

Church of St. George
Sporting - Alexandria

Stories for boys

Inspired by the Old Testament [11]

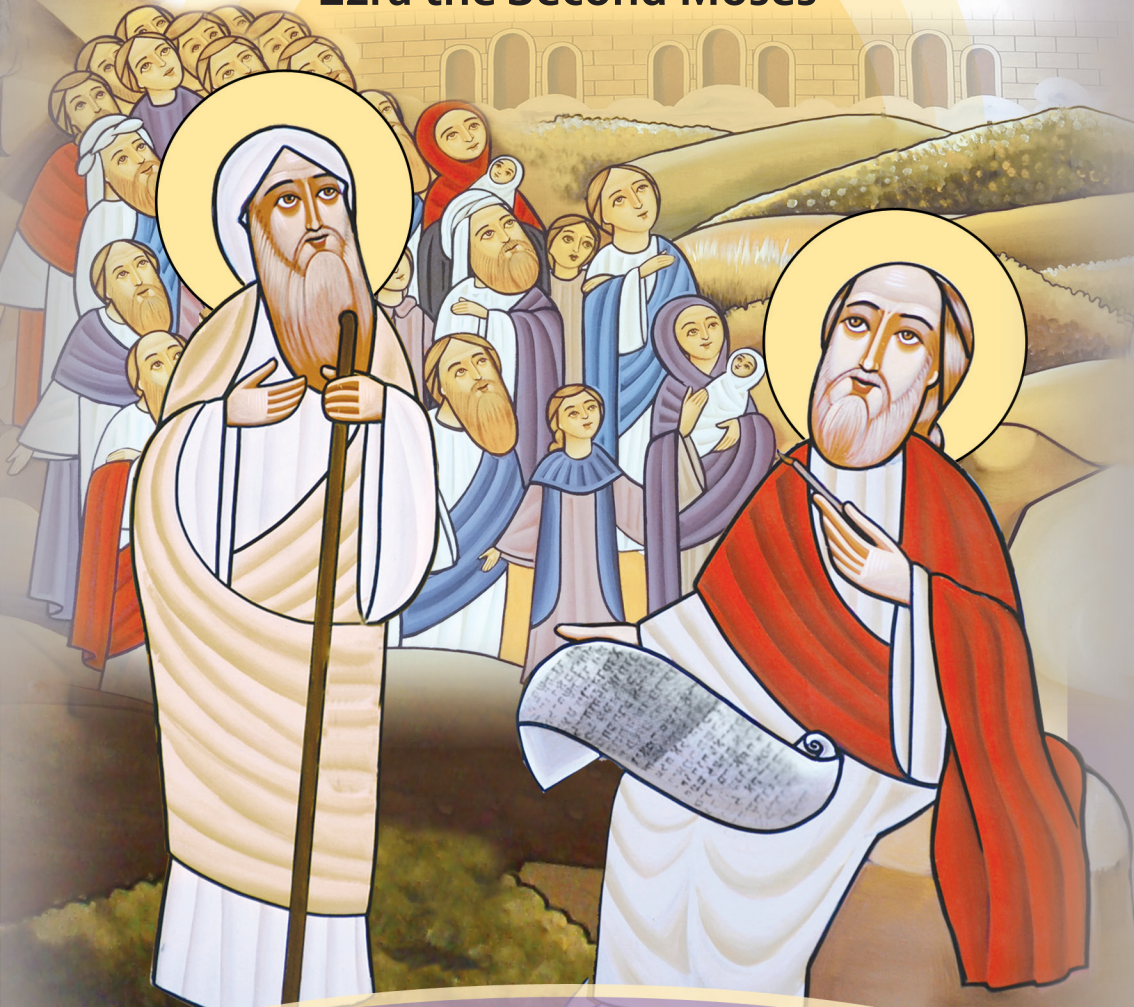
Supportive introductory edition

2020

Decorated with Coptic icons

Book of Ezra

Ezra the Second Moses



Prepared by: Fr Tadrous Yaqoub Malati

Publisher: St. George's Sporting Church

Queen Mary and Prince Tadros Coptic Orthodox Church South Brunswick, NJ 08831

**In the Name of The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit
One God, Amen**



The book's name: Stories for Boys Inspired by the Book of
Ezra [15]

Author: Father Tadros Ya`qub Malati

Translated by: Jerome Arsany, Mark Bassem, Bishoy Magdy

Edition: 2020

Publisher: Martyr St. George Church - Sporting

Church of Queen Mary and Prince Tudres - South Brunswick

Print: Perfect Graphic

Decorated with Coptic icons, by Sister Sawsan

Characters of the Story

For tracking the story's events easily, we provide an overview about the important characters in the story:

Cyrus king of Persia: Isaiah the Prophet Prophesized that God will prepare Cyrus to return the captives back from Babylon to Jerusalem (Isaiah 45:1).

Zerubbabel: He led the first group of three groups returning to Jerusalem; Joshua the priest was with him in 538 B.C. to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:2).

Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean king of Babylon: He ordered to destroy the Temple of the Jews and carried the people away to Babylon (Ezra 5:12), especially the great and skilled craftsmen.

Belshazzar: The son of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 5:14), he desecrated the altar utensils by using it to drink wine and get drunk. On that day, Babylon collapsed.

Sheshbazzar: The king made him the governor of Judah, he received the holy utensils (Ezra 5:14).

Ezra: A skilled scribe in Moses' Law and in teaching people how to live by it. He led the second group for the returnees to Jerusalem in 458 B.C.

Nehemiah: From the royal lineage of Judah, he was born into captivity; he led the last group of returnees to Jerusalem in 444 B.C. to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and in addition to repair the city. Ezra went to Jerusalem 12 years earlier than Nehemiah.

God the Worker in Sufferers

Caroline noticed that her 10 years old son, entered his room and he didn't play as usual, but sat silently. Caroline took him on her lap and asked him: "What are you thinking of, Mark?"

Mark: "Mom...Have you heard about the girl who was hit by shrapnel on her heel, at the entrance of the Church of the two Saints, St. Mark and Pope Peter, in Alexandria on the New Year's Eve of 2011?"

Caroline: "I know her well. What's strange was that when she fell on the ground in front of the door of the church, there was an invisible hand removing the debris that was falling on top of her, from the bodies of the people who were martyred. And when her mother called her, she stood and went to her."

Mark: "Mom...Why did God allow the martyrdom of 23 believers and the injury of a many others who weren't guilty? Does God leave the church to suffer by cruel people? Why does God allow continuous tribulations for the believers in many cities in Egypt?"

Caroline: "God is always busy thinking of us, Mark; He gives us many blessings and sometimes He allows some tribulations that if we accept thankfully, we'll get rewarded, also to remind us by our sins... so we return to God and repent. Don't you remember when God allowed the Babylonians to win against His people?, they even destroyed the temple, took many people as captives, and deprived them of their country and their temple. He left them in Babylon for seventy years then finally, he permitted them return to the Land of promise!"

Mark: “Why did He allow that for them?”

Caroline: “Because they worshiped idols and did evil things, so they were allowed tribulations, but they didn’t turn away from evil. He allowed the Babylonians to capture them and humiliate them.”

Mark: “How did they return to their country after seventy years?”

Caroline: “Their returning story is wonderful; it was mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.”

In Babylon

The Jews lived in their own neighborhood in Babylon; they were allowed to set up business projects, and practice some of their religious rituals. Honestly, some Jews succeeded in their projects and became rich, but some others were very sad for their city, their temple and their worship. In these tough times, there were some people who were chosen to work in the royal palace like Daniel and the three young men. They refused to



worship idols and they never stopped worshipping the true God. So, God blessed Daniel the Prophet by revealing to him the dreams that troubled king Nebuchadnezzar, and also revealing its interpretation to him. After Nebuchadnezzar, his son Belshazzar ruled, who made a great banquet for his thousand lords. He commanded that the sanctified articles of the house of God was to be brought - that his father stole from Jerusalem's temple - to drink the wine from at his banquet. He then saw a hidden hand writing mysterious words. Daniel was called to interpret this. He told him that his kingdom will collapse immediately because he used the sanctified articles of the house of God, to get drunk. This happened as Persia broke into Babylon and took it over on the same night.

Cyrus the King of Persia God's anointed and shepherd

Daniel the prophet, being an elder, met the King Cyrus the Persian with some of the pious Jews, and they told him that the God chose him to build Him His house in Jerusalem, and that He called him His anointed and shepherd.

The King was astonished because of what they said, and he asked them: "When did this happen? And by whom?"

Daniel answered him: "More than two hundred years ago, God announced it to the prophet Isaiah, while being in Jerusalem, who said: "Who says of **Cyrus**: "He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem: "You shall be built" and to the temple: "Your foundation shall

be laid." Thus says **the Lord** to His anointed, to **Cyrus**: "Whose right hand I have held to subdue nations before him and loose the armour of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut." (Isa 44: 28, 45: 1)

So **Cyrus** asked **Daniel**: "How does your God call me His anointed and shepherd, and I am not from His people?"

Daniel answered: "Our God is the creator of all human beings and He loves them all. He drives the whole universe at all eras, and He knows everything before it happens. He knows how kind hearted you are, and that you'll permit His people to return to Jerusalem and encourage them to build His temple."

While listening to that elder prophet, as if light shone in Cyrus' heart.

Daniel told him also about the prophet Jeremiah, who advertised that the people will return from the captivity after seventy years, and the seventy years have been completed (Jer 29: 10-14).

He clarified to him also, how God gave him to foretell about the union of the two Kingdoms, Persia and Medes, and that they were going to conquer Babylon.

Cyrus felt that Israel's God is the God of Heaven, and that He called him to build the God's house at Jerusalem. Confidently, he said: "He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah." (**Ezra 1:2**)

Cyrus's heart moved to work seriously, encouraging the Jews on returning back to Israel and beginning to rebuild the ruined temple.

The meeting between Cyrus and Zerubbabel

How joyful Cyrus was, checking out a Hebrew manuscript that contains Isaiah's book. He didn't believe his eyes knowing that the God of Heaven called him by his name more than two hundred years ago, considering him as His anointed, and His shepherd, and that He's giving him victory over many nations, etc.

The King met Zerubbabel, whom he called 'Sheshbazzar' which means 'joy in the midst of troubles', as he saw in him the internally cheerful leader in the captivity land.

Zerubbabel was surprised by the King inviting the Jews to ascend to Jerusalem to build God's house. He requested from the ones who weren't be able to ascend, to donate gold, silver, luggage or cattle to help the ones who were going for this job. Cyrus commanded that all the vessels of God's house were to be brought out from Nebuchadnezzar god's house, and to be handed in to Sheshbazzar to carry it with him to Jerusalem.

Indeed, God is the Lord of impossible. He changed the heart of the pagan King to work for the Lord's house.

The three regiments

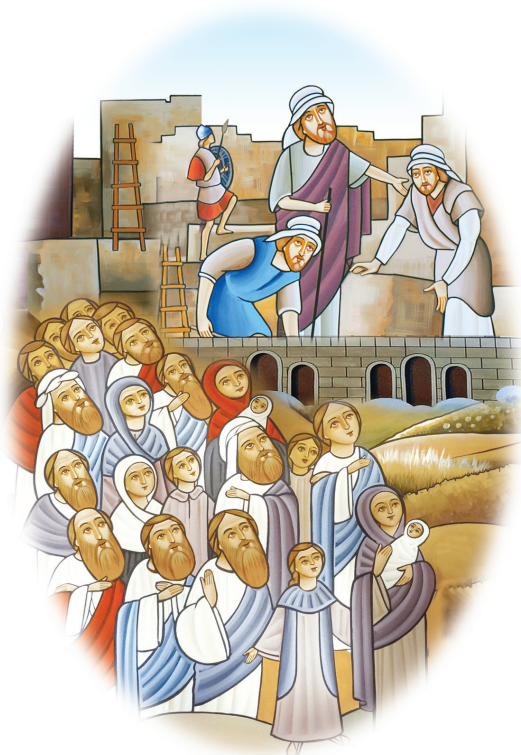
Zerubbabel led the **first regiment** in 538 B.C., he was accompanied by 49897 men.

He started **building the temple**, but unfortunately the work was disrupted because some of the rich people took care of building their houses not God's temple.

In 458 B.C., Ezra the scribe led the **second regiment** accompanying 1754 men with him, he was concerned about making everyone cares about God's word, and practicing His commandments.

As for the **third regiment**, Nehemiah the governor led it, and cared about **building Jerusalem's wall**, so that the enemies won't enter and destroy the city.

Although the three regiments had one goal, which was: returning to worship God as His law commanded, sticking to God, and recalling the divine commandment, every regiment had its own role which completed the work of the other two regiments.



The processions of the people returning to Jerusalem

Caroline paused, then she shook her head very calmly, and with a sweet smile, she said to her son **Mark**: “Mark, I often think about the three processions that got out of captivity land to Jerusalem. Also, I think about the procession of the children of Israel, the day they left Rameses in Egypt to the wilderness under the leadership of Moses the prophet.

I become very happy seeing the people who lived in captivity and left it, had set in their hearts never to return to it again. **Always remember:**

- Indeed, compared to the captives they are few, but they are heroes believers, whom God and all heavenly people rejoice over them. They represent the Church before Moses has come, and after he came. Also, after Christ came, everybody gather in heaven as a heavenly bride.

- They encourage us on going to the Upper Jerusalem, which is heaven.

- They're no more two Kingdoms or two nations, Israel and Judah, instead, they all became one nation. I pray that the Church in the whole world, with its different languages, becomes one Church.

- If we asked everyone from the returnees from Babylon: “What do you ask from God?” He'll answer: “I want God to use me in building His house and Temple.” Likewise, we yearn for seeing the heaven, the house of God.

- Those people came back from Babylon knowing that Satan will surely oppose them, but they over powered him by

the Lord. Thus we don't fear him.

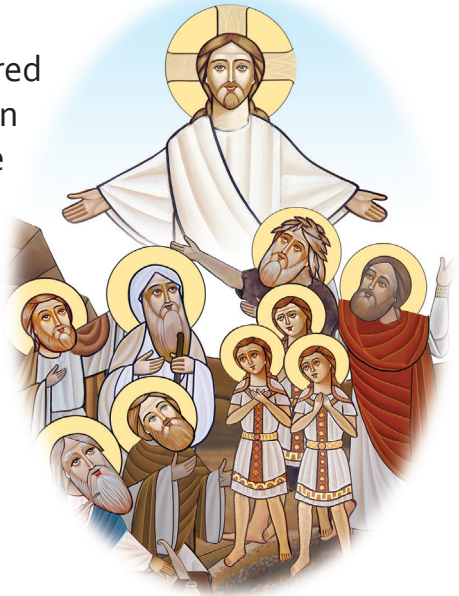
- They came to live in God's lap and celebrate feasts. To be happy like those who are in heaven".

Mark smiled and he said to his mother **Caroline**: "Mom, I thank God, who made me live in my country, with my family, and in my Church. If I were born in captivity, what would I have done?".

Caroline replied: "Wherever we're found, we are God's people and He takes care of us. From our side, we must live with God anywhere. There were great faith heroes in the land of captivity, you know some of them:

- 1- Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai.
- 2- The prophet Daniel and the three youth.
- 3- The prophet Ezekiel.
- 4- Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Holy Bible registered what those pious had done in captivity, but surely there were many more hidden unto from the prophet's eyes, as God said to Elijah: "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1Ki 19:18)



Ezra the scribe

Mark asked his mother: “Can we know anything about Ezra who led the second regiment, and wrote the books of Ezra and Nehemiah?”

Caroline replied: “He was called Ezra the scribe, because he was an employee of the royal palace, and a consultant for the Persian Emperor, specialized in the Jewish affairs. The Emperor loved him and called him “The scribe of the Law of the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:12, 21).

He loved the Holy Bible (Old Testament), collecting its books that were found among the captives in Babylon.

He was a priest born in Babylon, thus he didn't practice priesthood. But he loved worshiping like fasting and prayer. That's why he used to cry and humiliate before God, to return the people to the Land of Promise.

He was very kind, meanwhile firm, wished that all the people would be pious.

During repairing, he didn't rely on anyone but God, and was sticking to God's promises to his people.

Ezra the Second Moses

Mark asked: “Mom, Why did some Jews call Ezra the second Moses?”.

Caroline answered: “Moses the Prophet took the people out of Pharaoh's bondage into the wilderness to enter the land of Promise. Ezra took part in the second exodus, as the people left Babylon, the land of the captivity, to Jerusalem.

Moses received the law's tablets, and Ezra took care of the Holy Bible and collected the books of the Old Testament.

Moses was interested in education, and Ezra was also interested in the same work.

Moses was very patient and firm, and so was Ezra.

Moses was concerned that the people become holy, and in firmness Ezra demanded the people to return to the Holy God and confess, and he asked them not to marry pagans. He wanted all the hearts of the leaders and the people to be a temple of the Lord or His holy house!

They were successful spiritual leaders, while managing the people's affairs, cared for the salvation of their souls."



To my beloved ones:

What do you know about Ezra's book?

First: Some scholars see that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah reveal the second exodus. The first exodus is freedom from the slavery of Pharaoh and the springing of the children of Israel to Canaan, by Moses the Prophet, who was prepared by the Lord since his birth for this work. The second exodus is the return of the people of Israel from the captivity to Jerusalem by a decision of Cyrus the Persian.

Second: On the first exodus, all the Jews left Egypt with a group of Egyptians, and their journey lasted 40 years. As for the second exodus, those who were taken into captivity were the wealthy, the great, and the skilled, while the poor remained in Jerusalem, the ruined city, suffering from hardships. Upon returning, the first team was less than 50 thousand, because those who succeeded in their business projects refused to go out and be exposed to the dangers of the road and start in the ruined city of Jerusalem at that time. Those few who came out are considered to be pious to a large extent.

Third: The books of Ezra and Nehemiah register a very important event in the history of Israel. This event symbolizes Christ, who led us through His cross, resurrection, and ascension from the temporal world that was set in the wicked, as to the upper Jerusalem.

Fourth: The two books have in common the following:

- 1- Both began in Persia and ended in Jerusalem.
- 2- Both pointed out that the Persian king's decision to return to Jerusalem had been issued, to confirm that God works even without believers to build his heavenly kingdom.

3- Both were interested in construction, whether it was the temple or the city, as a symbol of the believer's commitment to positive action.

4- A prayer in the spirit of reverence and confession of sins was mentioned in the ninth chapter of both books.

5- The two books ended with the purification of the people.

6- If the prophet Jeremiah had confirmed the occurrence of the captivity of God's city and the return (Jer29:10-13), then these two books confirm that God is faithful in fulfilling His promises at the appropriate time.

Fifth: The Jews returned to Jerusalem in three stages: the first group was under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest in 538 B.C and rebuilt the temple. The second group was under the leadership of Ezra in 458 B.C. The last group was under the leadership of Nehemiah in 444 B.C and built the walls of Jerusalem while repairing the city.

Sections of the book

First: The return under the leadership of Zerubbabel (p.1- 6):

Ezra the scribe considers that returning to Jerusalem, building the temple, and practicing of worship is the fulfillment of God's word. Its goal is to connect the people with God's Word and commandment. Thus he often mention <<The word of God >>, declaring its role in the religious, social and civil life of God's people (Look at, 1:1 - 6:14,18 - 7:6,10,41 - 9:4 - 10:3).

Second: The return under the leadership of Ezra (P.7-10):

There is about 60 years between the events of (P.6 & 7), between the emergence of the two prophets Hajji and Zachariah and the return from the captivity under the leadership of Ezra.



2 Pounds (Supported for the service)