

## Ezra Seeks God's Law

It's Valentine's Day. You're young and beautiful. Why won't you go?" asked Yvonne.

Yvonne was trying to convince her cousin, Carey, to go out with her brother's friend, Jerrad. Jerrad had been in the company of Carey several times, when she and her cousins had been together.

"He likes you. He wants to go out with you. What's wrong with that?" said Yvonne.

Jerrad had expressed those feelings to Carey several times. And each time she had declined his invitation.

"He said he's not a Christian, and not trying to be," replied Carey.

"Yeah, but he said he doesn't mind if you are," said Yvonne.

"I know. That's nice of him," said Carey. "I'm not going to be romantically linked or involved with someone who doesn't love God. I'm not going to be unequally yoked."

"Oh, my goodness, Carey!" exclaimed Yvonne.

"Sometimes I think you use the Bible to avoid life! We're young. We're supposed to be experimenting and having fun," she continued.

"I live life. I have fun," said Carey, reaching for her purse in the restaurant booth. "And I live my life according to the Word of God, because it's the best way."

"Don't get mad and leave," Yvonne said.

"I'm not mad. I'm headed to Bible study," smiled Carey. "It starts in 30 minutes. Do you want to meet me there?"

**1.** *Finish this sentence: "I usually go to \_\_\_\_\_ for guidance about life."*

**2.** *How often do you go to the Bible for guidance about your life?*

**3.** *Which Scriptures have helped you make decisions about your life?*

## A Family Tree

*Ezra 7:1-7, KJV*

1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,

4 The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,

5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:

6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

7 And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

*Ezra 7:1-7, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup>the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup>the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup>the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup>the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest— <sup>6</sup>this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. <sup>7</sup>Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

Ezra 1—6 describes the return of the Jews to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile in Babylon. When the Persians conquered Babylon, they believed that if people retain their identities, they were more likely to be compliant to Persian

laws and less prone to rebellion. So Cyrus, the king of Persia, declared that Jerusalem and the temple should be rebuilt. While many of the Jews had become accustomed to life in exile, some, like Ezra, wanted to return to Jerusalem. And so, with the full support and resources of the Persian kings, the attempt to rebuild Jerusalem had begun.

Ezra had a long and detailed genealogy, dating all the way back to Aaron. Like Daniel, Ezra had not abandoned the faith. Because of his knowledge of the law, a later king, Artaxerxes, established Ezra as a teacher who could revive the temple practices and teach the people. The king granted Ezra everything he needed, as well as priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, and temple servants who would be able to restore the temple practices.

**4.** *Why was Ezra qualified to be a priest and teacher?*

**5.** *Why did Ezra need the king's blessing and support in order to succeed?*

## A Successful Journey

*Ezra 7:8-10, KJV*

8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

9 For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

*Ezra 7:8-10, NIV*

<sup>8</sup>Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup>He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. <sup>10</sup>For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Ezra and his group would have traversed along the Fertile Crescent to Judea, first going north along the Euphrates River, then south to Jerusalem. The journey took about four months, and they made it to Jerusalem safely because God's favor was upon the appointed scribe.

Ezra's personal preparation for this monumental task was three-fold: to study the law of Moses, to live by it, and then to teach it to others. Keep in mind that Ezra had to do this in a foreign land with no temple or ritual sacrifices to observe and copy. However, for the difficult situations that lay ahead of him, Ezra fully prepared his heart for the task by saturating himself with the revealed Word of God.

**6.** *How long did it take for Ezra and his entourage to complete their journey?*

**7.** *How would you describe Ezra's passion for God's Word?*

## **Ezra's Marching Orders**

*Ezra 7:23-26, KJV*

23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

24 Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates

*Ezra 7:23-26, NIV*

<sup>23</sup>Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should his wrath fall on the realm of the king and of his sons? <sup>24</sup>You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God.

<sup>25</sup>And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and

and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. <sup>26</sup>Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

In addition to a vast amount of building materials, gold, silver, and even livestock to restore the temple practices, Artaxerxes gave Ezra broad sweeping authority to establish order and administer justice. The king's deference to "the God of heaven" (vs. 23) may have been merely for show, but he attributed the coming success of the rebuilding efforts to the God of Israel to avoid any "wrath" (vs. 23) on him and his household.

The king made it clear that those who worked in the temple would not be obligated to pay taxes or tributes. Ezra would ensure this and establish a judicial system to administer justice to all the people in this particular area. While he focused primarily on the Jews, those who lived within this area would also be subject to Ezra's guidelines.

In the law of Moses, there were clearly spelled out consequences for not obeying the law. These consequences range from capital punishment to exclusion from the community, confiscation of property, mandatory restitution, and sometimes imprisonment. Artaxerxes's admonitions reflected these guidelines from Moses, with which he was probably familiar.

**8.** *What did the king fear would happen if Ezra failed?*

**9.** *Why did the king prohibit Ezra from taxing the temple workers?*

## Healing Words on the Wall

Adrienne got the worst news of her life that cold December night at the hospital in Chicago. Her support system was strong. Her mother, aunt, cousin, and spiritual mentor were all in the doctor's office as he revealed the 27 lesions on her brain from her MRI report, which almost matched her age of 28. He said without a doubt the lesions were cancerous, and she only had six months to live. Dr. Coleman advised, "Go home and enjoy your Christmas."

While everyone was wiping tears from their eyes, Adrienne was sitting in disbelief, thinking, *Am I dreaming?* When she got home that night, she also thought to herself that she would turn to the Scriptures. Her spiritual mentor said to search for verses on healing. Adrienne found 31 healing Scriptures, one for each day of the month. She wrote them out and put them on her bedroom wall so that she could see and read them throughout the day.

As Adrienne read her verses, her faith increased. She believed God for a healing. The day arrived for her to get a biopsy of the lesions. Just before the biopsy, the doctor requested another MRI. Once he got the new MRI, he called down to the operating room and told the nurse there would be no procedure because there were no more lesions on her brain. He said to send the patient home.

The Word of God is not a mantra we can recite to get what we want—but it is powerful. It can lead us to physical and spiritual healing, point out our sins, and then point us to God. It gives us God's directions for how to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

**10.** *Has reading Scripture ever led to something miraculous happening to you? Explain your answer.*

**11.** *Are faith and Scripture interrelated when it comes to guidance and promises?*

**12.** *Why would Scripture sometimes be the last place we look for guidance?*

## Rightly Divide the Word

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). You can only handle God’s Word with accuracy when you have studied His Word. The truth of His Word shows us the way to live a godly life that pleases Him rather than looking to the world for its hollow guidance.

► *Think of ways you can read and study the Bible more often. Write one or more of those here, then commit to reading Scripture more to find God’s guidance for any problems you are now having.*

### KEY VERSE

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

—Ezra 7:10, KJV

For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

—Ezra 7:10, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

#### Week of February 14 through February 20

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Job 1:8-11, 13-22—Job Suffers.
- Tue.** Habakkuk 1:12-17—Habakkuk Struggles to See Justice.
- Wed.** 1 Peter 2:20-25—Suffering for Doing Right.
- Thu.** Psalm 29—God Is in the Storm.
- Fri.** Mark 14:32-42—Remove This Cup from Me.
- Sat.** Job 38:1-11—God Speaks from the Whirlwind.
- Sun.** Job 8:1-10, 20-22—God’s Justice Is Unfathomable.