

Return

**“Leave Your Babylon and Return” – Ezra 1-2
February 19, 2012**

Our Sermon Series

RETURN <i>A 5-Week Study of the Book of Ezra</i>		
Date	Message Title	Bible Text
Feb 19	Leave Your Babylon and Return	Ezra 1-2
Feb 26	Return to Worship	Ezra 3
Mar 4	Return Despite Opposition	Ezra 4-6
Mar 11	Return to God’s Word	Ezra 7-8
Mar 18	Return to Repentance	Ezra 9-10
Mar 25	The Church Has Left the Building	Living the Bible!!!!

Outline of the Book of Ezra

Text	Time	Content	Theme
Ezra 1-6	22 years (538-516 BC)	1 st Return of 49,897 Under Zerubbabel	Restoration of the Temple
Ezra 7-10	1 year (458-457 BC)	2 nd Return of 1,754 Under Ezra	Reformation of the People

Questions for Our Return

1. What is my _____? (1:1)

- Background: The History of Israel (how they got to Babylon)
- Israel missed 70 Sabbath years (Jeremiah 25:8-14; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21)
- Babylon – ancient capital city of the Babylonian people; model of paganism and idolatry
- Application #1 – What is my “Babylon”?

Estrangement from someone	Slow creep into the world	Lack of spiritual attentiveness
Anger	Unforgiveness	Pornography
Addiction	Complacency	Dead marriage
Me	Lack of rest	Financial chaos
Ignoring God	Prayerlessness	Not in the Word
Unfaithfulness	Workaholism	Not present

2. How is God calling me to _____? (1:1-11)

- God moved Cyrus’ heart (v.1)
- God called the people to a specific purpose: to rebuild the temple and re-establish worship in Jerusalem (v.3)
- God moved people’s hearts (v.5)
- God provided for this return (vv.6-11)
- Augustine: “O God, command what you will, and give what You command.”
- Application #2 – How is God calling me to return?
 - a) What is the larger purpose for His call to return?
 - b) Will I trust Him to provide?
 - c) Prayer: “Lord, move my heart!”

God is Calling America to Return

1. America has gone to _____

- Kerby Anderson’s article: “The Decline of a Nation”
- Kerby Anderson: “America’s problem is not ultimately political, economic, or social. The decline of this nation (just as the decline of every other nation) is due to spiritual factors. The political, economic, and social problems we encounter are the symptoms of the spiritual deterioration of a nation. Just as there are spiritual principles that influence the life of an individual, so there are political-spiritual principles that govern the life of a nation. And though we may feel that these are obscure and difficult to discern, in reality they are visible to anyone willing to look at the record of history. Our problem is that we don't really learn from history. George Santayana said that ‘those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.’ Winston Churchill said, ‘The one thing we have learned from history is that we don't learn from history.’ History has shown that the average age of the great civilizations is around two hundred years. Each of the great civilizations in the world passed through a series of stages from their birth to their decline to their death. Historians have listed these in ten stages.”
- The Ten Stages of Great Civilizations in the World Throughout History

Stage 1: Bondage to Spiritual Faith	Stage 6: Selfishness to Complacency
Stage 2: Spiritual Faith to Great Courage	Stage 7: Complacency to Apathy
Stage 3: Great Courage to Liberty	Stage 8: Apathy to Moral Decay
Stage 4: Liberty to Abundance	Stage 9: Moral Decay to Dependence
Stage 5: Abundance to Selfishness	Stage 10: Dependence to Bondage

- Carl Wilson’s book: “Our Dance Has Turned to Death”
- Kerby Anderson: “The Book of Judges shows that the nation of Israel passed through these same stages. And this country will do the same unless revival and reformation break out and reverse the inexorable decline of this nation.”

- Our hope does not lie in the President or our Congress or a future President or future Congress. Our hope lies in God.
- **Jeremiah 17:5-8** – *This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”*
- **Psalms 33:12** – *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.*

2. Pray for God to _____

- Ezra 1:1,5
- **Application #3** – Lord, please...
 - Move the hearts of our nation’s leaders
 - Move the hearts of America’s pastors
 - Move the hearts of the American church
 - Move the hearts of Grace Fellowship
 - Move my heart

3. Let your heart break believing that _____ matter to God

- Ezra 2
- **2 Peter 3:9** – *The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*
- **1 Timothy 2:3-4** – *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*
- **Application #4** – Lord, I am sorry that I have become so “me focused” that I have lost sight of the 200 million people in America who are lost without Christ and the 5 billion people in the world who are lost without Christ. Lord, give me a heart for souls! I pray for the salvation of....

4. Ask God what your _____ is

- Roles in the 538 BC return included:
 - Leadership: Zerubbabel-plus (2:2)
 - Stewarding resources: Sheshbazzar (1:8-11)
 - Priestly service (2:36-39)
 - Levitical service (2:40)
 - Music (2:41)
 - Gatekeeping (2:42)
 - Serving and helping (2:43-58)

- **1 Peter 4:10** – *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*
- **Psalms 84:10** – *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*
- **Application #5** – Lord, what is my role in helping America return to You? Do You want me to...
 - Pray
 - Serve
 - Lead
 - Steward
 - Wash feet
 - Other

5. _____ for others in America to return

- The return of the first group under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6) was paving the way for the return of the second group under Ezra (Ezra 7-10) and the third group under Nehemiah.
- The first group’s financial giving paved the way for the future groups (Ezra 2:68-69).
- **Application #6** – How can I pave the way for others to return?
 - Through sharing my faith and inviting others to church
 - Through teaching/serving in children’s ministry, youth ministry, adult discipleship, prayer, care, connection, worship, missions.
 - Through my prayers and intercession for revival and spiritual awakening
 - Through tithing to my church
 - Through extra giving to build a children’s building
 - Through my participation in citywide prayer events seeking to pray for revival and spiritual awakening (i.e. National Day of Prayer).
 - Other

Questions to Discuss with My Family, Friends, and Small Group

1. What is the farthest you have ever been away from home (literal physical trip)? What was the return home trip like?
2. Read Ezra 1-2 aloud and discuss its meaning and applications using these notes. Share your applications with each other and pray for one another.