

## Ezra 7:11-28

### Introduction

Artaxerxes, was the fifth king of the Achaemenid Dynasty of the Persian empire. Ezra was the king's emissary and ambassador and came to Jerusalem bearing a letter from Artaxerxes.

Ezra would restore a knowledge and respect for 'Torah' in the post-exilic community that had probably not been understood for several centuries.

### Summary

**Ezra 7:11-28 contains a copy of a letter from Artaxerxes that not only granted Ezra permission to engage in the work of reform in Jerusalem, but also revealed the king's own desire for the Jews, together with Ezra's thankfulness for the favor he and the Jews had received from their Persian masters.**

#### 1. Royal Permission Revisited vv. 11-18

Artaxerxes' letter provided Ezra with official authority, as well as explaining why others had accompanied him on the journey home (**Ezra 7:11**).

If the God of Israel was pleased with religious compliance with a known set of rules, it was in Persia's interest to send officials to see whether such obedience was being observed and, if not, to teach and enforce it as quickly as possible.

The bulk of the Artaxerxes' letter deals with matters of worship in the temple.

First, funds were taken to Jerusalem from the Persian empire itself, in the form of silver and gold (**Ezra 7:15**).

Secondly, we note that silver and gold were also taken to Jerusalem from exiled Jews in Babylon (**Ezra 7:16**).

Thirdly, Artaxerxes instructed the Persian treasurers in the Judean province to provide Ezra with a large quantity of silver, wheat, wine, oil, and salt (**7:22**). Artaxerxes evidently feared that the Lord's "wrath [would] be against the realm of the king and his sons" (**7:23**).

#### 2. Tax Incentive vs. 24

In what must have been seen as an act of particular generosity, all temple officials were to be free from taxation (**Ezra 7:24**).

What better way to ensure the good graces of temple officials, priests, and Levites in particular, who might otherwise secretly curse the king or offer sacrifice on his behalf in a way not prescribed in the law, than to give them generous tax breaks?

### 3. Judicial Matters vv. 25-26

The main purpose of Ezra's coming was to instigate the rule of law in the city by appointing magistrates and judges and to implement a program to educate those who seemed unfamiliar with it (**Ezra 7:25–26**).

Ezra acted like the governor of Judah, though he was never actually called one. Like Joseph in Egypt, Ezra worked for a foreign government and was probably resented for it. Because Ezra was given the power to enforce sanctions for noncompliance and that the first real issue to be dealt with was the problem of mixed marriages, Ezra likely became unpopular very quickly.

There are several important things here:

First, though those who argue for implementation of Old Testament civil law plus its sanctions in our modern society (theonomists) sometimes employ this passage to argue that this is precisely what Ezra did in a Persian society. It is not quite the case.

Secondly, respect for the civil law was important in Jewish society. The law of God, including its civil code, was meant to be a blueprint for a healthy society.

Thirdly, the office of the civil magistrate is an honorable one (**Rom. 13:2–3**).

Fourthly, Christians should accept the office of magistrate in a secular society as an honorable office.

Fifthly, no amount of enforcing penal sanction on wrongdoing can change the human heart.

Sixthly, Ezra was being established as a new Moses.

The task before Ezra was a difficult one, but he was divinely strengthened to perform it: "I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me" (**Ezra 7:28**).

Whatever the task, however difficult it may appear to be, if it is one which the Lord approves, there is always the promise of divine enablement to accomplish it.

### 4. Christ Centered Exposition

"Where is Jesus in this passage?" Christ is the One who caused this pagan king to write this letter!"

Christ, too, is a letter-writing King.

The Bible is his letter to His people, including this letter from a Persian monarch.

Christ says to His people: "I am in complete control; I am ensuring the end from the beginning; I am determining the future of my people. I am aligning the events of history to ensure that my purpose for the redemption of my people will be accomplished according to plan."

The is most wonderful news.