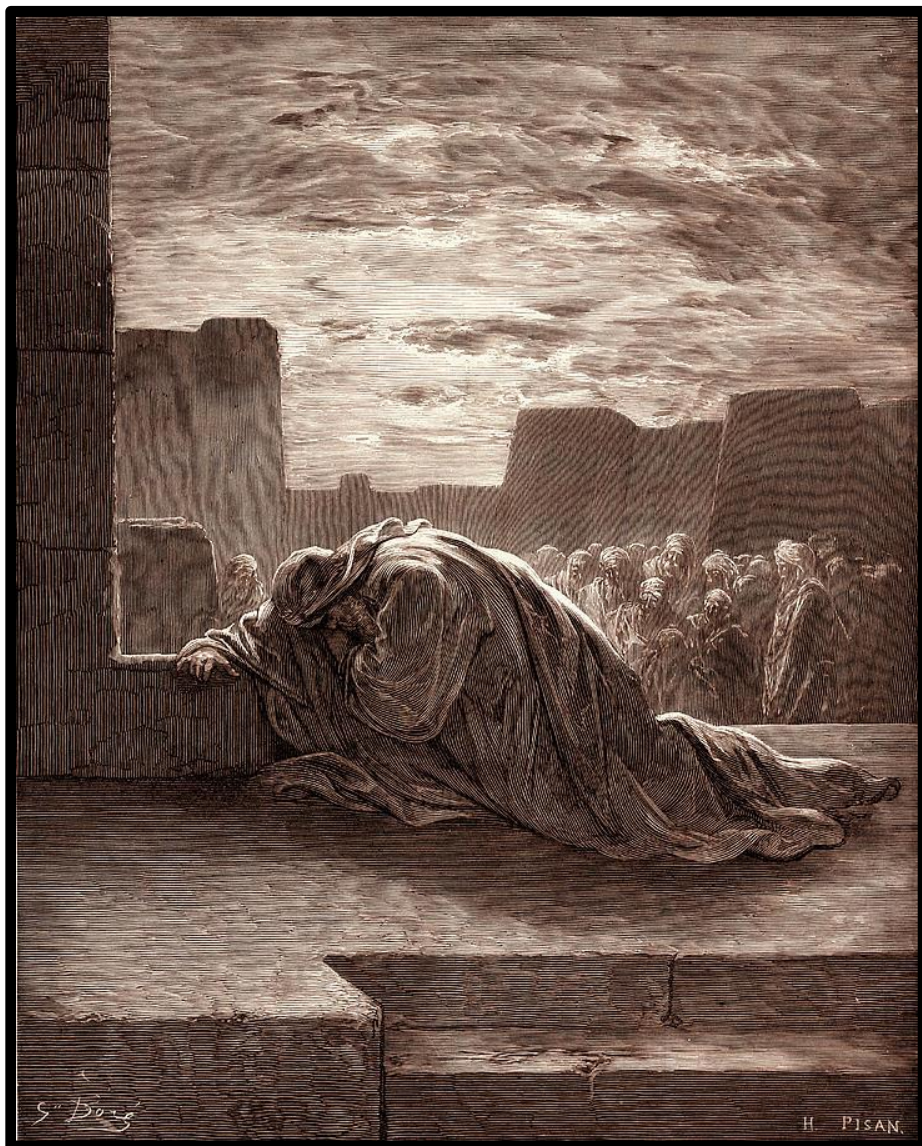


**LIVING GODS WILL**

**Vessel of God**

**EZRA**



**Ezra in Prayer by Gustave Dore**

**Born:** 480 BC – Babylon

**Died:** 440 BC – Jerusalem (40 years old)

**Ezra** was a Jewish **priest** and **scribe** with impeccable credentials.

**Ezra** led 42,360 **captive Jews** from Babylon to Jerusalem.

**Ezra** taught the word of God and led a **spiritual revival**.

**Ezra** successfully **restored** Jerusalem and the **worship** of God's word.

**Ezra the Scribe (Ezra HaSofer)** led the second wave of Jews returning from **Babylon to Israel**. He headed the religious revival of the people there at the beginning of the Second Temple era. He also led the Men of the Great Assembly, one of the most influential groups of scholars in Jewish history.

Very little is known about the early life of **Ezra** the **Scribe**. He was born in Babylon to a priestly family, and dedicated himself to the study of the **Torah**. By trade he was a scribe, writing books of the Torah and Prophets. He lived in Babylon for the first decades of his life, studying under **Baruch ben Neriah**.

Throughout the time period of the Babylonian exile, the Jews waited impatiently for the day that Babylonian or Persian kings would allow them to return to their land and rebuild the Temple. When **Cyrus** was appointed king, their efforts were finally rewarded.

**Cyrus ordered that they be allowed to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple**. He even promised to provide supplies for the project.

Ecstatic, a large contingent of **42,360** people marched back to Israel, determined to rebuild the Temple and restore it to its former glory. They immediately laid the foundations, accompanied by the Levite orchestra and the cries of joy of the onlookers.

The exhilaration was short-lived. The other inhabitants of the land, feeling threatened by the sudden mass immigration, opposed the project. They bribed officials to order a stop to the building, delaying the construction until the reign of Cyrus had ended.

The next Persian king, **Ahasuerus**, was less amicable toward his Jewish subjects. Taking advantage of this, the inhabitants of Israel sent letters telling Ahasuerus that the Jews were planning a rebellion and spreading sedition. After reading those letters, the king halted the project.

The status quo remained unchanged until **Darius** took over as the next Persian king. In the second year of his reign, the prophets **Haggai and Zechariah** commanded

the Jews to resume the construction of the Temple. **Zerubbabel and Jeshua ben Jehozadak** took up the call and headed the rebuilding efforts.

Once again, though, the news was not well accepted by the nearby inhabitants. King Darius was sent a report of their activities, and agreed to let them continue only after searching the archives and discovering that King Cyrus had originally supported the project. After Darius encouraged the building, it continued unabated until the Temple's eventual completion four years later, on the third of Adar.

**Ezra** himself had not gone with the first group of returnees to Israel. He stayed in Babylon throughout this period, either to continue his studies or in order to avoid any power struggles with **Jeshua ben Jehozadak** over the position of high priest.

Once the first group had left, **Ezra** gained prominence in the Jewish community in Babylon. He began the process of identifying lineages, researching genealogies and forming detailed family lists. By the time he left Babylon, **Ezra** had clarified the ancestry of every family living there, identifying tribal lineages and illegitimate children.

After a long period in which the construction of the Temple was stalled, the news reached Babylon that its construction had been completed. This time **Ezra** would not be left out. The next year, King Artaxerxes gave **Ezra** permission to lead a mass immigration to Israel and to enforce the laws of **God** there. With this assurance, **Ezra** began a campaign to return all the Jews to their homeland. He traveled from town to town, telling his brethren of the impending return to the Land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple.

His words went mostly unheeded. The majority of the Jews remained in Babylon. Many even thought that he was lying and sought to kill him. Undeterred, **Ezra** gathered all who would follow, a relatively small group numbering **1,500**, and set out for Israel.

He brought along with him much gold and silver for the Temple's construction, along with orders from the king to the treasurer to give them ample amounts of wheat, wine, oil and salt. Their journey lasted four months, and they arrived on the first of Av. When they arrived, they celebrated by offering sacrifices to **God** and giving the gold and silver they had brought to the Temple treasury.

Soon after **Ezra** arrived in Jerusalem, he learned of the spiritual state of the Jews there. They had intermarried freely with the non-Jewish women of the land, and had ceased to keep the Jewish holidays and other commandments.

Devastated, **Ezra** tore his clothes and sat in mourning the entire day until evening. After the evening sacrifice was brought, he got up and began praying loudly to **God**, weeping for forgiveness for the sins of his people.

A crowd slowly gathered to watch his heartfelt pleas. His tears moved them as well, and eventually the entire group cried along with him, lamenting their sins.

Then **Shechaniah** the son of **Jehiel** stepped forward with a proposition. Speaking as a representative of the people, he asked that **Ezra** take a leadership role in helping the people leave their non-Jewish wives and return to the service of God.

Immediately, **Ezra** set up a group of officers for this purpose, and he had them all take an oath to carry out his instructions. After doing so, he sent out a proclamation throughout the land that all the Jews who had ascended to Israel from Babylon should gather in Jerusalem in three days.

The command was heeded. On the appointed day the people sat in huddled groups, pelted by a powerful rainstorm, as **Ezra** spoke to them. He chastised them for their misdeeds and encouraged them to better their ways. When he finished speaking, the congregation agreed as one to leave their foreign wives.

A system was set up whereby each town appointed an officer to be in charge of the people, ascertaining that they did not remain with gentile women. One by one, the men divorced their foreign wives and brought sin offerings. By the first of Nissan, only three months later, intermarriage was a thing of the past.

**Ezra** also gathered the people and read the **Torah** to them publicly, reacquainting them with its laws. One of the immediate results of that oration was the renewed adherence to the holidays. After hearing the laws of the Festival of Booths (**Sukkot**), the people kept the holiday with a fervor and piety not seen since the days of **Joshua** the son of Nun. At that time the people also embraced complete Shabbat observance.

Although **Ezra** was a strong spiritual leader and experienced marked success in influencing the populace to strengthen their connection to **God**, his sincere devotion did not lead to an improved economic and military state. Over the next 12 years the situation worsened. The walls of Jerusalem were crumbling, and enemies routinely looted the area. A sense of resignation pervaded the people. They accepted the status quo, unwilling to work to change it.

Then a Jewish government official arrived from Babylon, named **Nehemiah**. He had heard of the dire situation and was on a mission to fix it. He inspired the people to rebuild the walls and defend themselves. Soon Nehemiah was appointed governor over the area, administering to the Jewish people's physical needs as **Ezra** tended to their spiritual wellbeing.

**Ezra** is one of the few people who oversaw the preparation of the **red heifer** for use in the Temple as a means of purification.

**Ezra** was a prolific writer, authoring the **book of Ezra**, **the book of Malachi**, and the **book of Chronicles** up until his era. He also meticulously established a model text for the Torah, writing a scroll against which all other Torah scrolls were to be checked for accuracy.

It was kept in the Temple throughout the Second Temple period. It is due to his diligence that our Torah scrolls have remained invariably and remarkably accurate until today.

One of **Ezra's** main accomplishments was the re-establishment of Torah adherence in Israel, ensuring that its observance would not be lost. He also established the **Great Assembly**, which was responsible for forming the liturgy of prayer, along with many of the systems of Jewish law that are in place today.

**Ezra** wanted the people to know how important and essential the **Word of God** was. **Nothing must supersede worship of God, and obedience is not optional.**

The sovereign **God** looks over and protects His children, always keeping His promises and providing encouragement through those He sends (**Ezra 5:1-2**). Even when His plan seems to be interrupted, as with the rebuilding of Jerusalem, **God** steps in at the appropriate time to continue His plan.

**God** is as intimately involved in our lives as He was in **Ezra's** life, and like **Ezra** we are sometimes enabled to do the impossible. **Ezra** did the impossible, for the hand of the **Lord his God** was on him (**Ezra 7:9**).

Every believer is a living temple (**1 Corinthians 6:19**) in which the **Holy Spirit** dwells. The opposing forces in **Ezra's** day were people with evil in their hearts. The opposing force in our Christian lives today is evil himself, **Satan**, who has come to destroy us and in turn destroy **God's** temple (**John 10:10**).

Our goals should be worthy in **God's** eyes as well as our own. Yesterday's sorrows can be today's successes if the hand of the **Lord** is upon us. **Ezra's** goal was worthy in **God's** eyes, and he effectively used the returning Jews' sorrows for the success of rebuilding **God's** city and restoring worship.

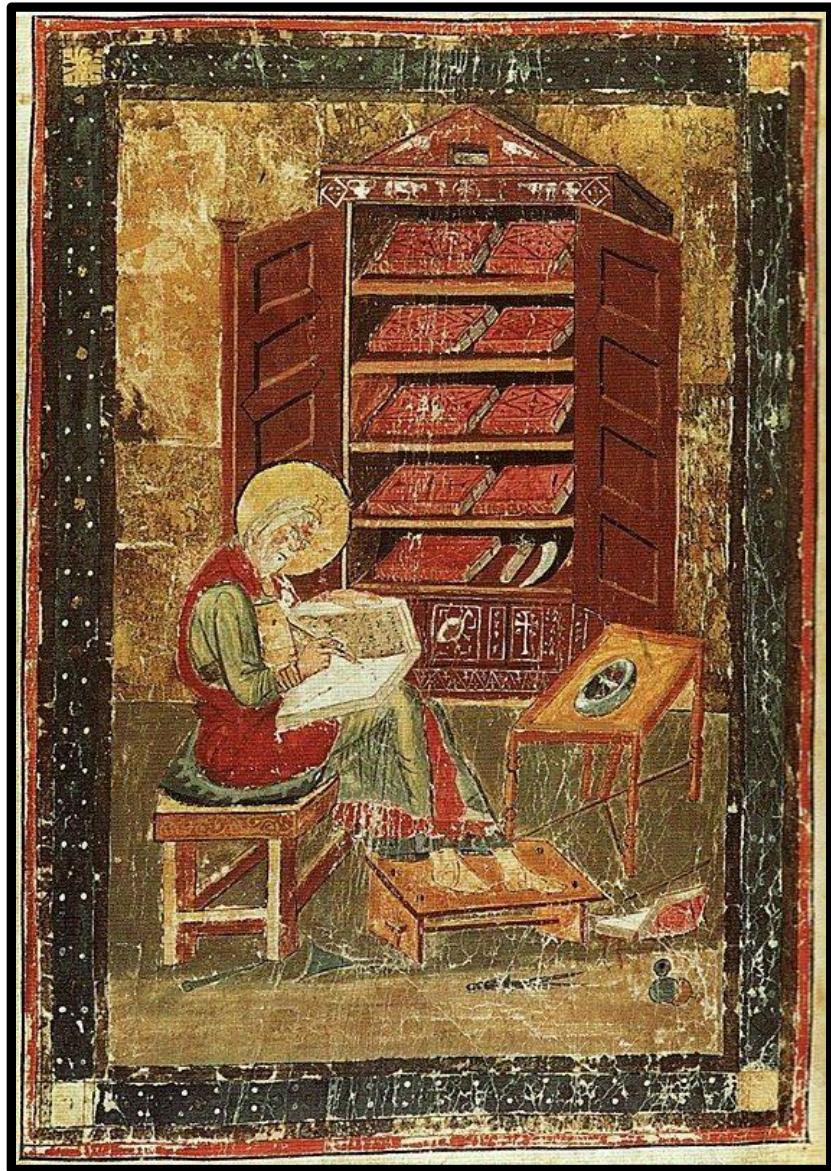
### SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

**Ezra 7:6** this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.

**Ezra 7:10** For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

**Ezra 7:21** And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently,

**Ezra 7:25** And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them.



**Ezra the Scribe**