

Ezra

Chapter 7

Ezra Comes to Jerusalem

After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, ² the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, ³ the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, ⁴ the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, ⁵ the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest— ⁶ this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. ⁷ Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸ Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. ⁹ He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

7:1–5 The genealogy of Ezra given here lists 16 ancestors back to Aaron, the brother of Moses. (CSB)

Ezra the son of Seraiah ... Aaron the chief priest. To certify Ezra as a priest, his genealogy is traced from Seraiah—high priest when Jerusalem was destroyed (2Ki 25:18)—back to Aaron, brother of Moses (Nu 3:1–3). However, not all ancestral links are included in vv 1–5. (TLSB)

7:1 *After these things.* The events of the preceding chapter concluded with the completion of the temple in 516 B.C. (CSB)

Spans an interval of more than five decades from the dedication of the temple in 516 BC to “the seventh year of Artaxerxes” (v 7). Biblical record passes over in silence the years of Darius’s successor, Xerxes (486–465 BC; cf 4:6), king at the time of Esther. Events recorded in the rest of Ezr and all of Ne transpired in the reign of Artaxerxes, nicknamed “Long Hand” (464–424 BC; cf 4:7). (TLSB)

Artaxerxes. The identity of the king mentioned in this chapter has been disputed. If this was Artaxerxes I, which seems likely, Ezra would have arrived in Judah in 458, and there would be a gap of almost 60 years between the events of ch. 6 and those of ch. 7. The only recorded event during this interval is the

opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the reign of Xerxes (486–465) in 4:6. (CSB)

The events recorded in the book of Esther had occurred during this interval. (PBC)

Ezra. Perhaps a shortened form of Azariah, a name that occurs twice in the list of his ancestors. The Greek form is Esdras, as in the Apocrypha. (CSB)

Seraiah. Means “The LORD is prince.” He was the high priest under Zedekiah who was killed in 586 by Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 25:18–21) some 128 years before Ezra’s arrival. He was therefore the ancestor rather than the father of Ezra; “son” often means “descendant” (see 1Ch 6:14–15). (CSB)

Azariah. Means “The LORD helps.” (CSB)

Hilkiah. Means “My portion is the LORD.” He was the high priest under Josiah (2Ki 22:4). (CSB)

7:2 *Zadok*. Means “righteous.” He was a priest under David (2Sa 8:17). Solomon appointed Zadok as high priest in place of Abiathar, who supported the rebel Adonijah (1Ki 1:7–8; 2:35). Ezekiel regarded the Zadokites as free from idolatry (Eze 44:15). They held the office of high priest until 171 B.C. The Sadducees may have been named after Zadok, and the Qumran community (see “The Time between the Testaments,” p. 1437) looked for the restoration of the Zadokite priesthood. (CSB)

Ahitub. Probably means “My (divine) brother is good.” He was actually the grandfather of Zadok (Ne 11:11). (CSB)

7:5 *Eleazar*. Means “God helps.” The Greek form of the name is Lazarus (Jn 11:1). (CSB)

7:6 A half century after the temple of stone and wood was erected, it was apparent that a rebuilding of Israel’s moral integrity was needed if the rehabilitation of the chosen people was not to end in national dissolution. Ezra was the man who cleared away the rubbish of abuses and laid new spiritual foundations. (TLSB)

teacher. Lit. “scribe” (as in Ne 8:1, 4, 9, 13; 12:26, 36). Earlier, scribes served kings as secretaries, such as Shaphan under Josiah (2Ki 22:3, where the Hebrew word for “scribe” is translated “secretary”). Other scribes took dictation—such as Baruch, who wrote down what Jeremiah spoke (Jer 36:32). From the exilic period on, the “scribes” were scholars who studied and taught the Scriptures (cf. the “teachers of the law” in the NT; see notes on Mt 2:4; Lk 5:17). In the NT period they were addressed as “rabbis” (cf. Mt 23:7). (CSB)

High-level official in the ancient Near East who functioned as a secretary, but also oversaw the temple treasury (2Ki 12:10–11), was sent on important missions (2Ki 19:2–

7), and engaged in negotiations involving a knowledge of foreign languages (2Ki 18:18–27). A long line of scribes down to and beyond NT times claim Ezra as the founder of their guild, devoted to copying, preserving, and interpreting the sacred writings. (TLSB)

well versed. The Hebrew for this phrase is translated “skillful” in Ps 45:1 and “skilled” in Pr 22:29. (CSB)

Ezra’s ability and character provided even more important credentials for his role as a reformer. He was a well-trained, learned teacher of God’s Law (All of Scripture [Five books of Moses at this time] including the gospel promises). He didn’t just study the law as a scholar, but he observed it as a believing child of God. Ezra was a good teacher because his thorough knowledge and devotion to teaching were coupled to his godly life. He taught others by example as well as by words. Ezra provides a good example for all of us, whether we teach God’s Word as pastors, Christian day school teacher, Sunday school teachers, parents teaching our own children, or Christians teaching our neighbors by our example. To be effective teachers or examples we need a correct and thorough knowledge of God’s Word. This comes only through regular life-long reading and study of God’s Word. We can never graduate from our need to study God’s Word in daily Bible reading and in regular Bible class. (PBC)

hand of the LORD. For this striking description of God’s favor cf. also vv. 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Ne 2:8, 18. (CSB)

Expression repeated in Ezr, with variations, to show that success depended on the Lord (vv 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). (TLSB)

Ezra had all the credentials and ability, but he could succeed only if God blessed his efforts. The same is true for us. Our efforts, no matter how wisely planned or how well-intentioned they may be, can only succeed with God’s blessing. We should work hard for the gospel. But we humbly depend on God to bless our efforts with success through the power of his Holy Spirit. (PBC)

7:7–9 *seventh year ... first day of the first month ... first day of the fifth month.* Ezra began his journey on the first of Nisan (Apr. 8, 458 B.C.) and arrived in Jerusalem on the first of Ab (Aug. 4, 458). The journey took four months, including an 11-day delay indicated by the comparison of v. 9 with 8:31. The spring was the most auspicious time for such journeys; most armies went on campaigns at this time of the year. Although the actual distance between Babylon and Jerusalem is about 500 miles, the travelers had to cover a total of about 900 miles, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south. The relatively slow pace was caused by the presence of the elderly and the children. See inset to map No. 7 at the end of the Study Bible. (CSB)

7:7 *seventh year of Artaxerxes.* 457 BC. (TLSB)

some of the people of Israel. Caravan that went to Jerusalem with Ezra was similar to one described in ch 2. (TLSB)

7:9 *first day of the first month.* The month of Nisan (Feb/Mar), in which Passover was celebrated. Children of Israel also left Egypt in this month (6:19). (TLSB)

Babylonia ... to Jerusalem. C 800 mi. (TLSB)

fifth month. Month of Ab, in midsummer. (TLSB)

7:10 *study ... observance ... teaching.* See Ne 8. (CSB)

Ezra was a model for leaders of God's people. (TLSB)

statutes and rules. Pairing of these terms for God's Law is found often in Lv and Dt. (TLSB)

King Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra

¹¹ This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest and teacher, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the LORD for Israel: ¹² Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven:

Greetings.

³ Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. ¹⁴ You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand. ¹⁵ Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶ together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem. ¹⁸ You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. ¹⁹ Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. ²⁰ And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

²¹ Now I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you— ²² up to a hundred talents^b of silver, a hundred cors^c of wheat, a hundred baths^d of wine, a hundred baths^e of olive oil, and salt without limit. ²³ Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and of his sons? ²⁴ You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes,

tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God. ²⁵ And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. ²⁶ Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment. ²⁷ Praise be to the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way ²⁸ and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

7:11 *letter*. † Also written in Aramaic (vv. 12–26).

The letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra was written in Aramaic. The decree authorized Ezra to (1) journey to Jerusalem, accompanied by other volunteers; (2) inquire about conditions there, using God's Law as a guide; (3) deliver various donations, freewill offerings, and temple vessels; (4) draw on the king's treasury for additional money; (5) offer sacrifices; (6) appoint judges and magistrates to teach and enforce God's Law. (TLSB)

commandments ... statutes. Pairing similar to that in v 10. (TLSB)

7:12 See NIV text note. (CSB)

king of kings. (Text of Ezra 7:12-26 is in Aramaic) The phrase was originally used by Assyrian kings, since their empires incorporated many kingdoms. It was then used by the later Babylonian (Eze 26:7; Da 2:37) and Persian kings. Cf. 1Ti 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16. (TLSB)

Commonly used in Persian official documents. Near Eastern empires ruled over smaller, local kingdoms, which paid tribute (tax) and participated in imperial campaigns. (TLSB)

Peace. Letter's salutation ends with a word equivalent to our "et cetera," abbreviating amenities of typical greetings. (TLSB)

7:13 *Israelites*. It is noteworthy that "Israel" is used rather than "Judah." It was Ezra's aim to make one Israel of all who returned. The markedly Jewish coloring of this decree may have resulted from the king's use of Jewish officials, quite possibly Ezra himself, to help him compose it.

MAY GO – None shall be forced either to go or to stay. He who loves his God will avail himself of this favorable opportunity. (ACC)

7:14 *seven advisers*. Cf. Est 1:14, which refers to the seven nobles who "had special access to the king." This corresponds with Persian practice as reported by the early Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon. (CSB)

Intimate circle of advisers who “sat first in the kingdom” (Est 1:14). (TLSB)

inquiries. To ascertain to what extent the laws were being observed. (TLSB)

Law of your God. Perhaps the complete Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) in its present form (see v. 6). (CSB)

7:15 *silver and gold.* Cf. Hag 2:8. (CSB)

freely given. The Persian treasury had ample funds, and benevolence was a well-attested policy of Persian kings. – The king and his counselors had already made a present to the house of the God of Israel; and Ezra is now empowered to receive any contribution which any of the inhabitants of the province of Babylon may think proper to give. (CSB)

7:16 *offerings of the people.* The custom of sending gifts to Jerusalem from the Jews who lived outside Palestine continued until the Jewish-Roman War, when the Romans forced the Jews to send such contributions to the temple of Jupiter instead (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.9.1). There are close parallels to such directives in the contemporary letters from the Jewish garrison at Elephantine in Egypt, including a papyrus in which Darius II ordered: “Let grain offering, incense and burnt offering be offered” on the altar of the god Yahu “in your name.” (CSB)

province of Babylonia. Many Judeans continued to live in Babylonia and no doubt sent with Ezra gifts of silver and gold (8:24–30). (TLSB)

7:17 *with all diligence.* Phrase (also in v 21) stresses scrupulous compliance with king’s desire that money be used for items specified. (TLSB)

7:18 Whatever was left over was to go into a discretionary fund, presumably to be used for religious purposes. (TLSB)

7:19 *vessels.* Ezra delivered costly bowls and vessels to the proper authorities in Jerusalem (8:26–27, 33). (TLSB)

7:20 *provide from the royal treasury.* Texts from the treasury at Persepolis also record the disbursement of supplies and funds from the royal purse. (CSB)

Cf 6:4, 8. (TLSB)

7:21–24 Addressed not to Ezra but to government officials. (TLSB)

7:21 God was obviously at work in the heart of this Persian king, stirring his spirit for Israel’s benefit (1:1). (TLSB)

7:22 *hundred talents*. An enormous amount (see NIV text note). (CSB)

hundred cors. The total was relatively small (see NIV text note). The wheat would be used in grain offerings. (CSB)

salt without limit. See note on 4:14. A close parallel is the benefaction of Antiochus III as recorded by Josephus (*Antiquities*, 12.3.3): “In the first place we have decided, on account of their piety, to furnish for their sacrifices an allowance of sacrificial animals, wine, oil and frankincense to the value of 20,000 pieces of silver, and sacred artabae of fine flour in accordance with their native law, and 1,460 medimni of wheat and 375 medimni of salt.” (CSB)

Limits up to which Ezra could draw on the provincial treasuries involved huge sums. (TLSB)

7:23 Persian kings thought it wise to placate the national gods of the peoples incorporated into the empire. The immediate threat to Persia at this time was a revolt in Egypt, helped by an Athenian fleet. (TLSB)

wrath against the realm of the king. Egypt had revolted against the Persians in 460 B.C. and had expelled the Persians with the help of the Athenians in 459. In 458, when Ezra traveled to Jerusalem, the Persians were involved in suppressing this revolt. (CSB)

his sons. We do not know how many sons the king had at this time, but he ultimately had 18, according to Ctesias (a Greek physician who wrote an extensive history of Persia). (CSB)

7:24 *no ... taxes ... or duty on any of the priests ... temple servants*. Priests and other temple personnel were often given exemptions from enforced labor or taxes. A close parallel is found in the Gadates Inscription of Darius I to a governor in western Turkey, granting exemptions to the priests of Apollo. Antiochus III granted similar exemptions to the Jews: “The priests, the scribes of the temple and the temple singers shall be relieved from the poll tax, the crown tax and the salt tax that they pay” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.3.3). (CSB)

All personnel serving the temple were to be exempt from taxation, including the servants (e.g., 2:43–54). *temple servants*. See note, 2:58.

7:25 *wisdom ... in your hand*. Reference to God’s Law (cf v 14). (TLSB)

magistrates and judges. Appointment of these officials recalls provisions in the Law of Moses (Dt 1:16–17 17:8–13). Perhaps Ezra participated in writing the king’s decree. (TLSB)

teach. Judges were also to be teachers of the Law. (TLSB)

7:26 Decree ends with a threat of punishment, as had the decree of Darius (6:11–12). (TLSB)

judgment. Ezra's commission gave him powers equal to the authority of a governor, even though it is not explicitly said that he held this office. (TLSB)

Whoever does not obey ... must surely be punished. The extensive powers given to Ezra are striking and extend to secular fields. Perhaps the implementation of these provisions involved Ezra in a great deal of traveling, which would explain the silence about his activities between his arrival and the arrival of Nehemiah 13 years later. A close parallel to the king's commission of Ezra may be found in an earlier commission by Darius I, who sent Udjahorresenet, a priest and scholar, back to Egypt. He ordered the codification of the Egyptian laws by the chief men of Egypt—a task that took from 518 to 503 B.C.

Four penalties were listed: death, banishment, confiscation of property, and imprisonment. Not only murder but also such crimes as idolatry and adultery were capital offenses according to the Law of Moses (Ex 22:20; Lv 20:10). (TLSB)

7:27–9:15 Personal memoirs of Ezra. (TLSB)

7:27–28 Ezra's doxology ("word of praise") was written in Hbr and in the first person. Ezra praised God for moving the heart of King Artaxerxes to grant such favors, which would greatly benefit temple worship. The apostle Paul urged believers to give thanks for rulers (1Tm 2:1–2). (TLSB)

7:28 *me.* The first occurrence of the first person for Ezra—a trait that characterizes the "Ezra Memoirs," which begin in v. 27 and continue to the end of ch. 9. (CSB)

I took courage. Evidence of the Lord's steadfast love heartened Ezra as he was about to leave his home in Babylonia and make the long journey to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

from Israel. From the people of Israel. (TLSB)

Ch 7 Through the decree of the pagan ruler Artaxerxes, the Lord provides for the instruction of His people in His Word, as led by Ezra. Though the emperor provides numerous gifts, God's Word stands out as the greatest gift, by which the Lord converts hearts and extends His gracious rule. • We bless You, O Lord, for Your good Word, delivered for our salvation. Amen. (TLSB)