

It is not personal achievement, but personal commitment to live for God, that is important. Achievements are simply examples of what God can do through someone's life. The most effective leaders spoken of in the Bible had little awareness of the impact their lives had on others. They were too busy obeying God to keep track of their successes. Ezra fits that description.

About 80 years after the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, Ezra returned to Judah with about 2,000 men and their families. He was given a letter from Artaxerxes instructing him to carry out a program of religious education. Along with the letter came significant power. But long before Ezra's mission began, God had shaped him in three important ways so that he would use the power well. First, as a scribe, Ezra dedicated himself to carefully studying God's Word. Second, he intended to apply and obey personally the commands he discovered in God's Word. Third, he was committed to teaching others both God's Word and its application to life.

Knowing Ezra's priorities, it is not surprising to note his actions when he arrived in Jerusalem. The people had disobeyed God's command not to marry women of foreign nations. On a cold and rainy day, Ezra addressed the people and made it clear they had sinned. Because of the sins of many, all were under God's condemnation. Confession, repentance, and action were needed. The people admitted their sin and devised a plan to deal with the problem.

This initial effort on Ezra's part set the stage for what Nehemiah would later accomplish. Ezra continued his ministry under Nehemiah, and the two were used by God to start a spiritual movement that swept the nation following the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Ezra achieved great things and made a significant impact because he had the right starting place for his actions and his life: God's Word. He studied it seriously and applied it faithfully. He taught others what he learned. He is, therefore, a great model for anyone who wants to live for God.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Committed to study, follow, and teach God's Word
- Led the second group of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem
- May have written 1 and 2 Chronicles
- Concerned about keeping the details of God's commands
- Sent by King Artaxerxes to Jerusalem to evaluate the situation, set up a religious education system, and return with a firsthand report
- Worked alongside Nehemiah during the last spiritual awakening recorded in the Old Testament

Lessons from his life:

- A person's willingness to know and practice God's Word will have a direct effect on how God uses his servants
- The starting place for serving God is a personal commitment to serve him today, even before knowing what that service will be

Vital statistics:

- Birth: Bab., or Jerusalem
- Occupations: Scribe among the exiles in Bab., or King's employ., teacher
- Parents: Father Seraiah
- Contemporaries: Nehemiah, Artaxerxes

Key verses:

1. Ezra had been dedicated to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching to do so and to give an answer. Ezra 7:10

2. Ezra stood in the assembly of the people and said to them, "I have seen that you are in great distress and sorrow because of this thing." Ezra 7:10

3. Ezra stood in the assembly of the people and said to them, "I have seen that you are in great distress and sorrow because of this thing." Ezra 7:10

(3)

RETURN ROUTES FROM BABYLON

