

## **Ezra, Book Study**

### **Chapters 7 & 8**

#### **Chapters 7 & 8 with Notes: NKJV**

**7** After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia,

- Some 60 largely uneventful years passed between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. The ruler of Persia at the end of that period was Artaxerxes, who is also known to history as Artaxerxes Longimanus, the successor to Xerxes, the king who married Esther. The events of the book of Esther took place between Ezra 6-7. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup> the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup> the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup> the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup> the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest— <sup>6</sup> this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

- Ezra was a true priest from the direct lineage of Aaron and a scribe familiar with God's laws and commandments given to Moses for Israel's spiritual, moral, and ethical instruction. The eye of the Lord was upon Israel (see Ezra 5:5) and the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra. As Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 706*
- "His name stands very high in Jewish tradition, where he came to be regarded as a second Moses, and indeed it was he, more than any other man, who stamped Israel with its lasting character as the people of a book." (Kidner)
- To us a scribe sounds like a glorified secretary, someone who simply writes. That is not the idea of this description of Ezra. For the Jewish culture of that day, a skilled scribe was an expert in the Law of Moses, someone who was like a highly trained lawyer in the word of God. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- "In his case it is emphasised by the word skilled, or literally 'rapid' (cf. Psalm 45:1) – suggesting a quickness of grasp and ease of movement amid this complex material which was the fruit of the devoted study described in Ezra 7:10." (Kidner)
- Scribes were important and influential, and one might say that they had three main duties: to preserve the word of God, to teach the word of God, and to administer the word of God (in the sense of interpreting and applying it). – *Enduring Word Commentary*

<sup>7</sup> Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

- Some of the children of Israel: "And but some; for many chose rather to continue in the land of their captivity, though God by his prophets, and the king by his proclamation, had cried out, 'Ho, ho, come forth' [and so forth]. 'Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon,' Zechariah 2:6-7." (Trapp)

<sup>8</sup> Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup> He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him.

- Ezra and a second wave of priestly ministers arrived in Jerusalem the seventh year after the first return from Babylon. Ezra left the first day of the first month and arrived the first day of the fifth month, indicating that it took him four months to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem. – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 707*
- "Though the direct distance between Babylon and Jerusalem is about five hundred miles, the travelers would have had to traverse nine hundred miles, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south." (Yamauchi)

<sup>10</sup> For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

- "Here is a fine character of a minister of God: He prepares, he fixes, purposes, and determines, with his heart – with all his powers and affections, to seek the law of God, and to do it himself, that he may be properly qualified to teach its statutes and judgments to Israel." (Clarke)
- 1 Corinthians 9:26-27

### **King Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra**

<sup>11</sup> This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the LORD for Israel:

<sup>12</sup> Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, teacher of the Law of the God of heaven:

"Greetings.

<sup>13</sup> Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. <sup>14</sup> You are sent by

the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand. **15** Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, **16** together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. **17** With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

**18** You and your fellow Israelites may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. **19** Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. **20** And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you are responsible to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

**21** Now I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you— **22** up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit.

- "A 'talent' in the Babylonian sexagesimal system was 60 minas, with a mina being 60 shekels. A talent weighed about 75 pounds. A hundred talents was an enormous sum, about 3¾ tons of silver. This amount, together with a talent of gold, was the tribute that Pharaoh Neco imposed on Judah (2 Kings 23:33)." (Yamauchi)

**23** Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should his wrath fall on the realm of the king and of his sons? **24** You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God.

**25** And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. **26** Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment."

- The Jews greatly impacted the kings and leaders of the Babylonians and of the Medes and Persians. In this letter given to Ezra from King Artaxerxes, the king expressed his complete support for the Jews to build the city of Jerusalem. Note in verse 26 the severe punishment the king would impose on anyone not following his law or the Law of God. This ruling would keep the Jews from experiencing resistance in their efforts to follow God's Word. – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 707*

<sup>27</sup> Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way <sup>28</sup> and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

**8** These are the family heads and those registered with them who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

<sup>2</sup> of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom;

of the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel;

of the descendants of David, Hattush <sup>3</sup> of the descendants of Shekariah;

of the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him were registered 150 men;

<sup>4</sup> of the descendants of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, and with him 200 men;

<sup>5</sup> of the descendants of Zattu, Shekariah son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men;

<sup>6</sup> of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men;

<sup>7</sup> of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men;

<sup>8</sup> of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men;

<sup>9</sup> of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men;

<sup>10</sup> of the descendants of Bani, Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men;

<sup>11</sup> of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men;

<sup>12</sup> of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men;

**13** of the descendants of Adonikam, the last ones, whose names were Eliphelet, Jeuel and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men;

**14** of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zakkur, and with them 70 men.

- Adding the counts of the male members of the group together, there was a total count of at least 1,496 men in the group. Adding an estimated number of women and children (Ezra 8:21), we can surmise that the total number of the party coming with Ezra in the days of King Artaxerxes was something like between 6,000 to 7,000 people. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

## **The Return to Jerusalem**

**15** I assembled them at the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there three days. When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there.

- Concerned about the purity of the spiritual leaders and desirous of a "pure genealogy" for the priesthood, Ezra searched three days for priests who were sons of Levi. – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 708*
- The Levites were different from the priests. The priests came from one family among the entire tribe of Levi (the descendants of Aaron). These were the essential workers for the system of temple worship that Ezra was to promote. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- Perhaps the Levites were generally too comfortable with their lives in Babylon to go back to Jerusalem. Perhaps they were not willing to go back to their ancestral temple duties that put them under the authority of the priests. Whatever the reason was, Ezra had the money and the authority he needed, but not the men. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

**16** So I summoned Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam, who were leaders, and Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of learning, **17** and I ordered them to go to Iddo, the leader in Kasiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and his fellow Levites, the temple servants in Kasiphia, so that they might bring attendants to us for the house of our God. **18** Because the gracious hand of our God was on us, they brought us Sherebiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah's sons and brothers, 18 in all; **19** and Hashabiah, together with Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and nephews, 20 in all. **20** They also brought 220 of the temple servants—a body that David and the officials had established to assist the Levites. All were registered by name.

**21** There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

- As with any spiritual discipline or duty, it is possible to fast without the right heart and to trust it as an empty ritual, apart from its true spiritual reality. Real fasting – fasting that is partnered with real repentance and isn't only about image – has great power before God (Matthew 17:21). – *Enduring Word Commentary*

**22** I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, “The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.” **23** So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

- Ezra refused to seek man's assistance in fighting the enemies of the Jews, as he had informed the king that God would fight their battles. Ezra proclaimed a fast to entreat God to favor the Jews in their efforts. For believers, the battle is not our battle, but the battle belongs to the Lord (see 1 Sam. 17:47). – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 708*
- They needed protection because the danger was real. There was a constant threat of robbers and bandits, especially because they were transporting so many valuables. Yet because of their dependence on God (expressed through prayer and fasting), God protected them. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- “The voluntary gifts of the king were welcome. They were expressions of the king’s sense of the greatness of his God. These Ezra accepted with gratitude. It would have been quite another matter if he had asked the king to help him do what he had declared God was able to do for him.” (Morgan)
- “There is an added interest in the fact that Nehemiah, in his day, would see the matter quite differently, accepting a military escort as part of God’s bounty (Nehemiah 2:7-9).” (Kidner)

**24** Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, namely, Sherebiah, Hashabiah and ten of their brothers, **25** and I weighed out to them the offering of silver and gold and the articles that the king, his advisers, his officials and all Israel present there had donated for the house of our God. **26** I weighed out to them 650 talents of silver, silver articles weighing 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, **27** 20 bowls of gold valued at 1,000 darics, and two fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold.

**28** I said to them, “You as well as these articles are consecrated to the LORD. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your ancestors. **29** Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the LORD in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel.” **30** Then the priests and Levites received the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the house of our God in Jerusalem.

**31** On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.

- The hand of the Lord protected Ezra and his men from an ambush. – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 709*

**32** So we arrived in Jerusalem, where we rested three days.

**33** On the fourth day, in the house of our God, we weighed out the silver and gold and the sacred articles into the hands of Meremoth son of Uriah, the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, and so were the Levites Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. **34** Everything was accounted for by number and weight, and the entire weight was recorded at that time.

**35** Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. **36** They also delivered the king's orders to the royal satraps and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, **who then gave assistance to the people and to the house of God.**

- This reminds us of the great purpose of Ezra's expedition. In the final two chapters, we will see Ezra administering strict correction as a reformer but he did not come primarily as a disciplinarian. He came to give support to the people and the house of God, and only dealt with the problems of sin and compromise as necessary in the course of this greater goal. – *Enduring Word Commentary*