

Bible studies on Ezra

Ezra Chapter 8

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Background

In our previous study we looked at chapter 7 of Ezra. We read about Ezra, his journey to Jerusalem, and the decree of king Artaxerxes. This decree gave Ezra official sanction to teach the law (Ezra 7:14), appoint magistrates in his homeland (Ezra 7:25), and to offer sacrifices and beautify the temple (Ezra 7:15-17). Artaxerxes was so favourably disposed towards Ezra that his decree also included a strong warning to those who “*do not obey the law of your God and the law of the king*” (Ezra 7:26). So what made Ezra stand out and be noticed? What made him have such honour bestowed upon him?

The Message

In chapter 8 we read of the number and genealogic record of the Jews who accompanied him (verses 1-20), the spirit in which they entered upon the pilgrimage (verses 21-23), the arrangements for guarding and delivering the treasure in their keeping (verses 24-30), their arrival and the fulfilment of their commission (verses 31-36). Ezra was faced with a long and dangerous journey at a time of great unrest. And having boasted his confidence in God, he was hardly in a position to apply to the king for an escort! His prayer is heartfelt, and his faith is rewarded by God's own safe conduct.

Like so many 'historical' books in the Bible we are clearly reading so much more than history! To see God at work through His people, and the people around is so exciting, and fills us with confidence today in our corporate and individual walks with God.

Questions

1. Why do you think that initially there were no Levites in the group (verse 15)?
2. What does this teach us about our walk with the Lord?
3. What spiritual and practical preparations do the group make before beginning the journey (verses 21-30)?
4. What relevance do these preparations have in our relationship with God?
5. Why was the offering of gold and silver articles given to the priests, and what was significant about the manner it was given to them (verses 24-25, verse 28)?
6. What is significant about the charge given to the priests¹ (verse 29)?

¹ 'Guard' in verse 29 comes from the Hebrew word '*shaqad*' derived from a primitive root; to be alert, i.e. sleepless; hence to be on the lookout (whether for good or ill): hasten, remain, wake, watch (for).

7. How does the behaviour of the priests upon their return to Jerusalem inspire respect in the local community (verse 36)?