

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
EZRA

8 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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DAY 1**READ:** Jeremiah 25:1-14 & 2 Chronicles 36:1-21

There is a back story important to understanding the state of Israel at the start of the book of Ezra.

Under the leadership of Moses, the people of Israel had entered into a covenant relationship with Yahweh. They agreed wholeheartedly to the terms and conditions, understanding the blessings that would come with obedience and the curses that would inevitably follow disobedience (see Ex 24). This covenant was renewed shortly before Moses' death (see Dt 29) and yet again under the leadership of Moses' successor, Joshua (see Jo 24). But over time, the people rebelled against the Lord, engaging in idolatry and wickedness, and thus they experienced the curses outlined in the covenant.

Yet, true to His nature, God showed wave after wave of mercy, compassion and unfailing love, offering salvation to His people whenever they cried out to Him. This cycle of sin, supplication and salvation is the blaring theme in the book of Judges. The time of the kings brought a shift to Jewish life. In his book, "Unlocking the Bible", David Pawson says, *"The kings of Israel... had absolute power... The king ruled by decree and not by debate. His influence over his subjects was total, and therefore his character and conduct shaped society during his rule. He stood as a representative of the nation before God, but also as a representative of God before the nation."* The nation of Israel split early on (Israel to the North and Judah to the South). Israel was led astray by a string of wicked kings until the nation was conquered and dispersed by Assyria. Only Judah was left, and she, too, was led astray by many wicked and half-hearted rulers. Under the rule of Josiah, the book of the Law was found and the covenant renewed one last time (see 2 Kings 23), but even his reforms didn't last and after his death, the nation was plunged back into sin and idolatry. The end of 2 Chronicles describes the pitiful downfall of Judah as the nation is ultimately defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and deported in three waves. The city of Jerusalem, with its impenetrable walls and glorious temple is ravaged and burned, the people carried off into captivity.

All this time, the Lord had sent prophets to warn the people, reminding them of the covenant their ancestors agreed to and the blessings and curses that accompanied it, but no one would listen. Jeremiah had prophesied the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon and the subsequent 70 years of captivity, but his prophesy fell on deaf ears. We are left with an acute sense of the marring effects of sin against a holy God as the people are carried off in chains.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Our nation has never entered into a national covenant with Yahweh, but Canada was founded upon Christian principles, upon the beliefs that God exists as sovereign Lord and that the Bible is true and good. How have you seen Canada stray from these early principles? We know from Scripture that God judges the wickedness of the nations (even those who have not entered into a covenant with Him). The moral state of our nation should not cause us to fear or to complain; it should cause us to pray. Take time today to uplift our country in prayer. If you are fearful or judgemental, bring these feelings before our God and ask Him to give you His heart for Canada. Thank God for the loving-kindness He showed to Israel and has shown to us.
2. The prophets stood up for truth, often knowing in advance that no one would listen to them. Will you be spokesperson for truth? Through the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit said that as we mature, we will become firm in our faith. We will not be tossed

around by the winds of false teaching; rather we will speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Our conversation is to be gracious, loving and kind, but these things do not mean that we must sacrifice truth! Rather, truth is glorified in this context. But Scripture is clear: we must be people of truth and boldness, knowing that not everyone will agree, and in fact that we will be hated because of Christ, who is the Truth. Take some time to think about your call to truth as a Christian. Ask God to show you where and how He wants you to specifically stand for truth.

DAY 2

 **READ:** 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, and Ezra 1 & 2

The book of Ezra is an incredible historical document, highlighting the sovereignty of God. Spanning almost a century, it describes the return of two groups of Jews, with a third return described in the book of Nehemiah. The book of Ezra deals with the return of the exiles, the rebuilding of the temple, and the repentance of the people. Israel has been humbled, but God has not left her. He does not forget the covenants He made to Abraham and to David; Israel is still part of His plan to bring salvation to the earth.

The book of Ezra picks up 70 years after the Babylonian exile, describing a truly remarkable state of events in which the Persian king, Cyrus, makes a proclamation for the Jews to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple. (If Cyrus' proclamation is not proof enough of God's sovereignty, it is fascinating to note that Isaiah prophesied this event, foretelling Cyrus by name – 200 years before Cyrus was even born! (See Isaiah 44:24 – 45:25))

God's sovereignty is the focus of Ezra chapter 1. Unlike other rulers of the time, Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, was a tolerant monarch, allowing his subjects to practice whatever religion they liked. Cyrus was put into place by God and for God's purposes. Not only was he allowing the Jews to practice their religion within his empire, he was sending them back to their homeland to rebuild their centre of worship – worship that defined them as a distinct nation! Moved by the Lord, Cyrus makes his decree, thus fulfilling the prophecies of God spoken through Isaiah and Jeremiah.

And just like when the Israelites left Egypt, their surrounding non-Jewish neighbours are moved to give them gold, silver and animals. The king also gives back what Nebuchadnezzar ransacked from the temple. And with all these things, a group of exiles set out at the beginning of chapter 2 to return to Jerusalem and Judah (renamed Judea upon Persian rule), led by Zerubbabel. The returnees are divided into a two groups: 1) ordinary Israelites (vv 2-35), and 2) temple servants (vv 36-58) including priests, Levites and other temple workers. Verses 59-63 list a number of people who could not prove their ancestry. The priests were set apart specifically by Yahweh for their role in the temple, thus credentials were important. This is more than a list of names; the focus on temple servants illustrates the heart of what is happening here: the reinstatement of Yahweh-worship in Jerusalem.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. God's sovereignty is a theme throughout Scripture. It is because He is sovereign that we can trust Him. Spend some time reflecting upon God's sovereign hand in your life. How have you experienced God's sovereignty? Here are some questions to consider:
 - a. Think about how you came to follow the Lord. How was God's sovereignty evident in this decision?

- b. Think about what God has done in your life since you made a commitment to Him? How has He been sovereign in this?
- c. Where would you be if you had not chosen to follow the Lord?

Thank God for His sovereignty in your life.

2. There is nothing that is out of God's realm of power and control. If He could cause Cyrus, a pagan, to do His bidding, He can handle anything in your life. Ask God to show you a challenge in your life that you are struggling to control. Ask Him to show you any lies you have believed about His ability to help you. Spend some time giving this thing over to God. Ask Him to speak to you about how *He* wants to be King over this problem.

DAY 3

 **READ:** Ezra 3

In chapter 3 the actual rebuilding starts. Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last king of Judah, is clearly the leader along with the priest, Jeshua (or Joshua). It is the seventh month – the month of Tishri – during which there are many significant Jewish holidays including Yom Kippur and the Feast of Booths. Yom Kippur was the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance for the sins of the previous year, and was followed by the Feast of Booths, a festival which required all the Jews to gather together in Jerusalem in remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. We see unity among the people of Israel in how they “gathered as one man to Jerusalem.” The rebuilding of the altar was of utmost importance upon their arrival, as it had been for their ancestors when they entered the Promised Land centuries before (see Deut 27:1-8). The altar sacrifices as acts of worship were Solomon's purpose for building the temple in the first place. He sought to build a house dedicated to the Lord where sweet sacrifices could be made and Yahweh could be worshipped forever (see 2 Chr 2:4).

The focus on rebuilding the altar immediately showed that single-hearted devotion to Yahweh was the defining characteristic of the people of Israel. The offerings and sacrifices presented at the altar were sacred means of fellowship with the Lord, including praise, thanksgiving, repentance, the making of vows, and intimate communion meals between the worshipper and God. For 70 years the people had been surrounded by pagan shrines and temples without a place to properly worship Yahweh. So far, it seems the returnees are starting off on a good foot. Though they are fearful of the surrounding people living in the land (v 3) they forge on ahead, unlike their ancestors who, crippled by fear, refused to enter the Promised Land and were thus punishment with 40 years in the wilderness.

In the second year of their return, the people begin the reconstruction of Solomon's temple, holding a dedication ceremony at the laying of the foundation. The scene described at the end of the chapter is one of both joy and sorrow. There is joy among the people as they rebuild what their enemies had torn down, as they rebuild a house for the Lord after years of separation due to their sin. But there is also sorrow, especially for the older generation who remembers Solomon's temple. Solomon was the wealthiest person in history; he had unlimited resources and complete financial and political security when he constructed a house for the Lord. The new temple described in the book of Ezra obviously cannot compare to the grandeur of the original. Still, this is a momentous occasion as the people rejoice in God's goodness and steadfast love which is clearly evident in the midst of this miracle.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. This chapter shows the people's longing to fellowship with the Lord. Do you share this longing? In our free society, it is so easy to take our church, our Bibles and our time for granted. We are so blessed with freedom to worship the Lord, and yet we often lack passion and don't use our time effectively for the Kingdom. Do you enjoy your fellowship with the Lord? Do you spend time in worship, repentance and prayer? Do you listen for His voice? If there are areas of dryness in your relationship with Him, take some time to ask Him what is going on, and to show you any changes you need to make. If you feel you are in a great place, thank Him for the journey He has been taking you on!
2. The people were getting things in the right order by establishing the altar immediately upon arrival. Check the order of your heart. Is there any area where God is not exalted in first place? Here are some questions you may want to ask to bring revelation:
 - a. Is there anything in your life that you don't like to ask God about because you are afraid of what He might say?
 - b. Have you chosen to ignore a conviction of the Holy Spirit?
 - c. Do you have days when you put God aside, or areas of your life that you leave Him out of?
3. It's easy to think about a time in our lives when we felt closer to God or more "spiritually secure" and wish for it back. In times like this, we struggle to see the Lord's fingerprints in our lives because we are comparing the present to the past. But God's goodness and steadfast love are eternal qualities. He is as good, as loving and as present today as He was then. Spend some time thanking God for the qualities of His character. Thank Him for specific goodness He is showing you right now, today. Be encouraged that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (see Phil 1:6) as you submit to Him.

DAY 4

Ezra 4 can be a confusing chapter if the reader doesn't understand its structure. Verses 1-5 & 24 are part of the historical narrative of the book. Verses 6-23, however, give a glimpse into an event nearly a century later during the reign of King Artaxerxes I (464-423 B.C.). Ezra chapter 4 focuses on *theme* rather than on chronological order. This chapter illustrates the opposition towards the Jews and the hostility that existed among the people of the land. The author is showing the reader that the opposition in the earlier verses was not a single occurrence; it was a reoccurring problem for the Jewish community, a problem that has extended for centuries since.

**READ:** Ezra 4:1-5, 24

Here we see opposition brewing against the returned exiles. Some of the existing settlers ask to join in the building process. These people are the descendants of those who settled in Samaria (the capital of the north) after Israel was defeated by Assyria. Though they were taught the religion of Yahweh, they chose to worship their own idols instead (see 2 Ki 17:24-33). Their request to join the workers is one of malicious intent; really they are hoping to frustrate the building project.

The leaders stand firm, insisting that only the Jews will participate in the building. This doesn't sit well with the challengers. They start to play dirty, increasing harassment and

intensifying opposition. Through letters, bribes and intimidation they fight the builders until finally, the temple work is stopped in 536 B.C. and remains dormant for 15 years. The picture has changed much since the end of the previous chapter.

**READ:** Ezra 4:6-23

Now the narrative is put on pause and the reader is brought into the reign of King Artaxerxes I. A number of Jews are apparently attempting to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. A large group of adversaries write a letter of flattery to the king, seeking to tarnish the reputation of the Jews and stop the work. Their tactics are successful and the Jews are forced to cease building.

Opposition is not new. We must remember that we are in a *spiritual battle*. Since Satan fell from heaven he has been opposing God and the people of God. Opposition should not surprise us. When people attempt to tarnish our reputation and forcefully stop our work, we must remember that we are not alone, that God's people throughout history have faced the same things. Even when we are stopped we must remember that our sovereign Lord is in control, that He does not sleep, that His plans can never be thwarted. We must continue to put our trust in God and not in man, because we know the end. We know the glory that awaits at the coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is to this end that we labour, to this end that we endure all things for His sake.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Make a list of ways that you personally, and that the church, are experiencing opposition. Ask God to give you His eyes to see and His heart to feel. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8 which describes our role as believers in the face of the godlessness around us. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you personally through these verses. How does He want to encourage you? What does He want you to do today in light of this passage?
2. The Jewish people have been opposed all throughout history. The Holocaust of WWII was not an isolated time of persecution. It was preceded by thousands of years of persecution towards the Jews, and persecution did not stop with Hitler's demise. Much of the world looks to Israel with disdain. Let the opposition in your life stir you to pray for the Jewish people. Pray that their eyes would be opened to the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. Pray for God's favour and protection upon the state of Israel.
3. 2 Timothy 4:8 says there is a blessing for all who long for Christ's appearing. Ask Jesus to give you a longing for His return. Ask Him for a glimpse of His glory and of life under His authority. Ask Him to work in your heart so that you will be completely submissive to Him and His direction for you.

DAY 5**READ:** Haggai 1 & Ezra 5

Chapter 5 takes us back to the chronological narrative of Ezra. No work has been done on the temple for 15 years, and three kings have passed briefly through the Persian monarchy. Darius I is now two years into his reign as king of Persia. Haggai and Zechariah were prophets during this time, and chapter 1 of the book of Haggai gives us some telling backstory. It seems that the people of Israel had easily given up the fight to their adversaries in Ezra 4:1-5. They had dropped their commitment to rebuild the temple and started to focus on their own houses instead. They put their own personal comfort before

their commitment to the Lord. According to Haggai 1:2, the people had ignored God's clear calling, through Cyrus, to rebuild the temple, and were saying that this just wasn't the right time to be building. Haggai was sent as a warning voice to the people, who had ignored the warning God had already given by way of a drought. Even after 70 years of captivity and a miraculous return, we see, sadly, that the people are still lazy and disobedient.

In repentant response to the prophets, Zerubbabel and Jeshua decide to resume the temple project. Their assignment had been given through official proclamation by King Cyrus. The temple work had only stopped because of oppression from the local people, but the Jews still had an official right to rebuild the temple of the Lord. With this in mind, the people boldly begin building again. The validity of the work is questioned and a letter is sent to King Darius, urging him to investigate what is happening – if indeed the testimony of the Jews is true (see Ezra 5:11-16).

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. It is easy to put our personal comfort before our commitment to the Lord. When we receive a calling or a directional step from God, it is often exciting at first! But when we are in the middle of walking out what He has called us to, the excitement can die down quickly. Where we were once expectant we become bored, what excited us causes us dread, what sounded like a great adventure is no longer appealing. How many times we have jumped ship for these reasons! But remember, again, Philippians 1:6 *“being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* This promise requires a partnership. He won't do in us what we won't allow Him to do. In listening prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how you may have put your personal comfort before your commitment to the Lord. Take time to repent of any disobedience. Is there any comfort you must set aside to fulfil the commitment you made?
2. Throughout the Bible, the people of Israel seem caught in habitual disobedience. Is there an area of habitual disobedience, or habitual sin in your life? Spend some time talking to God about this area. What steps do you need to take to conquer this area? How can you fully rely on God in this? Ask God for His grace to help you say “no” to sin and “YES” to righteousness.
3. Zerubbabel and Jeshua remembered that they had a legal right to continue the building project. As Christians, we also have legal rights to God's promises. Often these promises are conditional: they require a heart that desires to follow God and a heart that is quick to confess sin. We need to remember the promises of God and the authority we have as His children. When temptation comes, we can tell the enemy to leave because we have been given a seat with Christ in the heavenlies (see Eph 2:6-7). Thank God for specific promises in His Word. Thank God that He keeps His Word, and that He is always faithful. Ask Him to keep your heart soft and submissive to Him.

DAY 6

 **READ:** Haggai 2:1-9 & Ezra 6

In the month following the people's return to the temple work, Haggai shows up with another word from the Lord. He points out the obvious – that this temple is nothing in comparison to the magnificent temple built by Solomon. But his message is one of encouragement in the midst of this truth. Through Haggai the Lord says, “Be strong! Work, for I am with you! I remember the covenant I made with you. My Spirit remains in your midst! Do not fear!” God promises to meet His people in this temple as He did in the last.

And there is a future prophecy within Haggai's word. In light of the New Testament, the reader cannot help but think of Christ's eternal kingdom where the Lord and the Lamb will be the temple in Jerusalem (see Rev 21:22).

Back in Babylon, King Darius does his research and comes out in full support of the Jews' mission to rebuild the temple. Not only does he support them vocally, he commands that they receive everything they need to reconstruct the temple, including animals for daily sacrifice! Again we see a pagan ruler being divinely used to accomplish God's good purposes. We also see the immediate blessing that comes with obedience. The people turned from their laziness and God gave them favour. God's faithfulness is evident here. No matter what mess His people get themselves into, He is so quick to respond to their repentance and acts of obedience.

By the 6th year of Darius' reign, the temple is finished and the people joyfully dedicate the house of God with sacrifice and offering. The following month all Jews who had returned from the exile and all who had chosen to separate themselves from the people of the land to follow Yahweh gather together to celebrate Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The writer makes a point to declare the joyfulness of the people at this time.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Our Lord is such an encourager. He is on our side, cheering us on as we follow Him. Through Haggai, He encouraged the people in the best way saying, “My Spirit remains in your midst”. God was right there with them. As believers of the New Covenant, we have the incredible blessing of the Holy Spirit *in us*. He is the deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (see 2 Cor 5:5). His residence in our lives guarantees the eternal fellowship we will have with the Lord when He comes to reign and we are given our resurrected bodies. How has the Holy Spirit worked in your life to make you more like Christ? Thank Him for this. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh today, to empower you for all God has for you.
2. Doing right brings true joy. When we are walking in righteousness we do not have guilt. It feels wonderful to do good, because God is good. When we obey Him and do what is right, we are acting more like Him; there is greater unity in our relationship with Him. The people experienced this when they celebrated the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They had spent four years obeying God's call to rebuild the Temple, and now they were finally able to practice the most celebrated festival, remembering God's deliverance out of Egypt. When have you experienced the true joy of obedience and goodness? Are you walking in this freedom today? If not, ask the Lord to help you do right today. Ask Him to help you respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 7

 **READ:** Ezra 7 & 8

The narrative moves to a time 57 years later when Artaxerxes I is King of Persia (reign: 464-423). Here we are introduced to the title character, Ezra. We are told a few things about Ezra: he is a skilled scribe, he is exceptionally knowledgeable about the Law of Moses, he has favour with God, and he is a doer of the Word. Not only did Ezra have much knowledge, he acted upon the knowledge he received. He clearly loved and feared the Lord, as is made evident by the references “the Lord *his* God.” Undoubtedly, he was a godly man, and his is a character we should imitate.

Like the previous Persian kings mentioned in Ezra's book, Artaxerxes I was sympathetic to the Jewish cause in Jerusalem. In fact, he sends Ezra to the city with a mission, commanding him to go and see if the people are living according to the Law of Moses. And, for the third time, we see the king offering his own wealth, and the wealth of his subjects, towards the cause of the Jews. Artaxerxes gives Ezra free reign to do with the money and the livestock as he sees fit. Ezra is even given the task to appoint and train people for governance in the region, and to govern people according to Jewish law. Ezra recognizes this good fortune as a direct sign of God's steadfast love and sovereignty. Putting full trust in the Lord, Ezra gathers some of the leading men and sets out on the journey to Judah.

Though the temple has been long standing already, it seems that the worship is not necessarily happening according to God's original intent. Judging from the men Ezra takes with him and hopes to find at Casiphia (all priests and Levites), it seems he wants to replenish the priesthood. Together this group is going to reinstate proper Yahweh worship in Jerusalem. Ezra is a man who finds full confidence in the Lord. Not wanting to put trust in man, he chose not to ask the king for protection long the journey to Jerusalem. Instead, he proclaims a fast at Ahava and the group seeks Yahweh for protection. Ezra knows that *God* is the one who has called him and these men to this mission; Artaxerxes is merely the Lord's mouthpiece. The truth ringing out here is just what Ezra tells the king in verse 22 – that God's gracious hand is upon those who look to Him, but His anger is against all who forsake Him. Ezra looks to the Lord, and after four months of travel, the group arrives safely in Jerusalem.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Meditate on the truth found in Ezra 8:22. What does it mean to look to God? How will it be evident in our lives if we truly are looking to God in life's situations? Where are you looking? Are you looking to God in the challenges you are facing, or are you looking elsewhere? This verse tells of a great promise if you are willing to look to Him in these things.
2. Is there a situation where you are hoping that God gives you favour with another individual (as Zerubbabel, Jeshua and Ezra desired favour from the Persian kings)? Ask for it! Ask God to give you favour in your dealings today. Thank Him for His wisdom and sovereignty. Thank Him for His mercy and protection.
3. Ezra was sent to make sure that Yahweh was being worshipped properly in Judah. Take some time to think about your home. Is Yahweh worshipped properly in your home? Is your home a Christ-centred place, or is it a place where selfishness and self-centredness and busyness rule? What would it look like to reinstate proper worship at your house? Spend some time listening in prayer for anything God wants to say to you about His place in your home.

DAY 8

 **READ:** Deuteronomy 7:1-6, Ezra 9 & 10

Ezra is grieved to find that the people have intermarried with women of the land – women from tribes God had explicitly told His people to stay away from. This wasn't because God was hateful or cruel or because he was being exclusive in His love. God always accepted outsiders as His people if they would dedicate themselves to His ways. But the nations listed in Deuteronomy 7 and Ezra 9 were extremely wicked and especially hostile towards Israel. God had commanded His people never to intermarry with people from other nations who were not willing to give up their idols to serve the Lord God only.

Intermarrying with pagans was dangerous because it would lead children and families away from Yahweh. Ezra is appalled to see that the people have so callously disobeyed God's law. His heartfelt prayer in Ezra 9 gives the reader a look into Ezra's heart and his deep desire for holiness.

Ezra 10 paints a picture of national repentance; even the weather is sad, as the people assemble in the rain to confess their sin before each other and the Lord. In repentance, all agree to end the foreign marriages. We are not given specific details about what happens to these women and their children – whether they are given any form of support and protection or even about the legitimacy of the marriages to begin with. The reader must keep in mind that these were women who refused to give up their idols to follow the Lord; if they had, they would have been grafted into the Israelite nation. This is a descriptive passage, describing something that had to be done at the time because of the people's national commitment to Yahweh. It is not a justification for divorce today, as Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 7 that Christians are not to divorce their unbelieving spouses.

Whatever the case, marriage and family is important to God. He designed for marriage to represent Himself. He desires to be central to marriage and family life. He commissions married couples to set themselves to raising godly children. He calls married couples to faithfulness and humility, love and respect. As believers, our marriages can be great testimonies to God's character, or considerable stumbling blocks to the gospel. Satan has gained much ground through broken marriages; he is an expert at ruining marriage and family, even within the church. We need to take back the ground he has stolen.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend time today praying for marriage and family. Pray for your own marriage (if you are married, or your future marriage if you hope to be), the marriages of family and friends, and also for marriage within the church.
 - a. Pray for your own marriage.
 - i. Pray for your spouse: relationship with the Lord; sexual purity; wisdom to make decisions; health; humility; integrity; etc.
 - ii. Ask God to show you areas of selfishness within your marriage. Are you willing to repent of these things and surrender yourself to Him?
 - iii. What is one thing you want God to do in your marriage? Pray for this thing!
 - iv. What is one way you can bless your spouse today? Do it!
 - v. Pray that your marriage would strengthen your family and show your kids the character of God. Pray that they would want to commit fully to Him because of what they see in their parents' marriage.
 - b. Pray for marriages in your family.
 - i. Pray for healing and restoration where there is brokenness.
 - ii. Pray for blessing and protection.
 - iii. Pray that these marriages would be a testament to God's goodness.
 - c. Pray for marriages in the church.
 - i. Pray that through God's restoration and strengthening, Christians would take back ground that the enemy has stolen.
 - ii. Pray for humility in the home, that spouses would seek to serve each other.
 - iii. Pray that men would love their wives as Christ loves the church.

- iv. Pray that women would honour their husbands; that they would not use manipulation to control their husbands.
- v. Pray that married couples would speak well of one another.
- vi. Pray that God's moral boundaries would be embraced by the next generation because of the Christ-centred marriages they witness within their homes.

The Book of Ezra

The book of Ezra is a display for the sovereignty of God, giving a glimpse into the history of the nation of Israel and God's faithful hand upon His people. After 70 years of captivity, the sovereign Lord miraculously brings His people back to the land of promise. It is a story of return, rebuilding and repentance as the people return to their land and to their first love.

Ezra 9:9 (ESV)

"For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem"

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