

Ezra and 2000 More Jewish Exiles Return to Jerusalem

Ezra 7

Ezra 7:1-24 - *“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, ² the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, ³ the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, ⁴ the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, ⁵ the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest— ⁶ this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.*

⁷ Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸ And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹ On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

¹¹ This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel:

¹² Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven. Greetings.

¹³ I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. ¹⁴ And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; ¹⁵ and whereas you are to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; ¹⁶ and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem— ¹⁷ now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem.

¹⁸ And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. ¹⁹ Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. ²⁰ And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king's treasury.

²¹ And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, ²² 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. ²³ Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? ²⁴ Also we inform you that it shall not

be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God.”

Background Notes

The rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem took almost 20 years. The foundation was laid in soon after 50,000 Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon in 535BC, but the project was delayed because of opposition on the one hand, and problems with priorities on the other hand. Opposition and priority problems will always hinder the work of the Lord. The opposition took the form of legal threats and legal delay. There were legal threats from the surrounding peoples, especially the Samaritans (Ezra 4), and legal delays by the Persian officials (Ezra 5). The age-old problem of not having the proper paperwork hindered the work of the Lord.

Satan uses many forms of opposition to hinder the work of the Lord, but we've seen how God overruled in Israel's favor with the authorities. And as a result of the motivating ministries of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the Temple was finally completed in 516BC (see Ezra 6).

There is a time gap of 58 years between Ezra 6 and 7. The inspired writer, Ezra, wrote a historical account in chapters 1-6. He was not in Jerusalem for the events in Ezra 1-56, so he was not an eyewitness. However, in those chapters he wrote the detailed record of the return of Zerubbabel with 50,000 Jews, and the rebuilding of the Temple.

Beginning in chapter 7, Ezra was an eyewitness. He arrived in Jerusalem with about 2000 former exiles from Babylon. Notice how Ezra changes to the first person in the last verse of this chapter: *“So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up [to Jerusalem] with me.”* The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem took exactly four months (v9). No planes, trains, or automobiles. They walked about 900 miles! By the way, the events recorded in the book of Esther took place during the 58 years between Ezra 6 and 7.

Doctrinal Points

1. Commitment is essential for God's blessing.

In this chapter it's quite obvious that God was blessing Ezra. The phrase, “the hand of God was upon him” was said about Ezra three times in just this one chapter. *“The king granted him all his requests, for the hand of the Lord his God upon him”(v6). “Ezra came Jerusalem for the gracious hand of his God upon him”(v9). “So I was encouraged because the hand of the Lord my God was upon me” (v28).* What a great phrase to describe the blessing of God – “the good hand of God was upon him.”

Have you experienced the good hand of God upon you? Yes, His good hand was definitely upon you in your salvation - but what about in your life as a believer? What is the key for having God's blessing on your life? **The key is**

commitment. Ezra was a deeply committed believer. How do we know this? Look at verse 10: *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*

I love verse 10! What a great text! Some Christians have favorite verses, and some have chosen specific Scriptures as “life verses.” Ezra 7:10 has been my “life verse” ever since I started teaching God’s Word full time. It helps me focus my commitment on what the Lord has called me to do. Ezra prepared his heart to study the word of the Lord, to practice the word of the Lord, and to teach the word of the Lord. I am committed to serving the Lord as Ezra did.

Ezra was both a priest and a scribe (v5-6). He was in the line of Aaron, thus he was a priest (v5). He was skilled in the Law of Moses, thus he was a scribe, or teacher (v6). Most importantly, he was fully committed to the Lord and His Word. No wonder God blessed Ezra!

God moved the heart of the Persian King Artaxerxes in Ezra’s favor as part of this blessing. Artaxerxes even authorized funds for Ezra’s mission! Remember - Artaxerxes was not a believer. He was a pagan - a polytheist - so he wanted to appease **all** the gods of **all** the nations, so he could gain the favor of **all** the gods (v23). But God worked through Artaxerxes to accomplish His purposes, and to bless Ezra. Notice - Artaxerxes told Ezra: *“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.”* (v18). Can you believe it? Those are choice words when you’re directing a ministry! It’s like checking off that box, “Use where most needed.”

Ezra took money that was given by unbelievers and used it for the glory of God. But notice - there were no strings attached. Artaxerxes didn’t direct Ezra to use the money for anything unbiblical or ungodly. This is of critical importance when we apply this Scripture today. We too can take the money of this world and use it for the glory of God. Remember, some of the gold that came out of Egypt was used for the Tabernacle, the house of God in the wilderness. The key to God’s blessing was Ezra’s commitment. Commitment is essential for God’s blessing.

2. Discipline is essential for God’s blessing.

“And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. ²⁶ Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment” (v25-26).

Ezra was not only given authorization and funding for his mission, he was given governing authority as well. You might think that with all this blessing of God on Ezra’s work, no authority would be needed. After all, Ezra was fully committed, and he came back to Jerusalem to minister to the people, and he was bringing funds with him. Who needs authority? Listen. No matter how much blessing is going on, a structure of authority and discipline is always needed. In fact,

discipline is essential. This was true in Ezra's day, and it is true today. The glaring lack of discipline in the church today is one reason why God cannot pour out even greater blessings on the church. Discipline is essential for God's blessing, whether it be in the family, or the local church, or any ministry.

Practical Application

Don't forget the third phase of the commitment cycle!

Commitment is essential for blessing - and if there is commitment, there will be blessing. But there is a third phase to the commitment cycle. What is it? Look at verses 27-28: *"Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me."*

The third phase of the commitment cycle is **praise!** Ezra thanked and praised the Lord for turning the king's favor towards Ezra and the Jews. Commitment to the Lord brings blessing from the Lord, and blessing from the Lord should result in praise to the Lord.

Sometime, even as Christians, we take blessings from the Lord for granted. There are committed believers, and there are blessed believers, but all too often there's not much praise or thanks to the Lord in their lives. But thanks and praise will actually result in further commitment and further blessing! So **don't forget praise** - the third phase of the commitment cycle!