

EZRA: STARTING OVER WELL AFTER GROUP FAILURE
Part I: Looking To GOD To Work In OTHERS To START Group Renewal
(Ezra 1:1-11; 2:68)

I. Introduction

- A. When the believer sees spiritual decay in the institutions of government, marriage, family, church and business around him, he may be tempted to despair, and ask, "How do I keep on keeping on' this way?!"
- B. The book of Ezra is all about starting over well after group spiritual failure. It offers us a step-by-step guide on starting over well both on the individual as well as group levels as follows:

II. Looking To GOD To Work In OTHERS To START Group Renewal, Ezra 1:1-11; 2:68.

- A. The book of Ezra begins where Israel neared the end of its prophesied captivity for judgment:
 - 1. God had predicted in the Mosaic Covenant that were Israel to turn from following Him, the nation would eventually be conquered by Gentiles and taken into captivity, cf. Deut. 28:15, 48-49, 63-68.
 - 2. Well, Israel's spiritual leaders had rejected God, turning the nation to serve idols, 2 Chron. 36:14.
 - 3. After repeated gracious efforts by God to the contrary, His wrath was unleashed on Israel as He used the Babylonians to attack and take captive Israel to Babylon for seventy years, 2 Chron. 36:15-21.
 - 4. Then, near the end of that captivity, the book of Ezra begins with God stirring the heart of the Persian king who ruled Israel to restore the nation to its Holy Land, cf. 2 Chr. 36:22-23 with Ezra 1:1.
- B. Ezra 1:1-8 and 2:68 reveal the **FIRST** step in **national group renewal** was **God's work in key parties**:
 - 1. At the right time, **GOD** moved the heart of the pagan Cyrus to decree Israel be restored to her land:
 - a. Ezra 1:1 reports God moved the Persian ruler, Cyrus to proclaim Israel be returned to her Holy Land in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 29:10 on the duration of Israel's captivity.
 - b. Actually, Isaiah 44:21-28 and 45:1, 5, written **200 years before** Cyrus made this decree predicted Cyrus **by name** would restore Israel from this captivity, cf. Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, fn. to Ez. 1:1.
 - c. Now, Cyrus did not follow Israel's God as Isa. 45:5b states and Cyrus himself wrote in his famous Cyrus Cylinder he heeded his pagan god, Marduk, cf. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 316.
 - d. Indeed, Cyrus's stated motivation to return Israel came from his belief he was to restore all captured peoples in his empire with their temples in hope their gods would give him a long life, Ibid., p. 315.
 - e. Apparently, God **ALLOWED** this pagan king's **FALSE** belief **ROOM** to influence him so that he would **RESTORE** Israel and her temple in fulfillment of His very **ANCIENT** prophecies!
 - 2. Then **GOD** moved socially recognized leaders of the Hebrews to respond to Cyrus' proclamation to return to rebuild the Jerusalem temple, Ezra 1:5.
 - 3. Then, **other Hebrews of financial means** were influenced by these moves of these leaders to finance this effort, Ezra 1:6; 2:68. Cyrus also returned the sacred vessels of the Jerusalem temple held in captivity for 70 years, and delivered them to the Hebrews to restore their temple worship, Ezra 1:7-11.
 - 4. Accordingly, it was easy for other "grassroots" Hebrew captives to follow these people back to Israel: with the emperor's blessing and edict, with the mobilization of Hebrew sociological leaders and the financing intact, it was easy for the rest to follow the lead of these people back to the Holy Land.

Lesson: For **GROUP RENEWAL** to begin, we must be sure **WE** are **PERSONALLY** aligned with God's Biblically revealed will, and then **WAIT** upon **HIM** to move **OTHERS** to fulfill His Biblical will.

Application: If concerned about the need for group spiritual renewal at some level, we **PERSONALLY** must (1) examine our **OWN** relationship with God (salvation, John 3:16; confession, 1 John 1:9; depending on the Holy Spirit, Gal. 5:16-23 and heeding Scripture, 1 John 1:7; 2:3). Then, we make sure we (2) align with **PROPHECY** describing God's plans for **US** in **OUR** era (cf. Ez. 1:1 and Rev. 3:14-22 and our series on "Christ's Scripture Prophecy On Contemporary Evangelicalism"). (a) For **OUR** era, we learned this means faithfully, courageously heeding the **TRUTH** of **WRITTEN SCRIPTURE** and **LIVING** and **TEACHING** it (b) in the Holy Spirit's empowering (c) versus heeding pressures to do just the opposite from carnal, worldly fellow Evangelical believers around us (review our lessons on this). (3) Then, we **PRAY** for God's will to be done in accord with His predictions and promises of Revelation 3:14-22, and **HE** will provide the **GROUP** renewal in accord with His promises.