

Aim:**Refer:** The Great Controversy chapter 16, Ezra

In 1534 King Henry VIII of England had separated England from the Roman Catholic Church and created the Church of England. The Church of England followed many of the Protestant beliefs but worshipped in a similar way to the Roman Catholic Church; instead of the Pope being called the head of the church, the king of England was the head.

In the beginning of the 1600's, the king of England declared those who would not conform to the traditions of the Church of England were not welcome in England. The Church of England had adopted many traditions from the Church of Rome but the Puritans were followers of what John Calvin taught and wanted to keep their worship pure and free from all reminders of Rome. But this was against the law and so their churches were forbidden and they were hunted, persecuted and imprisoned; they finally fled to Holland where they were free to worship as they wished. But life there was very different than they had known, the Dutch culture was very different than the English culture and the jobs available were very different too. They eventually decided to make a home for themselves in the "New World" – the newly discovered America.

They came to America because they wanted to keep their English culture but did not agree with the Church of England and wanted the freedom to worship in the way they believed was right and as time went on, they gradually made community laws requiring everyone in the community to worship in the same way too.

Roger Williams joined the Pilgrims at Plymouth a few years later and became a much loved minister. But his views that they needed to purchase land from the Indians, that everyone deserved religious freedom, that no one should be forced to attend church (for many would come even though they didn't believe) and that laws of the colony should only deal with how people should treat each other, not how they should worship God, were not well accepted. He was sentenced to banishment - forced to leave the community and for a time he lived in the wilderness then lived with an Indian tribe.

In 1636 Roger Williams purchased land from an Indian tribe on Rhode Island and started his own settlement which he called Providence Plantation. He believed that everyone should have the right to worship in the way they believed was right. Other communities with similar beliefs were also established nearby and in 1663 these combined communities were granted permission from King Charles II of England to form their own government.

Rhode Island became the home of the first Baptist church, the first Jewish synagogue and one of the first Quaker meeting houses in America.

Read Ezra 1:1-7 – This is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah that they would be exiled for 70 years.

Read Ezra 2:64-70 – Some people chose to stay in Babylon.

Discuss: Some of the reasons that people might have wanted to stay. (Old age, good jobs etc)

The people settled back into their home towns, some in or near Jerusalem, others in other towns in the land of Judah.

Ezra 3:1-4

In their second year back they started the work on the temple and when they completed the work on the foundation they celebrated.

Read Ezra 3:11-12

Discuss: Why were some people crying? (The new foundation was smaller)

The people who had been living in the land while the Israelites were gone were not happy about the Israelites return and tried in many ways to cause trouble. Before the temple was finished the troublemakers sent a letter to King Artaxerxes of Persia.

Read what King Artaxerxes wrote back in Ezra 4:18-23

Read Ezra 5:1 then turn to Haggai

Read Haggai 1:1-9 and discuss what it means

Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good."

Discuss other ways you could say this.

After hearing the prophecies of Haggai, the people started working on the temple again, then Governor Tattenai from the province west of the Euphrates River and some other officials came past and saw what was happening and demanded who had given them permission.

What did they say? **Ezra 5:11-13**

After a search was made and the decree of Cyrus was found, King Darius wrote back.

What was his decision? **Ezra 6:8-10**

Isn't that amazing? When they obeyed God He worked it out even better than they hoped for.

Discuss: What should / might the people have done when they were first made to stop building?

Discuss: What can we learn from this story?

Ezra's personal story begins in Ezra 7 when King Artaxerxes allowed Ezra the scribe to lead another group of any Israelites who wanted to return back to Jerusalem.

Ezra had a special job to do there. What was it? **Ezra 7:25**

When he arrived he found a problem. **Ezra 9:1-2 then read Ezra 10:1-3**

Can you think of some examples where Israelites were allowed to marry people from other nations? (Rahab, Ruth)

What was different in this case? (They were still idol worshippers)

If King David and King Solomon had not married idol worshipping wives from other nations, the kingdom of Israel would not have split and would not have been led to worship idols and they would never have been exiled to Babylon. Now the people were about to make the same mistake again.

Discuss: Can people today make that mistake?

Discuss: How can you avoid making this mistake?

Read: 2 Corinthians 6:14