

## Handout Ezra Lesson 4

### II. The Organization of the Community by Ezra and Nehemiah (Chapters 7–10)

- A. Ezra's mission and the registry of the second returning exiles (Chapters 7:1-8:36)
- B. Ezra's spiritual restoration of the covenant people through obedience to the Law and opposition to mixed marriages (Chapters 9:1-10:44)

The language of Ezra continues to change from Hebrew to Aramaic:

6:19-7:11 is in Hebrew

7:12-26 is in Aramaic

7:27 to the end of the book is in Hebrew

The Persian Kings between the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple that began in 520 BC and Ezra's mission in 458 BC:

- Darius I, son of Hystaspes (a kinsman of Cyrus I), ruled 522-486 BC
- Xerxes I, son of Darius I, ruled 486-465 BC (the husband of Esther and called Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther)
- Artaxerxes I, son of Darius I, ruled 465-424 BC

The events recorded in the Book of Esther took place between Ezra Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Significant names in Ezra genealogy:

1. Ezra is the son of Seraiah, the high priest during the reign of King Zedekiah, executed by the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Kng 25:18-21; Jer 52:24-27).
2. He is the great-grandson Hilkiah, the high priest during the reign of King Hezekiah (2 Kng 22:4; 1 Chron 5:39-40; 1 Chron 34:9).
3. He is a descendant of King David's high priest, Zadok (1 Chr 6:50-53; 2 Sam 8:17; 15:24-35; 17:15). For his loyalty to the Davidic kings, Solomon appointed him his high priest and decreed that all future high priests were limited to his line (1 Kng 1:7-8; 2:35; Ez 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11).<sup>1</sup>
4. He is the descendant of Phinehas, the high priest with whom God made a covenant of peace (Num 25:11-13; Sir 45:23-24/28-31).
5. He is the descendant of the High Priest Eleazar, the third son who succeeded his father Aaron as Israel's High Priest (Ex 6:23; 28:1; Num 3:3-4; 20:25-28; Dt 10:6).
6. He is the descendant of Israel's first High Priest, Aaron the brother of Moses (Ex 28:1-2; Sir 45:7-15).

Ezra's qualifications for the mission:

1. He has an excellent pedigree in the Aaronide and the Zadokite line of chief priests.
2. As an expert in the teaching of the Law of Moses, he possesses the necessary authority and enough preparation as a chief priest to properly conduct Temple liturgical services.
3. His expert understanding of the Law of Moses provides an authoritative link to the pre-exile past and for interpreting, explaining, and applying the ancient laws to a new context in which there is no Davidic king but instead, a Persian king they must obey.

→ over

Artaxerxes letter in 7:12-26 returns to Aramaic. After the official greeting, the letter addresses the king's orders for Ezra:

1. All Israelites who choose to go to Jerusalem are free to join Ezra. Since the letter uses the designation "Israel" it likely includes the people of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom deported into Assyrians lands, territories the Persians now control.
2. Ezra's mission is to investigate how the laws of the God of Israel are observed and applied in Judah and Jerusalem.
3. Ezra is to transport silver and gold provided by the king, by the province of Babylon, and contributions by the Jews remaining in Babylon.
4. The silver and gold will be used to purchase the animals and other materials for sacrificial offerings and for any other uses to support the ministry of the Temple.
5. Whatever else is needed will be supplied from the royal treasury.

Ezra receives additional powers in 7:25-26:

1. Ezra will have the authority to appoint magistrates and scribes in all the Jewish communities in the extended province of Trans-Euphrates.
2. He is to enforce that everyone must obey Persian law and the law of Yahweh. The "law of the king" refers to imperial law of Persia, which all Persian subjects had to obey. The Persian legal system permitted the observance of both local law and imperial law.

In 8:26-27:

- *six hundred and fifty talents of silver* = 25 tons of silver (about 22 metric tons)
- *one hundred utensils of silver valued at two talents* = 3.75 tons of silver utensils (about 3.4 metric tons)
- *one hundred talents of gold* = about 19 pounds (about 8.5 kilograms)
- *twenty golden bowls valued at a thousand darics* (a daric is a Persian gold coin)
- *two utensils of fine burnished copper as precious as gold*

Ezra ordered the departure from Babylon on the first day of the first month of Abib/Aviv (7:8). But they didn't start for Jerusalem until the twelfth, after recruiting Levites to accompany them (8:31). The twelfth day of Abib was just before the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Abib 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>- 21<sup>st</sup>); they started on their journey confident that the hand of God was over them, protecting them from enemies. Ezra and the caravan arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month of Ab/Av, in the seventh year of King Ahasuerus' reign in 458 BC (7:9). It is the same month the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple in 587/6 BC, and the returnees would have seen their return on this month as part of Yahweh's divine plan.