



# Community Group Discussion Guide

December 14, 2025

**Ezra 1:11; 3:1-7 | God's People Restored**

## MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: Describe something you thought was completely ruined—maybe a favorite shirt that got stained, a plant you were sure was dead, or a sports match you were convinced your team was going to lose—only to see it restored. How did it feel to see that thing come back to life again?*

## DISCUSS

Despite God's prophets calling His people to repent, they rejected His warnings until they were exiled to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:16-21). Yet God still had compassion on His people. He showed them favor in the pagan land and promised a plan for restoration, to bring them back in relationship with Him and back to a place of worship. After seventy years, a new power arrived on the scene to crush Babylon for their excesses, just as God had promised. King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple.

⇒ *While kings and kingdoms rise and fall, how can we be certain that God is ruling and reigning over all?*

The book of Ezra recounts God's faithfulness in restoring His people to their homeland. This restoration was not just about rebuilding the temple; it was about renewing their worship and devotion to God. In Ezra 1:1-11, God stirred the hearts of His people to return and provided the resources needed for their restoration. In Ezra 3:1-7, the returning exiles immediately restored the altar and resumed sacrificial worship, even before rebuilding the temple.

### **1. Ezra 1:1-11: God wants to restore us back into relationship with Him.**

**Ezra 1:1-4:** <sup>1</sup> *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: <sup>2</sup> "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."*

In Ezra's recording of the exiles' return to the land, God initiated a restorative work in their hearts that led them to action. God could have cut off His people in exile and never again shown them mercy or grace. But He is kind and gracious to undeserving sinners. God was true to His promise that His people would return to the land after seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10). Now that the Jews had received the decree of the Persian king to return home, it was time for them to act. Another exodus story had begun.

The author of Ezra clearly recognized God's providential hand in the Jews' return to Jerusalem. It often can be difficult to see such things in the moment, but with hindsight and the inspiration of the

Holy Spirit, the writer saw that God’s providential hand was at work in the Jews’ restoration.

- ⇒ *How have you seen God’s providential and restorative hand at work through the storyline of the Old Testament?*
- ⇒ *As you look back, where can you see God’s providential hand at work over your own life?*

God had given Cyrus, king of Persia, “all the kingdoms of the earth” and appointed him to rebuild the Lord’s temple. God even “stirred up the spirit” of Cyrus to issue a decree that would allow God’s people to return to Judah as part of His temple restoration plan. This massive turn of events must have been beyond their wildest dreams—unless they remembered God’s promises given long ago.

- ⇒ *Can you recall some of the promises God made to His people?*
- ⇒ *How can recalling the promises of God give you hope?*

**Ezra 1:5:** *Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.*

God also roused the hearts of the family heads of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. The word used for “stirred up” in verse 5 is the same word that was used in Ezra 1:1 referring to rousing the heart of King Cyrus. Therefore, the stirring that happened in the hearts of Cyrus and the leaders of the tribes was no coincidence. It was the prompting of the true and living God. The time of exile was over; thus, the people needed to act and follow God’s leading to restore their homeland and, more importantly, to restore their relationship with Him. Just as God stirred up Cyrus to make the decree, here God stirred up the people to respond in action.

- ⇒ *Can you describe a time when God “stirred up” your spirit to action?*

God was stirring up in the people the desire to “rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.” When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC, they destroyed the temple. The temple was meant to be the physical and symbolic place where God’s presence dwelled with His people. The temple’s destruction reflected that God no longer was with the people due to their unfaithfulness to Him. However, it was time for that relationship to be rebuilt and restored. God had proven true to His Word.

- ⇒ *After you had period of rebellion or disobedience, did it bring you peace to know that God worked to rebuild and restore His relationship with you?*

**Ezra 1:6-11:** *<sup>6</sup> And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. <sup>7</sup> Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. <sup>8</sup> Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. <sup>9</sup> And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, <sup>10</sup> 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; <sup>11</sup> all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.*

In Egypt, when the people were set free from slavery, they plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-26). God provided lavishly for the people. Here at the "new exodus," the people once again were given favor to leave the land while receiving vessels of silver, gold, goods, livestock, and valuables, in addition to all that was given as a freewill offering. To the Jewish exiles, these gifts would have reminded them of God's faithfulness to bring them to the promised land centuries prior. They would be sent back to their homeland having plundered the Persians, and they would be carrying back the vessels that were used in service at the temple.

⇒ *Compare and contrast the exodus from Egypt to the exodus from Babylon.*

Ezra 1:7 states, "Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods." This verse reveals a contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Whenever Nebuchadnezzar would conquer a nation, he would confiscate their idols and place them in the temple of his gods, thus demonstrating that his gods were greater than the gods of any nation he conquered.

Nebuchadnezzar thought he had defeated the Lord, when in fact it was the Lord who had allowed the king to punish the people for their unfaithfulness to Him. In Jeremiah 27:6, God described Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant." Just as God used Nebuchadnezzar to take these vessels from the temple, God used Cyrus to return these temple vessels to their proper place. The fact that these vessels had been kept and returned safely fulfilled God's promise in Jeremiah 27:21-22. Everything that God promised came to fruition. Even though the people experienced God's severe discipline, they could trust Him and serve Him because He is always true to His word.

⇒ *How did God once again reveal that He was sovereignly ruling over and orchestrating the nations for His purposes?*

⇒ *In your spiritual journey, how has God proven to you that He is always true to His Word?*

## **2. Ezra 3:1-7: Sacrifice is needed as part of our restoration with God.**

**Ezra 3:1-2:** <sup>1</sup> *When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem.* <sup>2</sup> *Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.*

A remnant of the exiled people returned home to Judah. Ezra 2 contains a detailed list of those who made the journey. Upon their return, the exiles had work to do regarding proper worship of God in Jerusalem. No longer chained by the oppression of regimes, they were free to return to their homeland, resettle into ancestral rhythms, and rebuild their central place of worship.

Ezra 3 records a major milestone in the history of their big move: rebuilding the temple and restoring their sacrifices to the Lord. The people faced a monumental task, and of chief importance was their worship. They needed God to guide and protect them as they returned to the land and rebuilt their community. They needed to restore temple sacrifices to have their relationship with the Lord restored.

⇒ *Why was proper worship of God their greatest priority? What personal application can you make about worship?*

"The seventh month," Tishri in the Jewish calendar, was a significant one. Tishri, corresponding to our September/October, included celebrations for their new year, the Day of Atonement, and the Festival of Shelters (Leviticus 23:23-36). King Solomon dedicated the original temple at the Festival of Shelters (1 Kings 8:2,65).

⇒ *Why is it vital to see that the timing in Ezra 3 is not coincidental? What does this timing reveal about God?*

**Ezra 3:3:** *They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.*

It is not an insignificant detail that they started with building the altar. Like Abraham and Joshua, who built altars when they entered Canaan (Genesis 12:6-7; Joshua 8:30-35), the people raised an altar to the Lord as it is written in the law of Moses. God initiates restoration, but His people must respond in faith and obedience. In Ezra, this meant rebuilding the altar and offering sacrifices even before laying the temple's foundation. The temple had been the dwelling place of God, where His presence rested among His people. But even in their unhoused worship, the Lord was reconciling them with Himself.

⇒ *Why might the Jews who returned to Jerusalem have been so focused on setting up the altar, offering sacrifices, and celebrating prescribed festivals?*

An important theme throughout Ezra was following and obeying the law of God. Ezra, as a priest and scribe, devoted himself to study and obey the law and to teach it to the returned exiles (verse 10). This new altar would be constructed over the place where the original altar of the temple had been. This act connected the people to their past and was one of sacrificial trust. As the smell of offerings consumed by fire would fill the air, it was a reminder of how sacrifices were needed to atone for their sins. God's people could not resume worshiping the Lord as He had instituted long ago without an altar. The worship of God demanded sacrifice, and sacrifice required an altar.

- ⇒ *What do these passages reveal about God's desire for restoration?*
- ⇒ *What is an area in your life in which you need restoration?*
- ⇒ *How can you encourage someone who is searching for restoration?*

The gathering of the people in Jerusalem itself was also an act of sacrificial trust in God. In verse 3, they set up the altar and began morning and evening offerings even though they feared the surrounding peoples and lived under constant threat. The land of Israel had been resettled with foreigners when the Israelites were taken into exile (2 Kings 17:24-41). The nations around them proved to be hostile to their rebuilding efforts. God's people would have to trust Him to protect their homes and possessions. The people could not rely on prideful self-sufficiency; they would need to trust and obey God. The protection they needed could only come from Him.

**Ezra 3:4-7:** *<sup>4</sup> And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, <sup>5</sup> and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. <sup>7</sup> So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the*

*Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.*

These verses describe the various sacrifices and offerings that the people reinstated. Not only did they offer sacrifices, but they also renewed the special festivals that reminded them of God's faithfulness in the past, such as the Festival of Shelters. This festival was one of the three great feasts that Israel celebrated in the Old Testament. Leviticus 23:26-43 describes in detail how they were to build booths and live in them for seven days "so that your generations may know that I made the Israelites live in shelters when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." After the exile, this festival would be another reminder that just as God led them out of Egypt, so too had God led them out of exile.

These sacrifices were needed to bring this sinful people back to God. Their sin had created a barrier between them and God. Only through a substitutionary offering could their relationship be restored. The people also began to give of their possessions so that the preparations for the temple could begin. The sacrifices and offerings given here at the new altar and eventually the new temple were never going to save the people from their sins permanently, but rather, they were meant to point to another perfect, substitutionary sacrifice that would once and for all remove sin and bring God's people into a right relationship with Him (Hebrews 10).

⇒ *Discuss this statement: While the people in Ezra were led out of bondage in exile, the Lord Jesus Christ leads us believers out of bondage to sin and death so that we might dwell with the Lord forever in the new heavens and new earth.*

## **TRANSFORM**

From start to finish, the book of Ezra is a testimony of God's faithful work of restoration. God roused hearts, provided goods, returned articles, and more. God is always working, even when it seems all hope is lost. This is a theme throughout the Old Testament. Just as the Lord worked to deliver His people in His perfect timing, we can trust that He works in our lives in the same providential way. Just as He raised up the right ruler to send His people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, we can wait on His faithful care to lead the movements of our lives. We may not know or understand His timing. We may not like or enjoy His means. But God's work is sure and steadfast because it flows from His good and faithful character.

1. HEAD: When things are hard, it's easy to start thinking God has forgotten us, or worse, abandoned us. This is especially true when we know we've messed up. But if we are in Christ by faith, then we are forever tethered to God's grace. We can know and trust and hold onto the fact that God is always working to reconcile us to Himself and make all things good and right and just as they should be, regardless of what we can see and reason on our own.

⇒ *What keeps you from trusting that God is for you and not against you?*

2. HEART: God's people seemed to be laser-focused on getting the "right" job done. Instead of giving in to overplanning and performative busy work, they committed themselves to radical obedience and a spiritual strategy over all else. This approach revealed their heart to draw near to God through the clear way He had laid out in His Word. God isn't ambiguous in what He desires. His people knew the requirements and followed them completely.

⇒ *What do you need to focus on in order to worship God with all your heart?*

3. HANDS: Though we are no longer required to perform ritual sacrifices to appease God's wrath for sin, we are called to an active life of sacrifice. The Bible is filled with clear and universal callings on our lives, geared toward our holiness as image-bearers of God. By faith, we can live a life of continual sacrifice, fueled by the desire to worship the God who has rescued us from bondage to sin.

⇒ *What can you do this week to worship God as a living sacrifice?*

---

The Gospel Project®: Adult Commentary  
© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

The Gospel Project® for Adults  
Leader Guide, Unit 17, Session 1  
© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources

Permission granted to reproduce and distribute within the license agreement with purchaser.