RESOURCES

The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict - Josh McDowell

Believers' Bible Commentary - William MacDonald

Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the OT - Warren Wiersbe

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life - Donald S. Whitney

cclburg.com/ThroughTheBible

47

Calvary Chapel Lynchburg presents

Through the Bible

with Pastor Troy Warner

My Notes

Ezra

The heartbreak of the destruction of Jerusalem was unparalleled in biblical history. This led to 70 long years of Exile. The people of God were scattered, cast out of the Promised Land and forced to endure nearly a century of humiliating subjugation. But God had promised that He would restore His people. And He did. When the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return home. The book of Ezra tells the story of this Remnant and their long journey to rebuild their homeland. With Jerusalem in ruins and the Temple destroyed, there was much to be done and at times it seemed hopeless. But God raised up men like Ezra to lead the people. This book tells us about Ezra restoring proper worship and obedience to the Land and the first victories of the Post-Exilic period.

March 29, 2017

About Ezra

Author: Ezra

Date: ca. 430 B.C.

Genre: History

Purpose: To tell the story of the return to Jerusalem by the remnant of Judah and the revival brought about by the leadership of Ezra the scribe.

Characteristics: One long story about the return of the Remnant, whose names are given, detailing the ups and downs, focusing on Ezra's spiritual leadership.

Questions to Think About

1.) Normally we skip over long lists of names in the Bible, but what is especially significant about the names listed in the book of Ezra? Does it surprise you that so few chose to return to the Promised Land?

2.) Ezra wept in the Temple when he read the book of the Law and how the people had broken it. How important is the written word of God to our lives? How can we be sure to be doers and not hearers only?

3.) Were you startled by the strict measures imposed by Ezra to bring the people back to God? What does this teach us about sin and repentance? Where in your life do you need to make a change?

4.) The books of Haggai and Zechariah take place during the events of the book of Ezra. Read those two prophets to get further insight into this story. What did you learn?

The Cyrus Cylinder

This ancient clay cylinder dates from the sixth century BC and contains a declaration from Cyrus the Great. The first section describes Cyrus' greatness and mercy—common themes in such declarations. The second section, composed of Cyrus' own words, describes how he returned captive peoples and their gods to their native lands. It also records his hope that all the returned gods will intercede before Bel and Nabu (the chief Babylonian gods) on his behalf. The description of Cyrus' mercy and efforts to return captives supports the biblical account of Israel's restoration from exile (see Ezra 1).

GRAPHIC BY KARBEL MULTIMEDIA, COPYRIGHT 2011 LOGOS BIBLE SOFTWARE

Outline

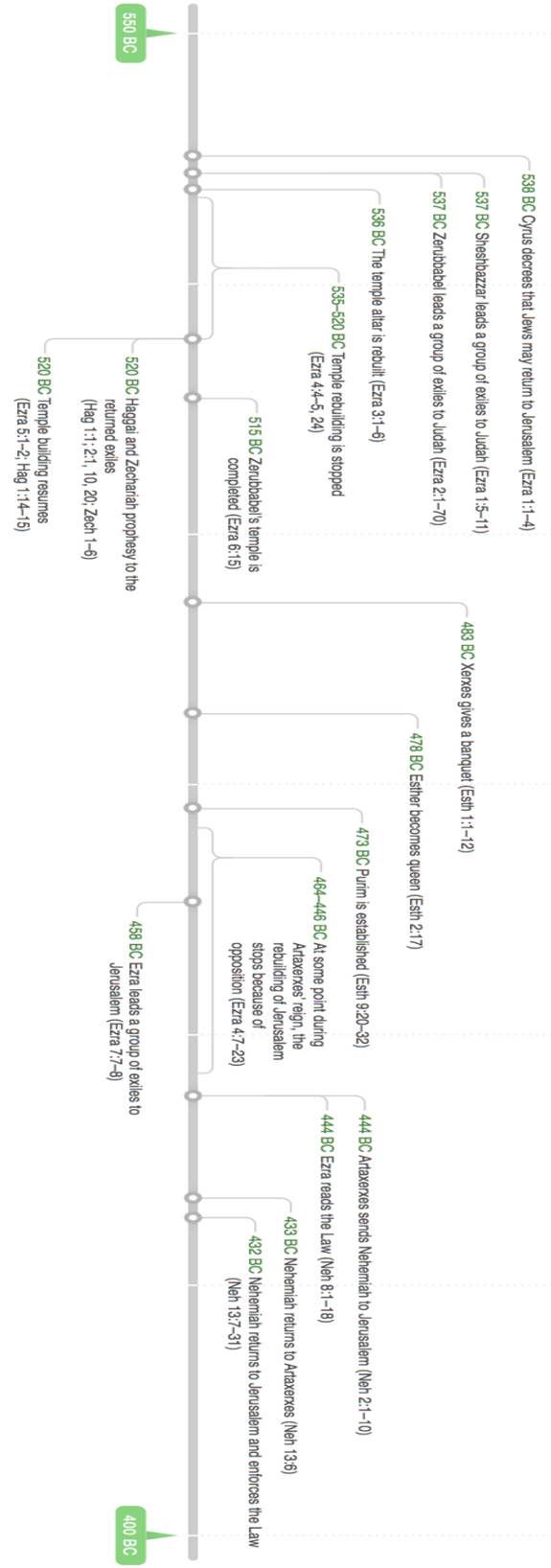
I. Return from Exile **(1-2)**
- **A.** Proclamation of Permission **(1)**
- **B.** List of Returnees **(2)**

II. Rebuilding Life in Judah **(3-6)**
- **A.** Preparation for Rebuilding **(3)**
- **B.** Opposition to Rebuilding **(4)**
- **C.** Continuation of Rebuilding **(5)**
- **D.** Completion of Rebuilding **(6)**

III. Return of Ezra **(7-8)**
- **A.** Arrangements for His Return **(7)**
- **B.** Entourage with His Return **(8)**

I. Ministry of Ezra **(9-10)**
- **A.** Sin of the People **(9:1-4)**
- **B.** Ezra's Prayer for the People **(9:5-15)**
- **C.** Ezra's Leadership in Reformation **(10)**

Adapted from *The World and the Word*, B&H Academic



Through the Bible – Ezra

Fasting[1]

Introduction

The book of Ezra shows the people fasting at several points. In chapter 8, they fast and pray for a safe journey. Then when Ezra realizes the sin of intermarriage that has infested the people, he fasts and mourns for days before resolving the issue. The definition of fasting is "the laying aside of food for a period of time when the believer is seeking to know God in a deeper experience." Fasting comes up in Scripture quite often. Jesus instructs us on how to fast in the Sermon on the Mount, assuming that this is part of normal spiritual life. We are expected to fast. So what should that look like?

Why Should We Fast?

The Bible gives a number of reasons of why we should fast. All of them carry the basic idea of abstaining from natural hunger in order to focus on the Lord. Any time we need to put aside the physical to be in tune with the spiritual, fasting is appropriate.

(1) We ought to fast when there is a specific, urgent need. Fasting serves as an act of spiritual desperation in this case.

(2) We ought to fast to seek God's guidance. By eliminating distraction our hearts will be wide open to hear the Spirit's voice.

(3) We ought to fast to express grief over sin. Jonathan fasted for his father's sinful treatment of David to demonstrate his broken heart and righteous anger.

(4) We ought to fast for deliverance or protection. This expresses to the Lord that we need Him and will not rely on ourselves to survive.

(5) We ought to fast to express repentance. When we sin, we abstain from the bread of this world to partake of the Bread of Life and recalibrate our thinking.

(6) We ought to fast to humble ourselves before God. Denying ourselves food demonstrates humility in a tangible way.

(7) We ought to fast to express concern for the work of God among His people. Nehemiah fasted when he learned the walls of Jerusalem were broken down.

(8) We ought to fast to minister to the needs of others. It is often appropriate to deny ourselves so that we might better serve each other.

(9) We ought to fast to overcome temptation. Fasting teaches us to deny our flesh in one way so that we can have control in other ways.

(10) We ought to fast to express our love to God. There is something sweet about refusing to nourish ourselves as an expression of dependence on the Lord.

---

[1] Adapted from "Fasting" from *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline. While we may not see the purpose of it on a human level, when we dedicate ourselves to seek after God and deny our flesh, there is power there. Any reason to draw closer to Jesus is a good one.

How Should We Fast?

We see fasting done several ways in Scripture. Sometimes our ideas about what fasting can intimidate us, but we ought to start with what we can do and move on from there. Don't let a false understanding of the Word keep you from being obedient!

(1) A normal fast involves abstaining from all food but drinking water. Most times in Scripture when you read about fasting, water was still drunk.

(2) A partial fast is when we continue to eat, but remove especially pleasant things from our diet like soda or sweets. This may work better for you if you work a rigorous job.

(3) An absolute fast is to neither eat nor drink. This involves extraordinary circumstances and should be done wisely so as to not endanger yourself.

(4) A supernatural fast is a special circumstance. Twice in Scripture (Moses and Elijah) we see God sustaining men far beyond normal exertion without food.

(5) A private fast is when you fast but do not tell anyone. Fasting should never be a point of pride and maybe there's something between you and God you need to work out.

(6) A congregational fast is when the people of God join together in this discipline. When your church calls a fast, you should absolutely participate.

(7) A national fast is when a national crisis arises and someone, usually the ruler, calls a fast. If you're concerned about your nation, maybe you should fast and pray.

Conclusion

Fasting can be daunting. But we are expected to do it in Scripture. We are commanded to fast. As members of the Body of Christ, we must discipline ourselves to do all that God instructs us to do. The early Church would fast every Wednesday and Friday from sundown to sundown. We may not need to do that exactly, but we can learn from their example.

And don't let it intimidate you! We all have to grow in many ways, and fasting is an excellent tool for spiritual growth. In a permissive, gluttonous world, we can learn to deny ourselves to follow Christ. Maybe you can't fast from food, but what about Facebook? What about texting or fast food or Netflix? Can you fast from your hobby for a week? Nothing is too great for us to do without in order to draw close to Jesus.