

Ezra 7, Part 2

Recap: What do we know about Ezra?

- Lineage of the high priests and a calling to the priesthood
- Skilled in the Law of Moses
- Set himself to study, to do, and to teach the Law
- He was born in exile and bondage in Persia (several generations removed from life in Israel)
- As slaves, the Jewish people had little liberty to practice their faith individually or corporately
- It was impossible for Ezra to serve as a priest without a Temple
 - o Never seen a working model of the priesthood or Temple
 - o Never seen how a priest performs the sacrifices
 - o Never administered a feast or festival
 - o Never seen the daily workings of a Temple and its administration
- Even though the Temple has been rebuilt, he had no reason to believe he would ever be released to go back to Jerusalem

Set himself to study, to do, and to teach the Law as part of his calling to be a priest.

- Without a physical reference, all Ezra had to go by was the Law, so the Law is what he studied. Everything Ezra knew about his calling to be a priest came from a study of the Law.
- Without being able to serve as a priest, Ezra determined to live a godly life as best he could and minister to his people as best he could within his own limited circumstances.
- If the best he could do in his circumstances was to preserve and pass the knowledge and practice on to the next generation, then he would do that. However he could, he would keep the Word of God alive for the generations to come.
- Even though he had no hope of ever fulfilling his calling as a priest because of his bondage in Persia, Ezra studied, practiced, and taught how to be a priest as if one day he would actually be one. He prepared himself as if he knew one day he would return to the kingdom and serve in that Temple.

Why prepare yourself for a calling that might never be realized?

Why study, practice and teach like a priest without a physical Temple in which to serve?

Application

- Do we ever imagine ourselves in the Kingdom of Christ and what tasks or responsibilities we will be given there?
- What do we know about being kings and priests and judges?
- What is our individual calling? What is our gift? What are we skilled in?
- Are the gifts and skills that we have in this life for this life only, or are they going to carry into life in the Kingdom?

- Are we studying and practicing and teaching just for living in this life, to pass this knowledge on to the next generation, or are we doing these things to prepare our own selves for possible roles and responsibilities in the kingdom?

We have to be careful about becoming too short-sighted in regards to our practice of faith.

- We can't be so short-sighted to think that we live for Christ only in this life, in these limited circumstances.
- Just because there may be no opportunity to put our gifts toward ministry at the moment or it is too difficult with other demands of life, do we say "Now is not the time for building the House of God" and go on with our lives?
- We cannot be so short-sighted to think that we are only tasked with carrying the knowledge forward to the next generation – our sons and daughters – and that once we have completed that task, our own job is done.
- If we do not see ourselves in a future role and if we are not working on our own preparation for that role, what is the point of teaching the next generation – to what end? To instill in them no more sense of purpose than to live only for this life only, and teach the generation that follows them the same?

What tasks does Artaxerxes give Ezra?

Read Ezra 7:11-26.

- Arise and go up to Jerusalem. Take any volunteers who want to go with you. (v13)
- Evaluate the situation in Judah and Jerusalem in regards to the Law of their God (v14)
- Carry silver and gold on behalf of the king and his counselors to offer to God of Israel (v15-16)
 - o Use the money to buy bulls, rams, lambs, grain offerings, drink offerings (v17)
 - o Whatever is left of the silver and gold, use it as you see fit (v18)
- Deliver the articles for Temple service to the Temple (v19)
- Whatever more you need, pay for it out the king's treasury (v20)
 - o To the treasurers: Give Ezra whatever he needs, up to a certain amount (v21-23)
 - o Do not impose tax, tribute, or custom on the servants of God (v24)
- Set up a justice system – appoint magistrates and judges according to the laws of your God (v25)
 - o Teach the Law to those who don't know it (v25)
 - o Punish those who do not obey it (v26) – death, banishment, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

Overnight, Ezra went from being a slave to being a national, spiritual leader. Imagine, one day you are teaching a small group Bible study and the next day you are made head of all God's people, responsible for their spiritual direction, their governance as a nation, the setting up of a justice system, and administering corporal punishment as necessary.

All you have is a lot of book-learning but no practical experience. (Imagine how ill-equipped you'd be if you didn't even have the book-learning. How well equipped are you.)

- What would our response be to Artaxerxes' letter?
- What is Ezra's response (v27-28)?

Application for us:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 1 Timothy 2:15

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philipians 3:12-14 NKJV

- How is the house of the Lord beautified?
- How has the Lord extended mercy to Ezra?
- How does Ezra refer to God in verse 28?

He calls Him Elohay, "my God." The use of the names Elohay ("my God") or Eloheny ("our God") is a signature of Ezra and Nehemiah. The people who use these personal names for God most often are David, Moses, Isaiah, and Solomon (in his early years). Ezra and Nehemiah rank second to these, followed by Jeremiah and Daniel. All these men all had a very high level of personal identification with God.

- When we refer to God as "my God," what does that communicate to others?
- When we hear leadership refer to Him as "our God," what does that communicate to us?
- When a leader like Ezra is being called to revitalize a people's relationship with God, does it matter how he addresses God?

Accountability

- Knowing what we know of human nature, what often happens when people are given a windfall of funds and told to do with it whatever seems good to them?
What danger is in that?
- Are there any accountability measures mentioned in Artaxerxes' letter?
- Why must accountability be part of the sanctification process?
- Are we accountable for how we use the gifts we have been given for the Lord's work?
- Is that accountability limited to how we use money?
- Can a lack of accountability hinder our progress toward becoming a sanctified people?

Liberty & the Law

Ezra was set free from slavery to physical masters, and yet, he was still in bondage to the Law. We have been set free from bondage of the Law, and yet we make ourselves slaves to Christ.