

# Ezra and the Law

Ezra 7:1-10, 23-26  
SS Lesson for 02/13/2022

**Devotional Scripture:** Ps 119:97-104

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Ezra 7:10*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### EZRA'S QUALIFICATIONS (EZRA 7:1-10)

##### *Levite priest (1-5)*

- Priests should be from the tribe of Levi (Deut 21:5)
- Priests should be anointed and consecrated (Exodus 28:41)
- Priests presented sacrifices and offerings to God (Lev 1:7)
- Priests could judge the people of Israel (Deut 17:9)
- Priests addressed the people for God (Deut 20:2)

##### *Scribe in the Law (6)*

- Scribes were learned in matters of the Law (Ezra 7:11)
- Scribes were teachers of the Law (Ezra 7:21)
- Scribes were skillful writers (Ps 45:1)
- Scribes were keepers of Books of Law (Neh 8:1)

##### *Guided by the Hand of God (7-9)*

- The Hand of God fulfills requests (Neh 2:8)
- The Hand of God is full of grace (Neh 2:18)
- The Hand of God protects (Ezra 8:31)
- The Hand of God provides knowledge (Isa 66:14)
- The Hand of God brings people into salvation (Acts 11:20-21)

##### *Obedient teacher (10)*

- Teachers should always teach sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)
- Teachers should speak what they know and have seen from God (John 3:10-12)
- Teachers must have first been taught (Rom 2:17-21)
- Teachers are appointed by God (1 Cor 12:28)
- Teachers should be qualified (2 Tim 2:2)

#### LAW'S REQUIREMENTS (EZRA 7:23-26)

##### *Obedience (23-24)*

- Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)
- Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)
- Obedience keeps us remaining in God's love (John 15:10)
- Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut. 28:1-6)
- Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)

##### *Judgments (25)*

- Expect judgment for stubbornness and unrepentant hearts (Rom 2:5)
- Expect judgment because all must appear before the judgment seat of God (2 Cor 5:10)
- Expect judgment because it is destined for man to face judgment (Heb 9:27)
- Expect judgment, but know that God knows how to rescue the godly (2 Peter 2:9)
- Expect judgment with confidence because of love (1 John 4:17)

##### *Penalties for disobedience (26)*

- Penalty of possible imprisonment (Matt 5:25)
- Penalty of God's punishment (2 Thess 1:8)
- Penalty of being ostracized (2 Tim 3:1-5)
- Penalty of being judged by God (James 4:11-12)
- Penalty of sin (James 4:17)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Ancestral background plays a crucial role in today's lesson. Because of Ezra's ancestry and his skilled knowledge of God's law, he was the right individual to lead his people back to their ancestral homeland. After the death of King Solomon in about 930 BC, the nation of Israel experienced political and religious upheaval. The 12 tribes of Israel were divided into 10 northern tribes (designated the kingdom of Israel) and 2 southern tribes (designated the kingdom of Judah; see 1 Kings 12:1–24; 2 Chronicles 10:1–11:4). Following this division, the king of the kingdom of Israel established two places of worship—at Bethel, just 10 miles north of Jerusalem, and at Dan, farther to the north. At each location a golden calf was placed (1 Kings 12:28–29; 2 Kings 10:29). This act was a blatant disregard for what the Lord had prescribed regarding the place and manner of worship (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11). Idolatry such as this eventually led to the destruction and captivity of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians around 722 BC (see 2 Kings 17:5–6; 1 Chronicles 5:26). The southern kingdom of Judah experienced a similar fate. After decades of immoral worship, in contradiction to the words of God's prophets, Jerusalem (the capital of Judah) was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Chronicles 36:14–20). During this conquest, Solomon's temple was destroyed and the people of Judah were exiled. The land of Judah was desolate—without its people, its king, its capital, and its temple. Within this context, the book of Ezra described two waves of Jewish captives returning to their homeland. It is extremely important for understanding the book of Ezra to distinguish between the two waves. The first took place in about 538 BC after Cyrus, king of Persia and conqueror of Babylon, decreed that captives could return to Jerusalem to build a temple (Ezra 1:2; compare 2 Chronicles 36:22–23). These returnees first rebuilt the altar in 537 BC (Ezra 3:1–6), then began work on rebuilding the temple (3:7–13). After opposition (4:1–5) and a brief delay (4:24), the temple was completed in 516 BC (6:15). Today's lesson focuses on those who returned to Judah in 458 BC, 80 years after the first return. This return was led by Ezra, an expert in God's law, whose life focused on proper worship of God. Over a century had passed since the Babylonians had taken Ezra's ancestors captive. In the midst of their captivity, the foundation that undergirded the actions of Ezra and his people was their faith in God and hope to return to their homeland. Only in Jerusalem could Ezra and his people worship properly, at the rebuilt temple.

### Key Verse: Ezra 7:10

*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**7:1-5.** **After these things** points to a gap of 57 years since the events at the end of chapter 6. The temple was completed in 515 B.C. in the reign of Darius I. After Darius' death in 486 his son Xerxes ruled for 20 years (485-465). Since Xerxes was the Ahasuerus mentioned in the Book of Esther, the events of that book occurred between Ezra 6 and 7. Then Xerxes' son Artaxerxes ruled from 464 to 424. From 515 to 458 (Artaxerxes' seventh year; 7:7) was 57 years. Ezra's lineage is traced back to **Aaron**, the first **priest**. This list is abbreviated, for it does not name every generation. Between **Azariah** and **Meraioth** (v. 3) six names appear in the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:7-10. Since **Seraiah** was the high priest when Jerusalem fell in 586 (2 Kings 25:18), Ezra may have been his great-grandson. Because of his priestly ancestry, Ezra, like the priests, had authority to teach (cf. Lev. 10:11; Ezra 7:10).

**7:6. Ezra... was a teacher well-versed in the Law of Moses.** The word "teacher" translates *sōpēr*, a broad word that means, a "recorder, scribe, secretary, or writer" (e.g., 2 Sam. 8:17; Es. 3:12; 8:9; Ps. 45:1). The word also referred to a learned man who could read and write (e.g., Jehudi in Jer. 36:23) and a learned man who could teach what he read in God's Law. Ezra was called a "teacher" (*sōpēr*) four times (Ezra 7:6, 11-12, 21; cf. v. 25). And he was called "Ezra the scribe" six times in Nehemiah (8:1,4,9,13 12:26,36). "Well versed" translates *māhr*, which is rendered "skillful" in Psalm 45:1. Ezra had the blessing of the pagan King Artaxerxes as well as the blessing of the covenant **God of Israel**. A few years later Nehemiah had an official position before **the king** (Neh. 1:11), but Ezra held no such position. It is enough for the author to note that he was a teacher who was well versed in the Law. That was to be his major function in life. Because of the king's favor Ezra was promised that he could have whatever he wanted. Rather than ask for

something personal, Ezra used the monarch's favor to advance the cause of **God** and His people. For the first of eight times in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, mention is made of God's **hand** being **on** Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh. 2:8, 18).

**7:7-10.** Not much is said here about the trip **from Babylon to Jerusalem** or the preparations for it. These few verses are a summary of the journey that is detailed in the rest of chapter 7 and in chapter 8. Returning with **Ezra** were groups of people corresponding to the groups in Zerubbabel's return (chap. 2). The trip back to the land took exactly four months, from **the first** to **the fifth** months, from Nisan 1 (March-April) to Ab 1 (July-August). **The good hand of... God was on** Ezra because he **devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching** it. "Devoted himself" is literally, "set his heart firmly" (cf. 2 Chron. 19:3; 30:19), which gives the idea that Ezra was inwardly determined. His determination was directed toward doing three things: studying God's Law, obeying it, and teaching it to others—an inviolable order for a successful ministry!

**7:11-12.** **Artaxerxes** wrote a letter (cf. **This is a copy of the letter**; 4:11, 23; 5:6) **to Ezra** that allowed Ezra and others to return to Israel. (On Ezra as **a teacher** see 7:6.) No reason for the decree was given. It can be surmised that Ezra had asked for permission to take a group back and that this decree was the official granting of his request. The decree was sent **to Ezra** personally.

**7:13-26.** **Artaxerxes** listed certain freedoms the people were to have as they journeyed to and lived in **Israel**. He gave them permission **to go to Jerusalem** (v. 13). He gave them **silver and gold** to take with them and he allowed them to get more in **Babylon** (vv. 15-16, 20). He said that they could offer sacrifices **on the altar at the temple** (v. 17). They were also given freedom to make their own decisions (v. 18). They could take back the utensils of **worship for the temple** (vv. 19-20). (Apparently not all of them had been carried back with Zerubbabel; cf. 1:7-11.) They could have **whatever** else they needed for the temple **up to** a certain limit (7:21-22). The wheat, oil, and salt were for use in the **grain offerings** (cf. 6:9; Lev. 2:1-2, 7, 13), and the wine was for **drink offerings** (cf. Ezra 6:9; Lev. 23:13). As noted in the NIV margin, the amounts were enormous: **100 talents** (3-3/4 tons) **of silver, 100 cors** (600 bushels) **of wheat, 100 baths** (600 gallons) **of wine, 100 baths of olive oil, and salt without limit.** **The priests and Levites** were not to be taxed (Ezra 7:24). In return for granting these privileges the king was to receive some benefits from the expedition. He wanted to avoid uprisings or feelings of anger against him (v. 23) and to have order in that part of his empire (vv. 25-26). **Ezra** was responsible to **administer justice to all the people** of the area, that is, to **all who knew the laws of his God**—the Jewish people. Ezra also was to administer the judicial system by handing out punishment to any who would **not obey** (v. 26).

**7:27-28.** Ezra's response to the king's decree shows what kind of man he was. He praised **the LORD** for what was being done under him. By calling Yahweh **the God of our fathers** he linked himself with the godly line that had been concerned with proper sacrificial worship. He also noted that God had given this idea to the king (**put it into the king's heart**). Ezra added that the purpose of all this was **to bring honor to the house of the LORD**. The privileges granted by Artaxerxes were for God's glory, not Ezra's. Ezra also said that God's **good favor** was shown to him in front of all the king's pagan **advisers and officials**. "Good favor" translates *hesed*, God's covenantal love for His people. (That Heb. word is rendered "love" in 3:11, in each verse in Ps. 136, and elsewhere.) It refers to more than love; it means covenantal love, love borne out of loyalty to a commitment. Because Ezra saw that God was working through him (**the hand of the LORD my God was on me**; cf. Ezra 7:6, 9; 8:18, 22, 31), he began the task of selecting people to make the difficult trip. This probably was difficult and must have involved much personal contact and persuasion. But he was successful in enlisting **leading men... to go** with him.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Ezra's Qualifications (Ezra 7:1-10)**

1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,  
2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,  
3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,  
4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,  
5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest —  
6 this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.  
7 Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.  
8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.  
9 On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.  
10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

### **Levite priest (1-5)**

*Priests should be from the tribe of Levi (Deut 21:5)*

5 The priests, the sons of Levi, shall step forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the Lord and to decide all cases of dispute and assault.

*Priests should be anointed and consecrated (Exodus 28:41)*

41 After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.

*Priests presented sacrifices and offerings to God (Lev 1:7)*

7 The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.

*Priests could judge the people of Israel (Deut 17:9)*

9 Go to the priests, who are Levites, and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict.

*Priests addressed the people for God (Deut 20:2)*

2 When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army.

### **Scribe in the Law (6)**

*Scribes were learned in matters of the Law (Ezra 7:11)*

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

*Scribes were teachers of the Law (Ezra 7:21)*

21 Now I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you—

*Scribes were skillful writers (Ps 45:1)*

45 My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.

*Scribes were keepers of Books of Law (Neh 8:1)*

8 all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

### **Guided by the Hand of God (7-9)**

*The Hand of God fulfills requests (Neh 2:8)*

8 And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

*The Hand of God is full of grace (Neh 2:18)*

18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

*The Hand of God protects (Ezra 8:31)*

31 On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.

*The Hand of God provides knowledge (Isa 66:14)*

14 When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes.

*The Hand of God brings people into salvation (Acts 11:20-21)*

20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

### **Obedient teacher (10)**

*Teachers should always teach sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)*

1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.

*Teachers should speak what they know and have seen from God (John 3:10-12)*

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

*Teachers must have first been taught (Rom 2:17-21)*

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?

*Teachers are appointed by God (1 Cor 12:28)*

28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

*Teachers should be qualified (2 Tim 2:2)*

2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

## **Law's Requirements (Ezra 7:23-26)**

23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

24 Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God.

25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them.

26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

## **Obedience (23-24)**

*Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)*

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

*Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)*

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

*Obedience keeps us remaining in God's love (John 15:10)*

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

*Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut. 28:1-6)*

1 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

*Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)*

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

## **Judgments (25)**

*Expect judgment for stubbornness and unrepentant hearts (Rom 2:5)*

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

*Expect judgment because all must appear before the judgment seat of God (2 Cor 5:10)*

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

*Expect judgment because it is destined for man to face judgment (Heb 9:27)*

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

*Expect judgment, but know that God knows how to rescue the godly (2 Peter 2:9)*

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

*Expect judgment with confidence because of love (1 John 4:17)*

17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.

## **Penalties for disobedience (26)**

*Penalty of possible imprisonment (Matt 5:25)*

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

*Penalty of God's punishment (2 Thess 1:8)*

8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

*Penalty of being ostracized (2 Tim 3:1-5)*

1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

*Penalty of being judged by God (James 4:11-12)*

11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbor?

*Penalty of sin (James 4:17)*

17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### ***Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh***

#### **The Return of Ezra (Ezra 7-10)**

Nearly 60 years pass from the end of chapter 6 until the events of chapter 7. It is during this interval that the drama in Persia, depicted in the Book of Esther, takes place. It is also during this time that Artaxerxes issues a decree, forbidding the Jews to continue work on the walls and city of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:7-23). Something has caused King Artaxerxes to change his mind, for when we come to Ezra 7 we find Ezra and a group of Jewish exiles preparing to journey to Jerusalem and the land of Judah. This is the second wave of returning exiles, with the third return taking place when Nehemiah made his trek to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1ff.).

Ezra is a very gifted man. He is a priest whose lineage is traced back to Aaron (7:5), and he is a scholar (7:6, 10-11). Whatever changed Artaxerxes' mind about allowing the Jews to rebuild the temple, his decree was generally very supportive of the Jews who wished to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. It specifically empowered Ezra to lead this effort, to govern, and to teach (see 7:12-26). Any man who is given the right to employ the death penalty is surely a man with authority (see 7:26). Ezra recognized that the king's decree was evidence of the good hand of God:

27 Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who so moved in the heart of the king to so honor the temple of the Lord which is in Jerusalem! 28 He has also conferred his favor on me before the king, his advisors, and all the

influential leaders of the king. I gained strength as the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me (Ezra 7:27-28).

Once again in Ezra, we come upon a meticulous listing of those exiles who returned to their homeland, this time with Ezra, some 80 years after the first wave of exiles returned with Zerubbabel. The first wave of exiles numbered around 50,000; this second wave was probably no more than 5,000 strong, counting women and children. Derek Kidner provides us with a good explanation for this second list:

The interest of this forbidding list of names and numbers lies in the fact that in every case but one these groups are joining, at long last, the descendants of the pioneers from their own family stock, who had been in the first part to return from Babylon eighty years before.<sup>337</sup>

When the people had assembled in preparation for their “exodus” by the river of Ahava, Ezra proclaimed a fast (8:21-23). Ezra had apparently spoken to the king concerning the sovereignty of his God. Having done so, Ezra could hardly ask the king for an armed escort to protect them and the wealth they were transporting from those who might wish to ambush them on the way (see 8:31). Ezra distributed the gold and silver and the temple utensils among twelve of the leading priests (8:24), and the people set out on their journey to Jerusalem. When these Jews arrived, they offered sacrifices to God at the temple and also delivered the king’s edicts to the governors of those lands surrounding Judah (8:35-36).

It was after this that Ezra learned some very distressing news. From the time the temple had been completed until the arrival of Ezra and those who accompanied him (approximately 70 years), the spiritual state of the Jews had seriously declined:

1 Now when these things had been completed, the leaders approached me and said, “The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the local residents who practice detestable things similar to those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 Indeed, they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons and have intermingled the holy seed with the local residents. Worse still, the leaders and the Levites have been at the forefront of all of this!” (Ezra 9:1-2)

It is worthy of note that the leaders of the Jews led the way in this sin (9:2). Ezra was stunned when he heard this report. He immediately began to mourn over these sins. He tore his garments and pulled some of the hair from his head (9:3). Those who were godly joined him in his mourning. Ezra’s prayer is certainly a model prayer; it is the prayer of a godly leader in response to the sin of his people:

5 At the time of the evening offering I got up from my self-abasement, with my torn tunic and robe, and then dropped to my knees and spread my hands to the Lord my God. 6 I prayed, “O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed, my God, to lift my face to you. For our iniquities have climbed higher than our head, and our guilt extends to the heavens. 7 From the days of our fathers until this very day our guilt has been great. Because of our iniquities we, along with our kings and priests, have been delivered over by the local kings to sword, captivity, plunder, and embarrassment—right up to the present time. 8 “But now briefly we have received mercy from the Lord our God, in that he has left us a remnant and has given us a secure position in his holy place. Thus our God has enlightened our eyes and has given us a little relief in our time of servitude. 9 Although we are slaves, our God has not abandoned us in our servitude. He has extended kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, in that he has revived us to restore the temple of our God and to raise up its ruins and to give us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 “And now what are we able to say after this, our God? For we have forsaken your commandments 11 which you commanded us through your servants the prophets with the words: ‘The land that you are entering to possess is a land defiled by the impurities of the local residents. With their abominations they have filled it from one end to the other with their filthiness. 12 Therefore do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, and do not take their daughters in marriage for your sons. Do not ever seek their peace or welfare, so that you may be strong and may eat the good of the land and may leave it as an inheritance for your sons forever.’ 13 “Everything that has happened to us has come about because of our wicked actions and our great guilt. Even so, our God, you have exercised restraint toward our iniquities and have given us a remnant such as this. 14 Shall we once again break your commandments and intermarry with these abominable peoples? Would you not be so angered by us as to wipe us out, with no survivor or remnant? 15 O Lord God of Israel, you are righteous, for we are left as a remnant this day. Indeed, we stand before you in our guilt. However, because of this guilt no one can really stand before you” (Ezra 9:5-15).

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/22-return-promised-land-ezra>)*



### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

Leaders must cast vision and invite others to see that vision similarly. Leaders must address immediate decisions, favors, or requests made to them by their followers. By reading widely, listening to the advice of experts, and preparing for all possible scenarios, thoughtful and successful leaders are able to face a variety of challenges. Ezra flourished as a leader because he focused on what really mattered: the wisdom of God and law of God. He studied God's Word and law in order that he might teach and lead Israel well. Because of his determination in study, combined with his priestly background, Ezra showed to be the most capable leader for Israel's return to Jerusalem. He became an example to following generations of a God-focused leader. The primary goals of his life were to study, to do, and to teach God's Word! Is Ezra a model for you?

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary***

The seventh chapter of Ezra opens with "after these things..." (Ezra 7:1). In the earlier chapters, Ezra, the writer of the book, records the early years of the first generation of Jewish people who returned from captivity in Babylon. There is a gap of 58 years between the latter part of Chapter 6 and the opening of Chapter 7 (Ezra 6:22; 7:1).

Reconstruction of the Law - The builders completed the temple in Jerusalem, but the people's spiritual condition needed help. Ezra wanted to make the four-month journey from Persia to Jerusalem to teach the people God's ways. He was a direct descendent of Aaron, which qualified him to be a priest in the temple. He was also well-trained as a scribe. Ezra's role was to bring the hearts of the people back to God through the revealed Word of God. However, the Persian king, Artaxerxes, had to approve anyone traveling. The Lord gave Ezra favor in the king's eyes, so Ezra set out with God's hand of protection and blessing over his travels.

God's Teacher - God put it into the king's heart to grant Ezra everything he required for his trip to Jerusalem and more. Ezra possessed full authority to discern the state of Judah and Jerusalem according to God's law. Artaxerxes believed that satisfying the gods of the people in the conquered territories surrounding Persia was a benefit to the empire. Ezra collected money from the king and from the Jewish exiles who remained in Persia. He carried the papers giving him permission and the authority to appoint judges. These leaders punished anyone breaking the rules. By the time Ezra arrived from Persia, the Jews had resided in the land for about 60 years. The Scripture describes Ezra as a man faithful to the Lord. He saturated himself in God's Word and guided his life according to its truths. Ezra knew the law and lived it out. Therefore, the people listened to him, respecting him as an effective teacher.

God's Light - David called God's Word a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Ps. 119:105). Just as Ezra committed himself to study God's Word, we too should apply it and teach it. This ought to be our goal as His children.