

Lesson 7 – Ezra 7-10

Text: Ezra 7-10

Main Characters: God, Ezra, Artaxerxes

Key Passages:

- Ezra 7:10 – Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Lord, to do His will, and to teach others.
- Ezra 9:13 – God punished the people far less than they deserved.

Main Storyline:

About 75 years after the first group of Jews had returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1), a man named Ezra (a devout priest and scribe) was sent by King Artaxerxes to see how the Jews were doing, specifically how well they were obeying the Lord. Artaxerxes had given a decree which said that Ezra and any other people who wanted to should return to Jerusalem and worship the Lord with the full backing of the king's treasury. Artaxerxes did not want any punishment to come upon him or his kingdom for failure to worship God. He also instructed Ezra to teach everyone in the region around Jerusalem about God and His laws so that they could also obey them. Anyone who failed to obey the laws of God and the king was to be punished immediately, up to and including death.

Ezra was elated that the king would provide so abundantly. He knew that God was the true source of these and all blessings. Ezra was thankful to God for being with him and the other Jews.

Though many people returned with Ezra, it was a much smaller group than had returned originally under the decree of Cyrus. At first, there were no Levites present in the group, so Ezra needed to send for some Levites, who then accompanied them. Before they left, they held a fast and prayed to God, seeking protection and guidance. Ezra did not want to request any military protection from the king, as Ezra had told the king that he could trust that the Lord would be on the side of those who seek Him. God answered their prayer, and the people enjoyed a safe journey back to Jerusalem. As the king had instructed, the governors and people of the region also gave their support to the Jews

Ezra also split the offerings of wealth that had been given to them into the custody of some of the leaders. They were to keep track of them on their journey to Jerusalem. When they arrived, the numbers and weights were recorded again.

After Ezra arrived, the leaders of the Jews came to him and told him that the people had not separated themselves from the foreign people in the surrounding areas. In fact, some of the people had intermarried with them and had children with them. The leaders and rulers amongst the Jews were, unfortunately, the worst offenders. Ezra was astonished and very upset; after he heard this information, he immediately tore his clothes and pulled out some of the hair from his head and beard. As he sat, fasting, everyone who respected the word of the Lord came around him. That evening, he arose from his fasting and prayed to God. He recognized the nation's sins and was ashamed because of them. However, he also acknowledged God's mercy in continuing to uphold them. Finally, he acknowledged that God had punished them far less than they deserved; no one could stand before God.

While Ezra was praying, more people gathered around him, weeping bitterly. One of the men, Shechaniah, suggested that Ezra lead the people in making a covenant to put away the foreign women and the children born by them. Ezra agreed and set the plan in motion. The people together made a covenant that they would do it, and the names of those people who had foreign wives were recorded.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) The good hand of the Lord is constantly on those who seek and obey Him.
- 2.) It is important to avoid sin; it is easier to avoid sin than to repent after becoming caught in it.