

## WEEK THIRTY-EIGHT INTRODUCTION

Ezra 1:1 sets a tone for the entirety of the book. The events recorded in this book unfold according to God’s will and word, which He previously promised through the prophet. History is read through the lens of God’s action within history for the good of His people and the glory of His own name. The return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity provides a demonstration of God’s purpose and ability to keep His word, deliver His people, and restore them. In this way, this week’s reading invites us to revisit how we ourselves understand the unfolding of history. Is history simply the turn of events which has brought us to this point, or is history the arena of activity of our sovereign, living God? Are the events of this world a random collection of incidents, decisions, and movements, or is God shepherding the story of His creation unto His appointed and promised climax? Answering these questions will fundamentally reorient how you view the news broadly and even the happenings in your very own life.

## KEY SCRIPTURE

*Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.*

—Haggai 2:5-6 ESV

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**How does God keep His promise in Ezra 1:1? How do you see God’s “behind the scenes” activity in these early chapters of Ezra? How can you trace His hand in your own life?**

**What is the response to the foundation of the temple being laid in Ezra 3:11? Why do you think they responded this way? Meditate on the content of what they proclaim. Can you say the same, why?**

**In Haggai 1, what is God's indictment of His people in verse 5? What does He command them to do? How do they respond (v.12)? How does God supply what they need to respond as He commands (vv. 13-14)? What is your response to God's word today?**

**God calls His people to repent (Zech. 1:3-6). He points them to the spiritual density of those who preceded them in that they did not listen to His word (Zech. 1:4). In His word God reveals His will and word. Repentance begins in and is measured by responsiveness to God's word. How ought you repent according to God's word?**

**What does God promise in Zechariah 8? According to verse 2, what attribute of God stirs Him to action? What is the prize of God's restoration according to verse 8?**

**Zechariah 13:1 describes a fountain for the cleansing of sin and uncleanness. What is the ultimate fountain that cleanses from sin? Where do we find that precious flow?**

The name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther yet His presence saturates the Scripture's witness. Where can you see God's hand and activity? What might that mean for you in seasons where you might not understand what God is doing?

**BE A DOER OF THE WORD**

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

**-Ezekiel 3:18 ESV**

**How can you model and give true justice and mercy this week? How can you devise *good* for others rather than evil?**