

Ezra Lesson 07

Ezra Chapter 7

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Introduction: Chapter 7 presents the actual coming of Ezra to Jerusalem. Again, there is remarkable evidence of God's providential intervention in prospering His work. God put into the heart of another Persian king to underwrite, protect, and further strengthen God's people and work.

There is some conflict among commentators concerning the historical placement of events. Some take the position chapters seven and eight are about a year after the events of the chapter six and the completion of the Temple.

Contextually, that certainly is plausible. However, others based upon historical details pertaining to the kings of Persia place this time approximately 58 years later or about B.C. 458. The conflict centers around exactly who is the Artaxerxes mentioned. Part of the problem rests in how the name Artaxerxes had become a generic title of Persian kings similar to the Roman use of the name/title, Caesar. Most recent commentators take the position this Artaxerxes was one who ruled later than at the time in chapter 6 and that's why the interval of 58 years.

Insight into understanding these two chapters is in noting that the first ten verses of chapter 7 present a summary of the greater mission which is detailed in the rest of chapter 7 and through chapter 8. From Ezra's perspective, the first six chapters of this book are historical. The final four are autobiographical.

I. Ezra Sent to Teach the People

Ezr 7:1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

Ezr 7:2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

Ezr 7:3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,

Ezr 7:4 The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,

Ezr 7:5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:

Though the context would seem to suggest a rather short interval after chapter six, we will proceed with the assumption that these proceedings took place 58

years later. Ezra here presents his priestly pedigree, establishing his lineage back to Eleazar the son of Aaron.

Ezr 7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. This verse fairly well summarizes the rest of the book of Ezra. He went from Babylon back to Jerusalem.

Notice how he described himself as “a ready scribe in the law of Moses.” The essence of that statement is that Ezra was a diligent scribe of the Scripture. In other words, he was a man of the Word. He knew it and understood it. He goes on to summarize his undertakings and how “the king granted him all his request.” As will be noted, Artaxerxes granted to him very substantial resources.

It might be inferred that Ezra had some sort of royal relationship with this Persian king not unlike that of Nehemiah (the king’s cup-bearer) or perhaps even Daniel (a royal advisor) who lived years earlier. Ezra makes it clear the assistance of Artaxerxes ultimately was because God’s hand was upon him (Ezra). The idea of God’s hand being upon one is found several times in Ezra and Nehemiah and has the sense of God’s blessing.

Ezr 7:7 And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

Ezr 7:8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

Ezr 7:9 For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

Ezra further summarizes how in so going from Babylon to Jerusalem he was accompanied by priests, Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims (servants of the Levites). The journey took approximately four months—traveling on foot in a large caravan was slow. He again notes how their ultimate safe arrival was due “to the good hand of his God upon him.” There is sound scriptural basis here for seeking journeying mercies of the Lord as we travel even to this day.

Ezr 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Ezr 7:11 Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.

Ezr 7:12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time.

Here perhaps is the reason why God's hand was upon Ezra. He "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD." The word translated as seek (vrd dawrash) has the sense to 'resort to', to 'frequent,' to 'consult,' and to 'enquire.'

Ezra was a man whose heart was determined to seek God's Word. The idea is of frequent and regular study. He had prepared his heart "to do it." He not only had a hunger for what God's Word had to say, he was determined to do it (i.e., obey it). He had prepared his heart "to teach in all of Israel God's Word"—its "statutes and judgments."

In Verses 11-12, this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. Ezra briefly summarized how king Artaxerxes issued a written decree on Ezra's behalf prescribing his authorization, his appropriations from the royal treasury, his authority, and in short, the royal blessing upon the expedition he was about to undertake.

Verses 12-26 presents the details of this decree. Artaxerxes describes himself as "king of kings" and notes Ezra as a scribe of the "God of heaven." It is remarkable how this pagan king of the mighty Persian empire (which at the time was the most powerful empire in the world) would acknowledge Jehovah God as the God of heaven, that is, God over all.

Ezr 7:13 I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

Ezr 7:14 Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand;

Ezr 7:15 And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem,

Ezr 7:16 And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem:

Ezr 7:17 That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:18 And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.

Ezr 7:19 The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:20 And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house.

Artaxerxes decreed how “all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites” throughout the Persian empire were free to return to Israel along with Ezra if they so desired. Sadly, only a remnant chose to do so. Many were too comfortable making money in Babylon. Ezra was authorized to bring funds from the royal Persian treasury for the Temple at Jerusalem.

He was authorized to receive a “freewill offering” from the people (i.e., Jews in the empire) for his expedition to Jerusalem. The purpose of these resources was to buy whatever necessary for proper sacrifices at the Temple. He could do whatever with what was left over according to God’s will.

Additional sacred vessels for Temple worship were to be sent for service of the Temple. For anything else he needed for the Temple in Jerusalem, he was authorized to appropriate from the king’s treasure house (i.e., treasury). The generosity of this pagan king toward the work of God and His worship is most remarkable. God indeed had providentially worked in his heart.

II. Artaxerxes Makes A Decree

Ezr 7:21 And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily,

Ezr 7:22 Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.

Ezr 7:23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

Ezr 7:24 Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

Artaxerxes further issued a decree to all royal officers “beyond the river” (i.e., west of the Euphrates, or toward Jerusalem) to give to Ezra whatever he required “speedily” to the limit noted. Moreover, whatever Ezra was commanded by “the God of heaven” concerning the Temple at Jerusalem, he was authorized to do.

Part of Artaxerxes motive in all of this was that he feared the wrath of God against him and his sons. Indeed, the fear of the Lord had been instilled into Artaxerxes. The question arises, how did this come to be? Did God directly intervene and so convict his heart? Or, had Ezra or other high ranking Jews ‘witnessed’ to him from the Old Testament Scripture, instructing him of the God of heaven.

There probably was a combination of both. As God’s Word was presented to Ezra, God’s Spirit convicted his heart of the need of God’s work.

In verse 24, the King also granted tax-exempt status to the priests, Levites and their attendants in the Temple service. This is a clear scriptural example of tax-exempt status by a secular government for God’s work.

Ezr 7:25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

Ezr 7:26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

Ezra was authorized to establish a judicial system in and about Jerusalem to teach and enforce the Law of Moses. Additionally, he was given the authority to prosecute those who ignored the Scripture, ranging from imprisonment to even death.

Ezr 7:27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem:

Ezr 7:28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Ezra and the children of Israel faced a lot of trials in attempting to get the temple rebuilt, but they did not quit.

Leonardo DiCaprio once said “Why worry? If you have done the very best you can, worrying won’t make it any better. If you want to be successful, respect one rule: Never let failure take control of you.”

I believe failure did not stop Ezra. He looked to God in his setbacks and kept on going. And sometimes what looks like failures to us due to time or constraints are in the perfect timing and will of the Lord. His timetable probably won’t match ours.

Ezra concluded the chapter by thanking and praising God for having put such things into the heart of the king for the further beautification of the Temple. Ezra thanked God for granting such mercy before the rulers of Persia. He again noted God’s hand upon him. Therefore, he began to gather together out of Israel chief men to go up with him to Jerusalem.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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