

EZRA

Ezra 7:1 - 10:17

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Ezra

Key-location: Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Prayers of Ezra (Ezr 8:21-23; 9:5-15; 10:1).
- Marriages between Jews and worshipers of other gods condemned (Ezr 9:1-4; 10:2,10-18, 44).

Key-attitudes:

- Ezra's holiness and determination.
- The inconsistency of the Jews in Jerusalem.
- Ezra's anger and grief when he saw the sins of the Jews in Jerusalem.

Initial-situation:

The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the city, and carried its citizens into exile. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews lived as exiles in Babylon for seventy years. Then Persia conquered Babylon. King Cyrus, of Persia, issued a proclamation permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The first group of Jews to return from exile to Jerusalem numbered 42,360.

Initial-problem:

Eighty years after the first group of exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem (458 B.C.), Ezra led a second group of exiles to Jerusalem.

Final-situation:

The exiles assembled in Jerusalem, confessed their sins, and agreed that each man who had married a foreign woman would put her away.

BIBLE STORY

Eighty years after the first group of exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem (458 B.C.), Ezra led a second group of exiles to Jerusalem.

Ezra was a teacher well-versed in the Law of Moses. Ezra devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws to the Jews (Ezr 7:1-10).

Before leaving on the trip, Ezra proclaimed a fast to ask God for a safe journey for the returning exiled Jews. Ezra had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on

everyone who seeks him.” Therefore, Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect them from bandits. They fasted and petitioned God for safety. God answered their prayers (Ezr 8:21-23).

Ezra arrived In Jerusalem and discovered Jews who had adopted the customs of the surrounding people. Jewish men had married non-Jewish women who worshiped other gods. Jewish religious leaders and government officials were the first ones guilty of this unfaithfulness (Ezr 9:1-2).

Ezra ripped his robe and slumped to the ground, horrified by the immoral conduct of the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem. Ezra sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice, Ezra fell on his knees and prayed. Ezra confessed both the sins of his ancestors and the sins of present day Jews (Ezr 9:3-15).

Ezra continued praying, confessing, weeping, and throwing himself down before the temple of God. A large crowd gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. The exiles assembled in Jerusalem, confessed their sins, and agreed that each man who had married a non-Jewish woman who worshiped other gods would put her away (Ezr 10:1-17).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When the Jews first returned to Jerusalem, they had a determination to serve the Lord. What motivated them to replace that determination with tendencies to follow the customs of people who did not serve the Lord God?
2. What motivates you to replace the desire to serve God with tendencies to follow the customs of people who do not serve the Lord God?
3. What part did prayer play in Ezra’s life?
4. How did Ezra’s confession about God influence his actions?
5. What problem did Ezra face when he arrived in Jerusalem?
6. How did Ezra confront fellow Jews who were guilty of disobeying God?
7. What can you learn from Ezra that will help you deal with people who are doing wrong?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Prayer produces results.** God answered Ezra’s prayer for protection on the trip to Jerusalem (Ezr 8:23). Ezra prayed for the Israelites who abandoned God’s laws. They recognized their sins (Ezr 10:1).

2. **A Christian's conduct should be influenced by what he confesses about God.** Ezra had told the king that God's hand is on everyone who seeks him. Therefore, Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect them from bandits. The Jews fasted and petitioned God for safety. God answered their prayers (Ezr 8:21-23).
3. **Christian leaders need to devote themselves to: studying God's word, obeying God's word, and teaching God's word to others.** Ezra devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws to the Jews (Ezr 7:1-10).
4. **A person's zeal to serve God can become weakened by the influence of non-believers who surround them; therefore, God's people must continually remember their commitment to give God first place in their lives.** The first group to return from Babylon to Jerusalem immediately built an altar as a symbol that their priority was serving and obeying God (Ezr 3:1-13). The years passed and they forgot God's laws and gave themselves to mixed marriages with women who worshiped other gods. Religious leaders and government officials were the first ones guilty of this unfaithfulness (Ezr 9:1-2). The history of Israel proves that religious devotion is weakened by pagan influence.
5. **Combining prayers with tears is the best way to confront someone about their wrongdoing.** The Christian who weeps and prays when confronted with the sins of others is the one who will most likely lead the wrongdoers to repent. Ezra wept and prayed when he learned of the detestable practices of the Jews (Ezr 9:3-5; 10:1). Jews began to weep, then they confessed their sins, and they agreed that each man who had married a non-Jewish woman who worshiped other gods would put her away (Ezr 10:1-17). Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Lk 19:41). Paul feared that when he visited the church at Corinth he would weep over many who were sinning (2 Cor 12:23).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Chant:**
Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

All	
“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1 NIV).	
Group 1	Group 2
Brothers and sisters	<u>if</u> someone is caught in a sin
you who live by the Spirit	live by the Spirit
should <u>restore</u> that person gently.	gently.
But <u>watch</u> yourselves,	or you also may be tempted.
All	
“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1 NIV).	

2. **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in “twitter” length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about the story.
- How they are similar to or different from Ezra.
- What they should do in order to help people be all that God wants them to be.