

## **Bibles???**

### **The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority**

Good evening church,

We are going to continue our study this evening in the book of Ezra.

We are going to do chapter 7 and 8.

**Let's pray...**

For the last few weeks, as we have been studying the book of Ezra, we have seen how this remnant – this group of 49,000 Jews, led by Zerubbabel – how they returned from exile in Babylon following the decree by King Cyrus.

We studied how they came together as one and rebuilt the altar and resumed worship with God by offering sacrifices.

They then laid the foundation of the temple and started working on rebuilding the temple and then the work stopped because of the opposition.

We saw in our study last week that God lifted up Haggai and Zechariah to exhort the people that they needed to resume the work on the temple – and we saw at the end of Chapter six – the temple completed and dedicated.

Some of you might be thinking – when does Ezra come into play???

And the answer is starting here in chapter eight.

From the time that the temple was completed at the end of chapter 6 to the beginning of chapter seven, there is a period of 60 years.

It is believe that the events in the book of Esther occur during this time period.

**[Ezr 7:1-28 NKJV] 1 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.**

The name Ezra means in the Hebrew means helper or help.

And that is exactly what Ezra does.

You see during these 60 years after the temple was rebuilt, the Children of Israel once again started to wander away.

So Ezra brings correction to the nation –

If you read the book of Nehemiah, we find Ezra standing on a pulpit and giving a sermon to the people.

Ezra was a priest, a direct descendent of the line of Aaron.

However, he wasn't doing priestly duties because he was in Babylon and not in Jerusalem where the temple had been rebuilt.

But notice in verse six that Ezra was a skilled scribe –

Even though he was in Babylon, he prepared himself by studying the word of God and when the time was right, God tapped him in the shoulder to lead another group out of captivity and back into Jerusalem.

**7 [Some] of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim** (the Nethinim were the temple workers – the ones that carried water to wash the altar)**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.**

Ezra dedicated himself to seeking – to studying carefully the word of God.

But Ezra wanted more than to simply know God's word – **he knew that he had to live it.**

**(Jas 1:22 NKJV) But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

If we think it's just enough to read or learn about God's Word, yet we don't let it affect our behavior, church - we are actually fooling ourselves.

We need to learn to obey what God says.

Ezra wasn't doing this so that he could live a better life for himself.

Ezra knew that he needed to share God's word with other people.

Church, we have a message to share.

God loved this world so much that He gave His only begotten Son for us.

We have been cleansed from our sins by the blood of Jesus.

God wants to work in people's lives.

We need to share.

**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 scribe of the**

**Law of the God of heaven: Perfect [peace], and so forth. 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.**

Ezra was given the authority to take those that wanted to go with him to minister to the Lord in Jerusalem.

As I mentioned earlier, the remnant that Zerubbabel led was about 49k – Ezra is going to lead about 1500 people back to Jerusalem -

**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.**

In our study last week, how God worked in the background and ultimately the temple was restored using the taxes that were collected by the Persian upon those that had offered resistance to the building of the temple.

Here, God determined to fund the project once again using Persian money.

**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?**

It is important to note that Artaxerxes was not a believer – in his letter, you will see him refer to God as your God.

Artaxerxes motive was to live in harmony with the God of Israel in order to not be overthrown.

While Israel's recent history had been one of captivity, Artaxerxes may have understood it was a discipline from their God.

And he may have known their earlier history - when no Gentile nation could stand against them.

So, he is hoping to buy some goodwill from God and the Jews.

**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. 25 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.**

By "all the people", Artaxerxes was referring to the Jews in Jerusalem.

You see, Artaxerxes was giving Ezra permission to live by the Law of Moses in their own land.

Ezra was to set up a judicial system and hand out punishment when it was required according to the word of God.

He was going to set up those that knew the law as judges and he was then going to teach those that did not know the law.

Starting in verse 27, we have Ezra's response.

**27 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, 28 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.**

Ezra knew that such authority and generous and broad support – like the one he was receiving from Artaxerxes could only be granted by God.

In the same way that God moved the heart of Darius in last week's study, we see that God moved the heart of Artaxerxes.

And because Ezra saw the evidence of God's support and blessing, he was comforted for the work that lay ahead.

**[Ezr 8:1-36 NKJV] 1 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:**

Here we have the names of the males that made the 900 mile trip back to Jerusalem with Ezra.

Remember they had to carry all the gold and that was given to them by Artaxerxes.

We are going to skip to verse 15 – you guys can read those names on your own time.

**15 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.**

As we read earlier, the trip back to Jerusalem was voluntary – no one was being forced to return.

Along the trip, about 100 miles northwest of Babylon, Ezra stops to assess the situation and he realizes that there are no Levites in this group that he is leading back to Jerusalem.

Now, the Levites were the chief helpers to the priests –

Since Ezra was going to the Second Temple to initiate reforms, he'd need Levites who could perform services in the Temple.

**16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 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. 18 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; 19 and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; 20 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.

Because there were no Levites in the group heading back to Jerusalem, Ezra picked out a team to see if they can recruit Levites to join them.

And they returned with 38 Levites and 220 Nethinim -

21 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. 22 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." 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

Ezra and his group were carrying a bunch of gold back to Jerusalem along a route that was known for thieves.

They were easy targets – so Ezra fasts in order to receive direction from the Lord.

He didn't want to go to King Artaxerxes and ask for an escort because that would have contradicted his response to his letter.

Ezra had already stated that he was encouraged because he knew God was with him.

What kind of a testimony would he have given if he would have gone back to the king and asked for protection.

There are many people who would say – Ezra should have just done the safe thing and asked the king for protection. After all, there is nothing wrong with having an escort – Nehemiah is going to lead another group later on and he is going to get an escort.

As believers, whenever we are backed into a corner – we think we only have two options, we can either lie down in defeat or we can turn to the world for help.

Church, God has limitless options for us if we only cry out to Him.

That is the choice that Ezra went with.

He called on the people to fast and pray so that God would reveal to them the way.

**24 And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests--Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them-- 25 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. 26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles [weighing] one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, 27 twenty gold basins [worth] a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold.

Ezra divided the valuables among the leaders of the priests, making each of them responsible for their portion.

They were responsible then to watch and keep them until they arrived in Jerusalem and delivered them to the leaders of the priests and Levites there.

They were weighed before the trip began and weighed again once they got to Jerusalem.

28 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. 29 "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." 30 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.

The word “Holy” here in verse 28 doesn’t mean sinless. It means set apart.

His people were considered precious to God – in the same way that you and I are God’s precious possession.

**31 Then 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. 32 So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.** (They must have had jet lag)

Ezra and his group were easy targets as they did not have an army protecting them.

However, they did know that God was with them because they had prayed and prepared.

Four months of camping and moving – that is how long it took to get to Jerusalem from Babylon and they are totally skipped-over, serving to emphasize that God made sure nothing happened along the way.

**33 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, 34 with the number [and] weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.**

Just as the priests and the Levites gave account for the gifts entrusted to them, there will come a day when you and I will give an answer for what we did with that which was given to us.

**35 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. 36 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.**

This is mission accomplished. Not only did Ezra and the 1500 men deliver the items for the temple – they also provided support for the people as well as those that worked in the temple.

And as they placed their trust in the Lord – God blessed them.

I pray that we may learn from the example of Ezra – that we may seek out His word, that we may be obedient to His word and share it – and also that we may seek His direction when we are placed into a corner.

God is faithful church.

Amen

Let's pray...