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Ezra 8

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Ezra 8

Topics.

- The genealogy of those who went up with Ezra from Babylonia.
- The chief men that accompanied Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem.
- Ezra sends for Levites men of insight, to come up to Jerusalem.
- Ezra proclaims a fast at the river Ahava, to seek a safe journey.
- Ezra sets apart faithful men to weigh out the silver and gold.
- Ezra and the people depart from Ahava and arrive in Jerusalem.
- The returned exiles, offer burnt offerings to God.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ended as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28) the Persian King Cyrus had sent exiles led by Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (Persia had defeated Babylon in 539 B.C.). Despite opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and after encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.). Then in 458 B.C., Ezra led the second of three waves of returning exiles. By the time Ezra arrived, the people had again fallen into sin, Ezra preached God's word and the people repented (10:9-17). Ezra succeeded because God's hand was upon him (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) (Ezra 8:18, 22, 31). This book (probably written by Ezra), shows that God uses pagan kings to accomplish His purposes and His faithfulness to His promises and His people.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: begins with priests, Levites, singers and temple servants leaving Babylon and going up to Jerusalem carrying all the silver and gold that the king had granted them and that they had found in the province of Babylon. The chapter ended with king Artaxerxes making a decree that whatever Ezra required it was to be done.

EZRA 8:1

The Genealogy of those who Went Up with Ezra from Babylonia.

- **Ezra 8:1:** These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king:

The story so far: Cyrus king of Persia conquered Babylon and gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem. Ezra had returned with Zerubbabel in the first wave of returning exiles. Later he returned to Babylon with an embassy of faithful men where he won the favour of the Persian king and returned in the second wave with the Jews spoken of in this chapter. Since many Persian kings adopted the name Artaxerxes, it is not easy to pin-point exactly which king the name Artaxerxes refers to here: chapter six ended with the words: "They finished their building (of the temple) by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the house of the LORD was

finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. (Ezra 6:14-15). Then, chapter seven begins with the words: "after this" (meaning after the completion of the temple), during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, and verse seven of the same chapter states: "in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel went up to Jerusalem." The seventh year spoken of here does not refer to the year after the completion of the temple, but the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes the king. Who this Artaxerxes is, is not easy to say; he cannot be the Artaxerxes between Cyrus and Darius, because he hindered the work of the building.

- **Ezra 4:21-23:** Therefore make a decree that these men be made to cease, and that this city be not rebuilt, until a decree is made by me. ²² And take care not to be slack in this matter. Why should damage grow to the hurt of the king?" ²³ Then, when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their associates, they went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease.

So, it must have been one of the following two that followed after Darius, which means it could have been either:

1. **Xerxes, Darius's son and successor:** who was also called Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus, who at this time may have been working with his father Darius, as his viceroy, and acting as co-emperor with his father during his lifetime, which was not unusual. As Darius's son it is most likely he favored the Jews, and promoted their cause and saw that his father's decree was carried out.
2. **Artaxerxes Longimanus, the son of Xerxes and grandson of Darius:** which is more likely. In chapter seven he is seen as the king of Persia who was best known by the name of Artaxerxes. Though the following verse shows that the building work of the temple was fully completed during the reign of Darius:

- **Ezra 6:15:** and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

However, after the reign of Darius the temple was more fully completed and adorned by Artaxerxes, who made a decree that the people of Israel may go to Jerusalem with all the silver and gold that they find in the whole province of Babylonia, and that whatever else is required for the House of God that they lack or that Ezra desired the king would provide. (Ezra 7:11-27).

- **Ezra 7:21:** "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence,
- **Ezra 7:27:** Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king (Artaxerxes), to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem,

Most commentators suppose the "Artaxerxes king of Persia," refers to Artaxerxes Longimanus.

EZRA 8:2-14

The Chief Men that Accompanied Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem.

- **Ezra 8:2-14:** Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush. ³ Of the sons of Shecaniah, who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men. ⁴ Of the sons of Pahath-moab, Elichoenai the son of Zerachiah, and with him 200 men. ⁵ Of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah the son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men. ⁶ Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men. ⁷ Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men. ⁸ Of the sons of Shephathiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with

him 80 men. ⁹ Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men.

¹⁰ Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith the son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men. ¹¹ Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah, the son of Bebai, and with him 28 men. ¹² Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men. ¹³ Of the sons of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men.

¹⁴ Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

The heads of the families that accompanied Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem are recorded here for their honour. The total number of adult males that came with each family was one thousand four hundred and ninety-six. If we add woman and children to this number the whole caravan would probably have been over four thousand.

Of the sons of David, Hattush: (v2) according to (1 Chron. 3:22) Huttush was a descendant of David, and grandson of Shechaniab. It is common in Old Testament genealogies for the word sons, to refer to descendants and not immediate sons.

Of the sons of Phinehas and Ithamar: (v2) by the sons, is meant of the families of these two men, two of which he names, being Gershom and Daniel, not Daniel the prophet, he was of the royal blood, and of the tribe of Judah; this was some eminent descendant of Ithamar, as Gershom was of Eleazar.

Of the sons of Pharosh: (v3) (i.e. one of the sons of Pharosh) which separates him from the other Shechaniab mentioned in (v5).

Of the sons of Shecaniah: (v8), of the sons of Pharosh, who is described here to distinguish him from another Shechaniab (v5).

Many of the names mentioned from (v2-14) also occur as heads of the families mentioned in the list of the Jews who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:3-15), this should not be surprising since many descendants of the families that went in the first wave, would now desire to go in this second wave, especially after hearing the temple is rebuilt.

EZRA 8:15-20

Ezra Sends for Levites Men of Insight, to Come Up to Jerusalem.

- **Ezra 8:15-17:** I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi. ¹⁶ Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joarib and Elnathan, who were men of insight, ¹⁷ and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and the temple servants (Nethinims in KJV) at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God. ¹⁸ And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18; ¹⁹ also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiab of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; ²⁰ besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

To the river that runneth to Ahava: (v15) or the river of Ahava, as it is called in (v21, 31), by comparing of these places, it seems that Ahava was the name both of the river and of the town or place by which it ran. Today, the modern name for Ahava is Hit, it is situated on the Euphrates river, at a distance of about 80 miles northwest from Babylon, and famous for its bitumen springs. In order to avoid the scorching heat of the desert of Arabia, it was common for those who travelled from Babylon to Jerusalem, to firstly travel northward and then turn westward, to pass through Syria into Palestine. Ezra had good reason to take this route, since he intended to gather together as many Israelites as he could, to return with him to Jerusalem. It appears he took this course, and on his way made a stopover for three days in the country of Ahava, from where he could easily send out messengers to Iddo and his brothers dwelling at Casiphia to invite them to come and join him.

I found there none of the sons of Levi: (v16) after making a search of the people Ezra found that there were no Levites within the company of people with him. This is ordinary Levites, not priests. Knowing that only seventy-four had returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:40), and being fully aware of how important they were to the service of the temple he tells leading men of insight what to say and sends them to Casiphia and tell Iddo, the leading man and his brothers and temple servants to send ministers for the service of the House of the LORD.

Ezra sent for Eliezer: (v16) and ten other leading men of insight who were all in some part of the camp in Ahava.

The temple servants (Nethinims in KJV): (v17) the word Nethinims means the given ones, dedicated, set apart, for the menial work of the sanctuary for the Levites. It was the name given to the temple assistants in ancient Jerusalem. They served under the Levites in the temple, and were accordingly freed from all tolls. The tradition is that the inhabitants of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjathjearim were the original Nethinims.

- **Joshua 9:27:** And Joshua made them (the inhabitants of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjathjearim) that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

Their duty was to do the menial work around the temple such as collecting fire wood and water etc., and general maintenance around the temple.

Send us ministers for the house of our God: (v17) ministers here includes both Levites and Nethinims.

Iddo, was not one of the Nethinims, but a prince or chief of the Levites and the Nethinims (none of the Nethinims; were over the Levites, but were servants to them) and a chief teacher of the law. By his influence thirty-eight Levites and two hundred twenty Nethinims (descendants of the Gibeonites who performed the servile duties of the temple).

Casiphia, the exact location is unknown, but it is safe to suppose it was a place, village or town near Babylon and not far from Ahavah where Ezra knew that many of the Levites and Nethinims lived and where Iddo was the chief over them both.

By the good hand of our God: (v18) meaning by the blessing and favour of God upon them. The expression, "the hand of God," is a symbolic expression signifying God's divine protection and the seat of His active power, the idea is that the great hand of God is over us like a great iron shield securely wrapped around us so that nothing can hurt or harm. Much like when we find a butterfly in our house and gently wrap our hands around it to protect it while we carry it outside where we can let it safely go free. They returned with almost forty Levites for the service of the House of the LORD and two hundred and twenty the temple servants.

EZRA 8:21-17

Ezra Proclaims a Fast at the River Ahava, to Seek a Safe Journey.

- **Ezra 8:21-23:** Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. ²² For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." ²³ So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Then I proclaimed a fast there: (v21) that we might afflict ourselves before our God, this does not mean that they physically inflict harm upon themselves or crawl on their knees to some place of worship as some religious people do today, but that they humble themselves and set aside

time from daily duties and business to pray. Since Ezra had not asked for a convoy of the king's soldiers to travel with, it is almost certain that the focus of this time of prayer would be upon praying for a safe journey, especially since they had their wives and children with them and were carrying in wagons treasures of gold and silver of great value, which would be an enormous temptation for rebel Arabs, Samaritans, marauders and others to plunder.

I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers: (v22), because Ezra had confidently and boldly magnified Israel's God before the king, saying that He does good to all who seek Him, and is against those who forsake Him, it is very likely that he felt embarrassed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect them from enemies on their journey. There would have been no harm for Ezra to ask for an escort, seeing that his whole journey was made possible by the king's support, but it seems like he felt it would show a lack of faith on his part since he had previously told the king his God would protect him.

To seek from God a safe journey: (v21) for themselves, their children, and all their goods and the path they should take on their journey and keep them safe from marauding tribes and desert robbers seeking for unprotected caravans.

EZRA 8:24-30

Ezra Sets Apart Faithful Men to Weigh out the Silver and Gold.

- **Ezra 8:24-30:** Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. ²⁵ And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. ²⁶ I weighed out into their hand 650 talents of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents, and 100 talents of gold, ²⁷ 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. ²⁸ And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. ²⁹ Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD."
³⁰ So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten other priests were jointly entrusted with the charge of carrying the temple treasure and the sacred vessels safely back to Jerusalem. In Zerubbabel's time the silver, the gold and the vessels, were counted by number, while here in Ezra's time they are counted by weight.

Following are some reasons that a number of faithful men were chosen to weigh the valued treasures together prior to it being delivered:

- When they did arrive in Jerusalem it would easily be seen if any were missing.
- As a security against any charge or accusation being laid against anyone of taking any part of them.
- To remove all temptation for someone to steal a small part of the entire collection.
- As a double check that the counting or weighing of it is correct.

This same principal applies today, when the congregation collection is counted, it is counted by two or three faithful leaders to remove all temptation to steal a small part and as a double check that the counting of it is correct.

1 talent of gold weighed around 30-40kg.

1 talent of silver weighed around 20kg.

A daric (dram in NT) was a Persian gold coin weighing about 8-9 grams.

This following gives a visual picture of the vast weight of treasured items they had to transport back to Jerusalem.

- 650 talents of silver = 13.000kg.
- 200 talents silver vessels 200 = 4000kg.
- 100 talents of gold = 3000 – 4000kg.
- 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics = 160 - 180kg.
- Two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold = say 10kg.

This means that they had around 21,000-22,000kg (around 23 -24 tons) of highly valued treasures to carry back to Jerusalem. It is easy to see why Ezra stopped at the river Ahava (v21) to pray for a safe journey from marauding tribes and desert robbers. These would have been transported in wagons and were to be delivered to the chief priests and the Levites at Jerusalem.

Two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold: (v27) since copper was at this time in common use among the Babylonians, most commentators suppose that the vessels referred to were not made of copper, but of an alloy capable of taking on a bright polish, which was greatly esteemed among the Jews, and was probably composed of gold and some other metals, that took on a high polish and was not susceptible to tarnish.

EZRA 8:31-34

Ezra and the People depart from Ahava and Arrive in Jerusalem.

- **Ezra 8:31-34:** Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. ³² We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. ³³ On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. ³⁴ The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

The expression, "the hand of God," is a symbolic expression signifying God's divine protection and the seat of His active power, the idea is that the great hand of God is over us like a great iron shield securely wrapped around us so that nothing can hurt or harm. Much like when we find a butterfly in our house and gently wrap our hands around it to protect it while we carry it outside where we can let it safely go free. They returned with almost forty Levites for the service of the House of the LORD and two hundred and twenty temple servants. There were not only many enemies who hated them, but also many robbers, who had they seen a caravan carrying such valued treasures would have speedily plundered it, which means in answer to the prayers the people prayed at the river Ahava (v21) God, either led the Jews on a safe path free from such marauders, or kept those who would rob them from coming across them. They reached Ahava in nine days, and, having remained there three days (v15), resumed their journey on the twelfth and reached Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month (Ezra 7:9), which means from their departure from Babylon to their arrival in Jerusalem was around four months. Upon arriving in Jerusalem there would have been great excitement upon meeting with family members and friends etc., and catching up with the news, and a need for rest after such a fatiguing journey, which was done during the first three days. This caravan consisted of thousands of men,

women and children and a large amount of treasure tempting marauding tribes of the desert to plunder them. To accomplish a journey so long and so arduous in perfect safety could not be done without the hand of God guiding, directing, and protecting them from the hand of such enemies.

The whole was counted weighed, and recorded: (v34) the vessels of silver and gold was counted and weighed in the House of the LORD, by two priests, being Meremoth and Eleazar and two Levites, Jozabad and Noadiah so that they would be witnesses of the weighing and counting. The total number of each item would have been compared with the number counted at Ahava to see that both totals were the same, which they were. The total of these freewill offerings was recorded at this time.

EZRA 8:35-36

The Returned Exiles, Offer Burnt Offerings to God.

- **Ezra 8:35-36:** At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven 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 commissions to the king's satraps (kings lieutenants in KJV) and to the governors of the province Beyond the River (this side of the river in KJV), and they aided the people and the house of God.

Many suppose that the statement, "Those who had come from the captivity," only refers to those who had come up in in this second wave with Ezra, which maybe so, especially since this would be the first time they had been able to offer sacrifices to the LORD on the altar of burnt offering since they were taken into captivity over seventy years ago. However, it also possible that the exiles who came up in the first wave were also included in the great celebration, especially, since the second wave had returned with:

- Priests, Levites and temple servants to help in the service of the temple.
- Enormously valued sacred treasures of the temple.
- Multitudes of animals to be used for offerings and sacrifices.
- Great wealth in the form of silver and gold.

All of these items would be a great blessing to the whole house of Israel and not just the second wave that returned, and for this reason it seems more logical that all the people of Israel would be included in the celebration and burnt offerings, by which they acknowledged the LORD their God and expressed their gratitude for their restoration as a nation under their own government, authority and rule.

Twelve bulls for all Israel: (v35) they offered twelve bulls, for all the tribes of Israel, for it is most likely that there would be some of every tribe that had now returned, and from here on there was no longer the house of Judah and the house of Israel, but one whole nation called Israel, as they should have been from the beginning.

Twelve male goats for a sin-offering: (v35) again signifying the whole house of Israel, for it is the atonement that secures God's favour and mercy to us.

They delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps: (v36) (kings lieutenants in KJV) and to the governors of the province. This refers to king Artaxerxes orders issued to all the military and civil governors of the provinces near Judaea recorded in the following verses:

- **Ezra 7:21-24:** "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence,²² up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.

²³ Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. ²⁴ We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

Ezra and the returned exiles delivered this sovereign edict, to the lieutenants in military authority, and the governors in civil authority, which was of course accepted and immediately acted upon. Purely out of complaisance to the Persian king's sovereign edict the people of the province no longer hindered Israel, but furthered the adorning and furnishing of the temple with vessels and other conveniences, eased them of all burdens, released those who served in the temple from paying taxes and allowed the people of Israel to freely worship the Lord their God as the decree of Artaxerxes commanded them.

Beyond the River (this side of the river in KJV): (v36) refers to the provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Judea, which were on that side of Euphrates adjoining the land of Israel. The exiled Jews survived through years of darkness, separated from their land and their holy place of worship, but God kept them through the perils of life and their journeys through lands surrounded with enemies and brought them safety home to the holy city they loved. Likewise, as those in Christ journey through the darkness of this world, separated from their true home and place of worship in heaven, God will keep them safely in His hand as they travel through the perils, hardships and sorrows of this life and bring them safely to their true home in the heavenly holy city, where only peace and happiness dwells.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.