

Let's Worship God

20th-25th May 2019

Ezra





Monday - Ezra 7:1-6 - The Hand of the LORD

The account of history recorded in Ezra now jumps from 515 B.C. to the time of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned from about 464 to 423 B.C. During this time, Ezra, a descendant of Aaron the first High Priest determines to move from the region around Babylon to Jerusalem. (We should note that the list of his ancestors tracing his line back to Aaron must be incomplete, as more than fifteen generations had passed since the time of Aaron a thousand years before. Keep in mind that, in Biblical languages, the term "son" also means "descendant." The important point is that Ezra is of the priestly family, not that we have a complete list of all his ancestors between him and Aaron). Not only was Ezra of the priestly family, but he was personally skilled in the study of God's Law.

We are told that "the king granted him all that he asked." As we will see in the days to come, this not only included permission to migrate to Jerusalem, but also involved money for the beautifying of the Temple as well as permission to take others with him. The reason the Scriptures give for the king's favor is "the hand of the LORD [Ezra's] God was upon him." Last week we learned the expression "the eye of God" is on someone means the LORD blesses and protects him. A similar expression found frequently in Ezra and Nehemiah refers to the hand of the LORD being upon His servants. This repeated phrase reminds us that it was not merely by the kindness of the Persians kings, nor by the cleverness of the Jewish leaders that these good things were accomplished. Rather, it was according to the grace and mercy of the LORD God, who was working out His sovereign plan by means of His earthly servants. We can trust the LORD to continue doing so, using us as we seek to obey His will as He has revealed it in the Bible.

Questions

1. What are some things we learn about Ezra in this passage?
2. What does it mean that "the hand of the LORD" is on someone?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that the hand of the LORD will be upon us to accomplish His good purposes.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:27

Praise: Psalm 117 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Tuesday - Ezra 7:7-10 - To Study the Law of the LORD

Today, we learn something of Ezra's motives for moving to Jerusalem. In the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign (about 458 B.C.), Ezra sets out on his journey from Babylonia. Accompanying him are several other Israelites, some of whom are priests, others are Levites who are the hereditary singers and gatekeepers in the Temple, as well as some Temple servants. (The term used for these "servants" is the same we saw before that indicates that these are likely the descendants of the Gibeonites - Canaanites who became servants of the LORD and, thus, eventually became Israelites by faith). As verse nine indicates, the journey took four months - and we will learn more about what occurred during that time in chapter eight.

Why did Ezra do this? Why did he lead this expedition on this arduous journey? Was it because he knew that in Jerusalem his priestly status might offer him privileges and honor? Was it historic nostalgia - a desire to live where his ancestors lived? The Scripture tells us his main motivation was to study the Law of the LORD "and to teach His statutes and rules in Israel." Of course, Ezra was already a scribe who studied the Law of Moses. There were plenty of copies of the Scriptures available in Babylonia. If he merely "set his heart to study the Law of the LORD," he could have done that without moving - though it is certain that Jerusalem, with the new Temple was clearly becoming the center of such study of Scripture. More than just private study, Ezra desired to teach. He knew there was a need for qualified teachers of Scripture in Jerusalem, and so he went there.

Not everyone is called to teach in the Church. It is important that we have well-trained and well-qualified elders to carry out the formal instruction of God's people. Nevertheless, Ezra is an example to us all. We must not be content merely to engage in private Bible study, but rather be ready to share what we learn. By doing so, believers can be iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17), helping each other grow in the knowledge of the LORD, and we can be better prepared to share God's Truth with the world around us.

Questions

1. Why did Ezra make this move to Jerusalem? What does this encourage us to do?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we may be bold to share what we learn from God's Word.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:27

Praise: Psalm 118 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Wednesday - Ezra 7:11-26 - The Decree of Artaxerxes

Because of God's grace and providential care of His people, Ezra finds favor in the sight of Artaxerxes king of Persia. The king and his seven counselors (men who held a hereditary position close to the king because they were of the families of the seven conspirators who overthrew the impostor, Smerdis, and placed Artaxerxes' grandfather, Darius, on the throne) determined to support Ezra. According to this decree: 1) Ezra and any Israelite who wished to accompany him could move to Jerusalem, 2) the king and his counselors made donations to finance sacrifices on behalf of the king and his sons and to beautify the Temple, 2) Ezra could raise revenues from the taxes of Babylonia and from freewill offerings, 3) the officials of the Province Beyond the River (roughly the modern-day countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel) were to provide treasure and goods for the Temple, 4) the Temple and the priests, Levites, and others who labored in it were to be tax-exempt, and 5) Ezra had authority to appoint magistrates and judges throughout the province to govern the worshippers of the LORD.

We saw back in chapter four that opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem resulted in Artaxerxes' command that construction on the walls cease. As the names of the adversaries in that passage are not the same as those who show up in Ezra's and Nehemiah's time, we must conclude that this occurred earlier in Artaxerxes' reign. The people of Ezra's day understood Artaxerxes' words recorded in verse eighteen to be a reversal of his previous command. The Jews could now rebuild the walls of Jerusalem - a project that would be finished under Nehemiah's leadership after further opposition. Thus, it is generally understood that this decree of Artaxerxes is the "word to restore and build Jerusalem" mentioned in Daniel 9:25. It was no coincidence, therefore, that so many Jews were looking for the coming of Messiah's Kingdom in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, for this decree came in 458 or 457 B.C. As the LORD revealed to Daniel, 483 years later, the public ministry of Jesus Christ began. Three and a half years after that, He put an end to sacrifices by offering Himself up as the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of His people. After another three and a half years, the Gospel went forth to the nations following the stoning of Stephen. The LORD is faithful to keep His promises.

Questions

1. What five things are found in the king's decree concerning Ezra and the Temple?
2. Why is the timing of this decree important?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for wisdom to understand the Scriptures correctly.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:27

Praise: Psalm 119: Part 1 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Thursday - Ezra 7:27-28 - Ezra's Praise

The most common theme of Ezra is the theme of God's sovereignty. The LORD is in control of all things. As we have seen, He even uses the actions and intentions of mankind, whether noble or sinful, to accomplish His righteous will. Recognizing this, Ezra breaks forth into praise of the LORD. It was the LORD who put it into the heart of the king and his counselors to support the worship and to finance the beautifying of the Temple. It was the LORD who gave Ezra the courage to make his requests to the king and his officials. It was the LORD who guided and upheld Ezra as he gathered other Israelites to make the journey to Jerusalem with him.

As we consider the events recorded in Ezra, we find yet another remarkable providence. Back in chapter three, we read that the people rejoiced at the laying of the foundation of the second Temple. At the same time, many of the elders, who could remember the former glory of the first Temple, wept and mourned, for it did not appear that this new Temple could ever be as beautiful as the first one had been. However, we also noted that the prophet Zechariah had cautioned the people not to despise the day of small things. To their eyes, the new Temple might not have looked promising, but the LORD would accomplish great things with it. Of course, the greatest things for which that Temple was used involved the coming of Christ Jesus, but, as if to offer reassurance that He is able to keep His promises, the LORD provided for the beautifying of the Temple far beyond the expectations of the generation who saw its foundations laid. If the LORD kept that promise to build His earthly Temple, surely He will keep His promise found in Matthew 16:18 to build His Church against which not even the gates of hell can prevail.

Questions

1. For what does Ezra praise the LORD?
2. What other remarkable providence do we find?

Prayer Points

1. Praise the LORD for building His Church..
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:27

Praise: Psalm 119:Part 2 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Friday - Ezra 8:1-14 - The Second Wave

In today's reading, Ezra records the names of several leading Israelites who accompanied him from the lands of exile to Jerusalem. Many of these leaders bring with them significant numbers of men. As most of these likely brought wives and children with them, we can estimate that several thousand men, women, and children prepared to make the journey to Jerusalem. This represents the second major wave of Jews returning to Judah from exile.

The Babylonian Exile began in 605 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and took many people from the leading families into captivity in Babylon. Among these were Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (otherwise known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego). Later, in 597 B.C., another larger group of Jews were taken into captivity. Among them was the prophet Ezekiel, while Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem. Finally, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and took all but a few of the remaining Jews into exile.

Just as the exile occurred in three major waves, there were also three major waves of people returning from the Babylonian Exile. The first took place under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua after 539 B.C. The second, recorded here, was led by Ezra around 458 B.C. A third will be led by Nehemiah a little over a decade later. This reveals something of the wondrous character of God. Not only did He keep His promise to end the Babylonian Exile, He did so in a manner that demonstrates orderliness and well-roundedness. We can only stand in awe of such a God.

Questions

1. How many waves of exiles were taken into captivity?
2. In what years did these events take place?
3. How many waves of Jews returned from exile?
4. Why is this remarkable?

Prayer Points

1. Praise God for the wondrousness of His works.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:27

Praise: Psalm 119: Part 3 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Saturday - Ezra 8:15-20 - Levites Needed

As Ezra prepares to lead this expedition of returning exiles, he gathers them at "the river that runs to Ahava." We do not know precisely where this was, but can safely assume it was a small river or canal that ran into the Euphrates. While they camped there for three days, Ezra took account of who had gathered with him. While there were some priests, like himself, he found there were no other Levites to help with the Temple worship. As we see both from Ezra's recognition that faithful preachers of the Word were needed in Jerusalem, and from the revelation of God found in the book of the prophet Malachi, the worship in the Temple needed to be reformed. The priests and Levites in Jerusalem had become lax in their attention to the details of sacrificial worship and were neglecting faithful proclamation of God's Word. Ezra would need the help of both priests and faithful Levites.

He sends for wise men who intercede with Iddo, a leading Levite living at Casiphia (probably a town not far from Ezra's encampment). With Iddo's aid, Ezra recruits thirty-eight Levites plus two hundred and twenty Temple servants. (Again, these were most likely the descendants of the Gibeonites who did menial work in support of the Temple).

Just as in Ezra's day, it is not enough that the Church have teachers and other leaders. Each Christian receives spiritual gifts from the LORD to use in His service. These are not the same gifts, from one believer to the next. Rather, the LORD gives a variety of gifts to different Christians so that we can serve in a variety of ways. In this way, the ministry of the Word is enhanced and supported, and the Gospel is able to reach more and more people - even to the ends of the earth.

Questions

1. Why did Ezra need Levites to accompany him?
2. Why does the Church need people with a variety of gifts?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:27

Praise: Psalm 119:Part 4 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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