

PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

EZRA

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HISTORY:

The Book of Ezra was written by Ezra. ¹Ezra was a scribe who revived the Law of Moses as the basis for Jewish religious and social life during the period of restoration following the Babylonian exile. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra-Nehemiah is one book. The setting of the book of Ezra is the postexilic era (after Babylonian captivity) when the faithful Israelites were returning from Babylon to Judah, so they could rebuild God's temple and re-establish their temple worship. There were three successive returns from Babylon to the land of Israel (538, 458, and 444 B.C.), just as there had been three deportations to Babylon (605, 597, and 586 B.C.). The first return was led by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. The second return was under Ezra in 458 B.C. The people needed reforming; they needed to return to their covenant worship. The third return was led by Nehemiah in 444 B.C. God used pagan kings and godly leaders to restore His people by reinstating temple worship and reviving the Law of Moses. Ezra begins by seeing Cyrus's decree releasing the exiles as the fulfillment of God's promise in Jeremiah 29:10 (**Ezra 1**). **Ezra 2** we see the exiles return to Jerusalem and Judah led by Zerubbabel. A total of 42,360 people returned. The heads of families gave offerings for the temple.

3:1 **And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.** Now it is the "*seventh month*" of their arrival— September-October. Although the year is not mentioned, it is implied that this was the seventh month of their first year in Jerusalem. This is substantiated by the opening statement of verse 8 (the second year). Scripture says the people were in the cities and they gathered themselves "*as one man*" to Jerusalem. The idea was that they gathered in unity for the same purpose; having a spirit of unity among them or a fresh resolve suggests it was all for the purpose of God. It was important for them to get back to their sacrificial worship and regular calendar feasts unto God as one. Unity is one of the basic foundations for accomplishing a work for God. But they had a lingering sense of fear and intimidation troubling them because of the peoples of the lands (v.3). Lack of unity is one of the hindrances to revival in the twentieth-century church.

However, when the children of Israel returned to their homeland in the seventh month, it was supposed to be one of the most sacred and worshipful times. This was a time of the blowing of the trumpets (The Feast of the Trumpets; Day of Atonement, and The Feast of Tabernacles), yet their entire temple lay demolished (v.6).

¹ <http://www.getanewlife.org/clientimages/39165/14ezra.pdf>
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Trumpets	Atonement	Tabernacles
1st day 7th Month (Tishri) (Lev. 23:23-25)	10th Day 7th Month (Tishri) (Lev. 23:26-32)	An Eight Day Festival 15th to 22nd Day 7th Month (Tishri) (Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43)

²***The Feast of Trumpets*** marked the beginning of ten days of consecration and repentance before God. Its name comes from the command to blow trumpets. No kind of work was to be performed, but burnt offerings and a sin offering were to be brought before the Lord. It commemorated the end of the agricultural and festival year. The blowing of the trumpets on the first day of the month heralded a solemn time of preparation for the Day of Atonement;

this preparation time was called “Ten Days of Repentance” or the “Days of Awe.” The prophets linked the blowing of trumpets to the future Day of Judgment: “Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill...”

³***The Day of Atonement***, also known as Yom Kippur, was the most solemn holy day of all the Israelite feasts and festivals, occurring once a year on the tenth day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. The solemnity of the day was underscored by God telling Moses to warn Aaron not to come into the Most Holy Place whenever he felt like it, only on this special day once a year, lest he die (Lev.16: 2). This was not a ceremony to be taken lightly, and the people were to understand that atonement for sin was to be done God’s way. There is much more associated to this day.

⁴***The Feast of Tabernacles or The Festival of Booths*** began on the fifteenth day; begins and ends with a special Sabbath day of rest. During the days of the feast all native Israelites were “to dwell in booths” to remind them that God delivered them out of the “land of Egypt” and to look forward to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would deliver His people from the bondage of sin.

3:2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. ⁵The men who headed up the constructing of the altar were Jeshua, the priest (a descendant of Aaron), and Zerubbabel, the main leader (a descendant of David), along with fellow priests (other descendants of Aaron) and associates (other descendants of David). These recognized spiritual and civil leaders stood up or came forth and built the altar of the God of Israel.

⁶An “altar” is a table (usually stone or metal) where the priests burned animals and gave other gifts as a sacrifice to God. This was the altar of burnt offerings. This was the first agenda that was meaningful before they could worship God. Apparently the work on the altar had been done prior to the seventh month, for the sacrifices actually began on the first day of the seventh month (v.6). ⁷Jeshua was acting high priest. His grandfather, Seraiah, was high priest at the time of the destruction of the temple before the Babylonian captivity. Zerubbabel had led this group of captives back from Babylon. God had instructed them in the Law of Moses on how to go about offering. God had shown David that this was the only acceptable place for burnt offerings to be made.

3:3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening. The idea

² <http://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Trumpets.html>

³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Day-Atonement-Yom-Kippur.html>

⁴ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Tabernacles.html>

⁵ <http://ldolphin.org/daniel/ezra02.html>

⁶ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>

⁷ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/03.html>

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is that they built the altar on its former base, utilizing the foundation of the original altar. The people were fearful of the surrounding heathen nations because of their worshipping of their false gods and they saw the Jews as a threat and quickly wanted to undermine their allegiance to God. However, the Israelites offered sacrifices to God even though they feared attack from the surrounding people of the land. Resetting the altar on its bases was all that was needed to reestablish temple worship, so that it occupied its sacred site. Burnt offerings were the most common offerings for sin and it was done morning and evening. These were the first sacrifices made there in 50 years.

3:4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;— This was a time of year that was required by the Levitical law for all males to worship. ⁸The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days. During this time, the people lived in temporary dwellings (tents, booths, and lean-tos-a slope-roofed shelter) just as their ancestors had done many years before as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. The feast would remind the people of God's past protection and guidance in the wilderness and of His continued love for them. The sacrifices showed that the people wanted to be responsive to the Law of God. "*By number*" meant for on all the eight days of the feast there was a certain number of sacrifices fixed for every day; and exactly according to the law concerning them. According to *Kiel*: on the first day thirteen oxen, on the second, twelve, etc. They were careful to do all that the Law ordered.

3:5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord. After the Feast of Tabernacles the priests observed continual burnt offering, the new moons and all the set feasts of the Lord. ⁹The "*continual burnt offering*" is speaking of the regular morning and evening sacrifices. They would, from this time on, keep all of the appointed festivals that were consecrated (holy and sacred). A "*freewill offering*" might be made at any time. It was not of obligation, but of their free will.

3:6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. The sacrificial worship had been established on the first day of the seventh month, now it was time for the people to begin the task of rebuilding the Temple. The people had great zeal and enthusiasm for the worship of God, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not yet been laid. They began to be anxious to complete this task.

3:7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. Just as the people assembled as one man to go to Jerusalem for their sacrificial worship and feasts, they are assembling together for the building project of the Temple. The work could not proceed immediately, preparation had to be made. Money was given to the masons and "*the stone workers*" and carpenters. The preparation for the wood (cedar trees of Lebanon) had to come from Sidon and Tyre, where they were paid with meat, drink, and oil instead of money. ¹⁰Many years earlier, King Solomon built the first Temple for God. He too had paid the people from Tyre to send him good wood. The people from Tyre also sent that wood by sea to the port called Joppa. Joppa is a convenient port for Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 2:1-

⁸ <http://children.ccm.com/OTTeacherGuidePDF/CUROT120.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/03.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>

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16). And so, this is how the cedar trees of Lebanon had to come; by sea to the port of Joppa. King Cyrus had allowed them to do this. The king of Persia had helped to finance the rebuilding of the temple out of his own funds, for the Jews had not been back long enough to produce their own wood.

3:8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. This is the second year of the Israelite's return to the house of God at Jerusalem. The first year was in the seventh month to rebuild the altar, which is mentioned in Ezra 3:1, but at that time the Temple was not rebuilt. It was called the House of God even though it lay in ruin because it symbolized the consecration for worship. It took from September to June just for the preparation to rebuild the Temple. It took time just to bring forth the materials ordered. And the workers were hired from those who had returned under the direction of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, the remnant priests, and Levites. It took time to make the plans because this project was important to them. The Law of Moses commanded that the Levites begin their serving at thirty years of age. However, David changed the starting age for Levitical service to twenty years of age (1 Chronicles 23:24). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, they adopted David's revised practice. Therefore, the Levites at the age of 20yrs were appointed to supervise the workmen.

3:9 Then stood Jeshua [with] his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. The Levites were given the responsibility to oversee the rebuilding of the Temple. Three classes of Levites are mentioned: Jeshua and his family, Kadmiel and his family, and Henadad and his family. In this rebuilding we can conclude that this task was accomplished in an orderly fashion.

3:10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. The laying of the foundation was accompanied by festivity and singing. The priests were dressed in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites with cymbals to praise the Lord prescribed by king David of Israel. This was a time of celebration and they did it up with flair according to the ordinance of David.

3:11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because [he is] good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. Celebration always calls for singing. As they sang together, they gave thanks unto the Lord. ¹¹This is united, public praise. It is intense, emotional and God-centered. When they sang, they declared, *"He is good,"* not *"We are good."* When we have been humbled by God, our praise will be sweeter because it will not be mixed with sinful pride. The Jews could never say, *"Look at us, we did it, we brought ourselves back from Babylon."* No way. God humbled them, He punished them, and when the time came, He brought them home again. Human pride had been crushed years earlier. Now God alone would get the glory. They openly gave God all the credit. Shouting with a great shout once the foundation was laid, they kept going on that *"His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel."* They did not wait

¹¹ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2002-11-10-Overcoming-Disappointment/>
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until the building was done to praise the Lord. Even though laying the foundation was significant, there was a mountain of work left to do. Great things start small and deserve praise and thanks unto a loving God!

3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:—Some of the older people (many priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers) remembered and had seen the first house of God (Solomon's Temple) and were filled with emotion. They began to weep loudly because for one reason, they were alive to see the new Temple being rebuilt to honor God; second they were back in their own land to worship God. Even though it could not be compared to the first house, it was being rebuilt for the purpose of getting back on track to honor God. What an awesome sight, one group was weeping loudly and the other group was shouting loudly with joy just feels me emotionally. When one remembers how unworthy one is, and at the same time remembers how awesome God is will cause great emotion. If you had lost your home and then see it rebuilt, and get a chance to enter in again, it will cause tears of sadness because of some things that were lost that you couldn't replace, yet tears of joy for the chance to settle into its newness with a fresh start at the same location.

There were young and old there. The young might have been the ones shouting for joy loudly and the older ones were the ones weeping loudly. The young ¹²had never seen Solomon's temple, didn't remember its glory, and hadn't witnessed its destruction. All they knew about was what they had heard from the older generation (parents and their parents' friends). So when they saw the temple foundation relaid, to them it was an amazing sight and answer to prayer. This was a time to celebrate the goodness of the Lord. However, the older generation remembered how good things had been, and they recalled what had been lost through disobedience and they wept. In conclusion the young need the old to remind them of the past and the old need the young to encourage them about the future.

3:13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off. ¹³This had to be a spectacular sound with the cymbals clanging, the trumpets blowing, the weeping loudly, and the shouts of praise. Everyone had to know what was happening by the loud sounds. Wouldn't it be interesting to see a church in our day rejoicing so loudly that it would stir up the entire neighborhood? People far away could hear the noise but nobody could tell if they were laughing or crying.

SUMMARY:

The people of Israel are coming back home and they have gathered as one man to go to Jerusalem. There were certain ones who re-built the altar on its bases where they could offer their burnt offerings unto the Lord. Following this, the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles and began their regular observance of the various sacrifices. ¹⁴They built the altar even before they started rebuilding the temple. Why? - Because worship must always come first. Out of the rubble of their past disobedience, they first made sure they were right with God. In a sense, by making sacrifices first, they were saying, "Lord, we want to get right with you." The altar was the link between God and man. During all the years in Babylon, the people had no altar and

¹² <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2002-11-10-Overcoming-Disappointment/>

¹³ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/03.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2002-11-10-Overcoming-Disappointment/>
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thus no clear access to God and no assurance of forgiveness. Their disobedience had taken the altar away and broken fellowship with God. After the building of the altar, offering burnt offerings, and celebrating all the feasts, preparation of gathering supplies for the rebuilding of the Temple began. Money to the masons and carpenters was given. Food, drink, and oil were given to the people of Zidon and Tyre to bring cedar trees from Lebanon by sea of Joppa authorized by king Cyrus of Persia (**3:1-7**).

In the second year after the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they began rebuilding the Temple with the Levites in charge. When the Temple's foundation was complete, there was a great celebration. The priests and Levites blew trumpets, clash cymbals, and sang praises to the Lord, *'He is good, and His love, mercy toward Israel will last forever.'* There was such loud shouting going on because the foundation of the Temple had been laid that some of the older ones were weeping among those that were shouting loudly with joy and the people far off couldn't distinguish the difference (**3:8-13**).

APPLICATION:

What would you share with others from the Book of Ezra? Would it be worship, coming together as one man, giving of your time, celebrating what God has done in your life, or building God's temple. All sound good to me. For the Israelites, putting Him first was the most meaningful part of their coming back home. Their worship was restored in the right way. There is no place like home. The return of the Israelites to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple are repeated in the lives of every Christian who has come out of the captivity of sin and returns to God to rebuild their lives.

After being humbled we find restoration. This brings a joyous outburst when we remember what God has done in our lives. We get back to what we are supposed to do, that is, praise Him, who makes all things possible! Through the Joy of praise unto Him, He restores us! Ask God to restore you, so you can get back to the practice of worshipping Him!

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HISTORY:

6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. Cyrus king of Persia died and now king Darius is in office. Darius made a decree commanding that the records be searched to determine if Cyrus had permitting the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. Apparently the valuable treasures were stored in the same place as the historical documents, in the house of the rolls or public library or museum where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

6:2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:— However, the province of Medes was not in the main city of Babylon but was found at Achmetha (the capital of the ancient Median empire), called Ecbatana (Persian capital, 300mi. NE of Babylon) in the foothills where Cyrus and other Persian kings had their summer homes. Probably all of Cyrus's documents were in Achmetha and the words on the scroll or roll (the decree of Cyrus) were therein a record was hence written.

6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;—This allows us to know that in Cyrus' first year of reign a decree had been sent out concerning the house; the Temple of God at Jerusalem where the Jews offered sacrifices. Thus it spelled out exactly what was to be done: *"Let the house be built... let the foundations be strongly laid; the height...threescore cubits (90ft.), and the breadth... threescore cubits (90ft.)."* Solomon's Temple was only thirty cubits high and twenty cubits broad. These instructions to rebuild authorized a much larger facility. Cyrus wanted to rebuild a bigger and more impressive facility than the one which was destroyed.

6:4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:— The walls were to be built with three rows of big stones and a row of new timber (wood). Money from Cyrus' storehouse will pay for it. Cyrus not only permitted the rebuilding, but he was willing to underwrite the expenses of the project.

6:5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God. The vessels were crucial to the re-establishing of the sacrifices and proper worship of Jehovah. The vessels which were stolen by Nebuchadnezzar and brought to Babylon were to be restored and brought back to the house of God (Temple) at Jerusalem. Everything was to be placed back into its proper place, placing them in the house of God as they were before.

6:6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:— Darius responds to now found written decree of Cyrus. He instructs Tatnai (governor), Shetharbazai, and companions Apharsachites that are beyond the river (west of the Euphrates) to not hinder or interfere with the rebuilding of the Temple. The message in short was, *"leave*

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them alone" (v.7).

6:7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. God so favored the Jews that through Darius. Darius forbade the officials from interfering with the building project. The governor and elders of the Jews were to be left alone to build the house of God in its former site.

6:8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. Now Darius goes on to make a decree to those described in verse 6. After finding out they were not to hinder the work, they find out what they were to do to help with the work. They were to give money from the tribute (taxes) to the Jews in order to finance their expenses.

6:9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:— Also they were to include for the priests: the animals for the sacrifice, that is, the young bullocks, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings unto God; wheat, salt, wine, and oil each day without fail.

6:10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. Darius also had ulterior motives in helping the Jews re-establish their worship. Darius wanted them to pray for him and his sons to the God of heaven. Cyrus had recognized the authority of the Jewish God, now Darius recognizes this authority and seeks His blessings.

6:11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. Darius further decrees that anyone who disobeys and alters this word would be hanged. The idea was that a beam would be pulled out of his house and this person would be nailed to this piece of wood. This kind of crucifixion was customary among the Assyrians. His house would be destroyed, made a dunghill for going against these rules.

6:12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed. Wow! Darius calls upon a greater power, God's wrath upon all kings and people to be destroyed. If they put their hands against the Temple at Jerusalem to destroy where God has caused His name to dwell, they would be destroyed. Darius made the decree which cannot be changed and it was to be done will all diligence.

6:13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily. Tatnai and his fellow officials responded quickly to carry out king Darius' decree. Other versions of scripture say "*beyond the river*" which seems to mean "*on this side the river*" which is still west of the Euphrates.

6:14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of

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the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Well, the first temple of Jerusalem was built by King Solomon, but destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. However, the Jewish elders completed the building of the second Temple at Jerusalem which is always hence first decreed by the commandment of the God of Israel, and then He uses other instruments enacted to the commandment which were kings Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. The elders of the Jews were able to build, finish their building program, and prosper as they received physical and spiritual prosperity nourished through the prophesying of the prophets Haggai, and Zechariah the son of Iddo. ¹⁵Haggai and Zechariah preached and kept them with the desire to do this according to the Will of God. Cyrus (Ezra 1) had written instructions given him from the Lord, and Darius (Ezra 6) and Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:20-21) gave further orders of how it also was to be finished.

6:15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. Ezra here gives the exact day of the completion of the house of God. The sixth year of the reign of Darius was 516 B.C., exactly 70 years after the destruction of the first temple (586) by Nebuchadnezzar, thus fulfilling the prophecy of 70 years of exile; punishment God had spoken by His prophet Jeremiah over the Jews (29:10), and now the temple house was finished the third day of the month Adar.

6:16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. They had their celebration. The children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the children from captivity kept the dedication of the house of God with joy just as Solomon and the people did in their first dedication of the Temple of God. This was a very much needed and fulfilling festive occasion for all.

6:17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. The dedication of the house of God was followed with lavish sacrifices which did not exceed in the dedication of Solomon's Temple. They offered an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs as sacrifices. They also offered twelve he goats for a sin offering for all Israel. Although it was the southern tribes (Judah) who were taken into captivity, and permitted to return, and rebuild. They were conscious of the fact that Israel was a nation of twelve tribes.

6:18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. ¹⁶Many years earlier, God had told Moses how the priests and Levites should serve in the temple. Moses wrote these commands in his books (Numbers 3:6-9; 18:1-32). ¹⁷The priests were Levites, too. Not all Levites were priests, however. Some were keepers of the doors. Some were singers and musicians. All Levites were set aside for the service of the Lord. Just a few were priests.

6:19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. The children of the captivity were the ones who had returned from exile, whom after the dedication of the temple, kept the observance of the Passover on its appointed date. This was done the fourteenth day of the first month. Each year the Jewish men were required to make three trips to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, Pentecost, and

¹⁵ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/06.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>

¹⁷ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/06.html>

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the Feast of Tabernacles. They come to remember how God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

6:20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. Great preparations were made. The priests and the Levites purified themselves together and were clean. This purification was important and qualified the priests for holy service. The temple had been dedicated, and now the people were dedicating themselves to the Lord. So, the Passover was a time to put away all evil from their lives. What good is a dedicated Temple if you don't have dedicated people? The Levites killed the Passover lamb and was to be eaten by the exiles, the priests, and themselves.

6:21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat,— Not all the people were children of Israel. There were the proselytes who had embraced the Jewish religion by having mingled with the Jews in their captivity. This means that the heathens saw it and walked in the light of the Lord with them. A significant rule regarding the Passover was that it could not be celebrated by those who had not repented of sin. Only those who had lived separated lives could partake and eat. ¹⁸They were all ready at one time to observe the proper rites and ceremonies.

6:22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. Following the Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasts for seven days. During this time the Jews had to remove all yeast (leaven) from their dwellings, a picture of personal purification. To a Jew, yeast was a symbol of evil, so Passover was a time to put away all evil from their lives. This was now to be a joyous time in their lives. We have to look at all the things that had occurred in their lives at this time: the rebuilding of the Temple, its dedication, the Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were all possible because of what God had done. All was with joy, because the Lord had given them cause to be joyful. They were quick to give Him all the credit for this joyful moment. There is spontaneous joy when God's people see evidence of Him working through and turning the heart of the king of Assyria to assist them. The title, King of Assyria was held by every king who succeeded the great Neo-Assyrian Empire regardless of what country they may have come from. This encouraged them to complete the rebuilding; to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of the God of Israel.

SUMMARY:

6:1-12 Cyrus king of Persia died and now king Darius is in office. Darius made a decree commanding that the records be searched in the Babylonian archives. However, the province of Medes was not in the main city of Babylon but was found at Achmetha (the capital of the ancient Median empire), called Ecbatana (Persian capital, 300mi. NE of Babylon) in the foothills where Cyrus and other Persian kings had their summer homes (6:1-2). In Cyrus' first year of reign, a decree had been sent out concerning the house; the Temple of God at Jerusalem where the Jews offered sacrifices. The foundational measurements were laid out, the walls to be built,

¹⁸ <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/12172/eVerseID/12172/RTD/Clarke>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

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and the timber to be used. Money from Cyrus' storehouse will pay for it (6:3-4). Also, the vessels which were stolen by Nebuchadnezzar and brought to Babylon were to be restored and brought back to the house of God (the Temple) at Jerusalem. Everything was to be placed back into its proper place. Darius responds to the now found written decree of Cyrus. He instructs Tatnai (Persian governor), Shetharbazai, and companions Apharsachites (Persian advisers) that are beyond the river (west of the Euphrates) to not hinder or interfere with the rebuilding of the Temple. They were to "leave them alone" (6:5-7). Furthermore, king Darius goes forth to make a decree describing what they were to do to help with the work. They were to give from the king's goods, even the money from the tribute (taxes) to the Jews in order to finance the expenses of these men to do the work, even the animals for the sacrifice; wheat, salt, wine, and oil are included each day without fail for the priests (6:8-9). Darius also had ulterior motives in helping the Jews re-establish their worship. He wanted them to pray for him and his sons to the God of heaven, and seeks God's blessings. Anyone who disobeys or alters this word or put their hands against the Temple at Jerusalem to alter and destroy where God has caused His name to dwell would be hanged. All kings and people would be destroyed by God's wrath. King Darius calls upon a greater power! (6:10-12).

6:13-16 ¹⁹Governor Tattenai, Shethar Bozenai, and their advisors carefully obeyed King Darius (6:13). With great success the Jewish leaders continued working on the temple, while Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them by their preaching (6:14). And so, the temple was completed at the command of the God of Israel and by the orders of kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes of Persia. The Temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (6:15). The Israelites—the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy (6:16).

6:17-20 One hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs were offered as sacrifices at the dedication (6:17). Also twelve goats were sacrificed as sin offerings for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then the priests and Levites were assigned their duties in God's temple in Jerusalem, according to the instructions Moses had written (6:18). The returned exiles kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month (6:19). For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean (6:20). So they killed the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their brother priests, and for themselves.

6:21-22 The sacrifices were eaten by the Israelites who had returned and by the neighboring people who had given up the sinful customs of other nations in order to worship the LORD God of Israel (6:21). For seven days they celebrated the Festival of Thin Bread. Everyone was happy because the LORD God of Israel had made sure that the king of Assyria would be kind to them and help them build the temple (6:22).

APPLICATION:

Ezra carefully pointed out that rebuilding the temple was commanded first by God then by the kings, who were His instruments. God's will is supreme over all rulers, all historical events and all hostile forces. If I trust in His power and love, with complete dedication to Him, no opposition can stop me.

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¹⁹ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/the-temple-is-dedicated/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

HISTORY:

Ezra was a priest, a scribe, and a great leader. His name means “help’ and his whole life was dedicated to serving God and God’s people. He wrote most of 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Psalms 119. He centers the narrative of the book of Ezra around God and his promise that the Jews would return to their land, as promised by Jeremiah. The **exile** of Jerusalem started with the first deportation in 597 B.C.

When Nebuchadnezzar died, his successor was not strong and the city of Babylon was captured in 539 B.C. by Cyrus the Persian²⁰. He established one of the most successful and enduring of the great ancient empires. The **first return**²¹ to Judah for the Jews came shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon, 538 BC (Ezra 1:1), led by Sheshbazzar.²² The **second** came 80 years later, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I²³, 458 BC (Ezra 7:7), led by Ezra. And the **third** came 13 years after the second, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, 444 BC (Neh. 2:1), led by Nehemiah.

Part of Cyrus’ success came from his practice of showing respect for the religious beliefs of his captured peoples. In his first years according to both Persian records and the biblical account he proclaimed that all the captive peoples whom the Babylonians had dragged into exile should be allowed to go free (2Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1-4). As he conquered the cities, he treated the inhabitants with mercy. Although not a servant of God, Cyrus was used by God to return the Jews to their homeland.

The Book of Ezra covers the return from captivity to rebuild the Temple, up to the decree of Artaxerxes, the event covered at the beginning of the Book of Nehemiah. Haggai was the main prophet in the day of Ezra, and Zechariah was the prophet in the day of Nehemiah. But Ezra himself does not appear in the book until Chapter 7.

The earlier chapters are devoted to the first group of returned exiles under the political leader, Zerubbabel²⁴ and the priestly leader Jeshua²⁵ (Ezra 1:1—6:22); restoring worship (Ezra 3); rebuilding of the temple where they had to overcome opposition from the people of the land (Ezra 4:1-5), but in the end they completed the structure. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to finish their task of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1-2). The temple was completed and dedicated. Ezra points out that rebuilding the Temple was decreed first by God and then by the kings.

The second group of exiles return to Jerusalem led by Ezra (Ezra 7:1—10:44). There is a gap of almost 60years²⁶ between the events of Chapters 6 and 7. Ezra 7:10 says, *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”*

²⁰ Also known as Cyrus the Great, Cyrus (reigned 550-530 B.C.) was the founder of the Persian Empire; the Elder; King of Persia, King of Anshan, King of Media, King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, King of the four corners of the World.

²¹ http://www.truthnet.org/Biblicalarcheology/11/Israel_Restored.htm

²² Sheshbazzar was appointed governor of the province of Judah by Cyrus (Ezra 5:14); led the first group of exiles back from Babylon to Judah, bringing with him the vessels taken from the Temple (Ezra 1:8, 11; 5:14) by Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:13) and laid the foundations of rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:6).

²³ Persian King, succeeded his Father Xerxes (assassinated) and authorized Ezra's mission to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-7, 11-26).

²⁴ Governor of Judah; Grandson of Jehoiachin, second to last king of Judah; Led the first band of Jews, numbering 42,360, who returned from the Babylonian Captivity.

²⁵ Jeshua, head of the priestly family of Jedaiah; helped organize the first group of exiles that returned to Jerusalem.

²⁶ http://checkpointbible.org/survey/ezra_bible_survey.html

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

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SYNOPSIS:

8:1-14 These verses contain a list of those who returned with Ezra to Jerusalem. *"The chief of their fathers"*, refer to the heads of each household. There are several important facts to consider from this list of names.

1. First, the names that appear in this list are similar to those which appeared in the list of Chapter 2. Those who returned first under Zerubbabel had left parts of their families and relatives behind in Babylon. Now, many of these also returned under the leadership of Ezra.
2. Second, there are twelve families mentioned in this list. This is implied to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.
3. Third, there were a total of 1,496 males and fifteen heads who returned with Ezra. This was a much smaller group than the one that had returned with Zerubbabel earlier.

8:15 **And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.** The events described in this chapter are described from Ezra's personal viewpoint. After viewing the people Ezra was faced with a dilemma. There were no Levites among them who were returning. ²⁷The river, spoken of here, is a small stream that flows into the Euphrates. It was about 8 day's journey from Babylon. It appears they stopped to rest the people. They abode in tents (3 days), because there were so many of them. This was the only way to house the people on the trip. There were no Levites with them. This was very strange, for seventy-four Levites had gone up with Zerubbabel, but on this trip Ezra found none. It would appear that the Levites should have not been content to stay in Babylon but on hand to eagerly go back to Jerusalem to do the work of the Lord in the temple. God had called these men for a special service but they were not found on the trip to Jerusalem. The trip back to Jerusalem was halted while Ezra waited to recruit Levites.

8:16 **Then sent I for Eli-e'zer, for A'ri-el, for Shemai'ah, and for Elna'than, and for Jarib, and for Elna'than, and for Nathan, and for Zechari'ah, and for Meshul'lam, chief men; also for Joi'arib, and for Elna'than, men of understanding.** Ezra sent a group of messengers to Iddo to secure Levites. These chief men mentioned here were men who had enough authority that they would be accepted by Iddo as messengers from Ezra. They were men of understanding meaning wise.

8:17 **And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphi'a, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Neth'inim, at the place Casiphi'a, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God.** And Iddo was the chief of the Neth'inims. The Neth'inims had been set aside to do the menial work in the temple (priest helpers). He was, also, the head of the Jews at Casiphi'a. Ezra sent the group to a place called Casiphi'a. The families of many people who used to work in the temple were living there. Ezra had sent out a commandment unto Iddo for such ministers of the house of God.

8:18 **And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebi'ah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;—** *"By the good hand of our God"* meant that God was active in every detail of this adventure. Ezra began to thank God for the good fortune of the Levites coming back. The group followed through with the commandment of Ezra because they brought back a man of understanding named Sherebi'ah, along with eighteen of his sons and

²⁷ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/08.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

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brothers. He was a very astute man and descendant of Mahli, the son of Levi and grandson of Israel.

8:19 And Hashabi'ah, and with him Jeshai'ah of the sons of Mera'ri, his brethren and their sons, twenty;— God also sent Hashabi'ah, and Jeshai'ah of the sons of Mera'ri, his brethren with twenty of his sons and brothers. So Levites were from the division of Mera'ri.

8:20 Also of the Neth'inim, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Neth'inim: all of them were expressed by name. They were able to secure 40 Levites and 220 Neth'inim.

8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. They camp outside Babylon at the river that runs to Ahava and Ezra proclaimed a fast at the Ahava River.

POINT:

Why Fast?

- 1. For Jesus to come back*
- 2. For help in a new venture in ministry*
- 3. To avert some danger or threat*
- 4. To express sorrow and loss*
- 5. To express repentance and grief for sin*
- 6. Not for the praise of men*

Matthew 9:14-15

Matthew 4:1-2; Acts 13:3

Ezra 8:21; 2Samuel 12:16; 2Chronicles 20:3

2Samuel 1:12; 1Chronicle 10:12

Joel 2:12-13

Matthew 6:16-18

Ezra realized the importance of depending upon God. Their prayers and fasting prepared them spiritually. This was to implore God for safety and prosperity; preparing them for the rest of their journey. He spoke of them afflicting themselves before God in this fast; seeking Him in the right way for their children and all their goods when they traveled. They wanted no harm to come to the women and children, or to their precious cargo.

8:22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. Ezra was ashamed to ask King Artaxerxes for soldiers to protect them from the enemies. They had already declared that God would protect them. If he were to ask for the soldier's protection, then it would look as if God was not able to take care of them.

8:23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. Ezra knew God's promises to protect his people but he didn't take them for granted. He also knew that God's blessings are appropriated through prayer, so Ezra and the people humbled themselves through fasting and prayer, and God listen to their entreaty and their prayers were answered. Fasting humbled them because going without food reminded them of their dependence on God's provision. It also gave them extra time to pray and meditate on God. They therefore put God first.

8:24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them,— The Levites are now about to return to be ministers for the house of God; a fast had been proclaimed, and now ²⁸it was time to carry out the service of the Lord. Therefore, Ezra appointed 12 leaders of the priests,

²⁸ http://k.b5z.net/i/u/6036879/f/Sunday%20School/July_28_2013.pdf
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

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Sherebiah, Hashabiah (Levites vv.18, 19), and 10 of their brethren with them. The number of priests and Levites were equal, adding in all, twenty four.

8:25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered:— So in the hands of 12 trustworthy priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah and 10 of their brethren, they were placed in charge of transporting all the silver, gold, and the vessels, even the offering unto the house of God, and then weighing them. This probably refers to some type of inventory of all that was brought into the house of God. They had an obligation, but even more, it was the Lord's treasure and those priests and Levites would one day give an account to Him. The king and his counselors, his lords and all Israel had offered and presented many precious gifts for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.

8:26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents;— ²⁹Ezra weighed all the objects before they left their camp by the river Ahava. Then he could be sure that nobody would steal these precious things. The commodity was great and it was costly. We must be very careful with the money and other gifts that people give for the work of God. We must find people whom we can trust to look after these things. And we too must be people whom other people can trust. Other people should be able to trust us with anything, not just God's money.

8:27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. The basins and the vessels of fine polished bronze were precious as gold.

8:28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers. Ezra reminded the priests and Levites whom he had put in charge as guardians, that everything they were guarding was holy unto God, including themselves! Every object used in Temple service was set apart for God. They were considered as holy treasures as they were also consecrated men.

8:29 Watch ye, and keep them, 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. Stewardship is taking special care of whatever God has entrusted to you. "*Special care*" means considering these things as being from God and for Him. They could not be careless with the things of the Lord. They were to watch and keep a record until they were received into the hands of the chief of the priests, the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel at Jerusalem to go into the chambers of the house of the Lord.

8:30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God. So the priests and Levites accepted the responsibility of transporting the silver, gold, and vessels to Jerusalem into the house of God.

8:31-36 They broke camp and then departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month to Jerusalem. God protected them from the enemy that was along the way. They arrived in Jerusalem and

²⁹ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

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rested for three days. On the fourth day, business was taken care of (the weighing and dispensing of the items to the priests in the Temple of God). Those who had returned from exile offered burnt offerings unto God. They also delivered the king's decree to his official representatives throughout the area. As a result, the people of Jerusalem were encouraged, and the worship of God was strengthened.

SUMMARY:

³⁰Ezra proclaimed a fast in preparation for the journey to Jerusalem. He wanted the assembled group thereby to humble themselves before God in order to ask Him for a safe journey for themselves, their children, and their possessions. Being humble before God shows one's spiritual dependence and acknowledgement that God is in total control. Thereby, Ezra did not want to ask for military protection (soldiers) because he had already publicly announced that God would take care of the people as they returned. Thus, committing themselves to prayer and fasting brought the answer they had intreated unto God (**8:21-23**).

Ezra chooses twelve priests and twelve Levites and divides the treasures among them. Gifts of silver and gold were weighed, as well as offerings contributed by the king, his counsellors, and his lords for the house of God. They are charged with bringing these items and the offering of the house of God safely to Jerusalem. Ezra reminded the priests and Levites that the vessels, silver and gold, and the freewill offerings were holy unto the Lord. Therefore they were to keep a watch over all they were entrusted with until they reached Jerusalem to pass them unto the hands of the chief priest, the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel in the Temple. The priests and Levites accepted the responsibility of transporting the gifts that had been weighed into their hands to take to the temple in Jerusalem (**8:24-30**).

APPLICATION:

It's necessary on life's journey to be prepared to choose the right allegiance. When we choose God and His way, it will be affective for us in receiving the right answer.

All belong to God especially the gifts we give back to Him. He is generous to us, why not be generous to Him. Whatever we are in charge to do, we are to be good stewards over it. As good stewards, our temple, God's dwelling place has been entrusted unto us for safe keeping to guard. This is a most generous gift we have to give unto the Lord.

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³⁰ <http://ldolphin.org/daniel/ezra02.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

SYNOPSIS

9:1-2 Once in Jerusalem, the leaders of the children of Israel came to Ezra and said, "...**The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them.**" The fact that the priests and the Levites also intermarried* was particularly upsetting as they were the leaders of the children of Israel and they were the ones to set the example of right and wrong.

9:3-4 When Ezra heard this news he was deeply upset and tore his tunic and his cloak and pulled his hair from his head and his beard** and sat down and was appalled. All the people who feared the Word of the Lord God of Israel gathered around Ezra and he was distressed over the unfaithfulness of the remnant of the children of Israel. God had already reduced their numbers because of their unfaithfulness and now they were threatening to bring on God's anger again.

NOTE:

**The fact that intermarriage was practiced unhindered in Israel throughout most of its history is clearly acknowledged in the Old Testament. Moses married a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1), Mahlon and Chilion Moabite wives (Ruth 1). Deuteronomy 21:10-14 permitted the marriage of women taken captive in war. David took among his wives a daughter of Geshur; Many Israelite marriages to foreign wives can, of course, be justified on the grounds that the foreigner became a proselyte (a convert) to Israel. But they were nevertheless tolerated and divorce was not required of them. Before the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they were warned not to intermarry with the inhabitants (Deut. 7:3). But they did intermarry in time and the situation became uncontrollable.*

Many Christian young and old fall in love with unbelievers and consequently either fall away from their faith or have their zeal for the Lord greatly diluted.

***The beard is held in high respect and greatly valued in the East and was never cut off but in mourning, or as a sign of slavery. This symbolized for Ezra, extreme personal pain felt because of the people's sin.*

9:5-7: Repentance and the Results of Sin

Ezra is before the Lord with his torn cloak and other signs of mourning until the evening sacrifice and then he rose and fell on his knees with his hands spread out to the Lord and prayed: "...**O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings as it is today.**" (9:6-7)

POINT:

Ezra recognized that sin is serious and that no one sins without affecting others. Ezra prayed and confessed the sins of his people while Jesus, our Great High Priest intercedes continually on our behalf.

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This chapter contains Ezra's prayer. A true mark of a man of God is that he mourns over sin, both his own sins and the sins of others.

POINT:

Ezra's prayer is a model of confession. It has four elements:

1. *Confession acknowledges the absolute righteousness of God in all His dealings with us.*
 2. *Confession submits to God's righteous dealings without complaint or excuse.*
 3. *Confession agrees with God concerning His view of our sin.*
 4. *Confession casts the sinner on God with their undeserved mercy, centering it on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*
-

Ezra's prayer makes no petition, but rather, he implicitly casts himself and the nation on God's undeserved mercy, although he had not sinned in the way his people had. He demonstrates the need for a holy community around the rebuilt Temple.

9:8-9: GIVING THANKS FOR MERCY

"But now, for a brief moment, the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant * and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem." (9:8-9)

NOTE:

**A remnant is a small part that somehow has been left over from some larger substance, especially refers to those who survived a political or military situation. Spiritually, remnant also means those who repent and survive God's judgment; maintaining a relationship with God. Yet in this case, a major part even of the remnant had sinned. How tragic!*

For a brief moment, the time given to this prayer, Ezra remembers God's past kindness to Israel in spite of their sins by praising God for His mercy and righteousness for leaving a remnant and not forsaking them to slavery. It was giving them a little life, liberty, and joy, even "a nail* in His holy place"(KJV), a fixed settlement in the land of Judea, where they could hang their hopes and their future, refresh their spirits, cheer their souls, and give them light and gladness. It was like life from the dead for them, seeing after all that God had done to punish the people for their previous sins, and then deliver them from that punishment, you would think the people would know better than to go back into sin again. But look at God's mercy! And Ezra gives thanks for Mercy. Grace* is given by God.

NOTE:

** Things were stored on nails (pegs) set up all around the room. If something was on its peg, it was safe and secure, stored properly and ready for use at the appropriate time.*

**Ezra says God punished them less than they deserve (V13). This is a description of grace. Grace leads God to offer us salvation and forgiveness despite the fact we deserve punishment. Hence, it is unmerited or undeserved favor.*

9:10-15: ACKNOWLEDGING GUILT

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html>

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Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing* has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. Ezra offers no excuses and not even an explanation, just confesses the sins of the nation. **But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other...** They were warned by the prophets if they only follow God's rule would they would be a strong and prosperous nation and that prosperity would be left as an inheritance to their children. Ezra pleads in his prayer that if God punished sin in the past, then they shouldn't break His commandment again? He doesn't want God to be angry or consume them. There has to be a remnant to fulfill the plan of a righteous God. He tells God that they are the remnant left. They have no hope without Him as they stand before Him in their guilt, because of it not one of them that can stand clear in His presence."

NOTE:

**This transgression had not been limited to just the ordinary citizens but had been committed by some of the community leaders, priests, and Levites, as well.*

We as a society have down played the importance of sexual purity and fidelity. We overlook when they date, live with , and marry persons who do not know the Lord and have no interest or intention of knowing God; they just want to be with a "church woman" or a "church man." Remember, God has not overlooked this!

POINT:

The appeal must be made for mercy for the guilty, not as a favor to the deserving (or semi deserving). Ezra also did not claim special circumstances or did not tell God that their difficult environment made their present compromise understandable, or that all their other good works or faithfulness somehow excused their idolatry. He simply realized that no one can stand before God and reason their way out of this!

SUMMARY:

I was just reading in Ezra Chapter 3 about how the Jews went back to their homeland for the first time in over 140 years. They rebuilt the foundation of the temple. They had their first public worship service in years. And the people were weeping and shouting and praising God. And that's OK! That's what can happen when the Spirit of God is working in your life!

The remnant had traveled the 1000 mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. When they got there they spent about 5 months setting up and getting prepared to start the work. They had a time of preparation, a time of observation, and a time of motivation. Because of the extensive preparation where Ezra continually taught the people God's Word and lived it out in front of them, they were convicted of the sin in their midst. They observed that sin and were motivated to change. All of that led in one of the most powerful prayers of corporate confession in the Bible. Notice what didn't happen. Ezra didn't implement a bunch of rules and laws and programs to force the change on the people. That wasn't the type of approach he used.

He first got on his face before God Almighty being so ashamed and prayed. Through prayer he

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confessed the sins of his people identifying with their needs saying “our iniquities.” Through prayer he began to thank God for His grace and mercy for the remnant He had spared and then he acknowledged guilt. He ended prayer knowing God was righteous and no one could stand before God’s presence with guilt. Ezra knew that repentance was needed for the people to get back in right standing with God. God in His mercy did stir the people’s hearts to change getting them back on course (see Ezra 10:1-2).

APPLICATION:

This passage, written about a problem 2,500 years ago, can teach us today how we should deal with the problems we face within God’s holy community, the church, in our own 21st century to get us back on course. Often we cry out for justice when we feel abused and unfairly treated. In those moments we forget the reality of **our sin** and the righteous judgment we deserve.

Be careful, that you don't forget the price of forgiveness. Sin is a serious thing and we must handle it with care! Sin ordered God’s Only Begotten Son to the cross. We mustn't forget that among the requirements for God's forgiveness are repentance, confession and abandonment of our sins. Choose to intercede for God’s people rather than to get into fleshly anger. Identify with their sin and confess it as your own. One way we can do this is by loving God with our words through prayer first.

Leaders need to lead the way in confession and model Godly repentance for those they lead. We must not get discouraged and quit, as the returning people did at first, but continue on boldly in the face of difficulties as they did later from the encouragement from the prophets.

Be determined to oppose apostasy in every form, make confession of your sins when you commit sin, be pleasing unto God and do His pleasure, and put away the evil from among the righteous. We are all in need of prayer to keep us on the right course. Stay prayerful!

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