



1. A Life Centered on God's Word¹

Jason S. DeRouchie

The priest/scribe Ezra was a man whose life provided a model of godly leadership to a people in desperate need of hearing God's Word and seeing God's will lived out in practical ways. He also provides a model of godly leadership for believers living today.

The narrator of Ezra describes him as a minister who descends from Aaron (7:1-5) and has the right professional abilities: he was a "scribe" "skilled in the Torah of Moses" (7:6; cf. 7:11). Ezra's every request was granted him by the Persian king and his ministry flourished "because the (good) hand of Yahweh his God was on him" (7:6, 9). But the narrator does not present Ezra's credentials as the reason why Ezra succeeded. Why was God's good hand upon Ezra? Ezra 7:10 answers this question.

For Ezra set his heart to study and to practice the Torah of Yahweh, and to teach both statute and rule in Israel. (Ezra 7:10)

In this verse, the main verb "set" is followed by three prepositional phrases beginning with the word "to." Ezra "set his heart" (1) to study, (2) to practice, and (3) to teach. Notice: all three activities are grounded in God's Word. To put it another way, Ezra did nothing outside of the umbrella of God's good Word. Beyond this, the three activities described in verse 10 (to study, to practice, and to teach) appear in a very specific order. This three-step progression characterized Ezra's life and ministry and we are wise to follow his example. Sound study of the Scriptures must give rise to personal practice. Only then can we have a basis for effective teaching.

But as one scholar emphasizes, far too often preachers and teachers either lose the centrality of the Word in their ministry or confuse the order of Ezra's resolve.² Some focus on teaching technique (3) at the expense of quality time in the Word (1), thus substituting the shape of the message for its essence. Others are quick to proclaim God's truth (3) but are slow to apply it to their own lives (2), resulting in hypocritical leaders who have

forgotten that only the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8; cf. Ps 24:3–5; Heb 12:13). Still others apply (2) before having studied (1), allowing their own definitions of right and wrong to guide conduct rather than the revealed divine will in the Scriptures.

Ezra set himself (1) to understand God’s Word, (2) to apply it, and (3) to proclaim it—in that order! This personal commitment generated a ministry blessed by God. We would do well to follow the pattern of Ezra today. “The hand of our God works for good on all who seek him, but his powerful wrath is against all who forsake him” (Ezra 8:22).

¹This study is condensed from Jason S. DeRouchie, “A Life Centered on Torah (Ezra 7:10).” An exegetical insight on pp. 249–50 in G. D. Pratico and M. V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007. For the full version, see <https://jasonderouchie.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/BBH-Life-Centered-on-Torah-Ezra-7v10-Derouchie.pdf>.

²Daniel I. Block, “Training Scribes and Pastors in the Tradition of Ezra,” *Southern Seminary Magazine* (June, 1999): 6.

About the author: Jason DeRouchie serves as Research Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology at [Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in Kansas City, MO, and as content developer and global trainer with [Hands to the Plow Ministries](#). Jason and his wife Teresa have eight kids (including two sons-in-law) and are active members at [The Master’s Community Church](#) in Kansas City, KS.