

Know the God of Scripture

Volume 1

Week 20: Ezra, A Man of God - Answer Guide

Below is the answer guide for this week's lesson. By no means are the answers complete or the only possible responses to each question. They are a guide to fully understanding the intent of the questions posed.

1. The prophecy of the return of the exiles to Jerusalem is found in Jeremiah 29:10-14. Moses foresaw God's wrath upon the nation of Israel 700 years earlier as recorded in Leviticus 26:34-35. The Sabbath Moses is alluding to is mentioned in Leviticus 25:4 where every 7th year seed is not planted in order to let the land rest (Sabbath). Maimonides (1138-1204), a respected Jewish Old Testament scholar, says 69 sabbatical years + 1 = 70 years as predicted by Moses and Jeremiah. These are referred to as Jubilee Sabbaths. 1 Chronicles 36:21 is alluding to the sabbaths that the land of Israel had experienced during the captivity of Israel.

2. Ezra, in Hebrew, means "helper." He is a descendant of Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5). His desire was to establish purity within the Temple after it was rebuilt. He was a very skilled scribe in the law of Moses. A quiet and humble man, he exhibited a zeal for righteousness. He was a faithful prophet of YHWH.

3. The phrase is "the hand of God was upon him." Ezra was a great example of what an available, willing and empty vessel for God looks like. He acted as the literal "hand" of God, who faithfully recorded what God placed on his heart. God's favor was shown on Ezra as evidenced in his life.

4. Ezra was asked to read the Law of Moses in Nehemiah 8:1-4. The people's reaction was to bow down prostrate and worship the Lord. These were Persian-minded Jews who weren't familiar with the Torah. That day they were schooled in the Law of Moses and it convicted them! God's Word, even today, has the power to convict and transform people (Romans 12:1,2).

5. Zechariah is written as a chiasm (a literary device), with chapter 5 being the main message, "the coming of God's Kingdom." He was given divine visions of the coming Messiah. Haggai's message was the hope of the coming Kingdom of God. In addition, Haggai (1:1-15) the prophet, accuses his fellow Jews of being self-absorbed by building their house and neglecting God's house (Temple)! Both prophets pointed to a "Day of the Lord" where the Messiah, the eternal King of Israel, would come and forever reign over His kingdom.

6. The book of Malachi is unique in that he doesn't address the people of Jerusalem, but the priests of his day. He accuses the priests six times with the pattern of claim – disagreement – response. The priests serving in the rebuilt Temple of God were corrupt and far from obeying God's Law in their hearts and their rituals. He exposes the true human heart condition of depravity and a need for a redeeming Messiah where the future hope of Israel would be restored.

7. Ezra was a Scribe and very familiar with the Law of Moses. He demonstrated a passion to:

1. Study the Law: Hebrew "*darash*" meaning to seek or search
2. Practice the Law: Hebrew "*asah*" meaning to put into action
3. Teach the Law: Hebrew "*lamad*" meaning to teach or learn

"... determined in his heart" is a Hebrew phrase meaning to establish in the inner man. In other words, he, like David, sought to make God's Law part of his very being so he could walk rightly with YHWH. One must know the Word of God in order to abide by it. One of the best ways to incorporate the Law of God is to know it well enough to teach it with confidence. Teachers who have done what they teach are the most respected and admired.

8. Deuteronomy 7:3 specifically commanded the Israelites not to intermarry with unbelievers or non-Jews when they entered the Promised Land. The purpose was clear, so that the sons and daughters of foreign lands would not turn the hearts of the Israelites towards other gods. The dilemma Ezra faced was that this act had already happened. He exhibited great humility in approaching God by kneeling with His robe torn and raising his hands towards heaven.

Syncretism is the process of bringing two or more religions together to form one that displays traits of each part. This is highly dangerous because God is jealous and specifically commands His people to not worship other gods in any form or fashion.

It is interesting that God never commanded Ezra to make his decree of divorce, for God opposes divorce (Malachi 2:13-16). Ezra was distraught that his fellow Israelites had broken God's Law. It seems his purpose for commanding the divorces was to rid sin from the life of Israelites like removing leaven from dough (Matthew 18).

9. Ezra was deeply distraught as evidenced by his response. Upon hearing the news, he tore his tunic and pulled out his hair (Ezra 9:3), indications of deep mourning. He seemed devastated of the unfaithfulness demonstrated. He fell on his knees and prayed confessions for the people.

10. Ezra's prayer is in Ezra 9:6-15. Ezra 9:8 is a demonstration of his comprehension of divine grace (reference Ephesians 2:8). Ezra confesses sin, pleads for covenant renewal, and vows to follow Torah. It is followed up with celebration to the LORD.

In the same manner, Ezra's prayer is a model for us to implement in our daily prayers. A simply acrostic I've learned over the years that I try to implement in my prayers is ACTS. It stands for:
A – Accolades: Acknowledge God for who He is by praising Him
C – Confession: Confess your iniquities before the LORD and seek His forgiveness
T – Thanksgiving: Be thankful for God's goodness, His intervention in your life, and all He's blessed you with
S – Supplication: End your prayers by praying for other people, especially for those who ask for your prayers

Additional Questions:

1. Answers will vary depending on personal experience. Reading God's Word draws us closer to Him. It starts the day off right with our hearts full of joy and hope. It reminds us who He is, what He has done in the past and that He is coming back. Reading God's Word "resets" our thinking and keeps us focused on Him.

2. Answers will vary depending on personal experience. Ezra encountered many obstacles, most linked to the rebelliousness of the Jews and surrounding people.

3. Answers will vary depending on personal experience.

