

## **Ezra: A Model for Restoration**

We want to be the church God established through Jesus Christ and His apostles. As **Ephesians 2:19-20** says, the household of God is to be “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (ESV). We want to be part of that household, that building, that temple. A brief survey of the religious landscape over the last 2000 years would cause anyone to say something went wrong. Divisions abound. Doctrines differ. Creeds divide. Names denominate. It is a far cry from what Jesus prayed in **John 17:21**, “that they may all be one...” (ESV). We find ourselves in the same boat as the Israelites who returned from Babylon. The temple was destroyed, worship lost, sacrifices impossible. They had to restore what God had revealed through their prophets of old. The remnant in **Ezra** stands as an example of restoration, from whom we can gain insight.

The Israelites came out of Babylonian bondage in the exact same way they did from Egyptian slavery, plundering their neighbors to subsidize the journey (**Exodus 12:35-36; Ezra 1:6-11**). This was God’s choice, not the remnant’s, but I find it intriguing that God Himself works in repeated patterns.

The first problem the exiles faced regarded the priesthood. In **Ezra 2:59-63**, the sons of Habaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai could not prove their descent and were refused from the priesthood. Yet, no passage ever expressly prohibits anyone from the priesthood based on their descent. Several passages, however, name the descendants of Aaron as priests (cf. **Exodus 28:1; 30:30; Leviticus 8; et al**). Why wouldn’t Zerubbabel and Jeshua allow these men to act as priests? They understood when God specified the descendants of Aaron, He excluded all others.

But there were non-Aaronic priests. In **Genesis 14:18**, we learn about Melchizedek who “was priest of God Most High” (ESV). Then in **Exodus 3:1**, we learn about Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, who was a priest in Midian. In **Job 1:5**, Job, though not called a priest, acted as a priest for his family, consecrating his children and offering sacrifices for them. Why didn’t the remnant use these scriptural precedents? They understood that Melchizedek, Jethro, and Job were priests under a different covenant. God had made a covenant with Israel. Certainly, the Scriptures they read included information about other covenants. Certainly they learned things about serving God from the inspired record of those covenants. But they couldn’t base their practice on covenants other than their own.

When the seventh month came in **Ezra 3:1-6**, they built an altar and offered burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept the Feast of Booths. They kept up regular burnt offerings, new moon offerings, and appointed feasts. This was all “as it is written in the Law of Moses ” (ESV). We can find this prescribed in **Numbers 28-29**. Why did the Israelites do these things? They understood if God said to do something, they were supposed to do it. Further, they were to do it God’s way.

In **Ezra 3:7**, they brought cedars from Lebanon to lay the foundation of the temple exactly as Solomon had done in **II Chronicles 2:8, 16**. Was no other wood good enough? Or did the Israelites simply follow the example of their forbearers?

In **Ezra 3:8**, Zerubbabel and Jeshua appointed the Levites from 20 years old and upward to do the work of ministry for the temple. But how could they do that? In **Numbers 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47** the Levites from age 30 to 50 were to be appointed. Did they disregard God’s Law? No. In fact in **I Chronicles 23:24**, David explained that since the duties of the Levites had changed, no longer needing to carry the tabernacle, they could be appointed from 20 years old and upward. That seems like an arbitrary change for David to make. And yet, the Israelites understood David was a prophet from God. David wasn’t making a change; God was prescribing a pattern through His prophet.

In **Ezra 3:10**, when the temple’s foundation was laid, the priests, Levites, and sons of Asaph came in their vestments with trumpets and cymbals to praise the Lord. They did this “according to the directions of David” (ESV), which can be read in **I Chronicles 16:4-7; 25:1-8**. This wasn’t David’s approach that could be followed or not. This was God’s pattern to follow; they followed it.

Don’t miss that the words of praise they sang in **Ezra 3:11** were not simply words chosen out of thin air. They were the very words of praise used when God consecrated the original temple in **II Chronicles 7:3**. I have no doubt other words of praise were used as well. The Old Testament is rich with other offerings of praise. But when the Holy Spirit recorded the worship of these restorers, He recorded them doing exactly what the original builders did.

In **Ezra 9:1-2**, the Israelites admitted to violating God’s law regarding marriage to foreigners. The Law clearly prohibited this in **Deuteronomy 7:1-5**. However, the Law never explained what to do if this law was broken. In **Ezra 10:2-3**, the remnant made a decision saying it was according to the Law. They would covenant with God to put their wives away. This was never expressly commanded or exemplified in the Law. Rather they drew a logical

conclusion based on teaching in the Law. The Israelites grasped that God expected them to draw logical conclusions from what He had revealed.

Today, some declare the New Testament never asserts we should use it as a model for how we serve and worship God. I deny that (cf. **I Timothy 3:14-15; II Timothy 3:16-17**). But even if it were true, making such a claim treats the New Testament as if it popped into existence in a vacuum. That just isn't the case. The background of the New Covenant is the Old. Just as the writings in the Old Covenant were to be viewed as a pattern for those who would serve God according to that Covenant, so are the writings of the New for us who long to be in a New Covenant relationship with God. We can see from these ancient restorers how we should submit to our apostles and prophets and their writings as modern restorers.

-Edwin L. Crozier