

Notes on Ezra Chapter 8

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II. Preparation and Journey Led by Ezra – Chap. 8

In chap. 7, King Artaxerxes had authorized Ezra to lead another group of exiles to return to Judea. This chapter gives the details of that group and its return (whereas chapter 7 had simply summarized the fact that it was done).

Verses 8-14

1. What is listed in Ezra 8:1-14? How do you know that Ezra was in the group? Note that these numbers total 1354. How does this compare to the size of the first group?

The list of people to return with Ezra

These verses give a list of the names of the leaders of the people who made the trip with Ezra. Note the reference to “with me” in v1, showing this was the group that Ezra had been authorized to lead.

The number of men (not counting families) that returned with Ezra was 1354 (including the Levites, etc. added in vv 15ff). This was a much smaller group than the first group that Zerubabel had led, which had totaled over 50,000 (cf. chap. 2).

Verses 15-20

2. Where did they meet before leaving? How long were they there?
3. Who was missing from the group? (Think: Why would this be a problem?)
4. What did Ezra do about this problem, and what was the result?

No Levites among the exiles to return

The people who had volunteered to make the trip were gathered together by the river Ahava (cf. vv 21,31). They camped there three days, but when Ezra searched among them he found no Levites. Apparently there were priests, but the Levites were responsible to assist the priests in the temple. So the lack of Levites was a problem.

Ezra discussed this with the leading men (“chief men” – ASV) and the men of understanding (“teachers” – ASV). He gave them a command to carry to a man named Iddo, who was a chief man at a place called Casiphia. Iddo was a leader of the Nethinim, so he was instructed to bring servants for the house of God. See on v20 below regarding Nethinim.

The instruction to Iddo resulted in a group of men to return to Jerusalem to do the needed work of service. A man of understanding named Sherebiah, of the tribe of Levi, came with his sons and brothers. Also other Levites came, so the total Levites were 38.

Also 220 Nethinim came, itemized by name. Here we have an explanation as detailed as any of who the Nethinim were. They are said to be people appointed by David and other leaders to serve the Levites. So the Levites helped the priests in the temple, and the Nethinim helped the Levites. Cf. 2:43; 7:7.

Note that Ezra gave the credit to God for these men. He and others had worked to bring it about, but God blessed their effort. We should remember to also give God credit and thanks when our needs are met.

Verses 21-23

5. What did Ezra have the people do before leaving (v21)? What does this practice refer to?
6. What was the purpose of this act? Why had they not asked for soldiers to protect them?
7. Application: What lessons can we learn from this about our own journeys today?

The people ask God's blessing on their journey

Before beginning the journey, the people made special request of God by means of fasting for His aid and protection. Ezra had told the king that God was with those who served Him and against those who did not (see 7:6,9,28; Josh. 23:16). So he did not think it would be fitting now to turn and ask the king for armed guards to protect them. Instead, they made request of the Lord and put their faith in Him. This request was answered as they did arrive safely.

One reason why they needed protection is described in the following verses. They had much silver and gold and other valuables with them to take to the work in the temple. This might endanger them from robbers, etc. But God cared for them and they had no such problems.

Surely we also need to ask God's blessings on the work we do. We should request His care and protection when we travel, or when we undertake any work for Him. If the Lord does not bless our work, we will not accomplish good for Him. If His blessing is on the work, then we can accomplish much.

Note that this passage clearly illustrates the Biblical purpose of fasting. We are expressly told that they fasted and prayed in order to entreat God. This was a means of showing how seriously and sincerely they sought God's blessings on their work. See also 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Chron. 20:3.

Note also that, when we make a request of God and then receive what we asked for, we can and should give God credit that He answered our prayer.

Verses 24-30

8. Describe what they took with them (vv 24-30). What does this show about why they were concerned about protection?
9. Who was put in charge of the treasure? Note that they prayed about this, then they put men in charge. What does this teach us about prayer?
10. **Define** stewardship. How did these men illustrate the concept of stewardship?
11. Application: What are some things that we today are stewards of? What are some things we can learn about stewardship from this Bible example?

Men appointed to be responsible for the treasure

The king had authorized people to make free-will offerings for the work of the temple, and the king and his counselors had also made donations – 7:14-16. This resulted in a great quantity of valuables being transported with Ezra's group. There were six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles {weighing} one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, twenty gold basins {worth} a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. Compare the amount of the first group recorded in 1:9-11.

Preparation for the trip required making individuals responsible for caring for the precious things being taken. This was not left up to everybody in general but nobody in particular. Ezra made twelve specific individuals responsible for various items. The quantity was measured to them to keep, so it could be measured again to be sure they delivered the complete amount when they arrived in Jerusalem.

Note how this illustrates the concept of stewardship. These men were in charge of something that did not belong to them; in fact, it belonged to God's work. They were in charge of it, but

could not do with it just whatever they chose. They were to care for it and use it properly, but then they were to give account for what they did with it.

Ezra said that these men were holy or set apart to do this work. They were caring for holy possessions for the temple, so they were to be holy in their work. Cf. Lev. 21:6-8; 22:2,3.

We today support God's work by freewill offerings on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1,2). Like the funds here in Ezra, these funds today are given to specifically do God's work in the spiritual temple, the church. That makes them holy, or set apart to God. They can no longer be used for just anything we desire or anything men may choose. They must be used according to God's plan, and to use them for other things would be to misuse that which is holy.

We also have God's holy word and the duties of His church. These are holy responsibilities also to care for, so we too must be holy people to do them (1 Peter 1:15ff; 2:5-10). In a sense, our responsibility is even greater than that of these men. They were stewards of only material wealth. We are stewards of that which leads to eternal life. Someday we will be called to account for how we used these gifts. Are we using them wisely?

Then note that Ezra and the people had prayed to God for protection. But having prayed, they also took measures to do what they could to bring about what they prayed for. They asked God's protection, but then appointed men to be specifically responsible to protect the valuables. Likewise, we pray for daily bread, for the gospel to be spread, for wisdom, etc., but then we must work to the extent we are able to bring about what we prayed for. God deserves the credit, but He expects us to do what we can.

Verses 31-34

12. When did they depart? What was the result of their journey?

The journey completed

The people, having completed their preparations, began their journey on the 12th day of the first month. 7:8,9 had said that they began on the first day of the first month. I assume this means that was when they gathered to begin the journey, but the preparations described here took the intervening time. So they actually left on the twelfth day.

God answered their prayer for protection, so they arrived safely with no ambushes from enemies. Note again the credit is given to God for the blessing of safety.

Having arrived safely in Jerusalem, they waited there for three days. Then the men who had been entrusted with the valuables delivered them to those in charge of the temple. The implication is that, when the goods were measured, all was found to be present. Note that the stewards were called to account for their stewardship. It is proper to check up on those who are stewards. They should be glad to provide things honorable in the sight of men as well as God – 2 Cor. 8:21.

Verses 35,36

13. Describe some things they did after arriving.

Sacrifice and praise to God for the safe journey

The people then made sacrifice of praise to God. This was done by those who had returned from captivity. I assume that means all who had returned, including people of both groups. The many animals offered are described.

They people also went to the governing authorities of the region to deliver to them the decree from the king (see chap. 7). This resulted in their receiving the finances and cooperation that the king had decreed.

So the second group had arrived safely from their journey.

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