

Introducing Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10)

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[0 : 0 0] But chapter 7, verse 1 to 10. The son of Phinehas and the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron and the chief priest.

This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher while versed in the law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Ezra, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.

Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month.

For the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of God and to teaching his decrees and laws in Israel.

[1 : 3 0] Cool. Thank you, William. Good afternoon, English service.

Lovely to see you all. So my name's William, for those who are new, and lovely to see you all. And those of you joining the live stream, including my family. I just want to say as well, just a brief word, thank you for those of you who have been kind of like, you know, quietly caring for our family.

We've had a rough couple of weeks of health issues. And yeah, we're just really reminded again how amazing it is to be part of God's family. But this particular family has been really kind and generous and gracious to us.

So, yeah. Sorry, not meant to choke up, but I'm really thankful. Yeah, so thankful. Okay, Ezra 7. We're going to jump into this passage, but let me ask all of us a very easy question.

What would PCBC English look like if there was no teaching of God's word? It's an open question. All right. No wrong answers. Anyone brave enough?

[2 : 4 1] What would happen if there was no teaching of God's word? That's part of English service. Anyone want to shout out? Mariah? Mariah? Okay.

Someone relay the message to me. She's in the foyer. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Like a daycare. Yeah. It'd be PCBC daycare.

All right. Fair enough. Yep. Any other thoughts? No teaching of God's word. What would be the result? What would it look like? Chaos. Okay.

All right. Chaos for Fran. Anything else? Just a random room. Okay, Ken. Yep. Just a couple of, you know, mostly Asian-looking people just gathering together on a Sunday afternoon.

Yeah. Certainly be shorter, right? You get to dinner faster. Maybe you'd have more time to just have some DMCs, like, you know, more time for coffee.

[3 : 37] I don't know. Believe it or not, much of church history, actually, this was the case for Christians, even when they showed up to church. Here's a photo of what happens a lot in the Roman Catholic Church.

For a long time in Europe, the service, as it were, was conducted in not the local language, but in Latin, right? And so what that meant was that most people, regular punters, would come faithfully week after week.

They wouldn't understand what was going on. And then they would join in, and then they'd leave. Yes, there were beautiful buildings that you were part of. Paintings on the walls.

So you might pick up a few things. But most people could not understand what the priests had said, nor ever read it for themselves. Actually, even in our own country.

This is New Zealand, right? Aotearoa. The first Christian sermon in New Zealand was preached in, anyone know? 1814. Right there on Oiki Bay.

[4 : 40] By an Aussie chap named Samuel Marsden. Well, he preaches in English, and no one understands him, right? And it was actually only 1868, 54 years later, that hardworking translators and missionaries, like Te Wīdama, they were able to translate the whole Bible into te reo Māori, and then that's when people really started to understand.

And even before then as well. And so I want you to picture this. So far in the book of Ezra, which we've been journeying through as a church, we're seeing how God's people, at their best, they can do a lot, right?

They could rebuild God's temple. They could be really united in the service. They could all go on mission together, back to Jerusalem. And yet we need to remember a people of God, without the word of God, understanding it, are still in a messy situation.

Imagine if Ezra 1-6 is a story of rebuilding God's temple. What follows there from Ezra 7-10 is a story of rebuilding God's people, the people themselves.

And that's what we'll see. In Ezra 7, these first 10 verses, we're going to see a man of God's favor. He's helping to rebuild God's people. How? Through his devotion to search, to do, and to teach the scriptures.

[6 : 01] You'll remember two weeks ago, Pastor Barry led us through God's people celebrating good times, right? This was the celebration where we could see joy, right, on the people's faces.

We could join together with them and be happy for them. The temple was rebuilt. The God of heaven and earth could be honored again. And we were reminded, right, to take that kind of posture of celebration.

I loved, Dominic was at the desk at the back, just remind us to have joy, right? This is a joyful time when we come together. Whether it's Sunday services, Lord's Supper, baptisms, combined worship, anniversary, banquets, whatever the occasion, we come together as God's people.

We celebrate good times, just as God's people in King Darius' time did. But pay attention now in your Bibles, because now we go from 622, celebration, celebration, celebration, 7 verse 1.

After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes, right? Who's now the king? I get today is king's birthday, but we're focusing on these kings. Who's now the king in this passage?

[7 : 13] Artaxerxes, king of Persia. Not King Cyrus, all the way back in Ezra 1, verse 1, who first let the Jews go home. Not King Darius, who gave orders to rebuild the temple.

But now we're in Artaxerxes' reign. So actually, there's actually been a bit of a time jump, right, from the end of chapter 6 to this passage.

We've actually jumped forward. There's a flash forward now to 58 years later. So any of you 58 years old? Some of you? No? That's a long time. Feels like an age.

Generations. While the author has not mentioned it, a lot has happened to God's people in between this gap. Anyone know what happened? Maybe sum it up with one word.

It starts with an E. Esther. That's right. During the reign of Artaxerxes' father, Xerxes, the Bible tells a story, right? In the book of Esther.

[8 : 15] Esther was married to Xerxes. She had to risk her life to save all of God's people from being completely wiped out by an ancient enemy. And so really, when we get to 7 verse 1, we think, oh, more Ezra.

We should actually be like, wow, more Ezra. Because the story could have just stopped dead in its tracks. It could have been, that's it. No more of God's people.

It is a miracle that Ezra himself gets a story. It's a miracle that God's people by this time have not been completely genocided. If it were not for the hidden hand of a sovereign God, which we pray about, which inspires us today.

This sovereign God was inspiring the faith and obedience of a people back there and then. Preserving them. Keeping them alive. Without Esther's bravery and Mordecai's faith, people of God evolved, there would be no Ezra, Sariah, unpronounceable names, and no Ezra.

That's for certain. And so what does this part of God's word want us, PCBC, to know? To hold on to about this man of God?

[9 : 28] Let me tell you two things about Ezra from this passage. One is that we first see from this passage Ezra's extraordinary calling. Verses 1 to 7. Not sure any of you work in a workplace where there might be some te reo used.

Maybe some tikaka Maori. Okay? Maori customs. If you're ever invited to a session like this or a gathering like this, you may hear someone or you yourself maybe ask to give what's called a pepeha.

Okay? A pepeha. And a short intro to who you are. For example, you know, you can go to pepeha.com and you can generate one for yourself. And so I would probably say something like, Kia ora tatou.

Greetings, everyone. Ko maungare te maunga. Wellington's my mountain. Ko tamaki te awa. The river, tamaki. That's my river. No tamaki makauru ahau.

I'm from Auckland. And ko wedemu toku ingoa. My name is William. This is a collective way of introducing yourself, isn't it? You don't just give your first name or your, I don't know, Reddit handle.

[10 : 40] You give your full name and then some, your lineage, all the way back. Who are your fathers? Where are you from? What river are you? What mountain are you? And this is kind of what we see here.

A collective introduction, right? Here in verse 1. But I mean, look how long his pepeha goes. Right? Hello, I'm Ezra, Zariah's son. Azariah's grandson. Hilkiah's great-grandson.

And on and on and on. It's lengthy, right? Look again at the text. And we see it goes all the way back to Aaron, the chief priest himself.

Big names. In fact, no one else in this book gets such a long intro. Not even King Cyrus. Not even Shezbazar, the first Jewish person mentioned in chapter 1.

The author, therefore, is telling us, hey, pay attention to this guy. He has authority all the way back to Moses' bro. Not only are we told to pay attention to Ezra's family tree, though.

[11 : 47] His whakapapa, as it were. We are told in verse 6 he has the favor of the king of the time. Do you see? We see that, don't we?

Look at that. The hand of the Lord his God was on him. Verse 6. Isn't that amazing? Someone well respected by his own family and yet favored by outsiders, the authorities.

How many of us could say that's who we are? But then verse 6 tells us explicitly that the hand of the God was on him.

That's how. That's how. This is no ordinary man. I mean, we saw how the Lord moved already, right? He moved on King Cyrus' heart to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem.

We saw how the Lord is at work. He stirs the people's hearts to leave their life in Babylon, to rebuild God's temple, to restore true worship.

[12 : 41] And now here, chapter 7, verse 6, we see again God's sovereign hand at work. Ezra is loving. This book loves to remind us who is ultimately in charge.

Of all your trials. Of all their trials. And all their situations. We're going to keep seeing this. In the next few weeks of Ezra's story.

There's going to be a king's decree, right? Just like the start of Ezra. And then there's going to be a people who obey. Yes, there are long lists of names. And then, actually, there are problems when they return.

Unfinished business, as it were. Why does our God love to repeat himself and leave patterns through the Bible? It's so we don't forget that he is the God at work.

He is a God who does not hide himself. He leaves footprints for us. See him at work. He is always the sovereign Lord through history.

[13 : 41] He is always the king of kings through history. Even in your history. He is the same God who calls extraordinary people like Ezra. Who none of us are like.

And yet he calls ordinary people like you. And you and you. To follow him. The same God. And look. Our gifts may differ to Ezra's.

Some of you might not be, you know, a bookworm like he is. Rather than being well-versed in the law of Moses. Verse 6. Maybe you are well-versed in running live streams. Or making coffees.

Or playing music. Maybe your gift is listening well to someone else. In times of struggle. Your gift could be just being able to make someone laugh.

Please know whatever your calling is. There is the same God behind it. The God of Israel and Ezra's story is the same God who is ruling over your story. And if you know that it's this sovereign God who is guiding you.

[14 : 46] Who has his hand on you. Then whatever he has gifted you for. Whatever field. You can. We can do for his glory.

Our purpose can change and shift. That's what we can learn from. Even as we consider this one guy's extraordinary calling. But we also see, right, not just an extraordinary calling.

Verse 8 to 10. We also see that Ezra has been sent on an extraordinary mission. Have a look. Verse 8, right. We see from there. And verse 9.

Ezra, he makes a long trek home. And again, he returns because, not because he's so smart. Not because he's so gifted. Not because he's so, I don't know, savvy at traveling.

It's because of God's gracious hand. Verse 9. But then what is his purpose when he returns? What does the text tell us? Look at verse 10. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord.

[15 : 46] And to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Actually, verse 10 in the original language literally starts with saying, Ezra set his heart to seek out God's law.

To set his heart. Or in fact, the word in Hebrew is darash. Like looking for, I don't know, a bite or a sting on your skin. Searching it out.

Scratching it over here. Trying to find it. This is the kind of attitude Ezra has to the law of the Lord. To learn what it says and means. To learn the culture.

Learn the context. Learn what to do with it in 2024 or whatever time he was living in. But not just to comb through the text, but to observe it, right?

Look at verse 10. Observance. More literally, to do it. To do what it says. And only then is he to teach it. You see those three phases.

[16 : 48] That is Ezra's extraordinary mission. But you might say, why all this effort? Isn't some joyful music good enough?

Isn't just some amazing food and chats sufficient to bring us together? To empower us for God's mission? Think about their situation.

I mean, certainly they would have had some idea of how to worship God. Otherwise, they wouldn't have wanted to build a temple in the first place. They wouldn't have thought to put an altar for sacrifices like Moses had commanded.

And yet remember how long it took them. How much they struggled. Do you remember? It took Haggai and Zechariah, these prophets, to have to preach to them.

To appeal to them. Hey, leave those paneled houses. Get back to worshiping God. And do you remember how much they were discouraged by opposition?

[17 : 46] There was a lot of it. Generation after generation. And perhaps even after resuming temple worship. Perhaps after, in that gap, those 56 years.

Surely it would have been easy to kind of go, we've got a temple now. We've got a building. It's really nice. Why are we doing this again? Can you see? Can you sense that?

60 years, that's certainly long enough to forget your mission. Your vision. And this is because while the temple is rebuilt, the word is missing.

While the temple is rebuilt, the word is still missing. You see, so God has called Ezra on this mission. It's extraordinary because even though the temple's been rebuilt, there's a new generation of people, 60 years on, that have to be rebuilt themselves.

From the heart. And what will truly rebuild them? God doesn't send Ezra, the builder, to extend the temple. God doesn't send Ezra, the entertainer, to throw fire into the air and draw a crowd.

[18 : 55] He sends Ezra, the teacher, to teach them the precious word of God. To rebuild them spiritually, right? Not with gold or silver or costly stones, something far more precious, God's word.

Shared through someone devoted to God's word. And by God's grace, here is a man devoted on an extraordinary mission. He's going to study. He's going to observe. He's going to teach God's word to the people.

And all three aspects are critical for us today as well, when it comes to rebuilding God's people spiritually. But please don't take away from this that, oh, that's good.

We'll just need Ezra at PCBC and we can just go on and make some more coffee. I love coffee, by the way. Note that this will not be a one-man job.

Because we already see in this text, right, did Ezra come by himself? Verse 7, oh, no, he didn't. A whole team came with him.

[20 : 00] This is a team going back on this mission, supporting each other. Actually, in Nehemiah chapter 8, we're going to see this in a couple of months when we get there.

In Nehemiah chapter 8, verse 7 to 8, it specifically says and describes a scene where Ezra himself is reading God's law. To the whole congregation, the whole nation of Israel. And then others are teaching and translating God's word so it makes sense to the people around them, section by section, book by book.

Ezra's devotion should be shared, not just by Ezra himself, but by all of God's people, including us. I want to encourage you to be careful.

If ever someone, even a pastor, famous YouTuber, whatever, claims to have God's authority to teach and yet does not live out what they teach.

This verse 10 will not allow us to listen to them. Or what about someone who just learns a lot, right, you know, gets lots of degrees and yet never passes on what they've learned.

[21 : 05] That's no good either. That cannot come from God's gracious hand. We want to be careful because there are people like that out there, plenty. At 1 Timothy, Paul writes to young Timothy and warns them, they want to be teachers of the law, these people.

But they don't know what they're talking about, what they confidently affirm. So be careful, church. I don't take for granted that you'll be here forever.

You may, the law may send you to another church or another city, another place, right? You could join the Exodus to Australia, for example. Wherever you're sent, be careful. Find a place where God's word is studied, observed, and taught.

Because if you and I want to be built up spiritually, we must place ourselves under the gracious hand of this kind of understanding of God's word.

Not fancy stories. Not just fireworks. Not just experiences. Certainly, I hope that, and my prayer is that here at PCBC, you will see echoes of this kind of devotion from those who preach God's word to you.

[22 : 22] They don't just tell you what to believe, but they live it out. They observe it themselves. I mean, let's be frank. I'm certain you will not remember every word of Pastor Albert's sermons or my sermons.

But my prayer is that you would pay attention as we devote our time to studying, doing, and teaching these words out.

These God-breathed words from the Holy Spirit. But maybe some of you are here, you're wondering, well, that's fine for you, but how do I do this? How do I seek, do, and teach God's word?

You might feel like, I don't know the Bible well. I haven't been to college. I'm not from a special family. I haven't been anointed with a job of teaching the Bible here at church.

Haven't been given a calling to this kind of ministry. I feel like I'm just an ordinary person. And this is where we need to move beyond Ezra. Chapter 7.

[23 : 25] In our thinking. Because, let's face it, you and I are not Ezra. Ezra has this extraordinary calling. Ezra has this extraordinary mission, yes. But we're not Ezra. So I cannot end this sermon by saying, just be like Ezra.

But I can tell you that there's someone with an even more special calling and mission. That we are called to worship and follow, right? This teacher who has given us our own special mission.

The King of Kings. I think in this description of Ezra's devotion, we get like a shadow and a glimpse of Ezra's own promised king. His own teacher.

His own Messiah. Messiah. I'd imagine that as he studied and observed God's law, he's reading the Psalms. He's reading all these places that point him to Yeshua. Messiah.

The promised one. The great high priest we have just been praying to. Helping us to speak God's word. because we want to also consider the call and mission of the extraordinary Christ, King of Kings.

[24 : 32] Think about it, right? Think of his story, how similar it is to Ezra. He was descended from a very, very great family tree, was he not? He too was a son of exiles from Babylon like Zerubbabel.

Think of his baptism at that day. God the Father, he pronounces his favor on him. This is my son whom I love. With him I'm well pleased. Not even Ezra got that kind of royal treatment.

And since a boy, we know Jesus understood perfectly God's law, right? He was able to sit at the temple gates and teach and school adults. And we know he delighted to do the Father's will.

The Bible tells us so. We know he diligently taught God's word to others, even amidst opposition. And we know he blesses those who share his devotion to God's word.

You see, Ezra taught God's law, but Jesus teaches and fulfills it himself. Ezra lifted up God's word before his people, yes, but Jesus, he was the word of God.

[25 : 40] And he's lifted up before the people on the cross of Calvary. And after he makes this perfect sacrifice for our sins, this priest, not Ezra, this priest alone, Jesus, he rose again.

This perfect, resurrected teacher, advocate, king. And for every believer Jesus calls into his kingdom, he seals them with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And he puts God's law into people's hearts. So that where Ezra could not, we can live it out from our hearts.

And everyone who trusts in Jesus, and that's my prayer for each of you, you'll be called, you'll be able to seek, do, and teach God's word. I guarantee it.

The Holy Spirit does. What a privilege. And this risen Lord Jesus, indwelling in our hearts, this resurrected perfect teacher, did he not give us an extraordinary mission as well?

[26 : 45] Yeah? How does it go, right? Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in God's triune name. And then, remember, teaching them to obey all I've commanded.

You see, PCBC, to follow Christ will mean to learn to be devoted to teaching about Jesus the same way as others have.

After all, every brother or sister baptized into PCBC is someone you and I are called to journey alongside. To keep making as a disciple, forming them by the power of the Holy Spirit, showing them the wonders of his word.

I don't know, do we treasure this privilege? Or for some of us, are we kind of like, oh yeah, Bible's good, but let's really speak of something else. May that never be.

Have a think about it. Under God's hand and his grace, what are some ways you can level up in this mission?

[27 : 52] Maybe you are up here, if you were an RPG character, your levels would be high, right? On all these different skills, music making, coffee making, whatever. But what about the Bible? Where are you at?

Where are you at? I've visited enough churches. Blessing to be at Roscoe Baptist. I'm Pastor Dave Giesber's church this morning.

But I visited lots of other churches to know that it's not the norm that people will treasure God's word. You may have seen this too. You may have been at a church where maybe this wonderful book was not even opened once.

There's a famine in this land. And the famine is causing people to starve from a lack of God's word. There is people out there hungering for more than just stories and songs.

And so let us remember how amazing it is. What a privilege it is to open up God's word. Here in our groups. With each other through the week. To do it freely.

[29 : 01] Without shame or persecution. Let us apply our hearts and minds therefore to search the scriptures. Like the early Christians did. Let us obey the scriptures through our lives.

Like thousands of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. In history past. Some of them who died defending this privilege. And let us be a people who teach. Who share God's word.

As we do and live it out before our friends and family. It doesn't matter how big or small our church building is really. Until Jesus returns we will always need God's word to keep rebuilding us.

So that's my prayer. I don't know how many sermons in we are since PCBC English started. But we will always need until Christ returns God's word to rebuild us.

It's where a true church can be found. God's word. God's people. So let's pray that by his grace the Holy Spirit keeps working through this. Through us. To be a people of God in Christ.

[30 : 02] Under his word. Let me pray. For us. Heavenly Father. Eternal God.

We thank you. For the word of Christ. For the word about Christ. Jesus. Passed down through generations. Even to us today.

We thank you for those of us. Who have had the privilege of hearing about Jesus. From a young age. Lord would you help us to. Be faithful to pass on.

The words of Christ. Beyond ourselves. To the generations beyond us. Who have yet to. Hear. And experience. Yeshua.

Messiah. The son of God. Thank you for this privilege. Let us continue to respond now. As. A grateful people. Under your word.

[31 : 01] In Jesus name we pray. Amen.