

+++ And To Do It

Ezra 7:1 – 8:36

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~ Paul admonished Timothy, “.... *be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed; rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*” That means to be a good student of Scripture, friends. We need to learn to handle the Bible with loving care and an understood goal and purpose. That purpose is to tell others about the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The goal is to lift Christ up so He might draw them unto Himself. One example of a man in the Word of God who did just that and handled the truth properly, correctly and completely was Ezra, the ready scribe. This man had a Godly character that we all do well to learn; and emulate in every literal facet.

The first six chapters of the historical book of Ezra have recorded the account of the remnant of Israel returning from Babylonian captivity and beginning to rebuild the temple and the city. There were about fifty thousand who returned initially; but there must have been several million Jews in captivity in Babylon at this time. The nation Israel had gone into captivity for idolatry; and for not keeping the Sabbatic year. Maybe they didn't think it was too important? Well, God did — but they thought they were getting away with disobedience because it went on for four hundred ninety years. Then, their rebellion ended abruptly — almost overnight — when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and carried them all away. God put them out of the land until the seventy Sabbath's were observed. Well, they're back in the land at the time in which we are studying, but we have seen them encounter harsh difficulties; and they almost gave up and walked off the job in our previous report.

We have considered in previous reports how the remnant became very discouraged — in many ways — after their return to rebuild Jerusalem. They weren't encouraging those who had remained in Babylon to return and help them by the way they were acting, either. However, there did come a wave of revival from Babylon in a group led by Ezra. These two

chapters will chronicle the return of those who did so under his teaching. Later, we'll see the reformation that began under Ezra. Revival always leads to reformation – that's ALWAYS true; and Nehemiah is going to make that fact painstakingly clear in his book....

VII

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,

~ We're also going to have an opportunity to meet Artaxerxes in the second chapter of the book of Nehemiah. We have already seen this king search for and find the previous decree made by Cyrus that granted permission for the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the temple and city of Jerusalem. That chapter marked the beginning of the seventy weeks prophesied in Daniel. So, we'll come back to Artaxerxes.

In this section of Scripture, we need to take time to become familiar with Ezra. He is an elusive character in the Bible; one who is typically overlooked and easily passed by. His record of service as a priest is all but ignored today. I do not believe he receives proper recognition in the believing world, by Bible expositors or by the church today, exclusively because of his message. Among the constant and unending chatter on an ultra-religious social media, I'm confident I have never seen his name mentioned more than once or twice. Have you ever heard a sermon on the historical book of Ezra? Have you ever been in a study where the entire book of Ezra was presented correctly? ~

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 Zeremiah, 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:

~ If there had been a temple in Jerusalem, Ezra would have functioned in his priestly office. The lineage in verse two through four tells us Ezra came from Eleazar, Azariah, and Hilkiah; therefore, Ezra would have likely been the high priest. A little further investigation in the twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers gives the account of Baalim; he couldn't curse Israel, but he taught Balak to intermarry with Israel. That brought the world, the flesh and the devil into the camp. One man married a Midianite woman, and Phinehas observed it as sin. He took a javelin and executed the man *and* woman. That's when the plague that had broken out among the people was stayed. And that may seem harsh, because it is — but two lives were taken to save multitudes. That's the kind of people Ezra came from.

There are myriad logical applications of this section of Scripture to our present condition, too. For example, there are many who feel we shouldn't have capital punishment because it means we are brutal and uncivilized. They always seem to bafflingly question why judgment should be executed. Well, execution doesn't have anything to do with the life of the man that is executed — because his life is ended anyways; the judgment of death is *NOT* for that person. No, friends, the judgment of death is for the protection of the rest of society. The purpose of prison isn't correction or reform — not by any means. The purpose is protection of human life. When judgment is not meted out on the one guilty party, then myriad others have to pay. Oh, how we have absolutely lost our way in this world today.

Let's just keep it real: our streets are not safe because we do not carry out the death penalty as we should — as commanded by God. God does things His way because He wants to save and protect human life. God also knows exactly how bad the human heart can be. When the human heart becomes wicked and perverted, no one can know the things it is capable of doing. Don't bother telling me executions don't deter crime, either; because I have personally discovered that when the police give people a ticket, it slows them down on the highway. That is just one great spiritual lesson we have in this little book of Ezra.

Well, since there was no temple to serve in, there was no reason for Ezra to return with the first delegation that went back with Zerubbabel. Ezra spent all his time in Bible study in the meantime, and I'm sure he had a ministry

among those who had also stayed in Babylon. Now, the temple is complete, and Ezra will return with a group of about two thousand people. Ezra was a Bible teacher, and the Word of God is the only thing he taught....

⁶ This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

⁷ And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

⁸ And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

⁹ For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

~ So, the trip from Babylon to Jerusalem took almost five months. Apparently, Ezra didn't jump in his multi-million-dollar Lear Jet and make the trip quickly in style. Ezra had prepared his heart for this day that he would return; he knew it was coming, and he had faith in God to believe what he read in the Word of God. The Mosaic Law, the Book of Joshua, and perhaps a few others were in existence in Ezra's day; and most fundamental conservative scholars agree that Ezra wrote first and second Chronicles. Either way, Ezra gave his heart and life to studying the Word of God – but not just studying it – *DOING* it! That is so, so important, friends. *Studying* and *doing* are two wholly and totally separate things. Further, Ezra only taught the Word of God because he was qualified to do so. I wish many people would learn that....

¹⁰ For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

11 Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.

12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time.

13 I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

14 Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand;

15 And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem,

16 And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem:

17 That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.

18 And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.

19 The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem.

20 And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house.

21 And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily,

22 Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.

23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently 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 certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem:

28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

~ It's very important to note in verse thirteen that the decree was *NOT* a command; it was a grant of permission. Apparently, Ezra had been an effective witness to King Artaxerxes. If anyone was planning to return, it

meant that they meant business with God! So, off goes Ezra to Jerusalem. Notice the beautiful thanksgiving Ezra declares unto the Lord in verse twenty-seven. The temple is now rebuilt, and it is to be beautified. I think any house of the Lord today ought to be made as beautiful as it can possibly be. This also seems to be when most of the leaders of the nation returned to the land. The list that went with Ezra is now given, and many of them are Levites....

VIII

¹ These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.

² Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush.

³ Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty.

⁴ Of the sons of Pahathmoab; Elihoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males.

⁵ Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males.

⁶ Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males.

⁷ And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males.

⁸ And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males.

⁹ Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males.

10 And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males.

11 And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males.

12 And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males.

13 And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males.

14 Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding.

17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God.

18 And 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; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;

19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty;

20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

~ What a great prayer meeting this must have been! They afflicted themselves to find a right way. I hope you'll take a moment to consider all that implies. Ezra had gone before the king and said, "... God will provide!" Ezra waxed eloquently, to be sure. Well, I think Ezra is re-thinking speaking a bit too hastily. They all get out there to this river and the journey starts, and Ezra looks around at the families and children; and it reminds him there will be whole lot of danger on the trip. They were carrying tremendous wealth with them which would have made them a target. A band of soldiers to escort them back would have been a good idea. But Ezra wasn't about to go back and tell the king, "... by the way, I know I said God said He will provide and protect, but He meant He would provide the protection through *YOU!*" That just wasn't going to happen.

Many of us tout very loudly about how we trust the Lord; but then, when we get down to the nitty gritty of life, we don't really trust Him. Ezra was a very human being; and I'm glad the Word of God points that out. Ezra was ashamed to go back to the king, so the only alternative was prayer and fasting. I think the Lord puts many of us in the position where all we can do is trust Him. I know God has done that to me many, *MANY* times....

23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them,

25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered:

26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents;

27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.

28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers.

29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.

30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.

32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels 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; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites;

34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.

35 Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD.

36 And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

~ Twelve he goats in verse thirty-five means one burnt offering for each tribe of Israel. That speaks of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ dying on the cross for all of God's children. God brought them safely through this journey back to Jerusalem; and I hope you can continue with us on our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God as we continue to seek — and discover — Jesus Christ on every page of Holy Writ ~

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