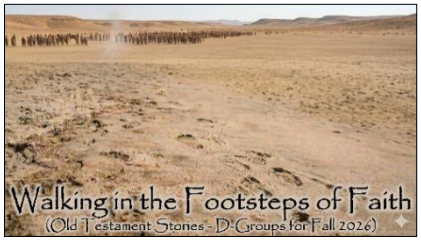
"Walking in the Footsteps of Faith"
OT Stories - Fall 2026 D-Groups



For Wednesday, November 11
Ezra (Ezra 7-10)

The Big Picture - Where We Are in the OT Timeline

Overall, we're in this **"post-exile"** stage of Israel's history. For the nation of Judah, captivity in Babylon lasted 70 years - *just as Jeremiah had foretold* (see Jeremiah 25:11-21 and 29:10). The first exiles were taken from Jerusalem around 605 B.C.; then, starting around 538 B.C., King Cyrus the Great, a Persian, conquered Babylon and, early on, issued a decree that allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. *(As a reminder, the 10 northern tribes essentially ceased existing as a nation after being conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.).* That's why this "post-exile" stage can also be described as a time of **returning, restoring and even rebuilding.** While it didn't lead to true freedom for the Jewish nation, it *at least* meant coming home.

For this week, we are focusing on **EZRA** - one of two key figures, along with **NEHEMIAH**, of this specific time period (**ESTHER** fits here as well, but not on location in Jerusalem). Here's a basic timeline of this overall period:

> **538 B.C.** - Cyrus' decree and the initial return under Zerubbabel, a direct descendent of Judah and leader of the Jewish exiles. *During this overall time, between 538-516 B.C., the Temple is rebuilt (the story is told in Ezra 1-6 before Ezra himself comes onto the scene).*
>
> **483-473 B.C.** - the events of Esther (chronologically, pre-dates Ezra himself)
>
> **~458 B.C.** - a second return of Jewish exiles led by Ezra *(Ezra 7:1ff)*
>
> **~445 B.C.** - a third return led by Nehemiah who becomes "governor" and leads the efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem itself *(his story is also worthy of reading, but we're focusing specifically on Ezra)*

Within this time period, Ezra served as a priest and scribe, belonging to the tribe of Levi; within this basic stage of Israel's history, his role was largely to help bring about spiritual revival by teaching obedience to the *Torah*, restoring the people's covenant responsibilities. As mentioned back when we looked at 4 kings in 2 Chronicles, Ezra is regularly proposed as a writer of Chronicles. From a post-exile perspective, he tells Judah's story with an emphasis on the importance of being faithful to Yahweh and the covenant. That theme fits with Ezra 7-10 as well. Overall, it was a time where getting back to the spiritual basics mattered; and that's where Ezra comes onto the scene. As the nation was returning from captivity - a reality that happened because of a failure to be faithful, it was time to get serious about coming back to God's Law!

The Close-Up for November 11 - Ezra 7-10

READ the TEXT: **Ezra 7:1-10 and 9:1-10:27 (if you have time to read the whole story of Ezra - for that matter, as well as Nehemiah - it's certainly valuable, but this section of Ezra is our specific focus)**

Some notes on the overall flow of the story with emphasis on the key sections listed above:

Chapters 1-6 … This section tells of the initial return under Zerubbabel and the re-building of the Temple, even amidst adversity. *(it's worth reading 3:10-13 amidst this overall timeframe to get a sense of how significant this was to God's people!)* God's favor is upon His people, even as those in power support the work.

Chapter 7 … There are three basic sections here. **First, Ezra is introduced** - it's clear what is emphasized about him: his commitment to the Law (see vv. 6 and 10). Application-wise, Ezra's story has something to say about how we approach what God has revealed. While it was the *Torah* for Ezra, for us it's how we embrace and respond to God's Word as a whole. It's different in some key ways - for example, we are not "under Law" in Christ; yet faith in Christ should still certainly care about following what God reveals to His people! **Second, we read this letter from King Artaxerxes establishing his mandate, including a charge to be faithful in his duty of upholding the *Torah* (see vv. 25-26).** That's a remarkable command from a non-believing ruler! **Third, we see Ezra's joyous and humble response in praise.**

Chapter 8 (a list of those who returned and the actual journey back to Jerusalem)

Chapters 9-10 *(Nehemiah 8-9 is worth reading here as well as a companion scene)* … revival requires repentance. Quite quickly, a massive problem was identified: intermarriage with surrounding nations in violation to God's Law (see Deuteronomy 7:1-4). In response, Ezra leads the people in a prayer of repentance and confession. Driven by their desire to be faithful, they land on a remedy that seems quite uncomfortable (see 10:2ff). Overall, it's a hard story to make sense of. Does this actually represent the best solution to the problem? Was it's *God's* solution? In the end, there's no real satisfactory way to answer the moral questions that come from this part of the story. Nonetheless, don't miss the heart behind it all: a staunch commitment to be faithful to the covenant Yahweh had made with His people!

Two Key Reminders throughout This Semester

1. **God is ultimately the HERO of these stories; remember, as part of Scripture, God is *revealing* Himself to us. *So, what do we learn about Him through this story? What can we learn from the human characters about putting our faith/trust in Him?***
2. **We read these stories through a Christ-lens. *So, how do we read this story differently in light of Jesus and being His followers?*** Consider how repentance is still part of following Jesus as well as how discipleship might calibrate how we wrestle through what it looks like when we've gone down a wrong path.

Some Additional Questions for Reflection

- ***As you reflect on Ezra's story, what stands out about a response of faith to God? What does Ezra's story teach us about trusting Him, especially re: faithfulness and repentance?***
- ***While we are not "under Law" or the same covenant responsibilities, what does Ezra's story teach us broadly about responding to what He has revealed through His Word?***
- ***How can we balance faithfulness to God's commands with His broader heart when repentance gets messy (as it so frequently does)?***