

Ezra 7:1 ¶ 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,
Ezra 7:2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,
Ezra 7:3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,
Ezra 7:4 The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,
Ezra 7:5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:

It's at this point that Ezra becomes part of the narrative; he served under King Artaxerxes of Persia. The opening verses establish that he is a descendant of Aaron through his son Eleazar.

Commentators note that some 55-60 years pass between chapters 6 and 7, during which time the events recorded in Esther took place.

Ezra 7:6 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.

Ezra 7:7 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.

Ezra 7:8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which *was* in the seventh year of the king.

Ezra 7:9 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.

Ezra 7:10 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.

Ezra was a skillful scribe or teacher of God's law as recorded by Moses. Guzik clarifies: "To us a scribe sounds like a glorified secretary, someone who simply writes. That is not the idea of this description of Ezra. For the Jewish culture of that day, a skilled scribe was an *expert* in the Law of Moses, someone who was like a highly trained lawyer in the word of God."

Ezra asked the king for permission to go to Israel and see how the reconstruction was going. God had softened the king's heart to grant Ezra's request. Others accompanied him on his journey to Jerusalem, including priests, Levites, singers, porters and Nethinims (temple servants). His journey is dated to the 7th year of the reign of Artaxerxes. He left Babylon on the 1st day of the 1st month and arrived in Jerusalem on the 1st day of the 5th month (July / August).

I liked the NIV for verse 10: "*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*"

Ironside made a pointed application: "One reason there is so little power with much of the preaching and teaching of the day is a lack of consistently doing the truth ere proclaiming it. Men preach the Lord's near coming, who give no evidence that the "blessed hope" has moulded their ways. Men teach the truth of

the mystery of the one body, who yet, for filthy lucre's sake, or because of other circumstances, abide in what practically denies it. Men proclaim the heavenly calling who have never learned to walk on earth as strangers and pilgrims. Is it any wonder their words are without power and their ministry but as clouds without water? The path of blessing is doing-then teaching. It was thus with the true Servant. Luke writes 'of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach' (Acts 1:1). Woe be to any man, however able and gifted, who ventures to neglect the first while carrying on the second. Ezra was a pattern man in this respect. He undertook to do what he found written; then "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Ezra 7:11 ¶ 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.

Ezra 7:12 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.

Ezra 7:13 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.

Ezra 7:14 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;

Ezra 7:15 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,

Ezra 7:16 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:

Ezra 7:17 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.

Ezra was given a letter from King Artaxerxes authorizing the trip and making provision for beautifying the temple and making the required offerings. He decreed that any of the people, priests and Levites in his realm that wanted to go with Ezra could do so. He specified that Ezra was acting on behalf of the king and his advisors to find out whether the people were acting in obedience to the law of God, a copy of which Ezra took with him. He also designated that Ezra take from the king and his counselors a gift of silver and gold for the God of Israel that dwells in Jerusalem. He was also take the silver and gold freely offered for support of the temple by friends and family remaining in Babylon. He was to use some of the money to make offerings to "your God" upon arriving in Jerusalem.

Ezra 7:18 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.

Ezra 7:19 The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, *those* deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem.

Ezra 7:20 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.

The king authorized Ezra to use the rest of the money as he saw fit in accordance with the will of "your God." The king evidently also sent a gift of items to be used in the service of the house of "thy God" in Jerusalem. He also authorized Ezra to take whatever else was needed from the king's treasury to facilitate service at the house of "thy God."

Ezra 7:21 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,

Ezra 7:22 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*.

Ezra 7:23 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?

Ezra 7:24 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.

The king then made a decree to all the treasurers west of the Euphrates to give Ezra whatever he required of them up to the sum of 100 talents of silver, 100 measures of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil and salt (no limit). Everything was to be done in accordance with the command of the "God of heaven" because he did not want to incur God's wrath against the kingdom or his family. The king also decreed that the priests, Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims and any other ministers of the house of God be exempt from paying any toll, tribute or custom.

According to the NIV Commentary:

- 100 talents = 3.75 tons of silver
- 100 measures (cors) = 650 bushels of wheat
- 100 baths = 600 gallons each of wine and oil

Ezra 7:25 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.

Ezra 7:26 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.

The king then authorized Ezra to appoint magistrates and judges from those who know the laws of God and commanded that he teach those laws to those that did not know them. The king decreed that any person who would not follow the law of God or the king was to be judged and sentenced speedily (as required by law

is implied)—either death, banishment, confiscation of goods or imprisonment.

I truly think this is one of main reasons that our prisons are so full in America today. The court system moves at a snail's pace. The consequences of sin are not sufficient to deterrence. It often seems that the government is more concerned with the welfare of the guilty than of their victims. Worst of all—many that are a part of the judicial system are corrupt and self-serving, and they certainly don't care about God's law. There is a verse in Ecclesiastes that applies.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

Ezra 7:27 ¶ 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:

Ezra 7:28 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.

Ezra closes this chapter praising "the LORD God of our fathers" for putting it in the king's heart to beautify the temple and for extending mercy to him before the king and his counselors. Ezra credits God with giving him the courage to gather some of the leaders of Israel to go with him.

It struck me how many times the king made reference to God as Ezra's God. That is something I pray that people will note as obvious about me and my family—that we serve the one true God in the name of His Son Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.