

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 8

In this chapter we are told who and how many went up with Ezra to Jerusalem, (^{<1500E>}Ezra 8:1-14), the gathering of them together at a river, from whence he sent to Babylon for Levites to come to him, who did, (^{<1505E>}Ezra 8:15-20), the proclaiming a fast for a safe and prosperous journey, (^{<1509E>}Ezra 8:21-23), the delivery of the vessels and money given him into the hands of priests, to take the care and charge thereof, (^{<1509E>}Ezra 8:24-30), their safe arrival at Jerusalem, where they deposited the gifts in the temple, offered sacrifices to God, and delivered the king's commissions to his lieutenants and governors, (^{<1509E>}Ezra 8:31-36).

Ver. 1. *These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them,* etc.] Which follows from hence to the end of (^{<1504E>}Ezra 8:14),

that went up with me from Babylon; with Ezra the priest and scribe, the writer of this book:

in the reign of Artaxerxes the king; that is, Darius Hystaspis, in the seventh year of his reign, (see ^{<1500E>}Ezra 7:1,7), though many think Artaxerxes Longimanus is meant.

Ver. 2. *Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel,* etc.] Not Daniel the prophet, he was of the royal blood, and of the tribe of Judah; this was a priest, a descendant of Ithamar, as Gershom was of Eleazar in the line of Phinehas:

of the sons of David; Hattush; perhaps the same with him in (^{<1302>}1 Chronicles 3:22), who was a descendant of David the king; these three men seem to have come alone without any of their families, at least they are not mentioned, nor their numbers given, as the rest that follow be.

Ver. 3-14. *Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh,* etc.] Who is so described, to distinguish him from another Shechaniah, (^{<1505E>}Ezra 8:5),

Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy, of the males an hundred and fifty; males only were reckoned, not women and children;

though that there were such that went up is clear from (^{<15121>}Ezra 8:21), from hence to the end of (^{<15184>}Ezra 8:14) an account is given of the number of the males that went up with Ezra, who were chiefly, if not altogether, sons of those that went up with Zerubbabel; such of them as were left there behind, and now returned, at least a great number of them, (see ^{<15101>}Ezra 2:1), it is particularly remarked of the sons of Adonikam, (^{<15183>}Ezra 8:13), that they were the last of them; not that they were the last that came in to go with Ezra, or were backward and dilatory, but the last with respect to the first of his sons that were gone before, and seem with them to be the whole of his family; the number of all that went up under their respective heads amounts to 1496.

Ver. 15. *And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava,* etc.] From whence also the river bore the same name; or that from the river, (see ^{<15121>}Ezra 8:21), and may be the same with Adiabene, a country in Assyria, which had its name from the river Adiava:

and there abode we in tents three days; or pitched their camp; this was the place of their rendezvous:

and I viewed the people and the priests; mustered them, took the number of them, and what tribe and families they were of:

and found there none of the sons of Levi; excepting the priests.

Ver. 16. *Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding.*] These were all in the camp, in some part of it, to whom Ezra sent messengers to come unto him; three of them are of the same name; the first nine were men of chief note, rank, and dignity in their family, and the other two were noted for men of good sense, and that could speak to a case well, and so fit to be sent on such an affair as they were.

Ver. 17. *And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief, at the place Casiphia,* etc.] Not a place by the Caspian sea, and near the Caspian mountains, as Munster, which was too far off to go and return in the time they must, (see ^{<15109>}Ezra 7:9 8:15,31), but, as Jarchi, a place in Babylon so called, a village near it, or a parish or street in it, where Ezra knew lived many of the Levites and Nethinims, and where Iddo was the chief of the Levites, and over them both:

and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia; but Iddo was not one of the Nethinims; for he was chief of the Levites, and by his authority many of them were sent as well as of the Nethinims; but none of the latter were over the Levites, for they were servants to them, (⁴⁵⁸⁰Ezra 8:20), but, according to Jarchi, the Nethinims are not at all intended in this clause, who reads the words,

to Iddo and Achim, (the name of a man with him; perhaps it may be better rendered, “to Iddo and his brother”,)

who were appointed, or settled, in the place Casiphia; and with him Deuteronomy Dieu agrees, and so the Syriac version,

who dwelt in Casiphia: that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God; both Levites to be singers and porters there, and the Nethinims to wait on them.

Ver. 18. *And by the good hand of our God upon us,* etc.] Favouring their designs and orders, protecting those that were sent, and inclining those they were sent to use their interest and authority with those that were under them, and making them willing also to agree to what was proposed to them:

they brought us a man of understanding of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; an Israelite, of the tribe of Levi, in the line of Mahli a son of Merari, the third son of Levi:

and Sherebiah; or rather “even Sherebiah”; so Aben Ezra; for he is the understanding man that is meant, and described by his pedigree:

with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; all together made this number.

Ver. 19. *And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari,* etc.] These were of the same division of Levites as Sherebiah:

his brethren and their sons, twenty; these thirty eight, with those they came with, were all Levites; the Nethinims follow.

Ver. 20. *Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites,* etc.] To wait upon them, and minister to them, as they did to the priests; some think those were the same with the Gibeonites, whom Joshua gave to the service of the sanctuary, and

David confirmed; but others are of opinion these were different from them, and an addition to them:

two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name; in the history that Iddo sent of them to Ezra; and so the names of the Levites, though not here expressed, only the names of those they came with.

Ver. 21. *Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava*, etc.] After the messengers to Iddo were returned with those they brought with them:

that we might afflict ourselves before our God; humble themselves before him for their sins, confess them, and declare their repentance of them, and ask forgiveness for them:

to seek of him a right way for us; to take from thence towards Jerusalem, to be directed by him in it: either by a prophet, or by a vision in a dream, as Eben Ezra; or rather by the guidance of his providence; this they sought in prayer by the river side, where it had been usual with them, and since has been, to perform religious exercises, (see ~~Gen~~ Ezekiel 1:1 3:15 ~~High~~ Acts 16:13), hence Tertullian^{f83} calls the prayers of the Jews “orationes littorales”; they sought not so much which was the shortest and easiest way for them to travel in, as which was the safest:

and for our little ones and for all our substance; for the safe conveyance of them; this shows, that though males only are numbered, as before, yet they had their wives and children with them; for little ones cannot be supposed without women to take care of them.

Ver. 22. *For I was ashamed to require of the kings band of soldiers and horsemen*, etc.] Which he might have had, only asking for them; so great was the interest he had in the king’s favour:

to help us against the enemy in the way; the Arabs, Samaritans, and others, that might lie in wait for them, to rob them of their substance:

because we had spoken unto the king: of the special favour of God to them, his singular providence in the protection of them:

saying, the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; that pray unto him, serve and worship him; his hand is open to them to bestow all needful good upon them, temporal and spiritual, and his power and providence are over them, to protect and defend them from all evil:

but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him; his word, his ways and worship; his powerful wrath, or the strength and force of it, is exerted against them and they are sure to feel the weight and dreadful effects of it: and now all this being said to the king, after this, to desire a guard to protect them, it would look as if they had not that favour in the sight of God, and did not believe what they had said, but distrusted his power and providence towards them; therefore, rather than reflect any dishonour on God, they chose to expose themselves to danger, seeking his face and favour, and relying on his goodness and power.

Ver. 23. *So we fasted, and besought our God for this*, etc.] Sought the Lord by fasting and prayer for a good journey, and preservation in it:

and he was entreated of us; accepted their prayer, as Jarchi, so that they came safe to Jerusalem.

Ver. 24. *Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests*, etc.] That were in company with him; so that it seems there were more than the two mentioned, (^{<4582>}Ezra 8:2), very probably their families, or some of their brethren, were with them:

Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them; these men named were Levites, and not priests, (^{<4583>}Ezra 8:18,19) and therefore the copulative “and” must be supplied:

and Sherebiah, etc. or with the twelve priests, Sherebiah, etc. and ten Levites more with them; so that the number of priests and Levites were equal, and in all twenty four.

Ver. 25. *And I weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels*, etc.] When he delivered them to them; this he did as a proof of his own integrity and faithfulness, and as a security against any charge or accusation of embezzling any part of them, and to set them an example, and also that they might be under no temptation of acting such a part, and might be vindicated should they be charged with it: even

the offering of the house of our God; what was freely offered for the service of it:

which the king and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered; as freewill offerings, (see ^{<4575>}Ezra 7:15,16).

Ver. 26. *I even weighed unto their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver,* etc.] Which, according to Scheuchzer^{f84} amount to 975,000 imperials, and, of our money, 2,229,450 pounds sterling: and silver vessels one hundred talents; which came to 35,300 pounds, or 50,000 imperials; according to Jarchi, there were one hundred vessels, and every vessel weighed a talent, and so Aben Ezra, which, with Brerewood^{f85}, was three hundred and seventy five pounds:

and of gold one hundred talents; which, according to Scheuchzer^{f86}, were equal to 1,222,000 ducats of gold; the value of gold now is above 14 and a 3d to the value of silver, by which may be judged the difference between one hundred talents of gold and one hundred talents of silver; according to David de Pomis^{f87}, there were two sorts of talents; common talents, which weighed sixty pounds, and the talent of the sanctuary, which weighed double to that.

Ver. 27. *Also twenty basins of gold, of a thousand drams,* etc.] Which were upwards of 1000 pounds of our money; for Bishop Cumberland says^{f88}, the Persian “daric”, “drachma”, or “drachm”, weighed twenty shillings and four pence; and, according to Dr. Bernard, it exceeded one of our guineas by two grains, (See Gill on “11 Chronicles 29:7”)

and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold; which perhaps is the same with the Indian or Persian brass Aristotle^{f89} speaks of, which is so bright and pure, and free from rust, that it cannot be known by its colour from gold, and that there are among the cups of Darius such as cannot be discerned whether they are brass or gold but by the smell: the Syriac version interprets it by Corinthian brass, which was a mixture of gold, silver, and copper, made when Corinth was burnt, and which is exceeding valuable; of which Pliny^{f90} makes three sorts, very precious, and of which he says, it is in value next to, and even before silver, and almost before gold; but this sort of brass was not as yet in being: Kimchi^{f91} interprets the word here of its colour, being next to the colour of gold.

Ver. 28. *And I said unto them, ye are holy unto the Lord, the vessels are holy also,* etc.] As they were dedicated and set apart to holy service, so the vessels were sacred to holy uses, and therefore not to be converted to any other:

and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers: and therefore not to be made use of but in his service.

Ver. 29. *Watch ye, and keep them,* etc.] The vessels, the gold, and the silver, that they be not hurt and diminished:

until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord: that is, until they had delivered them in full weight, as they had received them, in the presence of those persons as witnesses, and into their hands, in order to be laid up in the chambers and treasuries of the temple.

Ver. 30. *So took the priests and the Levites,* etc.] The twelve priests and twelve Levites, mentioned in (^{<451834>}Ezra 8:24),

the weight of the silver and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God; this they undertook to do, and did.

Ver. 31. *Then we departed from the river of Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem,* etc.] The month Nisan, answering to part of March and part of April; this was two days before the passover began:

and the hand of our God was upon us; guiding, directing, and protecting them by his providence:

and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way; either by intimidating them, that they dared not attack them, or by directing them to take a different road, whereby they escaped them, (see ^{<451822>}Ezra 8:22).

Ver. 32. *And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.*] Before they went about any business, delivered what was committed to them for the use of the temple, and the commissions to the king's officers; as it was but proper they should have some rest after such a fatiguing journey.

Ver. 33. *Now on the fourth day,* etc.] After their arrival at Jerusalem:

was the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, weighed in the house of our God; the temple, that it might be seen and known that the exact weight which had been deposited with them was now faithfully delivered:

this was done by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; these were priests:

and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; two priests and two Levites; for since there were of both

that were charged with the above things, it was proper there should be some of both, when weighed, that they might be witnesses of their fidelity.

Ver. 34. *By number and by weight of everyone*, etc.] They were delivered in by tale and weight, which exactly agreed to the number and weight in which they received them:

and all the weight was written at that time; an account was taken in writing, and laid up, that it might not only be known hereafter what freewill offerings had been made in Babylon, but that it might be a voucher for the fidelity and integrity of those that brought them, should it ever be called in question.

Ver. 35. *Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity*, etc.] Namely, those that now came along with Ezra:

offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel; by way of thankfulness for their deliverance from captivity, and for their safe journey:

twelve bullocks for all Israel: according to the number of the tribes; and there might be some of every tribe that now came up:

ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs; these and the bullocks were burnt offerings:

twelve he goats for a sin offering; according to the number of the twelve tribes, also to make atonement for sins they had been guilty of:

all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord; excepting the twelve he goats, which were a sin offering.

Ver. 36. *And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river*, etc.] The governors of the provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Judea, which were on that side of Euphrates the land of Israel was:

and they furthered the people, and the house of God; or "lifted them up"^{f92}, eased them of all burdens, and freed them from all impediments, and assisted them and furnished them with everything, as the decree of Artaxerxes enjoined them; and provided everything as they required for ornamenting the temple, and for the sacrifices of it; all which is to be

understood of the king's lieutenants and governors, who obeyed his commands.