

The Secret to Changing the World

Ezra 7 & 8

58 years have passed since the temple was completed and rededicated (Ezra 6:14-22). During that time, the Jews' earlier zeal to return to the Mosaic Law and follow God wholeheartedly had waned. They started intermarrying with unbelieving Gentiles. The Levites had neglected the teaching of the Law and temple worship became more formal than sincere.

God sent Ezra, a Jewish priest and scribe who was living in Babylon, to lead another group of exiles back to the Promised Land. His primary ministry consisted of leading the people to return to obeying the Law. Ezra was a man who was strongly motivated by the Law of God. He provides an example for the kind of people God uses to bring about revival.

*If we want to bring about spiritual renewal in our world,
we must be devoted to knowing, practicing, and teaching the truth of God's Word*

Ezra's background (7:1-10). Ezra's genealogy (1-5) shows that he was a man of importance whom his fellow Jews would have respected. His ancestry is traced back to Aaron. A scribe (6) was a person who functioned as a copier, writer, and communicator. Ezra's personal resolve provides an excellent example for every believer (10).

Artaxerxes' decree (7:11-26). The king appointed Ezra as the person responsible to him for the affairs conducted in the Jewish community in Judah. Artaxerxes' decree promised permission to go to Jerusalem (11-13), provisions for the temple worship (14-20), authorized Ezra to withdraw funds from the provincial treasury (21-23), and permitted him to establish judicial and education systems in Judah (24-26). Artaxerxes permitted all this so that there would be peace and good will among his Jewish subjects, and so that he might appease Yahweh's wrath (23).

Ezra's thanksgiving (7:27-28). Ezra recognized and acknowledged that God had moved Artaxerxes to do what he had done.

The people who returned (8:1-14). The descendants of the priestly and royal families in Israel appear first in this list (2-3). Then the names of the rest of the Jews follow. Ezra's companions were mainly the relatives of those Jews who had returned 80 years earlier under Sheshbazzar (compare 2:3-15 with 8:3-14).

The recruiting of Levites to return (8:15-20). The returnees assembled on the banks of the Ahava waterway. No Levites had volunteered to return to Judah. In view of his plans for the restoration, Ezra needed more Levites than those already in Judah.

Due to his recruiting efforts, 38 Levites and 220 temple servants joined the immigrants. This brings the total number of men who returned with Ezra as about 1,700—plus women and children. One writer calculated the total number between 4,000 and 5,000. The number was smaller than the 50,000 who went on the first return (2:64-65).

The immigrants' spiritual preparation (8:21-23). Ezra sensed his great need for God's help in the dangerous trip that lay before them. This moved him to seek God's favor in prayer.

Ezra's physical preparations (8:24-30). Ezra took special precautions to make sure that the expensive temple utensils arrived safely and to guarantee that everyone would view his handling of the precious cargo as completely honest.

Safe arrival (8:31-36). The trip took four months, and covered 900 miles. God kept them safe on their dangerous trip, and all 28 tons of their valuable cargo arrived safely. The returnees offered burnt offerings (consecration of their persons) and sin offerings (atonement for sin). They delivered Artaxerxes' decree to the satraps and governors and they aided the people and the worship in the temple.

God's good hand was so evident on his people that even surrounding peoples helped them in the sacrificial system, the means of fellowship with God.

The Key to Changing the World – Ezra 7:10

- *For Ezra had set his heart* – devotion, commitment
- *to study the Law of the Lord* – Bible study – seek the meaning and application
- *and to do it* – practice, obedience, lifestyle
- *and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel* – pass on his knowledge and learning to others

Consequently, *the good hand of his God was on him* (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31)

The kind of the people God uses

- Devoted to God (7:1-5)
- Skilled in the Word of God (7:6)
- Trustworthy character (7:11-26)
- Granted wisdom by God (7:25)
- Recognized God's presence and acted boldly (7:27-28)
- Persuasively gathers a following (8:1-14)
- Recognizes limitations and seeks to address them (8:15-20)
- Seeks to prepare people spiritually before acting (8:21-23)
- Delegates responsibility and authority (8:24-34)
- Leads in worship and celebration (8:35-36)