



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God called Ezra from the priestly class to be a teacher of the Law—a scribe. But hearing God's call was not enough. He had to prepare for his calling by studying hard, so that when the time came he could confidently declare God's Word to the exiles who had returned to Israel.

That day came when, with the newly constructed wall of Jerusalem as his backdrop, Ezra lifted his voice to teach the Scriptures to the nation and call them to obedience. The truth shone through Ezra's words like a beacon, and the people, who had lived for years in darkness, saw the way of God clearly. God moved mightily in people's hearts as He used Ezra to open their eyes. In this thrilling moment, Ezra was doing what he was born to do.

Ezra's example demonstrates the powerful results of combining the study of Scripture with the call of God. Do you yearn to know, prepare for, and live out God's calling? Let's take a closer look at Ezra's life as a model for our own walk with God.



DIGGING DEEPER

The historical setting of Ezra's story is the period of the Jewish exile after the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and moved the people out of the land. As you recall from our study of Nehemiah in study 6, "Taking Responsibility," the captivity lasted seventy years. Then the exiles returned to their homeland to rebuild the temple, reestablish worship, and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Quotable

There are two great days in everyone's life. The first great day is the day you were born. And the second great day is the day you discover why.

— Charles R. Swindoll



First Group Led by Zerubbabel

The first group to return was a large company of almost 50,000 Jews who followed Zerubbabel along a similar route that Abraham had taken nearly 1,500 years earlier. Read in Ezra 1:1–4 the decree of Cyrus king of Persia that prompted this return. What was the mission that God gave the Jews through Cyrus?

The returnees laid the foundation for the temple, but enemies blocked further construction. The project lay dormant for sixteen years until God spoke through the prophet Haggai, who exhorted them to complete the mission they were called to do:

“Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? . . . Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house.” (Haggai 1:4, 8)

The temple was completed in 516 BC and dedicated with a great celebration (Ezra 5:1–6:22).

Further Study

For a fascinating description of Zerubbabel’s temple and its 500-year history until Herod the Great expanded it around 20 BC, read the “The Temple of Zerubbabel” section of the “Temple” article in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger. A copy of this classic Bible study resource can be obtained in the Insight for Living Ministries Web store.

Second Group Led by Ezra

The temple now built, Ezra asked King Artaxerxes to send him and a second group of Jews including priests and Levites to Jerusalem to help the people reestablish worship.¹ The king commissioned him, donating opulent adornments to beautify the temple and instructing Ezra to exhort the people to obey God’s Law. Read Artaxerxes’ letter in Ezra 7:11–26.



Imagine Ezra's delight as he read the king's commission! He credited the Lord for moving in the king's heart (Ezra 7:27) and humbly acknowledged God's calling on his life. What is the phrase that Ezra repeats in the following verses: Ezra 7:6, 9, 28, and 8:18?

As you review the fabric of your life, do you, like Ezra, recognize God's hand at work? Can you see Him stitching together events and people and weaving a pattern in your personality and abilities to make you who you are? Chuck Swindoll says in his message, "There are two great days in everyone's life. The first great day is the day you were born. And the second great day is the day you discover why."

Have you discovered why you were born—your calling? Use the space below to reflect on God's movement and calling in your life. Share with a friend, mentor, or your pastor what you write.

Heeding God's call, Ezra and about 1,500 others including priests and Levites journeyed to Jerusalem from Babylon in a caravan with camels loaded with donations for the temple, ready to proclaim God's Law to the people.

Third Group Led by Nehemiah

A few years later, God moved once again in the heart of Artaxerxes to commission Nehemiah to lead a third group to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls (Nehemiah 2:1–9).

Through three mass migrations under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, God turned the wheels of world affairs to bring tens of thousands of Jews back to the land of promise. The same divine hand that removed them because of their disobedience now ushered them home. The people had a heart to obey God, but how could they do so without someone to teach them God's commands?



How Ezra Prepared for His Calling

God selected Ezra to be the nation's teacher, a priest whose family line traced back to Aaron, the brother of Moses and first Israelite high priest. As priest, Ezra could enter the temple, bring sacrifices, and represent the people before God. As a scribe, he "was well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given to the people" (Ezra 7:6).

Can you observe four key concepts in the following verse that describe how Ezra prepared for his calling?

Ezra had *determined* to *study* and *obey* the Law of the LORD and to *teach* those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel. (7:10, emphasis added)

Try fleshing out these concepts by elaborating on what they mean and looking for other verses that illustrate them. (An excellent resource is a Bible concordance.) We've given you a start for each concept. Add your own ideas as you search the Scriptures!

Ezra *determined*. He set his heart. Made a personal commitment. Daniel made a similar commitment in Daniel 1:8. Now, add your own ideas.

Ezra *studied*. He became a student of Scripture. For an example, look up Joshua 1:8.

Ezra *obeyed*. He put into action the truth that he learned. Another verse is James 1:22.



Ezra *taught* others. He shared what he learned with other people. Look up Romans 12:7.

As Ezra diligently studied, his calling to proclaim God’s truth clarified. The oil lamp that flickered on his study desk became a flame in his heart that burned brighter and brighter until the day when God set him on a lampstand to be a light of truth for the nation.

Bible Exposition on Display

The day for which Ezra so faithfully prepared came when, under Nehemiah’s leadership, the Jews completed the walls of Jerusalem. The people built the walls “with the help of our God” (Nehemiah 6:16); now they turned to Ezra for help in building their lives with the Word of God.

All the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey. (8:1)

Ezra’s message is one of the clearest examples in the Bible of genuine exposition of the Scriptures. Read the account in Nehemiah 8:2–12, and note the key components of Bible exposition. Under each heading below, explain what happened from the text and write a principle for Bible exposition today.

Reading of and Respect for the Scriptures

Explanation of the Scriptures (Note: As Ezra read, the Levites circulated through the crowd, translating the Hebrew into Aramaic, the language of the common people.)



Response to the Scriptures

Why did the people weep? For years, they had lived in *ignorance* of God’s Word, which created *instability*. They had no ballast to keep their lives upright as they tipped over into superstition. *Uncertainty* settled into fear because they had no compass to guide their life’s course. The people wept tears of remorse for the wandering years, but Nehemiah wiped away their tears with an exhortation to “celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words *and understood them*” so now they could follow God’s way (Nehemiah 8:12, emphasis added).

Bring It Home

The Bible is *the* source of truth. “No other book is like it,” says Chuck, “because in these pages are truths to guide your life, to raise your family, to conduct your business, to form your ethics and your integrity. All of that is in this book, but it takes study.”

Out of your study of the Word of God will come the understanding of God and the calling of God—what God would have you do. Ezra’s example challenges us to

- Spend time in the Scriptures
- Stay faithful to Bible study groups
- Trust God to use us to counter the ignorance, instability, and uncertainty of our day.

Don’t worry about when or how God may use you, where He may send you, or what platform He may give you. Just be available and ready, and stay in the Word!

A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You for filling our minds with food for the soul. Give me an appreciation for the Word, how it guides me in the ways I should go. Hold me faithful, Lord, to Your calling, and may I trust You to use me to help others know You and Your way. Amen.

Endnote

1. Ezra’s name means “help.”



WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

Studying Hard

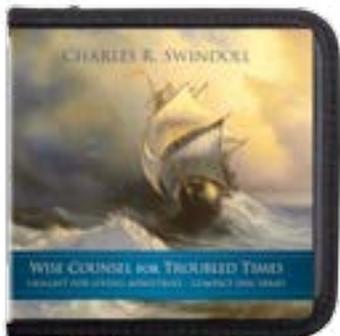
Ezra 7:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–8, 12

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

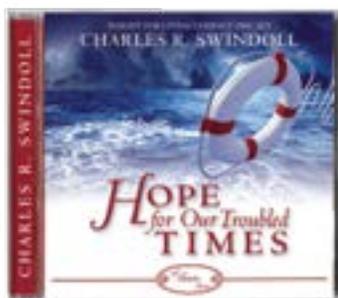
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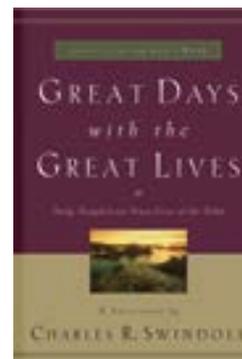
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For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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