



SHARING SCRIPTURE

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Making Sense of History: Zerubbabel and Ezra

For use: Sept. 29 - Oct. 5

Texts: Jeremiah 25:11, 12; Daniel 9:1, 2; Ezra 4:1-7; Isaiah 55:8, 9; Ezra 7:1-28

Lafcadio who? Cincinnati is celebrating the 150th anniversary of one of its most famous writers that you've never heard of. Patrick Lafcadio Hearn was a late 19th-century author who, at one time, was known around the world.

Hearn was born in Greece to a Greek mother and an Irish father. Family problems brought young Hearn to Ireland where he was abandoned by his mother and raised by an aunt. At age 19, the young man came to Cincinnati in 1870 with not a dime to his name. He slept in warehouses and worked as a proofreader until he got a job writing. He later wrote of Creole culture in New Orleans and then travelogues on the West Indies. He left a significant mark in Japan where he recorded folk tales, opening this fascinating culture to the West.

But it was who he wrote about that left the greatest impact. "He wrote the stories of real people and he had a very deep interest in, and empathy for those people who had somehow become separated from their stories," states Hearn scholar Mary Gallagher. "He gravitated toward those who were, like all immigrants, exiles and displaced persons or peoples, disconnected from cultural continuities and forced to create new stories to make sense of their new circumstances." [1]

That's a bit like one of the greatest writers in Scripture—the priest/scribe named Ezra. His passion for the exiled people of God in Babylon led him to bring the Jewish people back to their roots through the greatest writings of all time—the Word of God.

While around 50,000 Jews returned to their homeland in the first group released by King Cyrus, Ezra came back in 457 B.C. with around 5,000 people. While we don't know exactly what his scribal work was for Persia, we know of his great impact on gathering the Scriptures, having them transcribed, and then distributing the Word of God to the people.

Like Lafcadio, Ezra had a deep interest in reconnecting people with their stories. He carefully studied and understood his exiled people and helped the Jews "make sense of their new circumstances." It's a spiritual journey we should all take when we get separated from our roots.

For Reflection

Connecting: Is there a story-collector in your family who has gathered information about your past history? Share a brief example of something interesting they have discovered.

Sharing: Read Ezra 7:1-10. What notable qualities do we learn about Ezra from this introduction? Which of these qualities make him stand out as a perfect candidate to lead Israel at this time of transition?

1. Ezra was a priest and came from a line of priests stretching back to Aaron (see vv. 1-5).
2. Ezra was a “skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given” (v. 6).
3. Artaxerxes, king of Persia, had confidence in Ezra “according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him” (v. 6).
4. Ezra successfully traveled from Babylon to Jerusalem “according to the good hand of his God upon him” (v. 9).
5. “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (v. 10).
6. Other...

Applying: Reflect on the beginnings of your Bible study group. How did it start? What was its original purpose? When did each of you join the group? Now try to capture the purpose of your group in one sentence.

Valuing: Have you lost touch with your own spiritual roots? Do you feel you are still strongly connected to God as compared to when you first fell in love with Jesus? Pray with one other person in your group asking the Lord to reignite that first love during this coming week.

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Paul Richardson
Executive Director

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