



The book of Ezra picks up the story from where 2 Chronicles left off, in 538 BC. Cyrus, king of Persian, had overthrown the Babylonians and now controlled the regions where the exiled Jews lived. He issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their devastated homeland and rebuild the Temple. The first wave of exiles to return is led by Zerubbabel (grandson of King Jehoiachin of Judah) and covers their struggle to rebuild during 538-515 BC. Ezra, a priest, brings the second wave of returned exiles in 458 BC.

The two central themes of the book of Ezra are to rebuild the Temple and regroup God's people. But Ezra also provides a somber reminder that this is not the wonderful, glorious restoration promised by the prophets. The ruling Persian empire provided a stark reminder that Israel does not have a Davidic king on the throne. Furthermore, after the second Temple reconstruction, the Lord does not fill the Temple with His Presence as He had done during Solomon's reign. The glorious restoration was to still occur in the future, setting the stage for the coming Messiah.

One of the major problems Ezra encountered was that many of the Jews had been intermarrying with foreign unbelievers. Recall that when Israel was first moving into the Promised Land, God told them they could not intermarry with the Canaanites and other inhabitants because such marriages would lead them into idolatry. The exilic judgment from which they returned was a result of their apostasy. And now the pattern was starting to emerge once again... This was not a racial issue, it was theological.

The book of Ezra is a good reminder that God does not always work through spectacular miracles. Sometimes carrying out God's will and furthering His kingdom on earth can be frustrating and challenging. Ezra also reminds us how important it is that we know and understand God's Word, especially when we undertake difficult tasks for His kingdom.