

CHAPTER SEVEN



Study, Observe, Teach

READ: EZRA CHAPTER 7 AND NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 8

Before we get into this chapter, I wanted to point out a couple of things. First of all, there was a gap of about 57 years between chapters 6 and 7. If you'd like to fill in that gap, turn to the book of Esther, as the events in that story took place after chapter 6 and before chapter 7. While tens of thousands of Jews returned to Jerusalem, over a million Jews chose to stay in Susa, the capital of Persia. The story of Esther chronicles the opposition they faced during that time.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are three books that go hand in hand. Not only are they knit together in many ways, they also symbolize the work of the Holy Spirit in purifying our heart, renewing our mind, and leading us through spiritual warfare. The name Ezra means “help,” and Nehemiah means “comfort,” which point directly to The Holy Spirit Who is referred to in the New Testament as both our helper and comforter.

CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART

In order to understand the heart, let's take a closer look at the definition:

Heart: The center of emotion, especially as contrasted to the head as the center of the intellect. (Dictionary.com)

The Bible tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things. Why? Because it doesn't follow God's law, it follows emotion. It is natural but wrong to trust our hearts to lead us. If we listened to the heart, we'd eat too much, sleep too much, and spend too much. But when we come to Christ, He purifies our heart. He gives us new desires and affections. He allows us to be tested and be tried. He allows us to go through the pain of pruning and loss, so that we might blossom and bloom.

I love this quote from GotQuestions.org,

Being pure in heart involves having a singleness of heart toward God. A pure heart has no hypocrisy, no guile, no hidden motives. The pure heart is marked by transparency and an uncompromising desire to please God in all things. It is more than an external purity of behavior; it is an internal purity of soul.

We have to be willing to repent of our sin, surrender our lives, and allow Him to change us. As David prayed,

*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
(Psalm 51:10, KJV)*

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

The phrase, “the hand of God” is mentioned six times in this chapter and the next. It shows us that Ezra believed in the power and of God and knew that His hand was at work in their lives. Instead of chalking it up to chance or coincidence, he glorified God.

EZRA A TYPE OF HOLY SPIRIT

As we go through these next few chapters, we’ll see how Ezra (like the Holy Spirit) leads and teaches the people through this process of purification, repentance, and renewal. We’ll see what true repentance and surrender looks like.

In chapters 1-6 we saw the rebuilding of the temple. Watch now as chapters 7-10 deal with the revival of the people. And, as you begin to learn more about Ezra in this story, notice how his ministry exemplifies the work of the Holy Spirit:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26, KJV)

He was sent by the king to lead and to teach the people, just as the Holy Spirit was sent by the King of all Kings to lead and to teach us.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (John 16:13, KJV)

THE MARK OF A GIFTED TEACHER

If you’ve already read this chapter, you might have noticed something interesting: it starts out by referring to Ezra in the third person, but after the letter from the king it changes to first-person narrative, where Ezra refers to himself as “I” or “me.”

Create in Me a Clean Heart

As we start to learn about this man, we discover he was a teacher, in fact, the Bible tells us that he was well versed in the Law. Looking at another crossover in Nehemiah chapter 8, we see that Ezra helps the Israelites gain a better understanding of God's Word.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. (Nehemiah 8:8-9, KJV)

Anyone can teach, but it takes a good teacher to lead you to a deeper understanding, and Ezra was able to do that. Notice how the people were weeping after they heard God's Word. That's the mark of a gifted teacher.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. (Ezra 7:10, KJV)

Notice three things in that verse:

1. He studied God's Word.
2. He observed God's Word.
3. He taught God's Word.

I love the significance of those words, and I love the order they're in: study, observe, and then teach... A great example for all believers who hope to lead others to Christ!

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV)

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Though the direct distance between Babylon and Jerusalem is about five hundred miles, the travelers would have had to traverse nine hundred miles, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south. (E.M. Yamauchi)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Have you ever heard of the Bereans? In Acts 17, Luke points out that they were more noble than the Thessalonians. Why? First of all, they were eager to receive the message, but more importantly they examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:11, KJV)

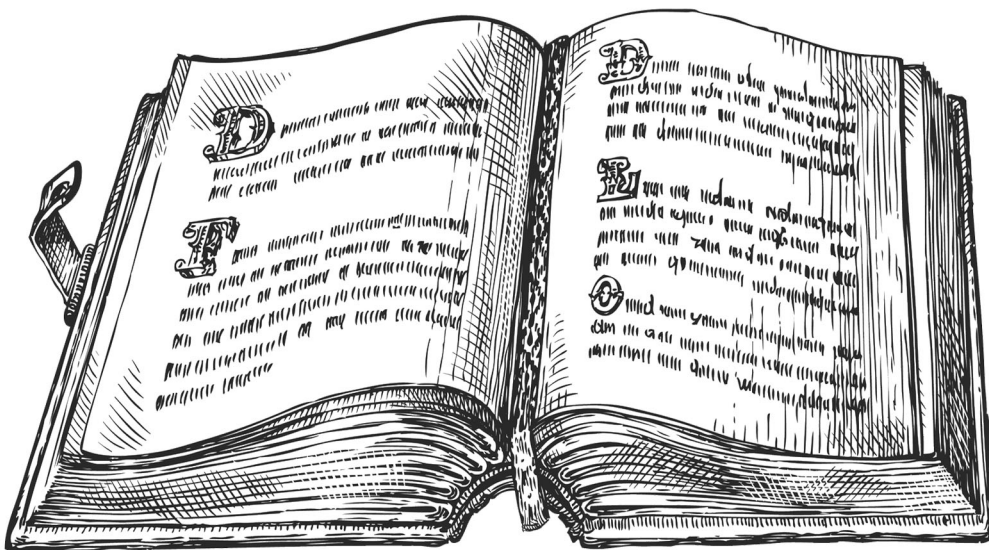
I grew up in a church with an incredible teaching pastor. And, perhaps the most important thing he taught us was to search the scriptures. He challenged us to get into the Word. He encouraged us to examine the scriptures to see if what he said was true. He pointed us to God, not to himself.

How many of us are doing this? Are you rightly dividing the truth, or merely hearing what you accept as the truth? Are you going to the source, or is your faith washed down, passed down, and handed down from others?

For some it's merely based on the way they were raised. They were born into in a "Christian" family, and as a result they've adopted their parents' beliefs.

For the wise stewards among us, however, faith comes by hearing the Word of God. When the gospel is filtered from one generation through to the next, it has the potential to get lost in translation. It's important that our Bibles are open and we're searching the scriptures ourselves.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God,
a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth.
2 Timothy 2:15*



When did Ezra arrive in Jerusalem,
and when did he leave Babylon?

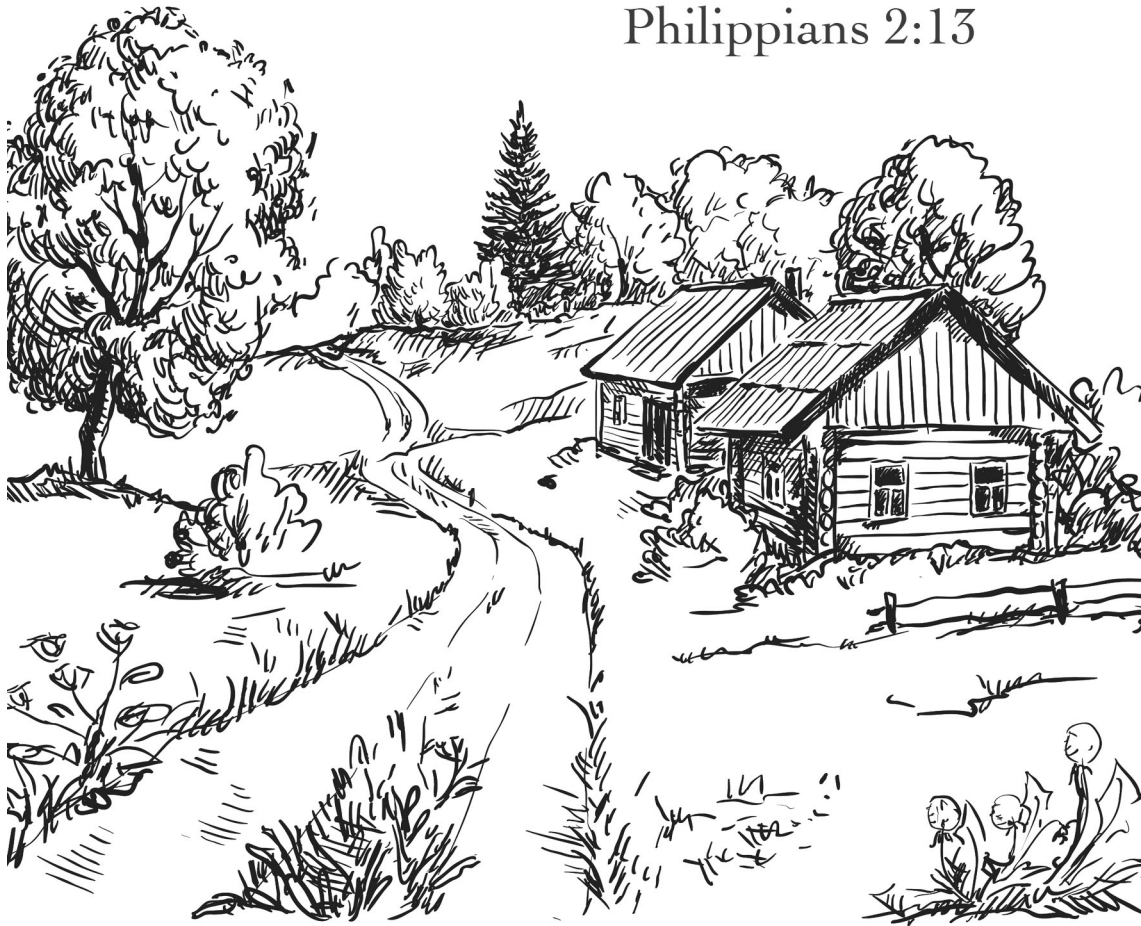
How many times does this chapter men-
tion the hand of God being on Ezra?

Verse six tells us that Ezra was a scribe.
What is a scribe?

What three things did Ezra prepare
his heart to do?

For it is God which worketh in
you both to will and to do of
his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13



CHAPTER EIGHT



When He Calls You to Act

READ: EZRA CHAPTER 8 AND MATTHEW CHAPTER 25:14–30

I never dreamed I'd be a writer: that I'd write a book when I could hardly read the ones that I had. I failed Grade 12 English, and my idea of a great book was the comic book Bible. Oh, and Archie comics, I loved those too. They even had Christian ones back in the day!

I enjoyed magazines because the pictures spoke a thousand words I couldn't read. Well, perhaps I could read them, but not very well, and so the bite-sized blocks of text were best suited to my style. My ability wasn't anywhere near the level of expertise that it needed to be at when I stepped into my ministry. However, God was leading me.

The thing is that God doesn't need us to accomplish His will, He's fully capable of doing that on His own. What He wants is the opportunity to work through His people. He desires fellowship with us, and therefore He calls us to be His hands and His feet. Not by our strength alone, but by His mighty Spirit that works through us.

Consider the life of Moses who lacked confidence.

David who was merely a boy facing a giant.

Paul who said, "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."

Gideon who said, "My clan is the weakest, and I am the least in my family."

And Peter, who denied Jesus three times.

HE EQUIPS THOSE HE CALLS

God didn't choose these men because they were equipped for His mission, He chose them because He desired to use them, and with the calling upon their lives He equipped them. Here's the thing we so often miss: our accomplishments are not based on who we think we are. They're based on the power of God working in us and through us. If we truly believe in His power and might, then we can believe in our calling.

It's not our ability He desires, it's our obedience, and so we're often led to places we'd never dream of stepping into, like writing a Bible study on the book of Ezra.

When we were moving last year, we had a beast of a bedroom suite that had to be moved.

I swear the wide dresser is about as heavy as a deep freeze. And so, when it came to moving this stuff I had my concerns.

Just as the men were coming down the stairs, my husband said “You probably don’t want to watch this.”

He was right, it was stressful to watch, but unlike so many others who had tried it before, these men moved it with ease. The difference? With the right shoulder straps, they were well equipped for the job. I could tell they had done this before.

Let me say it again, “God equips those He calls.” That might sound cliché, yet it’s worth repeating. What it’s really saying is this:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13, KJV)

Imagine the power you have when God’s on your side. The impossible is always possible when He calls you to act. If He’s called you to it, He will see you through it, and so throughout scripture He says, “Be strong and courageous.”

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

In this chapter we see that Ezra refused to ask the King for protection. Nehemiah, on the other hand took a different approach. Both men believed that the hand of God was upon them and were aware of the danger, but Nehemiah was accompanied by army officers and cavalry while Ezra fasted and prayed.

EZRA CALLS MEN TO MINISTRY

Looking at Ezra chapter 8, we see a picture of the Holy Spirit again as Ezra examines the people, and calls faithful men into ministry. Verses 23-24 tells us that together with the people, Ezra fasted and prayed and then he set apart the priests for ministry.

Compare that with this portion of scripture from Acts:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:2-3, KJV)

He Equips Those He Calls

Ezra's ministry was an incredible feat. Travelling 900 miles, He led approximately 1800 men, from Babylon to Jerusalem. After they arrived, he continued to lead them and teach them. Surveying their needs, he called them into ministry, but it didn't end there.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

In the first wave of people that returned to Jerusalem there were 341 Levites among them. There weren't any in the second wave, which is why Ezra put in the effort to find and bring several with him. Levites were important to this mission as they are the only tribe appointed by God for the priesthood.

EZRA EQUIPS THEM WITH GIFTS

Notice verses 28-30. He equipped them with gifts in the same way that the Holy Spirit equips you and I. The gifts that we're given are a free-will offering to God to be used for His glory and honor until that day when we stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give account of these gifts we've been given.

We're all called into ministry in some form or another. To some it's travelling far to minister to people unknown. To others it's ministering right there at the kitchen table with our own family. To some it's ministering within the body of an organized church, and to others it's out on the street witnessing to people in need.

With whatever you're given and where ever you're sent, use your gifts wisely. Follow the nudging of the Holy Spirit as He continues to lead. As Ezra says in verse 29, "Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the Lord." Wisely use the gifts that you're given for His glory and honor and praise.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

There were significantly less people in the second group that returned to Jerusalem. If you look at the names of the families, however, you may notice that most of them were related.



Why do you think it was important for there to be some Levites among the people?

How many men did Ezra send to Iddo, the chief, at Casiphia?

How many Levites came back with them, and how many temple servants?

What was the purpose of the fast before the journey?
