

Rising From the Ruins

Dedication

Ezra Chapters 7-10

Leaders Guide

Dedication is a very serious business. According to the Bible Dictionary, dedication is the act of setting apart or consecrating persons or things to God, to persons, to sacred works. It is usually accompanied by an announcement of what is being done or intended and a prayer for divine approval and blessing.

We saw in the previous lesson that the temple was dedicated in 516 BC. But that's not the end of the story. People need to be dedicated, too.

Fifty eight years later, King Artaxerxes I sent another large contingent of Israelites back to Jerusalem under the leadership of a man named Ezra.

Who is Ezra?

The name Ezra means “the Lord helps.” He was a descendent of Aaron (7:5), a priest (7:12), a scribe or teacher (7:6, 10-11), and King Artaxerxes envoy to Jerusalem.

Read Ezra 7:13-28.

Complete the following questions:

Level A, B, and C

- Why did the king send Ezra and the others to Jerusalem?
 - Verse 13 _____
 - Verse 14 _____
 - Verses 15-22 _____
 - Verse 25a _____
 - Verse 25b _____
- What was Ezra not allowed to do? Why was that important?
- How does Ezra react to the king's letter?

Preparing for the Journey

Ezra organizes the journey home, gathers the people, and assigns responsibilities for the four month journey.

Read Ezra 8: 15-36.

Answer the following questions:

Level A, B, and C

- What was the first issue Ezra had to deal with? How did he solve the problem?
- Ezra begins the journey trusting in God. What is the first thing he does to confirm God's protection?
- The exiles were carrying treasures from Persia to Jerusalem without an army to protect them. What is Ezra's solution?
- What events conclude the journey?

Level A

- How would you describe Ezra's skills as a leader?

Level B

- What does Ezra's example show us about the characteristics of wise leadership?

Level C

- How can the example of Ezra inform church leaders today? What character traits should we look for when we call leaders?

The Problem

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem he was informed about a serious problem developing in Israel—intermarriage with pagan worshippers which was “diluting” the faith. The problem was not so much the marriage as it was the effect the marriage was having on the faith of the people.

Note to leaders: Religious syncretism is the worship of God and other gods simultaneously.

Read Ezra Chapter 9

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- Why might the Jewish men have taken non-Jewish wives?
- How does Ezra react to the news?
- What are the highlights of Ezra’s prayer?

Level B

- How was interfaith marriage causing difficulties in their faith?
- The Bible tells us to live our faith not only at church, but also at home. How is this complicated by an interfaith marriage?
- Anything that contributes to backsliding in our faith is dangerous. In Ezra’s time it was intermarriage with pagans. What are some things that you see today as a danger for faithful Christians?

Level C

- For Ezra, interfaith marriage is a serious sin and must be confessed and repented. What parts of his prayer resonate with you? How? Why?
- A secure and sacred remnant is important for accomplishing God’s plan according to Ezra. How does this connect to Jesus?
- What temptations and influences do you see in our society that pull Christians away from following their faith?

Rededication

The Israelites joined with Ezra as he prayed and confessed their sin. They realized that it was important to rededicate themselves to God's Law. Whenever we stray from God and the tenets of our faith, we sin. Ezra teaches the people well. He sets an example of how to repent, how to pray, and how to join in community to find a solution and return to God.

Read Ezra 10: 1-17.

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- The people held on to the hope that they could salvage their relationship with God. What is their solution?
- What did Ezra do when the leaders gave him their support?
- Who was charged with investigating the families accused?

Level B

- Strong leadership leads to consensus, unity, and action. How does Ezra lead the people so they can rededicate themselves to God's Law and His plan for Israel?
- The Israelites gave up their families to stay on the right path with God. Read Matthew 18:7-9. What does Jesus say about how to protect yourself from sin?
- Rededication to God often means we must sacrifice worldly things. Read James 4:4. What have you given up since becoming a Christian? Is there something else you need to turn away from to keep your faith strong?

Level C

- Sometimes inaction and waiting, rather than demanding and dictating, is a more powerful strategy. It tends to encourage initiative in others to step up and act. How did Ezra capitalize on this idea?
- Believers must be different from the world and committed to their faith. Read Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:17 and 5:15; and James 4:4. For a Christian, how is Old Testament Ezra an example of how to live?
- Holiness matters. What characteristics of Ezra speak to his holiness? Consider Romans 6:19-22 and 2 Corinthians 1:12 and 7:1 in your answer.