

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 39

God guided Israel to repentance

Ezra 7:1–10:44



DAY 1

God provided for Israel's worship • Ezra 7:1–28

READ

Ezra 7:1–28

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ezra 7:1–28

A physical temple is only good if people worship there with right hearts. But in the 50 years between Ezra 6 and 7, the hearts of the Jews strayed from God. Since God was still committed to having a people to worship in His presence, God providentially raised up the right leader to bring the hearts of His people back to Him. Ezra was a priest skilled in the law of Moses (Ezra 7:1–6), and God provided people to return to Jerusalem with Ezra (7:7–10). While the group that returned with Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple, this second group returned to ensure that the temple was functioning properly. Like Zerubbabel, Ezra succeeded because “the good hand of his God” gave them success (7:6). This phrase is often repeated (cf. 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) to emphasize that it was by God’s *sovereign* hand that the people were able to return. Ezra recognized God’s *unrivaled power* over Artaxerxes (7:27; Prov 21:1) and over himself (Ezra 7:28). This gave Ezra courage, so he prepared the leaders of Israel for the journey to Jerusalem (7:28).

ASK

1. Why did the Israelite’s hearts need to be restored?
Because God’s purpose in bringing them back to the land was so that they would worship Him.
2. What man did God prepare to restore Israel?
God prepared Ezra, a priest who studied, obeyed, and taught God’s law.
3. What did the king give Ezra?
The king gave permission to any Jew who wanted to return to Jerusalem. He also gave silver and gold and articles for temple service.
4. What phrase repeatedly emphasizes that it was God’s power that restored His people?
“The hand of God” (Ezra 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31).

DISCUSS

1. What kind of people do you follow? What makes someone a good leader? Why is it important to have a good leader?
2. How does God’s unrivaled power give you courage to obey Him?

DAY 2

God protected Ezra on his journey to Jerusalem • Ezra 8:1–36

READ

Ezra 8:1–36

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ezra 8:1–36

God is determined to have a people devoted to worshiping Him, so by His great power He makes sure His plan will happen. He raised up the right man, and now He provided for the trip to Jerusalem. First, He gathered the people (Ezra 7:28b–8:14). Second, He supplied Levites for worship in the temple (8:15–20). Third, He protected the people (8:21–26). The journey to Jerusalem was dangerous, but Ezra was determined to make it without any help from Artaxerxes' soldiers. Ezra believed in the sovereignty of God, and his life proved it. He did not want to do anything to confuse the king concerning his trust in God's ability to protect the people on the return to Jerusalem (8:22). So the people, urged on by Ezra, depended on God alone through prayer and fasting (8:21–23). God answered, so Ezra and those with him were able to aid the people and the house of God (8:31–36). As with all that came before, this divine deliverance came at "the hand of our God" (8:31).

ASK

1. How did Ezra find Levites willing to return?
Ezra got the help of Israel's leaders, but ultimately it was by the good hand of God.
2. Who was missing from the group, and why were they important?
The Levites. The Levites were the only ones who could assist in temple worship.
3. Why did the Jews fast and pray?
Fasting and prayer were acts of utter dependence on God to protect them on the journey.

DISCUSS

1. If you believe God is sovereign, how will your life show it?
2. How has God protected and provided for you? Do you talk about this with others, so that they will see God's power?

DAY 3

God prompted the people to repent • Ezra 9:1–10:44

READ

Ezra 9:1–10:19

EXPLAIN

The truth of Ezra 9:1–10:19

God knew why He was bringing Ezra to Jerusalem, but Ezra did not know until now, when he heard the sad news: just a few generations after the first return under Zerubbabel, the Jews had begun to intermarry with the people in the land (Ezra 9:1–3). Even the priests and Levites were guilty. Israel was supposed to be a holy nation (Exod 19:5–6), pure and set apart to worship God. God had forbidden intermarriage because

foreign wives inevitably led Israel to worship foreign gods (Exod 34:10–17; Deut 7, 23). In desperation, Ezra threw himself upon the mercy of God (Ezra 9:3–15). He identified himself with his people as he prayed with true humility and utter brokenness over sin. Ezra entrusted himself completely—no matter the consequences—to the God who is "just" (9:15). Many of the people truly repented. They were broken over their sin (10:1–5) and committed to turn away from their sin (10:6–15). Three months later, in time for the Passover celebration, the Jews had completely separated themselves from the surrounding people (10:16–17). They were ready to worship God.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. How had the people sinned?
They had married foreign women, which led them to worship foreign gods.
2. What did Ezra do when he heard?
He was very sad, trembled, and confessed the sins of the people.
3. Why was Israel's sin especially bad?
Even after God graciously restored them from exile, they turned to the same sin that had begun Israel's fall (1 Kings 11).
4. How did the people respond?
They repented.

DISCUSS 

1. How do you respond to sin in your family, church, or community? What things can you imitate from Ezra's response?
2. How do you know the people repented? What elements of true repentance do you see (confession, sorrow, getting rid of the sin, turning to God)? When you "apologize," do you truly repent?

DAY 4*Rightly handling the word of truth • 2 Timothy 2:15***READ** 

2 Timothy 2:15

EXPLAIN **The truth of 2 Timothy 2:15**

Only some are called to be teachers of the church like Timothy (1 Cor 12:29; 1 Tim 2:12; Jas 3:1). But every Christian, including you, is called to teach God's word in some way (Deut 6:7; Col 3:16; Titus 2:3–4). Ezra shows you the preparation that is required (Ezra 7:10). First, he diligently studied God's word. So like him, be a hard worker, rightly handling God's word (2 Tim 2:15). Do not misrepresent God. Work hard to get it exactly right. Be diligent to guard against false teaching (2:14, 16–17). Second, Ezra put God's word into practice in his own life. This does not mean you have to be perfect before teaching, but you embrace God's word for your own life and show good fruit (Matt 7:5, 16). Third, as you know and do, then teach. Perhaps you will one day do so as an elder over the church (1 Tim 3:2), but even if not, you are still called to serve as a priest of God (1 Pet 2:5). Only when every believer is faithful to teach others will the church be what it is called to be (Col 3:16).

ASK 

1. What was Ezra's pattern of preparation?
He studied God's word, obeyed God's word, and taught God's word (Ezra 7:10).
2. Why is it important to study and obey God's word before teaching others?
So our words and actions match God's word; so we're not a hypocrite (Matt 7:5).
3. What does it mean to accurately handle God's word?
It means to work very hard to get it right.
4. Who is called to teach?
All Christians are called to teach one another (Col 3:16).

DISCUSS 

1. What are some jobs where it's important to be accurate? What happens when someone does something inaccurate in a job like this? Are the consequences greater when dealing with God's word?
2. Since you are called to teach God's word in some way, what steps can you take to be able to do so?

DAY 5

He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion •
Philippians 1:6

READ

Philippians 1:1–11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Philippians 1:6

God made sure to complete His work in Israel by returning them to the land and restoring their hearts to Himself, and one day He will finish that work (Rom 11:26). So you can trust that God does the same for you, if you are His. By His sovereign grace He saved you, and by His sovereign grace He restores and reforms you over and over again. So when you feel like you are too weak and doomed to fail, run to Him in prayer as Ezra did and receive mercy and grace for every need (Heb 4:16). Like Ezra, you must work hard to grow in godliness, but your hope is in the grace of God at work in you (1 Cor 15:10). Your hope is not in yourself, but in your God who will complete His work in you (Phil 1:6). And this hope will not fail, because when God saves, He never fails to finish the job (John 6:40, 44; Rom 5:10). He faithfully keeps all those He saves until the “day of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:10–15; 2 Cor 5:9–10).

ASK

1. Who completes God’s work of salvation?
God Himself.
2. Why don’t we need to fear concerning God’s work of salvation?
Because God will not fail to bring His work to completion.
3. When is God’s work of salvation brought to completion?
The “day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).
4. How are believers rewarded?
According to the faithfulness of their ministry on earth (1 Cor 3:10–15; 2 Cor 5:9–10).

DISCUSS

1. Describe a time you started something but were unable to finish it. Why is this never true of God?
2. When you are carrying something heavy, does it slow you down? If you live as if your salvation depends on your own efforts, will you be more or less successful in serving God?

NEXT WEEK

God led Nehemiah to
reconstruct the wall

Nehemiah 1:1–7:73a

