

Ezra 2 ESV

1 Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. 2 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel...36 The priests...40 The Levites...43 The temple servants...55 The sons of Solomon's servants... 59 The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel... 64 The whole assembly together was 42,360, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. 66 Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, 67 their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720. 68 Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. 69 According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments. 70 Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.

Scriptures for further study:

Luke 4:17-19

Matthew 5:17

Romans 8:7-8

1 John 2:15-17

“God’s grace and forgiveness, while free to the recipient, are always costly for the giver.... From the earliest parts of the Bible, it was understood that God could not forgive without sacrifice. No one who is seriously wronged can ‘just forgive’ the perpetrator.... But when you forgive, that means you absorb the loss and the debt. You bear it yourself. All forgiveness, then, is costly.”

-Tim Keller

The Westminster Shorter Catechism question 14

asks: What is sin?

Answer: Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way.



The Hand of God over our Identity and Ordinary Ezra 2

BIG IDEA: Because of the liberating power of the gospel, let us seek to live out our identity with a calling to the extraordinary ordinary despite the rubble of brokenness around us.

Simply - God’s grace is often magnified in the mess and minutiae of life.

OUTLINE

1. The Liberating Power of the Gospel

2. Our Identity in Christ

3. Our Extraordinary Ordinary

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. When people meet one another for the first time what are some of the questions (after names are exchanged) asked to gain understanding of one another?

2. *The Israelites were liberated from captivity in Babylon to return to their homes and reestablish God's worship in the temple which was to be rebuilt.* Read Isaiah 61 and Luke 4:17-19. What greater liberation than the liberation of the Israelites did God have planned? To what are you held captive today?

3. *Read 1 John 2:15-17.* Where do you find your identity? Is your identity in Christ or some worldly version of Christianity?

4. *Read Ezra 2:68-69 and Ephesians 2:10.* What did God's people do when they returned to their homelands? Have you thought that your life is ordinary? How can the sermon's message help you see that God is doing extraordinary things through the daily grind of your life?

“Commands show us what God is like, what He prizes, what He detests, what it means to be holy as God is holy. To hate all rules is to hate God Himself who ordained His rules to reflect His nature. The law is God's plan for His sanctified people to enjoy communion with Him.”

-Kevin DeYoung

“The finished work of Christ on the cross is not God's way of saying to us, ‘You're free to go now’ but ‘You're free to come now.’ He is not sending us off but inviting us in.”

-Sam Allbery

“Christ is our life — not only the guarantee of it in heaven, but the down payment of it by the Spirit now, as he lives in us. His joy our joy, his love our love, his peace our peace, his strength our strength. These are not gifts moving from him to us. They are his life experienced as our life.”

-John Piper

“We want big results — sooner rather than later. And we’ve forgotten that God showers his extraordinary gifts through ordinary means of grace, loves us through ordinary fellow image bearers, and sends us out into the world to love and serve others in ordinary callings.”

-Michael Horton

“This chapter, however uninviting it may seem, is a monument to God’s care and to Israel’s vitality.”

-Derek Kidner

Praise to Jesus. Praise Jesus for your liberation, which came through God absorbing the LOSS AND DEBT OF SIN of your sin through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Because “The finished work of Christ on the cross is not God’s way of saying to us, ‘You’re free to go now’ but ‘You’re free to come now.’ He is not sending us off but inviting us in.” Praise the Lord because He loves you and wants you to be with Him. Praise Jesus for your identity found through Christ in you, which means you have a fountain of joy, peace, love, and strength welling up inside you as you experience His life in you.

Repentance through Jesus. Read 2 Peter 1:3-4, 13-19. Confess the areas of your life where you have normalized your sin emptying the cross of its power and denying the work of the Holy Spirit in you life by choosing to walk in the flesh. Is Christ your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you looked to Christ to secure and protect your comforts in order to enhance your personal kingdom.

Consecration for Jesus. Because of the liberating power of the gospel, let us seek to live out our identity with a calling to the extraordinary ordinary despite the rubble of brokenness around us. May God’s grace be magnified in the messiness and minutia of your life this day and all of your days, through Jesus Christ!

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chapter 2 of Ezra documents the exiles’ return from Babylon to resettle in their former homes in Jerusalem and Judah. It shows that the exiled Judeans responded to Cyrus’s decree and took it as a fulfillment of prophecy. The return is not just the end of the exile but also a reoccupation of the ancient homeland. Those who returned were identified by how they served in the temple, by who their father was, and by other categories such as servants and singers. Because Ezra made an effort to identify the priests and temple personnel, this return is about reestablishing the worship of Yahweh there.

-ESV Study Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. Go back and read Ezra 1:6. What was the reason that these Israelites returned to Jerusalem and left Persia? *(Ezra 1:6 tells us that the Lord “had stirred” them to return. As we go through Ezra 2 keep in mind that these are the names of those that God led to return).*
2. In Ezra 2 we read the names of those that left Persia to return to Israel. Talk with your children about how these people are real people. Our history as God’s people is real history and not a fairy tale or fable.
3. How does this chapter’s list of names remind us once again of God’s faithfulness? How does God’s faithfulness strengthen us in our faith journeys, especially during the times of struggle? *(God spoke through his prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, about how He would restore His people after their exile. This chapter gives us the names of those Israelites that God brought back to their land in fulfillment of His promise. God’s faithfulness gives us peace and strength as we have the uncertainty of our lives. We can count on God to do what He has promised for us such as always being with us and giving us the strength to persevere).*

Scriptures for further study:

Joshua 1:9

Matthew 28:20

Hebrews 13:5

Romans 8:32

FOR STUDENTS

1. *Read chapter 2 verse 1 of Ezra.* Where did all the people return to?
2. Why do you think Ezra lists out the families and numbers them?
3. What groups are returning?
4. *Read chapter 2.* What do you notice? Why are these lists wonderful and crucial at this point in salvation history?
5. *Read in Numbers 3:1-20 about God's choosing the Levites to care for temple worship, with only Aaron's line serving as priests.* In what ways does Ezra 2 highlight the importance of the temple and its workers?
6. *The leaders listed first are Zerubbabel and Jeshua (v.2).* Read more about them in Haggai 1 and write a few brief observations.

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. *The various lists provided for us in this chapter are not only extensive but also quite detailed.*

Question: While it may not make for the most exciting reading, what does the inclusion of such minute detail like this suggest about the accuracy and historicity of the Bible? How does this in turn lend credibility to the Bible as a trustworthy word?

2. *Notice that the descendants of Hobbah, Hazzok, and Barzillai (verse 61ff) could not initially verify their status (as sons of Aaron) until a priest later vindicated them. If you are an unbeliever, consider how this is analogous to your own present situation before God. Because of your sin, you are unable to achieve for yourself the vindication you need in order to stand before God. But God has provided a priest for you (Jesus Christ), who has done for you (through His life, death, and resurrection), what you cannot accomplish on your own.*

Question: Are you willing to look outside yourself for help by turning to the only Priest who can save you and justify you before a Holy God?

3. *Everything necessary for the rebuilding of the temple had already been provided by God when He moved the heart of King Cyrus. Nevertheless, many of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site (verse 68). In a similar way, though God has already provided everything necessary for our salvation, our hearts are also moved to give and to sacrifice, not because we need to but because we want to.*

Question: In what ways is God perhaps moving you to freely give your treasure (or time and talent), as a way of gladly responding to your salvation?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork:

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." This artistic rendering by Blake serves to encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances.

William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to bringing prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible to life; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

As a child, he came home one day and told his parents he saw "a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His middle-class mom and dad greatly loved him and all their seven children but didn't appreciate their son's story. Only the pleas of his mom saved him from the "beating" his dad said he deserved! Blake's visions continued throughout his fifty years. Among his many visions, Blake saw Christ with his Apostles and a great procession of monks and priests and heard their chant." He saw "God's face pressed against his window, seeing angels among the haystacks, and being visited by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel." Blake believed the Bible was the most significant work of poetry ever written. It was the basis for the art. His love for the Bible and his visions were the stuff of a vast collection of visual and literary art through which Blake attempted to describe "the body of God."

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.