

### The Jews Who Returned to Jerusalem with Ezra

#### Ezra 8

**Ezra 8:1-24** - *“These are the heads of their fathers’ houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: <sup>2</sup> of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; <sup>3</sup> of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were one hundred and fifty males; <sup>4</sup> of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males; <sup>5</sup> of the sons of Shechaniah, Ben-Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males; <sup>6</sup> of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; <sup>7</sup> of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; <sup>8</sup> of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males; <sup>9</sup> of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; <sup>10</sup> of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josiphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males; <sup>11</sup> of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males; <sup>12</sup> of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males; <sup>13</sup> of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these—Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah—and with them sixty males; <sup>14</sup> also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.*

*<sup>15</sup> Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there. <sup>16</sup> Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. <sup>17</sup> And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia—that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. <sup>18</sup> Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; <sup>19</sup> and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; <sup>20</sup> also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name.*

*<sup>21</sup> Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. <sup>22</sup> For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.”<sup>23</sup> So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.”*

#### Background Notes

In our study of Ezra, there are a number of dates in the sequence of events around the exile of the Jews in Babylon. If you're trying to memorize them, it helps to remember that there were three phases going into exile, and three phases returning from exile.

The three phases going into the captivity were:

**Phase 1: 605BC** - Nebuchadnezzar entered Judah; took Daniel and others captive to Babylon.

**Phase 2: 597BC** - Nebuchadnezzar entered Judah; captured Jerusalem; took Ezekiel and others, including the king, as captives to Babylon.

**Phase 3: 586BC** - Nebuchadnezzar conquered the kingdom of Judah; destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple Solomon had built.

The three phases of the return from exile were:

**Phase 1: 538BC** - The Edict of Cyrus the Persian king allowed about 50,000 Jews to return, led by Zerubbabel. The Temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. Phase I is covered in Ezra 1-6.

**Phase 2: 458BC** - Ezra returned with about 2000 Jews. This phase is covered in Ezra 7-10.

**Phase 3: 445BC** - Nehemiah returned; led the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city walls that Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies had destroyed about 140 years earlier.

The events of the book of Esther took place between 538BC and 445BC - between Phase 1 and Phase 3 of the return.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. A godly leader prays about everything.

Ezra was a godly leader. He had natural leadership abilities, and he also had God-given spiritual ability to lead God's people. Ezra gladly took on the responsibilities associated with spiritual leadership, so Ezra 7-10 are great chapters to study on this important topic.

The foundation necessary for being a godly leader is seen in Ezra 7:10 - "*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*" Ezra was committed to the Lord, His Word, and His work - essential for a spiritual leader.

In Ezra 8 we see a godly leader in action. One example of Ezra's leadership was his ability to get more Levites to return to Jerusalem (v15). Levites were responsible for maintaining the Temple, so going back to Jerusalem meant a lot of work for them. Most Levites were reluctant to go back, because living in Babylon was not a bad deal for them! But because of Ezra's inspiring (and maybe convicting) message, 38 Levites and 200 Temple servants returned to Jerusalem. Motivating reluctant people takes spiritual leadership, and Ezra had that ability.

Notice - Ezra proclaimed a time of prayer and fasting before they started on their four-month journey (v21). How many of you pray for safety on the road before you start a long trip? It's biblical! Ezra did it - and we should follow his good

example. How about praying for the safety of your luggage on the roof rack? Ezra prayed that the Lord would guide and protect the people and their children - and all their possessions. Their possessions - that's the stuff on the roof rack! Ezra prayed about **everything**, and so should we.

Ezra decided not to ask the king for an armed guard for the journey (v22). This would not have been wrong, but Ezra prayed about this matter and God gave him the answer. Verse 23: *"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."* \_So Ezra prayed about **everything**. What a great example! A godly leader prays about everything.

## 2. A godly leader uses common sense.

**Ezra 8:24-34** - *"And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them—<sup>25</sup> and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. <sup>26</sup> I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, <sup>27</sup> twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. <sup>28</sup> And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. <sup>29</sup> Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD." <sup>30</sup> So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God. <sup>31</sup> We departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. <sup>32</sup> So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days. <sup>33</sup> Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, <sup>34</sup> with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time."*

Ezra returned to Jerusalem with a lot of money and valuables for support of the Lord's work. It would be worth about \$20 million today. That's a lot of money! When you have a lot of money around, there must be accountability - or some of the money just might do a disappearing act! Sadly, it even happens in the church. Ezra used his God-given common sense and divided the money between 24 responsible men, including 12 priests, and made them accountable to one another (v24). And notice that the money was carefully weighed before the journey (v25-26).

Ezra gave them a serious exhortation (v28-29), and the 24 men took the responsibility seriously. All the money was accounted for at the end of the trip: *"All the weight was written down at that time"* (v34). Notice: Ezra, the godly leader, did not handle the money himself. This showed his common sense - not only from the standpoint of temptation, but for appearance. No one could accuse Ezra of dipping into the treasury for a loan, or for personal luxuries. Handling money in the Lord's work requires a lot of God-given common sense. A godly leader uses common sense.

## **Practical Application**

**Remember, worship comes before service.**

**Ezra 8:35-36** - *“The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD.<sup>36</sup> And they delivered the king’s orders to the king’s satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.”*

When the exiles with Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, they **worshiped the Lord** with sacrifices (v35). Then they **served the Lord** by supporting God’s people and God’s house (v36). This is always the divine order: worship before service.

It’s true that service to the Lord is actually worship in itself. True worship and true service go together, hand in hand, because there can’t be one without the other. True worship of the Lord is bound to result in a godly lifestyle and some kind of service for the Lord.

If your worship doesn’t result in service, you’re just going through the motions of worship in order to feel good. And if you’re truly serving the Lord, it’s bound to result in worship! If your service doesn’t result in worship, you’re just serving for selfish reasons.

So worship and service go together, but the divine order that we see in Scripture is: worship comes before service.