

## Restoration of Exiles: A Study of Ezra Chapter 7

We noted in the beginning of our study that Ezra 1-6 is about the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and resuming sacrifices there. At the end of chapter 6, the Temple was finally completed (in 516 BC), sacrifices were being offered, and two major festivals were held.

The second half of the book, Ezra 7-10, is about restoring the Jewish society to live according to the laws of God. Notice that the two major halves of Ezra show that it is not only God's will that his people worship him (1-6) but also that they live their lives according to his will all the time (7-10).

The second section of the book begins during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia (465-425 BC). In "the seventh year of the king" (i.e., 458 BC), Ezra leads another procession of the Babylonian captives back to Jerusalem. This means that over fifty years have passed from the time of the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ezra himself is mentioned for the first time in 7:1, and he plays a prominent role in chapters 7-10. The book never says Ezra wrote it, but he may well have, guided by the Spirit and using official documents and other sources for the earlier portions of the book.

Chapter 7 gives an overview of Ezra's trip to Jerusalem and sometimes jumps ahead to describe the actual trip, though it unfolds in more detail in chapter 8.

Read Ezra 7:1-10 and notice that Ezra was a priest, descended from Aaron (7:1-5). He was also a teacher, well versed in the Law of Moses (vv. 6, 12) and had devoted himself to studying and observing the law as well as teaching it (vv. 10-11). Because of this, he possessed the wisdom of God (v. 25). Verse 6 may imply that Ezra had initiated the idea of going to Jerusalem ("granted him everything he asked").

1. What does the description of Ezra tell you about the qualities needed in a leader of God's people?
2. How well does this square with what you read in the New Testament? Can you think of a NT passage that says the same thing?
3. Ezra 7:10 says Ezra was devoted to doing 3 different things. Which of these do you do best? Which might you need to pray that you may do more of?

Ezra 7:11-26 is a letter King Artaxerxes wrote: 1) authorizing Ezra to make the trip back to Jerusalem and 2) describing some of the ways he was helping Ezra. You may want to read the letter straight through first, and then re-read sections of it as you notice the points below.

As to the purposes for Ezra's trip, he was leading a group of other Israelites (vv. 7, 13) back to: 1) check on the welfare of the people there (v. 14), offer sacrifice (v. 17), and appoint leaders to administer justice and create a society based on God's law (vv. 25-26). (This last purpose will be emphasized in chapters 9-10.) Artaxerxes' motive in sending Ezra back for these purposes appears to be to avoid the wrath of God upon himself and his kingdom (v. 23). The Persian kings believed in God's power to do good and harm (6:10, 12).

The letter in Ezra 7:11-26 also describes several things the king did to help Ezra, including: providing this letter to authorize the trip and its purposes, giving him some gold and silver (v. 15), allowing him to "raise funds" from others in Babylon (v. 16), giving him some leeway in how to use the money (v. 18), giving back articles from the Temple that the king of Babylon had taken from Jerusalem when he overthrew it a century before (vv. 19-20), instructing the local leaders to provide additional support up to generous limits (vv. 21-23), and not allowing those local leaders to collect tax or tribute from those who worked at the Temple (v. 24).

4. Do you think all these things that happened were merely the work of a pagan king or do you think God was involved in it? Why?

Ezra 7:27-28 are something of a soliloquy of Ezra where he tells how he felt about all that was happening. Read it now.

5. What light do these two verses shed on question #4 above? Since he realized that God was at work, what did Ezra do? (first word in v. 27). What's the obvious application for us?
6. What gave Ezra the courage to embark on such a large and difficult undertaking? (v. 28b). Can you see the hand of the Lord on you in any way that gives you courage to do something you believe he wants you to do?
7. Read the following verses and see if you can determine what specific, good things took place in each of them that was due to the "gracious hand" of God (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; 9:8). What light does this shed on how the gracious hand of God works in our lives today?