

## Supplementary Materials for Kool Journal for Parents/Adults

**Week 1: 22-28 January 2018 (pp. 10 – 17)**

### The Book of Ezra

"Ezra" is a short form of Azariah, which means "Yahweh has helped." In the Hebrew Bible (MT) Ezra-Nehemiah is a single work. But in the Septuagint (LXX), Latin Vulgate (ca. AD 400) and our English Bible it has been divided into two separate works.

### Historical background

Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire and then conquered Babylon in 539 BC. His governance style was the opposite of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's. The latter removed conquered people from their lands and tried to get them to assimilate their culture, customs and religion. The Persians, unlike the Babylonians, maintained a different policy of tolerance toward conquered peoples, permitting them to return to their homelands and followed their own religions. In this manner, he hoped to win their loyalty and thus provide buffer zones around the borders of his vast empire. Though Cyrus worshipped various pagan gods, he had an encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who made it clear that the temple of Jerusalem was to be rebuilt. In fact, Persian kings even funded the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

The first return of the Jews came in 538/537 BCE when Zerubbabel and several thousand Jews went up to the city of God to establish the altar and resume sacrifices (Ezra 1-6). Later, under the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-423), both Ezra (Ezra 7-10) and Nehemiah returned, in 458 and 445 respectively. Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem for at least twelve years though it only took him 52 days to complete the building of the walls (Neh 6:15).

### January 22-28 Ezra chapters 1 – 2

Watch videos (for overview)

- The Bible Project, Ezra-Nehemiah, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkETkRv9tG8> (8:36)
- British Museum, **The Cyrus Cylinder**, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRMzru0wRw> (15:32)
- RevivalProphecy, **Cyrus The Great in Bible Prophecy Part 1** (up to 3:56 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCr3YEGGgr8>

### Review Verse of the Week **Ezra 1:2**

*The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.*

Date/Passage	Reflection and Response (R & R)
Mon. 22  1:1 – 6  {1:2-3}	Jeremiah prophesied that the Jews would remain in captivity for 70 years (Jer 25:11; 29:10). So did Isaiah who had prophesied about this 100 years earlier, calling Cyrus by name even before he was born. Cyrus was not a Jew but God worked through him to return the exiled Jews to their homeland. He may have been shown the prophecy of Isa 44:28-45:6. Cyrus' decree permitted the Jews freedom to work together to undertake the huge task of rebuilding the Temple. But returning to Jerusalem would

	<p>mean giving up everything they had accumulated for an arduous journey and starting all over again. Of the 12 tribes, only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin responded. The 10 tribes of the northern kingdom were unwilling to share the vision of rebuilding the Temple. They preferred wealth and security (accumulated during the Babylonian captivity) to the sacrifice of that God’s work would require. Major works require the change of attitudes as we see how the hearts of the leaders, family heads, priests and Levites were moved by God.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you face difficult situations and feel surrounded, outnumbered, overpowered or outclassed, do you not realize that God’s power is not limited to your resources? Just as He had used Cyrus, He can use anyone to carry out his plans. We are to trust God, knowing that He is ultimately in all that takes place on Earth.</li> <li>• When you are asked to serve, how would you respond as a team member, no matter who gets the credit?</li> <li>• Do you let our comfort, security or material possessions prevent you from doing what God wants?</li> </ul> <p>Today, the opportunity to be used by God to achieve His purpose is open to all true believers. The key to be used by God is to renew our minds with the Word of God and to think God’s thoughts continuously. If we do, God will alert us to the opportunities that may have passed us by if we were not walking “by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16, 25). Paul reminds us that “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Phi 12:13).</p>
<p><b>Tue. 23</b> 1:7 – 11 {1:11}</p>	<p>When Nebuchadnezzar ransacked the Temple, he took many of the valuable furnishings with him. What he did not take, he burned (2 Chr 36:18-19). Most of the captured items were made of solid gold (1 Kgs 7:48-50) and Cyrus kindly returned them to the Jews for the Temple they would soon rebuild. Sheshbazzar is Babylonian name for Zerubbabel (governor mentioned in 2:63) who led nearly 50,000 people to make the return trip under his strong leadership in 538 BC.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every article of gold and silver returned by Cyrus was a witness to God’s protection and care over many years. Are you ever discouraged by events in life and are on the verge of giving up hope in God’s promises to you? The turning point may be ahead.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Wed. 24</b> 2:1—58 {2:1-2}</p>	<p>The first list (2:2) is made up of men who were leaders. The same list appears in Neh 7:7. The people listed were from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (1:5), divided by families (2:2-30) or by cities (2:21-35). 2:36 begins listing priests, Levites and other Temple servants. These returned exiles rebuilt the temple, but only after a 20 year struggle. The work was halted for several years but was finally completed. Nevertheless, the return from captivity was celebrated in Psalms 126 and 147.</p> <p>Note: The Nehemiah listed in 2:2 is not the one who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem 80 years later nor is Mordecai the person who appears in the book of Esther.</p>

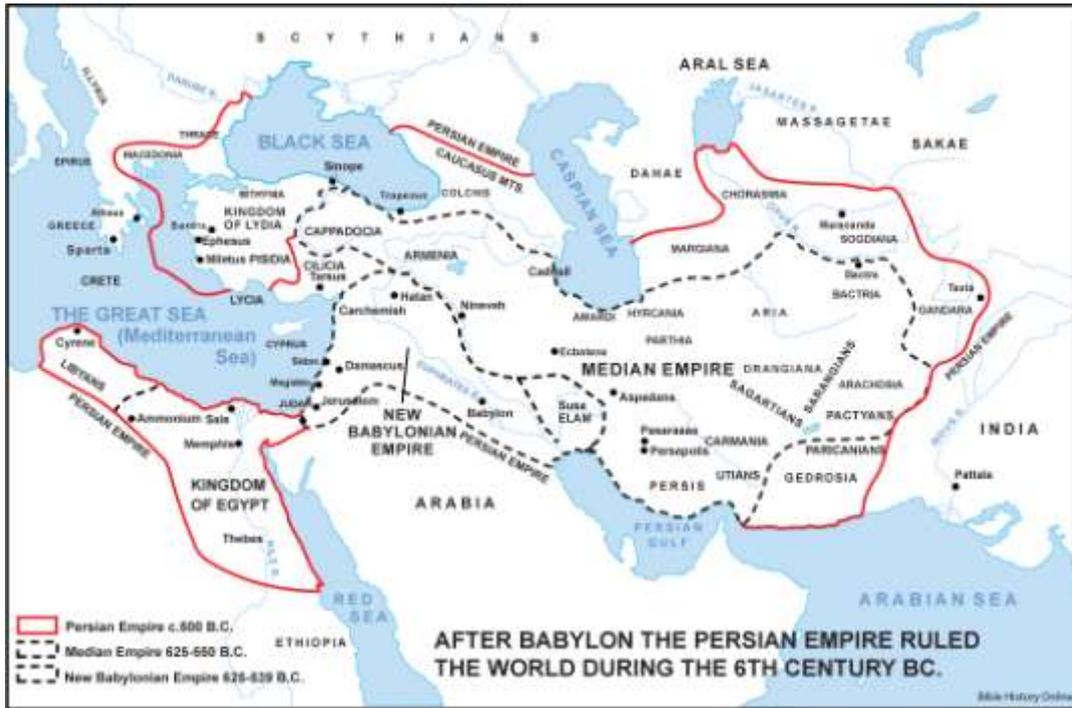
<p><b>Thu. 25</b></p> <p>2:59—63</p> <p>{2:59,63}</p>	<p>Genealogies were very important credentials to the Hebrew people. If they could not prove that they had descended from Abraham, they were not considered true Jews and were excluded from full participation in Jewish community life. In addition, some privileges were restricted to members of certain tribes. For example, only descendants of Levi (Abraham’s great-grandson) could serve in the Temple.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today, who are the true “sons of Abraham”? (Gal 3:7). Are you one?</li> <li>• How should we respond to the privilege stated in Col. 3:11:“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fri. 26</b></p> <p>2:64—70</p> <p>{2:68-69}</p>	<p>The money given was enough to start rebuilding the Temple. The people put what resources they had to the best use. But this Temple could not match the splendour of Solomon’s while the amount of money David gathered was a thousand times more (1 Chr 22: 14).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how generously some of the family leaders gave towards the building of the temple (2:68).</li> <li>• Consider also the example set by Barnabas in the New Testament who went beyond the tithe required by the Old Testament regulations (Lev 27:30-34). He even “sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37) in order to meet the material needs of believers in Jerusalem.</li> <li>• Do we limit our giving to 10% of our income? The Bible emphasizes that we should give from the heart all that we are able (2 Cor 8:12; 9:6).</li> </ul> <p>Let your gift be decided by God’s call to give generously, not by the amount you have left over. The psalmist in Psalm 147:10 affirms that although God created everything, His greatest joy comes from our genuine worship and trust.</p>
<p><b>Sat. 27</b></p>	<p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have you learnt about God’s sovereignty over the affairs of men and our human freedom to act?</li> <li>• Does it bring hope and comfort to Christians or fear and confusion?</li> </ul>

**References**

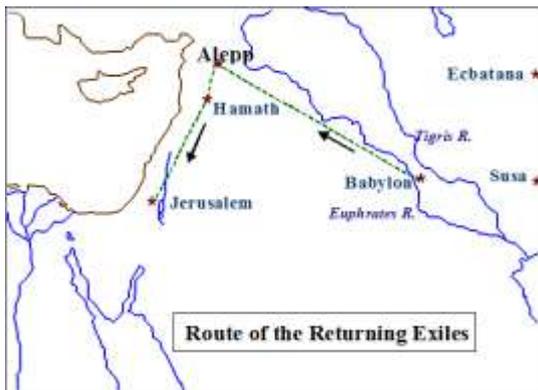
Gene A Getz, **Life Essentials Study Bible: Biblical Principles to Live By**, Holman Bible Publishers, 2011.

Tyndale House Publishers, **Chronological Life Application Study Bible**, 2004.

<https://bible.org/article/book-ezra>



Source: [http://www.bible-history.com/maps/images/ezra\\_persian\\_empire\\_sixth\\_century-bc.jpg](http://www.bible-history.com/maps/images/ezra_persian_empire_sixth_century-bc.jpg)



### Cyrus Charter of Human Rights

Inscribed on the Cyrus Cylinder (now kept at the British Museum) is the first declaration of Human Rights. A replica of the cylinder is also kept at the United Nations in New York. Part of Cyrus' charter states:

"I am Cyrus. King of the world. When I entered Babylon... I did not allow anyone to terrorize the land... I kept in view the needs of people and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being... I put an end to their misfortune. The Great God has delivered all the lands into my hand; the lands that I have made to dwell in a peaceful habitation.... .When my soldiers in great numbers peacefully entered Babylon... I did not allow anyone to terrorize the people... I kept in view the needs of people and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being... Freed all the slaves... I put an end to their misfortune and slavery (referring to the Jews and other religious minorities). The Great God has delivered all the lands into my hand; the lands that I have made to dwell in a peaceful habitation..." Source: <http://www.farsinet.com/iranbibl/kings.html>

