

EZRA 7

EZRA THE SCRIBE

This chapter begins with no other indication of time than the words, “Now after these things.” However, in reality, about 48 years had elapsed between the events recorded in the previous chapter and the mission of Ezra that is described here. The inspired historian gave us no recorded history of this intermediate period of time. Zerubbabel passed into obscurity after accomplishing his work of building the Temple, but the brilliant Messianic anticipations that had clustered around him at the outset of his career were to await their fulfillment in a greater Son of David than he was. Jeshua the high priest was probably no longer living, either; nor do we hear any more of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. But the Lord raised up other servants to take their place, and one of them was Ezra the scribe. Even though this Book bears his name, we are not introduced to him personally until during the reign of yet another Persian king, named Artaxerxes. This Artaxerxes was the son of Xerxes, and the grandson of Queen Vashti and Darius Hystaspes (the same man as the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, and the Darius of Ezra 6). Artaxerxes came to the Persian throne around 474 BC, and it was in roughly the seventh year of his reign (467 BC) that he commissioned Ezra the scribe to go to Jerusalem. Thirteen years later, this same Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission to rebuild the ruined walls of Jerusalem.

Ezra was a priest – one of the descendants of Aaron. God chose him to be an instrument of good to His people Israel, so that he might put honor upon the priesthood – the glory of which had been much eclipsed by the captivity. Ezra’s personal qualifications made him very eminent. He was a man of great learning, for he was a scribe in the law of Moses. He was very familiar with the Scriptures; he had the words ready, and he was well-acquainted with the sense and meaning of them. Now that prophecy was about to cease, it was time to promote Scripture-knowledge – according to the counsel of God by Malachi, the last of the prophets, when he said, “Remember the law of Moses!” (Mal. 4:4) But Ezra was also a man of great piety and holy zeal. He sought the law of the Lord – that is, he made it his business to enquire into it. He searched the Scriptures; it was there that he sought the knowledge of God’s mind and will – which is indeed to be found in the Scriptures, but not without seeking. He also conformed his actions and lifestyle according to what he read therein, and he dedicated himself to teach God’s people the Word. Happy shall we be if we endeavor, through the strength of the Lord, to imitate the worthy example of such a man of God!

Ezra’s expedition to Jerusalem was for the good of his people. King Artaxerxes kindly granted him whatever he desired, in order to put him into a capac-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A general account of Ezra himself and his expedition to Jerusalem – verses 1-10
- ❖ A copy of the commission that the Persian king gave to Ezra – verses 11-26
- ❖ An exclamation of thankfulness to God for His favor to His people – verses 27-28

ity to serve his country. Ezra's countrymen were kind to him also; when he went back to Jerusalem, many others went with him. But above all, how kind Ezra's God was to him! He obtained this favor from his king and country by the good hand of the Lord that was upon him.

Beginning in verse 11, we have a copy of the commission which Artaxerxes granted to Ezra, giving him authority to act for the good of the Jews. He gave Ezra power to enquire into the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem, and the rule of his enquiry was to be the law of his God. If, upon enquiry, he found anything amiss, he was to ensure that it was amended speedily. Artaxerxes entrusted Ezra with the money that was freely given by the king himself and his counselors, as well as that which was collected among his subjects, for the service of the house of God. The king also commanded his treasurers to provide Ezra with whatever he needed out of the king's own revenues. He exempted all the ministers of the Temple from paying taxes to the government; and he further empowered Ezra to nominate and appoint judges and magistrates for all the Jews, on that side of the Euphrates River.

Ezra could not proceed in his narrative without inserting his thankful acknowledgement of the goodness of God to him and his people in this matter! As soon as he had concluded the king's commission, he added the words, "Blessed be the Lord!" He was grateful for his commission from the king, which had been given to him by the Lord's Providence acting upon Artaxerxes' heart. The king, in the honor which he showed Ezra, probably had an eye to his merit; but Ezra himself ascribed his advancement purely to God's mercy. This noble scribe was a man of courage; yet he did not attribute his encouragement to his own heart, but to the Lord's hand. Whatever service we are enabled to do for Him and our fellow human beings, God must have all the glory of it! Strength for that service is derived from Him; and therefore, the praise of it must also be given to Him.

Lord, we bless You and give You the glory for whatever particular service Your strength has enabled us to do for You and our generation of fellow human beings; for we acknowledge that our hearts, by nature, are utterly void of anything that is good or righteous. We thank You for giving us a rich and abundant supply of Your grace and blessings without measure, O Lord! Amen.

