

**Commentary on Ezra**  
**Bible Study, Notes, Questions, And Comments**

by David E. Pratte

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# Comments on the Book of Ezra

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Notes to the reader: I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). Instead, I have divided the notes by groups of verses, and most groups of verses begin with a numbered study question or questions marked with arrows (>>>). These questions are there to challenge you to study and reach conclusions for yourself before reading our material.

The abbreviation “**b/c/v**” means “book, chapter, and verse.” Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

# Introduction to the Book of Ezra

## Background of the Book

>>> #1. Skim the book of Ezra and summarize its theme.

>>> #2. 2 Chronicles 36:11-21 describes the historical background preceding events in Ezra. Read the verses and summarize what happened.

>>> #3. What prophets prophesied during the time of the book of Ezra (note Ezra 5:1,2)?

### Theme

Ezra and Nehemiah give the historical accounts of the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity. Ezra records the events relating to the first two groups, and discusses especially the rebuilding of the temple.

### Author

Generally believed to be Ezra.

### Summary of book by sections:

Chap. 1-6 — Rebuilding of the temple

Chap. 7-10 — Return of Ezra and purifying the people from foreign wives

### Summary of events by chapter:

Chap. 1 — The decree of Cyrus that the Jews could return (536 BC)

Chap. 2 — Names of those who return

Chap. 3 — Laying of the foundation of the temple

Chap. 4 — The people of the land oppose the work and move the king to stop it

Chap. 5 — Prophets encourage the work to resume; inquiry is made of King Darius

Chap. 6 — Darius decreed to allow the work; the temple completed

Chap. 7 — Ezra decreed to lead another group to return (458 BC)

Chap. 8 — Preparation and journey

Chap. 9,10 — The people put away wives and children of foreign blood (cf. Deut. 7:2,3; Exodus. 34:15,16; Josh. 23:12f; Neh. 13:23-27)

### Contemporary prophets

Haggai and Zechariah lived during this period and helped motivate the people in the work. See Ezra 5:1,2; 6:14,15).

### Historical Setting

Events in Ezra and Nehemiah occurred during the period of the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity. When the Babylonians had captured Jerusalem and overthrown the nation of Judah, they took the Jews into captivity away from Palestine into Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:11-21). But the Medes and Persians later overthrew the Babylonians and began a policy of allowing the Jews to return to Palestine.

There were actually three groups that returned. The first group returned in 536 BC under leadership of Zerubbabel, the second group in 458 BC led by Ezra, and the third group in 445 BC led by Nehemiah.

Consider the history of the period according to the reigns of several great Persian kings (note 4:3-7):

**Cyrus** — He overthrew Babylon in 538 BC. The first group of Jews returned to Palestine under Zerubbabel's leadership in 536 BC.

**Darius the "Great"** — During his lifetime, the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt.

**Xerxes** — This is the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. He eventually chose Esther as his queen, and by her influence the Jews were saved from destruction.

**Artaxerxes** — This man was son of Xerxes and stepson of Esther. He ruled from about 465-423 BC. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were written during his reign.

Ezra's record begins with the first group that returned under Cyrus. But Ezra himself became personally involved in the story during the 7th year of the reign of Araxerxes, when Ezra led a group of Jews back to Palestine (458 BC). In the 21st year of the reign, Nehemiah led another group of Jews to return, and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

### **Recommended Reference Work**

*A Remnant Shall Return*, Bob and Sandra Waldron, 1996

### **Practical Lessons**

In many ways, the time of Ezra and Nehemiah was like our own. God's people had been in apostasy, which led to the Babylonian captivity. Some leaders had begun the work of restoring the people to God's service, but there were still many problems and the people continued to fall into sin. The task of Ezra and Nehemiah was to provide leadership to continue the restoration and to challenge the people to spiritual faithfulness.

Similarly under the New Testament, after the first century God's church went into apostasy resulting in the Catholic and Protestant churches. In our age, God's people have sought to return to God and to restore the church. But there are still many problems and God's people often continue to fall into sin. Strong and faithful leaders are needed to continue the restoration and to challenge God's people to spiritual faithfulness.

We can learn many practical lessons from the problems Ezra and Nehemiah faced and how they dealt with them by God's help.

## **Part 1: Rebuilding of the Temple - Chap. 1-6**

### **I. The Decree of Cyrus that the Jews Could Return (536 BC) - Chap. 1**

#### **Notes On Ezra Chapter 1**

#### **Cyrus decreed that the Jews could return – 1:1,2**

>>> #4. *When did events in Ezra 1 occur (v1)?*

>>> #5. *What decree did Cyrus make (v2), and what prophecy did this fulfill?*

After Babylon fell to the Persians, the first king of the Persian Empire was Cyrus. The defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians had been predicted by various Old Testament prophets, including Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:12-14; 29:10-14; cf. Daniel 5).

God then motivated Cyrus to send the Jews back to Jerusalem so they could rebuild the temple. This is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:20-23. We are not told exactly how God so moved Cyrus. God works by His providence in ways we do not understand. But Isaiah had prophesied this would happen, even calling Cyrus by name (Isaiah 44:24-45:7).

Waldron points out that this was a general decree stating a general policy of Cyrus and the Persians. The Babylonians had taken people away from their homelands and resettled them elsewhere. But the Persians sought to gain favor and peace among their captives by allowing them to return to their homelands, rebuild their temples, and re-establish worship of their gods.

#### **Provisions for the rebuilding of the temple – 1:3-6**

>>> #6. *What did he permit Jews to do in order to bring about his decree? How did the people respond (vv 3-6)?*

In the case of the Jews, Cyrus decreed that God had commanded him to build the house for God at Jerusalem. So he authorized two things to accomplish this:

(1) Some of the Jews were to go back to Jerusalem from captivity to build the temple.

(2) Those who remained in their places of sojourning (i.e., captives who did not return) were to help finance the effort by giving gold, silver, goods, and livestock by freewill offerings.

Waldron also points out that Persia ruled the entire area (and more) that had been controlled earlier by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians. So the decree in principle would have allowed, not just the people from the southern nation of Judah to return, but also people from the northern nation of Israel or Samaria. However, only those who were willing to go did so. We will see that this included generally those from the southern nation of Judah.

The people did as Cyrus decreed. Some determined to go to Jerusalem to build the temple. Others determined to help financially by providing silver, gold, goods, and livestock.

Note that those who actually did return were basically of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with some priests and other Levites (of the tribe of Levi). These were stirred in spirit by God to return. As with Cyrus, this would not necessarily mean direct revelation. They could have been stirred by longing for their homeland, by remembrance of the promises God had made to the nation, by the prophecies of Jeremiah and others, or even by other prophets who urged them to go.

### ***Return of the temple furnishings – 1:7-11***

>>> #7. *What had Nebuchadnezzar taken, and what did Cyrus decree about it?*

>>> #8. *Summarize what was to be taken back (vv 8-11).*

Cyrus himself gave back all the articles of value taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple. These are described in some detail, demonstrating the great value of what had been in the temple, and the considerable sacrifice Cyrus made in giving it back. A total of 5400 articles of gold and silver were returned.

These articles had been taken when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and placed in the heathen temples of Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:7,18; Daniel 1:2; Ezra 5:14; 6:5). Later, as recorded in Daniel 5, Belshazzar had used them in an idolatrous feast. At that time God sent a moving hand to write on the wall a warning to Belshazzar that his doom was sealed. Daniel interpreted the meaning of the message, and that night the Persians overthrew Babylon.

These same articles were apparently now to be restored to their place in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem at the decree of Cyrus. So they were put in the care of one named Sheshbazzar to return. He did so, as shown in 5:14,16. Sheshbazzar is here called a prince of Judah. 5:14 says he was made governor of the land, and 5:16 says he began the rebuilding of the temple.

There is question who this Sheshbazzar is, since the governor was also called Zebubbabel. Some conclude they are different names for the same man. Others conclude they are two men who worked together. There is evidence for both views. It is not clear which is correct.

## **Notes on Ezra Chapter 2**

### **II. Names of Those Who Returned – Chap. 2**

#### ***The people listed – 2:1-60***

>>> #1. *Skim chap. 2 and summarize what it describes. These people came with whom (2:2)?*

This chapter contains an enumeration of the people who returned according to their families. As described in chap. 1, they were among those who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, but were now allowed to return each to his own city.

These returned in the first group that returned in 536 BC, led by a group of men named here (cf. the list in Neh. 7:7).

Jeshua most likely was the priest (probably the high priest) referred to in 3:2 and elsewhere in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Zerubbabel is also referred to frequently throughout these books (3:2,8; etc.). He evidently led this first group of captives who returned. He is listed in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:12,13; Luke 8:27). This would indicate that he was a prince with right to the throne. However, the nation was led at this time, not by kings but by governors subject to the Persians. No king would reign as a legitimate descendant of David till Jesus became the spiritual King of the church.

There is some confusion regarding the name of his father: Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2 and the references above in Matthew and Luke) or Pedaiah (1 Chron. 3:19). A number of possible explanations exist (many people have more than one name, etc.), but these are not worth discussing in detail.

These verses record in detail the numbers of people from various cities, occupations, etc., who returned.

### **Priests not found in the genealogy – 2:61-63**

>>> #2. *What problem did some priests have (vv 61-63)? What was done about them? (Think: Why would this be a problem?)*

Certain men claimed they had a right to serve as priests, but they had no genealogy to prove their ancestry. Priests had to be descendants of Aaron (Numbers 16:39,40). Since there was no proof this was true in these men's case, they were excluded from being priests until such time as there was a priest who could consult Urim & Thummim to determine the legitimacy of their claims (Exodus 28:30).

Note that this was not meant as a conclusion that these men were evil sinners of some kind. They were still allowed to be part of God's people. The point is that they could not serve in special capacity as holders of office without having the required qualifications of that office. The same is true regarding men who seek to serve as elders and deacons today. The fact a man **lacks** evidence of qualification is sufficient basis to exclude him. We need not prove him guilty of evil.

### **Tally of those who returned and of the contributions – 2:64-70**

>>> #3. *How many people returned (vv 64,65)?*

>>> #4. *What did the people do to help the work (vv 68,69)?*

The total number of people who returned were 42,360 who were reckoned as part of the congregation of Israel. Also there were 7337 who were servants that accompanied them (but apparently not of the lineage of the nation).

Also described are the number of animals they had and the amount of gold and silver that was contributed for the rebuilding of the temple.

All these people returned to the land of Israel and lived their in their cities.

## **Notes on Ezra Chapter 3**

### **III. Laying of the Foundation of the Temple – Chap. 3**

#### **A. The Sacrificial Offerings Restored**

#### **The altar restored and sacrifices begun – 3:1-3**

>>> #1. *When did vv 1-6 occur? What special events occurred in that month (see Lev. 23:23-44)?*

>>> #2. *Who took the lead in these events? Where else do we read of them, and what do we know about them?*

>>> #3. *What did they build? For what purpose?*

>>> #4. *What offerings did they begin with (v3)? Give **b/c/v** and describe these offerings.*

The events here occurred in the "seventh month." Cf. this to v6. This appears to mean the seventh month of the year, which would occur in the fall of the year. That would fit the events

described, since several important acts of worship were commanded to occur in that month. Lev. 23:23-44 says this included the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of the Tabernacles (which is mentioned here in Ezra 3:4). [Cf. Num. 29; Neh. 7:73; 8:1.]

The first group of exiles who returned were now settled in the land (2:70). Their first acts, even before they began work on the temple itself, were to restore the spiritual worship and praise of God. This is proper because, without proper honor to God they had no way to ask and receive His blessing on their efforts.

They were led in this work by Jeshua and Zerubbabel. Jeshua was the leader of the priests, presumably the High Priest (see on 2:2; 3:8; Neh. 12:1,8). Zerubbabel led the government and appears to be the appointed governor (see also on 2:2; 3:8; etc.).

They built the altar as a place to make their burnt offerings as the Law of Moses required. This is described in Deut. 12:5,6 and many other passages. God had commanded that, when they entered the land, He would designate a place where they were supposed to worship Him and offer their sacrifices. This was done, of course, on an altar. Israel here erected an altar so they could have a place to offer sacrifices.

They did this though they feared the people of the land. We will see that the people were a real threat to them (chap. 4). Re-instituting the worship of God would likely alienate these people. But at the same time, they needed to worship God, and the altar gave them a means to request His care and protection against the people.

So they built the altar and began the regular offerings, including the morning and evening offerings. These were required every day of the week, as described in Num. 28:2-8.

### ***Feast of the Tabernacles – 3:4-6***

>>> #5. *What feast did they keep (v4)? List other **b/c/v** regarding this feast.*

>>> #6. *Describe this feast and explain its purpose.*

>>> #7. *What other service did they offer (vv 5,6)? Give other **passages** regarding the new moons and explain them.*

>>> #8. *Application: What lessons should we learn from the fact these returning exiles began by offering correct worship?*

They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles. This is mentioned in Lev. 23:33-44 (Deut. 16:13-17; cf. Neh. 8:14ff). This feast required the people to build booths to dwell in for a period of seven days as a remembrance of their travels in the wilderness after God freed them from Egypt. Many offerings were associated with each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, as listed in Num. 29:12-38. The returned exiles carefully observed these daily offerings.

And from that time on they offered all the regularly required sacrifices. These included the ones required at the beginning of each month (the New Moons – see Num. 28:11-15). They also kept all the appointed feasts that God had commanded. 2 Chronicles 2:4.

All this began with the first day of the seventh month (see v1). The people willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord (Num. 29:39). And all this was done before they had even laid the foundation of the temple.

Likewise we, if we want God's blessings on our lives, must purify our worship and praise to Him. If we seek to restore our worship and service to Him, we must be sure we offer the honor that pleases Him.

## **B. The Foundation of the Temple Laid**

### ***Work on the temple begun – 3:7-9***

>>> #9. *How did they obtain logs? Find the places mentioned on a map.*

>>> #10. *Who else had obtained logs similarly, and for what purpose? Give **b/c/v**.*

>>> #11. *When did they begin work on the temple? Who oversaw the work? (Think: Why them?)*

The people then began the work of rebuilding the temple. They had to hire the workers (masons and carpenters) who had the required skills to do the work. They also had to purchase the necessary materials. They ordered cedar logs from Lebanon, and paid the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring them to the sea at the seaport of Joppa (see MAP). This would then require transporting them overland to Jerusalem. They paid for these provisions by sending food, drink, and oil. This is like what happened when Solomon built the first temple – 2 Chron. 2:10,16; cf. 2 Samuel 5:9-11. The funds for the work were apparently part of what King Cyrus had authorized in 1:2 (cf. 6:3).

The work began in the second month of the second year after they had left Persia, at the direction of Zerubbabel, Jeshua (see v2) and the rest of the priests and Levites (cf. 1 Chron. 23:24). The Levites, in particular, were the ones who oversaw the work, all of them from age twenty and up being involved. They, of course, were the tribe of the priests and, as such, they had been appointed as a tribe to care for the temple and the worship there.

In particular, the Levites were directed in this work by Jeshua, the High Priest and others named Kadmiel and Henadad (along with their families), who were apparently among the Levites. Also included were some among Judah. I know nothing else about these specific men.

### **The foundation laid – 3:10,11**

>>> #12. *What did they build first? What did they do when it was complete? (Think: How do we know they used instruments? Are similar statements found regarding New Testament worship?)*

The building began, naturally, with the foundation. When this had been completed, a ceremony was conducted to praise God for the work accomplished thus far.

Priests were dressed in their priestly apparel having trumpets. Along with Levites, the sons of Asaph, they led the people in singing, praising God, and giving thanks to His name. This was done as had been ordained by King David (see 1 Chron. 6:31ff; the sons of Asaph are specifically mentioned as being part of this work in 1 Chron. 25:1ff).

They sang praise to God, giving thanks to Him for His goodness and mercy toward Israel. Then the people gave a great shout, praising God, because the foundation of the house was laid.

Note that the use of instrumental music (trumpets and cymbals) in worship is here, as elsewhere, expressly described and authorized in the Old Testament. If God still wants such instruments today, why are there no such passages in the New Testament that clearly describe them and authorized their use in our worship today? Instead, every New Testament passage says simply to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; etc.).

For further information, see our articles on instrumental music in worship at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

### **The reactions of the people – 3:12,13**

>>> #13. *Describe the different reactions of the people.*

>>> #14. *Application: When we accomplish work for God, how should we react? Who deserves the glory? Why?*

The people shouted in praise to God, but many of the older men who had seen the first temple, wept aloud when the foundation of this temple had been laid. So the weeping of the people mingled with the shouts of joy, and the noise could be heard from far away.

It is not clear whether the people who wept did so for joy or sorrow. It could be that the new temple did not compare in glory to the original one, yet that is not stated and would seem to be hard to tell just by looking at the foundation. (Haggai 2:3 refers to such an idea, however this came much later in the reign of Darius, and could well refer to the progress of the building after much more than just the foundation had been built.)

Often the greatest expression of joy is found, not in shouting aloud, but in weeping for joy. Those who were old enough to have seen the original temple, to have gone into captivity and

suffered through it for many years, would surely be the ones most deeply moved now to return to Judah and see the new temple beginning construction. Tears of joy would surely be appropriate.

Another possibility is that the people wept in sorrow for the sin that had led to the destruction of the temple.

Note that it is good for God's people to praise Him and give Him honor and glory for any good we accomplish. Remember that it is His work being done through us. These people could never have built the temple had God not empowered it — they surely had been unable to do so for many years while in captivity. So we will accomplish good for God only with His blessings. Let us remember that we are able to do the work only because He blesses us, and that any good done is really a blessing He gives. So let us give Him glory.

## Notes on Ezra Chapter 4

### IV. People of the Land Oppose the Work – Chap. 4

Whenever God's people do His work, there will always be adversaries. People will oppose the work and seek to prevent it or at least to so subvert it as to destroy its real intended effect. This is what happened with the Jews in their work of building the temple. Since we will experience similar problems, there are lessons we can learn from the tactics of God's enemies here and from the means used to deal with them.

#### A. Religious Compromise

##### ***People of the land seek to participate – 4:1-3***

>>> #1. *Who heard about the work on the temple? What did they offer to do?*

The first tactic of the adversaries was to try to become part of the group working on the temple. They claimed to be servants of the true God since the time they had been brought to the land by Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. So they wanted to be part of the work.

The record does not clearly state what their intent was. Perhaps they would have perverted the temple for their own purposes. Or maybe they intended to cause strife to hinder the work. Or perhaps they would have truly joined in the work, provided they would be permitted to continue their own perverted worship in the temple. In any case, we will see that they did not really want to truly serve God according to His true pattern.

##### ***Background of the people in the land***

>>> #2. *Read 2 Kings 17:24-41. How had these people come into Samaria? Describe their worship.*

2 Kings 17:24-41 records how these people came to the land, and it explains why Zerubbabel was right to reject their help. When the Assyrians had removed the Israelites from the land, they had also brought into the land people from other nations who were not Israelites either in lineage or in religion.

At first, these people did not worship the true God. They were eventually taught about God, and they did attempt to worship Him after a sort, but they also worshiped their false gods as they had in their homelands. We are expressly told that they continued in their false perverted form of worship, even as they professed to honor God. Hence, God rejected their worship. 2 Kings 17:32-34,41

##### ***Rejection of compromise with perverted worship – 4:3***

>>> #3. *How did Zerubbabel and Jeshua respond to their request? Explain why they responded this way, based on what we know about these people.*

Now in Zerubbabel's day the people of the land came to help on the temple, but he rejected their help. He said the people of the land had no part in the matter, but the Jews would do the

work by themselves. He pointed out that King Cyrus had authorized the work (1:1,2), so they were acting legitimately, both according to God's law and according to civil law.

To have accepted their help would have been to have religious fellowship with people in error. The worship offered by these people professed to honor God but was not according to God's authorized pattern. To have accepted their help on the basis of their claim that they worshiped God, would have been to declare them to be acceptable before God despite their error.

### **Modern applications**

>>> #4. *Application: What lessons should we learn? Today whom should we likewise refuse to allow to become part of God's work with us? See 2 John 9-11; Gal. 1:6-9; Matt. 15:1-14.*

Likewise today there are people who tell us they worship the true God - they don't openly profess to rebel against God - but they do not truly serve according to His prescribed authority. They may be members of some denomination, having never been truly converted, or they may serve God with unauthorized practices (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13).

We may be tempted to worship with them, or to use them in our worship services, or otherwise appear to fellowship them. Most denominations gladly welcome such people into their fellowship, and today many members of "churches of Christ" advocate fellowshipping such people. But we must refuse to fellowship such people today for the same reasons the Jews here refused to do so. If their worship and conduct is not according to God's word, then we sin if we fellowship them and we make it appear that their conduct is acceptable. (See 2 John 9-11; Ephesians 5:11; Proverbs 17:15; 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1; 1 Timothy 5:22; Psalms 1:1,2; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Romans 1:32; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20; etc.)

Note that, when we refuse, people will most likely accuse us of being in the wrong. As happened here, the people we refuse to accept may resent our action and become our adversaries. Or other people who hear about our stand may accuse us of being wrong. Some may accuse us of driving people away from the truth. In any case, when we take the stand taken by God's people here, we can be sure that some will accuse us of being in the wrong and will defend those who are perverting God's worship.

People today, who resent our refusal to fellowship religious error, should carefully consider passages such as this. And we should carefully consider it, when we are tempted to compromise with error and perversions of God's pattern.

### **B. Harassment - 4:4,5**

>>> #5. *How did the people respond to this rejection of their request? How do people today similarly respond, when we teach them their service to God is not acceptable?*

Having been forbidden a role in the work, the people of the land became a hindrance, trying to discourage the work. They made trouble and even hired people to try to frustrate the work. We are told some more about the methods that were used in the book of Nehemiah. These efforts continued until the times of king Darius.

The chronology of this chapter is confusing, because the names of the kings does not seem to fit the order of events. Perhaps the author, having introduced the fact the people tried to hinder the work, gives some examples from the reigns of later kings that did not follow chronologically but just illustrate the point, then later returns to the chronology. (See Mott's notes.)

The Waldron's argue that Ahasuerus (in v6) and Aratxerxes (in v7) are not the later leaders we commonly think of by those names (see introductory notes). They claim both these terms refer to Cambyses, who succeeded Cyrus (remember that kingdoms often have more than one king by the same name). However, they offer no proof. Such an explanation would make the chronology fit better, but why the name changes? Could it be that various Persian rulers were

called by these names, just like various Egyptian rulers were called “Pharaoh,” various Roman rulers called “Caesar,” and various New Testament Jewish kings called “Herod”?

### **C. False Accusation and Legal Opposition**

#### ***The people of the land determine to write to the king – 4:6-10***

>>> #6. *What did the people do next (vv 6-8)? Who wrote the letter?*

One method the people of the land attempted was to write a letter to the civil government and make false accusations against the Jews, hoping the authorities would stop the Jews’ work. The letter was sent to the king of Persia and was written in the Aramaic language, since this presumably was the proper form of such an official appeal.

We are told here the names of various individuals who were behind the letter. Specifically, the men who wrote the letter were Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe. They were accompanied by various representatives of the nationalities of people who had been moved into the land. These groups are named in v9 (cf. 2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 5:6; 6:6).

V9 says that Osnapper had captured these people and settled them in the land. Presumably this is just another name for the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (v2).

#### ***The people’s letter to the king – 4:11-16***

>>> #7. *List some accusations they made against the Jews (vv 11-16). What proof did they offer? (Think: Did their evidence prove their accusations? What evidence was overlooked?)*

>>> #8. *List other Bible examples you can think of in which God’s people were falsely accused or harassed to hinder their work for God.*

>>> #9. *Application: List some accusations people sometimes make against God’s people today to discourage and discredit us.*

The people wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes informing him that the Jews were building the city of Jerusalem, repairing the walls, etc., and that if they were allowed to succeed, they would end up rebelling against the rule of Persia. They point out that history showed the Jews had rebelled repeatedly (cf. 2 Chron. 26:13). So they claimed they would surely rebel again if they rebuilt the city.

They claim further that the people would not pay taxes, and the king would end up having no power in the whole region. They said this, they claimed, because they were so loyal to the king that they didn’t want him to be dishonored!

Of course, they said nothing about the fact they just did not want to see the Jews succeed. And the fact there was no evidence these people intended to do any such thing was apparently irrelevant to them. They hoped the king would overlook their lack of evidence and would just look up the past history of the Jews. They hoped this would be sufficient to convince him to punish the current generation!

Furthermore, they conveniently failed to mention that the Jews had been specifically authorized to do this work by King Cyrus (1:1,2). The decrees of Persian kings could not be changed, even by the king who made the decree, let alone by other kings (as shown in Daniel and in Esther). So they did not want the king to research and find Cyrus’ decree. They just wanted him to find the Jews’ past history of rebellion!

#### ***Other similar examples and modern applications***

The same trick has been used against God’s people repeatedly. People who oppose God’s work misrepresent the motives, teaching, and work of God’s people by telling lies and half-truths. They hope to discredit the work and turn people against it – especially civil authorities – hoping people will pressure God’s people to stop.

This method was used in the first century when Jesus’ enemies claimed He intended to literally tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days, that He taught people not to pay taxes to Caesar, that He would be a king in competition with Caesar, that He committed blasphemy, that

he cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, etc. All these were half-truths or outright lies intended to turn people against Him.

So today one favorite trick of people who oppose the gospel is to use lies and half-truths to misrepresent the real beliefs and intentions of God's people. We are said to believe in "water salvation," that we can earn our salvation, are legalists, lack love, follow Alexander Campbell, are "anti's," don't believe in cooperation, don't believe in helping orphans, etc. As with the Jews in the story in Ezra, these are all either completely untrue or else half-truths that miss the real point of our beliefs. But by prejudicially describing our views, people hope to prejudice others against us.

In the case of the Jews, we will see that these deceitful methods were temporarily successful. We must make sure they do not succeed in our day.

### ***The king's response – 4: 17-22***

>>> #10. *What did the king command in response to the letter?*

King Artaxerxes responded that he had searched the archives and found that the Jews had indeed been a rebellious people. He found that the kings of the Jews had at times been mighty rulers who ruled over all the provinces in the area and demanded tribute from them. This would have been true, for example, in the times of David and especially Solomon (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Chronicles 18:3). Perhaps his point was that, if the Jews would do this in time past, they might indeed rebel in his day, as their enemies accused. Instead of paying tribute to him, they might seek to rule the people around them and seek tribute for themselves.

So he agreed with the Jews' enemies and determined to forbid the Jews to proceed with their building. He told the people of the land to see to it that the Jews stopped. He concluded that he saw no reason to allow activities in his realm that would harm his authority as king.

### ***The work discontinued – 4:23,24***

>>> #11. *How did the Jews' enemies respond to the letter? What happened as a result?*

>>> #12. *Application: Did the Jews do right when they quit? What should they have done? What can we learn?*

Of course, the king had decided exactly what the Jews' enemies wanted. Not only did the Jews not have his permission to continue with the work, but the enemies had his authority to put a stop to the work. They were naturally quite zealous to do so, even by force of arms if necessary.

So the Jews did stop working until the second year of the reign of Darius. (Note the apparent historical conflict here. This places Artaxerxes as reigning before Darius. This demonstrates that there must be some confusion of names here – there must have been more than one ruler with these names or rulers who had more than one name, etc.)

Apparently the Jews made no effort to contact the king and explain that their work had been authorized by decree of king Cyrus. Since the laws of Medes and Persians could not be changed (Daniel 6), it would appear that this could have been corrected.

So the Jews must have given up too easily. In any case, it is clear they quit when God did not want them to. We must take care lest we be discouraged in our stand for truth by the apparent power, influence, and successes of those who oppose our work for God.

We do not need human authority for our work for God. We ought to obey God, rather than man (Acts 5:29). Even if civil authorities did decree that we should not serve God, we should do His work anyway. But in many cases, civil rulers can be influenced to approve or accept our work for God, if we will at least try. In this case, the Jews apparently just gave up without trying. We will see that God was displeased with them, and He will likewise be displeased with us if we let people of the land influence us to neglect the work He commands us to do.

## Notes on Ezra Chapter 5

### V. Prophets Encourage the Work to Continue – Chap. 5

#### ***Prophets rebuked the people for not working – 5:1***

>>> #1. *What prophets spoke to the Jews about their work on the temple? When did this occur (Haggai 1:1)?*

Sometime later, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the people and urged them to continue the work on the temple. Haggai's teaching is recorded in the book of Haggai (see Haggai 1:1ff), and Zechariah's is recorded in the book of Zechariah (see Zechariah 1:1ff).

Haggai 1 gives helpful additional information regarding the events recorded here in Ezra. Haggai 1:1 says his prophecies began in the second year of king Darius. This agrees with Ezra 4:24, which had told us that the work on the temple stopped until the second year of Darius. Waldron says this would have been 16 years after they returned to Judah. So the work had evidently been neglected for quite some time.

The book of Zechariah adds little about the current situation, although he later gives some prophecies indicating God's determination to bless the people in their work. Most of his prophecies are symbolic, and many are predictions regarding Jesus and the coming New Testament.

#### ***Why the people had not been working***

>>> #2. *Read Haggai 1:1-11. According to Haggai, why had the work on the temple stopped? What had people been doing instead?*

>>> #3. *What did Haggai say the people should do? (Think: What does this show regarding the fact the people quit work in chap. 4?)*

Haggai 1:1-11 also helps us understand why the work on the temple had stopped and what God's attitude was toward the people for their neglect of the work. In 1:2 the people said **it is not time** to build the Lord's house. They were neglecting and postponing the work.

But 1:4 says that they themselves were now dwelling in paneled houses. They had plenty of time to build their own houses, and even had made them quite nice. They had provided better homes even than just basic necessities. But they had allowed the temple of God to continue to dwell in ruins.

So the temple was neglected because the people thought they did not have the time or the means or the ability to build. But they had built more than adequately for themselves. They may have used the decree of the king as an excuse to stop working on the temple (Ezra 4:24). But this was, at least to some extent, an excuse. As discussed on Ezra 4, they should have obeyed God even if that required them to disobey civil rulers. But they even had the authority of Cyrus behind them, which we will see was enough to authorize them to continue the work, had they been willing to do so. The truth is that they just preferred to go about their own affairs and seek their own prosperity instead of working on the temple.

Haggai points out that the real problem was in them and their conduct: "Consider your ways" (1:5,7). Here is the real problem! The problem was not their circumstances: It was them! Instead of working on the temple, they had sought their own prosperity. But they had failed to really achieve even that, because God hindered them. 1:6 - They worked at providing food and clothing for themselves, but they found the results inadequate. It was like working to earn money, then storing the money in a bag with holes – it is just lost. The effort does not produce the intended benefits.

God said the reason they had so much trouble meeting their own needs was that He was working against them, because His house was still in ruins (1:9). He had called for droughts on all the produce of their land (1:10,11). So the solution was for them to go get the wood and build the temple, so He could be properly glorified (1:8). Then He would bless them.

## **Lessons for us**

>>> #4. *Application: What lessons should we learn from the people's failure to work? How are people today sometimes similarly guilty?*

Wouldn't God have much the same to say to many members of many local congregations of His people today? How often do we see members of the church who have plenty of time to provide themselves with nice houses, clothes, cars, and plenty of food? They live beyond necessities to the point of luxuries.

Yet in so many cases we neglect the Lord's work. We may have built nice meeting houses to assemble in; but remember the temple today is the church, and the work He wants in the church goes far beyond just assembling. He wants us to spread the gospel to every person in our community and then beyond into the whole world. How active are we in that work?

How many are saying, "It is not time to do that work." We don't have the time now, we don't have the money, we are too small, people are not interested in the gospel, etc., etc. We have excuse after excuse, but the real problem is the same as with the Jews. The problem is not our circumstances; the problem is us! We are just more committed to our own interests than we are to the work of the Lord!

God may or may not withhold physical blessings from us when we fail to work for Him, yet surely He will often withhold His spiritual blessings. If we seek to please Him, we too need to "consider our ways." We need to be about the work He has given us and not let the work be hindered because of opposition or just plain indifference!

### **The people returned to the work – 5:2**

>>> #5. *Who led the people to get back to work (Ezra 5:2)? What lessons should leaders in the church today learn?*

Stirred up by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the leaders of the people got to work and led the people to get back to work on the temple. The leaders led and the teachers taught, so the people went to work!

This is also described in Haggai 1:12-15. Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. 2:2) determined to lead the people to get back to work. Note that Haggai 1:1 calls Zerubbabel the governor of Judah. He was a civil leader, where Joshua was the high priest and the leader of spiritual worship. Together they again led the people back to work. This began in the sixth month of the second year of the reign of Darius.

As a result, God spoke through Haggai and assured the people that God was once again with them (1:13). They had repented of their neglect and had gone back to work, so once again they had His favor. Various passages in Haggai and Zechariah continue to assure them of God's favor.

Likewise we need preachers, teachers, and elders like Haggai and Zechariah who see the real problem and will speak God's message and warn the people of the need to get to work! Sometimes people will be stirred up to get the job done if they have the leadership they need. With the effort of dedicated teachers, like Haggai and Zechariah, and the leadership of committed men, like Zerubbabel and Joshua, God's people today may be stirred up to get to work. If we do, we can have confidence that God will also be with us and bless our work for Him.

### **The governor questioned the Jews about their work – 5:3-5**

>>> #6. *Who questioned the Jews about their work? What temporary decision was made (v5)?*

The people were questioned about this work by Tattenai, the governor of the region, along with another man named Shethar Bozenai and other companions. Tattenai is called the governor of the region beyond the River – presumably this is the river Euphrates. So he was a higher authority than Zerubbabel. The latter was governor of Judah, but Tattenai was governor over the whole region. So he had a right to investigate.

He began by asking what authority the Jews had for their work – who commanded them to work on the temple. This was a legitimate question. In fact, it was the question that should have been asked and answered properly in chap. 4. We will see that these rulers are evidently not prejudiced against the work of the Jews. They are a different group of people from those who lived in the land and actively opposed the work of the Jews in chap. 4. These people have proper authority; and as good rulers, they simply wanted to know what the law was and apply it properly. So they asked what law or authority the Jews had.

The Jews also responded respectfully and wisely this time. They told the rulers who all their leaders were in the work. And, we will see from the later story, that they told them of the authority that had been given them by Cyrus.

The civil rulers determined to check the matter out to see whether or not the king had a record of the authorization that the Jews claimed to have received. But in the meanwhile they decided not to stop the work until they had consulted with Darius. Obviously, these rulers, not being from among the people of the land, were not hostile as had been the people in chap. 4. But the passage also says this happened by the power of God. He worked with the Jews so the rulers were favorable.

All this also shows that the Jews had been without excuse for stopping work in the first place. Had they told about the authority they had, and had they been determined to continue the work, God would have blessed them before so they never would have stopped the work. The fact He was displeased with them shows they should have continued working all along.

### ***The governor determined to write to King Darius – 5:6-10***

>>> #7. *How did Tattenai summarize the Jews' work to the king (vv 6-10)?*

These verses then record the letter Tattenai the governor, along with Shethar Baznai and his companions, sent to King Darius to inquire about the Jews' work on the temple. They began by explaining that the people of Judea were building a temple to their great God, making it of timber and heavy stones. They said the people were diligent in the work and the work was prospering.

They then told the king about their inquiry as to what authority they had to build the temple, and they had asked the names of the chief men among them. All this was being reported to the king, and it was an accurate record of what had happened.

### ***The Jews' response to the governor's inquiries – 5:11-16***

>>> #8. *What answer had the Jews given regarding why the temple had been destroyed? What authority did the Jews give for their work?*

This part of the letter then records the response the Jews gave to the rulers, including more detail than had been recorded in v4. The Jews had first said that they were servants of the great God who ruled heaven and earth, and the temple they were rebuilding had originally been built by one of their earlier great kings. This, of course, was a reference to Solomon, who had built the original temple (1 Kings 6:1,38).

The Jews then explained that their ancestors had later become unfaithful to God, so He had punished them by allowing the Babylonians to take them away into captivity (2 Chron. 36:16,17). At that time the temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

They then explained that, when King Cyrus of the Persians had come into power, he had decreed that they could return to Judea and rebuild the temple (see on 1:1). And in fact, he had returned to them the articles of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple when he had destroyed it. All these had been given to a man named Sheshbazzar, who had been named governor and who had been commanded to bring these articles to Judea (1:7-11). This man had brought the articles as commanded and had begun building the foundation. But the temple had not been completed. Of course, the point was that they were now finishing what had been authorized by Cyrus many years before.

This was the reply that the Jews should have given in chap. 4 to the people of the land who stopped them from their work. If they had then the same commitment to the work that they had here in chap. 5, they would never have stopped the work. And that is why God was upset with them. Fortunately, they were now back on the job, and they have given a proper explanation to these rulers. And the rulers have given an accurate explanation of the matter to the king.

### ***The governor's request – 5:17***

>>> #10. *What did Tattenai request of the king?*

>>> #11. *How did the Jews' response in this case differ from chap. 4, when their enemies then insisted they stop work?*

Tattenai's letter to Darius accurately conveyed the situation as it was. Tattenai then requested that the king check this out in the records to see if Cyrus really had made such a decree as the Jews claimed. Then he asked the king to write back and tell the governor what the facts were and how he wanted them to handle this matter. The results will be recorded in the next chapter.

Note that this demonstrates an important Bible principle: God's people should submit to civil law, but it is Scriptural for us to appeal to the authority of human rulers to protect us from enemies and wrongdoers. Civil rulers are ordained of God for the punishment of evildoers and the reward of those who do good (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:11-15). If that is their purpose, then God approves of our calling upon these rulers to protect our righteous cause. Paul used this principle several times when he was threatened with harm by those who opposed his work (Acts 22:25-29; 25:10-12).

## **Notes on Ezra Chapter 6**

### **VI. The Temple Completed – Chap. 6**

#### ***The decree of Cyrus found – 6:1-5***

>>> #1. *What did Darius do when he received Tattenai's letter (cf. chap. 5)? Where did he find the answer he sought?*

>>> #2. *How was the construction of the temple described?*

>>> #3. *How was the work financed (what did Cyrus send to help)?*

As the governor Tattenai had requested in his letter in chap. 5, King Darius made a search for the decree that the Jews claimed authorized their work. He searched in the archives where treasures were stored, and the decree was found recorded on a scroll in the palace in Achmetha in the province of Media. The NKJV footnote suggests that this was Ecbatana, capital of Media.

The decree said that Cyrus authorized the building of the temple, just as the Jews claimed, and as recorded already in Ezra 1:1-8; 5:13,14. It said the house of the Lord, where sacrifices were offered, should be rebuilt. The record even gave more detail than in Ezra 1. It said the height would be sixty cubits and the width sixty cubits (ninety feet by ninety feet). It would be built from three rows of heavy stones and one row of timber. This was the same as the original temple (1 Kings 6:36).

Furthermore it said the expenses were to be paid from the treasury of the king (cf. 3:7). And just as chap. 1 recorded, the gold and silver articles taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar should be returned to the house of God.

Vv 2-5 appear to be a record of the original decree written by Cyrus. But it also appears that the quotation begins the letter of King Darius to Tattenai, in response to the letter the governor had sent to the king. So that vv 6ff simply continue the king's response.

#### ***The decree of Darius to continue to work – 6:6-8***

>>> #4. *What did Darius tell Tattenai and his companions to do regarding the work (vv 6,7)?*

Having quoted the original decree, King Darius then continued by commanding governor Tattenai and his companions (cf. 5:3,6) to stay far away from the Jews and not hinder the work on the temple in any way. They were to allow the governor and elders of the Jews to proceed with the work of building the house of God.

In fact, he commanded that the government should provide things needed for the work. Tax money should pay for the work and should be given to the men in charge of the work, so they work would not be hindered in any way.

### **Provisions for the work – 6:9-12**

>>> #5. *What decree did he issue to help provide for the work (vv 8-10)?*

>>> #6. *What did he hope the people would do in the temple (v10)? What can we learn?*

>>> #7. *What penalty would be incurred by any who opposed the work?*

Further, the king decreed that tax funds should be used to pay for the animals and other provisions to be used for the sacrifices that the priests needed day by day in the offerings to be made at the temple in Jerusalem. This would result in a sweet aroma to go up to the God of heaven.

I don't know that this means the king was converted to believing in the God of the Old Testament as the one true God. I suspect more likely he just wanted the blessing of all the gods in the empire, so he tried to please them all.

Further, he hoped the people would pray to God on behalf of the king and his sons. The New Testament likewise teaches that we should do the same for rulers today – 1 Tim. 2:1,2.

Then he went still further and proclaimed a severe curse on anyone who attempted to change his decree. He said that, for such a person, a timber should be removed from his own house and used to hang the man on. Then his house should be destroyed to the level of a refuse heap (cf. Dan. 2:5; 3:29).

Finally, he called upon the God who caused His name to dwell in that place (Deut. 12:5,11; 1 Kings 9:3) to destroy any person or king who sought to alter the decree or to destroy the temple that would be built in Jerusalem.

This was Darius' decree, and he commanded diligent obedience to it.

### **The completion of the temple – 6:13-15**

>>> #8. *How did Tattenai and his companions respond?*

>>> #9. *What did the people do, and what was the result (vv 14,15)? When was the work completed?*

Tattenai and his companions then proceeded to diligently do as the king commanded. The work on the temple proceeded and prospered, guided by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (5:1).

The work thus proceeded till the temple was finished on the third day of the month Adar in the sixth year of Darius' reign. Haggai 1:1 said the work began again in the second year of Darius' reign (cf. Ezra 4:24; 5:1), so it took approximately four years after the work began again till it was completed.

This was said to be done according to the command of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes. The first two we have plainly seen were involved, but the involvement of Artaxerxes is less obvious. He became involved later (cf. 7:1,11; Neh. 2:1), so perhaps this is included by looking forward to what he later did.

### **Dedication of the temple – 6:16-18**

>>> #10. *What did the people do when the temple was complete? How did they do this (vv 16-18)?*

Following the completion of the temple, a dedication ceremony was held. Solomon had conducted a similar ceremony when he originally built the temple (1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5). This celebration occurred with great joy among the people and involved the offering of many sacri-

fices in the new temple: one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering, one goat for each of the tribes of Israel.

Then the service of the temple was organized, including priests and Levites set up in their divisions as provided for in the law. See 1 Chron. 23:6; 24:1; 2 Chron 35:5; Num. 3:6; 8:9. These, of course, were the people that God had assigned to care for the tabernacle/temple and to offer the sacrifices there.

### ***The Passover celebrated – 6:19-22***

>>> #11. *What was the first feast celebrated at the temple? Describe the feast: What was done, and what was the purpose? Give **b/c/v**.*

>>> #12. *Application: How would the Jews know how to arrange the priests and keep the feasts? What lessons can we learn today?*

Now that the temple had been set up, the people were finally again able to participate in the various worship activities, including feast days, as provided for in the law. The temple had been completed in the month Adar, the last month of the Jewish religious calendar (according to Waldron). The next month would be the first month, which was when the Passover was to be celebrated. So the temple was completed just in time for the Passover.

The Passover was the annual memorial to the last plague God brought through Moses on the Egyptians. The firstborn son in each home of the Egyptians died; but the children of the Israelites were protected by God, if they placed the blood of the Passover lamb on their doors. It was celebrated each year on the 14th day of the first month, followed by the 7-day feast of Unleavened Bread. See Ex. 12:6,15; 13:6,7; 2 Chron. 35:11; 30:21; 35:17.

The Jews kept this feast in the rebuilt temple, led by the priests and Levites. To do this the priests and Levites had to purify themselves, so they were ceremonially clean as required by the law. See 2 Chron. 29:34; 30:15. The priests led in offering the required sacrifices for themselves, for the Levites, and for the people.

The Israelites who had returned from captivity ate the Passover along with those who had cleansed themselves from the defilement of the land so they could seek God (cf. Ezra 9:11). These were apparently people from the region who had determined to follow God, along with those who returned from captivity.

The people also kept the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread. All this was done with joy, for the people rejoiced that God had returned them to the land by means of the decrees of the king of Assyria. Why refer to the king as the king of Assyria, rather than the king of Persia? Waldron claims that Darius was first king of Assyria as part of the Persian Empire. Then he became king also of the whole empire.

### ***The principle of restoration***

Note that we have here an example of the principle of restoration according to divinely revealed pattern in the written word. The priests were organized “as it is written in the Book of Moses” (v18). See also 3:1-6, especially v2. The law also spoke of the Passover. The people were able to know what to do to worship and serve God simply by reading and following the written word. This was true even though they had been gone for decades and neither the temple ritual nor the priesthood had been active for all those years. Likewise, today our service of God in His church can be restored by simply studying and following the written word of the gospel, even if people have not followed it for years.

Note also that this was done with great **joy**. We ought to have great joy to see God’s service restored in our own lives or in the lives of others where it has not been done (cf. Luke 15). But too often we lose the joy until God’s blessings are removed. Why provoke God to wrath, as Israel had done, till He punishes us so severely? Why not see all His great gifts to us day by day so that we rejoice at every opportunity to praise Him? Why be so unappreciative, as many are, so we do

not have joy in our day-to-day service? Why wait till the opportunity is taken from us before we realize what we should have been doing?

Waldron points out that the story of Esther would have taken place during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) between Ezra 6 and 7.

## **Part 2: Spiritual Restoration of the People – Chap. 7-10**

### **I. Ezra Decreed to Lead Another Group to Return (458 BC) – Chap. 7**

#### **Notes on Ezra Chapter 7**

##### ***Ezra introduced to the story – 7:1-6***

>>> #1. *What important character is introduced in v1? When did this occur?*

>>> #2. *What do we learn from his genealogy? What other job did he have (v6)? (Think: Study a dictionary and determine what work scribes did.)*

In this chapter we are introduced to Ezra himself. The previous chapters, though included in the book of Ezra, nevertheless happened several years before Ezra was personally involved in the events. The first group returned from Babylonian captivity in about 536 B.C. led by Zerubbabel, whom we have read about in chapters 1-6. Ezra led a group that returned in about 458 B.C., almost 80 years later. Many things can change in 80 years (compare the changes that have occurred in America in the last 80 years).

These things happened in the reign of Artaxerxes (v1). Cf. Neh. 2:1. This was the son of the Xerxes who ruled during Esther's day.

We are given Ezra's lineage. To those of us under the New Testament, genealogies are of little value. But to a Jew under the Old Testament, ancestry was very important. This was especially true in Ezra's case, because his lineage showed him to be a descendant of Aaron (v5). This qualified him to be a priest, as he is referred to several times in the book.

We are told some things about Ezra's character. He was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses – cf. 7:11,12,21. Scribes were men whose job was to make records and keep accounts and make copies of records, etc. But Ezra was a scribe especially of the Law of Moses; such scribes would copy and study copies of the Scriptures. They did not have modern printing equipment, so each copy of each book had to be made by hand. In doing this work, scribes often gained a good knowledge of the books.

We are also told that the hand of the Lord His God was upon Ezra. He clearly was a good man who lived close to God and was devout. As a result God blessed him to fulfill his requests from the king as described in the following verses.

##### ***The Law of Moses and the Law of God***

>>> #3. *Case Study: Some people claim the Law of Moses is different from the Law of God, and that the Law of Moses was removed at the cross but the Law of God continues in force. What can we learn about this from vv 5,12?*

Note that the Law of Moses is said to be that which the Lord God of Israel had given. Some people try to distinguish the Law of Moses from the Law of God as two separate laws. Seventh Day Adventists and others say the Law of God was the 10 Commands and was never removed by Jesus so is still in effect today. They say the Law of Moses was the rest of the Old Testament (other than the 10 Commands) and is what Jesus removed on the cross.

However, this passage says Ezra was a scribe of the Law of Moses, which God gave. That would imply that the Law of Moses is the Law of God. V12 then settles the matter for sure, saying that Ezra was a scribe of the Law of God. V11 says he was expert in the words of the commands of the Lord. So there is no difference between the Law of God and the Law of Moses.

For further information, see our articles on the old law for today at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

### ***Ezra's trip – 7:7-9***

>>> #4. *What do vv 7-9 say Ezra and the people did? When did they leave, and when did they arrive? (Think: Who are Nethinim? Cf. 8:20.)*

Here is a brief summary of Ezra's trip. He left Babylon on the first day of the first month of the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, and he arrived in Jerusalem four months later on the first day of the fifth month. With him were priests, Levites, and people of various other occupations.

The Nethinim are mentioned in 2:43; 8:20; 1 Chron. 9:2. ISBE says these were servants in the temple, but their history and origin are uncertain. Note especially that Ezra 8:20 says that David appointed them to help the Levites in the temple service.

Note that this is just a brief overview of what we will read about in detail in the following verses – we do not have two separate trips led by Ezra. (cf. Genesis 1 to Genesis 2).

### ***Ezra's relationship to God's law – 7:10,11***

>>> #5. *From v10 list 4 things Ezra did with the Law. For each one list another **passage** showing why it is important.*

>>> #6. *Application: What are some important lessons we can learn regarding Bible study from Ezra's example?*

Here we are told more about Ezra's character. Four important steps are described regarding Ezra's attitude toward the law, all of which we should imitate.

#### **(1) He prepared his heart.**

To be acceptable, all service to God must come from the heart (Romans 6:17; Matthew 15:16ff; Proverbs 4:23; etc.) We will never properly learn God's will, let alone do it and teach others, until we get our own hearts right (Acts 17:11).

#### **(2) He then sought the law of the Lord.**

We can never do God's will till we know it. The NKJV footnote on "sought" says "study." We must be diligent students if we are to know God's law (Psalms 1:1; 119:47,48,97-99; 19:7-11; Acts 17:11; Joshua 1:8; Deuteronomy 6:6ff; John 8:32; Hosea 4:6; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Proverbs 2:1-20; Matthew 5:6). So Ezra's proper attitude of heart led him to study to learn God's law.

As a result of this study, he became expert in the law (v11). Some want to ridicule us if we think we need to be experts in God's law, but surely it is as valuable for us as it was for Ezra. Cf. Psalms 119:45.

#### **(3) He then practiced what he learned.**

Knowledge is worthless without application (Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6). Many people know what God expects but don't practice it. Ezra was not one of these.

#### **(4) He then taught others what he himself had learned.**

See Deut. 33:10; Neh. 8:1-8. You cannot teach what you do not know, and you will never teach effectively what you do not practice (Hebrews 5:12ff; Romans 2:21ff; 1 Timothy 4:16). We today are obligated to obey God and to be teachers to the extent of our ability (Acts 8:1,4; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; Hebrews 3:12-14; 5:12-14; 10:24; James 5:19,20; 1 Peter 3:15). The steps Ezra followed are the right steps in the right order. We would do well to imitate him.

### ***The letter of Artaxerxes – 7:12-18***

>>> #7. *What did the letter of the king authorize Ezra to do in vv 12-19?*

Here is the beginning of the decree Artaxerxes made authorizing Ezra to lead people to Judah. He began by addressing Ezra as a scribe of the law of God. Artaxerxes decreed that Ezra could go to Jerusalem and take with him all Israelites, including priests and Levites, who voluntarily chose to go.

He was to go to see how the people in Jerusalem and Judah fared as regards their obedience to the law of God. And he was authorized to take with him silver and gold from the king and his advisors as an offering to God. Also the people could send free-will offerings for the service in the temple. These should be used to buy animals and other substances for offerings. The rest of the silver and gold could be used according to the best judgment of Ezra and the people as needed according to God's will.

### **Articles for the temple – 7:19-23**

>>> #8. *What else did he promise Ezra in vv 20-23? What reason did he give in v23?*

They also could take with them articles that could be used in the temple. Then the king issued a decree to those beyond the River who were in charge of the king's treasure to give whatever Ezra requested up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. Other things needed for the temple could be bought or provided from these gifts.

They were to have whatever they needed to do God's will in the temple. The king was concerned to please God, so as to avoid bringing wrath on his realm because of displeasing God. (It does not seem that this proves Artaxerxes was converted completely to God's service. Perhaps he just viewed God as A god who truly was powerful and did not want to bring the disfavor of that god.)

### **Provisions for religious leaders – 7:24-26**

>>> #9. *What protection was given to religious leaders in v24? What authority was Ezra given in v25?*

The king then decreed that those who served in the temple should not have to pay any form of taxes (see v7 regarding Nethinim). And he authorized Ezra to set up judges and other rulers to make sure God's law was properly enforced. This required judges to know God's law, and Ezra was to teach it to those who did not know it (it could also be that he was to teach the people the law – 2 Chron. 17:7; Malachi 2:7). Cf. Exodus 18:21,22; Deut. 16:18.

Those who would not obey the law were to be punished by whatever means was deemed best: death, banishment, confiscation of goods (as in a fine), or imprisonment. Note that laws must be enforced to be effective, and people must know the laws in order to be able to obey them. The duty of rulers is to teach people the law and to punish those who disobey. We today need judges who will diligently follow this pattern.

### **Ezra's thanksgiving to God – 7:27,28**

>>> #10. *How did Ezra respond to the king's commands (vv 27,28)?*

For this decree of the king, Ezra praised God. He could improve the service in the temple and make the temple more attractive. He considered this to be a blessing from God. The king made the decree, but Ezra gave glory to God for moving the king to do so. We should give thanks to God for our blessings, even when they come through other people.

So Ezra began to prepare for the journey by finding leaders of the Israelites to make the journey with him.

## Notes on Ezra Chapter 8

### II. Preparation and Journey Led by Ezra – Chap. 8

In chap. 7, King Artaxerxes had authorized Ezra to lead another group of exiles to return to Judea. This chapter gives the details of that group and its return (whereas chapter 7 had simply summarized the fact that it was done).

#### **The list of people to return with Ezra – 8:1-14**

>>> #1. *What is listed in Ezra 8:1-14? How do you know that Ezra was in the group? Note that these numbers total 1354. How does this compare to the size of the first group?*

These verses give a list of the names of the leaders of the people who made the trip with Ezra. Note the reference to “with me” in v1, showing this was the group that Ezra had been authorized to lead.

The number of men (not counting families) that returned with Ezra was 1354 (including the Levites, etc. added in vv 15ff). This was a much smaller group than the first group that Zerubabel had led, which had totaled over 50,000 (cf. chap. 2).

#### **No Levites among the exiles to return – 8:15-20**

>>> #2. *Where did they meet before leaving? How long were they there?*

>>> #3. *Who was missing from the group? (Think: Why would this be a problem?)*

>>> #4. *What did Ezra do about this problem, and what was the result?*

The people who had volunteered to make the trip were gathered together by the river Ahava (cf. vv 21,31). They camped there three days, but when Ezra searched among them he found no Levites. Apparently there were priests, but the Levites were responsible to assist the priests in the temple. So the lack of Levites was a problem.

Ezra discussed this with the leading men (“chief men” – ASV) and the men of understanding (“teachers” – ASV). He gave them a command to carry to a man named Iddo, who was a chief man at a place called Casiphia. Iddo was a leader of the Nethinim, so he was instructed to bring servants for the house of God. See on v20 below regarding Nethinim.

The instruction to Iddo resulted in a group of men to return to Jerusalem to do the needed work of service. A man of understanding named Sherebiah, of the tribe of Levi, came with his sons and brothers. Also other Levites came, so the total Levites were 38.

Also 220 Nethinim came, itemized by name. Here we have an explanation as detailed as any of who the Nethinim were. They are said to be people appointed by David and other leaders to serve the Levites. So the Levites helped the priests in the temple, and the Nethinim helped the Levites. Cf. 2:43; 7:7.

Note that Ezra gave the credit to God for these men. He and others had worked to bring it about, but God blessed their effort. We should remember to also give God credit and thanks when our needs are met.

#### **The people ask God’s blessing on their journey – 8:21-23**

>>> #5. *What did Ezra have the people do before leaving (v21)? What does this practice refer to?*

>>> #6. *What was the purpose of this act? Why had they not asked for soldiers to protect them?*

>>> #7. *Application: What lessons can we learn from this about our own journeys today?*

Before beginning the journey, the people made special request of God by means of fasting for His aid and protection. Ezra had told the king that God was with those who served Him and against those who did not (see 7:6,9,28; Josh. 23:16). So he did not think it would be fitting now to turn and ask the king for armed guards to protect them. Instead, they made request of the Lord and put their faith in Him. This request was answered as they did arrive safely.

One reason why they needed protection is described in the following verses. They had much silver and gold and other valuables with them to take to the work in the temple. This might endanger them from robbers, etc. But God cared for them and they had no such problems.

Surely we also need to ask God's blessings on the work we do. We should request His care and protection when we travel, or when we undertake any work for Him. If the Lord does not bless our work, we will not accomplish good for Him. If His blessing is on the work, then we can accomplish much.

Note that this passage clearly illustrates the Biblical purpose of fasting. We are expressly told that they fasted and prayed in order to entreat God. This was a means of showing how seriously and sincerely they sought God's blessings on their work. See also 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Chron. 20:3.

Note also that, when we make a request of God and then receive what we asked for, we can and should give God credit that He answered our prayer.

### **Men appointed to be responsible for the treasure – 8:24-30**

>>> #8. Describe what they took with them (vv 24-30). What does this show about why they were concerned about protection?

>>> #9. Who was put in charge of the treasure? Note that they prayed about this, then they put men in charge. What does this teach us about prayer?

>>> #10. **Define** stewardship. How did these men illustrate the concept of stewardship?

>>> #11. Application: What are some things that we today are stewards of? What are some things we can learn about stewardship from this Bible example?

The king had authorized people to make free-will offerings for the work of the temple, and the king and his counselors had also made donations – 7:14-16. This resulted in a great quantity of valuables being transported with Ezra's group. There were six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles {weighing} one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. Compare the amount of the first group recorded in 1:9-11.

Preparation for the trip required making individuals responsible for caring for the precious things being taken. This was not left up to everybody in general but nobody in particular. Ezra made twelve specific individuals responsible for various items. The quantity was measured to them to keep, so it could be measured again to be sure they delivered the complete amount when they arrived in Jerusalem.

Note how this illustrates the concept of stewardship. These men were in charge of something that did not belong to them; in fact, it belonged to God's work. They were in charge of it, but could not do with it just whatever they chose. They were to care for it and use it properly, but then they were to give account for what they did with it.

Ezra said that these men were holy or set apart to do this work. They were caring for holy possessions for the temple, so they were to be holy in their work. Cf. Lev. 21:6-8; 22:2,3.

We today support God's work by freewill offerings on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1,2). Like the funds here in Ezra, these funds today are given to specifically do God's work in the spiritual temple, the church. That makes them holy, or set apart to God. They can no longer be used for just anything we desire or anything men may choose. They must be used according to God's plan, and to use them for other things would be to misuse that which is holy.

We also have God's holy word and the duties of His church. These are holy responsibilities also to care for, so we too must be holy people to do them (1 Peter 1:15ff; 2:5-10). In a sense, our responsibility is even greater than that of these men. They were stewards of only material wealth. We are stewards of that which leads to eternal life. Someday we will be called to account for how we used these gifts. Are we using them wisely?

Then note that Ezra and the people had prayed to God for protection. But having prayed, they also took measures to do what they could to bring about what they prayed for. They asked God's protection, but then appointed men to be specifically responsible to protect the valuables.

Likewise, we pray for daily bread, for the gospel to be spread, for wisdom, etc., but then we must work to the extent we are able to bring about what we prayed for. God deserves the credit, but He expects us to do what we can.

### ***The journey completed – 8:31-34***

>>> #12. *When did they depart? What was the result of their journey?*

The people, having completed their preparations, began their journey on the 12th day of the first month. 7:8,9 had said that they began on the first day of the first month. I assume this means that was when they gathered to begin the journey, but the preparations described here took the intervening time. So they actually left on the twelfth day.

God answered their prayer for protection, so they arrived safely with no ambushes from enemies. Note again the credit is given to God for the blessing of safety.

Having arrived safely in Jerusalem, they waited there for three days. Then the men who had been entrusted with the valuables delivered them to those in charge of the temple. The implication is that, when the goods were measured, all was found to be present. Note that the stewards were called to account for their stewardship. It is proper to check up on those who are stewards. They should be glad to provide things honorable in the sight of men as well as God – 2 Cor. 8:21.

### ***Sacrifice and praise to God for the safe journey – 8:35,36***

>>> #13. *Describe some things they did after arriving.*

The people then made sacrifice of praise to God. This was done by those who had returned from captivity. I assume that means all who had returned, including people of both groups. The many animals offered are described.

They people also went to the governing authorities of the region to deliver to them the decree from the king (see chap. 7). This resulted in their receiving the finances and cooperation that the king had decreed.

So the second group had arrived safely from their journey.

## **Notes on Ezra Chapter 9**

### **III. The People Put Away Foreign Wives and Children - Chap. 9,10**

#### **The Sin of Intermarriage Is Discovered**

#### ***The problem revealed – 9:1,2***

>>> #1. *What problem was brought to Ezra in vv 1,2?*

>>> #2. *List other **passages** and explain the Old Testament teaching about this.*

>>> #3. *Application: What problems can occur today when Christians marry people who are not Christians?*

>>> #4. *Who led in this sin (v2)? What can we learn about the importance of example?*

Ezra had brought the group of exiles back in chap. 8, and the first thing that is recorded as happening was a major problem. So often, when we rejoice in having received a great blessing or achieved a good work, the devil soon seeks to defeat or discourage us by problems.

The law had required that the people of Israel were not to marry the people of the nations that they were to defeat and remove from the land (the nations listed in v1). The purpose of this was to keep their evil influence from leading the Israelites to sin especially in idolatry (see v12; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; Exodus 23:32; 34:12-16; Leviticus 18:24-30; Joshua 23:12,13; Nehemiah 13:23-27). However, the people in Judah had committed this sin, and the leaders and rulers of the people had been the most guilty.

Sin is always tragic. Serious consequences so often follow. This is true of all sins, even sins by those who make no claim to be God's people. But sin is especially tragic when it is committed by the people of God, because they are the ones who have professed allegiance to God and who

therefore ought to be most faithful. Worst of all is when the leaders of God's people are involved. When the leaders go astray, they often lead the other people astray, setting a bad example, and failing to demand purity of the people. Elders, preachers, teachers, and mature Christians need to learn this lesson. See Acts 20:28-30; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

The New Testament does not contain a direct and express prohibition against marriage to people who are not Christians, like the Old Testament passages listed above (though some believe there are indirect prohibitions of it). But the practice ought to be avoided today, because it often leads to consequences exactly like these Old Testament passages warn against.

Furthermore, there are many problems, dangers and temptations to one who marries a non-Christian. There may be conflicts over how to raise the kids, how much to give to the church, whether or not to attend all the services or whether to attend a denomination, what moral standards we will follow, who our closest friends will be, even where we will live (in a town with no faithful church?), etc.

And even if there is no direct conflict in these matters, still the one who is not a Christian does not share that which is most important in life to the Christian – a relationship with God. The Christian must live with the daily knowledge that the dearest person on earth to him/her is destined for eternal punishment, and the non-Christian's example works against the Christian in raising the children and teaching the lost, etc. Surely we can see that a Christian would be foolish to put himself in such a situation, yet it happens time and time again.

### ***The righteous grieve over the sin – 9:3,4***

>>> #5. *How did Ezra and others react to this news (vv 3,4)?*

Ezra was deeply grieved over this sin by the people. He tore his clothes and plucked out some of his hair and beard. This were signs of great grief. All others who respected God's words came together with him to grieve. They are said to tremble at the word of God – cf. Isaiah 66:2; Ezra 10:3. They realized the severe consequences of disobedience to God.

People who are aware of the sins committed by others ought to feel great grief. It is right that we should grieve over sin. Sin is terrible in what it does to our lives, our eternal destinies, and especially our relationship to God. People who do not grieve over sin are people who are not likely to live apart from sin.

This sin in particular brought grave consequences in this life, even if people are willing to repent of it, as we will see. We will also see that the sin of unscriptural divorce and remarriage today likewise brings grave consequences. The situation is tragic in that the people involved are going to suffer greatly for their sin either in this life or in eternity (or both). It is truly a cause for grief.

### ***Ezra confessed the sin to God – 9:5-9***

>>> #6. *How bad did Ezra feel (v6)? How did he describe the people's guilt and the consequences (v7)?*

>>> #7. *What blessing had God given them anyway (vv 8,9)?*

>>> #8. **Define** "remnant." *What remnant did Ezra refer to here?*

Not only had Ezra torn his clothing and plucked out hair, but he had also been fasting. Fasting is a way of showing grief. It is also a way, when accompanied by prayer, of making especially serious requests to God and showing extreme sorrow for sin (cf. 10:6).

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra went to God in prayer over this matter. It is always right to go to God in prayer about our problems, especially spiritual problems and times of great spiritual needs. Those who care about God's will, and who therefore grieve over sin, will naturally be driven to prayer when they see sins, especially such grave ones affecting so many people as in this case. And those who commit the sin must pray to God to be forgiven (Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12; 21:28-32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:8-10; Proverbs 28:13).

Ezra deeply expressed his grief in prayer (cf. Daniel 9:7,8). He fell to his knees, spread out his hands toward God, and was too ashamed to even lift his face to God. The people were so guilty He could not face God. He said their sins had covered their heads and risen to the heavens (Psalms 38:4; 2 Chron. 28:9).

Ezra recalled that which God obviously knew – that the nation had frequently sinned against God, and for those sins God had sent them into captivity (Psalms 106:6; 2 Chron. 36:14-17; Daniel 9:5,6). Even the kings and priests had been sent to the sword (death), plunder, captivity, and humiliation. You would think they would have learned the lesson to avoid sin.

Now, by God's grace they had just been allowed to return from captivity. Ezra had just led a group of exiles back from captivity. This was a revival granted by God's mercy through the Persians. God had allowed them to return to rebuild the temple and the city wall (as in the book of Ezra).

Yet for all these punishments and mercies, here they are in sin again! Though they had been slaves, God had not forsaken them. Surely they ought to have known better than to turn around and go right back into the kind of sin that led to idolatry and led to captivity.

How many times are Christians today likewise guilty? We too are all sinners saved by the grace of God. We deserve to be punished eternally for our sins, just as Israel deserved captivity. Yet by His great mercy God sent Jesus to die for us and offer us the hope of eternal life, which we surely do not deserve. Yet how often do we just go right back into sin, even sometimes knowing we should not do so?

Note that Ezra refers to those who had returned as a "remnant" (v8; cf. v15). A remnant is a small part that somehow has been left over from some larger substance. In this case, the greater part of Israel had been destroyed for sin and remained in captivity. Those who returned were a small part of the group. This concept of a remnant is common in Biblical teaching to refer to the small part of those who maintain a relationship with God (cf. Rom. 9:27). Yet in this case, a major part even of the remnant had sinned. How tragic!

### ***Ezra's summary of the people's guilt – 9:10-15***

>>> #9. *What command did Ezra say they had broken (vv 9-12)?*

>>> #10. *Why was Ezra especially upset by the sin in this case (vv 13-15)?*

But for all God's goodness in returning the people from captivity, now they again had forsaken His commands. Specifically, God had warned them that the land was unclean, having been defiled by the sins of the people, especially idolatry. Therefore, He had commanded them to separate themselves from the people of the land so as to avoid their sins. Yet Israel had again committed sin; instead of separating themselves from the people, they had intermarried with them. God had expressly forbidden this because of the iniquities and abominations of the people of the land (see references on v2). Had they maintained separation and purity, God would have kept them in the land to receive its great blessings even for future generations. But they had been cast out of the land because of sin.

After all that God had done to punish the people for their previous sins, and then delivered them from that punishment, you would surely think the people would know better than to go back into sin now. How could they so presume on His mercy? Did they think he would spare them now? Ezra affirms that surely such sin would lead God to be so angry He would consume them and this time leave no remnant.

Note that Ezra says God punished them less than they deserve (v13; cf. Psalms 103:10). This is a description of grace. Grace leads God to offer us salvation and forgiveness despite the fact we deserve punishment. Hence, it is unmerited or undeserved favor. What we deserve is punishment.

And then note again the reference to the returned exile as a "remnant" (vv 14,15; see notes on v8).

## Notes on Ezra Chapter 10

### The Sin Resolved

#### **Repentance required giving up the unscriptural wives – 10:1-4**

>>> #1. *What was Ezra doing (v1)? Who joined him?*

>>> #2. *Who confessed Israel's sin? What did he say they had done?*

>>> #3. *What did he recommend should be done to resolve the problem?*

>>> #4. **Define** *repentance*. *How does the solution fit the meaning of repenting?*

In chap. 9, the returned exiles had discovered a serious spiritual problem in their midst. Many men, including many leaders of the nation, had married wives of foreign nations in disobedience to the law. Ezra had mourned for the sin and prayed to God at length confessing the people's evil. As Ezra continued in this prayer, a large group of people assembled and joined him in grieving for the sin, weeping bitterly.

This chapter describes the solution to the problem that was determined and, in so doing, shows us important principles about removing sin from God's people and spiritual restoration of those who have departed from God's way. In particular, it shows us what needs to be done when people have committed the sin of entering into sinful marriages, which they have no right to enter.

The solution was proposed by a man named Shechaniah. Nothing else is known about this man, but he was a wise and courageous man to propose the solution. First, he acknowledged what had been done and that it was a sin: men had married people from the surrounding forbidden nations (see notes on 9:2 for Scriptures and details regarding this sin). Yet he said there was hope. Even in time of the deepest sin, there is hope if people are willing to turn from it.

He said the people who were guilty needed to repent, and the only way to overcome the harm done and do proper restitution was to put away the foreign wives and their children. He proposed that they make a covenant with God to do this. This would be done according to the law and according to the guidance of those who tremble at God's law (see on 9:4).

Note that repentance required giving up the wives, since the marriages themselves were illegitimate. They could not continue in the marriages, because they had no right to be in them. They were forbidden because the foreign wives would influence the men of Israel to worship idols and commit other pagan sins. So long as the marriages continued, the sin would continue. So the only solution was to get out of the marriages.

This was done by means of a covenant before God - a solemn promise and commitment before Him (cf. 2 Chron. 34:31). So far as I can tell, this is as far as the legal procedure went. There is no record of any certificate of divorce being given (as in Deut. 24:1ff). The putting away was done by a commitment made before God and before the leaders of God's people. Of course, the men involved had to follow through and cease living with those wives.

#### **Similar repentance is required today.**

The Bible demands repentance as a condition for forgiveness today, even as it did then, whether the sin was committed before conversion or afterward (Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Acts 17:30; Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 20:21; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10). And repentance requires undoing the harm done by the wrong acts (Ezekiel 33:14,15; Leviticus 6:1-5; Matthew 21:28-31; Luke 19:8; Philemon 10-14,18,19).

This might involve returning property that we took that belongs to someone else. The thief may have the property in his possession, but it still belongs to the one he stole it from. To truly repent, he must attempt to return it to the rightful owner (cf. Ezekiel 33:15). A penitent runaway slave must return to its rightful owner (book of Philemon 10-19). (Cf. Acts 26:20; Exodus 22:1-15; Acts 19:18f; Matthew 14:3,4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

## **Application to adulterous remarriages**

>>> #5. *Application: What does the New Testament teach about people who divorce for a cause besides fornication then remarry? See Matt. 19:9; Rom. 7:2,3; 1 Cor. 7:10,11. How does this situation compare to Ezra 10?*

Specifically, when the sin was taking wives from foreign nations, who would influence the Jews to sin, then the only solution would be to get rid of those wives. Similarly, if a man or woman under the gospel has unscripturally divorced and then married someone else, they too are living in a sinful relationship. The marriage was sinful, not just to enter, but also to continue, because it is adultery (Matthew 19:3-9; 5:31,23; Romans. 7:2,3; 1 Corinthians 7:10f). Once again, the only solution would be to cease the marriage relation, just like this case in Ezra's day. A definite agreement and commitment needs to be made before God and His people in which the couple agrees to separate. Then they must follow through and no longer live together as man and wife.

People want us to think that this is too hard a measure to apply; surely God would not require such sacrifices. Yet He did in this case in Ezra. The people had to give up even their families to make restitution. Jesus plainly said that there would be people who would have to forsake family to serve Him (Luke 14:26; 18:28-30). He said that those who are not willing to do this are not worthy of Him. Yet when it comes down to actual cases, people want to say that surely God would not require such a hard thing!

For further information, see our articles about divorce and remarriage at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

### **Strong spiritual leadership is needed.**

Ezra was encouraged to take the leadership and get the job done (v4). This would take courage to do, and he was urged to have this courage (cf. Josh. 1:5-9). The people in sin need great courage and commitment to make correction, but the leaders of God's people also need great courage and conviction to teach and lead God's people to see the need for such action and to follow through with it.

Such steps are never easy for God's people. The needed change will be made only when the leaders are willing to take a firm Scriptural lead and when the people are willing to follow and make the necessary sacrifices.

### **The plan of correction put to action 10:5-8**

>>> #6. *What role did Ezra have in this (vv 4-6)? Why would this be hard?*

>>> #7. *Application: What lessons can we learn about good leadership from Ezra?*

>>> #8. *What were the people commanded to do in vv 7,8? What was the penalty for refusing?*

Ezra followed through on this plan of action, and required all the guilty people to assemble and put away their wives. He made them take an oath – make the solemn promise required by the covenant that had been agreed upon. This included the leaders and all the people.

He then went into the chamber of Jehohanan, son of Eliashib and there he fasted (eating no bread and drinking no water) and mourned for the guilty of the people. I have no idea who this man was, so apparently it does not matter, except that it was an appropriate place for Ezra to do what needed done. What he did was fast (cf. 8:21) and mourn for the sins of the people. This shows again that the sin was terrible, and it illustrates the purpose of fasting as an expression of grief and/or of repentance or special request of God.

### **The penalty of those who refused to make correction**

They issued a proclamation that all the people were to come to Jerusalem to make the arrangements for the guilty men to put away their wives as had been agreed upon (v5). The leaders

gave the people three days to come. Those who would not do so, would lose their property and would be separated from the people (i.e., they would “withdraw” from him).

Note that the penalty for refusing to make correction was severe. The sin was great, the correction would be painful, but there were severe penalties for refusing. Likewise, today there must be discipline from the church for members who refuse to correct unscriptural marriages.

In the case of Israel in Ezra’s day, the penalty was loss of property and separation from the people. Today, of course, the New Testament nowhere authorizes seizure of property, but it does teach withdrawing from those who practice sin, including fornication. Living in an unscriptural marriage is adultery (a form of fornication). Therefore, we must withdraw from those who do such and will not separate as described here in Ezra. (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

When we take such measures in these cases today, some people think we are cruel and lack compassion. They claim that such measures go beyond what the Scriptures require. However, God required it in Israel’s case here, and the New Testament passages clearly teach it today.

### ***The people meet to make the correction – 10:9-15***

>>> #9. *What did Ezra tell them? How did the people respond?*

As the leaders had determined, the people gathered in the open square by the temple within the required three days. This occurred on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month of the year (Ezra had just arrived in the fifth month – 7:8,9). But it was a time of heavy rain, so the people trembled because of the serious problem they faced and because of the rain.

Ezra stood before them and taught them of their guilt in taking foreign wives, as has been discussed (cf. 9:2). He demanded that they make confession and agree to separate from the people of the land and from the pagan wives. Note again that what was required was separation, without mention of a certificate of divorce.

### ***Confession required***

The correction required separation from the foreign wives. But they also had to confess the sin to God. This was required for Israelites who sinned under the law. See Lev. 26:40-42; Josh. 7:19-21; Prov. 28:13.

Confession of sin is also required as a condition of forgiveness for children of God today who sin. We must not only repent of the sin, we must pray to God for forgiveness. Then we must change our lives and make restitution. See Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12; 21:28-32; 1 John 1:8-10.

### ***The congregation’s commitment to do right***

The congregation responded to Ezra by agreeing they would do as he had taught. However, they appealed to Ezra to give them more time. There were many people involved, it would be a very difficult thing to do, and it was a time of heavy rain.

So they requested that the leaders of the congregation supervise the matter, and let people who were involved in the sin come with their city leaders, each city at an appointed time, till the matter was resolved. In this way they would turn away God’s wrath. Note that God’s wrath continues until correction is made.

### ***Opposition from within the congregation***

>>> #10. *Who opposed the solution? What lessons can we learn from this opposition?*

Though the people did agree to make correction, there was some opposition. Two men named Jonathan and Jahaziah led the opposition, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai.

As it was then, so it is today. One can be sure that there are those from among God’s people who will oppose the efforts of faithful men of God to lead the people to make needed reforms to please God. Invariably it seems that change for the good comes only against the will of some within the congregation who ought to support the truth.

This seems to be true in general, but in particular it is true in the matter of unscriptural marriages. When faithful men preach the need for those in adulterous remarriages to repent and leave their marriages, there will be those who say this is not required and that those who say it is needed are false teachers or unnecessarily troubling the people. In such cases, as with Ezra, God's faithful servants must continue on to stand for truth and lead people to obey.

### ***The people begin to put away the sinful marriages – 10:16-19***

>>> #11. *Who was included among the transgressors (v18)? What lessons does this teach us?*

>>> #12. *What else did the people have to do to make correction (v19)?*

As the agreement had been made, the process was begun whereby the people would put away their foreign wives. Ezra and other leaders were in charge of investigating and questioning each man regarding his guilt. From the tenth month to the first month the work continued. So the whole process took a total of three months to complete!

The first ones mentioned as being guilty were actually sons of the priests, even sons of Jeshua the high priest and his brothers! (See regarding Jeshua on 5:2; Haggai 1:1,12.) So indeed the problem did reach to families of some of the very most influential leaders among the people (see 9:2).

All these promised to put away their foreign wives. Then they had to offer the sacrifice for trespass as required by the law. So today, those in unscriptural marriages must promise to separate from their unscriptural spouses and must meet the New Testament conditions of forgiveness (repentance, confession, and prayer), then they must follow through and separate from their unscriptural companions.

### ***A list of the names of other guilty individuals -10:20-44***

>>> #13. *Think: Why would God list in the book the names of the individuals who committed the sin? What lessons should we learn?*

>>> #14. *What else would make the solution hard (v44)?*

Here is a list of the names of the individuals involved. We may wonder why God would bother to list the names. But there are lessons we can learn.

First, we can learn that the Bible does not hesitate to identify sinners by name. Some today would claim that we should not name people who are guilty of sin, but the Bible does not hesitate to do so. Fortunately, these apparently repented and changed.

Furthermore, such lists help us appreciate that the people who committed this sin and had to leave their wives were real people. These people would have been known to their friends and neighbors. The application of God's law then, like now, was not just a matter of theory. It had practical consequences in personal lives. Often today God's people will preach His word about some issue until it affects someone they personally know – perhaps some close friend or family member. Then suddenly they may change their doctrine rather than acknowledge that their loved ones are in sin and must make the necessary sacrifice to correct their lives. This list of names shows us that real people committed real sins and had to make the sacrifice necessary to repent. We must not hesitate today to stand for truth no matter whom we know that is affected by the teaching.

### ***Note the involvement of children in these families.***

>>> #15. *Case Study: Suppose someone argues that God would not require people in unscriptural remarriages today to separate, because it would be too hard. How would you respond?*

We are expressly told that some of the wives that were put away, also had children. This would make it especially hard for the husbands to put them away. Nevertheless, the people obeyed.

Today, the existence of children is often used as an excuse why people in unscriptural marriages must not be required to put away their spouses. This is a play for sympathy, and indeed it is difficult. Not only must the husband and wife give up their marriage, but the children are left without a normal family relationship. But God used this case to make it clear that this problem does not justify continuing to live in a sinful marriage.

Note that, this situation would be different from today in one regard. 10:3 shows that the men not only put away the wives, but also put away the children of those wives. The only reason I can think of for that relates to the reason why the marriages were sinful to begin with: the pagan wives would influence the people of Israel into sin. Often such influence comes through the children. The children may be influenced into sin by their pagan parent, then the children in turn influence the faithful parent or the children of other families into sin. So the only solution, given the reason why the marriages would be sinful, would be to separate the wives and their children from the congregation.

This is not true, however, of the reason today why unscriptural remarriages are adulterous. It has nothing to do with any guilt or probable guilt of the children. It has to do with the parent who divorced without Scriptural grounds and then remarried. The children are in no way to blame for this. So, when the parents separate, both parents are still responsible to love and care for the children as parents ought to do. Making proper arrangements for this may be difficult, but the faithful parents should surely continue their relationship with their children.

### ***Conclusion of the book***

Under Ezra's guidance, not only had another group of exiled Jews returned to Palestine, but a great spiritual reform had occurred. God's people had been in great error and apostasy. Reform occurred only by diligent effort in the face of great hardship and opposition. This was not easy, but required great sacrifice and commitment. Likewise, it is not easy to reform God's people today either, but we must have the commitment necessary to stand for truth and make the sacrifices needed.

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