

**Study Aids**  
Discussion Questions  
For “What’s the Message?” Lessons

Lesson 83

People who have not studied Ezra and the practice of Judaism in the centuries since then have very little understanding of the influence Ezra had at the time of the ministry of Jesus, and continues to have to this day in Judaism.

Under Ezra, Judaism became a legalistic religion, focusing more and more on the performance of the ritual done in a proper manner, and the keeping of the Law to the utmost detail. Gradually the idea of Jeremiah, of putting in a new heart of flesh to replace the old heart of stone, faded from consciousness. Gradually the importance of a change of heart disappeared, and was replaced by a visual public display of piety.

This was the climate into which Jesus came and preached in His sermon on the mount “You have heard it said by men of old . . . but I say to you . . .”

Questions:

What a contrast between these two points of view! The religion of Ezra had become a theology of self-justification, with the emphasis on what I have done to earn God’s acceptance, rather than on what God had done **for** the Israelites over past centuries and continues to do for us today.

If you had been an Israelite at the time of Jesus, steeped in the tradition of Ezra, would the words of Jesus have been acceptable to you? Why, or why not?

Is there anything positive that can be said about the legacy of Ezra? From a human standpoint, what did the law community of Ezra accomplish?