

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 7

In this chapter we have the lineage and character of Ezra described, (^{<1570>}Ezra 7:1-6), his expedition to Jerusalem, and of many others with him, (^{<1570>}Ezra 7:7-10), a copy of the commission King Artaxerxes gave him to execute, (^{<1571>}Ezra 7:11-26), and his thankfulness, (^{<1572>}Ezra 7:27,28).

Ver. 1-5. *Now after these things*, etc.] The finishing of the temple, and the dedication of it, and keeping the passover:

in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia; in the seventh year of his reign, (^{<1570>}Ezra 7:7,8), who is the same with Darius in the preceding chapter; so Jarchi and Aben Ezra; (See Gill on “^{<1564>}Ezra 6:14”).

Ezra the son of Seraiah; the high priest slain by Nebuchadnezzar (^{<1572>}Jeremiah 52:24,27), this Ezra was a younger son of his, brother to Josedech, and uncle to Joshua, who were high priests in succession; his pedigree is carried in the ascending line up to Aaron, in this and the four following verses; only six generations, for brevity sake, are omitted, between Azariah and Meraioth, which may be supplied from (^{<1387>}1 Chronicles 6:7-10), (See Gill on “^{<1388>}1 Chronicles 6:3).

Ver. 6. *This Ezra went up from Babylon*, etc.] A second time; for that he went up with Zerubbabel is clear from (^{<1621>}Nehemiah 12:1), and is plainly intimated, (^{<1574>}Ezra 5:4),

and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; the meaning is, not that he had a quick hand in writing out copies of it, but was well versed in the knowledge of it; had studied it thoroughly, well instructed in it, and was abundantly qualified to teach it others; he was an eminent doctor of the law; so scribes, in the New Testament, who are the same with the lawyers, were such as were teachers of the law; the word here used in the Arabic language signifies to be expert, as Jarchi^{f73} learned from one of their doctors:

and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him; either upon Ezra, giving him favour with the king, and so success and prosperity; or it may denote the divine influence of the God of Ezra upon the heart of the king, moving him to grant what he asked of him, even everything he desired: he seems to have been sent upon an embassy to the king from the chief men at Jerusalem; perhaps the governors of Syria had not so fully made the disbursements the king in his decree had required them to make, since the following commission chiefly respects such things; and he was sent on that errand to acquaint the king with it, as well as to persuade those that remained to return, and to obtain leave for it.

Ver. 7. *And there went up some of the children of Israel,* etc.] Perhaps some of the ten tribes, as well as others of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; who, notwithstanding the edict of Cyrus, chose to remain in Babylon, and in the countries of it, until they saw how things would go in Judea; and hearing that the temple was finished, and that those that had returned had built them houses in their several cities, and prospered, thought fit to return also:

and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem; to take their places, and execute their offices in the temple now built; for of the Levites especially, some of which were singers, and others porters, and of the Nethinims, there were but few that went up with Zerubbabel: now this journey of theirs was taken

in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king; that is, of Darius Artaxerxes, and this was the year after the temple was finished: though it is thought by many learned men, and not without some show of reason, that Artaxerxes Longimanus is meant.

Ver. 8. *And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month,* etc.] With the above company; this was the month Abib, answering to part of July and part of August: which was in the seventh year of the king; as in the preceding verse.

Ver. 9. *For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon,* etc.] The month Nisan, answering to part of March and part of April; this was New Year's day:

and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem; the first of the month Ab, as in the preceding verse; so that he was just four months on his journey:

according to the good hand of his God upon him; his power and providence, which gave him and his company health and strength, supplied them with everything necessary, directed, protected, and defended them, and brought them in safety to their journey's end.

Ver. 10. *For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord*, etc.] To attain to the knowledge of it, that he might be master of it, and expert in it, and know what was not to be done, and what to be done; he had set his heart upon this, bent his studies this way, and taken a great deal of pains in searching into it, in reading of it, and meditating on it;

and to do it; he was not only concerned to get the theory of it, but to put it in practice, to exercise himself in it, that it might be habitual to him; and the rather, as his view and intentions were not merely for the sake of himself, but

to teach in Israel statutes and judgments: and therefore it was not only necessary that he should have a large and competent knowledge of the laws, moral, ceremonial, and civil, but that he should act according to them himself, that so by his example, as well as by his instructions, he might teach the people.

Ver. 11. *Now this is the copy of the letter that the King Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest*, etc.] This title relating to his office is justly given him, since he was the son of an high priest, and lineally descended from Aaron, as the above account of his pedigree shows:

the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel; the doubling of the word “scribe”) shows that he was very wise and learned in the law, in the commandments and statutes of it the Lord gave to Israel; not only in the language of it in which it was written, but in the matter and substance of it, in the things contained in it; for *yrbd* “dibre”, signifies “things” as well as words.

Ver. 12. *Artaxerxes, king of kings*, etc.] Having many kings and kingdoms subject and tributary to him; for this was not merely a proud haughty title which the eastern kings¹⁷⁴ assumed, particularly the Persians; for after

Cyrus they were so in fact, who took this title also, and had it put on his sepulchral monument,

“Here I lie, Cyrus, king of kings ^{f75};”

this title was given to Grecian kings, particularly Agamemnon is called king of kings ^{f76}, he being general at the siege of Troy, under whom the rest of the kings fought; if this was Darius Hystaspis, of him Cyrus dreamed that he had wings on his shoulders, with one he covered Asia, and with the other Europe ^{f77}:

unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven; of which titles (see ^{<1371>}Ezra 7:11):

perfect [peace], and at such a time; the word “perfect” belongs to Ezra’s title as a scribe, signifying that he was a most learned and complete scribe or teacher of the law of God; “peace” is not in the text, and the phrase “at such a time” respects the date of the letter, though not expressed, or is only an “et cetera”, (See Gill on “^{<1340>}Ezra 4:10”).

Ver. 13. *I make a decree*, etc.] Which, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, when signed, might not be changed, (^{<2118>}Daniel 6:8),

that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm; who remained there, and took not the benefit of the edict of Cyrus, which gave them leave to go; but neglecting the opportunity, it seems as if they could not now go out of the realm without a fresh grant, which is hereby given:

which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee; this decree did not oblige them to go whether they would or not; for they might, notwithstanding this, continue if they pleased; it only gave them leave to make use of the present opportunity of going along with Ezra, if they chose it.

Ver. 14. *Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors*, etc.] Such a number the kings of Persia used to have from the times of Darius Hystaspis, who was chosen out of seven nobles to be king, and ever after the Persian kings had seven counsellors privileged, as those nobles were, (^{<7014>}Esther 1:14), and Ezra had the honour to be sent with a commission from this king and his seven counsellors,

to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem; the inhabitants thereof, whether they had knowledge of and behaved

according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; a copy of which he had with him, and was very expert in and conversant with, and could readily and at once pass judgment whether they acted according to it or not.

Ver. 15. *And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem.*] In the temple built there; for the service of which, either for purchasing and procuring vessels that were wanting in it, or for sacrifices to be offered in it, the king and his nobles had made a voluntary contribution, and intrusted and sent Ezra with it.

Ver. 16. *And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon,* etc.] Not that he might take it wherever he found it, whether the owners of it were willing he should have it or not; but whatever was freely offered by them, as Jarchi, that he was allowed to take, whatever he could get in that way:

with the freewill offering of the people; of the people of the Jews, who thought fit to continue in the province:

and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; those freewill offerings, whether of the natives of Babylon, or of any of the Jewish nation, for the service of the temple at Jerusalem, he had leave and a commission to carry with him.

Ver. 17. *That thou mayest buy speedily with this money,* etc.] Thus freely contributed by one and another:

bullocks, rams, lambs; which were for burnt offerings:

with their meat offerings, and their drink offerings; which always went along with the burnt offerings, according to the law of Moses; and which the king seemed to have a right knowledge of, being, no doubt, instructed by Ezra, or some other Jew in his court:

and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem; the altar of burnt offering in the temple there.

Ver. 18. *And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren,* etc.] The priests, that he should think fit to take in to his assistance in this work:

to do with the rest of the silver and gold; which should be left after the sacrifices were offered up:

that do after the will of your God; as they should be directed by him, or was prescribed by him in the law.

Ver. 19. *The vessels also that were given thee for the service of the house of thy God,* etc.] These were vessels of silver, basins of gold, and vessels of fine copper; not what formerly belonged to the temple, they were delivered by Cyrus to Sheshbazzar; but what the present king and his counsellors freely offered at this time, (see ^{<1185>}Ezra 8:25,26), those

deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem; perfect and complete, the full number of them, as the word signifies ^{f78}; meaning not to be delivered before him, or in his presence, as a witness thereof, but that they should be dedicated and devoted to his service, who was worshipped in the temple at Jerusalem, and by the inhabitants of it; he seems as if he thought him a topical deity, the God of that particular place, which was the notion of the Heathens, (see ^{<1123>}1 Kings 20:23), though he also speaks of him as the God of heaven.

Ver. 20. *And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shall have occasion to bestow,* etc.] For the beautifying and ornamenting the temple, (^{<1172>}Ezra 7:27),

bestow it out of the king's treasure house; where the money collected by tribute, tax, and custom, was deposited; his exchequer, as it may be called, (see ^{<1168>}Ezra 6:8).

Ver. 21. *And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river,* etc.] The receivers of his tribute, tax, and custom, beyond the river Euphrates, on the side towards the land of Israel:

that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven; (see ^{<1172>}Ezra 7:12),

shall require of you, it be done speedily; which seems at first a grant at large for whatsoever he should want or demand, but is limited and restrained by what follows.

Ver. 22. *Unto one hundred talents of silver*, etc.] Which amounted to 35,300 pounds sterling; these, according to Jarchi, were to buy the offerings or sacrifices with:

and an hundred measures of wheat; or corn, the same measure with the homer, each of which held ten ephahs, or seventy five wine gallons, five pints, and upwards; these, according to the same writer, were for meat offerings, made of fine flour, or rather bread offerings, as they may be called:

and to an hundred baths of wine; which was the same measure in liquids as the ephah in things dry, a tenth part of the cor or homer, and held seven wine gallons, five pints, and upwards^{f79}; these were for the drink offerings:

and to an hundred baths of oil; the same measure as before; these were to mix in the meat offerings:

and salt without prescribing how much; because it was used in all offerings, and was cheap, and therefore no measure is fixed, but as much as was wanting was to be given, (see ^{<OR>}Leviticus 2:1-13).

Ver. 23. *Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven*, etc.] In the law given by Moses to the people of Israel:

let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven; for the service of it, particularly sacrifices:

for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? through the neglect of the service of God in the temple, and by reason of the default of the king's treasurers.

Ver. 24. *Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God*, etc.] The king had a right and perfect knowledge of the distinct offices and services of those persons, (see ^{<OR>}Ezra 7:7),

it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them; that they might be the less encumbered with the affairs of life, and be more at leisure to attend divine service, and do it the more readily and freely; it was

usual with the Heathens to except ecclesiastics from taxes, tributes, and imposts; so the priests in Egypt^{f80}, and the Druids here in Britain^{f81}.

Ver. 25. *And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand*, etc.] Which he had a large share of from the Lord, and could readily make use of to good purpose; and this may be meant of the law of God made with the highest wisdom, and to know and observe which is an instance of wisdom in men, (^(f80)Deuteronomy 4:6),

set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; such as God, in his great wisdom, directed to in his wise law to be appointed over the people, to judge righteous judgment; to inform them in all matters of controversy that might arise among them, and decide them according to it; and lead them into a greater and better knowledge of it, (^(f81)Deuteronomy 16:18 17:9). Jarchi takes the word for “set” to be a comparative, and the sense to be, that the wisdom of Ezra was greater than the judges that judged the people, than them that knew the law:

and teach ye them that know them not; such people that were ignorant thereof; though the above writer interprets this of ignorant judges,

“the judge that knows not to judge, make him know judgment to do it.”

Ver. 26. *And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king*, etc.] Either the judge who delays judgment, or does not execute it according to the law of God, and of the king; or the people, that do not obey the law of God in matters of religion, and the law of the king in civil things, Judea being now a province of the Persian empire; though some think the law of the king only refers to this law or decree of the king, which gave the Jews power to execute their own laws:

let judgment be executed speedily upon him; immediately, without delay, according to the nature of his crime:

whether it be unto death; if guilty of a capital crime, deserving death, let him be put to death:

or to banishment; from his native country to a foreign distant land;

or to rooting out^{f82}, as the word signifies; an utter extirpation of him and his family, a destroying him root and branch; or, as Jarchi expresses it, a rooting him out of the world, his seed and family:

or to confiscation of goods; to payment of mulcts and fines:

or to imprisonment; for such a term of time; all according to the breach of what law he may be guilty of; thus far the king's decree.

Ver. 27. *Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers*, etc.] This is Ezra's thanksgiving to God for the above decree:

which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart; which he rightly took to be of God, who wrought in him to will and to do:

to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem; to provide for the ornamenting of it, for vessels in it, as well as for sacrifices; for as for the building of it, that was finished.

Ver. 28. *And hath extended mercy unto me, before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes*, etc.] Before Artaxerxes, his seven counsellors, (^{<B7M4>}Ezra 7:14) and the nobles of his realm, in being appointed by them to carry their freewill offerings to Jerusalem, and the king's commands to his treasurers, with leave to take as many of the Jews with him as were willing to go:

and I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me; animated to undertake this work, and execute this commission, being under the influence of divine favour and protection:

and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me; he went about in the several parts where Israelites dwelt, and persuaded some of the principal men among them to go along with him to Jerusalem, showing them the king's decree, which gave them leave; and their names and numbers are described in the next chapter.