

Ezra 7:1-28**Ezra Comes to Jerusalem**

7 After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra 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 Zerahiah, 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 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. ⁷ Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

⁸ Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.

King Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra

¹¹ This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord for Israel:

¹² Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, teacher of the Law of the God of heaven:

Greetings.

¹³ Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. ¹⁴ You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand. ¹⁵ Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶ together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ With this money be

sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

¹⁸ You and your fellow Israelites may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. ¹⁹ Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. ²⁰ And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you are responsible to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

²¹ Now I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you— ²² up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit. ²³ 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? ²⁴ 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.

²⁵ And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and 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. ²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Praise be to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honour to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem in this way ²⁸ and who has extended his good favour to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

2 Timothy 2:14-17a

¹⁴ Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not

need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. ¹⁶ Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. ¹⁷ Their teaching will spread like gangrene.

Please have your **Bibles opened** to **Ezra chapter 7**

There's an **outline** for you to take **notes**. Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Intro/Context (Ezra 7:1-6)

[Slide-Context]

Just a **recap** where we got up to last week in Ezra chapter 6

We left the **Jewish people** from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin – who had **returned from exile in Babylon** – back in Jerusalem and they have **completed the rebuilding of God's Temple** and they've **celebrated the Passover Festival**.

And we saw that the Persian King – **King Darius** – ruling over the Persian Empire which included Israel at that time – he had **allowed this to happen and even funded it**. And we said – **God moves hearts – even the heart of a pagan King**.

(pause)

As we hit Ezra chapter 7 this morning

60 years have gone by between chapter 6 and 7

There's been **two kings after Darius – Xerxes and Artaxerxes**

And during this 60 years – the **events recorded in the Book of Esther** have taken place.

(pause)

[Slide-Context]

Now the author of the book – **Ezra himself** – finally **shows up!**

And we are given **Ezra's family tree** (genealogy) – and we see – verse 5 - he is from **the priestly tribe of the Levites** and that he is a **descendant of the first High Priest** of Israel, **Aaron** (Moses' brother)

And we also see that Ezra is a **descendant of Seriah** (verse 1) who was the **High Priest when the Jews were exiled** to Babylon – this shows that there was **continuity in the priesthood** – even though they were in exile.

And we also learn from verse 6 that **Ezra** is - not only a priest - but also “*a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses*”

And this morning I'd like us to focus on **how devoted Ezra was to God's Word** – so that we can learn from Ezra.

So we are going to use **verse 10** – the **key verse in the chapter** – to help us do that
If we skip down to verse 10 it says

[Slide-Key Verse-V10]

For Ezra had devoted himself to the study - and - observance [obedience] of the Law of the Lord, - and - to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Ezra was devoted to **three things**

The **Study** of God's Word

The **Observing** (**obeying**) of God's Word)

And the **Teaching** of God's Word

[Slide-learn, live, teach]

I've called this – **Learn it** – **Live it** – and – **Teach It!**

Learn It (Ezra 7:6, 10a; 2 Timothy 2:15)

So, first let's look at **Learn it**

[Slide-Learn it]

First part of v10 says - *Ezra had devoted himself to the study... of the Law of God*

Ezra studied God's Word in detail – and really learnt it well

How well do we learn?

Learning illustration

When my son and three daughters studied for the HSC – my son got an overall mark of 97.9% - my three girls' marks were much lower. I told all of them at the time; their marks reflected the amount of effort they put into learning.

My point is – **we have to put some effort in to learning and studying God's Word!**

Ezra had grown up in the family of priests

But he is introduced to us - not because he is a priest – but because he is a **student of God's Word.**

Before Ezra taught anyone, he invested time in understanding God's Word - and he was respected because he was well versed in God's Law.

Verse 6 says - "*The hand of the Lord his God was on him*" (v.6) – this was because Ezra's life was shaped by God's Word.

In our NT reading – The Apostle Paul – passes on the baton to young Timothy – and he says in 2 Timothy 2:15 - we are to “*correctly handle the word of truth*” – and we can only do that – if we learn it well!

Application:

For us then – perhaps some questions we can ask ourselves this morning:

- Am I making time to not just read God’s Word – but time to study it and learn it?
- Is my heart *set* on really knowing God and His Son Jesus?
- Have I prayerfully considered joining a Bible Study Growth Group?

Some people mentioned in our Bible Study groups this week – that it is difficult to study the Bible on your own – if we don’t have questions in front of us to help dig deep into the Bible passage

So I thought it would be helpful to just have **a few general questions** that we could ask ourselves when we read ANY Bible passage

- What “fallen condition” do I share with the people in the Bible passage?
- Who am I most like in the Bible Passage?
- What’s the BIG IDEA of this Bible Passage?
- Having read the Bible Passage – what action will I take?
- And if I’m reading an Old Testament Passage – how does this passage point me towards Jesus?

(pause)

Now the Bible contains 66 books and it can be quite daunting to read and learn it – so we might also need – **ways to learn the Bible!**

Ways to learn

- It's worth developing a big picture of the Bible Story – the timeline we have in the Hall for the children is quite helpful – you can also get summary timelines on the internet!
- When we read the Bible – it's more helpful to read a whole book of the Bible to get continuity in God's story – than to just read random Bible passages or verses
- As we read the Bible – we can highlight passages that spoke to us – we can even write them down for future reference
- We could buy a Study Bible – which has study notes explaining the passage to us
- And we could use a Bible Commentary – which gives us detailed notes about each book of the Bible. A good general commentary is – The NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY – edited by Don Carson
- We could also commit to memorizing one Bible verse per week – to increase our knowledge of the Bible
- And we could also attend a "Discovery Bible Study" Group – separate to our regular Bible Study Groups – which takes people – through God's timeline – from Creation to Christ Jesus! (please see myself or David – if you'd like to join this type of study group)

Live It (Ezra 7:6-20, 10b; 2 Timothy 2:16-17)

This brings us to the 2nd point – once we've learnt God's Word – we need to **Live it!**

[Slide-Live It]

Second part of v10 says - *Ezra had devoted himself to... the observance of the Law of the Lord ...*

You see – it's not just a matter of having **head knowledge** of God's Word – we must also have **heart knowledge**

Ezra had God's word in his heart and lived out God's Word – so God was with him...

We see this in verse 6 - *The king had granted Ezra everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him*

In verse 7 – Ezra brought a whole community with him – to reestablish worship in Jerusalem – priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants – it's a bit like a huge church plant!

And because Ezra lived out God's Word in obedience – in verse 9 – *the gracious hand of God was upon Ezra* in the treacherous 900-mile (1400km) journey from Babylon to Jerusalem – which took four months! Ezra and his travelling companions would have been exposed to danger carrying valuable possessions through hostile places.

And when we read King Artaxerxes letter given to Ezra in verses 11 to 20 – it confirms Ezra’s godliness – and he’s pretty much given whatever he needs - to establish worship in Jerusalem

- Verse 13 – Ezra’s is allowed to take any Israelites who want to go with him
- Verse 14 – Ezra is entrusted to investigate what’s going on in Judah and Jerusalem - to see how people are actually living out God’s Law – because Ezra is the expert in God’s Law!
- Verses 15 to 20 – Ezra’s reputation and integrity are so respected - Ezra’s is trusted with all the silver and gold he needs - and he can buy whatever is needed to make sacrifices to the Lord and what is needed to ensure proper worship is carried out

Ezra's credibility and influence came from a life which has been lived in obedience to God’s Law! Even the pagan King, Artaxerxes, can see this about Ezra!

When we obey God’s Law – it positions us to do God’s purposes and also enables people to trust us – because they see we are fair-dinkum!

In our NT reading – 2 Timothy 2:16-17 - the Apostle Paul urges young Timothy to *avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene!*

What Paul is saying is - our lives must be lived in obedience to God’s Word – there should be no ungodly behaviour or godless chatter!

Living Illustrations

For example -

Imagine, that you work for a big company and the Boss of the company has to travel overseas for a couple of years. So he says to you and the other trusted employees, "Look, I'm going overseas. And while I'm gone, I want you to pay close attention to the business. You must manage things while I'm away. I will email you regularly. When I do, I will give you clear instructions what you should do from now until I return from this trip."

Everyone agrees.

The Boss is gone for a couple of years. During that time he sends regular emails communicating his desires and concerns.

Then finally he returns.

He walks up to the front door of the company and immediately discovers everything is in a mess--weeds in all the flower beds, windows broken at the front of the building, the receptionist is asleep at the front desk, loud music blaring from several offices, and some workers playing cricket in the warehouse.

Instead of making a profit, the business has suffered great losses. Without hesitation he calls everyone together and asks, "What happened? Didn't you get my emails?"

They say, "Oh, yeah, sure. We got all your emails. We've even printed them out and filed them. And some of us have memorized them. In fact, we have 'email study' group every Sunday to remind us of your emails. You know, those were really great emails, boss!"

Then the Boss asks "But what did you do about my instructions?" And, the employees reply, "Do? Well, nothing. But we read every one of them!"

Application:

For us...

How **obedient** are we to God's Word?

Are we living it!

To assess our own worship and obedience to God, we need to ask ourselves some important questions:

- Do I worship God on Sundays only or with my whole life?
- Is my worship sincere or by rote?
- Am I giving a fair proportion of my time, talent and resources in service to God – or am I short changing God?
- Am I obeying God's Word, even when no-one is watching?
- Do I practice what I say I believe?
- Do I talk about God and Jesus often – or only occasionally?
- Would non-Christians see me as a hypocrite? Do they even know I'm a Christian?
- Am I quick to repent when God's Word or another person convicts me of my sin?
- Do I show the love of Jesus consistently or half-heartedly or begrudgingly?

- I am caring about others or just staying in my own little world – do I pastorally care for others – a phone call – a visit – a conversation over morning tea to see how they are going?

And - to help others assess their worship and obedience:

- Am I setting an example of humble obedience to others
- Am I encouraging and discipling people in their walk with Jesus
- Am I praying for people to become more faithful in their worship and obedience

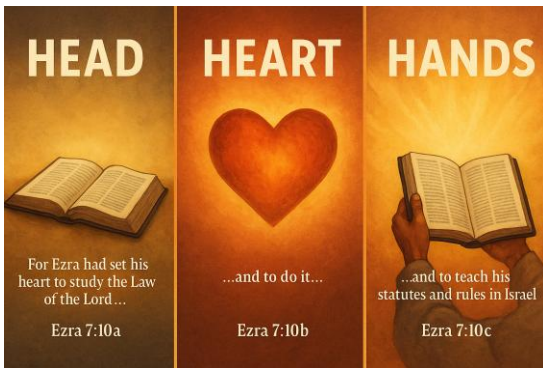
Teach It (Ezra 7:21-28, 10c; 2 Timothy 2:14)

This brings us to the 3rd point – once we've **learnt** God's Word – and **lived** God's word - we need to **Teach it!**

[Slide-Teach It!]

Third part of v10 - *Ezra had devoted himself to... teaching its decrees and laws in Israel...*

You see – it's not just a matter of having **head knowledge** of God's Word – and **heart knowledge** of God's Word – it's also a matter of using our **hands** – to **teach** God's Word



In verses 21 to 24 – King Artaxerxes gives Ezra the authority to oversee the proper worship at the temple

Ezra is to be supplied with silver, wheat, wine (in baths – not bottles) and olive oil – and unlimited salt (verse 22)

It seems that the King has a motive for entrusting Ezra to teach the people proper worship – it's in verse 23 – if the King gives Ezra what he needs – and Ezra teaches the community to follow God's law then they will become obedient citizens and less likely to rebel against Persian rule – and then God's wrath/anger won't fall on the King or his sons.

And to gain favour with God – the King gives the Jews exemption from paying tax (verse 24)

Then in verse 25 – out of deep respect for Ezra's knowledge and wisdom of God's Law – the King authorizes Ezra to appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice in the region – and Ezra is to also teach God's Law to any who do not know the Law.

Again – if society is built on God's Law – it's less like to give the King problems in this region of His Kingdom!

And to make sure the King covers all bases – in verse 26 – he outlines the punishments that Ezra can implement should people not obey God's law – these punishments include - death, banishment, confiscation of property or imprisonment

Those who ignore God's Word face judgment!

This gives us some idea of how important the King sees God's Word is – and why it needs to be passed on to others.

(pause)

Now, Ezra's mission wasn't for personal success; it was to transform a nation through the teaching of God's truth.

That's why things like teaching Scripture to our children in schools or at our Jaffa youth group - is so important – it's a way of transforming the next generation!

God's Word is not meant to stop with us—it flows through us - on to others.

In our NT reading – in 2 Timothy 2:14 – the Apostle Paul tells young Timothy to ***“Keep reminding God's people of these things”*** – these things are the things that Paul has taught and passed on to Timothy from God's Word.

Paul passed on the baton to Timothy.

That's our job too!

Just like an Olympic 4x100 relay team

The baton change is crucial - if it's done clumsily the race is over – the baton change has to be done smoothly.

If we've learnt God's Word and are living God's Word – passing it on to others will go smoothly

Now if we are meant to teach others

It's worth asking ourselves how we do that

Not everyone is going to be able to preach – or teach a Scripture class or youth group

But there are other ways - depending on our context

- Meeting up with someone – one-on-one - to read and explain the Bible with them and pray – or to go through “Christianity Explained” with them
- As a parent or grandparent – we can teach our children at home
- We can tell people how we came to believe in Jesus – and what we believe (Testimony)
- We can practice hospitality – invite someone over for dinner – it's a safe environment for them to ask questions and to explore the Bible with them
- We can refer people to Bible apps and Podcasts that teach and encourage

Conclusion/Challenge (Ezra 7:27-28)

To finish up then – in verses 27 and 28

[Slide-Conclusion]

Ezra recognizes that everything—his opportunity to learn, live, and teach God's Word— and the good favour he got from the King – all of it - comes from **God's**

gracious hand. Ezra doesn't boast in his success or influence. He worships God and gives Him the Glory!

For us, it's worth pausing every day and **thanking God for where we have seen His gracious hand in our lives**

- For the doors God opened – which we thought were closed!
- For the answered prayers!
- For His provision – and He often provides immeasurably more than we can imagine!
- For His protection!
- For the way He transforms people including us!

[Slide-Conclusion 2]

And notice that because God's Hand was with Ezra – it gave him courage and confidence – verse 28 – “*Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage*”

So, let me leave us with a **challenge** for the week ahead

[Slide-Challenge]

"Will we be like Ezra this week? Will we open the Word for ourself? Will we let it shape our life? And will we teach it to our children, grandchildren, our friends, our church family?"

"Take courage—the **gracious hand of the Lord your God is on you** – as you learn, **live and teach God's Word.**"

Let's pray

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gracious hand upon us in every detail of our lives. Father, please enable and equip us to learn from your Holy Word and apply you Word to our lives, so we live it. And Father, please grant us opportunities to teach your Word, like Ezra did, to people who don't know your word and don't know Jesus. In His Name, we pray. Amen