

Gleanings of Grace

Ezra 7

Lesson 16

The book of Ezra relates the story of two returns to Jerusalem after the seventy years of Babylonian captivity. The first return was led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (chapters 1-6). The second return was led by Ezra for the purpose of rebuilding the spiritual condition of the people (chapters 7-10). Sandwiched between these two accounts is a gap of nearly six decades and the reign of at least five kings.

OBSERVATION: Ezra 7

1. Read Ezra 7 using the Observation Worksheet (the last page of this homework). After reading through the chapter, what would you say to someone if they asked you what it is about?
2. Key words help us to better understand the verses. We have listed below key words. Mark each one in a distinctive way (either with a symbol, highlighting, or some form of boxing, circling, or underlining). Mark each of the key words each time they are used in the text. Remember to mark any personal pronouns that refer to the *LORD* and each of the people marked as key words.
Key Words: *LORD/God, Ezra, and King Artaxerxes*
3. The term of conclusion *therefore* is in verse 17. Mark the word; record the conclusion and what it was based upon.
4. Scan the chapter and list three indications of King Artaxerxes' generosity.

Background:

1. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon no longer reigned over much of the world. He had been defeated by King Cyrus of Persia. What does Ezra 1:2 declare that he *proclaimed*?

- a. This verse refers to a prophecy of Jeremiah. What was it? Jeremiah 29:10

- b. The prophet, Isaiah, also made a prophecy about Cyrus. What did he declare in Isaiah 44:28?
 - 1.) Isaiah made this prophecy approximately 150 years before Cyrus took the throne. What does this say to you about God's word?

2. Ezra 3:1 describes the attitude of the people as they began to rebuild the temple. What does it say?
 - a. If you were told that *the people gathered together as one man*, what attitudes or actions might you be looking for?

3. Ezra 4:4,5 describes some of the opposition from the adversaries when they heard that the temple of *the LORD God* was being rebuilt. What does verse 4 reveal they tried to do?
 - a. In what ways might we be *discouraged/frustrated* when we are doing God's work?

4. In an attempt to stop the work, a letter was sent to King Artaxerxes regarding the Jews. After researching Israel's history, what did he discover about them? verses 19, 20
 - a. Of course, God was fully aware of Israel's history. Yet, His plan for them remained the same. How does this personally speak to you?

5. As a result of his research, King Artaxerxes issued a command to *cease* the rebuilding of Jerusalem until he gave the command that it may be restarted (Ezra 4:21). A letter was then written to King Darius, referring to the decree made by King Cyrus. King Darius, rather than decide upon the character of the people, decided on the basis of the decree made by Cyrus. Using Ezra 6:11,12, record the strength of his decree.
 - a. Darius referred to the temple as the *house of God* seven times in his letter. Why do you think an understanding of this might provoke him to allow the rebuilding?

Read Ezra 7:1-9

1. The first exile to Jerusalem was because God moved upon the heart of a king. Sixty years after the completion of the temple, God moved upon the heart of a priest. Ezra's ancestry went all the way back to Aaron, the first high (*chief*) priest. How does verse 6 describe him?
 - a. The role of the scribe during the time of the Babylonian exile was to be an expert in God's written word. They were to copy it, preserve it, and teach it. Ezra was an *expert*. He faithfully and accurately performed his responsibility as a scribe. Consider the importance of accurately copying God's word. There must have been a great temptation to add thoughts or self-interpret. Why does it continue to be important to accurately present God's word?

2. Using Ezra 7:7, list the people who returned with Ezra. Note: The *Nethinim* were foreigners who did menial tasks in the temple.
 - a. Ezra's responsibility was to rebuild the spiritual life of the people. Why might these people that you listed be helpful?
 - 1.) What are your thoughts as you consider the importance of different roles in the body of Christ?
 - a.) Scan 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and share your thoughts.

3. Record the last phrase of Ezra 7:9.
 - a. The same phrase occurs in verse 6. What do you think it means?

Read Ezra 7:10

1. This verse provides a reason as to why *the good hand of his God was upon him*. What was it?

2. Observe the contrast of 2 Chronicles 12:14 and 19:3. What do you see?
 - a. Describe a heart that is *prepared to seek the Law of the LORD*?

3. Notice that Ezra sought the LORD with a purpose. What was it?

4. Meditate on the following verses as you thoughtfully record them:

Matthew 7:24

John 13:17

a. What is *wise* about *doing* God's word?

b. Consider a time when you were tempted to ignore God's word, but did not. In what way(s) were you *blessed*?

3. Using Ezra 7:10, list the two things Ezra purposed to do.

a. After preparing his heart, purposing to do, Ezra also purposed to *teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*. Why are the first two crucial if we are to be *skilled* at what we do in God's eyes?

4. Before moving on to the next verses of Ezra, pause to ponder the words of this verse. What lesson might be in it for you personally?

Read Ezra 7:11-26

1. This section of Ezra 7 discloses King Artaxerxes' letter of permission to Ezra. Scan verses 14-20 and list the permissions/instructions which he gave to Ezra and the people of Israel who *volunteered to go up with him*.

a. What are your thoughts as you review his generosity?

2. This letter was not only a letter of permission directed toward Ezra and the people of Israel. According to verse 21, who else was this letter intended for?
 - a. What were King Artaxerxes' instructions of the *treasurers*?
 - 1.) Notice the phrase, *let it be done diligently*. Define the word *diligently* as it may apply to the king's instructions.
 - 2.) Record the words of Psalm 119:4.
3. Write the phrase which begins Ezra 7:23.
 - a. How do you think they would know what *the God of heaven commanded*?
 - b. Notice the king's concern in these verses. Why do you think their disobedience to obeying God's word would reflect upon his *realm*?
4. King Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to *set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people...* What was the criteria for these men?
 - a. Although the instructions in Malachi 2:7 were specifically for the priests, we can assume God's expectations for the *magistrates* and *judges* are the same. What does Malachi 2:7 state?
 - 1.) Why do you think all Christians should be held to these expectations?

Read Ezra 7:27,28

1. As you read these two verses, describe Ezra's response to the king's letter.
 - a. What did God do?
 - 1.) Ponder the words of Proverbs 21:1. What are your thoughts?
 - a.) How are you encouraged when you consider some of the *kings* who govern the nations today?

2. Again we see the phrase indicating that *the hand of the LORD my God was upon Ezra* (Ezra 7:28). Consider the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 4:17,18. How did he recognize the *Lord's hand upon him*?
 - a. As believers, in what ways is the *LORD's hand upon us*?
Challenge: Use Scripture to support your answer.

REVIEW: Ezra 7

1. What did you learn from this chapter about the importance of:

Preparing your heart to seek the LORD

Purposing to do the Law of the LORD

Diligently teaching the statutes of the LORD

Blessing God for what He has done

2. In what ways were you challenged by this chapter in Ezra?

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
- Psalm 19:7*

Observation Worksheet

Ezra 7

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 Zerahiah, 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. ⁷ Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim 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. 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. 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. 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? 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. 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.