

The Book of Ezra

Bro. Frank Shallieu

(1996 Study)

The following notes on the Book of Ezra were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1996. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by “**Comment**” or “**Q**” (an abbreviation for “**Question**”) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

THE BOOK OF EZRA

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1996)

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

Ezra 1:2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

The prophecy about Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1,13 comes to mind: "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.... I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts." This prophecy, which even called Cyrus by name, preceded his birth by several centuries. "Not for price nor reward" is significant, for some countries allow captives to return to their homelands but only if they leave their temporal goods behind. Thus the cost of the return is substantial, with the captives taking out of the country only those goods they can carry; all else is confiscated, becoming the property of the state.

The verses in Isaiah, just quoted, correspond to the last two verses of the Second Book of Chronicles. When books were printed in the old days, instead of printers using page numbers, a succeeding page repeated the last word of the preceding page (unless the word was "the" or "and") so that the reader would be assured of the right sequence. 2 Chronicles 36:22,23 reads, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

What was "the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah"? It was Jeremiah 25:12,13 and 29:10. "And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations.... For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."

When did Jeremiah say, "For thus saith the LORD, ... after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, ... causing you to return to this place"? Jeremiah 25:1 provides the answer: "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the *fourth year of Jehoiakim* the son of Josiah king of Judah." In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah prophesied of a *coming* captivity in the land of Babylon that would last for 70 years, but historians have almost universally erred by starting the 70 years when Jeremiah uttered his prophecy in that fourth year. Consequently, the captivity and the return from Babylon are off in the chronology

by 19 years, yet 2 Chronicles 36:21 clearly states, “To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she [the land] lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.” How could the 70 years begin in the third or fourth year of Jehoiakim if, *during the captivity for 70 years, the land would be desolate?* Jeremiah was not saying that the land would be desolate from the time he spoke but that *later*, when the people would be taken into captivity and the land would be made desolate, it would *remain desolate for 70 years*. In short, the 70 years began to count in 606 BC, and not when Jeremiah uttered the prophecy in the fourth year of Jehoiakim.

“The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.” How did the Lord do this? In Isaiah 44:28, God predicted, prior to the birth of Cyrus, that he would be a conqueror of nations and that he would issue a decree allowing the Jews to return to Israel. Isaiah 45:1,13 contains the additional prophecy that when Cyrus marched against Jerusalem, God would providentially open the gates so that he could enter and succeed. Who probably called the attention of Cyrus to this prophecy? It was Daniel, for he said in Daniel 9:2, “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” If the wise Daniel had to be refreshed on this prophecy of Jeremiah, what about the other Jews? Daniel providentially realized that the 70 years were up, and he wanted to pray in harmony with the prophecy of Jeremiah.

“He [Cyrus] made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing.” Cyrus not only made the proclamation, but he wrote it out. Therefore, when he said, “The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth,” this statement was in harmony with other prophecies where God had said, “I have given you all these kingdoms. I have opened the gates before you.”

God “hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.” While other nations that were in captivity at the time of the first year of Cyrus were allowed to return to their homelands through a simple proclamation, that which pertained to Judah was put in writing. For thousands of years, it was the custom for a new king to grant amnesty to prisoners, especially political prisoners. But it was the *double* affirmation for the Israelites of the proclamation, plus the written decree mentioning the Lord God and Judah, that was outstanding.

In addition to Cyrus, the Lord used Nebuchadnezzar, who burned people alive in a furnace other than the three Hebrews (Daniel 3). And there was a practice in those days of skinning alive the enemy commander or governor as a form of death. This practice was done to intimidate the leaders of the next country to be attacked. Those leaders would then weigh very seriously whether or not their armies could defeat the soon-to-invade enemy army. Any doubts would put great fear in the hearts of the leaders. Soldiers need a bold, confident leader and the skinning method tended to undermine and destroy such boldness. By weakening the commander, the entire army was weakened.

Notice what is missing in verse 2. In Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1,13, God commanded Cyrus to build not only the Temple but also Jerusalem. However, when Cyrus issued the decree, he modified the command by omitting the rebuilding of Jerusalem. He felt that if the Israelites built the walls of the city, they would, in time, want to secede from his control. In fact, Cyrus even put a limit on the size of the Temple. When the old-timers who remembered the glory and beauty of Solomon’s Temple saw the much smaller size of Zerubbabel’s Temple, they wept.

Ezra 1:3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the

God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Notice how the decree was worded. In effect, it proclaimed liberty to the Jewish captives in Babylon and allowed a *freewill* return to the homeland. To remain in Babylon was a temptation because some of the Jews had risen to positions of affluence. As a result, the majority did not have the zeal to leave temporal goods and prosperity for an arduous journey back to an unwalled city.

The first part of the Book of Ezra is history. Ezra wrote only the last three or four chapters. The earlier chapters were collated from information handed to him. Incidentally, because the counts were made in different months, there were two enumerations of the number of Jews who returned to Israel. Both counts were around 50,000 people.

Notice the insertion Cyrus made: “(he is the God).” How interesting! A few years later he probably forgot, but at this time, he was filled with a feeling of triumph and joy. King Nebuchadnezzar voiced similar sentiments after his seven years of insanity: “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed *the most High*, and I praised and honoured *him that liveth for ever*, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation... Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the *King of heaven*, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Dan. 4:34,37).

Comment: The question “Who is there among you of *all his people?*” shows that some captives returned to Israel from all 12 tribes.

Reply: Yes, that is true, even though a greater proportion returned from Benjamin and Judah.

Ezra 1:4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Even the Jews who remained in Babylon were honored. Their neighbors were to give a freewill offering of silver, gold, goods, or beasts. It was unusual for a conquering nation to allow money of the realm to be removed, but this, too, was part of Cyrus’s decree. In addition, there was to be a freewill offering for the Temple.

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

Subsequently a number of these individuals will be mentioned by name, some of whom figured prominently in history.

Ezra 1:6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Wagons, donkeys, swords, etc., would have been given.

Ezra 1:7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

Ezra 1:8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Cyrus was moved not only to issue the proclamation but also to remove from the treasury house the Temple vessels that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar 70 years earlier. The vessels were given into the custody of the Israelites who would be returning to Jerusalem.

Sheshbazzar is another name for Zerubbabel. Called “the prince of Judah,” Zerubbabel was the governor—and hence was recognized as the most important civil leader. Joshua was the high priest.

The vessels were counted (“numbered”) to make sure that all of them were being returned. The inventory list is in verses 9-11. Another reason the vessels were counted was realized by Bro. Roy Mitchell, who made a velvet chart to demonstrate these numbers in a spiritual sense.

Ezra 1:9 And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

Ezra 1:10 Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand.

Ezra 1:11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

Presumably within two or three years after Cyrus issued the decree, the Israelites returned to Jerusalem. The total number of vessels is given as 5,400. However, when the *listed* vessels are added up, the total comes to 2,499. The importance of 2,499 in regard to the 50-year Jubilee cycles is given in the *Second Volume*. In his calculations, the Pastor had $51 \times 49 = 2,499$.

Ezra 2:1 Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city;

Ezra 2:2 Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:

Ezra 2:3 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two.

Ezra 2:4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two.

Ezra 2:5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five.

Ezra 2:6 The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve.

Ezra 2:7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

Ezra 2:8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five.

Ezra 2:9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore.

Ezra 2:10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two.

- Ezra 2:11** The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three.
- Ezra 2:12** The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two.
- Ezra 2:13** The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six.
- Ezra 2:14** The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six.
- Ezra 2:15** The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four.
- Ezra 2:16** The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight.
- Ezra 2:17** The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three.
- Ezra 2:18** The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve.
- Ezra 2:19** The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three.
- Ezra 2:20** The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.
- Ezra 2:21** The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three.
- Ezra 2:22** The men of Netophah, fifty and six.
- Ezra 2:23** The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight.
- Ezra 2:24** The children of Azmaveth, forty and two.
- Ezra 2:25** The children of Kirjath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three.
- Ezra 2:26** The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one.
- Ezra 2:27** The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two.
- Ezra 2:28** The men of Beth-el and Ai, two hundred twenty and three.
- Ezra 2:29** The children of Nebo, fifty and two.
- Ezra 2:30** The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six.
- Ezra 2:31** The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.
- Ezra 2:32** The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.
- Ezra 2:33** The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five.
- Ezra 2:34** The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five.
- Ezra 2:35** The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.
- Ezra 2:36** The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy

and three.

Ezra 2:37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.

Ezra 2:38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.

Ezra 2:39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

Ezra 2:40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four.

Ezra 2:41 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight.

Ezra 2:42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all an hundred thirty and nine.

Ezra 2:43 The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth,

Ezra 2:44 The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon,

Ezra 2:45 The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub,

Ezra 2:46 The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmal, the children of Hanan,

Ezra 2:47 The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah,

Ezra 2:48 The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam,

Ezra 2:49 The children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai,

Ezra 2:50 The children of Asnah, the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim,

Ezra 2:51 The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur,

Ezra 2:52 The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha,

Ezra 2:53 The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah,

Ezra 2:54 The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

Ezra 2:55 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda,

Ezra 2:56 The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel,

Ezra 2:57 The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami.

Ezra 2:58 All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.

Ezra 2:59 And these were they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not show their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel:

Ezra 2:60 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two.

Ezra 2:61 And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name:

Ezra 2:62 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.

Joshua, the high priest, is mentioned in the listing (verse 2); as here, his name is sometimes spelled Jeshua. The Nehemiah who is listed in the same verse is not the Nehemiah we know. The listing is simply a record for posterity to prove that the return to Israel was a reality. The number of each family is mentioned but not the individuals.

Comment: At this point, the Israelites still had a genealogy record.

Reply: They still had lineage tables and family records, but a *public* register did not exist at this time. And they did not have all of the Scriptures.

Ezra 2:63 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

Tirshatha means "governor" (KJV margin).

Comment: It is interesting that the Urim and the Thummim had to be used to settle a matter.

Reply: Joshua is the priest who eventually got the Urim and the Thummim, a miraculous manifestation in the jewels of the high priest's breastplate that provided responses to questions.

One problem for the Israelites was that they did not have the Word of God at this juncture. They had only pieces of Scripture, although some of the people had very good memories. Therefore, the Word of God had to be miraculously restored years later, and Ezra got possession of it. In the Sinai wilderness, the Law in its fullness, with all the details, was kept on the side of the Ark of the Covenant, and the Ten Commandments were put in the Ark.

As a side note, Bros. Morton and John Edgar drew interesting types about what happened from here on.

Ezra 2:64 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

This tally became important when the Jews got to Israel for making sure they had all arrived and also for the record's sake.

Ezra 2:65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.

Ezra 2:66 Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five;

Ezra 2:67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

That was quite a booty to take back to Jerusalem, especially when we consider that the Jews went into captivity with just the clothing on their backs. Their animals included horses, mules, camels, and asses.

Some critics have faulted the mathematics in the total of those who returned to Jerusalem, but the numbers can be harmonized. When the second chapter of Ezra is compared with the counting in Nehemiah, the two accounts differ. However, if the individual names are added together, being careful not to count duplicate names twice, the two totals will agree. In addition to the 42,360 Jews (verse 64), there were 7,337 servants and maids. While the Ezra and Nehemiah accounts agree as far as painstakingly adding the details ourselves, they do not agree with the sum totals in the books. To reconcile these differences, we need to refer to a historical book not in the sacred canon but somewhat similar to the Book of Chronicles; it is called the Book of Esdras. The First Book of Esdras lists details that are not in either Ezra or Nehemiah. If the numbers in all three books are added together, the total agrees with the sum total here in the second chapter of Ezra.

Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar) was the governor at the time Cyrus issued the decree allowing Jews to return to build the Temple. The next governor was Ezra followed by Nehemiah. Even though we are reading the Book of Ezra, so far Ezra himself was not on the scene. The book is merely bringing us up to date regarding the experience of the Jews in Babylon until the time that Ezra was empowered or greatly favored by the king of Persia.

Nehemiah became governor of Judea in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, when the king commanded that the wall of Jerusalem could be rebuilt. The date of this decree is an important link in Bible chronology, but there was a big gap in time between the first year of Cyrus and the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and another Persian king reigned in between these two. Thus the Nehemiah of verse 2 cannot be the later Nehemiah. Incidentally, *Artaxerxes* is a title like Caesar, Pharaoh, Benhaddad, and Hazael.

Q: There are marginal references in the King James Version to “I Es.” in chapters 1 and 2 of Ezra. Would this be 1 Esdras?

A: Yes. The Book of Maccabees is another book not included in the sacred canon. However, as a historical record, it has value and is generally accurate. In contrast, since the books of Kings and Chronicles are included in Scripture, they can be completely relied upon for accuracy; the few discrepancies that occur can be harmonized by another detail in the Word of God itself, either in the context or elsewhere in Scripture.

Comment: It is interesting that someone took the time to count all of the animals, especially when the count got up in the thousands.

Reply: It is also interesting that 200 singing men and women were among those returning.

Before the Jews left Babylon, or Persia at this time, for the journey back to Israel of almost four months, they would have rallied at a central point, just as the Israelites journeyed to the city of Rameses the night of the Passover. At Rameses Moses assumed the leadership. Now, at

whatever the central point was in the Persian Empire, Zerubbabel assumed the leadership.

Ezra 2:68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

Ezra 2:69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

When the Israelites left for the Exodus, they spoiled or impoverished Egypt because the Egyptian people, being afraid they would all die, showered the Israelites with gifts. Thus the Israelites left Egypt in a wealthy condition but then spent the next 40 years in the desert.

Ezra 2:70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

When the Jews returned to the Holy Land, they did not all coalesce in Jerusalem, for some went to their former cities. However, the great majority lived close to Jerusalem because they were mostly from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The people realized that the decree to return to their homeland was of Divine Providence. Therefore, religious matters became very important to them, and they did not return to pluralistic gods after the long Babylonian captivity. The people had learned that lesson, and now they felt that the Lord's blessing was upon them. Nevertheless, because building their own houses became a priority, they had to get certain lessons to direct them to build the Temple first.

Q: The animals listed for the return were all unclean. Were clean animals also taken?

A: Yes. Lambs, for example, were more common, whereas camels were expensive because they were beasts of burden, traveled long distances without water, and could be milked.

Q: Who were the Nethinims? They were numbered with the children of Solomon's servants (verse 58).

A: Five centuries earlier the Nethinims were not put to death but were incorporated into the citizenry of Israel because of unusual circumstances, but they had to be hewers of wood and bearers of water. In other words, they did more of the hard labor usually in connection with building the Temple and cities.

Comment: Young's *Analytical Concordance* says that the word means "dedicated" and that the Nethinims were "a class of persons employed as servants or assistants to the Levites; probably the Gibeonites and others reduced to servitude."

Ezra 3:1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

Ezra 3:2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

"The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua ... and ... the priests, and Zerubbabel ... and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon." Although this gathering took place before Ezra was on the scene and before the Israelites had the Word of God, many of the people could remember

portions of Scripture, including various offerings such as the daily burnt offerings of a lamb morning and evening, the Passover lamb, and the offerings on the Day of Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. Thus these sacrifices were performed accurately. Where the people fell short, however, was on the moral law, that is, on their conduct. When Ezra, a very unusual character, came on the scene, he took action.

Ezra 3:3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

The altar was even more important than the Temple in the sense that an altar was needed for burnt offerings. The altar was built on a platform or court.

Not even the foundation of the Temple had been built yet. The people feared that if they started with the Temple proper, the work would be interrupted, as happened later. It was fitting that they built the altar to give praise and thanksgiving to God for their release from Babylon and their safe arrival back in Israel.

Comment: Noah acted similarly when he left the Ark and built an altar.

Reply: Also, Abraham built an altar when he got into the Promised Land. The individuals were following an ancient custom.

Comment: The counterpart for these burnt offerings would be when the Christian immediately bows down in prayer to thank the Lord for a deliverance.

Q: Did the Jews now offer burnt offerings in the same area where Abraham had offered Isaac?

A: Yes.

Ezra 3:4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

“They ... offered the daily burnt offerings by number”; that is, they offered the daily burnt offerings as prescribed by the Law. The kind of burnt offering depended upon a person’s income—a handful of flour, a dove, a lamb, etc. These offerings showed thanksgiving in a practical way.

“They kept also the feast of tabernacles.” Notice what is missing: an observance of the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month. One reason for this omission was the lack of a Temple, which meant they could not take the blood into the Most Holy and sprinkle it on the Ark of the Covenant. The Feast of Tabernacles was the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and it lasted a week or two depending on whether it was a special occasion.

Ezra 3:5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

“And afterward offered the continual burnt offering.” From the Feast of Tabernacles onward, a lamb was offered morning and evening (afternoon). In other words, the Israelites followed the ceremonies of the Law as best they could under the peculiar circumstances of having an altar but not a Temple.

The term “new moons” meant that on the first day of each lunar month, there was a particular offering. Not only were the “set feasts” observed, starting with the Feast of Tabernacles, and the daily and new moon offerings, but also “freewill” offerings, that is, offerings subsequent to the Day of Atonement. In other words, as the people wanted to show their appreciation to the Lord during the rest of the year, they could bring an offering.

Ezra 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

From the first day of the seventh month onward, the people offered what they could.

Ezra 3:7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

When Cyrus issued the decree for Jews to return to their homeland, he only allowed them to build the Temple, but that Temple required beams, masonry, shrubbery, etc. Cyrus made provision for these needs in his decree by ordering Jews who remained in Babylon to give a “freewill” offering for the Temple. Cyrus also gave the Jews permission to get materials from nearby cities. All the while the Jews had a subconscious fear of the people in the surrounding nations (Ezra 3:3). Just as under Solomon, cedar trees were brought from Lebanon to the seaport, or harbor, of Joppa.

Ezra 3:8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

Ezra 3:9 Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

Ezra 3:10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

Ezra 3:11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

Ezra 2:69 states that 100 priests’ garments were freewill offerings that the Jews took out of Babylon. No doubt in the future, deeper spiritual lessons will clarify on some of these details, but here the number 100 is certainly a symbol of perfection.

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

Ezra 3:13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

“But many ... who were ancient men, that had seen the first house ... wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy.” The people who heard the spontaneous outbursts of both mourning and joy could not distinguish the one from the other. The “ancient men” wept when they saw the foundation platform for Zerubbabel’s Temple, which had not been built yet, for they realized it was not as large as Solomon’s Temple. Cyrus had specified the size of this new Temple because he did not want it to be as large, lest it become a fortress.

Comment: Haggai 2:3 reads, “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”

Reply: Those words in Haggai were uttered later when the Temple was more complete.

Ezra 4:1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel;

Ezra 4:2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

The “adversaries” were similar in principle to the Samaritans. With today’s philosophy, the answer would have been, “Yes, surely you can help.” However, certain principles will become apparent that teach to the contrary.

Comment: The adversaries are a type of nominal Christians who have not made a full consecration.

Reply: The application or lesson for us today is not to let the unconsecrated participate in public worship, including praying, playing the piano, singing in the choir, and voting in a business meeting. This subject is touchy, for feelings get hurt. However, children can sing, for they are covered under their parents’ consecration until they reach the age of reason. Some of these decisions are difficult to make, but once principle is violated by giving in, it becomes twice as hard to take a firm stand. The question will be asked, “Why are you objecting now at this late date?” The matter should be nipped in the bud.

Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

Zerubbabel and Joshua took a stand, seeing the inappropriateness of accepting help from non-Israelites. The Israelites who lived in the suburbs were more vulnerable to attacks from these adversaries.

Ezra 4:5 And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Ezra 4:6 And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Three Persian kings are mentioned: Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus. In other words, the harassment and frustration persisted through the reigns of three different kings. Cyrus reigned 7 or 9 years after 536 BC depending on the reckoning.

Ezra 4:7 And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

Ezra 4:8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:

Ezra 4:9 Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites,

Ezra 4:10 And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time.

These enemies not only hindered the endeavor to build the Temple but even wrote letters to the rulership of other peoples, trying to incite an armed conspiracy and invasion.

Ezra 4:11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.

Ezra 4:12 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.

Ezra 4:13 Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.

What a clever strategy! The Jews were merely building the walls of the Temple complex, not the walls of the city, but the enemies gave the effort a wrong twist. The last thing the Persian king wanted was an armed insurrection against his authority. Notice the adjectives “rebellious” and “bad.” The enemies were saying that the Jews had a reputation of being rebellious and bad and that their rebellion would affect the king’s revenues.

Ezra 4:14 Now because we have maintenance from the king’s palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king’s dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

Ezra 4:15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.

Again, how clever! It is like the scribes and the Pharisees, who hated the Roman rulership, saying, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15).

Ezra 4:16 We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

Ezra 4:17 Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the

scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time.

Ezra 4:18 The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.

Ezra 4:19 And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

Ezra 4:20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.

Ezra 4:21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me.

Ezra 4:22 Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

Ezra 4:23 Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.

Ezra 4:24 Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

“Artaxerxes” is a general title like Caesar and Pharaoh. After Cyrus died and up until the second year of Darius, the work on the Temple ceased. Israel's enemies were successful in writing the letter and accusing the Jews of being rebellious, and they even told the king where to look so that the Jews would appear to be insurrectionists. But later, when the king's hand was guided in the right direction, the record was quite different, and the same type of threat boomeranged against Israel's enemies.

Q: The order of kings is confusing. In Ezra 4:5-7 the order was Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes. The letter was written in the reign of Artaxerxes, which sounds like the fourth king, but if the building ceased unto the second year of Darius, where was Darius in the succession—after Cyrus or after Artaxerxes? Is there another Darius?

A: We will consider this question in another lesson.

We should keep in mind that Ezra had not even appeared on the scene yet. The earlier chapters of the Book of Ezra are introductory.

Ezra 5:1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.

The mention of the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah places their ministries at the time of Ezra.

Ezra 5:2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

Zerubbabel and Joshua were encouraged by the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah to build the Temple. Up until this time, only the foundation, or Temple platform, and the altar had been completed.

Comment: Shealtiel and Zerubbabel are in Jesus' lineage, as listed in Matthew 1:12.

Ezra 5:3 At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

The phrase "on this side the river" refers to the Euphrates River. Usually the reference would be to the Jordan River, but the context here is the distance between far-off Persia and Judea. The land ultimately promised to Abraham if he was obedient in leaving Ur of the Chaldees included all of Lebanon up to the river Euphrates. Therefore, when Abraham crossed the Euphrates, he was in the Lebanon part of the Promised Land, "on this side the river." From there he went down to Canaan proper.

Now the Israelites were again having problems. The earlier problem was that the neighboring people around Jerusalem wanted to assist in building the Temple. These people had been transported to replace the Israelites who were evacuated from the northern kingdom by the king of Assyria about 150 years before 606 BC and the capture of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:9,10). These people of the land, who were foreigners and not Israelites, said they worshipped the same God and thus wanted to cooperate in building the Temple. However, the Israelites rightly refused their offer. Of course the idea of the Israelites' returning to rebuild their Temple was disturbing to those whose help was refused. Subsequently they decided to write a letter to king Darius of Persia. The Temple itself, the sanctuary complex, had rather formidable walls, so these foreigners in Israel would try to make an issue of the walls.

Ezra 5:4 Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?

Asking for the names of the men was an implied threat, which was carried out. In those days, if someone brought up a criticism to the king and he thought it was valid, the party or parties were usually put to death. Particularly there was an effort to discourage the leaders: Joshua, Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Zechariah.

Ezra 5:5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.

Ezra 5:6 The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king:

Ezra 5:7 They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace.

Ezra 5:8 Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

Ezra 5:9 Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

Ezra 5:10 We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them.

Ezra 5:11 And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up.

Ezra 5:12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.

Ezra 5:13 But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.

Ezra 5:14 And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;

Ezra 5:15 And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.

Ezra 5:16 Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.

Ezra 5:17 Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

Such were the contents of the letter that was forwarded to Darius the king concerning the restoration work on the Temple in Jerusalem. Notice how the letter starts. While the Temple was nothing compared with Solomon's Temple, the adjectives emphasized the fortress-like quality of the Temple, causing the king to think that perhaps Cyrus had gone too far with the decree and the seeds of rebellion were being sewn. But notice, also, how careful Israel's enemies were to word the letter, lest anything be found subsequently as a falsehood. Cyrus did issue a decree, he did give the Israelites gold and silver, and he did return the Temple vessels. It is odd, but despots of old generally vindicated their ruthlessness in the name of justice. Thus the letter was worded very carefully, but Israel's enemies were steering the king along a negative line. They knew what lesson the king would draw from a description of a Temple made of "great stones" with walls and from their report that the work was progressing rapidly. Darius would want to nip the work in the bud. They also curried the king's favor by letting him know what was happening.

Ezra 6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

Ezra 6:2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

Ezra 6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree

concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

Ezra 6:4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:

Ezra 6:5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

Ezra 6:6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

Ezra 6:7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

Ezra 6:8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

Ezra 6:9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:

Ezra 6:10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

Ezra 6:11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

Ezra 6:12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

The enemies of the Israelites thought King Darius would react differently, but they were very careful not to tip his hand. Darius went over the details of the letter and agreed their letter was truthful but saw that they had a negative intent. Consequently, he turned around and told Israel's enemies that they had better cooperate and forward the work on the Temple. "Do not bring any more complaints to me. Do not disturb me with this. In fact, you must cooperate in the building of the Temple."

This situation reminds us of a somewhat typical lesson. The reason the Jews do not build the Third Temple is the fear of a jihad by the Muslim nations, whose inhabitants outnumber them almost 100 to 1. In addition, the Western nations would be opposed and upset. In the Kingdom Age, when the Temple will be rebuilt, many of the nations who are currently opposed will be expected to forward the work speedily.

Comment: Isaiah 60:10 says, "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee."

Reply: Isaiah is mostly written from the standpoint of the Western Gentile nations, who will help to rebuild the walls. However, we are suggesting also that Muslims of the seed of Ishmael and Keturah will be expected to cooperate in the rebuilding in the next age. But of course Ezra is not telling us about the future; the book is simply relating what happened back in Israel's history. Israel's enemies tried to put all kinds of blockages in the way. Later the Book of Ezra will have a review from another standpoint to give us a chronological fix on the stream of time.

Ezra 6:13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

Notice the word "speedily."

Ezra 6:14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

Ezra 6:15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Zerubbabel's Temple was finished during the sixth year of Darius. In other words, the building of the Temple took from the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, who issued the decree, down to the sixth year of King Darius. Time periods are given in other books. Haggai 1:1 states, "In the *second* year of Darius the king, in the *sixth* month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel ... governor of Judah, and to Joshua ... the high priest." Haggai 2:1 mentions the seventh month: "In the *seventh* month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai." The Book of Zechariah mentions several time periods. Zechariah 1:1 reads, "In the *eighth* month, in the *second* year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah." Zechariah 1:7 states, "Upon the four and twentieth day of the *eleventh* month, which is the month Sebat, in the *second* year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah." Zechariah 7:1 tells, "And it came to pass in the *fourth* year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the *ninth* month, even in Chisleu." These various Scriptures give us some idea of the lapse of time.

Ezra 6:16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy,

Ezra 6:17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Ezra 6:18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

The Israelites kept the Feast of Dedication, a date that became important later in Jewish history. There was a dedication of the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, and now Zerubbabel's Temple.

Ezra 6:19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

Ezra 6:20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and

killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

Ezra 6:21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,

Ezra 6:22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

First, the Israelites kept the Feast of Dedication, and now, at the proper time, they kept the Feast of Passover. In the meantime, the house of God was built and dedicated, a priesthood and Levites were instituted, there was a ceremony for purification, and now the Jews kept the Feast of Passover. And they made a sharp distinction to keep their worship and fellowship separate from the people of the land, who previously wanted to cooperate in building the Temple. The principle is the same for the Christian Church. On special holy occasions, the true Christian Church is expected to make a distinction between the consecrated and the unconsecrated. In matters of importance and religious worship, such as the Memorial, there should be no participation by the unconsecrated. Twice now this lesson and principle have been manifested in the Book of Ezra. Those Jews who returned from captivity sensed that the principle of separation was proper. Later, when the Prophet Ezra appeared on the scene, the separation became even more distinct. (Here we are at the end of chapter 6, and we have not even met Ezra yet. All of these earlier chapters are preparatory.)

The Jews kept not only the Feast of Passover but the seven days of unleavened bread that followed. Thus they kept the entire ceremony.

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,

Notice that Ezra 6:14 mentioned three kings: Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. Actually, the history of the kingdom of Persia began with Darius the Mede, who reigned two years; he was followed by Cyrus, who reigned seven years; and then came Cambyses, who is not mentioned here but reigned almost seven years. Therefore, after Cyrus's decree almost 14 years elapsed before Smerdis, a counterfeit party, claimed to be the brother of Cambyses and reigned for seven months. Next was Darius Hystaspes, who was king of Persia for about 36 years. So far in the study of Ezra, we have read only about his second, fourth, and sixth years. Now the Temple was finished, and Ezra is appearing on the scene.

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:

Ezra was in the priesthood through Zadok, a branch of the Aaronic priesthood.

Comment: That means Ezra will officiate in the Third Temple.

Comment: One reason all of this lineage was given is to show that when the Jews returned from the 70-year captivity in Babylon, their genealogy records were still intact.

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.

Suddenly Ezra comes into the picture. How he got favorable recognition from the king at this time is not stated, for he did not return to Israel with Zerubbabel and Joshua. The account does not tell what he requested or how much authority he had, although certain details will come out later. To state the matter mildly, Ezra was a very learned scribe. In fact, he was phenomenal, almost like a second Moses. When Ezra subsequently got the Biblical scrolls, he went through all of them and made needed corrections. His training, therefore, must have been profound, and the spirit of the Lord was 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.

Notice, we are now in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, which was approximately 465 BC, that is, 60 or 70 years after the decree of Cyrus. This was Artaxerxes Longimanus, the Artaxerxes with the long arm or hand. "Artaxerxes" and "Xerxes" were just titles like Caesar; they were expressions of kingship from a Persian background. This was the combined kingdom of Media-Persia, the two arms and breast of silver in the image of Daniel (Dan. 2:31,32). In some places in the Bible, the Median name is used, and in other places, the Persian name is used for the *same* king. Unless the identity is established for duplicate names, the situation becomes confusing.

Comment: This is the same Artaxerxes for whom Nehemiah was the cupbearer.

Reply: The Pastor made a strong point that it was not until the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes (454 BC) that a commandment gave permission to the Jews to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. But now we are only in the seventh year.

Comment: Therefore, in the reading, we are only 13 years from 454 BC; that is, it is 467 BC.

Notice that some priests, Levites, and Nethinims still living in Babylon now returned with Ezra.

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.

The trip from Babylon to Jerusalem took Ezra four months, 120 days, as it were.

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 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 inquire 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 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.

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.

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.

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.

This decree is a reiteration of the decree of Cyrus, the first king of Persia, which succeeded the Median branch of the empire. The decree assured that Ezra and company would return with a lot of goods and even money from the treasury of the kingdom of Persia. Also, an injunction was issued that no tax would be imposed on any who were associated with the ministry of the Temple, including the Nethinims.

It is interesting to realize that Esther was the wife of this Artaxerxes. First, Xerxes married Esther. After Xerxes died, Artaxerxes succeeded him and married Esther. In the Babylonian, Persian, and Egyptian kingdoms, it was considered mandatory that a prince, a king's son, have a relationship through a royal princess. When in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah was given the commandment to rebuild the city walls, the account mentions one beside him. Although her name is not given, the implication is that Esther was providentially the queen beside Artaxerxes. "And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time" (Neh. 2:6).

Notice how much emphasis Artaxerxes' command placed on the God of Israel. The work of His people was not to be disturbed. The work was to go forward speedily with the king's blessing and that of the seven counselors.

Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, and there was no friction between them. Isn't it strange that secular history provides no information about Ezra, yet the book contains so many details and names. In other words, Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the minds of the people in many ways—not merely with lust, money, and power but even with education. Satan is at the head of the department of education. Therefore, secular history is polluted and twisted and interpreted from his standpoint. And of course he does not honor the Jews.

The influence of Daniel on the kingdom of Persia was great. In fact, Daniel influenced Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon; Darius the Mede; and Cyrus. The three Hebrew children belonged to the college of the magi. In addition, as governor, Daniel had civic responsibilities. Thus the influence of Daniel goes down through history.

Ezra 8:1 These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.

Ezra 8:2 Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush.

Ezra 8:3 Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty.

Ezra 8:4 Of the sons of Pahath-moab; Elihoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males.

Ezra 8:5 Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males.

Ezra 8:6 Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males.

Ezra 8:7 And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males.

Ezra 8:8 And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males.

Ezra 8:9 Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males.

Ezra 8:10 And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males.

Ezra 8:11 And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males.

Ezra 8:12 And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males.

Ezra 8:13 And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males.

Ezra 8:14 Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

Verses 1-14 give the genealogy of the males who returned to the homeland with Ezra.

Ezra 8:15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

There may have been a town called Ahava, as well as the river (see verse 21). Why did Ezra abide at the river for three days? He was probably waiting for all to assemble so that they could have a group fast (see verses 21 and 23).

Ezra “viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.” Ezra did not mean that there were no sons of Levi, for the priests were Levites, but that there were no sons of Levi who were fit for service. Obstacles to service could be the corruption of lineage, conduct, or marriage, for example. Whatever the reason(s), Ezra did not see any Levites who were suitable for service.

Ezra 8:16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding.

Ezra sent for these 11 “men of understanding,” who were reliable and responsible, because he intended to give them a commission.

Ezra 8:17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God.

This verse seems to bear out the fact that when Ezra looked for Levites, there were none suitable for the purpose at hand. Therefore, he trusted that these 11 men would seek out

suitable representatives.

Ezra 8:18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;

Ezra 8:19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty;

Verses 18 and 19 tell us that Ezra was able to collect 38 sons of Levi, not a large number. “They brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel [that is, Jacob].” Notice that the lineage between Mahli and Levi is omitted.

Ezra 8:20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

The Revised Standard calls the Nethinims “temple servants.”

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Ezra 8:22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

The character of Ezra will now start to be displayed. At the river Ahava, Ezra proclaimed a fast and prayer with the purpose of asking the Lord’s blessing and protection on the ensuing journey to Israel. This assemblage reminds us of the children of Israel gathering at Rameses on the night of the Passover.

Why did Ezra say in effect, “I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way”? Because he had previously boasted to the king about the *mighty* Jehovah, to now ask the king for help would be demeaning for Ezra. In this embarrassing situation, he sought the Lord for help.

Ezra 8:23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.

In what manner was God entreated of Ezra and the others? We should keep in mind that the account of this experience was written down years after it happened. Therefore, prior to this written record, Ezra and the others prayed and fasted and returned safely to the homeland, as verse 31, also written years later, states: “The hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.”

Comment: The RSV is a good translation of verse 23: “So we fasted and besought our God for this, and *he listened* to our entreaty.” Obviously, the Israelites did not know that God had listened until after they arrived safely in Israel.

Ezra 8:24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them,

Ezra 8:25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering

of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered:

Ezra 8:26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents;

Ezra 8:27 Also twenty basins of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.

The gold, the silver, and the vessels were divided among 12 priests for transport, one priest for each tribe. By this arrangement, it would be harder for potential robbers to get all the booty. Splitting up the valuable items also made sense because of the weight of the metal.

The wealth that Ezra and company took with them to Israel is listed in verses 25-27. “Fine copper, precious as gold” was especially fine-quality brass that looked like gold.

Ezra 8:28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers.

Ezra 8:29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.

When they got to the Holy Land, the valued items would again be weighed and counted. This procedure assured that nothing would be stolen or lost through negligence.

Ezra 8:30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

Ezra 8:31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.

In those days, thieves occupied the high ground so that they could watch for travelers to prey upon, but God’s providence kept them from robbing Ezra and the others en route.

Ezra 8:32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

Ezra 8:33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites;

Ezra 8:34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.

Ezra 8:35 Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD.

Ezra 8:36 And they delivered the king’s commissions unto the king’s lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

When Ezra and company arrived at Jerusalem, the valued items were put in the hands of responsible men in Jerusalem.

Ezra 9:1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

Ezra 9:2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

When Ezra arrived at his destination, he heard this discouraging news with regard to Jews who were already resident in Israel. Obviously, they knew about Ezra's upright character, so the "princes," or "officials" (RSV), informed him about the mixed marriages. Alien seed had been mingled with the holy seed in Israel. Thus the princes discharged their responsibility by passing on this information right away.

Ezra 9:3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

Ezra 9:4 Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Usually one who was in deep anguish shaved his head, but here Ezra was so overcome that he rent his inner and outer garments and then ripped some of the hairs out of his beard. This was such astonishing news that Ezra did not know how to handle the matter. Therefore, he sat silently as stone until the "evening sacrifice" at 3 p.m.

Others saw Ezra in this pitiful condition of humility before God. Those who rallied to him were the ones who "trembled at the words of the God of Israel." Thus there are times when the word "fear" means reverence in the constructive sense—fear lest in any way one has dishonored God. Others who were of the same spirit commiserated with Ezra and participated with him in his anguish.

Comment: This trembling, or fear, would be the principal part of wisdom that is mentioned in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning [principal part] of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Comment: A *Manna* comment says that even the strongest of the brethren need the support of their brethren. Here Ezra was an exceptionally strong, leading personality, but it must have been comforting to him to have others manifest understanding of the issue and support.

Ezra 9:5 And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,

Ezra 9:6 And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

Having humiliated himself in chagrin and shame, Ezra arose and then fell on his knees, spread out his hands to God, and began to pray, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my

face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.”

Comment: Like Daniel, Ezra prayed to God about “*our iniquities [being] increased over our head, and our trespass [being] grown up unto the heavens.*”

Reply: Yes, and this was the official afternoon hour of prayer. Zacharias, John the Baptist’s father, was also praying at this time when the angel Gabriel spoke to him. This hour seemed to be particularly appropriate for special, poignant prayer (Luke 1:8-12).

Ezra 9:7 Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.

Ezra 9:8 And now for a little space grace hath been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.

In his prayer, Ezra was saying that the sin was doubly sorrowful not only because of the mixed-marriage condition but also because the Lord had just so remarkably blessed him on the journey back to the homeland and because the king had previously given him authority to return and had even donated goods (and made others do so as well) to further the work of the Temple. After all the providences leading to his journey to Jerusalem, it was especially grievous to Ezra to learn of the people’s sin. The Lord had shown such great favor, and the people had shown negligence and disobedience.

Ezra 9:9 For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

Ezra 9:10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments,

Ezra was referring to information recorded by Daniel about the wall of the city being built “in troublous times” (Dan. 9:25). It is remarkable that, starting with Cyrus, *three kings* of Persia extended great and unusual favor to the nation of Israel, who were an insignificant people, relatively speaking. God’s favor, the favor of these heathen kings, and the promises in Holy Writ were all wonderful blessings, yet here was a dilemma confronting Ezra. The prophet was troubled and overwhelmed in this experience.

Daniel’s long prayer, in which he assumed responsibility for some of the transgressions of the nation, was a little different. He reminded God of His promise to Jeremiah about favor returning after 70 years, and of course at the end of that time period, Cyrus did issue a decree, as mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah.

Ezra was saying to God, “You have done everything to show us mercy and kindness, but what have we done? Look at our situation. We have failed to show proper appreciation for what has been done for us in influencing the kings of Persia to be so generous.” Those who returned to Israel did not have a large geographic inheritance; in fact, they had only a nail in a sure place, but that nail in the Holy Land was hammered in by the kings of Persia. Anyone who dared to disobey the decree of the king of Persia would receive punishment. For an infraction of the law

of the Medes and the Persians, houses were destroyed, goods were confiscated, etc.

Ezra 9:11 Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

Ezra 9:12 Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

In verse 12, Ezra purposed that from now on, the people should refrain from intermarriage with the heathen and have a clean slate, as it were. But this was not the end of the story.

Ezra 9:13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this;

Ezra 9:14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?

Ezra 9:15 O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

Ezra was saying that in spite of all their guilt, problems, and pollution, God's grace had brought them back to Israel through remarkable providences, and now they were faced with a dilemma as to what to do. Ezra was so ashamed that he said, "We cannot stand before thee because of this [our trespasses]." Although he had said, "We will not intermarry anymore," the problem was still not solved.

Ezra 10:1 Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

Ezra 10:2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

The Lord was starting to answer Ezra's prayer in a manner he had not thought out, for Shechaniah would suggest drastic but proper action.

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

Ezra 10:4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

Comment: What a noble individual Shechaniah was, as well as Ezra!

Reply: Under this circumstance, the Lord moved right-hearted Shechaniah to speak, but Ezra was head and shoulders over the others in other respects. The gist of Shechaniah's words were,

“Do not give up. Wouldn’t a solution be to separate ourselves from all heathen wives and their children?”

Ezra 10:5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

At first, Ezra was puzzled as to how to handle the situation, but now he knew what to do. Ezra mourned particularly because of the transgressions that had occurred prior to his arrival from Persia. He continued to fast and mourn.

Ezra 10:7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

Ezra 10:8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

Ezra 10:9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.

Ezra 10:10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

This was almost the tenth month, so the winter season was starting with “great rain.” It was as though even the heavens were dark against them as they assembled in a downpour and Ezra spoke to them.

Ezra 10:11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

Ezra 10:12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

The congregation agreed that it was necessary to separate themselves from the people of the land and that such drastic action was the only solution. “So must we do,” they said.

Ezra 10:13 But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.

Ezra 10:14 Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

Ezra 10:15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them.

Comment: It is quite unusual that only four individuals opposed the putting away of the foreign wives. The Revised Standard reads, "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah *opposed* this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite *supported* them." There were two ringleaders and two supporters. How remarkable that the people were so like-minded! It would be nice to see the nation of Israel today similarly so like-minded.

Reply: Yes, we would think that present-day Jewry would take lessons from their history. Instead they try to work out their problems with *human* wisdom and imagination.

Ezra 10:16 And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.

Ezra 10:17 And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.

Ezra 10:18 And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah.

Ezra 10:19 And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass.

Ezra 10:20 And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah.

Ezra 10:21 And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah.

Ezra 10:22 And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

Ezra 10:23 Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

Ezra 10:24 Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri.

Ezra 10:25 Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah.

Ezra 10:26 And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah.

Ezra 10:27 And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza.

Ezra 10:28 Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

Ezra 10:29 And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth.

Ezra 10:30 And of the sons of Pahath-moab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh.

Ezra 10:31 And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,

Ezra 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

Ezra 10:33 Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

Ezra 10:34 Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel,

Ezra 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh,

Ezra 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,

Ezra 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau,

Ezra 10:38 And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei,

Ezra 10:39 And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah,

Ezra 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,

Ezra 10:41 Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,

Ezra 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

Ezra 10:43 Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah.

Ezra 10:44 All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

About 100 individuals are named here, but “a little leaven leaveth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). If conditions continued among the returned captives, real Babylonish confusion would prevail in the nation in just a few more generations. In having the separation take place, Ezra was trying to stop the sin as early as possible.

While these wives and their children were put aside, being excommunicated from the nation, we would assume that provision was made for their needs according to the capability of each of the families involved (and perhaps with supplementary help from others). That way there would be as little discouragement, unemployment, and real hardship as possible on those who were put away.

Chapter 10 concludes the Book of Ezra, and we are now roughly in the time period of the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus. This same Artaxerxes was reigning when Nehemiah appeared on the scene 13 years later. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries for a short time. Ezra was a priest, whereas Nehemiah had civil authority as an appointed governor and was cupbearer for the king of Persia. The sequence in Scripture is Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, but this does not mean that each one died before the next came on the scene. Rather, they were somewhat contemporaneous, with overlappings in time. In fact, the Book of Esther backtracks in time. As queen, Esther played a part in prompting the king in a favorable way. Also, she had the Scriptures to show the king that God had been blessing Persia. Through Daniel’s prophecy, she could show that Persia was prophesied to succeed Babylon, the head of gold, as a world empire.

Comment: Presumably the wives were encouraged to return to their former heathen people.

Reply: Yes, and they would have been given a sufficiency of goods and money to take with them. Moreover, a bill of divorcement was probably issued. Certainly the women and children were not cast out with no means of support.

Q: Can we apply this lesson to the Gospel Age as a principle? If, *after consecration*, a brother dissolves a marriage not on Scriptural grounds, remarries, and then, years later, tries to return to the fellowship, shouldn't he put that second wife aside but make provision for her? Putting away the second wife would be proof of repentance.

A: Yes, if there is any hope of recovery, that is the only option open. Of course this principle equally applies to a consecrated sister. Many circumstances can be involved, and sometimes the steps are not retrievable. This type of problem is nasty and complex, and it causes a lot of anguish. Each case must be considered separately. In some cases, the lid to the coffin has too many nails in it, and a person cannot get released. These are real problems in both natural and spiritual Israel.

Q: Wouldn't some of the heathen wives have become proselytes?

A: Probably, but that was not an excuse in this particular situation. These other peoples in the land had said earlier, "We were taken captive and brought here. Now we worship God as you do, so let us help you rebuild the Temple" (Ezra 4:1,2 paraphrase). The Samaritans were such an example at the time of Jesus' First Advent.

Q: That was an interesting question because the Law does provide for proselytes. Is the point here that it would not be a complete conversion but, rather, a mixture that was displeasing to the Lord?

A: The problem is that the returning Jews were coming back for a fresh, clean start. The Temple, the city, and the walls needed to be rebuilt.

Also, the account does not say that the Jews married two wives. The wife who was put away may have been the first wife. A heathen wife could have been acquired either after the Jews returned to Israel or back in Babylon, that is, before leaving to return to the homeland. When the Israelites left Egypt, some Egyptians accompanied them; these Egyptians believed in the Word of God through Moses and were sympathetic at the time of the Exodus, but trouble arose later through some of them.

Someday in the future, these long lineages will become very meaningful in helping Jews to identify where they are in the arrangement.