

Lessons From Characters In Old Testament

Ezra & Esther

Lesson 55

EZRA:

Intro:

- A. The book of Ezra continues on with the events at the end of 2 Chronicles: (**2 Chron. 36:23**)
1. It covers two periods of time: the first journey back to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and then the second group under Ezra which started about 60 years later.
- B. Concerning Ezra, we learn: **Ezra 7:8-10**
- C. He is referred to by some as “the second Moses” because he *“had prepared his heart to see the law of the Lord, and to do it and teach statutes and ordinances in Israel”*.
1. Ezra had a great desire for God’s Law and it was obviously the foundation of his own life and he wanted others to live by it, as well.
- D. Ezra, along with Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, brought many of the Jews back to Jerusalem.
1. As Zerubbabel and Nehemiah focused mainly on rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, Ezra’s heart was in to restoring the worship of the Lord.
- E. Ezra was a descendent of Aaron (**Ezra 7:1-5**), the chief priest under Moses, and was related to Joshua/Jeshua, who became the High Priest of the temple when it was rebuilt. (**Ezra 3:2**).
- F. He was a priest and a scribe: *“...he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given.”* (**Ezra 7:6**).
- G. Let us remember King Cyrus, of the Medo-Persian empire, allowed the Jews to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.
(**NOTE:** Let us also remember Isaiah prophesied nearly 200 years earlier that Cyrus would give order for Jerusalem to be rebuilt [**Isa. 44:28**])
1. The first group left Babylon, led by Zerubbabel.
 2. As they began rebuilding the temple they soon were met with opposition from the Samaritans who sent King Ahasuerus (who succeeded Cyrus) a letter that caused him to put a stop to the rebuilding (**Ezra 4**).
 3. That resulted in about a 10 year delay before King Darius allowed the rebuilding to continue. (**Ezra 6:15**)
 4. Ezra was given permission by the next king, Antaxerxes, to lead another group of exiles back to Jerusalem.
- H. Ezra found the temple restored to its glory but realized the worship of the remnant who had returned had not took place: (**Ezra 9:1,2**).
1. Ezra’s reaction: (**Ezra 9:3**)
 2. And then we have Ezra’s prayer: (**10:9**)
 1. That is when he reminded them of their transgression and commanded them to make confession to the Lord *“and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.”* (**10:11**)
 2. The people obeyed and reinstated other practices of Moses’ law.
- I. **Summary Of The Book:**
- A. The first part of the book tells about the problems the Jews had which caused them to stop rebuilding during the rule of Artaxerxes (**4:6-23**)

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- B. The second part, **chapters 7-10**, begins with Ezra arriving in Jerusalem to teach God's laws to the people of Judah.
1. Ezra was horrified and disappointed to learn the people were committing the same sins as the other nations.
 2. They are now in serious danger of being punished and even destroyed by the Lord.
 3. So Ezra prayed and confessed Israel's sins, and the people agreed to begin obeying God's laws.

(NOTE: The book of Nehemiah reports other things Ezra did.)

(NOTE: God's people were no longer an independent nation but Ezra realized that God was in control, no matter what empire ruled over them.)

- C. So Ezra said: **(7:27-28)**

II. Lessons From Ezra:

A. A Kept Promise! (Ezra 1:1-4)

1. Many years before this time, the prophet Jeremiah had predicted that God's people would be in captivity for seventy years.
2. Now, King Cyrus was beginning to complete that prophecy.
3. Cyrus was not a Jew, yet God caused this ruler to be a special part of His plan for His people.
4. God kept His promise to return His people to their homeland.

B. The Enemy Doesn't Fight Fair! (Ezra 4:7-24)

1. Israel's enemies wrote letters to king Artaxerxes, making it sound as though they had the king's best interests at heart.
2. As a result, the king ordered the Jews to halt their work on the temple.
3. Although the information given to the king had some truth in it, it was not fair to assume the Jews would rebel as their ancestors had done.
4. But the enemy does not fight fair.
5. We shouldn't be discouraged when those who oppose our being a Christian try to dig up something from our past in an attempt to discourage and cause us to stop serving the Lord.
6. Even though the enemy may win a temporary victory, let it only be a delay and not defeat!
7. Obedience to God always brings opposition! *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."* **(2 Tim. 3:12)**

C. God's People Find Favor! (6:1-15)

1. Not only did King Darius command Tattenai, the governor, to stop hindering the work on the temple but he actually told the governor to use the king's treasury to pay for the work!
2. With the help of King Darius, the temple was completed in four years.

D. A Prayer For Forgiveness! (9:5-15)

1. Ezra's prayer is one of the best examples in the Bible of how to pray when we have sinned.
2. Even though Ezra himself had not married a foreign woman, he included himself in the Israelites' failure to obey God.

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- a. Notice the number of times he uses the words “I”, “we”, and “us” in those verses.
 3. By tearing his clothes, he was outwardly expressing the sorrow he felt because of the people's sins.
 4. Ezra recognized if God gave them what they deserved, He would have to destroy them all.
- E. Promises For Us!**
1. When Cyrus offered the Jews in Babylon the chance to return to Jerusalem most of them stayed put in their “comfortable” surroundings in Babylon.
 2. Those who did return found everything in ruins and devastation.
 3. We can understand how easily it would be for those Jews who went home to grow discouraged and want to give up.
 4. But God sent them encouragements in the forms of Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, and Ezra who emphasized to them the laws of God.

CONCLUSION:

- A. The winners in this life are Christians who fall but they keep starting over.
- B. The book of Ezra is a record of people who seized an opportunity to make a difference for God in an indifferent world.
- C. As God did then, so does He do now - He continually provides help and encouragement for His people, but He doesn't do the work for them!

ESTHER:

I. SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER:

- A. Esther was a Jew who lived during the captivity in Babylon.
 1. The Babylonian Empire has fallen to the Medes and Persians and Esther's story follows the reign of Cyrus during which time his son, Ahasuerus, is the king of Persia.
- B. Ahasuerus' wife, Queen Vashti, displeases him when she refuses to dance before him during a tremendous feast the king had declared. **(1:1-22)**
 1. Because she had disobeyed the king, she was declared no longer the queen and Ahasuerus set about to parade women before him that he might select another queen. **(2:1-18)**
- C. The story of Esther and Mordecai are: **(2:5-7)**
- D. At the charge of Mordecai, Esther does not let it be known she is a Jew and after all was said and done it was her the king selected to be queen. **(2:8-18)**
 1. Mordecai overhears a plan to assassinate the king and tells it to Queen Esther and the life of the king is saved **(2:21-23)**.
- E. King Ahasuerus promotes Haman to the highest position of all the princes and commands everyone to bow down to him and pay him homage, which Mordecai refuses to do **(3:1-2)**.
 1. Haman was “filled with wrath” and he planned to destroy not just Mordecai but all of the Jews throughout the kingdom **(3:5-6)**.
 2. He persuaded the king by saying, **(3:8)**

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3. A decree was issued and announced throughout the kingdom (**3:9,12-14**).
4. Esther is aware of the great mourning occurring among the Jews (**4:1-9**).
- F. Mordecai gets word to her along with a copy of the written decree to serve as proof and commands her... (**4:8**)
 1. For her to do as Mordecai instructs her, she knows she will risk her life because...(**4:11**).
 2. When Mordecai receives her answer, he gives her this reply: (**4:16**)
 3. Esther's answer is: (**4:16**)
- G. Esther approaches the king and he receives her and she invites him and Haman to a banquet. (**5:1-8**)
 1. At receiving the invitation, Haman is overjoyed! His joy is replaced by wrath when again Mordecai refuses to bow down to him and Haman, at the urging of his wife, decides to build a gallows and hang Mordecai the next morning. (**5:9-14**)
- H. That night the king could not sleep and commanded the book of the records of the chronicles be brought and read to him. (**6:1-13**)
 1. By Divine providence, the part which was read was concerning Mordecai's discovery of the assassination plot and the king realized nothing had been done to reward Mordecai.
 2. The next morning the king asks Haman, "*What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?*" (**6:6**).
 3. Thinking the king wants to honor him, Haman answers the question quite lavishly.
 4. We can only imagine the shock it must have been to Haman to know it was Mordecai the king was honoring.
 5. But there was nothing Haman could do except obey the king's orders.
- I. Esther reveals Haman's plot to the king. (**7:1-6**)
 1. The king, in his wrath, has Haman hanged on the gallows he had build for Mordecai and Mordecai is appointed over the house of Haman (**7:6-8:2**).
- J. The king authorizes Esther to... (**8:8**)
 1. The law was passed enabling the Jews to defend themselves and consequently, they are spared from annihilation.

II. Lessons From Esther:

A. God Invites Us Into His Presence!

1. Esther's fear she could be killed was not irrational; it was the law and it applied to every man or woman who approached the king without an invitation.
2. There was one exception, however, in that the king could choose to extend his scepter to show his approval.
3. Because of sin, our relationship with God is broken.
 - a. (**Jn. 3:16**)
 - b. Jesus gave His life to provide forgiveness and reconciliation with God.
4. Now Jesus says: **Mt. 11:28; Acts 17:27; Rev. 3:20; Rev. 22:17**

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B. God Makes A Way!

1. The situation for the Jews in Persia seemed hopeless, but God made a way.
2. Sometimes when temptations to sin seem impossible to overcome, let us never forget: **(1 Cor. 10:13)**
3. That way of escape will always require a proper respect, a proper understanding, and a proper application of God's word. **(Psa. 119:9,11)**

CONCLUSION:

- A. The book of Esther clearly shows the providence of God!
1. When Esther was selected as queen, it was to save the lives of the Jewish people **(4:14)**.
 2. In order to bring about their salvation, Mordecai had to be in the right place at the right time so he could hear about the plot to kill the king.
 3. Then, he had to report it and someone had to write it down **(2:21-23)**.
 4. The fact he did not at first get rewarded was very significant.
 5. Then, the king had to have a sleepless night and have the record of the chronicles read to him from the exact spot which mentioned Mordecai's deed **(6:1-3)**.
 6. Then, Haman had to come into the King's presence at the right time.
 7. If any of these events had not occurred, the entire outcome likely would have been different!

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NEHEMIAH
(The Book of Nehemiah)