



CWR/PTM

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**EZRA, NEHEMIAH, HAGGAI,
ZECHARIAH & MALACHI**

Week 1

Copyright © 2016 by Plain Truth Ministries Worldwide

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the publisher to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Printed in the United States of America.

Before You Begin Your Journey...

In this volume we have come to the chronological end of the Old Testament, (although we still have a few OT books left to explore in future volumes). We meet five great leaders of what is called the *restoration*—the period after the Jews' return from exile in Babylon. Three of them are prophets, one is a governor, and two are priests.

Ezra is a priest and a scribe, schooled in the law of Moses. The book that bears his name gives an account of the Jews returning from exile. After some years, Ezra was joined by Nehemiah, who was appointed governor of Judea by the Persian king.

We will read of the great challenges and obstacles these two men faced. While external enemies worked to thwart the rebuilding of the Temple and the reestablishment of the Jewish state, other enemies worked within to weaken and defeat the people. These enemies—apostasy, greed and oppression—are still with us today.

The last three prophets in the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi follow up on the ministry and messages of Ezra and Nehemiah, each in their own way. Haggai and Zechariah are both mentioned in the book of Ezra (5:1). From them we learn that conditions were not easy in the developing Judean community of those years. The people had become focussed on their own problems, and were complacent in continuing the work of restoring God's Temple.

Haggai calls the people to repentance, confident that they will respond to his message and face a future of hope and blessing.

Zechariah, with powerful visions and metaphors, continues to challenge Israel to restore the Temple and receive God's

favor. But the results these prophets hoped to see would not last long.


By the time of Malachi, conditions had deteriorated. Though the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple had been partially or wholly restored, the priesthood had fallen into laxity and corruption, and the people's interest had again turned from the House of God. Malachi calls for reform and revival, reminding the people that God will call every action into account.

These beleaguered prophets and leaders tell a story of the post-exilic age that is disappointing. After failing to live up to God's covenant under the monarchies, after suffering conquest and captivity at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians, God had mercifully given the Israelites a second chance to become a holy and righteous nation. And it seemed as though they were about to fail again.

This might sound familiar, since this is a story we repeat in our own Christian lives, as we *all* fail again and again and again, when we attempt to be righteous through our own efforts and deeds. Like Israel, our best efforts, apart from Christ, to restore our own goodness end in failure and disappointment.

But God will not fail. In the last two verses of the Old Testament, Malachi foresees the coming of Elijah in the person of John the Baptist. John prepared the way for our Lord, the Savior of Israel—and the entire world. He alone is able to make us righteous.

With the end of the Old Testament, the foundation is now laid for the coming of our Lord and Savior—who comes to his Temple, bringing the new covenant (Mal 3:1).

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greg Albrecht". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

How to Use the CWR Bible Survey...

1—Read and study at your own pace. This is a devotional. It is designed to help you consider and ponder the great truths of God’s written revelation. It is designed to help you worship and come to know God. We plan to cover the entire Bible in 43 volumes, and while that sounds like a long time, don’t be in a hurry. Take your time! Even though each volume is divided into bite-size daily lessons, you may want to take two days on each “daily” lesson.

2—We suggest you set aside a special time for the *CWR Bible Survey* every day. We recommend allowing 30-45 minutes, but even if you can only spare 15 minutes, try to make it part of your regular schedule. You will find that the *CWR Bible Survey* will be an invaluable resource for facing your daily challenges.

3—You will need a good Bible. This might be an excellent time for you to consider purchasing a study Bible. Plain Truth Ministries has reviewed many of the study Bibles that are available, and in cooperation with Thomas Nelson and Zondervan, we are pleased to be able to offer two superb study Bibles that will be an excellent resource and help to you. Please see the back pages of this book for more details.

4—Always read the assigned passage of the daily lesson in your Bible first. Each daily lesson builds upon the portion of the Bible being covered that day. You may want to begin by praying about what God has in store for you as you read, and then look at the questions and background information.

5—Consider the format of each daily lesson. Almost every daily lesson will include:

- **Opening Up to the Word** —a section designed to help you open your mind to the teaching God has inspired.
- **Digging Into the Word**—this section will encourage you to get your nose into the Bible and think deeply about what it says.
- **Living Out the Word**—here you will be challenged to consider the practical implications for your life. How does this passage help you live?

• **Window On the Word**—will offer key insights to help you more clearly understand the daily Bible passage.

6—After you finish the daily lesson, take some quiet time. You may simply think, look out the window, take a walk, or even get down on your knees. But use this time to let this daily lesson sink in. Ask God to show you what he wants you to understand from your reading and study.

7—Consider the *CWR Bible Survey* for small groups in which you may be involved. Tell your friends about it. If you are involved in a small group that meets for prayer and Bible study, introduce your group to it. Many are seeking an easy-to-read guide to help them understand the Bible and to help them know God. The *CWR Bible Survey* can do that!

• **Abbreviations Used in the *CWR Bible Survey***—

Genesis	Ge	Nahum	Na
Exodus	Ex	Habakkuk	Hab
Leviticus	Lev	Zephaniah	Zep
Numbers	Nu	Haggai	Hag
Deuteronomy	Dt	Zechariah	Zec
Joshua	Jos	Malachi	Mal
Judges	Jdg	Matthew	Mt
Ruth	Ru	Mark	Mk
1 Samuel	1Sa	Luke	Lk
2 Samuel	2Sa	John	Jn
1 Kings	1Ki	Acts	Ac
2 Kings	2Ki	Romans	Ro
1 Chronicles	1Ch	1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Chronicles	2Ch	2 Corinthians	2Co
Ezra	Ezr	Galatians	Gal
Nehemiah	Ne	Ephesians	Eph
Esther	Est	Philippians	Php
Job	Job	Colossians	Col
Psalms	Ps	1 Thessalonians	1Th
Proverbs	Pr	2 Thessalonians	2Th
Ecclesiastes	Ecc	1 Timothy	1Ti
Song of Songs	SS	2 Timothy	2Ti
Isaiah	Isa	Titus	Tit
Jeremiah	Jer	Philemon	Phm
Lamentations	La	Hebrews	Heb
Ezekiel	Eze	James	Jas
Daniel	Da	1 Peter	1Pe
Hosea	Hos	2 Peter	2Pe
Joel	Joel	1 John	1Jn
Amos	Am	2 John	2Jn
Obadiah	Ob	3 John	3Jn
Jonah	Jnh	Jude	Jude
Micah	Mic	Revelation	Rev

EZRA, NEHEMIAH,
HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH
& MALACHI

Israel Returns
From Exile

Introduction to Ezra

Authorship: Ezra is the presumed author of this book, especially in light of the fact that he refers to himself in the first person in Ezra 7:27—9:15. Because of a similarity of style between them, some scholars believe that Ezra might also have written 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Ezra was a priest and “teacher well versed in the Law of Moses” (7:6) who had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. His lineage is given in 7:1-5, although this is an abbreviated genealogy.

Date: Ezra covers several time periods. Chapters 1–6 recount the 23 years from the command of Cyrus to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem until the work was finished (538-515 B.C.). Chapters 7–10 describe the events after Ezra returned from Babylon (458 B.C.). There are two exceptions to this. Ezra 4:6 refers to an event in the reign of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.) and verses 7-23 include a letter written during the reign of Artaxerxes (464-424 B.C.).

The ancient historian Josephus, along with church father Jerome and the Talmud, categorize the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Yet, others point to the fact that both books contain almost identical lists (Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7), which would be unlikely were they originally the same book.

Ezra was widely accepted even before the Septuagint (200 B.C.), which means it may have been accepted as canonical only 250 years after it was written.

Setting and purpose: The book of Ezra is set in the era following the return of the exiles to Judah from Babylon to rebuild the Temple, as Cyrus had commanded. The returnees were ready to believe that God was going to reestablish the nation and usher in kingdom blessings.

There were actually three returns from exile, (538, 458 and 444 B.C.). These three returns from exile may or may not have anything to do with the fact that there were three deportations

from Israel to Babylon. The first return was led by Zerubbabel, the second was under Ezra, and the third was led by Nehemiah.

Nearly a fourth of the book is written in Aramaic, for it deals with official correspondence which was written in Aramaic. The first readers probably understood both Hebrew and Aramaic equally well, so no translation was needed.

Reading outline

I. THE FIRST RETURN AND REBUILDING, 1-6

- A. Going Home, 1-2
- B. Mixed Emotions, 3
- C. With Friends Like You, Who Needs Enemies? 4
- D. Get Back to Work! 5
- E. Friends in High Places, 6

II. THE SECOND RETURN AND REFORM, 7-10

- A. God in the Shadows, 7
- B. Bad Habits Die Hard, 8-9
- C. Breaking Up Is Hard to Do, 10

“Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.”

Ezra 1:7-8



Artwork by Gustav Doré

Going Home

DAY 1

Ezra 1-2

Do you know the country your family emigrated from to come to North America? Do you know why they came?

1. Who had prophesied that Israel would return to Jerusalem (1:1)?

2. Did Cyrus, the king of Persia believe in the one true God of Israel? What leads you to believe he might, or might not have (vs. 2-4)?

3. What special “temple-warming” gift did Cyrus give the exiles (vs. 7-11)?

4. How many people were in the group returning from Babylon (2:64-67)?

1. Have you ever visited your family’s country of origin?

2. When your family originally emigrated, were they believers? Do you see any providential move of God in their actions?

3. How would you feel if you had to leave the only country you had ever lived in (like most of the Hebrews who left Babylon) to go home to a place you had never been?

4. Where is home to you now? Is it the place you live now, or somewhere you used to live?

Cyrus, king of Persia (1:1) was also the king of Babylon, but had been king over other territories for 20 years. Formerly the king of Anshan, he later became king of Medo-Persia around 550 B.C. He conquered Babylon in October, 539 B.C. He supported the local gods of several regions he ruled. **“To fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah”** (1:1). In Jeremiah 29:10 and 25:11-12, Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in bondage in Babylon for 70 years. The deportation of Jews to Babylon began in 605 B.C. The decree of Cyrus in 538 was about 67 years later. By the time the people arrived in the land, it was 70 years.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Mixed Emotions

Ezra 3

OPENING
up to the Word

Although something good was happening to Israel in this chapter, people were still sad to the point of tears. Have you ever felt mixed emotions about something you feel God has done in your life?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What was the most prominent emotion experienced by the people as they began to offer sacrifices (v. 3)?
2. Why do you think the people around them would feel threatened by the Jews returning to their homeland (v. 3)?
3. What were the words that Israel sang to God when the foundation of the Temple was laid (v. 11)?
4. Who wept when the foundation was laid, and why were they so sad (v. 12)?
5. If you had been old enough to remember the original Temple, do you think you would have cried, or rejoiced? Why?

LIVING
out the Word

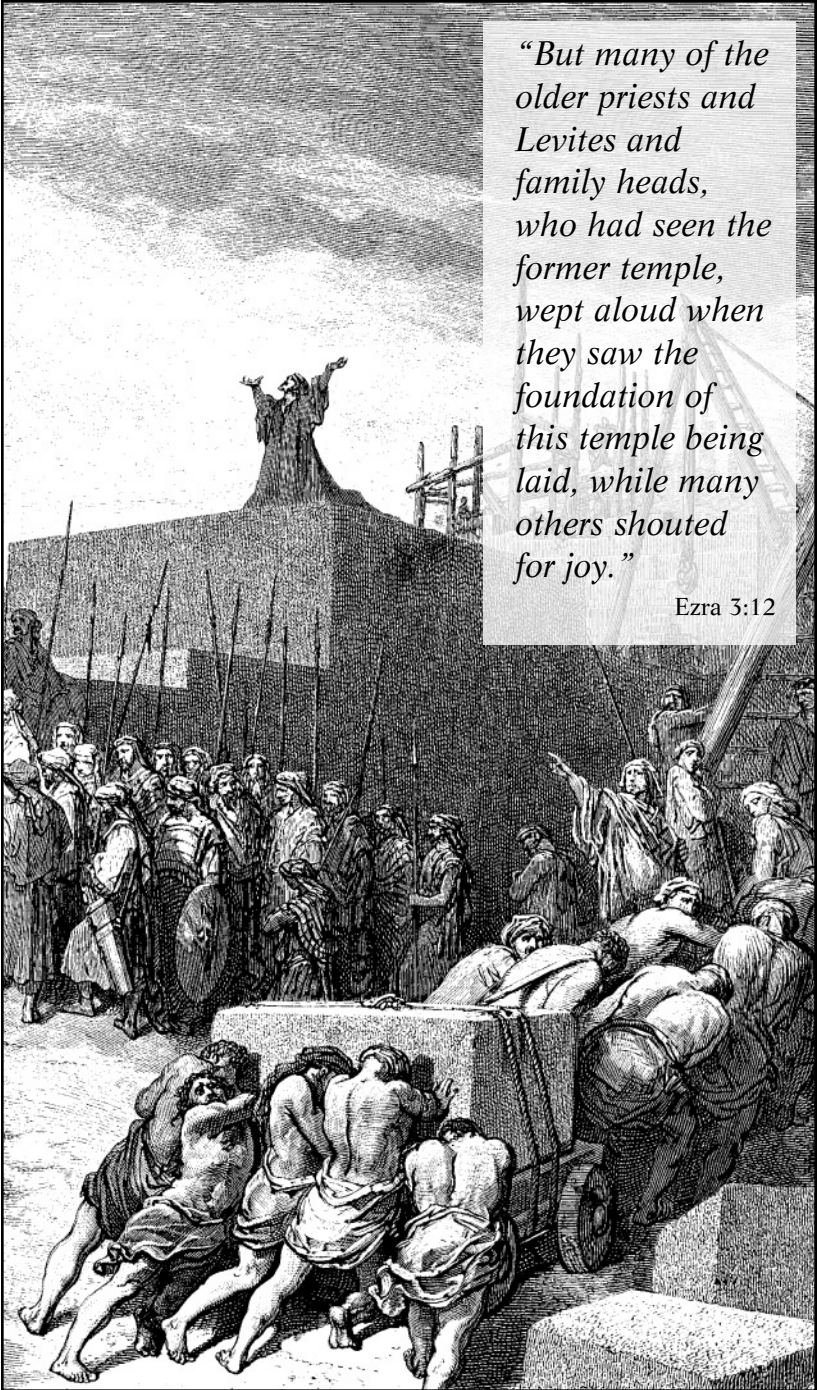
1. Have you ever lost something precious in your life—only to have it later replaced with something better? Did you learn anything from this experience? Do you believe God was involved?
2. What is the most precious thing that you've lost from your life? Was God responsible for the loss?
3. Did anything happen in your life to help ease the pain of your loss?
4. Bringing the Jews back to Israel was the start of a new work of God. What new work is he starting in you?

WINDOW
on the Word

***The seventh month** (v. 1) could refer to the seventh month after the Jews left Babylon, the seventh month after they arrived in Jerusalem or the seventh month of the calendar—the climax of the Jewish year. Three Hebrew religious festivals were held in the seventh month: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.*

“But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.”

Ezra 3:12



Artwork by Gustav Doré

With Friends Like You, Who Needs Enemies?

Ezra 4

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever been hurt by someone who appeared to be friendly, but later turned against you?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Who were these enemies of Judah and Benjamin, and where did they live (vs. 1-2)?
2. These people claimed to seek the God of Israel (v. 2). What might lead you to believe that their faith was not real?
3. How did their enemies work to discourage the building (vs. 4-5)?
4. Years later, their enemies penned a letter to King Artaxerxes. What did they insinuate Israel would do if the city was rebuilt (vs. 12-16)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Many of us have had friends who later turned against us. If you have had such an experience, why do you think your friend turned against you?
2. What lesson on friendship did you learn from that experience?
3. When the people of God say *let us arise and build*, the enemies of God may say *let us arise and oppose*. Are we still experiencing that today? How?

WINDOW
on the Word

Enemies of Judah and Benjamin (v. 1) were the people living in Palestine after the northern ten tribes of Israel had been deported to Assyria. The Assyrians left a handful of Israelites and brought in people of other cultures to marry with them. The purpose of this Assyrian practice was to prevent nationalistic patriotism and subsequent rebellions. These enemies were their descendants and would be the forefathers of the Samaritans mentioned in the New Testament. The **letter to Artaxerxes** (v. 7) is chronologically out of place, but logically inserted here by Ezra. By the time of the letter, the Temple had already been built, but not the city walls. The letters show the motivation and genesis of the opposition the Jews would face for years, and are therefore placed here. Chronologically, they fit between chapters 7 and 10.

Get Back to Work!

DAY 4

Ezra 5

What important project in your life have you been neglecting?

1. What two prophets did God use to start the people working in the Temple again (v.1)?
2. Zerubbabel, the governor, didn't wait until he got approval, but immediately started the work, along with Jeshua (v. 2). What does this tell you about Zerubbabel?
3. What metaphor does Ezra use to illustrate that God was supervising their activities (v. 5)?
5. Do you think you would have answered the way the Jews did (v. 11), or simply reminded the governor of Cyrus' edict? Why?

1. List in order of priority the three most important projects you have been neglecting. What is keeping you from getting back to work on them?

2. Do you believe God might be starting a renovation and reformation process in your life?

***Tattenai, the Babylonian governor** (v. 3), was appointed over the Syria-Palestine area—a larger territory than just Israel. He is named in a Babylonian record of 502 B.C.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Friends in High Places

Ezra 6

OPENING
up to the Word

Sometimes the help of God comes to us from unexpected places and sources. Why do you think God often meets our needs in unexpected ways?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. A record of the decree of Cyrus was not found in Babylon, but in the province of Media (vs. 1-2). Why do you think the scroll wasn't where they were looking?

2. Tattenai was not only told to stop hindering the work (v. 7), but to actively help. What was he to do (vs. 8-9)?

3. What penalty would Tattenai incur if he failed in these orders (v. 11)?

4. When was the Temple completed (v. 15)?

5. At the dedication of the original Temple under Solomon, 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats were sacrificed (1Ki 8:63). Compare these numbers to those in verse 17.

LIVING
out the Word

1. Have you ever been surprised at help you've received from someone you didn't know, or didn't know well?

2. The Bible says that God can direct the heart of the king like a channel of water (Pr 21:1). Have you ever experienced God affecting or changing someone's heart to help you?

3. Have you ever been in a position of helping someone you didn't know very well? Why did you do it?

WINDOW
on the Word

"A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana" (v. 2). The edict was not found in the archives of Babylon because Cyrus issued it in the summer of 538 while he was in Ecbatana. It had been placed in the official records there.



*Inscription written in Old Persian
from the time of Darius.*

*“A scroll was found in the citadel
of Ecbatana in the province of
Media, and this was written on it:*

Memorandum:

*In the first year of King Cyrus, the
king issued a decree concerning the
temple of God in Jerusalem: Let
the temple be rebuilt as a place to
present sacrifices, and let its
foundations be laid. It is to be
ninety feet high and ninety feet
wide.”*

Ezra 6:2-3

God in the Shadows

Ezra 7

OPENING
up to the Word

The Bible reveals that God has historically used people who do not believe in him to bless his children and his work. Can you think of any present-day examples?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why do you think Ezra's ancestry is given in this chapter (vs. 1-5)?
2. In what country and in what culture had Ezra developed his expertise in the law of Moses (v. 6)? What does that teach us about making the best of our circumstances?
3. What had been Ezra's life-long pursuit in Babylon (v. 10)?
4. What requirements did Artaxerxes put on the men Ezra would appoint to positions in the new government (v. 25)?
5. Where did the idea come from to send the Israelites back to their land (v. 27)?

LIVING
out the Word

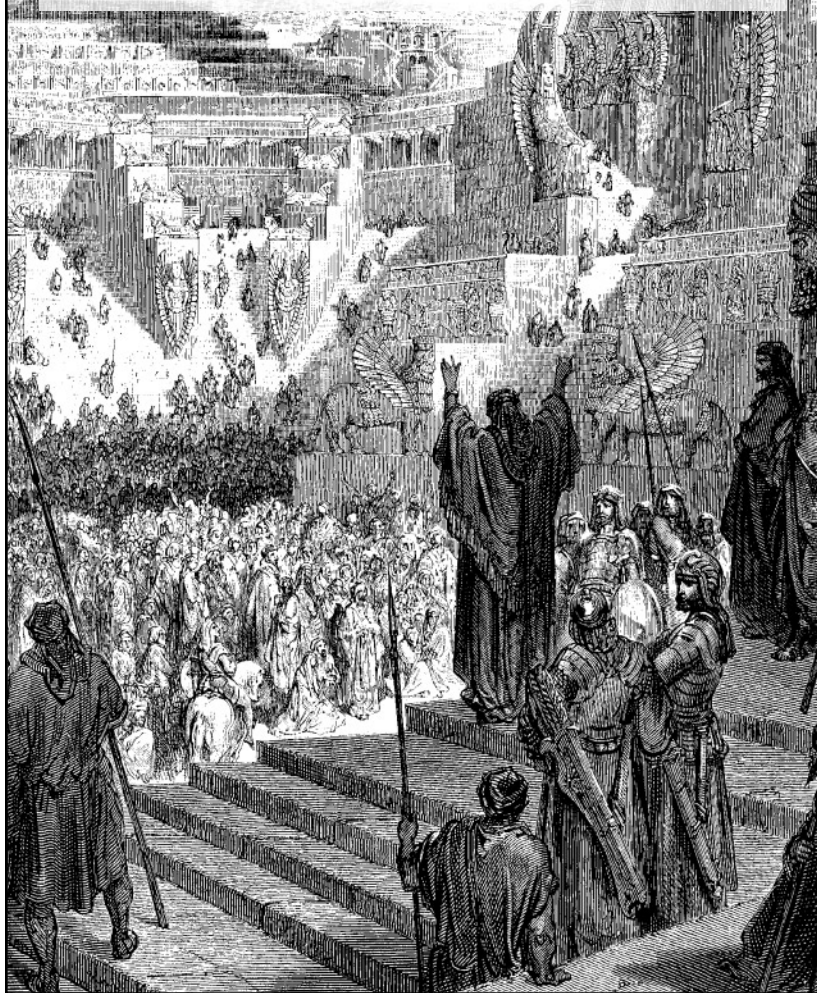
1. Have you ever experienced God working in the shadows of your life, unseen, but active?

WINDOW
on the Word

*"After these things" (v. 1). There was a gap of about 57 years between the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7. The Temple had been completed in 515 B.C. under Darius I. After his death in 486 B.C., his son Xerxes ruled for 20 years (485-465 B.C.). His son, Artaxerxes, mentioned in this chapter, ruled from 464-424 B.C. **Ezra's lineage** (v. 1) could be traced back to the first priest, Aaron, although this is an abbreviated genealogy.*

“Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish 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.”

Ezra 7:13-14



Artwork by Gustav Doré

Bad Habits Die Hard

Ezra 8–9

OPENING
up to the Word

All of us have patterns of behavior that don't glorify God. Why do you think some habits are so much harder to break than others?

DIGGING
into the Word

- 1.** Before Ezra left Babylon he discovered he had a problem (8:15). What was Ezra's problem, and why do you think it was so important to him?
- 2.** In what way did Ezra publicly declare his faith in God, and then actively demonstrate it (vs. 22-23)?
- 3.** What disturbing situation did Ezra learn about when he arrived in Israel (9:1-2)? Who were the worst culprits?
- 4.** Although Israel had sinned again, even after God had released them from their exile, what did Ezra recognize that God had done (v. 13)?

LIVING
out the Word

- 1.** What behavior or habit has been most difficult for you to leave behind?
- 2.** It's easy to get discouraged when trying to overcome. Christ-followers live by grace, having no confidence in the flesh (Php 3:3). We live by faith, not by sight (2Co 5:7). With Paul we trust that Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20), for we are new creations of God (2Co 5:17). We freely acknowledge our inability to overcome all the obstacles we face through sheer will power, while we place our trust in Jesus, for "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Ro 8:37).