

1. When you are set free, return to your home. (Ezra 1:1-3)

Where do you feel most at home? Why?

Where have you experienced your richest times of intimacy and growth in the Lord?

Do you ever feel like an exile? What conditions in this present world make you feel like there must be a better place to live?

Do you ever experience symptoms of spiritual homesickness? What are they? Do you feel like you are living in a place you don't belong? Why?

Have you forsaken your spiritual home? How? What do you need to do to get back to your spiritual home?

What are you most looking forward to in heaven?

2. When you feel like a remnant, return to your hope. (Ezra 9:1-9)

Those who take God and his Word seriously will always be a minority. Do you despair because more people do not seem to be following the Lord.

Do you often compromise your convictions to fit in with the majority? Why? How?

Israel is called a "holy race" (v.2) who had mixed itself with godless people. Describe how you prevent from making the same mistake?

Speaking of race...God did not forbid mixed races. God forbade mixed worship. God's people are comprised of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. God hates racism. Do you?

In fulfillment of God's promise he gives his people "brief moments" and "a little reviving" to return to Him. When and how has God done this for you? Is not one of those moments? Will you take advantage of it?

3. When you are disappointed, return to the promise. (Ezra 3:10-13)

After the temple was rebuilt, the older generation wept because even though the people had returned the glory had not.

After Ezra taught the people God's Word and Nehemiah rebuilt the wall, the hearts of the people were still far from the Lord.

All this leaves the people (and us) disappointed in the result. We would anticipate the conclusion of the story to be the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham being a Messianic King ruling an obedient people, God's presence saturating the place of worship, and a unified kingdom blessing every nation on earth. Instead, the Old Testament ends with a Messianic king missing from the throne, God's presence is missing from the temple, and God's blessing is missing from the earth.

What do think the people were anticipating to come next in their history?

Has our study of the epic Old Testament stories made you more grateful for the time in which you live? Has your level of appreciation for the gospel increased as you have understood how much God did to keep his promise?

Describe your level of disappointment in the political, financial, health care, entertainment offerings of this world. As you level of disappointment increases, does your level of anticipation for the return of Christ increase proportionally?

Additional Scripture

- Isaiah 2, 11
- Hosea 3
- Ezekiel 40-48
- Zechariah 2, 8
- Nehemiah 8-9