

Ezra 7-8 - Ezra Sent To Teach The People

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We're in Ezra chapter 7. Ezra, just to remind you, Ezra is a scribe. You guys know what, basically, the word, scribe, means? It's basically someone who writes things down. He was a copyist. Today we would probably call him Kinko. I don't know. He, and essentially, scribes began that way of just, they were very meticulous about the way they wrote things down when they copied the Scriptures.

But beginning with Ezra, and you guys got to know this, beginning with Ezra, the term scribe takes a whole new meaning and a whole new authority to the point where by the time Jesus came along, you guys remember how all of a sudden the scribes are like a big deal? He was constantly being challenged by the Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees from time to time, but it would talk about the religious leaders, the scribes and so forth.

And I always wondered, how did these scribes get to a place of such power and authority to the point where they would challenge Jesus? They're literally copyists. These guys sit around and write down the, and make copies of the, the Old Testament scrolls all day long. Who do they think they are? Well Ezra changes all that. With the beginning of Ezra and going forward, scribe takes on a completely different connotation.

It becomes tantamount to teacher because Ezra was a teacher and it also carries great authority because what we're going to see in the chapters that we're reading tonight is that Ezra was given authority by the king, and the king at this particular point is called, named Artaxerxes. He is going to give Ezra authority to go back to Israel, to go to Jerusalem, to oversee things related to the temple, to teach the Word, and to punish those who don't keep the Word.

It's really from the tradition beginning with Ezra, that the scribal tradition begins to take on its form to the point where we see it later on in the New Testament. In fact, scribe will be, will come to be the same as teacher, which of course later on will be known as, Rabbi under the Jewish understanding of a teacher, but it really begins here in what we're reading.

You're seeing an epoch in Jewish history in terms of the definition of who and what a scribe really is. Now, we ended, well, let me just say very quickly, in Ezra chapters one through six, we read about how God moved upon a Persian king at that time named Cyrus to grant permission to the Jews to go back to their homeland, to rebuild the temple, a temple that had been destroyed along with the entire city by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and after 70 years of exile in the Persian kingdom, God moved upon this king to send these people back and rebuild the temple, which they did.

And by the time we got basically to the end of chapter 6, the temple was built and the Jews had celebrated the Passover there in Jerusalem, but in the midst of that period of time, which took about 20 years roughly, give or take, there was opposition to the building. It ground to a halt. The Lord had to move upon prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to tell them, hey, get off your rear end and get started again building the temple, which they did.

God had to move upon yet another king to give them impetus to get started and, get moving, and eventually the temple, is built. Now, the walls around the city are still in rubble, but Ezra is now getting ready to make another journey to Jerusalem. The first journey was led by a man by the name of Zerubbabel, and that was, that was about 80 years from where we are right now in chapter 7.

In fact, there's 58 years, roughly, between the end of chapter six and the beginning of chapter seven. Fifty-eight years goes on. That's how long I've been around, right, and it really doesn't say anything about those years. During those years, the time of Queen Esther took place, Her marriage to King Xerxes or Ahasuerus and that's over now. We have another king on the throne of the Persian Empire. His name is Artaxerxes, and this is where we pick up, chapter 7. Look with me there, verse 1. It says,

“Now after this, (and again, that's 58 years, roughly) in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, (and then it begins to say) Ezra the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, ² son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, ³ son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, (Am I doing okay on these names, by the way? The son, why all the names? Why the list of names? This is very important because you're going to see that they're going to end in verse 5. Skip to verse 5) ⁵ son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief —(or your Bible may say high) priest.” (ESV)

This is why all the names are given because Ezra, who I believe is writing this account, wants you to know that he is in the line of Aaron. He's of the Aaronic priesthood, okay? Literally of that lineage. And it says in verse 6) *“this same*

Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe (and this is where your Bible may actually say teacher, if you have a different translation than the one I'm reading) skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.”

(Alright, so Ezra is being given grace to now take the second group of Jews back to the homeland. Now it says in verse 7) ⁷ *“And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. ⁸ And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹ For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him.”*

And then we have this, and we'll get into all this, by the way, he's giving you a quick synopsis of the fact that he left here on this time, he got there, but now he's going to back up and he's going to give us detail. And that's what the biblical writers often do. They'll tell a story and then they'll step back, and they'll tell it in detail. You see that in the Book of Genesis when it comes to creation.

It'll say God created the heavens and the earth, and in 6 days, he created them. And then it backs up and it starts giving you specifics, and then it backs up further and starts giving you specifics of just the creation of man okay? So, you're not reading about different events. You're just getting this telescopic view, or maybe I should say microscopic view, since it's going inward, closer and closer and covering more detail.

It says this about verse, about Ezra in verse 10. Look with me there. In your Bible, it says,

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it (that means and to keep it, or to follow it) and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

I want to stop there for just a moment because like I said before, this Ezra. He's the one who sets the new standard for scribes from this point forward. Now, this isn't the first time the word scribe appears in the Old Testament. It appears earlier than this, in fact even far as far back is in the time of Samuel.

But back then they were again, they were copyists, they were recorders, they were like secretaries, if you will, but notice what it says about Ezra. “*He set his heart, first of all, to study the law of the Lord.*” Now, that's what they had. He was under the Old Testament, and so being under the Old Covenant, the law of Moses, he set his heart to study the law, the law of Moses. Okay, next you'll notice he set his heart to do the law of Moses. In other words, to keep the law. He wasn't somebody who was just going to learn about it.

He was somebody who was going to do it. And then thirdly, he set his heart to teach the law to the people and it says the statutes and rules in Israel. First of all, number one, I'm really glad that we don't live under the law of Moses. I've just got to be honest with you, I'm very happy about that. I wouldn't have wanted to live under all the rules and regulations, and I'm just delighted that God allowed me to be born during the time of the New Covenant.

I think you probably are too. If you lived back in those times, you'd know what we meant. But imagine that these three things are said of you. Think about those three things said of you. First of all, have you set your heart to study the Word of God? And that means to get into the Word, to know what the Word says and to understand, not just truths here and there, but to understand the flow of God's revelation from Genesis all the way to the end of the book.

There's a, there's a beautiful, consistent flow to God's Word and people who study it recognize that and it's delightful to them and, but we need to set our heart to do it because our hearts can so easily get set upon other things, can't they? Have you ever thought about what's, what are the things that steal your time away from studying the Word of God? With me? I'd have to say entertainment, there's other things that I enjoy doing. I enjoy,

I've got a motorcycle and I like messing around with my motorcycle, and, I've always been a computer geek and I play around with computers. I like doing website work, stuff like that. There's a lot of things that I enjoy in this life. Love going camping. Just love it, but I've got to be careful, just like you, because those things can actually creep into that time that I would otherwise give to God in the study of His Word and pretty soon I find that I'm not, I'm not in His Word like I should be.

You might think, well gee, that seems strange, Pastor Paul. I mean, you teach twice a week the Old Testament on Wednesday night, and the New Testament on Sunday morning, and that's true, but that's studying the Word of God more or less, it's a little bit more, I'm doing it to teach, but there's a point I've got to be in the Word just for myself, just like you do. We have to get into the Word of God

so that we can learn, so we can grow and see what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. I like the fact that Ezra set his heart to do it, and what that says to me is he made it a priority because my heart so quickly runs after other things very, very quickly.

I love doing other things, and they can just absolutely steal my time. But notice he also set his heart to do the Word. I love that, too, because that isn't that what Jesus told us. He said, it's one thing to know the Word of God, it's another thing to put it into practice in our lives to literally walk it out. To make the determination I'm going to live what I've learned. If I've learned about forgiveness. I'm going to forgive.

If I've learned about generosity. I'm going to be generous. If I've learned about diligence and devotion to the work of the Lord, then I'm going to set my heart to be diligent and devoted. I'm going to put these things into practice. What did Jesus say about the person who puts things into practice? He said there comes a stability into that person's life. Remember the parable He told about the man who sees the Word of God but doesn't put it into practice.

He's like a man who builds his house on the dirt or the sand, and what happens? Waters come along and they begin to erode the soil and the house no longer has a sure foundation and it collapses and he's talking there, giving us an example of somebody who hears the Word of God, but doesn't really live it out. He says there's instability in their lives and they are subject to collapse. That's the fact of the matter.

But what did He say about the person who puts the Word of God into practice? They're like, it's like they're building their house on a rock solid, it's like the guy who digs down and builds his house on the rock. It doesn't matter how much wind comes along it's not going to erode that rock because it's on a firm foundation. Jesus said that there's stability in the life of the individual who does that. I like this example of Ezra. He didn't just make up his mind to know the Word. He made up his mind to do the Word.

And then lastly, he made up his mind to teach the Word. Now you might say, well, now wait a second, pastor Paul, that doesn't apply to everybody because not everybody is a teacher, and that is true. We are not all teachers. In fact, James tells us to not to presume to be teachers, because he says, it's one of those wonderful Scriptures I hate to think about late at night when I'm lying awake in bed, but he says for teachers will be held to a stricter judgment than non-teachers.

I'm a teacher, and so that's something God's going to hold me to a stricter sort of a standard because I'm speaking His Truth, but even if you're not a teacher, I hope I haven't scared you away from what I'm about to say, but even if you're not a teacher, you can still share the Word with people, even if it's just one on one or you're talking to somebody on a bus or at school or at work or something, you can share the Word of God.

Jesus told us go into all the world, make disciples, and you can teach God's Word by simply knowing it, living it, and sharing it with people in the simplest of circumstances. You don't have to be a teacher that gets up in front of a bunch of people and straps on a microphone and says, all right, all right, everybody, let's open our Bibles to...don't limit your understanding of what it means to teach the Word of God to just those kinds of things.

I really, what I see here in Ezra's heart, is I see a personal dedication to know the Word of God, to live the Word of God, and then to do something with what they know. To do something with what you know. What do you know about God? You say, well, I don't know that much. Well, share what you know. Whatever you've got in your pocket, give it away, right? Whatever God's given you, however little it may be, share it.

You moms with your children, share it with your kids. You're teaching your kids. You may not be a teacher in that spiritual sense of the one who does this and that, but you are teaching. Fact of the matter is we all teach with our lives, and we're going to talk about that a little bit here a little bit later, but we all teach with the way we live. All right, moving on. Now, in verse 11, he says,

“This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel.”

Stop there for a moment. You might ask yourself, why are they putting this in here? Can't we just skip over the letter? It's a bunch of political talk. It's basically the king going, Yeah, I want these guys to go there and do this and stay out of their way and don't give them any trouble. Why? Why is this even in your Bible? Well, I think the reason that Ezra, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, put this into this particular book is because he wants you to know something.

This is not a godly king. Artaxerxes was not a godly king; he was a pagan king. He believed in a multiplicity of gods. You and I believe there's one God. He believed there was all kinds of gods. There was the god of the sun, the moon,

the stars, the rain the, he had a god for every day of the week, he had a god for everything like that. That's why Ezra wants you to know about what Artaxerxes says in this letter, because he wants you to see that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. He wants you to see that.

And what I've just quoted to you is actually a proverb. The heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord, and God directs the course of those kings according to His sovereign will. It's not going to be that long, you guys, before we're going to be electing a new president here in the United States of America, and every time this happens, every 4 years, I feel the collective tension just rise in the church, don't you?

I mean, we start getting nervous and we start getting like...I wonder what's going to happen, and we wonder whether we should be happy, or we should dig a bomb shelter and go live in it and eat carrots and raw onions until, until the apocalypse comes. or something like that. It tends to cause this collective tension to rise up in us and I just want you to remember this, this year particularly, this election particularly, I've just really been determining in my heart to pray that God puts His man in the presidency. Even if it's not my man.

And I'll tell you what, God is working His Will and purpose in the world and for the United States of America, and I'm not saying that you and I should just sit back and not care. I think we should care. I think we should vote. Most of all, I think we should pray. Seriously. I think we should be in prayer. Lord, let Your will be done. Your will be done. You put the person in there that's going to bring this ship where it needs to go, and where it needs to go might not be where we necessarily want it to go.

Are you with me? But it's where, it's where God's purpose and God's plan is moving it sovereignly according to His predetermined will, and we need to be, we need to be all in, in terms of just saying, God, Your will be done, even if it's not my will. Isn't that what Jesus taught us to pray in the garden? Lord, not as I will, but Your Will be done okay? So, here's the letter. Verse 12,

“Artaxerxes, king of kings, (and that's not him bragging, necessarily like we call Jesus King of all kings. When he says Artaxerxes, king of kings, he means there are kings who are literally under him, he's conquered other nations, and they're probably living, they're either living in a dungeon or somewhere in his kingdom) to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now ¹³ I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you.

14 For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand, 15 and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, 16 with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, (and that would probably be a lot) and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem.”

Now stop there for just a moment. Do you hear what Artaxerxes is saying? He's sending Ezra back on a several multi, on a multifaceted mission. But one of the things is to go back and replenish the glory of the temple. The temple has already been rebuilt. It was rebuilt under Zerubbabel, which happened about 80 years earlier, right? Well, it got finished around 60 years earlier. But Artaxerxes is sending Ezra back with all kinds of gold and silver and money and he's telling him, just take what you want and go back.

Now you've got to understand. I don't know if you, I was thinking about putting a map up here to show you the route they were going to take from the Persian kingdom to Jerusalem, but I just didn't get it put together. It was a long journey. It would take them a minimum of three and a half months, okay, to get to Jerusalem and it was a route that was perilous, in that there were all kinds of things that could go wrong, not the least of which was bandits.

There were always robbers and thieves along the way, and these guys are bringing this huge troop of people, and by the way, they're going to be a group of about, well, we don't exactly know. We'll see in a moment here. Back then they only counted the men. Sorry, ladies. That was just the way it was, but there was a group of about 1500 men. But so, this is a huge group of people, but they got lots of money that they're carrying along, and that is a huge temptation to bandits and thieves. We'll get into why that's an issue in just a little bit, but he goes on to say in verse 17 that,

“With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem. 18 Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. (In other words, spend it, Ezra, however you see fit)

¹⁹ *The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem.* ²⁰ *And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.* ²¹ *“And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: (that's the land of Judah and that's sort of that area) Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence,*

²² up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. ²³ *Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons.”*

And that right there, is the primary reason why this pagan king wants to do this. He doesn't want to be judged or under wrath, and so he believes that there's a multiplicity of gods. They are fairly regional in their makeup. There's a God who rules over Israel. I'm going to send these guys back to appease this God, that's what pagans do, so that we don't fall under wrath. He's basically going back and telling him, go back and do what you need to do to keep your God happy because we want your God happy.

As long as your God is happy, He'll bless us. If your God isn't happy, He's probably going to be on our case, and we don't want him to be on our case so let's keep your God happy. You can see it's a very pagan understanding. Do you guys understand that when we try to make God happy so that life will be better, we're thinking like a pagan. That's literally pagan thinking that gets into our minds. I have to do something to make God pleased with me.

You would have fit in real good with the pagans. Yeah, it's pagan thinking. We're accepted by the blood of Jesus Christ okay, and that's the only way we're accepted or made acceptable. All right. So, he basically tells him, I'm giving you all this stuff. Verse 24,

“We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.”

Look at that. He gives them a no taxation rule. Wouldn't that be nice? He says you may not impose levy or taxation on any of the servants of the Lord. That's pretty nice.

25 “And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach.”

Look at there. Notice how the king is giving Ezra authority to teach. That is the authority that the scribes during the time of Jesus still took on, to teach the people. They were instructors in the Law. Some of the old translations of the Bible, call them lawyers, because they were men who were learned or scholarly in the Law and, doesn't mean they were attorneys. They had to do with the Law. He says, you are to teach these people, and then look how this authority went even further. Look at verse 26. Boy, this sounds dangerous.

“Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment.”

Wow. Now, notice he says, to those who don't obey the law of your God, or the law of the king. We're used to this when it comes to the law of the king, or the law of the land. You break the law, and you get in trouble right, and we understand that, but he's going further and saying, if they don't obey the law of your God, you have, I'm giving you permission to punish them. Potentially even execute them if they don't follow the law of God.

And he's basically saying, it's okay, Ezra. You can tell the people obey God or die or at least suffer the punishment whatever it may be, and this is a dangerous thing, you guys. I hope you understand just how dangerous that is. One of the things I have the deepest respect for is the men who framed the Constitution of the United States of America. I have a deep abiding respect for those men. You know why?

They understood the danger of taking the Church and putting it in the hands of the state because see, that's what they had come out of in England, and so they knew how dangerous it could be when the state begins to levy laws and punishments against people based on religious or spiritual expectations. Very dangerous.

Gone on many, many times throughout history around the world some of the most heinous acts of authority, frankly, took place under I'm sorry, but Roman Catholicism, when it was one with the state when the Pope was essentially the king. When he ruled and suddenly you don't obey God, and you pay the price physically, and the problem with this sort of an idea, and this is what the

framers of our Constitution understood, is that when obedience to God becomes a matter of political obedience, it no longer carries any kind of an act of devotion to the Lord.

We'll simply do things because we want to have political benefits, right? And suddenly, people begin to fake it. They go to church because there's a political boost in their career because of it, right? They start offering up prayers because it is politically expedient to do so. Well, what happens? Eventually, people don't give a rip about God, all they care about is their political future and their career, and devotion to God goes down the tubes.

It's exactly what happens. We've seen it happen over and over again. I love the fact that the United States of America said, you know what? We're going to stay out of the business of God. Now that doesn't mean that the framers of our Constitution didn't include God in their own personal lives, and even in terms of the Constitution, you'll notice that God is mentioned in there.

They were basically saying, we're going to let God influence what we do, but we're not going to, through the state, influence what God does, right? That was the original idea behind the separation of Church and State. It was not the separation of the state. It wasn't keeping the Church out of the State. It was keeping the State out of the Church, if you will, and so that's why I read this verse 26 and I shudder a little bit when Artaxerxes gives Ezra this authority of the State to punish acts of disobedience related to the law of God. Okay, end of the chapter, verse 27, it says,

“Blessed be (and this is Ezra just saying, isn't this cool? Blessed be) the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord (in other words, to spoof it up here a little bit with all these wonderful gifts) that is in Jerusalem,²⁸ and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.”

Now he hasn't gone yet. It told us that he went, but now he's gone back in time and he's giving us details. Chapter 8. Now, we're going to be able to scoot through some of this rather quickly because he begins here by saying,

“These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.”

And what proceeds from this point forward, here for several verses are just the names of the households, and the numbers of the men attached to each household, and again there are about 1,500 men listed here and it's really just an exercise in Hebrew pronunciation. So, let's skip down to verse 15. Verse 15 Ezra writes this,

“I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi. (he, or I, excuse me, I found there none of the sons of Levi) ¹⁶ Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, (that's a fairly popular name during that time) who were men of insight,

¹⁷ and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and the temple servants at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God.”

Stop there for just a moment. What in the world is going on? Ezra stops by a river, takes inventory of all the people that are with him, and he says, wait a minute, we're going back to replenish the house of the Lord, the temple. We don't have any Levites. We have nobody to do the work. We don't even know; they didn't know how many Levites were even back in Jerusalem at the time.

So, he's like, this isn't going to work. There are no Levites in this entire group of people. So, he takes some of these leading men, sends them to this place called Casiphia. We don't even know what that place is, and he says, but apparently he knows that there are some Levites living there, and he says, go and get some Levites and see if you can convince them to come along with us on the journey because we're going to need them for the work of the temple. Let's keep reading. Verse 18,

“And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18; ¹⁹ also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; ²⁰ besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.”

So, as it happened, they were successful. They convinced some Levites to come back. In fact, there were 38 of them and 220 temple servants along with them. So, add that to the 1,500 men. Sorry, we don't know how many women and children. All right, now check this out. This is really interesting. Verse 21,

“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods.²² For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.”²³ So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.”

Stop there, please, just for a moment. This is really, really interesting. What's happening here? Ezra says, all right, before we leave, now he's got his Levites, he's got all his people. This is this huge group of people. It's like a little town. They're camped there by this river. He says, all right, we've got a lot of people. There's bandits, there's wild animals, there's bad weather. I mean, there's lots of things that can go wrong.

We're carrying a lot of money. Gold, silver, precious things. He says, we need to pray and ask God to give us a safe journey. Now, somebody might have probably spoke up at that point and said, well wait a minute there Ezra. Why don't you just ask the king to detach a battalion of, soldiers to come along with us for the journey? He literally gave you a free pass to buy anything you want. He would surely give you a detachment of soldiers.

A hundred soldiers, maybe? Two hundred to go along with you, armed to the teeth. They can come along and keep us safe. Why don't we just do that, Ezra? Ezra goes, no, I can't do that because see, I was bragging about God to the king, and I was telling him how cool our God is and how he protects us, and now if I go back to him and go, oh by the way, we're scared we need some soldiers to go along with us because things might happen.

He knows that that is, that reflects very poorly on what he just said. Now, and please understand. What Ezra is concerned about here is what his actions say versus what his words have said. Do you understand what I mean? Sometimes we'll brag about God. We'll talk about God, and we'll go, Our God, boy is He cool. He's a cool God, He loves us.

Man does He love us and then we'll talk about his providential care God, you know My God will provide all your needs according to His riches and glory and we'll quote these Scriptures and tell people that our God is there and He's strong and He's a good God and all these sort of things and then we ourselves face a challenge right? Where fear is..., understand this. Ezra's afraid he's afraid of what might happen along the route and so now he's facing this fear of what might happen and he's thinking to himself, if I go to the king and I express this

fear, he's going to think, well aren't you a wimp, and who's this God you were talking about?

You told me, Ezra, that your God is able, well where's your faith in this God? Do you do you have any faith in this God of yours? Maybe your God isn't as able as you said. That's exactly what Ezra is concerned about, and so he says, we're not going to go back to the king and ask him for an armed battalion. You know what we're going to do? We're going to pray. We're going to fast and pray, and we're going to ask God for an armed battalion.

We're going to ask God for His angels to go before us and to protect us because I've been bragging on our God and I'm not going to let Him down now, and I'm not going to say, I'm not going to go to the King and say, my God is able, and then I'm going to go back to the king and say, oh, I guess He's not. And the natural question I think pops into all of our minds. When people see how I live, when people see how you live, what are we telling them about our God?

When they hear our words. When they see our life. What are we telling them about our God? What are we telling them? Are we telling them one thing with our words and another thing with our actions? That's the question that I think we need to ask ourselves because our actions are telling people something, right? They're telling people something. The question is, what are they telling people?

I'll be honest with you, and I trust I'm talking to born again Christians. I know that I am. I think we've got to be careful the way we talk to unbelievers. I think we have to be careful. When you're talking to somebody at the grocery store or on the phone or wherever you might run into somebody and you're telling them and they say to you, hey, how are things going? And you start telling them about some issues, some problems that you're going through.

What are you communicating to them about your God and His ability to do what He promised to do? Right? Something we all have to think about. What am I teaching? What am I, how am I instructing with just what I'm saying, are my words full of, I don't think God's going to help here. Well, we're just really going through a hard time. Listen, everybody goes through a hard time.

Everybody, everybody goes through hard times. Be careful who you're telling about your hard times, because if you're telling unbelievers, you are at the same time talking to them about your God. It's very, very difficult one minute to sit and talk doom. I don't know, I think I'm dead and then to say, hey you guys, you want to come to church? Somebody could realistically look at you and say,

Why? Why would I want to come to church with you? You're one of the most hopeless people I've ever met. You know?

But do people hear hope in your voice? It's one thing to tell somebody, we're going through a hard time. But you know what? God is able. God's able and we're looking to Him, and I'm not saying you should ever deny to people that you're going through that hard time. I think people outside need to know that we struggle. They need to know that the same struggles that they face, we face. But they need to know that we're facing them in the strength of the Lord.

They need to know that we're facing them in the hope of the Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit. They need to know that, and they will be attracted to that. It's like, wow, you're going through the same problems I go through, but I see something different about you. You're trusting God. There's a peace that comes from that trust when we do trust. That's what Ezra wanted to convey to Artaxerxes. We trust our God. We trust Him and God isn't going to let them down. Verse 24 he says,

“Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: (and these are some of the priests that have now come to join their group) Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. ²⁵ And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered.”

What he's saying here is, here's what I'm going to do. There's a lot of danger along this journey. What we're going to do is, we're going to pray, and then we're going to prepare. And so, he said, I'm going to take the goods, and I'm going to divide them among the people, and we'll weigh them out, take inventory, and then we'll account for them once we get back. But we're going to take these steps to make sure things aren't lost. He says in verse 30,

“So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God. (He says) ³¹ Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.”

And again, that journey would have taken a minimum of about three and a half months. We came to Jerusalem. He really doesn't have a whole lot to say about their journey. It must have been fairly uneventful.

³² *“We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. (And what that means is we rested three days. I like that. I'm liking that more and more the older I get) ³³ On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui.*

³⁴ *The whole (meaning all of the goods) was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded. (In other words, it was all accounted for. Nothing was lost along the way. And then Ezra ends this chapter by saying)*

³⁵ *At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord.”*

I like this, that right after accounting for all of the Treasures that they brought along, the first order of business was to offer up whole burnt offerings, which were thank offerings. They basically were saying God thank you. Thank you for seeing us. Thank you for getting us here, thank you for watching over us and they also, verse 36,

“They also delivered the king's commissions (and that means they read the letter the King Artaxerxes had sent with them to all) of to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.”

And with that, we finish the eighth chapter. Now, chapters 9 and 10, which we will not get into tonight, are going to deal with just the rest of Ezra's time there in Jerusalem and how he had to deal with some people issues. We've talked about the ministry before. It'd be wonderful if it wasn't for people. There are people! These people! And, wherever there's people, there's issues, right? Yeah, we all have issues. And we're going to see how Ezra deals with those issues, and we'll have a lot of interesting things to talk about, next week.