

A **NEW** Beginning @ Life



*“2 This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to **build him a Temple at Jerusalem**, which is in Judah. 3 Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to **rebuild this Temple of the Lord**, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you!’”* Ezra 1:2-3 NLT

- Do you ever feel like you need to make a new start at life?

There are many ways we make a new start at life—beginning a new job, getting married, going to college or vocational training, having children, moving to a new neighborhood, retiring, job promotion, divorce, experiencing a permanent disability, older children moving out of the house, joining a health club and getting serious about your health, or making a new spiritual commitment, etc. Each change is a new chapter in the story of our lives.

In the book of Ezra the people of Judah are starting a new life. They had been in captivity for nearly 70 years and now were free to go back to Jerusalem. They were free to rebuild their homes, families, city, nation and their lives. Making a new start at life was not as easy as they might have first thought. It was challenging and difficult. They needed God’s help and direction. They needed to start at the right place and build a proper foundation for their lives. We, too, need a good foundation and to start at the right place, that is, with God’s help. The book of Ezra teaches us some important lessons about making a new start at life. Are you ready for a new start—God’s way?

Central Lesson

We must restore the spiritual BEFORE we can successfully restore any other area of our lives. (Spiritual first, Secular second)

Scope: The books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are written during the same period describing a single flow of history aimed at Judah, the Southern Kingdom, who is returning from 70 years of Babylonian exile.

Chronicles - Retrospection—looking **BACK** at their history.

Ezra - - - - - Restoration—looking **UP** as they rebuild the temple.

Nehemiah - - Reconstruction—looking **FORWARD** as they rebuild Jerusalem.

Date: Ezra was written approximately 456-444 B.C.

Author: Ezra, a priest and teacher in Judah (7:11-12, 21). He is not specifically mentioned as the author, but evidence for his authorship is: 1. Jewish tradition recorded in the ancient Talmud names Ezra as the author. 2. Portions of the book were written in the first person from Ezra’s viewpoint (cf. 7:28-9:15).

Purpose: Ezra & Nehemiah were originally one book. The book of Ezra continued where 2 Chronicles ended (compare 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 with Ezra 1:1-2). The book of Ezra shows how *God faithfully fulfilled His promise to return His people to the Promised Land after 70 years of exile*. Also, the book emphasizes strongly the power of God’s Word and the crucial need to obey it on every level of life (cf. 1:1; 3:2; 6:14, 18; 7:6, 10, 14; 9:4; 10:3, 5).

Historical Setting: A historic overview of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

538-515 B.C.	483-473 B.C.	457 B.C.	445-425 B.C.
First return under Zerubbabel	The story of Esther between Ezra 6 and 7.	Second return under Ezra	Third return under Nehemiah
Ezra 1-6	Book of Esther	Ezra 7-10	Book of Nehemiah

Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity in **3 waves** of deportation: 606, 597, & 586 B.C. Also, Judah was brought out of Babylon in **3 groupings**: Zerubbabel’s group in 538 B.C., Ezra’s group in 457 B.C., and Nehemiah’s group in 445 B.C.

Outline of Ezra:

- I. **Restoration of God’s TEMPLE**—First Return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (**Chapters 1-6**)
- II. **Restoration of God’s PEOPLE**—Second Return to Jerusalem under Ezra (**Chapters 7-10**).

Major Lesson: Spiritual Restoration **FIRST**.

The book of Ezra demonstrates the prophetic fulfillment of Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:14 where the Lord declared 70 years of Babylonian captivity (Jer. 25:11) followed by restoration (Jer. 29:14). **Ezra** records only half of the restoration and **Nehemiah** accounts for the other half. **Ezra** describes the restoration of the *Temple* whereas **Nehemiah** records the restoration of the *walls around Jerusalem*. The book of **Ezra** deals with the *spiritual* restoration whereas **Nehemiah** deals with *political* and *national* restoration.

Ezra shows us a very important lesson about starting a new life and rebuilding broken lives—**we must restore the spiritual before we can successfully restore any other area of our lives**. Before God can change a marriage, He must change the hearts of the husband and wife. Before God changes a church, He must change the hearts of the members. Before God changes a city, He must change the hearts of the citizens. *Will you ask God to change your heart before changing your surroundings?*

By the Chapters—**HOW** to Make A New Beginning.

(Chapter 1:1-3, 5) Examine the ways that God is moving your heart. *What passion has God placed on your heart? What is God prompting you to do?* **(Chapter 2)** Organize your efforts. **(Chapter 3:2-3, 10-13)** Devote your heart & life to God as His servant and worshipper. **(Chapter 4:1-6, 21-24)** Anticipate and resolve opposition and conflict. **(Chapters 5-6 esp. 6:3, 7, 14)** Practice patience and lean on God’s timing. **(Chapter 6:15-22)** Celebrate victories and accomplishments. **(Chapters 7:6-10, 25-28)** Nourish yourself on God’s Word and share scriptural insights with others. God blesses us when our lives are centered on His Word. **(Chapter 8:18, 21-23, 31)** Seek God’s blessing & protection through prayer. **(Chapter 9, esp. 9:1-6, 10-15)** Examine yourself and confess/repent of all sin that has come into your heart & life. **(Chapter 10, esp. 10:1-4, 10-12)** Correct your mistakes and take steps to restore your relationship with God and others.

Central Lesson—We must restore the spiritual BEFORE we can successfully restore any other area of our lives.

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior.
- ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday’s study.
- ▶ Attend a small group.
- ▶ Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses.
- ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.