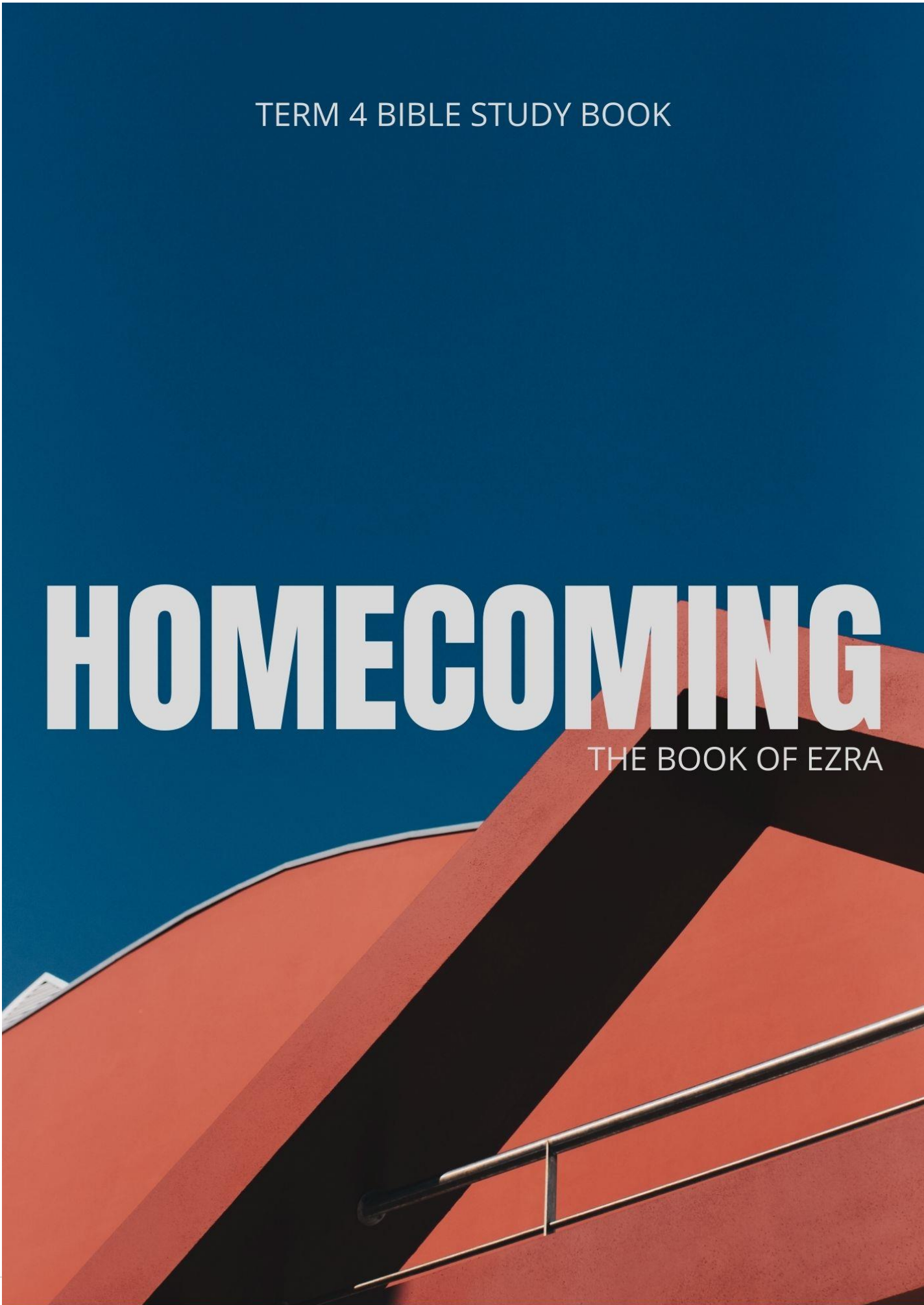


TERM 4 BIBLE STUDY BOOK

# HOMECOMING

THE BOOK OF EZRA



ST LUKE'S  
**2020**  
**VISION**

**Imagine a church:**

Where delight in God  
overflows into all of life

Where enduring truth  
inspires courageous witness  
and a heart for the nations

Where the lost surrender  
to the mercy of Christ

Where a hunger to  
know, love & serve Christ  
renews every season

Where the broken find  
a family and the outsider  
is embraced

# BIBLE STUDY PROGRAM – TERM 4 2020

## EZRA

### Homecoming

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St Luke's Anglican Church, Miranda

# Homecoming

## Bible Studies in the Book of Ezra

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are set during the restoration period. King Cyrus of Persia has taken over the Babylonian empire and has allowed the formerly exiled Israelites to return to Jerusalem. Ezra looks to the formative days of this restoration period and is structured around two significant characters.

1. Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6. 538 BC. Eighty year time span)
  - a. Ezra 1: Persian Decree
  - b. Ezra 2: List of Returnees
  - c. Ezra 3-6: External opposition overcome
  
2. Ezra (Ezra 7-10. 458 BC. One year time span)
  - a. Ezra 7: Persian Decree
  - b. Ezra 8: List of Returnees
  - c. Ezra 9-10: Internal opposition overcome

As you can see from the above, the book of Ezra (and Nehemiah for that matter) has a consistent pattern. A Persian decree compels a number of Israelites to return. These returnees set about different projects to reconstruct Jerusalem and its worship of Yahweh. Opposition is encountered and overcome by God's divine help.

Throughout the book there are many echoes of other Old Testament narratives. The Exodus, Numbers, the building of the tabernacle and temple are all swirling around in the story of Ezra. Care has been taken to connect the post Exilic community with their ancient Hebrew ancestors and we will pay attention to these echoes as we read through the book.

While we find many echoes of Israel's former triumphs, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are marked by a pervasive frustration. Moments of celebration are mixed with weeping. The faithful returning remnant prove to be as unfaithful as the generation that went into exile. The idolatrous nations, once scratching at the borders of Israel, are now part of the family. Ezra ends with Israel standing sadly in the rain, the failure of their leaders writ large. Nehemiah ends with the reformer beating his countrymen and pulling out their hair. Israel has returned to Jerusalem, but God, in all his glory, has not. The physical exile has ended, but the Spiritual remains. They wait for a voice in the desert to "prepare the way for the Lord and make straight paths for Him". They repent and rise; they renew their commitment to God. All the while they pray 'come Lord, come' lest the cycle (sin, judgement, repent, repeat) continue forever.

# Study 1 - Return

## Ezra 1-2

### Share

1. Is there a part of the bible that has had a profound effect on you? Has a part of the bible ever stirred you to action?

### Read Ezra 1:1

2. Where are we up to in the history of God's people?

3. The events that are about to happen are a fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah. What key prophecy did Jeremiah make regarding the end of exile?

### Read Ezra 1:1-11

4. What would motivate a King to not only free the people he has conquered, but sponsor the rebuilding of their foreign temple?

5. God doesn't just work a miracle in the heart of Cyrus but within the people of God as well. Why would it take a miracle for the people to decide to return to Jerusalem?
  
6. Do you hear any echoes from other parts of the OT in Ezra 1:5-6? Why might this be?
  
7. Whenever a tabernacle/temple is built, it is with plunder taken from tyrants. Moses builds with Egyptian gold. Solomon with Canaanite gold. The temple in Ezra with Babylonian gold. Is the same true of the temple Jesus builds by his spirit (Ephesians 2:21, Matthew 12:29, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 4:8)?

## Apply

8. How exactly does God move the hearts of the exiles to make such a courageous decision? Consider another angle on these events in Haggai 1:13-15?
  
9. Consider God's power in moving the heart of Cyrus (Proverbs 21:1) for the good of his people. Are there people in authority whose decisions could have a profound impact on the Kingdom?
  
10. God keeps his word. Ezra begins with this theme at the forefront. What promises has God made that you rest in, knowing that he will keep them? What promises has he made that you need to remember? What promises from God do you find most difficult to trust?
  
11. The temple of stone has been fulfilled in the gathering of God's people, the church (Ephesians 2:21). The call to build this temple, by going and making disciples, remains. Is your heart moved to build this temple, the body of believers. What is your particular role in this great work?

## Digging Deeper

12. Why is so much attention given to the articles of the Temple? Where, during the exilic period, did we last encounter them?

## Prayers Week 1

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Pray for Brett and Mardi, Evie, Harriet, Olivia, and Willow Middleton. Please pray for Brett as he seeks to encourage, serve and build up the wider staff team. Pray for wisdom that he and the team develop ministry plans that will help St Luke's stay faithful and growing into the future.



Pray for Matt and Lauren, Ezra, Joanna and Samuel Thomas and their mission work with OMF International to an unreached people group in South East Asia.

Pray for our Church Wardens: Colin Adams, Colin Contessa and Joel Garlato. Pray for our Parish Councillors: Laurie Davidson, Amanda Garlato, Elise Adams, Celia Hacker, Eliza Lucas, David Parkes, James Russell, Simon Veltmeyer (also our treasurer) and Kath Telfer. Pray for our Parish Nominators: Timothy Clipsham, Michael Easton, Megan Smith, Amanda Garlato, and Louise Parkes. Pray for our Synod Reps: Michael Easton and Amanda Garlato.

Pray for the wide range of outreach opportunities that we have with local schools. Pray that our scripture teachers would be diligent and loving as they teach classes. Pray that our school chaplains would effectively model Christ in the way they love and support the school community. Pray that our Kids Hope mentors would be a loving and stable relationship for children with social needs. Pray that the school programs not running during the Covid season will be able to continue next year.

*School Lunch program / Breakfast Club at Miranda Public / Breakfast Club Port Hacking High School.*

# Study 2 - Rebuild

## Ezra 3

### Share

1. Can you think of a time you were profoundly disappointed in something you were looking forward to?

### Read Ezra 3:1-13

2. What is the significance of the 'seventh month' for the Israelites (Leviticus 23:24, 27, 34)? What risks were the Israelites taking in assembling together as one in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:3)?
3. Do you hear any echoes of other parts of the OT as you read Ezra 3:7? Why might this be?
4. The purpose of the first Exodus was to allow God's people to worship (Exodus 8:1). Do we see this theme here in Ezra? How might this relate to the exodus in which Jesus leads us out of slavery to sin.



5. Why, in the midst of this joyful worship, do some weep? What does this teach us about the nature of this return from exile? How might this moment help us consider the effect of change on multigenerational church communities?
6. "*The sound was heard far away*". Is this good news or bad news for the Israelites (Isaiah 2:1-5)?

## Apply

7. How might pursuing worship today endanger us like it did the Israelites? Would you worship even if it put you in danger?
8. The festivals celebrated by the returned exiles remind them of their deliverance. What rituals and festivals have we been given to remind us? How engaged are you in these rituals?
9. The first song in the book is about the goodness, love and faithfulness of God, yet this is sung by a very frightened group of people. Is it in times of desperate need that you are reminded of God's goodness, or in times of plenty?
10. As we gather to worship, we may feel full of joy or feel like weeping at the inadequacy of the experience. What lesson do we learn from these feelings?

*To worship is wonderful, yet the church is not perfect. We are still waiting for that perfect moment of worship around the throne and shouldn't be surprised when worship now doesn't live up to our hopes.*

## Digging Deeper

11. The Festival of Tabernacles celebrates God's provision throughout the years of wilderness wanderings. It is also recognised as the moment Israel makes sacrifices on behalf of the nations of the world (In Numbers 29, seventy Bulls are sacrificed throughout the week corresponding to the seventy nations of Genesis 10). Why is this an appropriate yet difficult first feast to celebrate as they return to their homeland?

## Prayers Week 2

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Pray for Jennie and Don Everist. Pray for Jennie as she ministers and cares for the people who attend the Thursday Communion Service. Pray for her as she continues to pray and care for those who are unable to attend, due to Covid 19.

Pray for Liz Beilharz, as she organises music, sound and screens for the Thursday Communion Service.



Pray for Shane and Ruth, Kye, Joel, and Finn Sparks and their mission work making disciples in Gijon, Spain.



Pray for Marty & Katrina, Simeon, Jed and Luke Feltham, preparing to serve in Kenya with CMS.

Pray for our Prime Minister and government. Pray for our state and federal members, our Premier and government. We pray also for our local Council including our Mayor.

Pray for those who serve to protect our country. Pray for health and safety for the service men and women and their Chaplains both here and overseas. Pray for their families waiting at home.

Pray that the word of God which we hear on Sundays might shape how we live Monday to Friday. Pray that we would be respectful of workplace boundaries, but that we'd also *"be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have"* (1 Peter 3:15). Thank God that we have the opportunity to represent Christ in how we speak and act in the workplace.

# Study 3 - Resist

## Ezra 4

### Share

1. Can you think of a time you have faced difficult opposition from someone or a group of people?

### Read Ezra 4:1-5

2. Who are the “*enemies of Judah and Benjamin*”? What is their back-story?
3. The book of Ezra is structured such that we align the return from exile with the Exodus narrative. Cyrus is aligned with Pharaoh. Babylon is plundered just like Egypt was. God’s people, set free, are numbered into a holy army (Numbers 1 and Ezra 2). How then are we to understand the appearance of “enemies of Judah and Benjamin”?
4. The offer of an alliance would have been very tempting for the vulnerable Israelite community. When have such alliances damaged Israel in the past? In what ways is Christ’s church being tempted to consider alliances with the world?

5. What do you think motivates the enemies of Judah to discourage Israel and try to undermine their efforts? Are you ever tempted to undermine gospel hearted initiatives or change at church?

### Read Ezra 4:6-24

6. The enemies wore the guise of helpfulness and support at first, but the mask slips as they write to the King. How do they describe God's faithful people in verse 12? In what ways are God's people 'rebellious'? By whose standard might they be considered wicked? How is this similar to the world's perspective on faithful Christians now?
7. We often speak about God opening and closing doors as the means by which he guides us. This can be good and helpful at times, but how might it have been a damaging theology for God's people to take up at this point in Ezra? How might we be similarly cautioned?

## Apply

8. Has your Christian faith ever led you to be called 'rebellious and wicked'? Do you sit at odds with the values of your workplace, family, school community or society? How are we to conduct ourselves when such accusations are made (1 Peter 2:12)?
9. The great building project we are called to is to 'go and make disciples of all nations'. This is the Temple we are to build during the time we have been given. What forces in our world are opposed to this? Have you ever seen forces within the church opposed to this? What motivates professing christians to oppose gospel hearted initiatives or change?

## Prayers Week 3

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Pray for Tim and Shona, Annika, Hamish, Edward and Hugo Goldsmith. Pray for Tim as our Community Pastor. Pray for Tim as he also heads up our Local Mission profile for St Luke's and focuses on outreach and evangelism.

Pray for Sharyn as Office Administrator, to be able to facilitate and implement new procedures well.

Pray for Eddie as he assists with the bookkeeping on a Wednesday.

Pray for Lisa in Office Admin, working hard on keeping all our records in the Elvanto database. With so many regulations, this is a large job in a parish.



Pray for John-Francis Wallace as Pastor of Shalom Calvary Church. Pray for the local mission work in Indore, North India.

Pray for the **Square One Camp** on 6 – 8 November at Youthworks Conference Centres, Port Hacking. For Years 3 – 6 and their church leaders. "Big Wisdom for Little Ears".

# Study 4 - Rejoice

## Ezra 5-6

### Share

1. When was the last time you felt the wonderful glow of joy? Is this an experience, time with God or time with fellow believers, which fills you with joy?

### Read Ezra 5:1-17

2. Work on the Temple has languished for decades until, we read in 5:1-2, two prophets begin to encourage its resumption. Who are these prophets and what is the content of their message (Haggai 1:12-15 and Zechariah 4:6-10)?
3. *“The eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped”*. The idea that God’s people are the “apple of his eye” can be found at the first Exodus (Deuteronomy 32:10) and now here at the second (Zechariah 2:8). Could we say the same about the church?

### Read Ezra 6:1-22

4. Compare 6:3-5 with 1:2-4. What new information about the funding of the temple comes to light at this point? How does this fit with the wider biblical testimony about how God uses the suffering and evil that afflict his people for their good?

5. Who ends up paying for the rebuilding of the temple and the resumption of worship there (Ezra 6:8-9)?  
  
.
6. Throughout Ezra, we can be troubled by how the returned Israelites treat the non-Israelites around them. It can seem at odds with the prophetic promises that envisage nations streaming to the rebuilt temple for worship. Yet take note of who celebrates Passover in 6:21. How does this show the true priorities post exilic leaders?
7. What is the mood amongst the Israelites at the completion of the Temple? Compare the two previous mentions of joy (3:12 and 3:13) with this chapter (6:16 and 6:22). What has changed? Why might this be?



## Apply

8. *“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”* How should we be challenged by the words of Haggai and Zechariah? Consider what we have been called to build (Romans 15:2, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 1 Corinthians 14:12, Ephesians 4:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:11).
  
9. Does God’s providence, through the opposition faced by the Israelites, change how you might think of the opposition faced by the church or the opposition you personally face?
  
10. There are 3 connected reasons the Israelites are joyful in 6:22. What are they? How do you see these aspects of God’s character in your life?

## Digging Deeper

11. In Ezra 6:22 we learn the post exilic community celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Spend some time looking into the symbology of this feast and the symbology of yeast (Exodus 12:14-20, 39, Matthew 16:6, Galatians 5:9, 1 Corinthians 5:7). What must it have meant to those celebrating it in Ezra? Do we have similar moments in the Christian or secular calendar?

## Prayers Week 4

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Pray for Kylie Zietsch and her work at Johannesburg Bible College, South Africa.



Pray for Sarah and husband Tim and her work in India with BCTI and SIM.

Praise God for our Bible Study leaders and for their faithful work in teaching and ministering to us throughout the term.

Pray for our witness to our local community – especially as more units are developed and more people move into the area. Pray for opportunities to connect with our community.

Pray for peace and wise leadership in our world. Pray that there would be opportunities for Christians to share the love, peace and saving grace that Jesus offers to all.

Pray for English as a Second Language classes each Friday during school term (which have ceased due to Covid 19). Give thanks for Marina and her team as they wait until it is safe to teach and encourage again.

# Study 5 - Return

## Ezra 7-8

### Share

1. Is your understanding of the scriptures increasing, plateaued or going backwards? Do you think it is important for Christians to know the bible, or do we exaggerate the importance of learning, maturity and growth?

### Read Ezra 7:1-28

2. What do we learn about Ezra from this passage? From his lineage and the descriptions about him, what is at the centre of Ezra's life?
3. Ezra seems to have some standing in the Persian court (Ezra 7:6) and a relationship of sorts with King Artaxerxes. Where else do we see similar characters in the bible? Specifically, where do we see such a character in the first 5 books (Ezra's area of expertise)?
4. Ezra is given specific charges by King Artaxerxes: Specific tasks to accomplish when he arrives in Jerusalem. What are they? What role does the Law of the Lord have in the completion of these tasks?

## Read Ezra 8:1-36

5. What is the first crisis faced by Ezra as he leads another new exodus to Jerusalem (8:15)? Why is this a crisis? How is it overcome?
6. What is the second crisis faced by Ezra (8:21-22)? How is it overcome?

## Apply

7. Ezra was 'well versed' or 'skilled' when it came to the scriptures. He knows the scriptures well and is nimble and wise as he applies them to life. Should this be the aspiration of all Christians? Ezra's knowledge of the bible overflowed to others as he taught them. Should all Christians aspire to be teachers of the bible?
8. Ezra knows the bible, lives the bible and teaches the bible? Have you ever known someone who knows the bible but does not live the bible? Have you ever known someone who longs to live a righteous life, but does not know the bible? Have you ever seen the effects of a bible teacher who does not know the bible well?

9. Do you feel the hand of God upon your life (Ezra 8:22)?

## Digging Deeper

10. Why would God be concerned with bringing honour/beautifying the house of the Lord' (7:27)? Why does God want the Temple to be aesthetically wonderful to look at? Why not just a functional building?

11. Compare the genealogy of Ezra with the corresponding genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6. Why are there missing names in the genealogy in Ezra (Azariah to Meraioth)? Why is Seraiah listed as Ezra's father in Ezra 7:1 when some 120 years separated the two?

## Prayers Week 5

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Pray for Sam and Jess, Percy, Lois and Finn Morton. Pray for Sam as our Services Pastor, preparing the elements, which make up our Sunday services. Pray for Sam as he also heads up Youth Ministry; high school Scripture; Young Adults ministry. We particularly prayer for Jess with new baby due in December.

Pray for Sandy Rigby as she supports Sam in ministering to the youth of St Lukes. Please thank God that we have still been able to have high school scripture and that God will use scripture positively over this disrupted year. Please pray that kids have been still enough to hear that Jesus loves them and has made a way to have a relationship with them forever if they choose Him. Help the teachers to grow in patience, love and wisdom in how they conduct the classes.



Pray for Andrew and Adele, Isaac, Lucy, and Finn Southerton and their church plant in Wellington, City on a Hill, New Zealand.

Thank God for his loving provision in drawing us to him and making us his children and heirs. Pray for members of our families and those close to us who do not know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Pray for both wisdom and boldness in how to share the good news we have with those who are nearest and dearest to us.

Pray for the **Thanksgiving and Memorial Service** on Monday 23 November 7.30pm. Please pray for those who have lost loved ones over the last few years.

# Study 6 - Repent

## Ezra 9

### Share

1. Can you think of someone who has been enticed away from faith in Jesus? What was it that lured them away?

### Read Ezra 9

2. Ezra and the returned leadership begin seeing through their first obligation: To “enquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of God” (Ezra 7:14). What do they discover?
3. The leaders come to Ezra and confess their sin with an interesting listing of the nations (Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites). It is very reminiscent of such lists in the Old Testament (Judges 3:5-7). What does this reveal about the effectiveness of Ezra’s teaching?
4. How do you feel about God’s command to the Israelites not to intermarry? Is this command seeking to maintain racial purity or is it motivated by something else?

5. What impact has Ezra's teaching had on the post-exilic community in this moment (9:4)? Do the 'words of God' have the same impact on you at times? How does God feel about those who find themselves in such a state (Isaiah 66:2).
  
6. Ezra's anguished prayer is framed around the history of God and his people, much of which Ezra was not personally part of. What spiritual realities does Ezra acknowledge lay behind the exile, the return and the rebuilding. What is Ezra's great fear at this current moment? Do you ever feel this way too?

## Apply

7. The word of God is the great hero of this passage. The leaders have heard it from Ezra and it has proved living and active (Hebrews 4:12). How do your bible reading habits impact your acknowledgement of sin, repentance and change? Do you find that as you read the scriptures, less sin seems to have less gravity?
  
8. Consider how Ezra feels in 9:6. Does your sin ever leave you feeling unable to lift up your face to God? Should it?
  
9. What is absent from Ezra's prayer that is so often present when we hear people acknowledging their wrongdoing? Do our confessions share this?



10. When you confess your sins, do you spend time acknowledging God's judgement and kindness throughout the generations and in your own personal history? What impact might it have to do so?

## Digging Deeper

11. What messianic promise does the phrase "holy seed" in verse 2 remind us of? How does this help us understand the importance of maintaining Israel as a 'holy nation'?

*Genesis 3:15 speaks about the 'seed' of Eve one day crushing the Serpent's head (see also Isaiah 6:13. The word 'seed' may be rendered 'offspring' in some translations). It was to be Israel's vocation to be a Holy Nation, set apart from all other nations as a light, so that they would one day rescue all nations from the serpent and bring them into the great assembly around the throne.*

## Prayers Week 6

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Pray for Cam, Katrina and Peyton Harte. Pray for Cam as he heads up Children's Ministry, including KOS (Kids on Sunday), Primary Scripture, Children's Thursday arvo programs. We pray particularly pray for Katrina with new baby due in January.

Pray for Jess Moran as she overseas our Crèche and Playtime programs. We pray for energy and enthusiasm as she looks after this age group as well as providing support and encouragement for the parents.



Pray for Geoff and Liz, Johanna, Will, Tom and Zoe Robson and their work with Christian Union in Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand.



Pray for Rob and Jo, Lili, and Jemma Copland. Pray for Rob's work as the Anglican Chaplain at the University of Wollongong and for his work as Campus Director of the University Bible Group.

Pray for our ongoing and various Children's, Youth, and Young Adults Ministries; that God would be using the leaders and volunteers to sow seeds and help people grow into mature and loving relationships with Jesus. Pray that this would be a great witness to the wider community.

Pray that St Luke's as a community would be a welcoming family to the new person who walks through our doors, as well as the person who's been walking through our doors for many years. Pray that God would help us to love the people as he first loved us. Give St Luke's a spirit of hospitality, care and inclusivity.

# Study 7 - Renew

Ezra 10

Share

1. What is repentance? What makes for genuine repentance? Can you speak of a time you have repented? When does repentance need to be public?

Read Ezra 10:1-8

2. What do you think about Shecaniah's suggestion, later adopted by Ezra, to "*send away all these women and their children*". What's the worst that could happen by allowing this practice of mixed-religious marriage to continue (Nehemiah 6:17-19 and 13:23-24)?

3. Malachi was one of the prophets active during this period. Have a read of Malachi 2:10-16. How does it fill out some more of the picture of what is occurring in Israelite marriages at this time?
  
4. We often expect leaders to inspire and drive great change, but is this the dynamic we see here in Ezra 9-10?
  
5. The list of those who had married idolaters begins with the priests and Levites (James 3:1). The religious leaders were not immune, but actually 'lead the way' in this sin. Have there been moments you have been discouraged by the sins of leaders and those in authority?
  
6. One of the promises of the return from Exile was the promise of a new heart whereby people would long to obey God (Ezekiel 36:26). Is Ezra 9-10 evidence that this has happened, or that the true end to exile is still to come?

## Apply

7. We may feel shocked by the ruthless way sinfulness is cut off from the Israelite community in this chapter, but is it so different to Jesus' instruction to his followers (Matthew 5:27-30)? Are there sins you have been able to make a clean break from? Are there ones you struggle to 'send away'?

8. What would you say to a Christian brother or sister considering marriage to a non-Christian? May we take anything from these stories in Ezra and apply it to that situation? What might the New Testament add?

*2 Corinthians 6:14*

9. Idolatry and compromise creep into religious life via marriage in the post-exilic community. How does it creep into the church? How do we combat it (Romans 12:2)?
10. God treats the returned exiles better than they deserve. Read Titus 3:4-8 together and consider how we too are the recipients of grace.

## Dig Deeper

11. The 'first sin' after an act of re-creative salvation by God is always given significant attention in the bible. What other 'first sins' can you think of?

## Prayers Week 7

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Pray for our Student Minister Isaac Shumack as he joins us on Sundays while studying at Moore College during the week. Please pray that our new system for welcoming people would be useful and encouraging to keep loving new people. Pray that we would continue to connect with hospitality and warmth even with the current restrictions in place. Pray for Isaac as he prepares to start his ministry life with Toongabbie Anglican Church in 2021.



Pray for David and Kathryn, Reuben and Felix Luis. Pray for David as Campus Director of Geelong Christian Union at the Deakin University Campus in Victoria.



Pray for Peter, Katharine, Noah and Atticus Yock. Pray as they work amongst the students at the campus of Griffith University.

Pray for our **Christmas Services** on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Pray that we would plan well for a Christmas which is in a very exceptional year and how we will be ready to welcome those who might be seeking God this Christmas.