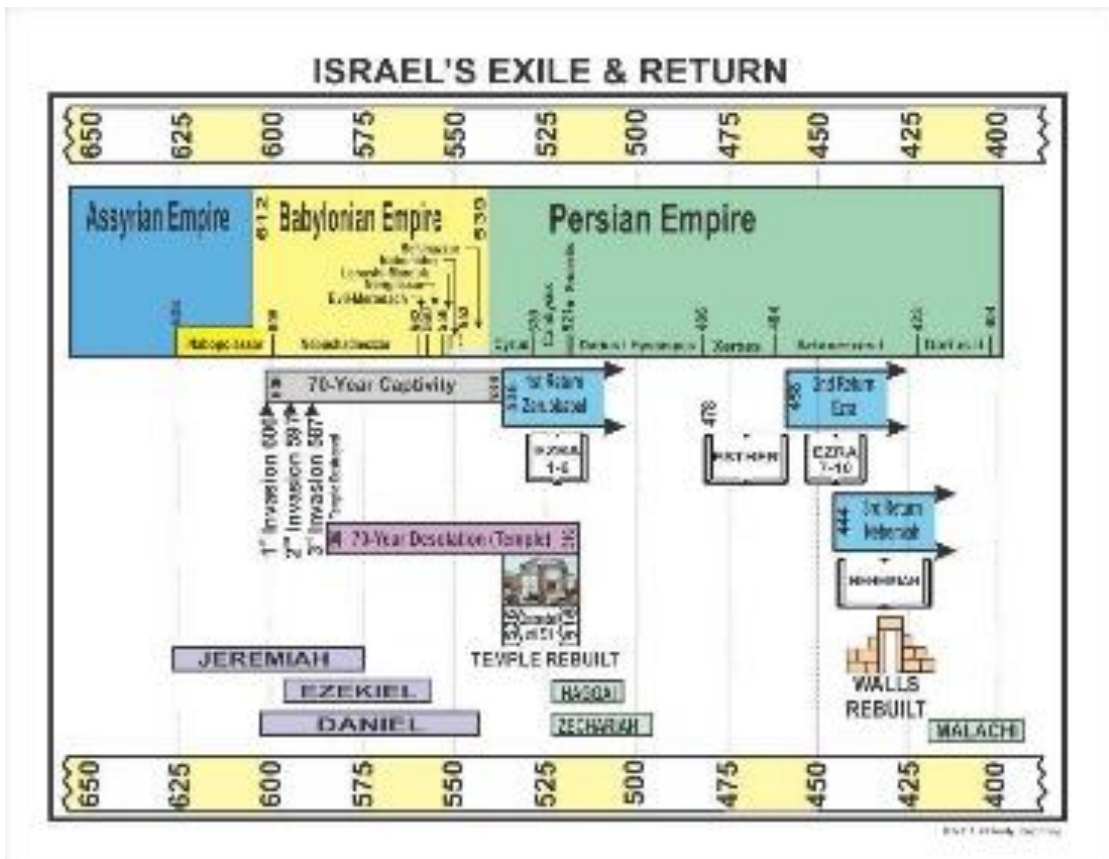


Turn in your Bibles to Ezra Chapter 7 as we continue our study of the book. We have covered 6 chapters in this book and guess who we actually get to meet tonight? Ezra! As we look at this Chapter, we are going to get to see the character of Ezra. What we are going to see in how Ezra is described is something that should be extremely important in the lives of every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ as an individual. Also, that should be very important in the life of a church, little c, and the Church, Big C.

As we begin let's look at one of our timelines again.



Short review! We have mentioned this and mentioned this, of the reason that Israel was conquered and led into captivity! Disobedience to God's Word! Which is Sin! In, 606 B.C. Israel goes under Babylonia captivity. In 538 the Persian Empire, led by King Cyrus conquers the Babylonians.

In 536 Cyrus makes his decree that all Israelites can return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the Temple. They got the foundation rebuilt and no sooner had they done that, they received opposition, persecution! And it discouraged them, and they stopped building the Temple! For about 14 years they stopped, until! Haggai and Zechariah gave them that kick in the pants through proclaiming, preaching, and reminding what the Lord has done and will do for them if they obey!

They were confronted with opposition again but this time they would not stop! Why! In their words to those bringing the opposition!

We are the servants of the God of Heaven and Earth, and we are going to rebuild this Temple. They were following the decree of Cyrus but more importantly following God's decree because his hand is upon them and he has put this plan in motion to bring glory to God's name and to bring Israel back to a light of the Gospel for all nations to see.

The Temple is rebuilt and as we have seen over the past two Wednesday nights the Israelites begin to follow the word of God and to bring true worship back into their lives. 60 years have passed and the remnant that had gone back to Jerusalem was having a hard time. Once again, we see God step in as God shows his sovereignty and brings another pagan king, Artaxerxes into the picture and to make another decree that sends Ezra back, with a second group of people, to Jerusalem with something very important.

I know you must be to Ezra Chapter 7 by now. I am going to do something a little different. I am going to start at almost the middle of the Chapter, and we are going to first look at the decree Artaxerxes made. So, let's begin in verse 11 and we will read through verse 24.

### **Ezra 7:11-24**

***<sup>11</sup> This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel: <sup>12</sup> "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now <sup>13</sup> I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. <sup>14</sup> For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand, <sup>15</sup> and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, <sup>16</sup> with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem. <sup>17</sup> With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem. <sup>18</sup> Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. <sup>19</sup> The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. <sup>20</sup> And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury. <sup>21</sup> "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, <sup>22</sup> up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. <sup>23</sup> Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. <sup>24</sup> We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.***

Another king, another letter and another decree! What we see here once again is the sovereign hand of God moving upon a pagan king to bring the nation of Israel, his people back to land that he gave them. But for a specific reason. To once again become the nation that is to be used to show his Glory, his power, his love, his mercy, his justice and that there is no other salvation but through God Jehovah.

No matter what selfish motives that King Artaxerxes may have had making this decree God was the person that stirred Artaxerxes heart to do this. Just as we saw with Zerubbabel with the 1<sup>st</sup> wave of Jews that came back to Jerusalem to begin to build the Temple. We see now with Ezra as God uses him to bring in this 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of exiles back to Jerusalem. They both were sent back with great provision.

With Zerubbabel the provision that was given was to help build the Temple and help them with items for the sacrifices and the worship to God. We saw this at the dedication of the Temple and began celebrating Passover again.

Now, within Artaxerxes' decree we see that the money that was being provided for Ezra was to be used to continue the Temple sacrifices and to assist in the offerings that were made to God for his faithfulness and for worship. But we also see that if that is not enough, King Artaxerxes says just let us know and we will provide more out of the King's treasury. Look at verse 20 again.

***Ezra 7:20***

***<sup>20</sup> And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.***

It's kind of like this!



It's like Artaxerxes handing over a blank check or a credit card and saying. No limit, it's yours to use.

Once again, we also see that everyone around the area of Jerusalem is to assist in providing what they need. Look at verse 21 to 23 again.

***Ezra 7:21-23***

***<sup>21</sup> "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, <sup>22</sup> up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. <sup>23</sup> Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons.***

I do want to show us this map. Because what does it mean, Beyond the River?



That is the Trans-Euphrates area that Matthew mentioned a few weeks ago. Every province east of the Euphrates river are to give those items we just read.

There are two things in verse 23 I want to point out. Though God's sovereign hand is directing all this we also see Artaxerxes selfish motives. This is 78 years from Cyrus' decree. Artaxerxes has seen and has heard what God Jehovah has been doing. He is wanting peace with the Jewish nation so that he will not get the wrath of God. And he is telling these people make sure you don't do anything that will bring his wrath on me. So, give them what I am telling you to give them.

Did you catch how verse 23 started though. ***Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven!***

Artaxerxes also speaks to Ezra personally about what Ezra is to do when he gets to Jerusalem. Look at verses 25 and 26.

***Ezra 7:25-26***

***<sup>25</sup> "And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach. <sup>26</sup> Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment."***

Do you have your Bibles? Hold them up! You hold in your hand the Wisdom of God! Let's talk about that for a moment. We are going to park here for a little while! Turn to 2 Timothy Chapter 3 verses 16 and 17.

***2 Timothy 3:16-17***

***<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***

When you hold the Bible, you hold the Wisdom of God! When you read, study the Bible you hold the Wisdom of God, because it is the very Word of God.

Listen to Proverbs 2:6 - ***For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.***

We have in the Bible words from God's mouth. Yes. He used 40 men, but they were each led by the Holy Spirit to write down each and every word. God breathed; God spoke into these men what to write.

Therefore, we have Truth, we have **THE** authority for all people, for all time, that pertains to creation, life, sin, salvation and exactly who God is!

God has provided his Word for us to know him in his fullness! For where else would we know of:

1. God's Power! **Genesis 1:3 - And God said let there be light! And there was light!**
2. God's Love, Mercy and Faithfulness! **Lamentations 3:22-23, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**
3. Again, God's Love! **John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, he gave, his one and only son!**
4. God's longsuffering! – **Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**
5. God's Holiness – **Isaiah 6:3 - And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”**
6. God's Justice – **John 12:47-48 - If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.**

Did you catch that? What are we going to be judged by? His word!! Who is doing the judging? Jesus! What ultimately got Adam and Eve kicked out of the Garden of Eden? A Rejection and Disobedience to God's Word! What got Israel put into captivity for 70 years? A Rejection and Disobedience to God's Word! What will send people to Hell? A Rejection and Disobedience to God's Word!

Would you say that God puts an emphasis on his Word? So much, that he refers to his one and only begotten son as the Word! And the Word became Flesh, John 1:14. People when we hold this Bible, when we read this Bible, and when we study this Bible, we are holding Jesus! Because we cannot know God, Jesus in his fullness outside of his Word!

I have heard and read how some people can't stand it when a preacher says that. They say, that Jesus is much more than that. That somehow limits God by saying that! Well, when I hear things like that. I stop and I listen, I watch. Those are code words for people that don't want God's Word to be the ultimate authority in their life. They want to make a Jesus, a God that fits their lifestyle. They can talk, they can live and they can condone anything and everything that God calls sin!

I want to quote something from one of Matthew's recent devotions.

***If a teaching or a way of thinking in your life erodes at the authority of God. It's false! It's that simple!***

That is exactly what is happening in American Christianity and that is exactly what happened to Israel.

What Ezra is going back with is a copy of the law of Moses. He is going back with the Torah, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. And it is according to the Law of Moses, he is going to appoint magistrates and judges to judge the people according to God's Word. It also states he is to teach the people. Why is he going to have to teach? Again, the Jewish nation has been immersed in this pagan culture for a long time. Many had neglected the law! So primarily the law of Moses, the Word of God was again to be followed and obeyed. And if disobeyed they will be judged accordingly. Just like for all of us when we stand before God!

Now some would say that this gave Ezra the right to also proselytize. That can be intimated here. Because the people had intermarried so there would be those lost from worshiping false gods. There surely were those from these other countries that had moved to the area. So, the opportunity is definitely there to do so!

But, what led to Ezra having this great opportunity! What was it about Ezra that this privilege, this great task was bestowed upon him? Let's go to the beginning of this Chapter and see. Look at verse 1.

### ***Ezra 7:1-11***

***Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup> son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup> son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup> son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup> son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest— <sup>6</sup> this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. <sup>7</sup> And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. <sup>8</sup> And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup> For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. <sup>10</sup> For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. <sup>11</sup> This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel:***

What I want to point out first is in verses 7, 8, and 9 is just a description of who came with Ezra to Jerusalem and we see that it took 4 months to travel from Babylonia to Jerusalem. But, now back to Ezra. What do we learn about him?

First, in verses 1 to 6, we learn that Ezra is in the line of Aaron as part of the Levitical priest line. So, he is a priest, a scribe. What did a scribe do? He made copies of Scripture so it would be preserved.



The scribe, to make sure they were not making any mistakes. The scribe would count the number of letters on each page. Not words! Letters! So, when they were done with a page. If it did not match, they threw it away and started over. Just with the very task that a scribe had of copying the law, Scripture. Would you not think that as Ezra is described, a scribe should become very skilled in the law? Now the word skilled here is used in a sense of that Ezra was ready to use the Word of God. He was diligent in his care of protecting and preserving the Word of God. But also, able to teach the Word of God.

Skilled in the law! To be a disciple of Jesus, Jesus said there was a cost. Remember what he said? We are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him! But to truly follow him we must know him, and we must adhere, obey to what he commands and shows us as truth. How do we do that?

Well, we get a good idea of that from the Apostle Paul as he is writing to Timothy in Ephesus. Turn to 2 Timothy again.

### ***2 Timothy 2:15***

***Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.***

The word approved is used in a sense of being tested, being tried. We are to present our lives to God as one that has been tried, tested against his Word. We do that by being a worker. We take the Bible, and we seek in it every truth that there is and then it is applied to our life and we live it. We don't take it and try to manipulate into our way of thinking or lifestyle that goes contrary to God's Word. We study it and take it and it creates a straight direct path in our lives in living the truth.

It is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

This idea of presenting ourselves to God is again used by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12. In Romans we have 11 Chapters of Doctrine. May I say Doctrine is very important when it comes to our lives as followers of the Lord Jesus. Without Doctrine we don't know the What, Why and How to apply this truth to our lives. So, Chapter 12 of Romans brings us to the point of now application.

### ***Romans 12:1-2***

***<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

We don't follow the culture, the world view of the world because our minds are renewed each and every day by having our minds transformed through the Word of God.

A follower of Jesus is only as strong as they are faithfully obeying and following God's Word. Therefore, we as a body of believers gathered together are only as strong together as we each are obeying and following God's Word. A church is only as strong as the one in the pulpit is faithful to preaching the truth of God's Word.

Ezra was a man, a scribe, skilled in the Law, the Word of God. That's just how Ezra was described. What or how did Ezra get to that point in his life. Let's look at verse 10.

### ***Ezra 7:10***

***For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.***

The word set in this verse means that Ezra:

1. Determined in his heart!
2. Prepared his heart!
3. Steadfast in his heart!
4. Endured with his heart!

What I would say is that Ezra was intentional! But what this shows us also is that it was important, it was a priority in Ezra's life. I bet there were days Ezra didn't want to study. Ezra come on they are having chariot races down by the river, let's go watch.

Is the study and reading of God's word a priority in your life? Have you set your heart to study the Bible? If not, that shows a lot about your heart it also shows that you can be swayed by the culture. If your life is not built on the truth of God's word it will all come tumbling down.

Jesus said this in accordance to his word. This is as Jesus is ending his sermon on the mount.

***Matthew 7:24-27***

***<sup>24</sup> "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."***

Yes. This is in reference to Jesus, but Jesus spoke specifically to following his words, his commands. You know Ezra gave us a great plan on being wise as Jesus referred to in these verses. To be skilled. Look at verse 10 again.

***Ezra 7:10***

***For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.***

Ezra was getting ready to go teach a nation about God's law. We see through this verse that the Word was a priority to Ezra, and this is a good example for us to follow.

1. Study God's Word, the Bible!
2. Do it! Obey it! Live it!
3. Then go teach others.

It is hard to teach others if we don't know what it says and if we are not living what it says. I noticed something that was said 3 times about Ezra, which I believe is a reference to his obedience. In verse 6 and verse 9 and verse 28, which we will read in a moment. In those verses it said, "For the hand of the Lord his God was on him."

I don't know about you, but we should want the hand of the Lord upon us! We should want to obey Jesus! We should want to bring glory to the name of Jesus! Ezra saw a mighty work of God and it led him to be able to say these words. Look at verses 27 and 28.

***Ezra 7:27-28***

***<sup>27</sup> Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, <sup>28</sup> and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.***



What we have seen and will continue to see through the rest of the book of Ezra is a priority and an emphasis on the Word of God. One reason that we clearly see that the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra was his faithful study, living and willingness to teach others the truth of God's Word.

God's Word brings knowledge of God and his holiness! It brings knowledge of the need of salvation from sin, and the way to receive God's forgiveness of sin, and the knowledge and discernment to live a pure life from sin. So that we can bring glory to the name of Jesus so that others will be saved!