

BIBLICAL

A verse-by-verse
series through the
book of Ezra

BUILDING

WEEK 1:

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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For the First Baptist Church of Gaston**



INTRO:

Wow. Yesterday was incredible. We were able to officially launch our fundraising efforts towards our 'Field of Dreams Vision!'. There are a lot of different folks who have put in a lot of work so that we can officially launch this important endeavor for the Glory of God in the life of our Church. I'm excited that as we walk through the book of Ezra, the Lord will be with us and guide us! That's the purpose of this daily devotional. Each day, I invite you to read a short devotional that I have written that will either look at a certain part from the previous Sunday's sermon or the coming Sunday's sermon text. The devotional is designed to collectively allow our hearts to be unified in this building process as we seek to raise the money for generations to be positively affected by what we give and do in the here and now.

Yesterday we began our series through Ezra by starting off with an overview, which we do every time that we start a new sermon series. This week in our devotional series we will focus on several of the themes and characteristics of Ezra that we touched on yesterday. We'll attempt to take a deeper dive and see how it applies to our daily lives each morning this week.

MONDAY, APRIL 28TH, 2025

‘THE IDENTITY OF OUR COMMUNITY!’

Yesterday, we touched on the Jewish community at the time of the events of Ezra. One of the main themes in the book of Ezra I pointed out yesterday, was the word ‘faithfulness’. The word ‘faithfulness’ that is used in Ezra comes from the Hebrew word ‘Emet’ אֱמֶת. This word describes the book of Ezra in terms of faithfulness in worship as well as faithfully following God’s Law (the Torah) to rebuild the temple for a place of worship. The town of Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages, were geographically in the former Kingdom of Judah. The community of Jerusalem at this time was composed of people that had been in exile in Babylon for 70 years, according to Jeremiah 25:11. What makes this community at the time of Ezra unique, is that they chose to come back. Not all the Jews from Babylonian exile returned to Jerusalem (see Ezra 1:1-4). Those who did, are known as the ‘remnant’ and they were united by their loyalty to Yaweh. This community of Jews returned to a land that they had not been in for 70 years. There were new people of different ethnic origins who had settled the land that they were forced to get along with. Along with the challenge of preparing to rebuild the temple, they had to fight the local opposition of the new settlers. Most scholars believe that their main argument was that they had ancient entitlement (Abrahamic covenant and Mosaic covenant). God allowed the way in His providence, as we will see in this Sunday’s sermon, for His people to settle the land that belonged to their ancestors.

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Application for Today: As we embark on this journey, ‘The Field of Dreams Vision’, it’s imperative that the saints of First Baptist Church of Gaston realize from day 1 the identity of our faith community. Our identity is that we are believers in Jesus Christ who seek to follow the great commission as given to believers by Christ Jesus. This building vision isn’t about making anyone’s name great except the name of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this multi-purpose facility is to reach generations to come for the Glory of Jesus Christ. This is our identity. All for Jesus.

Prayer Point #1: Spend time today asking for the Lord to personally unite your heart with the other believers in our Church.

Prayer Point #2: Spend time today praying specifically for the future parking lot for the multi-purpose building.

Prayer Point #3: Spend time today praying what God would have you give towards the building fund this coming Sunday.

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TUESDAY, APRIL 29TH, 2025

‘THE CHALLENGE OF A CHRISTIAN!’

We are continuing this morning in pulling out truths from Sunday’s sermon for our devotion series as we continue in the book of Ezra. As you remember from Sunday, the sermon focused on an overview of the book of Ezra. In continuing from the faithfulness that we discussed yesterday morning, we looked at the identity of the Christian community. This morning I want to discuss the challenge that we all face as Christians of being faithful to Christ in a fallen world.

The Jews in Jerusalem also faced this. The Jewish community had great instability due to the challenge of living and moving back to their land after 70 years in Babylon. They had a great challenge in Babylon with upholding their faithfulness to God. Take a look at Daniel and his friends, and how they stood up against the King. Now that the Jews return to Jerusalem, there were many ‘outsiders’ that had moved in with immense pagan lifestyles. For example, in Ezra chapters 9-10, Ezra comes to Jerusalem and finds the Jews marrying with non-jews, which was forbidden. That act alone posed a threat to the community because it loosened the covenantal bond between the Lord and His people. The Jews were living in a pagan community with temptations to blend with the culture. And just think, these Jews in Jerusalem at the time of Ezra were the small ‘remnant’. They may have thought of themselves as ‘religious’ or ‘better’ than their fellow Jews who chose to stay in Babylon and assimilate into the pagan culture instead of coming home to Jerusalem.

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But, some of them were just as ‘bad’ for giving into the worldly temptations in Jerusalem with the inhabitants who had moved there. Let us remember this morning that the challenge of being a Christian is living in the world, yet not being of the world. See John 17:16. As we have heard the Lord lead us to build in ‘The Field of Dreams’, we will face challenges each day. We will be tempted to listen to the world. The world may say ‘It’s not a good time to build’, or ‘we don’t have the money’, or ‘materials are much more expensive’. These are just a few that I know of. I am convinced that God is leading us in this direction, and because of that, Satan will throw every challenge that he can at us. God is big enough to provide all we need and more. Don’t give into Satan’s tactics today.

Application for Today: Don’t give into the pagan culture. Don’t drift. One small decision today could cause you to slip down a slippery slope. Stay firm. Stay strong. Stay faithful despite an unfaithful culture.

Prayer Point #1: Spend time today asking God to make you aware when you’re in a battle against Satan, as well as against the pagan culture. Ask Him to give you the strength to fight.

Prayer Point #2: Spend time today praying for the roof that will be on our multi-purpose building. That the roof will be installed properly and built strongly and be dependable.

Prayer Point #3: Spend time today praying what God would have you give towards the building fund this coming Sunday.

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30TH, 2025

‘LOOK BACK, TO SEE AHEAD!’

As we continue to look at aspects from Sunday’s Overview sermon in our devotions this week, this morning, I felt led by the Lord to show you something that He showed me. The 10 chapters found in Ezra can be split into two sections. In Ezra chapters 1-6, the author recounts events that were long before Ezra’s time in the history timeline of the Jews. Ezra chapters 7-10 seem to be written by Ezra himself and are called by many scholars as ‘The Ezra Memoir’. What I’m getting at this morning is simple, but God’s hand is all over this book, even in the structure of the text. In Ezra chapters 7-10, the text focuses on what specific things the Church was supposed to do once the temple was built. Ezra instructs the Jews on how they should worship. They should follow and obey the commands of the Lord. What I want to see is this: the author of Ezra (anonymous for chapters 1-6), reflects on the past, and then discusses the present that will set the theological template for the Jews in the years to come regarding temple worship. See, sometimes we have to look back at what God has done, to see that He can accomplish anything, even in the present. Back in 1865, Sandy Run Baptist Church (now FBCG), was burned to the ground. The Church came together and built a wooden structure to serve as the Church building in 1889. After two decades of severe depression in South Carolina (including the Spanish flu and boweevil) and while a dictator was overtaking Europe, in 1939, amidst a financial crisis in South Carolina, the members of FBCG built a sanctuary to accommodate their growing Church under the leadership of Rev. Edgar Davis. Then in 1985 under the ‘Together we Build’ campaign, and under the Leadership of Dr. William Paulling, FBCG yet again stepped out on faith to build the sanctuary that we will worship in this coming Sunday. See, sometimes we have to look back at what God has done in our history to be reminded, He can and will do it again!

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Application for Today: Reflect on your personal life this morning in how God has moved in your past. Remember He is faithful. Commit to having trust in His plan for the present, just as He has in the past.

Prayer Point #1: Spend time today praying, thanking God for what He's done in your past and how far He has brought you!

Prayer Point #2: Spend time today praying for the door knobs that will be on our new building. Pray that God will already prepare the hearts of each person that will touch these door knobs. And more importantly, by opening the doors of this building, they will want for God to open the door of their hearts, and receive salvation.

Prayer Point #3: Spend time today praying what God would have you give towards the building fund this coming Sunday.

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THURSDAY, MAY 1ST, 2025

‘DON’T GET IN GOD’S WAY!’

By now, I wonder if Sunday’s sermon and vision casting have started to sink in. Meaning, you’re starting to realize that as a Church, we really are stepping out on faith and doing this! Whether it has sunk in yet or not, I think it’s important that all throughout this process we remember to not allow ourselves to get in God’s way. While I did not mention it during Sunday’s sermon (as Sunday was an overview), in Ezra chapter three, there is an interesting situation that occurs. While I won’t go far in-depth on it this morning, as we will be getting to it later on in this series, I do want to highlight it as we continue to seek to stay unified during this process.

In Ezra chapter three, we find that Israel was able to begin the rebuilding process by laying the foundation for the temple. This was a big deal that the foundation was being laid during the second year of the Israelites’ return to Israel. God had moved in Government leaders and in the hearts of God’s people. It was happening! In Ezra 3:11, the people were rejoicing and praising God for all that He had done in this situation. He had provided and He had blessed. But look with me at Ezra 3:12, ‘But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy,’. The Israelites who were older remembered the Glory of Solomon’s temple before it was destroyed. They remember how much bigger and better it looked on the outside and inside. You may ask, why are they already complaining when just the foundation has been laid? Because the foundation would have been an indication of the size of the temple. Due to the reaction of the older crowd among the Israelites, it must have been a pretty small foundation in diameter.

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Some were praising God, others were complaining and weeping. They sound just like us today at FBCG. Throughout this process we are embarking on, there will be folks who praise God that we GET to give and that we GET to be a part of such an amazing 'GOD SIZED' project. There will be others who would rather sit on the sides and complain and critique every little aspect of the Field of Dreams process. May I encourage you this morning, be like the people of Ezra 3:11, not like the people of Ezra 3:12. God is doing something that we might not fully understand or even agree with, but guess what? He is God, and we are not. Let's trust Him and not try to get in God's way.

Application for Today: Don't get in God's way by constantly complaining and critiquing. Instead, pray and ask how God may want you to make this Field of Dreams process even better.

Prayer Point #1: Spend time today praying and asking God what kind of attitude you have currently? Are you an Ezra 3:11 person or an Ezra 3:12 person?

Prayer Point #2: Spend time today praying for the bushes that will be outside the building. Pray that they will be welcoming, inviting and will be trimmed and manicured through the years to come.

Prayer Point #3: Spend time today praying what God would have you give towards the building fund this coming Sunday.

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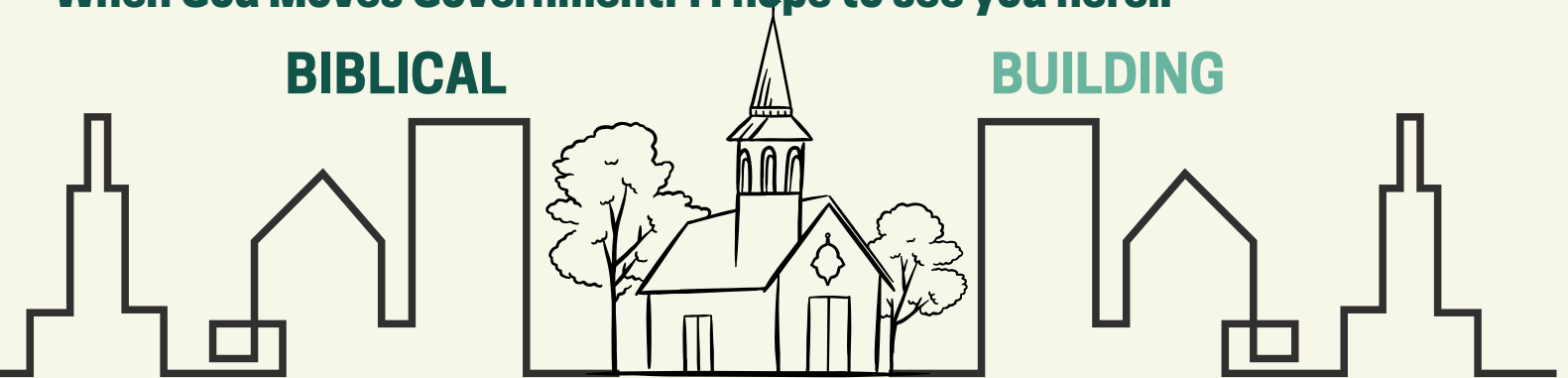
FRIDAY, MAY 1ST, 2025

‘GOD WILL MAKE A WAY!’

During Sunday’s sermon, I briefly mentioned that the Israelites did face challenges while rebuilding the temple. Ezra chapters 4-6 explain this. In Ezra chapter 4, during the reign of King Darius the temple construction had stopped. Then, the Prophet's Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to begin rebuilding. Once the people resume building the temple that the Lord had told them to build, more roadblocks enter the scene. The government in the region of Jerusalem sends a letter to King Darius informing him that the Israelites were building and that they verbally claim to have permission from Cyrus to rebuild the temple. I’m sure that some of the Israelites were discouraged and even disappointed that once they started back, the government wanted to get involved. Darius investigated the matter and found that his predecessor Cyrus did indeed authorize the rebuilding of the temple. So, King Darius orders it to move forward without interference and with financial support from the royal treasury (Ezra 6). With the help and ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple would be completed in the sixth year of King Darius’s reign. While I am not suggesting that the government will or should pay for our Field of Dreams vision, (though that would be awesome), I am saying that God is going to make a way despite the roadblocks that we will face. And though we don’t know what those roadblocks are right now, we are going to face challenges as we step out on faith. But, may we not view those as setbacks in our Field of Dreams journey, but may we view them as set ups for God to do incredible things and that He will get all of the Glory. I can’t wait to see you Sunday as we look at Ezra 1:1-11 with a sermon entitled ‘When God Moves Government!’. I hope to see you here!!

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Application for Today: May we remember and apply to our lives and mindset that even when roadblocks occur, that God is going to make a way, in His time.

Prayer Point #1: Spend time praying today about what may be going on in your life that you view as 'negative' but God may be using it in your life to bring you closer to Him.

Prayer Point #2: Spend time praying for the light bulbs that will be in the gym, the multi-purpose facility building. Pray that the gym lights will allow people to see the Light of God's Word as we study, worship, and fellowship in the space for generations to come.

Prayer Point #3: Spend time today praying what God would have you give towards the building fund this coming Sunday.

