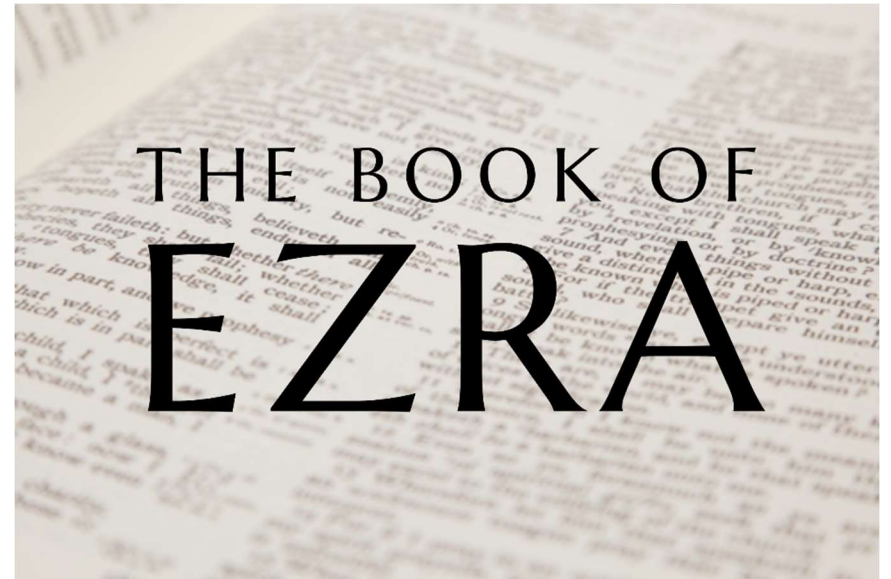


FAMILY WORSHIP BOOKLET



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Friday – Ezra 7:7-10 - To Study the Law of the LORD

Today, we learn something of Ezra's motives for moving to Jerusalem. In the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign (about 458 B.C.), Ezra sets out on his journey from Babylonia. Accompanying him are several other Israelites, some of whom are priests, others are Levites who are the hereditary singers and gatekeepers in the Temple, as well as some Temple servants. (The term used for these "servants" is the same we saw before that indicates that these are likely the descendants of the Gibeonites - Canaanites who became servants of the LORD and, thus, eventually became Israelites by faith.) As verse nine indicates, the journey took four months - and we will learn more about what occurred during that time in chapter eight. Why did Ezra do this? Why did he lead this expedition on this arduous journey? Was it because he knew that in Jerusalem his priestly status might offer him privileges and honor? Was it historic nostalgia - a desire to live where his ancestors lived? The Scripture tells us that his main motivation was to study the Law of the LORD "and to teach His statutes and rules in Israel". Of course, Ezra was already a scribe who studied the Law of Moses. There were plenty of copies of the Scriptures available in Babylonia. If he merely "set his heart to study the Law of the LORD", he could have done that without moving - though it is certain that Jerusalem, with the new Temple, was clearly becoming the center of such study of Scripture. More than just private study, Ezra desired to teach. He knew there was a need for qualified teachers of Scripture in Jerusalem, and so he went there. Not everyone is called to teach in the Church. It is important that we have well trained and well-qualified elders to carry out the formal instruction of God's people. Nevertheless, Ezra is an example to us all. We must not be content merely to engage in private Bible study, but rather be ready to share what we learn. By doing so, believers can be iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17), helping each other grow in the knowledge of the LORD; and we can be better prepared to share God's Truth with the world around us.

- Q1. Why did Ezra make this move to Jerusalem?
- Q2. What does this encourage us to do?

Produced by Ottawa RPC to help family worship.
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Thursday – Ezra 7:1-6 - The Hand of the LORD

The account of history recorded in Ezra now jumps from 515 B.C. to the time of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned from about 464 to 423 B.C.. During this time, Ezra, a descendant of Aaron the first High Priest, determines to move from the region around Babylon to Jerusalem. (We should note that the list of his ancestors tracing his line back to Aaron must be incomplete, as more than fifteen generations had passed since the time of Aaron a thousand years before. Keep in mind that, in Biblical languages, the term "son" also means "descendant". The important point is that Ezra is of the priestly family, not that we have a complete list of all his ancestors between him and Aaron.) Not only was Ezra of the priestly family, but he was personally skilled in the study of God's Law. We are told that "the king granted him all that he asked". As we will see in the days to come, this not only included permission to migrate to Jerusalem, but also involved money for the beautifying of the Temple, as well as permission to take others with him. The reason the Scriptures give for the king's favour is "the hand of the LORD [Ezra's] God was upon him". Last week we learned that the expression "the eye of God" is on someone means the LORD blesses and protects him. A similar expression found frequently in Ezra and Nehemiah refers to the hand of the LORD being upon His servants. This repeated phrase reminds us that it was not merely by the kindness of the Persian kings, nor by the cleverness of the Jewish leaders, that these good things were accomplished. Rather, it was according to the grace and mercy of the LORD God, who was working out His sovereign plan by means of His earthly servants. We can trust the LORD to continue doing so, using us as we seek to obey His will, as He has revealed it in the Bible.

Q1. What are some things we learn about Ezra in this passage?

Q2. What does it mean that "the hand of the LORD" is on someone?

Monday - Ezra 6:1-12 - Darius' Answer.

As the letter from Tattenai and his associates requested, Darius orders that research in the royal archives be done concerning the matter of the Temple. Not only does he have the archives at Babylon searched, but at other important cities as well. A scroll containing the decree of Cyrus is found in Ecbatana (about three hundred miles north of Babylon), the former capital of the Kingdom of the Medes and now one of the capitals of the Persian Empire. Indeed, Cyrus, who had united the Medes and Persians into one kingdom, used Ecbatana as one of his major seats of power. It is not surprising, therefore, that his decree would have been found there, as it is very likely that Ecbatana is the city from which Cyrus issued it. This record of the decree of Cyrus confirms that the Jews have told the truth. Therefore, Darius decrees that, not only should the work not be hindered, it should be supported. Tattenai is to divert taxes and tribute, that would otherwise be sent to the king, that these funds might be used to finance the building of the Temple. Furthermore, Tattenai is to provide any animals and other supplies the priests might require in order to make sacrifices and offer prayers for Darius and his sons. According to the practice of the Persians of that time, Darius backs up this decree with threats of horrific punishments for anyone who might defy it. We see God's sovereignty over the affairs of men. The LORD accomplishes His will by means. In this case, it was the means of Darius following in the footsteps of Cyrus. We know from history that Darius desired to emulate Cyrus. Supporting the Temple project in Jerusalem, as Cyrus had done, would certainly fit what we know of Darius' character. Darius' character, however, is not the sole explanation for these historical events. The LORD ordered events to bring about His will. It is He who should receive the ultimate praise for bringing these things to pass.

Q1. What reasons might Darius have for supporting the Temple project?

Q2. To whom should the ultimate credit be given?

Tuesday - Ezra 6:13-18 - The Temple Finished.

Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and the other officials of the province under them are diligent to obey the decrees of Cyrus and Darius. (Artaxerxes is mentioned here, as well, probably because it will be his decree that later permits the rebuilding of the walls of the city of Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah). Now, well supplied and protected from opposition, the Jews finish this massive project in only a few years' time. By the end of 516 B.C., the new Temple is completed and dedicated. We should note a few things from this passage. First, the Temple is dedicated and the Temple ceremonies are re-established in accordance with the Law the LORD revealed to Moses. Second, during and after the rebuilding of the Temple, the people profited from the preaching of God's Word by Haggai and Zechariah. Third, the completion of the second Temple in 516 B.C. marks seventy years since the destruction of the first in 586. Not only had the LORD kept his promise to restore the people to the land after seventy years of exile, He also restored the Temple after seventy years of desolation. While the people had sinful motives for abandoning the work, God used their sin for His own good purposes, so that, not only had their exile from the land ended after seventy years, their exile from the Temple also ended after seventy years. From these things we are reminded that: 1) all things must be done in accordance with God's revealed will (especially in matters of worship); 2) God's people always profit from the faithful preaching of His Word; and 3) the LORD uses even our sins sinlessly for His own good purposes.

Q1. What three things should we note from this passage?

Q2. Of what three facts are we reminded by these things?

Wednesday - Ezra 6:19-22 – Passover.

As we read yesterday, the new Temple was dedicated on the third day of the month of Adar (the last month on the Jewish ceremonial calendar). With the Temple finished, and the priests and Levites ceremonially purified, Passover could be celebrated less than six weeks later in the middle of the first month of 515 B.C.. For the first time in seventy years, a proper Passover could be observed at the central sanctuary, according to God's ordinances. The Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple, the people ate the Passover meal, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated. The people rejoiced that the LORD had governed the hearts of men like Cyrus and Darius to cause this to come to pass. It is worthy of note that the Kings of Babylon and of Persia after them had taken to themselves the title "King of Assyria" after conquering that land. The Scripture refers, here, to the King of Persia as "the king of Assyria", in order to display the wondrous nature of these events (that Assyria, one of Israel's greatest enemies was used for Israel's benefit) and to emphasize that the LORD was ending the Exile of Israel that began with the northern kingdom's fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. and followed with the conquest of Judah by Babylon a little over a century later. There is yet another remarkable thing to be found in this passage. Not only did Israelites eat the Passover meal, but also "everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel". In other words, at this time, many people who were not born Israelites were joined to Israel by faith, forsaking false gods, and worshipping the LORD alone. This continues to occur today, as the Gospel of Jesus Christ goes forth into the world. People of every tongue, tribe and nation are joined by faith to Christ, and thus become part of God's Covenant People - His true Israel.

Q1. What is noteworthy about the reference to the "king of Assyria"?

Q2. What is remarkable about who ate the Passover?

Q3. What does this teach us?