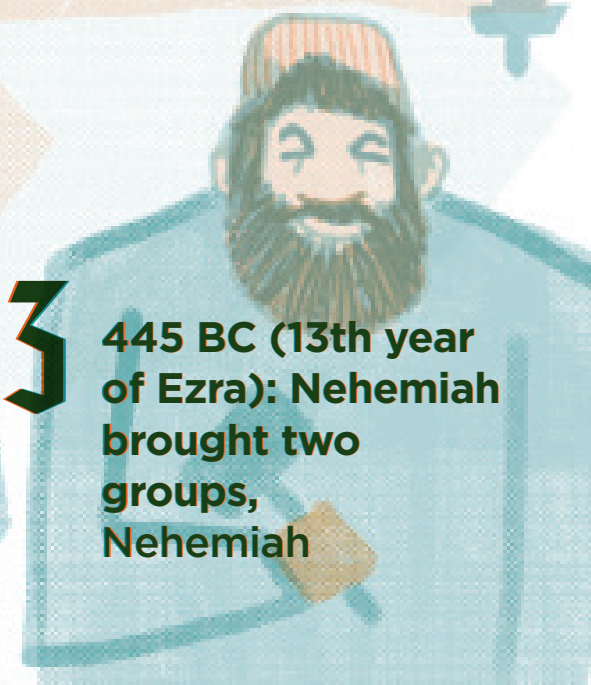
Aaron

First High Priest



2

458 BC (Ezra!)
1,800 returned,
Ezra 7-10



3

445 BC (13th year of Ezra): Nehemiah brought two groups,
Nehemiah



Ezra 1

PLANS TO PROSPER, AND NOT TO HARM

LESSONS FROM THE END OF THE EXILE:

- God plans the future
- God protects his people
- God provokes people's hearts
- God provides worshiper's needs



Ezra 2

GOING, NOT KNOWING

LESSONS FROM FORGOTTEN NAMES:

- God knows your name
- Yes, even your name
- God has requirements for worship
- Yes, even for your worship



A song of ascents.


When Yahweh restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

Our mouths were filled with laughter then,
and our tongues with shouts of joy.

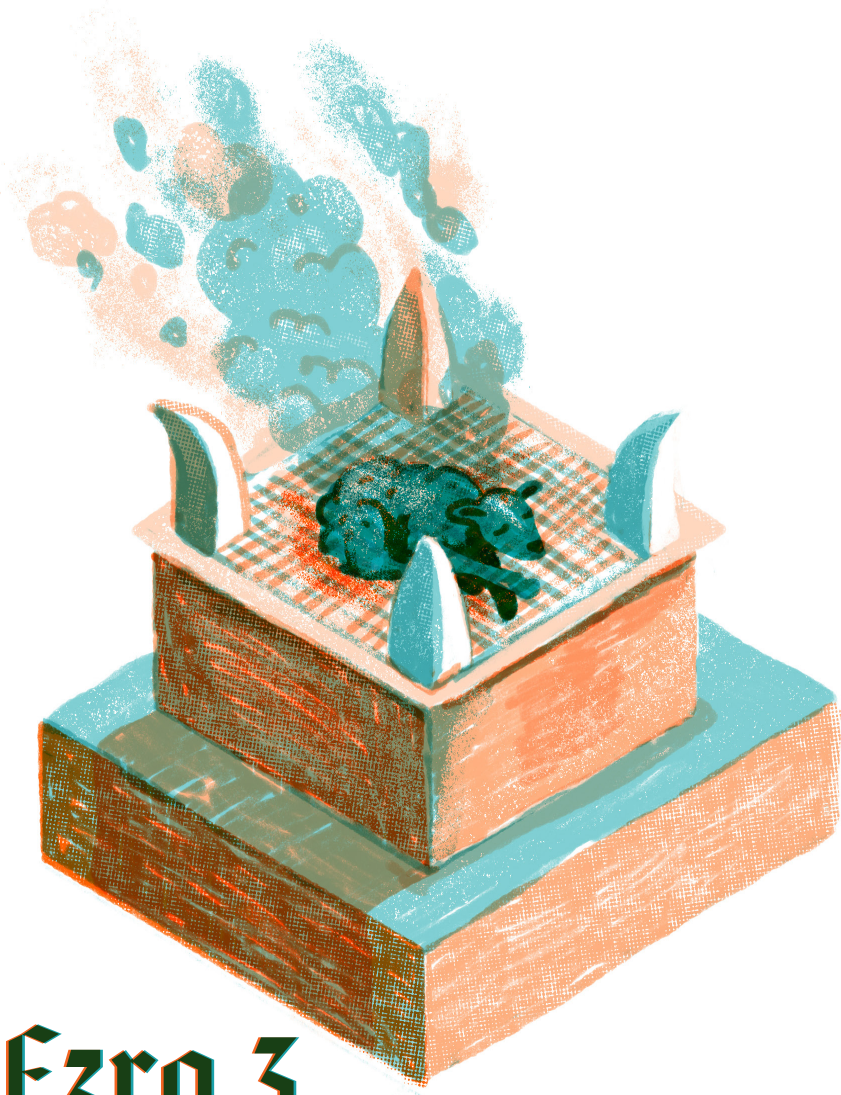
Then they said among the nations,
“Yahweh has done great things for them.”
Yahweh had done great things for us;
we were joyful.

Restore our fortunes, Yahweh,
like watercourses in the Negev.
Those who sow in tears
will reap with shouts of joy.

Though one goes along weeping,
carrying the bag of seed,
he will surely come back with shouts of joy,
carrying his sheaves.



—Psalm 126



Ezra 3

RULES OF WORSHIP

FIVE RULES FOR WORSHIP

- Rules are defined by God
- Worship is a response to forgiveness of sins
- Worship is exclusive
- Worship is about God
- Worship is about getting, not giving



A PSALM FOR GIVING THANKS.

Make a joyful noise to Yahweh, all the earth!

Serve Yahweh with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that Yahweh, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep
of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his
courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For Yahweh is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.



-Psalm 100



Ezra 4

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

**3 ESSENTIAL LESSONS ON DEALING
WITH OPPOSITION:**

- Opposition is rooted in exclusivity
- Wisdom is serpent-dove
- God's perspective is essential



Ezra 5

HE SEES YOU WHEN YOU'RE SLEEPING

FOUR WAYS YAHWEH KEEPS WATCH ON HIS PEOPLE:

- Prophets
- Providence
- Punishment
- Protection



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Ezra 6

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

SIX REASONS WE HAVE A BLOODY RELIGION:

- Blood protects
- Blood offends
- Blood cleanses
- Blood instructs
- Blood sanctifies
- Blood celebrates

THE TEN PLAGUES:

- 1 **WATER TO BLOOD**
(dead fish)
- 2 **FROGS**
- 3 **GNATS/LICE**
- 4 **FLIES**
- 5 **CATTLE PLAGUE**
(start of Israelite protection)
- 6 **BOILS**
- 7 **HAIL**
(crops)
- 8 **LOCUSTS**
- 9 **DARKNESS**
- 10 **FIRSTBORN**

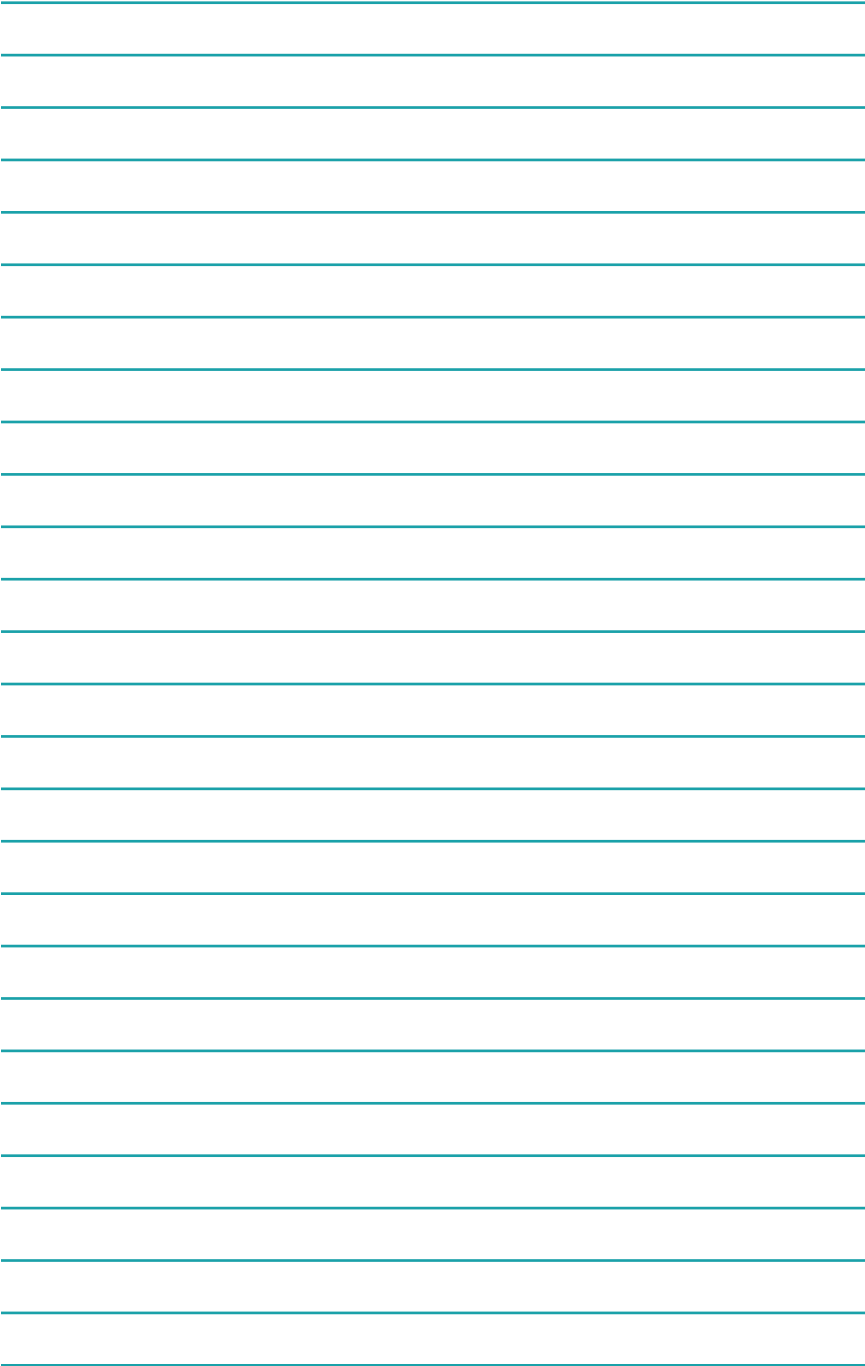


Ezra 7

PLUNDERING THE BABYLONIANS

THREE INDICATORS OF DEVOTION TO GOD:

- Commitment to God's word
- Commitment to holiness
- Commitment to discipleship



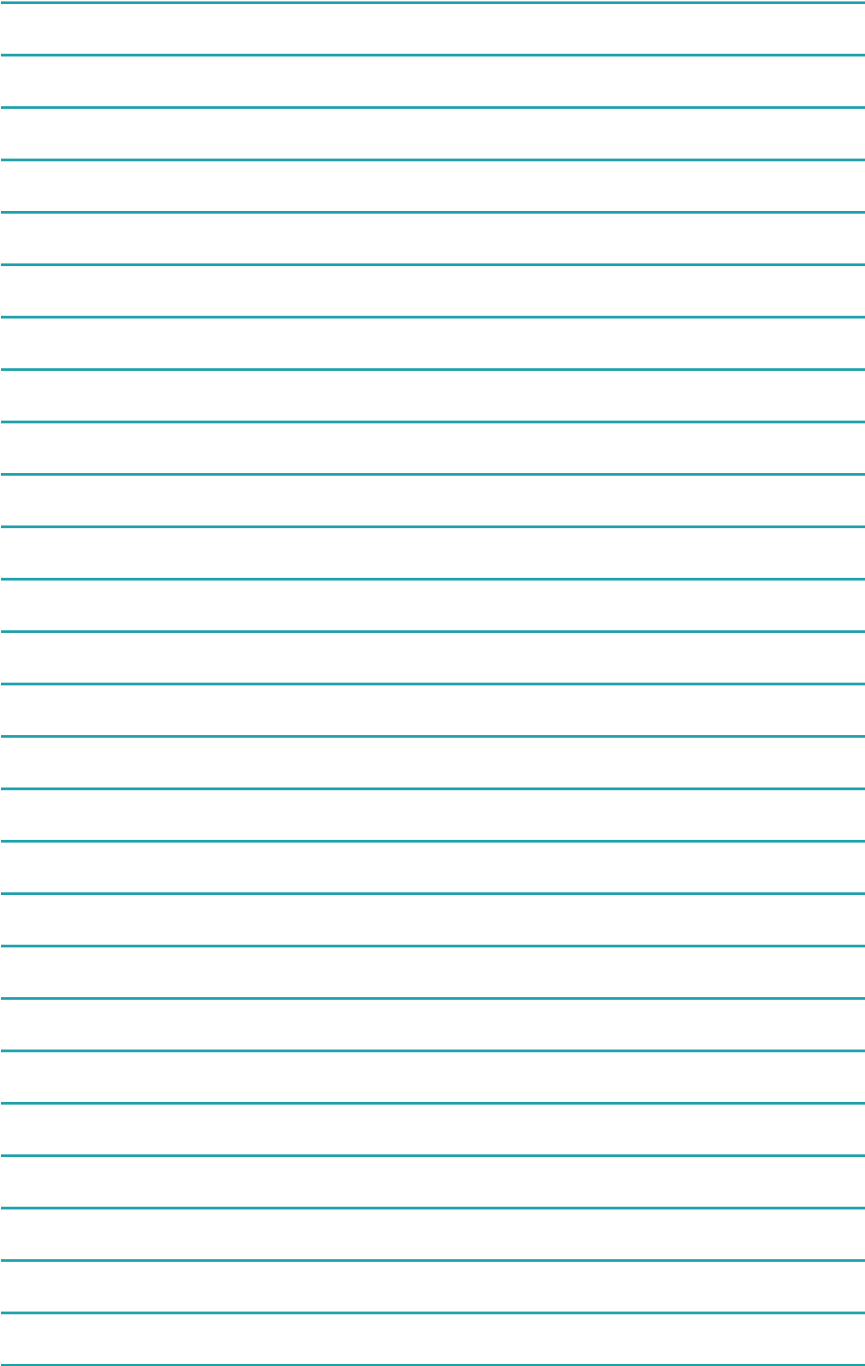


Ezra 8

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO GET A PRIEST AROUND HERE?

EVOLUTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD:

- Everyone is their own priest (before the flood)
- Heads of families are the priest (Flood—Exodus)
- The tribe of Levi (Exodus—Exile)
- Political leader (intertestamental period)
- Jesus as our high priest
- The priesthood of all believers







Ezra 9

CHRIST, MARRIED TO THE DEVIL

HOW TO REPENT:

- Be broken by it
- Pray about it
- Act on it

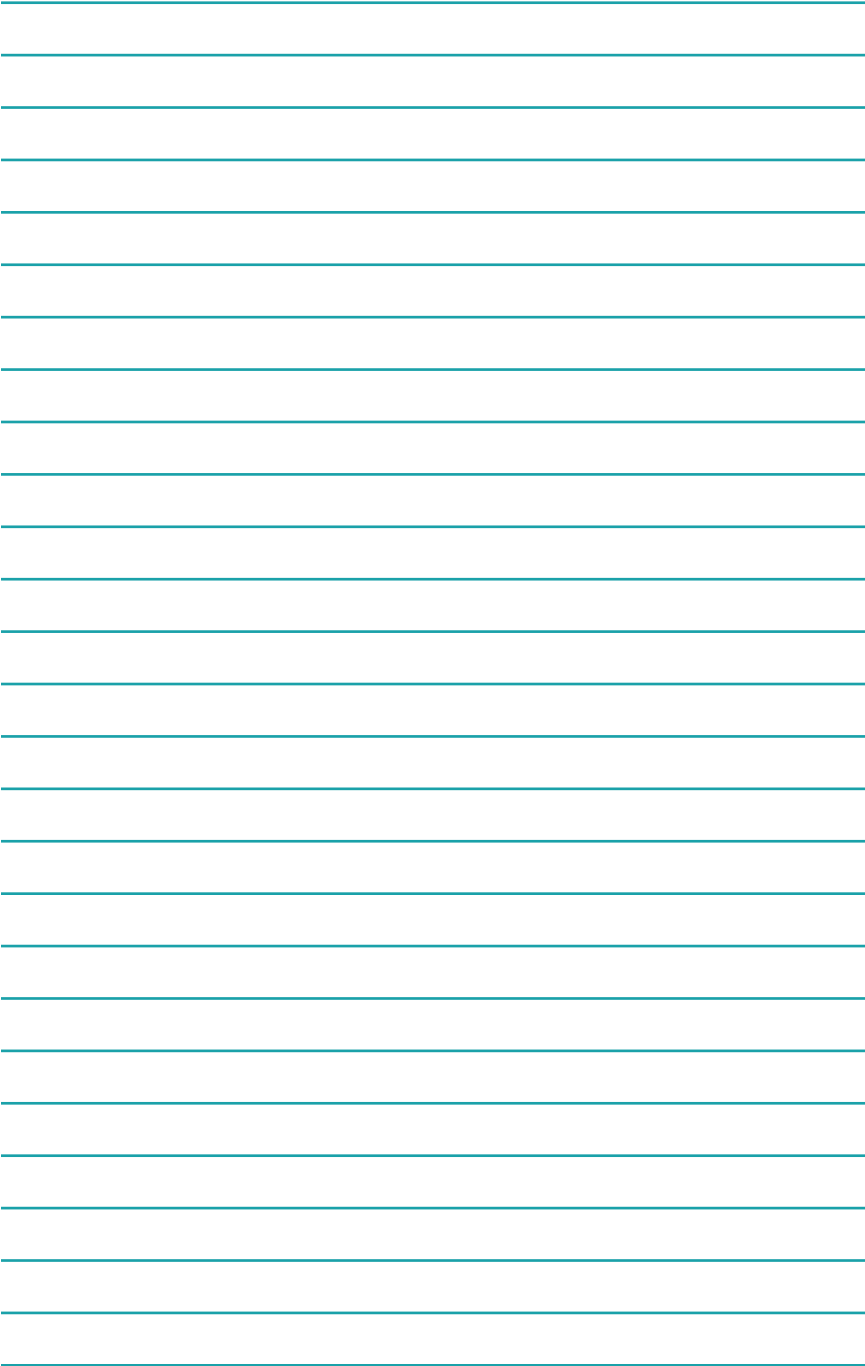


Ezra 10

KINGDOM WRECKERS

DIVORCE IS BIBLICAL ONLY WHEN:

- Your spouse is an unbeliever who wants to leave
- Your spouse has had an affair



Jesus said, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”

He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

-Matthew 19:4-9





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