CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
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Scripture Story: Ezra 7–10.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 50; 51.

leading them home



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flashlight

"Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he 'prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.' Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God's people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 608).

keytext

"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)

what do you think?

Do you like coming home? There is nothing like coming home after a long time away. You can imagine what it would have felt like to go home after all that time. How do you feel after being away from home? Are you happy to return? hesitant? unsure?

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INTO THE STORY

"After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—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. 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 arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. 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. 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."

"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. 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. 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, 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. 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.

"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. Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you are responsible to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury."

(Ezra 7:1-10, 13-20, NIV)

did you know?

About 40,000 Israelites went home with Ezra during this period. This was not the entire nation of Israel, but it was a significant number. The question of why some didn't go home should be looked at. Perhaps, as we see later on in the text, it is because of the intermarrying that the Israelites became so fond of during this time. Perhaps it was because of their lengthy captivity that they had become so comfortable in a foreign land that they couldn't see themselves leaving. Do you think you would have stayed or left?

OUT OF THE STORY

What do you think of Ezra now that you know a little bit more about him?

The king entrusted Ezra with money, valuable articles for the Temple, and told him to let him know if he needed anything else! What does this say about Ezra's character, and the trust that the king put in Ezra?

How can we be persons of character so that others can trust us?

How could you be like Ezra, devoting yourself to Scripture and following God's will?

Those going home included priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants. What does that tell us about God? about us? about our relationship with God?

How do you think the Israelites felt about coming home?

Why do you think Ezra was picked out of everyone else to lead the children of Israel back to the Promised Land?

punch lines

"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" **(Acts 5:42, NIV).**

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" **(Hebrews 4:13, NIV).**

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" **(Proverbs 4:23, NIV).**

"Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the LORD God" **(1 Chronicles 22:19, NIV).**

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" **(1 Corinthians 3:16, NIV).**

"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers" **(Proverbs 11:14, NIV).**

further insight

"Ezra endeavored to gain a heart preparation for the work he believed was before him. He sought God earnestly, that he might be a wise teacher in Israel."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 608

"Ezra became a mouthpiece for God, educating those about him in the principles that govern heaven."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 609

Sabbath

Read Ezra 7:10.

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity" (Fundamental Belief 17, Spiritual Gifts and Ministries).

Coming home is always an interesting thing. Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter. The city of Jerusalem was probably still in ruins at the time Ezra was given permission to take whoever wanted to go back to Israel. This would have made the coming home a bit bitter. However, they were no longer to be foreigners in a foreign country, so that had to be sweet.

It is important to realize that Ezra's leadership abilities were pretty important here. He had to convince those Israelites that were becoming more and more comfortable in Babylon, a city of incomparable riches, that they should go home to the rubble that was Jerusalem. That could not have been an easy task. Not only that: when he got the group together, there were no people from the tribe of Levi, which were very important to have, and so he had to go back and convince them. He could have done this only if he had trained himself to listen to God and to pray at every turn.

In what ways has God placed you in a position to influence those around you?

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Sunday

Read Colossians 1:11.

After having read the *Out of the Story* questions, do you think that you could have been a leader like Ezra? Could you have disciplined yourself enough in order to listen to God and make His will the desire of your heart? The task that Ezra was taking was a huge task, and one that could easily have failed. What do you do when you have a difficult task to complete? Do you bring God into the equation? Explain.

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Monday

Read Proverbs 9:10.

Ezra is the key to this story. The *Key Text* says that he was committed not only to knowing the law, but to keeping it as well. This is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to believing in God. Do we do what we know He wants us to? If not, why not? Do we even care about what He is asking us to do? Ezra cared! Not only did Ezra care, but he moved as soon as he was asked to move. He became what God needed him to be—a leader—and helped change the course of history.

Tuesday

Read 1 Chronicles 22:19 and Ezra 7:25.

But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition." This *Flashlight* quote is important to the reading of this whole text and in understanding the kind of person Ezra was. We oftentimes realize that something is wrong with our spirituality. We often think that we understand what we are supposed to do. However, are we willing to actually move in the direction that God is asking us to move? Are we truly seeking to know the will of God by becoming students of Scripture and people of action when it comes to His will?

Wednesday

Read Proverbs 3:23.

The *Punch Lines* this week spoke specifically about why we do what we do, and about our hearts. Ezra prepared his heart by making a decision to love God and seek His will. The decision came and the rest followed. Perhaps this is a good model for us.

"As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. . . . More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely" (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 67). The reality is that once our hearts are prepared, we become more and more in tune with what God wants and how we can fulfill His will in our lives. If Ezra could move a country's worth of people, in what ways can we move ourselves?

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Thursday

Read Romans 10:17.

Have you decided to move your heart to know the Scriptures, seek God's will, and lead others to Him? It's a big question, with another question in tow: "How?" The first thing to do is to ask God into your life and ask Him to make His presence known. Then search the Scriptures to see where God is talking to you. After this, it is simply a matter of movement, in order to live what you know to be true.

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Friday

Read Jeremiah 29:11-13.

Does God have a plan for you? Absolutely! It is the same plan for us all: to be together with one another again soon. He seeks reunion with all of us, and with you as well! Ask yourself this question: "How can I be a leader like Ezra for You, Lord?"

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 50; 51.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.