

Part 2: Spiritual Restoration of the People - Chap. 7-10

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I. Ezra Decreed to Lead Another Group to Return (458 BC) – Chap. 7

Notes on Ezra Chapter 7

Verses 1-6

1. What important character is introduced in v1? When did this occur?
2. What do we learn from his genealogy? What other job did he have (v6)? (Think: Study a dictionary and determine what work scribes did.)
3. Case Study: Some people claim the Law of Moses is different from the Law of God, and that the Law of Moses was removed at the cross but the Law of God continues in force. What can we learn about this from vv 5,12?

Ezra introduced to the story

In this chapter we are introduced to Ezra himself. The previous chapters, though included in the book of Ezra, nevertheless happened several years before Ezra was personally involved in the events. The first group returned from Babylonian captivity in about 536 B.C. led by Zerubbabel, whom we have read about in chapters 1-6. Ezra led a group that returned in about 458 B.C., almost 80 years later. Many things can change in 80 years (compare the changes that have occurred in America in the last 80 years).

These things happened in the reign of Artaxerxes (v1). Cf. Neh. 2:1. This was the son of the Xerxes who ruled during Esther's day.

We are given Ezra's lineage. To those of us under the New Testament, genealogies are of little value. But to a Jew under the Old Testament, ancestry was very important. This was especially true in Ezra's case, because his lineage showed him to be a descendant of Aaron (v5). This qualified him to be a priest, as he is referred to several times in the book.

We are told some things about Ezra's character. He was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses – cf. 7:11,12,21. Scribes were men whose job was to make records and keep accounts and make copies of records, etc. But Ezra was a scribe especially of the Law of Moses; such scribes would copy and study copies of the Scriptures. They did not have modern printing equipment, so each copy of each book had to be made by hand. In doing this work, scribes often gained a good knowledge of the books.

We are also told that the hand of the Lord His God was upon Ezra. He clearly was a good man who lived close to God and was devout. As a result God blessed him to fulfill his requests from the king as described in the following verses.

The Law of Moses and the Law of God

Note that the Law of Moses is said to be that which the Lord God of Israel had given. Some people try to distinguish the Law of Moses from the Law of God as two separate laws. Seventh Day Adventists and others say the Law of God was the 10 Commands and was never removed by Jesus so is still in effect today. They say the Law of Moses was the rest of the Old Testament (other than the 10 Commands) and is what Jesus removed on the cross.

However, this passage says Ezra was a scribe of the Law of Moses, which God gave. That would imply that the Law of Moses is the Law of God. V12 then settles the matter for sure, saying that Ezra was a scribe of the Law of God. V11 says he was expert in the words of the commands of the Lord. So there is no difference between the Law of God and the Law of Moses.

For further information, see our articles on the old law for today at our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verses 7-9

4. What do vv 7-9 say Ezra and the people did? When did they leave, and when did they arrive? (Think: Who are Nethinim? Cf. 8:20.)

Here is a brief summary of Ezra's trip. He left Babylon on the first day of the first month of the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, and he arrived in Jerusalem four months later on the first day of the fifth month. With him were priests, Levites, and people of various other occupations.

The Nethinim are mentioned in 2:43; 8:20; 1 Chron. 9:2. ISBE says these were servants in the temple, but their history and origin are uncertain. Note especially that Ezra 8:20 says that David appointed them to help the Levites in the temple service.

Note that this is just a brief overview of what we will read about in detail in the following verses — we do not have two separate trips led by Ezra. (cf. Genesis 1 to Genesis 2).

Verses 10,11

5. From v10 list 4 things Ezra did with the Law. For each one list another *passage* showing why it is important.

6. Application: What are some important lessons we can learn regarding Bible study from Ezra's example?

Ezra's relationship to God's law

Here we are told more about Ezra's character. Four important steps are described regarding Ezra's attitude toward the law, all of which we should imitate.

(1) He prepared his heart.

To be acceptable, all service to God must come from the heart (Romans 6:17; Matthew 15:16ff; Proverbs 4:23; etc.) We will never properly learn God's will, let alone do it and teach others, until we get our own hearts right (Acts 17:11).

(2) He then sought the law of the Lord.

We can never do God's will till we know it. The NKJV footnote on "sought" says "study." We must be diligent students if we are to know God's law (Psalms 1:1; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Acts 17:11; Joshua 1:8; Deuteronomy 6:6ff; John 8:32; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Matthew 5:6). So Ezra's proper attitude of heart led him to study to learn God's law.

As a result of this study, he became expert in the law (v11). Some want to ridicule us if we think we need to be experts in God's law, but surely it is as valuable for us as it was for Ezra. Cf. Psalms 119:45.

(3) He then practiced what he learned.

Knowledge is worthless without application (Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6). Many people know what God expects but don't practice it. Ezra was not one of these.

(4) He then taught others what he himself had learned.

See Deut. 33:10; Neh. 8:1-8. You cannot teach what you do not know, and you will never teach effectively what you do not practice (Hebrews 5:12ff; Romans 2:21ff; 1 Timothy 4:16). We today are obligated to obey God and to be teachers to the extent of our ability (Acts 8:1,4; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; Hebrews 3:12-14; 5:12-14; 10:24; James 5:19,20; 1 Peter 3:15). The steps Ezra followed are the right steps in the right order. We would do well to imitate him.

The letter of Artaxerxes

This then introduced the letter Artaxerxes gave to Ezra when he gave him permission to lead a group to Judea.

Verses 12-18

7. What did the letter of the king authorize Ezra to do in vv 12-19?

Here is the beginning of the decree Artaxerxes made authorizing Ezra to lead people to Judah. He began by addressing Ezra as a scribe of the law of God. Artaxerxes decreed that Ezra could go to Jerusalem and take with him all Israelites, including priests and Levites, who voluntarily chose to go.

He was to go to see how the people in Jerusalem and Judah fared as regards their obedience to the law of God. And he was authorized to take with him silver and gold from the king and his advisors as an offering to God. Also the people could send free-will offerings for the service in the temple. These should be used to buy animals and other substances for offerings. The rest of the silver and gold could be used according to the best judgment of Ezra and the people as needed according to God's will.

Verses 19-23

8. What else did he promise Ezra in vv 20-23? What reason did he give in v23?

They also could take with them articles that could be used in the temple. Then the king issued a decree to those beyond the River who were in charge of the king's treasure to give whatever Ezra requested up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. Other things needed for the temple could be bought or provided from these gifts.

They were to have whatever they needed to do God's will in the temple. The king was concerned to please God, so as to avoid bringing wrath on his realm because of displeasing God. (It does not seem that this proves Artaxerxes was converted completely to God's service. Perhaps he just viewed God as A god who truly was powerful and did not want to bring the disfavor of that god.)

Verses 24-26

9. What protection was given to religious leaders in v24? What authority was Ezra given in v25?

The king then decreed that those who served in the temple should not have to pay any form of taxes (see v7 regarding Nethinim). And he authorized Ezra to set up judges and other rulers to make sure God's law was properly enforced. This required judges to know God's law, and Ezra was to teach it to those who did not know it (it could also be that he was to teach the people the law – 2 Chron. 17:7; Malachi 2:7). Cf. Exodus 18:21,22; Deut. 16:18.

Those who would not obey the law were to be punished by whatever means was deemed best: death, banishment, confiscation of goods (as in a fine), or imprisonment. Note that laws must be enforced to be effective, and people must know the laws in order to be able to obey them. The duty of rulers is to teach people the law and to punish those who disobey. We today need judges who will diligently follow this pattern.

Verses 27,28

10. How did Ezra respond to the king's commands (vv 27,28)?

For this decree of the king, Ezra praised God. He could improve the service in the temple and make the temple more attractive. He considered this to be a blessing from God. The king made the decree, but Ezra gave glory to God for moving the king to do so. We should give thanks to God for our blessings, even when they come through other people.

So Ezra began to prepare for the journey by finding leaders of the Israelites to make the journey with him.

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