

## ***Ezra Chapter 8***

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- The first group of Jews under Zerubbabel to re-patriate back to Jerusalem did so 70 years after the city and Temple had been destroyed. There were some of the elders in that group that had seen the first Temple.
- Now that older generation had all died off. This was a new generation. This second group leaves Babylon 57-60 years after the first group - they've never seen the Temple, they've lived their whole lives in captivity.

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V: 1 One of the issues for those returning to Jerusalem from captivity, and how they could serve in different capacities was their lineage. Were they able to prove that they were Jewish, were they able to prove that they were Levites or from the lineage of Aaron and qualified to serve as a priest before the Lord.

- Thus we have the genealogies, their credentials presented up front:

V: 2-14 1,496 descendants of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron - priests.

V: 15-20 Ezra gathers the people at the rendezvous point which is a stream or river that feeds into the Euphrates at Ahava. There he begins to examine the group.

**Proverbs 27:23** “Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.”

- Upon inspection he discovers that they's got plenty of priests, but no Levites or Nethinims - no workers to help the priests in their duties.
- The Levites who were not priests did many of the practical tasks, assisting and facilitating the duties of the priests, the Nethinims did the heavy labor - cutting and moving wood, bringing water - all of which were necessary for the sacrifices to get done.
- Upon seeing the deficiency, Ezra sends to the leaders of the Levites and Nethinims that they needed to provide the needed help.

V: 18 “*And by the good hand of our God upon us....*” By God's grace he brought men of understanding to meet the need.

- They add to their numbers 38 Levites and 220 Nethinims. Now the total stands at 1,754 men.
- Then you would have to add to that their wives and children which would or could easily quadruple this number to minimally around 7,000 plus people.

- All these people were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation captives - they had never seen Jerusalem or the Temple. The Jews had by and large gotten comfortable in their new home they had taken Jeremiah's advice to heart.

**Jeremiah 29:4-7** “<sup>4</sup>Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; <sup>5</sup>Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; <sup>6</sup>Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. <sup>7</sup>And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”

- Yield to what I'm doing, don't fight it.

V: 21-23 Ezra calls the people to “fast & pray” - as they would need God's favor and protection on this long and dangerous journey. They needed wisdom on the route to take. They needed God's protection and favor.

- Ezra had been describing what an awesome God we serve and now he didn't want to ask for the king's soldiers to protect them along with way which would imply that His God wasn't able to keep them and the temple treasures safe.

**Testimony:** some years ago our older kids were headed out on a mission trip to the Philippines - God had blessed them and they had almost raised all the money they needed for the flight and the trip - but they were still just a little short.

- At our oldest son Joseph's HS graduation we had a sign out describing what the kids were doing and why they were doing it.
- Prior to that we'd been telling my dad and all our relatives what an awesome God we serve, how he provides, and just does the miraculous.
- When my dad saw the sign for the missions trip he told me, that if God didn't come through to let him know and he'd cover the rest of the expenses.
- As soon as he uttered those words, even though he as a non-believer was well intended - I began to pray - very soon after that the Lord provided the remainder of what was needed and I got to brag to my dad how God had once again provided.
- Ezra was in the same spot - let not the un-believers get the wrong idea about God! Wagons full of silver and gold...
- They sought the Lord and His favor, and God was entreated of them.

**Psalm 34:15, 17** “<sup>15</sup>The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry.” - “<sup>17</sup>The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.”

V: 24-30 Ezra separated out 12 of the chief priests, two being named, the rest being anonymous - and they were given the responsibility of keeping the various gold and silver Temple treasures safe.

- A combination of the offering of the Jews in Babylon, and some of the original vessels from the Temple taken by Nebuchadnezzar.
  - They weighed it, recorded it, and sent it with them - they were now accountable.
1. 650 talents of **silver** = 48,750 lb.. = 24.37 tons of silver.
  2. **Silver vessels**: 100 talents 7,500 lb.. - 3 3/4 tons of silver bowls, plates, pitchers etc.
  3. **Gold**: 100 talents = 7,500 lb.. = 3 3/4 tons of gold.
  4. 2 Golden vessels, basins - weighing 2,000 drams. 8 drams per oz. = 15-16 lbs.
  5. 2 to fine copper vessels that look like gold / brass.
- Admonition: You are holy unto the Lord. The vessels & offerings are holy, and belong to the Lord - basically keep it all holy.
  - Don't become un-holy by sinning through theft, covetousness, lying - don't allow the money to be used for un-Godly / un-Holy things - keep it all holy.
  - Again, accountability - weighing them before and after the trip to Jerusalem
  - We are called to the same thing:

**1 Peter 1:16** “... be ye holy; for I am holy.”

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** “<sup>19</sup>What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”

V: 31-32 They prayed, they fasted, and they moved out.

- God's hand was upon them and they were delivered from those that would hinder them or rob them. It was basically a 4 month trip.

**Ezra 7:8-9** “<sup>8</sup>And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup>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.”

**Psalm 121:1-4** “<sup>1</sup>I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. <sup>2</sup>My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. <sup>3</sup>He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. <sup>4</sup>Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

- God got them safely to their destination - His house.

**Jeremiah 29:11** “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

V: 33-34 They got there and rested for 3 days, but on the 4<sup>th</sup> day they got busy. They weighed the silver and gold in the house of God where it would remain.

- They were held accountable for what they were given - they had been given something of great value - so have we.

**2 Corinthians 4:7** “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

- Like the servants that were given the different talents we will be held accountable for our stewardship of God’s gifts, and giftings.

Paul describes the “Bema” seat judgment:

**2 Corinthians 5:10** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

**1 Corinthians 3:12-15** “<sup>12</sup>Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, stubble; <sup>13</sup>Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup>If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

- What have we been given?

**1 Timothy 1:11** “According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.”

**2 Timothy 2:13-14** “<sup>13</sup>Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.”

V: 35 They began to make burnt offerings praising the Lord for His favor and protection in their travels, also the sins offerings.

- These new arrivals were worshiping in their land, at their Temple, at the altar, for the first time in their lives!

**Psalm 122:1-2** “<sup>1</sup>I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. <sup>2</sup>Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.”

- A dream come true for Ezra and the group.

V: 36 Since they were headed that way the king entrusted them with some communications for the local officials.

- Having taken care of the spiritual matters, Ezra presented himself and his credentials to the local Persian officials.

**Matthew 22:21** “... render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”

- Ezra gave them the king’s letter and they were probably pretty quick to obey the king’s orders.

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“... *and they furthered / helped the people, and the house of God*” - they were a blessing, and no doubt a great encouragement.

- Ezra left Babylon with God’s law in his heart and the king’s letter in his hand, and the good hand of the Lord upon him - no wonder his mission was a success.
1. This group of people were willing to get out of their comfort zone and serve the Lord, they were willing just to go.
  2. They were looking for men of understanding - not just an emotional commitment. They understood the risks involved and trusted the Lord to see them through.
  3. They didn’t take it for granted, they fasted and prayed - seeking the Lord’s will.
  4. They were committed to Holiness - both of themselves and the things of God.
  5. They acknowledged that God’s hand was upon them, and gave God the glory!
  6. They worshipped God on His terms.
  7. The people were blessed and so was the house of God.