

Commentary & Notes on Ezra

The commentary and notes below are adapted from the teaching materials of Annie Kartoizian (1906-1989). In 1934 Annie became a missionary in China with OMS. During World War II she spent 21 months in a Japanese concentration camp as a prisoner. She was repatriated in 1943 and sailed on the famous vessel Gripsholm. In 1949 she made a miraculous last-minute escape from Beijing before it fell to Mao's Communists. When she could no longer enter China, Annie went to Taiwan. Annie and her family have been life-long friends of our family. In 1989, while pastoring with the United Armenian Congregational Church of Hollywood I had the honor of participating in her funeral. It was during those years in Los Angeles that Annie gave me her teaching notes (the commentary below) - laboriously typed on what is now yellowed paper with hand written marginal notes, many of which are in Chinese. - Pastor Steve

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

A. The connection of the book with the preceding books.

1. Notice the ending of 2 Kings. It ends in failure (2 Kings 25:26)

- a. The mass of the people were in Babylon under the chastening hand of God. The captivity in Babylon was a chastening. God was chastening them for their sins (2 Kings 25:6,11).
- b. The remnant left in Palestine had fled to Egypt never to return. This was apostasy, a falling away from God, going back to the world. As Peter said, "*The dog goes back to his vomit, the sow to the mire*" (2 Peter 2:19-22). We lose sight of them. When a man deliberately turns from God and goes back to the world, we lose sight of him. His spiritual history is over (2 Kings 25:2-6).
- c. Notice also in 2 Kings 25:27-30 that we have a picture of the grace of God. This example of grace is found in the place of chastisement, Babylon, not in Egypt. When a man goes back to Egypt (the world), he has fallen from grace. There is no more hope for him; but there is hope for those who are under the chastening hand of God. Out of Babylon grows hope. The books of the Kings end in failure. Man has again been found in the balances and found wanting. The Hebrew monarchy has failed; but God has not failed. Where sin abounds grace abounds more exceedingly (Romans 5:20). In all of man's failures we see the abounding grace of God. This has been true in every dispensation. Out of the failure of every dispensation the grace of God brought out a remnant. Out of the Garden of Eden came the promise of the "Seed of the woman." Out of the flood came Noah and his family; out of Sodom came Lot and his daughters; out of the Ur of the Chaldees came Abraham; out of Babylon came the remnant.

2. Notice the ending of 2 Chronicles. It ends not with an example of the grace of God as 2 Kings does, but with the promise of the grace of God (2 Chronicles 36:21), to fulfill three score and ten years (70). All chastening has an end for the honest heart, a good ending (2 Peter 5:10; Hebrews 12:11). Chronicles holds out the promise of a glorious return to Canaan (2 Chronicles 36:22,23). It is important to notice here that Chronicles goes back to Adam and gives the race a new start. It traces the history down through the chosen people of God and comes to the close with the promise of grace and the call of the God of grace to His people to return to their own land.

B. The Book of Ezra takes up the account where Chronicles left off. Remember that Chronicles goes a step farther than Kings. It is the beginning of the Jewish

commonwealth which lasted until the year 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus at the head of the Roman Armies.

C. The author is Ezra, a priest. His name means "help." He was probably born in Babylon, the grandson of Seraiah the chief priest, who was slain at the taking of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:18-21; Ezra 7:1,5), and therefore a descendant of Aaron. He was a man of deep humility (Ezra 9:10-15). He was a "ready scribe" or instructor of the law of God (Ezra 7:6). He was a man of fervent zeal for God's honor (Ezra 7:10; 8:21-23), deeply grieving over the sins of the people and sparing no pains to bring them back to repentance (Ezra 6:10; 9:3,4). He joined the Jews at Jerusalem many years after their return, going up thither with the second large company. Ezra seemed to have remained at Jerusalem. He is supposed to have arranged the books of the Bible then extant in their present proper order and setting the canon of the Scriptures for his time.

D. Key thoughts.

1. The book of ecclesiastical history upon the return from Babylon.
2. Separation; Joshua 23:11; Judges 2:3; 2 Chronicles 25:10.

E. Prophecies fulfilled in the book; Ezra 1:1-4; Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10.

1. Isaiah had predicted the name of their deliverer 150 plus years earlier
2. Jeremiah had predicted the time of their deliverance.

F. Connection with other Scriptures.

1. Jeremiah prophesied right up to the captivity.
2. Ezekiel prophesied during the captivity.
3. The book of Daniel takes up the narrative of the captivity where Chronicles leaves it.
4. Ezra is the first post-captivity books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). These books deal with the feeble remnant which alone had a heart for God.
5. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are the historical books beginning with the return from Babylon.
6. Zechariah and Haggai are the prophets of the period.

G. The return from captivity.

1. There were three deportations from Babylon.
 - a. 606/5 BC Jehoiakim, Daniel and three Hebrew children
 - b. 598/7 BC Jehoiachin and the 10,000 captives with Ezekiel and Mordecai.
 - c. 587/6 BC Zedekiah and the destruction of the city.

2. There were there periods of restoration.
 - a. 536 BC The return under Zerubbabel; Ezra chapters 1-6. These chapters cover a period of 23 years. Cyrus was king of Persia at this time.
 - b. 457/8 BC The return under Ezra. Ezra chapters 7-10. Artaxerxes was King of Persia.
 - c. 444 BC The return under Nehemiah. Artaxerxes was king of Persia.

- H. In Ezra we first find the name Jews. Before this time Israel is the title by which the chosen people are called. The name Jew originates with the exile. In Ezra and Nehemiah both names Jews and Israelites are found. In Esther Jew alone is mentioned. Hebrew refers to the race (Genesis 10:21; Philippians 3:5). Israelite refers to the covenant (Romans 9:4). Jew refers to their religion (Galatians 1:13).

- I. The key verse is Ezra 1:5.

- J. Outline of the book. The book is in two main parts.
 1. Chapters 1-6: Governorship and work of Zerubbabel. From the decree of Cyrus to the dedication of the restored Temple. Joshua was high priest. Haggai and Zechariah were prophets. (536-516 BC / 20 years)
 - a. Chapter 1: The proclamation by Cyrus allowing the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the Temple.
 - b. Chapter 2: The number and names of those who returned.
 - c. Chapter 3: The altar set up; the foundation of the Temple laid.
 - d. Chapter 4: Adversaries stop the building of the Temple.
 - e. Chapters 5,6: The prophets Haggai and Zechariah urge the renewal of building operations on the Temple. The Temple is finished and dedicated.
 2. Chapters 7-10: Journey of Ezra to Jerusalem from the Persian court and his work in that city. (457-432 BC / 25 years)
 - a. Chapters 7-8:31: At the request of Ezra, King Artaxerxes grants him leave to go to Jerusalem. He gives him a friendly letter and a commission; a goodly company go with Ezra.
 - b. Chapter 8:32-36: Ezra arrives safely in the city and offers sacrifice.
 - c. Chapters 9-10: Ezra, seeing the lapse of the people into sin, begins his reform. He prays to God, makes confession and the people repent and put away the evil.

II. EXEGESIS OF THE PROPHECY

- A. The governorship and work of Zerubbabel. Chapters 1-6

Joshua was the high priest. Haggai and Zerubbabel were prophets. Time from 536 BC to 516 BC. Nebuchadnezzar carried many of the Jews into captivity in the first year of his reign which was the fourth year of Jehoiakim. He reigned 45 years; his son Evil-merodach 23 years; his grandson Belshazzar 3 years; which made 70 years. Recall the workers, a godly governor, a godly high priest, and two prophets of God.

1. The proclamation of Cyrus allowing the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the Temple. Chapter 1

a. The decree of Cyrus. Ezra 1:1-4

1) The man. Prophecy regarding him: God's shepherd (Isaiah 44:28); God's anointed (Isaiah 45:1). His history; Daniel 1:21; 6:28: 10:1. Mentioned 15 times in Ezra 1-6; 2 Chronicles 36:22,23. Isaiah prophesied concerning him over 150 years before he appeared in history. He founded the Persian Empire; defeated the king of the Medes (559 BC); defeated Croesus, king of Lydia; captured Babylon (538 BC; Daniel 5:30). God stirred up his spirit in the first year of his reign after he conquered Babylon.

2) His proclamation.

a) He was charged to build a house for God.

b) He let all go who desired to go.

c) He urged those who did not go to help those who went.

3) The authority for his proclamation.

a) God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth.

b) God's spirit had stirred him up.

c) God had charged him to do the work. Remember Cyrus was a heathen king. He recognized one Supreme God. He declared that God had charged him. He blesses the people in the name of the Lord. He directs that gifts be made for the Temple. Here we see the secret of God's government of the world; Proverbs 21:1. God controls the destiny of nations.

b. The response to the proclamation. Ezra 1:5-6

1) Those whose spirits God had touched rose up; the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, priests and Levites.

a) Notice that God raised up their spirits.

b) They went with a purpose *"to build the house of the Lord."*

2) Those who remained at home strengthened the hands of those who went; vessels of silver, gold, good and precious things. What a lesson on missions. What a marvelous way to carry out God's program. See Matthew 28:16-20. Notice that this was spoken to the eleven (Mark 16:14-20 - again the eleven;

Luke 24:33-48 - again the eleven; Acts 14:1-3 - *“the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul.’”*)

- c. Cyrus gave them the vessels of the Lords house. Ezra 1:7-11

Cyrus equipped them to go. When God calls, He equips (Matthew 28:20; Mark 16:20; Luke 24:49). Cyrus not only wished that the people might be successful but he also aided them. So we might learn not only to pronounce blessings upon the people of God, but to render them all the help we can. Notice how careful God was of the vessels of His house. They were not lost nor had they been melted, nor mixed with other vessels so that they could not be known. God knows His own and never loses sight of them. All these vessels were given to Shesbazzar, probably Zerubbabel. Shesbazzar means “joy in tribulation” Zerubbabel means “a stranger in Babylon.”

- d. Lessons from chapter 1: It was God who was working. God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. God charged him. God stirred up the spirits of the priests, Levites, and the people. In salvation it is all of God, all of grace.

2. The number and names of those who returned. Chapter 2

This was important since the land must be divided among them, the titles must be paid, etc. It was also a roll of honor, those whose hearts God had stirred up. It was a reward of their faith. There is a more sacred record of those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. God’s spirit is stirring up people today and those who obey His call will come home to glory and find their names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Every one returned to his city. So each one today will go to the place prepared for them.

- a. The leaders are the first mentioned. Ezra 2:2

Zerubbabel, the governor; Joshua, the high priest; Nehemiah and Mordecai are here mentioned. Some think they were not the two famous men spoken of later (Nehemiah who went up in the third expedition and Mordecai mentioned in Esther). Others think that they were the same ones and that they returned to Babylon later.

- b. The People. Ezra 2:3-35

- 1) Some of these families are named from the persons that were their ancestors.
- 2) Others from the places they formerly resided.
- 3) The list is given here and in Nehemiah 7 differ a little. It may be that some who had given their names at first drew back. Others that declined at first, repented and went, and so increased the number. Verse 5: The sons of Arah is 775 - in Nehemiah 7:10 is 652. Verse 6: The sons of Jeshua is 2,812 - in Nehemiah 7:11 is 2,818. Verse 8: The sons of Zattu is 945 - in Nehemiah 7:13 is 845. Verse 10: The sons of Bani is 642 - in Nehemiah 7:15 is 648. Verse 11: The sons of Bebai is 623 - in Nehemiah 7:16 is 628, etc. Adonikam which means a high Lord were 666, just the number of the beast (Revelation 13:18).

- c. The priests and Levites. Ezra 2:36-63

- 1) About 1/10 of the whole company, 4,200 priests belong to four families.
- 2) Levites a small company, about 350
- 3) Nethinims, 43. It is supposed that they were the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:27). They were employed as hewers of wood and drawers of water.
- 4) Some who were looked upon as Israelites by birth could not trace their ancestry correctly and their seed whether they belonged to Israel (Ezra 2:59). They presumed that they were the seed of Jacob but could not produce their pedigrees. What a lesson; going to Canaan, the land of promise, and yet not title to any portion of the land. Is not this a picture of many today? They are going with the redeemed of God apparently in Heaven, but they have not title to a heavenly inheritance.
- 5) There were others who could not prove themselves and yet they were supposed to be of the seed of Aaron (Ezra 2:61-63).
 - a) The reason they had lost their evidence. One of their ancestors married a daughter of Barzillai, that great man in David's time (2 Samuel 19:39). He gloried in his alliance with such a great family and his descendants took the name of Barzillai. So their pedigree was preserved in the family of Barzillai and not that of Aaron. They were ashamed to belong to the priests because the priesthood was not held in honor in Babylon. How like many people today; they lose their title because they are ashamed of the Gospel and the people of God, and prefer worldly alliances and honor.
 - b) What they lost by this. When they came to Canaan they would have gladly been reckoned with the priests, because it was an honor to be so, but they were rejected and not permitted to eat of the holy things. Here in this world it is not popular to be a follower of Christ. It is more popular to belong to the world; but in Heaven it will mean everything to be a child of God. We must suffer reproach here if we would be with Christ there.
- d. The sum total of those who returned, their retinue and the offerings for the Temple. Ezra 2:64-70
 - 1) The number: 42,360
 - 2) Their retinue (Ezra 2:65): 7,337 servants; 200 singing men and women. The text even gives an exact record of the animals. God did not forget a single thing which was in His service.
 - 3) Their offering (Ezra 2:68-70):
 - a) They offered freely.
 - b) They gave after their ability.
 - c) An exact record of the gifts were kept. God keeps an exact record of what His people give (1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8-9).

- e. Notice they all dwelt in their cities; priests and Levites and people. They were in their own land and in their own cities. If we hear the call of God and obey it and have a clear title to the inheritance, some day we will dwell in our own city in our own country and be rewarded for the sacrifice we have made here on earth.

3. The altar set up; the foundation of the Temple laid. Chapter 3

In chapter 2 we left the people in their cities; and got a picture of the conditions of the country - the ground was untilled, the cities were laid waste, all was out of order. They first built the altar and laid the foundations of the Temple. They put first things first. Today some people would build their own houses, then they would begin to think about God. When people follow the example shown here, some thing will be accomplished.

a. The altar set up. Ezra 3:1-7

1) The ones who began the work.

- a) The condition of the hearts of the people “*gathered together as one man*” (Ezra 3:1). This is the secret of success (Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chronicles 7:1; Matthew 18:19). “*One accord*” is the secret of the book of Acts.
- b) The leaders were Jeshua, priest of the tribe of Aaron, and Zerubbabel, the governor of the tribe of Judah. These two represent Christ in His sacrificial death and in his High priestly word. How important it is that the leaders begin the work.

2) Building the altar of God (Ezra 3:1).

- a) The place of building, “*on the bases.*” They build upon the old foundation. We must return to the old paths, get back the old landmarks (Jeremiah 6:16).
- b) It was the first thing they did. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob built their altars and then pitched their tents (Matthew 6:33).
- c) They kept the word of Moses which was to them the law of God.

3) The sacrifices they offered.

- a) The burnt offerings, their dedication and yielding to the Lord.
- b) In keeping the feast they were careful to do all that God commanded. They especially observed the Feast of Tabernacles, since the seventh month was the time for its observance. The Passover celebrates the forgiveness of sins; Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit into the life; and the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrates our gathering home to be with the Lord.

4) Their gifts. They gave the fruit of their own labor; then they hired laborers from Tyre and Sidon to secure timber.

b. The foundations of the Temple. Ezra 3:8-13

This took place a little more than half a year after the altar was built.

- 1) The leaders again began the work.
- 2) They did it orderly (Ezra 3:10). God is a God of order. The Levites were the proper ones to do the work. They sang by courses and their song is the old one in Psalm 136.
- 3) The gladness and sorrow of the people.
 - a) The younger generation rejoiced. They had not seen the former Temple and did not know the you of temple service. It was the beginning of mercy to them; there is always joy when mercy begins.
 - b) The older ones were sorrowful. They had seen the glory of the former temple. It had been about 52 years since the former Temple had been destroyed. Zerubbabel's Temple was not so large. They realized that sin had caused all this destruction. Many had live wasted lives. When one who has wasted years comes to the Lord, he regrets the lost opportunities.

The Babylonian captivity lasted for seventy years; from 605 BC, when Jerusalem was delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, to 536 BC, the period of the first restoration under Zerubbabel. It was then that Daniel was taken captive. However, it was not until the fourth invasion of Jerusalem (during the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign) that the city as burned and the Temple was completely destroyed. From the fourth invasion, 587 BC, to the first restoration, 536 BC, there were 51 years. The Temple foundations were laid several months after the arrival in Jerusalem, so it had actually been 52 years since the former Temple had been destroyed. Captives were taken during all of the invasions, so that some had not been in Babylon all of the 70 years of exile.

Haggai 2:9 promised that this latter Temple should be more glorious than the first, although Solomon's Temple was more magnificent and costlier; it also was blessed by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. Haggai 2:9 is a Messianic prophecy in that he points to the spiritual glory which would arise from the presence of Christ.

4. Adversaries stop the building of the Temple. Chapter 4

Just as soon as the people of God begin to build the Temple the enemy attempted to defeat the work.

- a. The direct opposition. Ezra 4:1-5

The adversaries heard of the altar and Temple. Whenever God begins a work the Devil knows of it and begins to try to destroy it. Every work of God meets with opposition. It is the old conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. It runs through all the ages.

- 1) The opposition came from the Samaritans. They were the people settled in the land of Israel by the Assyrians after the captivity of the ten tribes. They intermarried with the Israelites who had been left behind and their offspring went under the general name of Samaritans. Originally they were idolaters, but

having received some instruction in the knowledge of the true God they claimed to be worshipping Him, though of course, in an ignorant and superstitious way (2 Kings 17:24-41).

- 2) Notice the subtle way they attempted to defeat the work. They sought to draw the Jews into a union with them. Had they united with the enemy, the plan of God would have been defeated.
- 3) The Israelites refused them. God demands true separation and a pure worship (John 4:22; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 7:1).
- 4) The Samaritans troubled them and “weakened their hands.” They probably withheld supplies and kept them from getting the timber from the people of Tyre and Sidon.

b. The indirect opposition. Ezra 4:6-16

King Cyrus favored the Jews, so they did not appeal to him. However, Cyrus lived only a few years after the Jews returned, not over 7 years. There arose a new king named Ahasuerus, also called Artaxerxes. Heathen authors call him Cambyses. He took no interest in the Jews and as soon as he came to the throne, the enemies appealed to him.

- 1) The accused the Jews. This is what the Devil is always doing (Revelation 12:10). The Devil does this often by putting a lying spirit into the mouths of those whom he uses as instruments. Very often those who accuse the children of God are the agents of the Devil.
- 2) A great number were employed in the work (Ezra 4:7-10). The Devil has many in his employ. All the forces of Hell combine against the people of God.
- 3) The copy of the letter is inserted out of the records of the Persian kingdom.
 - a) They represented themselves as very loyal to the government and greatly concerned for its interests.
 - b) They represented the Jews as very disloyal and dangerous to the government. The enemies of God always give the people of God a bad name.
 - c) They misrepresented the history of the Jews. The inference that they desire to have drawn is that the king is in danger of losing all the provinces west of the Jordan. Israel had already suffered for her past sins and they had been put away. Satan often tries to bring out the past which is under the blood.

c. The king stops the work. Ezra 4:17-24

- 1) The king of Persia allows himself to be deceived. He only examined one side of the matter.
- 2) The Samaritans, at the command of the king of Persia, stop the Jews from working. The enemies of God never lose an opportunity to hinder God’s work.

5. The Temple is finished and dedicated. Chapters 5,6

A break of 14 years probably ensued between chapters 4 and 5. The prophets Zechariah and Haggai stirred up the people. They gave the people a vision (Proverbs 29:18). The visions of Zechariah; the Lord in their midst going among the myrtle trees; all the earth quiet, opposition broken down; smiths destroying the horns (worldly powers); the city measured; the promise of great prosperity; the people cleansed from their sin of neglect; the promise to Zerubbabel that it was to be done by the Spirit of God (Zechariah 4:6). The people were stirred. The work had been stopped by might and power, but it as resumed by the Spirit of God.

a. The work revived. Ezra 5:1-6:12

- 1) The hearts of the people were stirred and again the leaders rose up first. The prophets also helped them.
- 2) God worked upon the hearts of their enemies (Ezra 5:3-17).
 - a) They inquire of the people who gave them the right to build.
 - b) They sent a letter to Darius, king of Persia. God's Spirit had subdued the enemy for their opposition was milder. The work did not cease at the request of the enemy, and "God's eye was upon them." God is able to look after the enemy if we continue as He bids us.

The Jews gave a full account of their reasons for building the Temple. We should have a reason for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15).

- 3) The Spirit of God stirred up the spirit of King Darius. God was working everywhere (Ezra 6:1-12).
 - a) Diligent search was made and God saw to it that the decree of Cyrus was found.
 - b) Darius made a decree giving the elders of Judah timber, etc. for the Temple.
 - c) A terrible punishment was to be meted out to the ones who disobeyed (Ezra 6:11,12).

b. The work finished. Ezra 6:13-15.

Notice how God made everything work for their good.

- 1) Darius the king was back oft hem with the resources of his kingdom and a royal decree.
- 2) The Samaritans were compelled to furnish supplies.
- 3) The Jews flourished in the building. They finished the Temple in 516 BC, six years after they began to resume the building ("*the hands of Zerubbabel*" - Zechariah 4:9).

c. The dedication of the Temple. Ezra 6:16-22

They dedicated it with joy. Everything was in order and the Temple was finished. The Passover was celebrated. Now they were newly delivered out of the hands of the Babylonians. The Passover is celebrated five places in the Old Testament: 1) Under Moses (Numbers 9:5); 2) Under Joshua (Joshua 5:10); 3) Under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30); 4) Under Josiah (2 Kings 23:21); and 5) Under Zerubbabel. In every case there was some special or important rededication of the people to God and to His worship. Here two groups participated; those who had returned from captivity, and those who had turned from the filthiness of the land. The filthiness of the land was idolatry, referring to the Israelites left behind by Nebuchadnezzar who had drifted into idolatry but were not returning.

B. The journey of Ezra to Jerusalem from the Persian court and his work in the city. Chapters 7-10

This is the second period of restoration. Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, and Zechariah had finished their work; God raises up another man to take their places. The prophet and the builder of the Temple are gone, but God raises up a great teacher, Ezra the scribe. The people needed to be taught God's word and God had raised up the right man in the right time and put him in the right place.

1. Artaxerxes, the king, at the request of Ezra granted him permission to go to Jerusalem. Ezra 7:1-8:30

He gave him a friendly letter and a commission. A goodly number accompanied him.

a. An account of Ezra and his expedition to Jerusalem. Ezra 7:1-10

1) Ezra's pedigree (Ezra 7:1-5). He was able to trace back to Aaron the priest. If we would be of service to God we must trace our spiritual ancestry to our priest Christ Jesus.

2) Ezra's character.

a) He was a ready scribe. The man who knows God's word is the one who will get things from God. He was mighty in the Scriptures and able to interpret them to others. He collected all the copies of the law, of the prophets, and the poetical books and put them into the order we have now. The prophetic period was nearly over; only one more prophecy to be written, Malachi, so it was time to gather the books together into a permanent record.

b) Ezra was a man of great piety and holy zeal (Ezra 7:10). He had a heart prepared to receive God's word and a heart that was ready to obey God's word. It was the rule and business of his life to seek God's law.

c) He taught the word of God. He first learned, then taught. He is to us a pattern of the way to become a minister of God's word.

3) His expedition to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7-10). It took him four months to go to Jerusalem. We do not know exactly how long it was after the Temple was finished. Some think it was the same year while others think it was years later. His influence in Babylon had been such that many went up with him.

b. A copy of the commission given to him. Ezra 7:11-26

There were seven provisions in the commission. Some think the reason that the Persian king was so kind to Ezra is that Esther had already become his queen.

- 1) He gives Ezra leave to go with all those who desire to go with him (Ezra 7:13).
- 2) He gives him authority to enquire into the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 7:14), whether the Temple was built, the priesthood was settled, the sacrifices were offered. So should the minister of God inquire into the spiritual condition of the people.
- 3) He entrusts him with the money which was freely given (Ezra 7:15,16). Some money was already in his hand. More money was to be received later.
- 4) He was given the right to have his needs supplied out of the king's treasures (Ezra 7:20-22).
- 5) He charges him to let nothing be wanting that was needful to be done in or about the Temple in honor of God (Ezra 7:23).
- 6) He exempts all the ministers of the Temple from paying taxes to the government (Ezra 7:24).
- 7) He empowers Ezra to nominate and appoint judges and magistrates for all the Jews on that side of the river (Ezra 7:25,26).

c. Ezra's thanksgiving. Ezra 7:27,28

He thoughtfully acknowledges the goodness of God to him and to the people. How can we "*beautify the house of the Lord*" today? Note Psalm 29:2, "*worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness*" and Psalm 93:5, "*Holiness becometh Thine house.*"

d. The company who go with Ezra and the treasure they take. Ezra 8:1-30

- 1) The company that went with him (Ezra 8:1-20). 1,754 men are mentioned. Some offered themselves willingly; the Levites who went were pressed into service (Ezra 8:15). Ezra had men for the service of God but lacked ministers for the house.
- 2) Seeking the protection of God (Ezra 8:21-23). He had plenty of men and plenty of money but wanted to be assured of God's presence. Danger from marauding Arabs was so great that a military escort was usually necessary; but Ezra sought God's protection and not that of man. God answered his prayer.
- 3) The treasures they took with them (Ezra 8:24-30). He committed the treasures to the chief priests and kept a strict account of that which each one had. We are the stewards of God and are to give an account of all that is entrusted to us.

2. Ezra arrives safely in the city and offers sacrifices. Ezra 8:31-36

- a. God took them safely to Jerusalem. He delivered them from their enemies.

- b. The treasurers were faithful and all the wealth was safely delivered.
 - c. The company offered sacrifices as soon as they reached Jerusalem.
 - d. Their enemies aided them (Ezra 8:36).
3. Ezra's reformation in Jerusalem. Chapters 9,10
- Ezra's rejoicing over his arrival in Jerusalem soon turned into sorrow, when he learned the condition of the people.
- a. The sin revealed and confessed. Ezra 9:1-15
 - 1) What the sin was (Ezra 9:1,2) - mixed marriages. The Devil's aim has always been to corrupt God's children in any way. These mixed marriages would thwart the purpose of God for Israel. Even some of the priests and Levites were guilty.
 - 2) Its effect upon Ezra (Ezra 9:3). He wept and humbled himself for the people.
 - 3) Others were affected by his sorrow (Ezra 9:4).
 - 4) Ezra laid it all before God (Ezra 9:5-15).
 - a) He was humble before God; on his knees.
 - b) His prayer (Ezra 9:6-15): 1) He confesses the sin as if it had been his own; 2) He owns their sin to have been very great; 3) They had long persisted in this sin; 4) He reviews the punishment their sin had brought in the past (Ezra 9:7); 5) God's recent mercies seem to make their sin seem even worse (Ezra 9:8,9); and 6) God had punished them less than their sin had deserved (Ezra 9:13).
 - b. The people came together and confessed their sins. Ezra 10:1-5
 - 1) When Ezra humbled himself the people soon followed his example.
 - 2) They encouraged themselves in the Lord. They acknowledged the sin and then could hope for forgiveness.
 - c. The sin put away. Ezra 10:6-44
 - 1) Ezra used the authority the king had given him. All the people were ordered to come together and commanded to put away their wives. Severe penalty was to follow refusal to do so.
 - 2) The people obeyed and came together.
 - 3) Everything was settled according to the law of God, and Israel was purified and cleansed. They all resolved to then do what Ezra commanded. They did put away their wives, even those by whom they had some children. This was a great hardship on the women and children. Thought by Jewish laws as such

marriages were null and void, yet as the women they had taken did not know these laws, their case was deplorable. However, we may take it for granted that each of them received a portion according to the circumstances of their husbands, and that they and their children were not turned away desolate, but had such a provision as their necessities required.

- 4) The list of those who had taken foreign wives (Ezra 10:18-44): 1) All classes of Jewish society were guilty; 2) Sin corrupted the influence of the priests; and 3) Repentance was painful (Ezra 10:44). Real repentance touches the soul with agony or it is worthless.