

Forefront Community Centre,
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A caring community with every member equipped to demonstrate Christ, working with others to advance God's Kingdom in Chard and the world

Seek God – in prayer, worship, study of the Scripture and fellowship, we value the pursuit of God in Jesus Christ;

Love Generously – in time, talent and treasure, to stimulate one another to good works and a lifestyle of generosity;

Expect transformation – to see God's Holy Spirit move in individual lives, in the church and across our community

You may have been coming to Forefront for years. Or maybe you just popped in for one Sunday. Either way, if you feel moved to act on the things mentioned in the talks, we would be pleased to pray with you.

Ask someone in the service to point you in the right direction, or call in during the week at Forefront Community Centre (next to Chard Post Office sorting centre).

“With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: ‘He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.” Ezra 3:11

As if that wasn't enough ...

Ezra is reputed in Jewish tradition to have established the “Assembly” of scholars which became the Sanhedrin (see Matthew 26:57-67).

He is credited with ensuring that the Feast of Purim continued to be celebrated after the Jews returned to Jerusalem (see Est 9:20-28)

An ancient Jewish tradition suggests Ezra wrote the book of Malachi (which simply means “My Messenger”). That’s impossible to prove, but Malachi is contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah and deals with the same issues. Compare Mal 2:11 with Ezra 9.

Ezra is reputed to be buried either in Iraq or Syria.

In addition to writing (or editing) the four books that obviously belong together, many theologians believe Ezra may have been responsible for organising and editing much of the rest of the Old Testament, too.

The edict of Artaxerxes was issued in his seventh year, 457BC. Going on in the world at the same time:

- Athens goes to war with Corinth and Sparta after making peace with Persia;
- This is the start of the Golden Age of Greek philosophy. The playwright Euripides is writing, Socrates is 12 years old, while Aeschylus is about to die;
- The Chinese ‘states’ are about to enter their 230 year “warring” period;

- Gautama Buddha will not be born for another six years;
- Rome, just a generation into its Republican history, is about to be taken over by a commission of 10 dictators.



We will be looking at the book of Ezra in the Sunday services from 26 June to 24 July. Please keep these notes handy during this month, and try to read the relevant chapters before the speakers give their remarks.

Ezra—Leading in turbulent times

A remnant will return. (Isaiah 10:21)

The prophets were clear with Israel and Judah—God would take them into exile on account of their unfaithfulness, lack of justice, and complacency. After a 70 year absence, a remnant would return, rebuild Jerusalem, and restart life as a chastened and faithful people. That return was going to need exemplary leaders.

We get familiar with Nehemiah because his book is popular with Christian leadership trainers, but Ezra was vital in the building of the restored Jerusalem. It was Ezra who re-kindled religious life, taught the Law, led the ceremonies and recorded much of what happened. He describes God's hand in the historical, political processes

which led to “all Israel” (in the form of a remnant) returning home. And he describes what it takes to build a people belonging to God, a nation, a Temple and a priesthood. 1Pet 2:19 suggests we can learn from him.



In Christ Jesus the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph 2:21)

Ezra is a time capsule. It includes 9 authoritative lists and 7 official documents and letters typical of Persian literature. Most is third person history, but by the end, Ezra is adding his own first-person accounts and comments. Whether or not Ezra was the final editor who compiled the account, his voice is the one that comes through.

Ezra is part of a set. Whoever wrote 1 & 2 Chronicles likely also wrote Ezra and Nehemiah. (Consider the last verses of 2 Chronicles and the first of Ezra.) For the first 200 years of Christianity, Ezra and Nehemiah were considered one book. Even after they started to be separated, Nehemiah was called “Second Ezra” for a thousand years.

Five weeks on Ezra	
God's hand in history	26 June
True worship	3 July
Working together	10 July
Purposeful people	17 July
Putting things right	24 July

Ezra—God’s hand in history

The restoration of Israel after their painful exile was God’s work. It continued the long history of his dealings with his people. It was vital to set the stage for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Can we see our place in history, and in Chard, as part of God’s vital and continuing work before the Return of Jesus?



Note Ezra 1:1 “...in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia ...”

Jeremiah had delivered a prophecy announcing that Judah would be desolate and subject to Babylon for 70 years. But then Babylon would be judged and God’s people would return home (Jer 25:11,12).

Jeremiah wrote to the exiles to remind them of this:

Speaker: Stuart Alcock
Read: Ezra 1:1-11

This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’ Jer 29:10-14

Ezra—True worship

The people were committed to building the altar and temple, and to worshiping God in their restored home.

They were exuberant and expressive. On the day the foundation of the Temple was laid again, there was

shouting in triumph and weeping as people compared the size of the new Temple to the old (3:12, and see Hagg 2:1-9).

Despite opposition, the people continued to build a place and culture of worship.

Speaker: Patrick Bryan
Read: Ezra 3:3-12, 4:4,5

In our own day, we are to be the people of praise and the Temple (1Cor 3:16); so how can we learn from Ezra and expressively praise God in a culture which undermines faith and ridicules enthusiasm?

To help you understand the context, please read the passages in advance each week

Pray before each talk that God will speak directly to your heart from these timeless words

Ezra—A people who work together

After more opposition and some divine intervention, the people of God get freedom and help to pursue their great project.

Everyone has a role, the distinctions between groups are broken down, and they celebrate victories together.

And, central to it all, is the Passover feast celebrating Moses leading the people out of Egypt.

What lessons can we draw from them about how we should work together? Is there a role and a gift for everyone? What leadership lessons are there? How do we motivate everyone to play the part God has for them?

For us, the Passover of Jesus is central to it all, leading us out of sin and into our Promised Land.

We celebrate that in the Breaking of Bread.

Speaker: Derek Burnside
Read: Ezra 6:3-22



Ezra—purposeful people

Speaker: Keith Barnard
Read: Ezra 8:24-34

Ezra and the rest of the Jewish people called to return are sent by the King, Artaxerxes (7:14,15). Those who return make an individual choice to do so (7:7,13).

Yet Ezra makes it clear that everything is done according to God’s will (7:27,28). He performs various acts to set the people and those with special responsibilities apart (8:21,28).

So who is responsible for the return of the people—they themselves? The King? Ezra and the other leaders? Or God? How do all these components work together?

How are we to live as a people destined for a new Promised Land?

To what degree are we contributors to our consecration? How are we to use worldly wealth and goods?

What role do other people and circumstances contribute? What is our “Artaxerxes”?

How do leaders in our lives contribute? And how do we see God’s hand in all of this?

The people who came back had an amazing, privileged place in history – and great responsibility. What does that mean to us?



The author and his purpose

The author understands priestly tradition and language. Reference to temple practices and sacrifices are detailed. Given the number of sources credited in Chronicles, and the use of letters and documents in Ezra and Nehemiah, it’s reasonable to refer to the author as an editor or compiler. Traditionally,

the editor was believed to be Ezra himself; but it’s quite possible that it was someone writing later, who included Ezra’s first-

person writings in the rest of his collated history, some time after 430 BC, when the exiled community had returned.

The collected works of Ezra (1,2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah) depict a seamless history of God’s people up to the return of the exiles, showing the remnant their important place in his story. The burning question was, “Does this Jewish past mean anything any longer, and are we still part of it?”

Ezra—putting things right

Speaker: David Burfield
Read: Ezra 9:5-15

The people had broken one of God’s commands and Ezra had to step in on their behalf to put things right.

Although restored and humbled, the work God had done among this restored people was only partial. They still awaited the new covenant promised in Jer 31:31-34 and later fulfilled by Jesus, and the renewal described in Joel

2:28-32 and Ezek 36:16-37:14 which was brought to fruition through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

How is Ezra’s prayer a model for us when Christians sin? How do the people respond? What is there for us to learn from this? How should we seek forgiveness, and forgive others?

Do we have any extra resources to draw on than were available to Ezra’s people?

