



November 1, 2015

Ezra 1

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 1

*“The Providence of God”*

Pastor Gary Hamrick

When God brought the Jews back to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, he did it in providential ways, because God is a providential God! He works in our lives in ways we cannot always see or appreciate. He has a plan for each one of us, and he has a plan for our church. Pastor Gary begins a new series through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah entitled “Ever Changing, Never Changing.” Concerning our lives and our church, there are some things that will change, and some things that should never change.

### Historical Background

1. Ezra was among the exiles that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.
2. Ezra is believed to be the author of the books of 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.
3. In Hebrew, Ezra’s name means, help or the helper.
4. Ezra was both a scribe and a priest.
5. The book of Ezra records the return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem following their 70-year captivity in Babylon, and the rebuilding of their lives and the Temple.
6. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one scroll.
7. The book of Ezra is about new beginnings, second chances, and fresh starts.

8. The book of Ezra is about adventure and faith.
  - a. Approximately 50,000 Jews traveled more than 900 miles on foot across arid desert terrain to start a new life.<sup>1</sup>
9. The book of Ezra is about rebuilding, not only their lives in a new land, but rebuilding the Temple of the Lord.

### The Jews Returned To Israel In Three Waves

10. In 586BC, Zerubbabel led the first return, numbering 49,897.
  - a. This return is described in [Ezra 1-6](#).
11. In 457BC, Ezra led the second return, numbering just 1,754.
  - a. This return is described in [Ezra 7-10](#).
12. In 444BC, Nehemiah led the third return, and the number who returned is not known.
  - a. This return is described throughout the book of [Nehemiah](#).

### Bible Interpretation and Application 101

13. Not every account in the Bible is intended to be an exact parallel for our lives today.
  - a. Pastor Gary used the story of the time King David danced before the Lord, in what was basically his underwear, as an example of a story that has no exact parallel for us.
  - b. The principle is that we should enthusiastically worship the Lord and not be self-conscious about what others might say or think.
14. There are many principles in the Bible that we can learn from as we prepare to build a new church.
15. Pastor Gary said he believed the timing of our building project and our study in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah was not a coincidence, but the perfect timing of the Lord as he speaks to us about important principles.
16. Pastor Gary said he believed the Lord would use the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to caution us, to encourage us, and to prepare us, as we go through the building process.

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<sup>1</sup> Today, this would basically be a journey from Iraq to Israel.

## King Cyrus

17. The Lord, by allowing the Babylonians to be part of his plan of discipline with the nation of Israel, purged and cleansed their hearts of two things: the monarchy and idolatry.
18. The Monarchy
  - a. The people of Israel governed themselves with a king for approximately 400 years.
  - b. They had a king, not because it was God's will, but because they didn't want God to king.
  - c. During their 70 years of captivity they learned what it was like to be under the rule and reign of an unjust and ungodly king.
  - d. They returned with a renewed hunger and thirst for the true and living God!
19. Idolatry
  - a. The people of Israel worshiped the false gods and pagan idols of the nations around them.
  - b. When the people returned, they never returned to the worship of idols.
20. They had a king and worshiped false gods and idols because that was the way the nations around them did things.
21. Pastor Gary said that oftentimes when we get ourselves into trouble, it's because we are imitating and practicing the ways of the world around us.
22. The Lord raised up Cyrus to be the king of Persia, and he announced this fact 150 years before Cyrus was born!
  - a. Three times in the book of Isaiah, Cyrus is mentioned as being the one who would bring the nation of Israel back from captivity.
    - i. [Isaiah 44:28](#) - "... who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem,' 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.' ' "
    - ii. [Isaiah 45:1](#) - "This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him..."
    - iii. [Isaiah 45:13](#) - "I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty."
23. We don't know for sure how the Lord "moved the heart of Cyrus," but Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote about Daniel being the one who read to Cyrus all of what the prophet Isaiah had to say about him and the

ways the Lord was going to use him.

- a. Daniel served in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and King Cyrus.

### God Has A Providential Plan For Our Lives And Our Church

24. **Jeremiah 1:5** - *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*
25. Other than the specifics, the things the Lord did in Cyrus's life were not unique, because the Lord also knew each one of us before we were born.
26. Pastor Gary said we need to understand that the Lord has a purpose and plan for each one of us, so we need to seek him, know him, find out what his will for us, and live in obedience to his will and his ways.
27. The visible hand of God is his miracles.
28. The invisible hand of God is his providence.
  - a. The providential hand of God is working behind the scenes and orchestrating things to accomplish his good purposes in our lives and our church.
29. The Bible teaches us that the Lord knows and cares about the details of our lives.
  - a. **Psalm 8:4** - *"[What] is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"*
  - b. **Daniel 2:21a** - *"He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them."*
  - c. **Matthew 10:29-31** - *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*
  - d. **Psalm 147:4** - *"He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name."*
    - i. Scientists estimate there are 10 trillion galaxies in the universe, and that there are 100 billion stars in every galaxy!

## Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Ezra 1:1-5](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. What are some examples of accounts in the Bible that you have incorrectly interpreted the principle? (See #13 above)
4. If you have been part of a church building program, what are some of the principles you learned?
5. Share examples of the ways you've seen the providential hand of the Lord at work in your life.
6. How have you seen the visible hand of the Lord (his miracles) at work in your life?
7. How has your faith and trust in the Lord increased because of the ways you've seen the visible and invisible hand of the Lord at work in your life?
8. Read and discuss [Psalm 8:4](#), [Daniel 2:21a](#), [Matthew 10:29-31](#), [Psalm 147:4](#), and [Jeremiah 1:5](#).
9. Close your time in prayer. Pray for the Lord's continued blessing upon the Making Him Known building project, and ask the Holy Spirit to help each person be thankful as they see the providential hand of the God at work in their life.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).