

What To Do With Your Religion

Ezra 7:10

Introduction

1. One summer a young teenager in Cincinnati was invited to Fort Hill Christian Youth Camp and there he became a Christian. When he returned he came to see me and said, "I've become a Christian, Now what do I do?"
2. That's the same question many people are asking? When you 'get' religion, What do you do with it? Some helpful suggestions can be found in Ezra.
3. Note Ezra's background. A descendant of Aaron; expert instructor in the Scriptures, a godly man. He enjoyed many blessings, some which went all the back to a godly grandfather!
4. Our text reveals three things Ezra did with his Religion:

I. HE STUDIED IT

1. Ezra 7:10a. Note the New American Standard Version; "Set his heart to study the Law of the Lord"
2. Doctors report how crucial a balanced diet is to good health. That is true spiritually. It is important to have some "method" of study and reading.
 - a. One can't learn about God in one day! One doesn't acquire spiritual maturity in one day!
 - b. The key is to spend time with God's Word.
3. Three reasons why new Christians fail in their new life.

II. HE SHOWED IT

1. Knowledge is never an end in itself, but must always find practical expression in our lives.
2. Ezra "practiced it." 7:10
3. Albert Schweitzer explained why he chose to bury his life in Africa, "because I wanted my life to be an argument for what I believed in."
4. The expression, "If you went on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

III. HE SHARED IT

1. "Ezra set his heart...to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (7:10). Matthew 28:19
2. June, 1981 Frascati Italy; & Texas
"Mamma, Mamma, when are you coming?"
3. The cry of a dying lost world!
4. The Gospel is the "Good News!" Acts 5:42
 - a. Good news of Truth and forgiveness!



Walking Thru The Bible EZRA

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezra belongs to the period of Jewish history following the Babylonian Captivity. As there were three stages to the deportation of Judah into captivity so also there were three stages to their "return" from Babylon. Ezra records two of the "returns" from Babylon and Nehemiah records the third "return."

Return #1	led by Zerubbabel	Ezra 1:1- 6:22
Return #2	led by Ezra	Ezra 7:1- 10:44
Return #3	led by Nehemiah	Nehemiah 1-13

An easy way to remember their tasks is to remember that all three were rebuilders following the time of captivity. Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple; Ezra was a priest who rebuilt the people; and Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls.

THE FIRST RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL Ch 1-6

1. RETURN (Ch. 1-3)

Chapter 1. The policy of the Babylonian kings had been to destroy the national spirit of the people they conquered by deporting them to different. But the Medo-Persians under Cyrus repatriate the exiled people to their homelands.

1:5-11 records the preparations of a group of Jews to return. Those returning received enthusiastic support from the rest of the Jewish community. They were given gold, silver, and beasts of burden for the journey.

Chapter 2 registers that some 42,360 Israelites, plus their 7,337 servants, returned to rebuild the temple well supplied. The leader of the first group was Zerubbabel (or Sheshbazzar 5:16).

Chapter 3. First, they erected an altar and reinstated the sacrifices that God had prescribed and began to lay the foundation of the new temple.

As soon as the foundation was finished they called the people together to celebrate. The Bible says that "*with praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good: His love to Israel endures forever'*" (3:11).

These shouts of joy were mingled with tears, as the older men remembered the glory of Solomon's temple. But the shouts of joy and tears could not really be distinguished; the celebration was so great that only triumph rang through.

2. REQUEST (4:1-2)

With only the foundation laid, almost immediately opposition arose. The people then living in the land made request that they be allowed to

have a part in the rebuilding of the temple. *"Let us help you build,"* they said, *"because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to Him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here"* (v.2).

3. REJECTION (4:2)

The request by the "people of the land" was flatly refused. *"You have no part with us,"* Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the other leaders replied. These were not people of Abraham's line and were not children of the covenant.

4. RESISTANCE (4:4-5)

The reply angered these Samaritans (a name that these "strangers" carried on into the New Testament period). Their opposition was so successful that for 16 years the temple remained no more than a foundation!

5. RETREAT (4:24)

During the years of opposition the Jews built homes for themselves and planted fields and laid out vineyards. But they didn't prosper despite all their hard work. They had permitted opposition to divert them from their commitment to God and their initial enthusiasm for the Lord had drained from their hearts.

6. RESTART (5:1-2)

On September 1, 20 BC, the prophet Haggai recalled Judah to the task of building the temple. In their efforts to meet material needs the people had forgotten their spiritual values.

New opposition to the rebuilding is detailed in 6:3-12. But King Darius' search revealed the authorization of Cyrus for the project and he ordered the Samaritans to let the work alone (6:7) and for the project to be paid for out of state taxes (6:8).

7. REBUILT (6:14-16)

In a series of jolting exhortations, Haggai, joined by the prophet Zechariah, stirred the people of Israel to action. Once again Zerubbabel and Jeshua led the people to build. Within four years the restored temple stood on the site of the temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. It was now 516 BC, or twenty years after their first return from Babylonian exile.

The seventy years desolation of Solomon's temple foretold by Jeremiah had passed. With the temple rebuilt, Israel was once again officially be worshipping in the Promised Land.

Interval Activities The events of the book of Esther occur between the 6th and 7th chapters of Ezra.

THE SECOND RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY -- Ch. 7-8

1. Ezra And the Second Return to Jerusalem - 7:1-10

Ezra plans his return and establishes his authority as a priest and teacher by tracing his lineage back to Aaron (7:10). He was a *"skilled scribe"* of the Law, a trained teacher who had *"set his heart to seek the law of God and to do it, and to teach in Israel"* the statutes and ordinances of the Law (v.10). A fresh start for God's people could be found only in a return to God's Word.

2. The Circumstances Prompting the Return - 7:11-28

Ezra and the people praised God *"who put such a thing as this in the king's heart"* and gathered at the departure point on the river (or canal) of Ahava.

3. The List of Those Returning - 8:1-14

4. The Details of the Journey and Arrival - 8:15-36

REBUILDING THE PEOPLE - Ezra 9-10

The people returned so they would be able to worship God according to the Law. However, many still had the tendency to wander away from the words of God written by Moses.

1. Sins of Intermarriage Reported 9:1-4

Within five months of Ezra's return a major problem is uncovered regarding the spiritual life of many Jews. The Jewish leaders report that some Israelites had been involved with their pagan neighbors' detestable practices brought on by marrying Gentiles wives. One of God's major prohibitions was that His people were not to marry outsiders (Ex.34:11-16; Deut.7:1-4).

9:3-4 Ezra was appalled because of the people's sin. He knew that it was for such sins that Israel had gone into captivity (v.7).

2. Ezra's Prayer to God 9:5-15

Deeply shaken, Ezra tore his clothing and hair-- went to the temple-- fell on his knees to the Lord in prayer.

3. The People's Confession of Sin - 10:1-44

Some felt there was still hope for Israel and called for the people to make a covenant before God to divorce the foreign women and send them away with their children. This was to be done "according to the Law." It took three months for all the marriages to be examined. Each case was judged individually so that justice would be done. By this action the community was not saying that divorce was good, it was a matter of following God's Law about the need for religious purity among God's people.

The message of the book of Ezra is clear. In order for the people to be in right fellowship with God, it was absolutely necessary for them to have proper temple worship (Ezra 1-6) and to live according to God's Word (Ezra 7-10).