

Ezra

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Ezra using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to the Historical Books* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§]And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶]Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||}that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||}and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi **(1)** Some, like “something sel

Prepare

Read the Introduction to Ezra, paying particular attention to the *Themes* and *Characteristics* of the book and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Ezra to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Ezra, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Ezra as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:2–4.** Of what does the decree of Cyrus, issued 538 B.C., mark the end? What was Persian policy? Where is this policy attested outside the Bible? To whom specifically was the Hebrew of Cyrus' decree made? What does the Aramaic version of the decree cite?
2. **1:5.** To which tribes did most of the exiles who returned from Babylon belong? What kingdom did they once form? Why are ministers from the tribe of Levi needed?
3. **1:6.** For what use are valuables given to the returnees? What event does the People of God going forth from bondage with gifts from their former captors recall? How is this in line with Isaiah's prophecies?
4. **1:8.** What is the possible identity of Shesh-bazzar? If so, what would be his lineage? What responsibilities did Cyrus assign him?

For application

1. **1:2–3.** Note the language of Cyrus' decree. Would "the LORD, the God of heaven" be the God in whom Cyrus believed? Why would an unbelieving politician claim a divine mandate for favoring a particular religious group?
2. **1:2–4.** What is the official language of the Catholic Church? If the pope or the Vatican Curia intends an official document for American Catholics, why would it be necessary to write it first in the official language and then distribute an English version? What problems would the official version help to resolve?
3. **1:5.** Note that only two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) plus some priests and Levites agree to return to Jerusalem. According to the note from v. 1, how long did the Judean exile last? When the other ten tribes were deported by the Assyrians two centuries earlier, what might have prevented them from returning with the others?
4. **1:7–10.** If your parish were to rebuild a church that had been completely destroyed, what vessels would you need for Eucharistic worship to resume? How would you obtain them, assuming the supply of money was limited?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:1–70.** What does this chapter contain? What does the headcount of 49,897 individuals (2:64–65) represent? How does the *Catechism* view the remnant returning from exile (CCC 710)?
2. **2:2.** What is the lineage of Zerubbabel? What roles does he assume? Who is Jeshua, and where else is he mentioned?
3. **2:62.** What did eligibility for the priesthood require claimants to show? What did genealogical records have to indicate? When would the right to exercise priestly ministry in Israel be denied?
4. **2:68.** What do the "freewill offerings" made by heads of families recall? To what does "its site" refer? What was the history of the site?

For application

1. **2:1–70.** The introductory note for this chapter cites the *Catechism*, paragraph 710: "The Remnant of the poor that returns from the Exile is one of the most transparent prefigurations of the Church." What is there about that return that prefigures the Church?
2. **2:59–62.** Why were the genealogies in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels important (Mt 1:1–17; Lk 3:23–38)? What did each list attempt to show about Jesus? Of what importance is the genealogy of your family to you? What might it show about you?
3. **2:58.** Aside from clergy, what kinds of personnel are needed to keep your parish in operation for daily and weekly worship? What would happen to the liturgy if those personnel were missing?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1–13.** When do the events in this chapter appear to take place? If the year of the decree is also the year of the first return, when was the Temple altar restored and the foundation of the Temple laid?

2. **3:3.** To whom does the expression “peoples of the lands” refer? What is the restored community urged to do about them? What are reinstated in accord with the law of the continual burnt offering?
3. **3:7.** What does giving food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians recall? In both cases, how was timber brought to Jerusalem? Why were cedar trees from Lebanon selected? What grant was meant here?
4. **3:12.** What do the elders who remember the magnificence of Solomon’s Temple lament? What did the prophet Haggai say to them?

For application

1. **3:2.** If you were rebuilding a Catholic church from the ground up, what is the most important item of furniture you would install? Where would you place it? Why would it be more important than anything else?
2. **3:4–5.** Perhaps borrowing from the OT, the Church extends certain holy days with an eight-day celebration called an octave. Which holy days have one? When does the octave begin, and when does it end? Liturgically, what should be happening during the octave?
3. **3:10.** What is being celebrated here? When do people normally celebrate a building project? Why would this celebration be taking place at this beginning point in the project?
4. **3:12.** According to the prophet Haggai (Hag 2:1–9), the Lord encourages the returnees to keep working on the Temple, even in the face of discouragement and disappointment. How should the presence of obstacles or setbacks affect your efforts to grow in virtue? When is trust in the Lord more necessary: when things go well or when they appear to go badly?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:1.** Who are the Samaritans? With respect to religion, what faith aspects did the Samaritans comprise? Why was their offer to help in rebuilding the Temple refused by the Jewish community?
2. **4:10.** Who is Osnappar? Although extrabiblical sources know of no resettlement of subjugated peoples in Samaria under Ashurbanipal, what is known about this king? What could deportations in the aftermath of his victory possibly explain? To what area did the name Beyond the River refer?
3. **4:12.** Since the letter dates from the days of Artaxerxes, to what building effort described here does it refer? When must this effort and the interruption that followed have occurred?
4. **4:24.** For how long is Temple construction halted? What narrative is resumed here, and to whose time does it bring the reader?

For application

1. **4:2–3.** If you had been among the Samaritan delegation offering to help the Jews rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, what benefit might you have expected if the offer were accepted? What would you have thought of their flat refusal of your offer?
2. **4:6.** Why did the Samaritans wait until a new administration before writing their accusatory letter? How would you respond to a false accusation of unlawful conduct? What would you do to prove that your conduct was legitimate?
3. **4:12–16.** An effective lie contains just enough truth to make the deception plausible. What about this accusation against Jerusalem is true? What is false or at least misleading? Although the king takes the bait (v. 22), what about the situation of the Jews makes the conclusion in v. 16 wildly improbable?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:2.** As project coordinators for the sanctuary’s reconstruction, when had Zerubbabel and Jeshua initially assumed leadership roles in the rebuilding? When did the rebuilding begin? According to Cassiodorus, when is a house destroyed rebuilt in the spiritual sense?
2. **5:6–17.** Why does Tattenai, along with Shethar-bozenai and other officials, write to King Darius? Why were the current regional governors unaware of Cyrus’ decree?

3. **5:13.** When did Cyrus II assume the title king of Babylon? Aside from the Bible, how else is his use of this title attested?
4. **5:16.** What was Sheshbazzar, as a civic official, authorized by the Persians to do? What role did Zerubbabel and Jeshua have? How did the letter writers provide a misleading description of the matter? What was the reality?

For application

1. **5:2.** Read the first chapter of the Book of Haggai. What problem is he addressing? Why does the Lord say that the Jews are looking for much and getting little? How would taking care of the Lord's interests before your own improve your life?
2. **5:5.** How aware are you that the eye of God is upon you? When obstacles appear to block your progress, on what basis would you decide whether to give up or continue?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:13–15.** When is the Temple finished? Why is it often called the Second Temple? Though initially a modest structure, what will the Second Temple undergo under Herod the Great around 20 B.C.? What will eventually happen to it?
2. **6:14.** Who stands behind the flurry of earthly and political activity to guide events? How does divine intervention thus take place? Why does the name of Artaxerxes seem out of place at this point in the story? What perhaps is the reason he is mentioned?
3. **6:17.** Although restoration of all twelve tribes of Israel remains a living hope for the future, who are actually dwelling in the homeland now?
4. **6:20.** When did the practice of Levites slaughtering lambs on behalf of the laity begin? In more ancient times, what was the custom for killing them for sacrifice?

For application

1. **6:3–4.** According to the note for v. 3, Cyrus is limiting the size of the Temple he is funding. Assuming a cubit equals about 18 inches, how large would the Temple be if built on his proposed scale? What spiritual effect do architects wish to achieve by designing churches of such dimensions?
2. **6:10.** For whom does St. Paul require Christians to offer prayer (1 Tim 2:1–2)? For whom is such prayer an act of charity?
3. **6:14.** Read the note for this verse. What historical events can you cite that illustrate how God intervenes amid human activity? How might such examples help you see God's intervention in your personal life?
4. **6:19.** This verse implies that the Passover had not been celebrated in some time, despite the Law of Moses that it be celebrated annually (Ex 12:14, 17; Deut 16:1). Assuming that the Passover could be celebrated only in Jerusalem, what had prevented its celebration until now? What especially contributed to the joy of this celebration (vv. 21–22)?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:10.** As one of the outstanding figures of postexilic Judaism, to what did Ezra devote himself? What does the language here recall? According to St. Bede, what makes Ezra clearly a type of the Lord?
2. **7:12–26.** What three goals does the letter of King Artaxerxes I authorize Ezra to pursue? What do several features of the decree suggest about how it was drafted?
3. **Word Study: Scribe (7:6).** In the ancient Near East, what was a scribe? What did his duties include? Because scribes were normally multilingual, how else could they also serve? What was probably the role of Ezra the scribe before coming to Jerusalem? How is Ezra also a scribe in the religious sense? By the time of the NT, what had a Jewish scribe become?
4. **7:28.** Since narration in the first person begins here, how does it mark the beginning of what scholars call "the Ezra Memoir"? Most likely, why would Ezra compose such a document? Either way, how is the memoir valuable from a historical standpoint?

For application

1. **7:6.** Why do those preparing for ordination to the priesthood spend so many years studying theology? With what does theology in general deal? What are some of its practical uses?
2. **7:10.** What attracts many of those who are not among the clergy to the study of Catholic theology? What does an in-depth understanding of doctrine matter for one following a secular vocation?
3. **7:25.** To what does “the wisdom of your God which is in your hand” refer? How literate are you in the study of that wisdom? What has it taught you about yourself? How has it led you to grow in fear of the Lord?
4. **7:28.** What is your experience of keeping a spiritual journal? What is the difference between a diary and a spiritual journal? How can the latter aid your growth in holiness?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:1–34.** Whom does Ezra lead back to Judea? Since the inventory lists nearly 1800 men and ministers of worship, how does the total size of the caravan come to exceed 6000 returnees? What was the size of the initial wave of exiles that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon?
2. **8:15.** Where is Ahava? Who is absent from the caravan assembling to make the journey home? Whom does Ezra thus invite to join the group, and for what purpose? How many men volunteered?
3. **8:21–23.** For what do the exiles fast and pray? Why is no military escort requested?
4. **8:31.** When did the departure from Ahava begin? In the interval, what had the group done? How did Ezra interpret God’s response to the fasting and prayer?

For application

1. **8:15.** According to *Lumen Gentium* (29), what prompted the bishops of Vatican II to restore the permanent diaconate? As a member of the hierarchy, what is the role of the permanent deacon in the Church?
2. **8:21.** In both the OT and NT, Scripture frequently exhorts us to humble ourselves before God (e.g., Ps 25:9; Jas 4:10). Why is God so attracted to the humble? How does one humble himself before God, who knows the secrets of the human heart?
3. **8:22–23.** In foregoing a military escort, what risk is Ezra taking for the safety of the caravan (vv. 26–27)? How does he come to know that God has listened to the group’s entreaty (v. 31)? Under typical circumstances, how do we come to recognize that God has heard our prayers?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:2.** What does Ezra lament regarding the holy race of Israel? According to the laws of separation in the Torah, what must Israel avoid, and why? What are the real issues behind the ban? What does Ezra thus oppose?
2. **9:3.** Of what is tearing one’s garments a sign? According to St. Bede, when Ezra tears his garments and spreads forth his hands to God with prayers and tears, whom does he prefigure?
3. **9:6–15.** In his prayer of confession, why is Ezra dumbfounded? Not only have the returnees recently experienced the *justice* of God in the form of covenant curses, but what else have they experienced? In spite of this, what has Israel broken yet “again”?
4. **9:9.** What sober acknowledgment is Ezra making here? Beyond this, what does it imply about God’s people?

For application

1. **9:1–2.** What does the sin of scandal involve? Why does the sinful behavior of those in authority take on a particular gravity (CCC 2284–87)?
2. **9:2.** Why does the Church refuse to recognize the validity of a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized member of another religion (unless properly dispensed)? What problems does she foresee to the faith of the Catholic in such marriages (CCC 1634)?
3. **9:9.** In what respect are all human beings in bondage? Under whose authority? As persons in bondage to sin, how are we shown mercy by God?

4. **9:10–15.** How might the sense of corporate guilt expressed in Ezra’s prayer apply to our situation today? In what ways are we corporately guilty for the breakdown of morals in our country?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:3.** What does Shecaniah propose to Ezra? How is the covenant sealed? To whom is “my lord” a reference?
2. **Word Study: Put away (10:3).** What does the Hebrew word *yaša*’ mean in both its normal and causative form? For what does Ezra thus use the verb? What is curious about his description? What might the difference in terminology suggest? Because marriages between Israelites and non-Israelites were forbidden by the Torah, what is clearly established? What does this mean about unions made in violation of the Mosaic Law?
3. **10:11.** Why did Ezra not need a personal revelation to know the will of the Lord for his people? What was the only thing Israel had to do?
4. **10:16–17.** What does Ezra appoint a special commission to investigate? How long do they take to complete their work?

For application

1. **10:3.** How does Shecaniah’s proposal sound to modern ears? If it sounds radical or uncompromising to us, how would we regard the conditions Jesus laid down for becoming his disciple (Lk 14:26)?
2. **10:7–9.** Why does Ezra choose to act on this matter so quickly, despite the heavy rain? Depending on circumstances, how quickly should you act once you determine what the will of God is?
3. **10:11.** If the will of God for a way of life is clearly stated in the Scriptures, what do you do if it conflicts with a strong desire for something different? According to the Book of Hebrews, what is the danger to avoid and the action to take upon learning God’s will (Heb 3:7–13)?
4. **10:12–14.** What is the assembly’s response to Ezra’s haste? Why is it not merely a delaying tactic? What is the relation between obedience and prudence in a situation like this?