

EZRA 8

A PRAYER FOR PROTECTION

Having received his commission from King Artaxerxes, Ezra gathered together a group of Jewish volunteers to return with him to Jerusalem. The Temple was finished and the Temple-service was re-established, and now was a perfect time for the children of Zion to return there. The heads of the families that accompanied Ezra are named here, for their honor; and the numbers of the men who came from each family is also recorded – amounting to 1,496 in all. Some members of these families had gone back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel around 70 years before; and more went up now, as the Lord inclined their hearts.

Ezra appointed a general rendezvous of the returning exiles at a certain place; but he found none of the Levites among them, although there were some priests. It appears that they desired to stay behind in Babylon, and so Ezra was much at a loss. He had enough money for the service of the Temple, but he needed men! So he chose 11 wise men out of his group to be sent back with a request for some of the Levites to accompany them. Thankfully, these men did not return to Ezra without something to show for it; for even though the request was made on short notice, they brought about 40 Levites with them to join the group, as well as 220 of the Nethinims – the Temple-servants who descended from the Gibeonites (Josh. 9). “Thus,” said Ezra, “were we furnished with Levites, by the good hand of our God upon us!” When faithful ministers have been in short supply, and the vacancies are well-filled – let God have the glory!

Ezra took pains to procure Levites to go along with him; but what would that have availed, unless he had God Himself going with him? This, therefore, was his chief care. In all our ways, we must acknowledge the Lord – especially in those ways wherein we are endeavoring to serve the interests of His kingdom on the earth. This is exactly what Ezra did here. He had steadfast confidence in God and His gracious protection. He told King Artaxerxes that those who seek Jehovah are safe under the shadow of His wings, even in their greatest dangers; while those who forsake Him are continually exposed, even when they are most secure. Ezra believed this with his whole heart, and he made confession of it with his mouth before the king. Therefore, he was ashamed to ask the king for a convoy of soldiers to go with them for protection, because he did not want to give the king a reason to suspect either God’s power to help His people, or his own confidence in that power. This does not mean that those who depend upon the Lord must never use the proper means for their safety and preservation; but when the honor of God is concerned, we must be willing to undergo any risks

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *An account of those who returned to Jerusalem with Ezra – verses 1-20*
- ❖ *Ezra and his group plead for the Lord’s presence on this journey – verses 21-23*
- ❖ *Ezra’s care for the treasures that they were traveling with – verses 24-30*
- ❖ *God’s care for them on their journey, and their safe arrival – verses 31-35*



instead of doing dishonor or reproach to His name, especially in the sight of the heathen!

In light of his confidence in the Lord, Ezra proclaimed a public fast among his group, in order to express their humiliation for their sins; for especially when we are in any imminent peril, we must be sure to be at peace with God, and then we are safe. This fasting was also intended to encourage the people's supplications, for prayer was always joined with religious fasting. Their errand to the throne of grace

was to seek the right way of God – that is, to commit themselves to the guidance of Providence, to put themselves under His protection, to beg Him to guide and keep them in their travels, and to ask Him to bring them safely to their journey's end. In all of our concerns about ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty to commit them to God by prayer, and to leave the care of them with Him (Phil. 4:6). Ezra and his people had good success in doing this; the Lord heard their prayers, for never has anyone sought Him earnestly in vain.

Ezra took particular care of the treasures that he had with him, which belonged to the Temple. Having committed the keeping of these treasures to God, he also committed the keeping of them to responsible men who were to keep watch over them. It was with great exactness that Ezra lodged this trust in their hands; “he weighed to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels” (verse 25), because he expected to receive it from them again by weight. In all trusts, but especially sacred ones, we ought to be exact – preserving a right understanding on both sides. These men had the oversight of over 6,000 pounds (2,722 kg) of gold, worth around \$177.6 million; as well as 45,000 pounds (20,412 kg) of silver, valued at nearly \$17.3 million.* Ezra gave these men a solemn charge concerning these treasures; they were to be kept separate and safe until they were weighed before the chief priests and Levites in the Temple. Similarly, when Paul charged Timothy with the Gospel-treasure, he told him to keep it until the appearing of Jesus Christ; for then he would stand before Him to give an account of his trust, and his faithfulness would then be his crown and honor!

Lord, we give thanks for the fact that since we are Your people, we are in close alliance with You, and we can rest assured that we enjoy Your wonderful protection. We thank You that we do not need to fear those who seek to do us hurt; for those who are on Christ's side are on the winning side, because He has already won the ultimate conquest in the great spiritual battle! Amen.