

Ezra 7-8

- Last week, we reached the end of the beginning of the restoration of Israel
 - The Lord is restoring the Nation of Israel after a period of discipline
 - God stirred the heart of the King of Persia to release the Jews from captivity
 - While simultaneously stirring the hearts of nearly 50,000 Jews to answer the call to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple
 - As that first band of refugees arrived in what was left of Jerusalem, they made a crude altar and began to worship God
 - God brought the Jews back to the heart of worship
 - No frills, no distractions
 - Just the people, with hearts to worship and thank God
 - With a total dependence on God
 - And as the people showed a true heart to worship, God was pleased
 - As we've moved along, we've noted that Israel's experiences can serve as a pattern for the way God restores His children in any age
 - For example, the first step the Lord brings us through following a period of rebellion, is to reignite a desire for worship
 - Before anything else, we are brought back to a place where we appreciate the Lord for Who He is and what He has done
 - This is the step we've watched God orchestrate through the first six chapters
- Today, our study moves into the second step of restoration for God's people
 - The people of Israel have rebuilt the temple in accordance with the Lord's request
 - They persevered, despite opposition, and eventually finished the building

- The temple now stood again in Jerusalem, though it was far less impressive than the one that Solomon built
 - Nevertheless, it was there, and that physical house of worship stood as metaphor for the work God did in the hearts of His people
 - Rebuilding them and bringing them back as a testimony to His faithfulness
- But what next? Where do these people go from here?
 - In God's plan of restoration, these people have returned to Him, and obeyed His instructions to rebuild the temple
 - So now comes the second step of restoration, beginning with Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem

[Ezra 7:1](#) Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, there went up Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah,

[Ezra 7:2](#) son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub,

[Ezra 7:3](#) son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth,

[Ezra 7:4](#) son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki,

[Ezra 7:5](#) son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest.

[Ezra 7:6](#) This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.

[Ezra 7:8](#) He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

[Ezra 7:9](#) For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.

- Chapter 7 of Ezra takes place 58 years after the close of Chapter 6
 - When we last studied, we noted we were in the time of Darius I
 - Darius ruled the Persian empire well, putting an end to rebellion and uniting the empire under his rule
 - He subdivided the kingdom into 20 divisions called "satrapies"
 - The leader of satrapy was called a "satrap", a nobleman who acted like a little king in authority over his division

- Darius was a man who built an extensive road system, a huge palace near the Red Sea
- And all in all, he brought the kingdom great prosperity
- Darius' son, Xerxes, succeeded him in 486 BC
 - He is the king who married Esther
 - As we said at the beginning of this study, all the events of the Book of Esther take place in the 58 years between Chapters 6 and 7
 - Under Xerxes, rebellions re-emerged, and eventually the Greeks destroyed a third of the Persian naval fleet, forcing Persian forces to withdraw from Europe
 - Eventually, Xerxes was assassinated
- The younger son of Xerxes, Artaxerxes, assumes power in 464 BC
 - Artaxerxes killed his older brother to gain access to the throne
 - He couldn't stop the decline of Persia as the Greeks, Egyptians and others in Asia Minor continued to rebel
 - One satrap remained firmly in Persia's grasp...the province *Yehud* (that is, Judah)
- During the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra departed from Babylon and returned to Jerusalem to join the exiles in the city
 - Ezra introduces himself with his genealogy
 - Ezra is establishing his credibility for what follows in the story
 - And he has an impressive lineage
 - His name is a shortened version of "Azariah", which means "Yahweh helps"
 - He descended from the first priest, Aaron
 - So he is a priest and scribe
 - A scribe was a communicator in every sense of the word
 - He wrote, copied, and taught the Word of God

- Ezra is credited with reestablishing and redefining the role of the scribe in Israel after the exile
- Before the exile, scribes served as messengers, military officers, and cabinet officials to the kings
- But after Ezra's day, scribes became uniquely associated with studying, writing and teaching God's Word
- In v.6, Ezra declares that the Lord's hand had been upon Ezra to bring an opportunity for him to join the exiles in Jerusalem
 - Ezra began to leave Babylon on the first of the first month, the month of Nisan
 - He didn't actually leave Babylon until the 12th, we'll learn near the end of Chapter 8
 - Which means that Ezra will depart Babylon around Passover
 - Consider how you would feel if you were captive for decades in a foreign land, and you were set free on July 4?
 - That's probably how Jews felt whenever they read of Ezra's departure from Babylon in mid-Nisan
 - And then, with God's grace, Ezra completed the 900-mile journey in only four months
- Why does Ezra leave for Jerusalem so long after the earlier exiles had reached the city?
 - The next verse tells us

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

- Perhaps one of the more memorable and inspiring verses in the Old Testament
 - Ezra was a man who had set his heart to three things, three important priorities
 - Notice the verse begins with the word "for", indicating that this is the reason for the departure
 - And also notice, the verse ends with the phrase "in Israel"
 - Ezra is determined to serve his people in his land

- And what Ezra feels called to do is especially important, especially at this moment in Israel's restoration
 - First, Ezra has set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, or the Torah
 - The term "Law" is the word "Torah", which is most specifically a reference to the books of Moses
 - But often, the Jew would call the whole of the Old Testament the Torah or instruction of God
 - So we should understand the meaning here to be that Ezra began to study all of the Word of God intently
- Secondly, Ezra committed to practicing it, to living it, to obeying it
 - It didn't satisfy Ezra to simply know what the Word said
 - Many men pursue the knowledge of God
 - Some even choose to do it through His Word
 - But Ezra knew he had to live according to it as well
 - Otherwise, his teaching would be hypocritical and lack authority
 - Godliness is the product of knowing and practicing the Word of God
- Finally, Ezra taught what he knew to others in Israel, to become an instrument to encourage obedience in others
 - Israel has always had many teachers, but often, those teachers were false and self-serving
 - But Ezra was a man who combined sincere knowledge, a model of obedience and a heart to serve others with the truth
- Many have come to this verse and held it up as a model for how Christians are to place a priority on the Word of God, and rightly so
 - We can certainly learn something from the examples of godly men who make a priority of learning, practicing and teaching others the Word of God
 - We understand that this is a model for any mature Christian

- And we acknowledge without a second thought that every Christian should aspire to this mindset
 - Oh, that every Christian could have these words recorded on their gravestone!
 - But when we make this application, we actually diminish Ezra's example
 - Ezra isn't like the ordinary Christian
 - And the vast majority of Christians are not even called to be like Ezra, much less expected to get there
- Take a second look at the start of that verse
 - Ezra set his heart on doing these things
 - To set your heart on something means to focus all your desire, energy and purpose on something
 - To place everything else second
 - To be consumed in the pursuit of something
 - While you or I may like to ski occasionally, Olympic skiers set their heart on skiing
 - While you or I might enjoy playing guitar, Carlos Santana set his heart on playing guitar
 - While you and I might enjoy taking a mission trip to Africa, missionaries set their heart on it
 - And while you might have a love for studying and living and even teaching God's Word, Ezra set his heart upon it
 - Very few in our day are following in Ezra's footsteps, and I believe only a few are called to do so
 - Everyone is called to study the Bible
 - Everyone is called to be obedient to the Word
 - Everyone is called to share (or witness) what they know with others
 - But only a few, in my experience, are called to set these three things above virtually everything else in their lives

- To make sacrifices for these things
- To set everything else aside to do these things
- To serve God's people at a level and with a dedication that puts them in different category
 - They are the Olympians of Bible study
- And we all benefit from their dedication, just as Israel is about to benefit from Ezra's unique dedication
- So now we know why Ezra leaves, but what triggers the timing of his departure?
 - Once again, Ezra explains by relating the letter of a Persian king, Artaxerxes

[Ezra 7:11](#) Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel:

[Ezra 7:12](#) "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now

[Ezra 7:13](#) I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you.

[Ezra 7:14](#) "Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand,

[Ezra 7:15](#) and to bring the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,

[Ezra 7:16](#) with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem;

[Ezra 7:17](#) with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.

[Ezra 7:18](#) "Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God.

[Ezra 7:19](#) "Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem.

[Ezra 7:20](#) "The rest of the needs for the house of your God, for which you may have occasion to provide, provide for it from the royal treasury.

[Ezra 7:21](#) "I, even I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the provinces beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it shall be done diligently,

[Ezra 7:22](#) even up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt as needed.

[Ezra 7:23](#) “Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons.

[Ezra 7:24](#) “We also inform you that it is not allowed to impose tax, tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim or servants of this house of God.

[Ezra 7:25](#) “You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them.

[Ezra 7:26](#) “Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment.”

- Once again, Ezra records a letter from the Persian king, and once again, this letter appears in Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible
 - The king’s order sounds similar to Darius’ order, and it is likely based on Darius’ earlier edict
 - He gives Ezra the right to leave for Israel and bring with him any other Jews who wish to return, along with priests
 - The group is to be well-funded out of the Persian treasury
 - And Ezra is to go with the power of the king to enforce his law in the land of Israel
 - In fact, Ezra is to be the king’s representative in the land, appointing judges to rule over the land
 - At first glance, we’re left wondering why the king has granted Ezra and Israel so much independence and wealth seemingly out of the blue
 - Did the Lord stir this king’s heart as He did earlier?
 - Well, we certainly know the Lord is working through these circumstances, as He works through all things
 - But there is no specific statement that God has directed Artaxerxes to make this move on Israel’s behalf
 - In fact, in this case, there is good political reason for Artaxerxes to make this move

- In 460 BC, the armies of pre-Alexandrian Greece attacked Persia with 200 warships
 - They captured Egypt and the coasts of Palestine and Phoenicia from Persia in 459
 - These regions formed the coastlines of present-day Israel
 - The very next year, 458 BC, is the year Artaxerxes orders Ezra to go down into Israel with more Jews
- It makes sense that the Persian king would send a well-funded group of pro-Persian Jews into the land to shore up his southern flank against the Greeks
 - And this group would be led by a hand-picked leader with the backing of the king to rule over the land
 - Ezra is essentially the Judean satrap, or governor, for Persia
 - He is sent to rule Israel for Persia and hold the territory for the king
 - Furthermore, the king's strategy is to keep the Jewish inhabitants of Judea in line
 - They knew their family members still resided back in Persia
 - Which gave them added incentive to remain loyal to the Persian king
 - As it happened, a few years later, the Persians and Greeks signed a peace treaty to end hostilities for a time
 - The king authorized more utensils and wealth be given to Ezra for the priests' use in the temple
 - These may be additional artifacts not originally given, or new works of the Jews living in exile
 - Additionally, the king authorizes tax breaks and a support line
 - In fact, Ezra was granted a stipend to continue teaching the Law to the people
 - In the end, the king authorizes whatever will keep Israel content, strong and on his side

- Ezra's effect on Israel will be to organize a government, a system of justice and rule of law
 - First, Ezra is to appoint magistrates and judges to judge the people of Israel
 - But if there are to be judges, then the people must first know what is expected of them under the Law
 - So they need to be taught concerning the Word of God
 - And so Ezra's second purpose is to establish religious education as a principle of Jewish society
 - He is to teach the people who are ignorant of God's laws
 - Where lawlessness exists, then Ezra is to bring punishment, according to the king
 - Remember the way God brought discipline to the nation of Israel?
 - First He removed leadership, then the literary class (the teachers), then He eliminated the false worship
 - Now in the restoration step, we've seen God working in reverse order
 - He's restored worship both in their hearts and in the physical form of the temple
 - And now, He is restoring His Word through instruction and justice and calls to obedience
 - There was a similar pattern in the Exodus
 - The people were moved out of captivity to a place of worship
 - And then, they were given a Law
 - Later, they were given judges to instruct and command them
 - Eventually, they were given leaders, kings
 - This is God's way of building up His people
- In this period of restoration, we see God re-establishing godly forms of learning
 - God is re-educating His people on the truth after centuries of false teaching

- But with teaching comes accountability
- Ezra comes with authority to hold the nation of Israel accountable, should they fail to hold to it
- Consider how God will bring this same pattern to bear in your own life
 - We've already said that God will discipline His children so that we might be rebuilt in a new way, according to His desires
 - And that God's first priority in restoration is to produce a heart of worship within His people
 - We understand it's not just a weekly gathering with singing and study
 - It's a daily life of living in praise and service to God
- Then comes step 2 of restoration, which is to re-engage our minds in a pursuit of God through His Word
 - In other words, our desire to worship God in Spirit must be matched with a commitment to know God in Truth
 - To know Him according to how He has revealed Himself
- If you want a simple picture of how God's call to worship is always followed by a command to know and follow His Word, consider your own salvation
 - In coming to faith, a new Christian is typically prone to focus initially on praise and worship and proclamations
 - We're taken over by grace and the awareness of God's love
 - We praise His Name
 - We call out to the Lord in repentance and thanks
 - We begin to understand some details of our faith
 - The cross, the resurrection, the grace of God
 - And your heart responded in worship and thanks
 - This phase of worship and praise was probably the full extent of your Christian experience for a time...until it was time to mature
 - Then, God began to place new expectations on your heart

- Having come to faith, you were challenged to get into God's Word
- Perhaps someone encouraged you
- Or perhaps you discovered it by yourself
- Either way, it was the Lord leading you into step two, because the times are short

[Eph. 5:15](#) Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,

[Eph. 5:16](#) making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

[Eph. 5:17](#) So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- The proper and expected course of development for any Christian is a careful, disciplined study of God's Word
 - Combined with a diligence to obey that Word
 - And it's no different for the nation of Israel
 - God is bringing Ezra to educate them on His Word, and then gives him authority to ensure it is followed
 - A knowledge of God's truth, combined with a commitment to follow it, are essential to a godly life that pleases God
- We might ask what would have happened to Israel had God not sent Ezra to Israel?
 - They might have continued their pattern of worship for a time longer
 - But it couldn't have lasted
 - In time, their hearts would grow cold, their worship would become lifeless and self-serving
 - Their flesh would have led them away to serve other gods
 - And the progress would have been lost
 - This happens to Christians today
 - Christians can be drawn away into experiences that emphasize emotion and style over knowledge and substance
 - They were drawn by the love of God and responded in worship

- But they find themselves in settings where they're never challenged to move beyond the infant stage of Christianity
- As the writer of Hebrews warns, they are not pressing on to maturity

Heb. 5:11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Heb. 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Heb. 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

Heb. 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- The effect of remaining stuck in step one of restoration, or of Christian growth, is to become dull or lazy of hearing
- We don't progress to teach; we regress to infants
- And in that infantile condition, we lack the ability to discern good from evil
 - Leaving us vulnerable to false teaching and the schemes of the enemy
- When the meat of God's Word isn't a staple in our spiritual diet, we are subsisting on junk food, and eventually, it will catch up with us
 - When God sent Ezra to teach, the expectation was that the Nation of Israel would learn through his influence and grow stronger spiritually
 - And that's the lesson for us
 - God restores his children patiently, carefully
 - And once the heart has begun to worship, it's time to work on the mind
 - And so, God will send us teachers
 - This is further evidence of the Love of God, as Ezra notes

Ezra 7:27 Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem,

[Ezra 7:28](#) and has extended lovingkindness to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king's mighty princes. Thus I was strengthened according to the hand of the LORD my God upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

- The return of Israel to Jerusalem was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise through Jeremiah
 - Nevertheless, it was a miraculous event that Israel should be freed to return to their land
 - What's more, the fact that their own captors would not only permit the exodus, but finance it, was even more remarkable
 - It's certainly evidence of God's hand at work, and as such, it serves as proof that the Lord was at work to fulfill His promises to Israel
 - This isn't luck or chance
 - This is providence
 - So Ezra leads a second wave of exiles back to Jerusalem
 - And that leads us into Chapter 8

[Ezra 8:1](#) Now these are the heads of their fathers' households and the genealogical enrollment of those who went up with me from Babylon in the reign of King Artaxerxes:
[Ezra 8:2](#) of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush;
[Ezra 8:3](#) of the sons of Shecaniah who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah and with him 150 males who were in the genealogical list;
[Ezra 8:4](#) of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah and 200 males with him;
[Ezra 8:5](#) of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel and 300 males with him;
[Ezra 8:6](#) and of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan and 50 males with him;
[Ezra 8:7](#) and of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah and 70 males with him;
[Ezra 8:8](#) and of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael and 80 males with him;
[Ezra 8:9](#) of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel and 218 males with him;
[Ezra 8:10](#) and of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah and 160 males with him;
[Ezra 8:11](#) and of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai and 28 males with him;
[Ezra 8:12](#) and of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan and 110 males with him;
[Ezra 8:13](#) and of the sons of Adonikam, the last ones, these being their names, Eliphelet, Jeuel and Shemaiah, and 60 males with them;
[Ezra 8:14](#) and of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and 70 males with them.

- And just as with the first group of exiles that departed Persia, we see a list of names of those who accompanied Ezra on the trip back
 - The main thing we learn in studying this list of names is the similarity between these names and the ones in the original list, in Chapter 2
 - It would seem in many cases, these names are relatives of those who left in the first group of exiles 80 years earlier
 - These families are at least one or two generations later than the original exiles
 - So they probably have heard of the exploits of uncles and grandfathers and wish to join them
 - We might interpret this as proof of God visiting His blessing on successive generations, as He promised to do

Ezra 8:15 Now I assembled them at the river that runs to Ahava, where we camped for three days; and when I observed the people and the priests, I did not find any Levites there.

Ezra 8:16 So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, teachers.

Ezra 8:17 I sent them to Iddo the leading man at the place Casiphia; and I told them what to say to Iddo and his brothers, the temple servants at the place Casiphia, that is, to bring ministers to us for the house of our God.

- The group eventually camps on the banks of a river called Ahava in a province of Babylon of the same name
 - At this point, Ezra realized he didn't have any Levite volunteers to accompany him for the work in Jerusalem
 - Since the Levites had the unique responsibility to maintain the temple and carry out certain aspects of the Law, they were crucial to Ezra's mission
 - So he stops here, while still in the region of Babylon, to recruit Levites to join his expedition
- Imagine the difficulty of that task
 - It's hard enough to round up volunteers to serve in the church nursery

- Imagine recruiting men to leave their entire way of life to leave for a Jerusalem in shambles?
 - It reminds us of another time when fishermen were asked to leave their nets and follow an itinerant preacher
 - In other words, apart from a call of the Spirit, no one would likely respond
- In the end, 38 Levites and 220 temple servants respond and join the exiles headed to Jerusalem

[Ezra 8:18](#) According to the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of insight of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, and his sons and brothers, 18 men;

[Ezra 8:19](#) and Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his brothers and their sons, 20 men;

[Ezra 8:20](#) and 220 of the temple servants, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, all of them designated by name.

[Ezra 8:21](#) Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.

[Ezra 8:22](#) For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him."

[Ezra 8:23](#) So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.

- At this point, Ezra has the men he needs and is ready to undertake the rest of the trip
 - It's at this point, he proclaims a fast among all who are traveling to Jerusalem
 - The purpose of the fast is to humble themselves and seek the Lord's protection
 - This trip was indeed a dangerous journey
 - The kingdom was not a stable place and the territory they would travel through was not secure
 - Between the Greeks and the rebellions and general lawlessness, the Israelites had much reason to fear for their lives

- Never mind the fact they would be in possession of a lifetime of riches in the form of gold and silver
 - Despite their fears, Ezra had apparently refrained from asking the king for protection for the trip
 - He says in v.22, that he was ashamed to request troops to protect him
 - When Ezra says he was ashamed, he means it felt shameful to make the request
 - It shamed him because earlier, Ezra had convinced the king to let him go by maintaining that the Lord had the power to hold Artaxerxes accountable should he refuse Ezra's request to leave
 - Imagine the irony if in one moment, Ezra declared that the God of creation commanded King Artaxerxes to let Israel go, or else
 - And the next moment, Ezra says "Oh by the way, I need some troops to make sure I get there."
 - Ezra was sensible enough to recognize the contradiction, so he never made the request
 - Similar to the way Moses left the land of Egypt vulnerable, yet under the Lord's protection
- But now that he has reached the brink of departing the Empire and facing the dangers of the road, Ezra realizes that he truly is dependent on the Lord for protection
 - He fasts and he entreats God on the matter
 - Verse 21 was the subject for the final sermon preached by John Robinson in the Netherlands before the Pilgrims sailed for the New World in 1620
 - Ezra is following the Bible's pattern for seeking God's will under circumstances where we can't move forward without God's reassurance
 - First, we subdue and restrain the flesh
 - If we are truly going to discern the Lord's will, we need to make sure we are not slaves to our flesh

- We need to discipline the flesh, make it our slave, and by doing so, diminish it's influence on our thinking and desires
- I think of it this way...imagine you are a child lying in bed and you think you hear a faint noise outside the window
 - You begin listening intently to hear it again
 - But the sound of your own heart beating and your own breathing drowns out the faint sounds from outside
 - You hold your breath and try to lower your heart rate so you can more clearly detect any sound from the boogie man outside
- In a way, that's what fasting achieves
 - It is a practice of self-discipline, designed to lower the influence of the flesh, so we can more clearly hear from God
 - It is a sacrifice done in love, as a sign of our desire to grow closer to God by hearing Him more clearly
 - That's Ezra's first step
- Next, Ezra sought God
 - Simply put, Ezra prayed, seeking God's will on whether there would be protection for the people
 - If God isn't going to protect the people, then there is little reason for the people to move forward
 - So seeking His will is paramount
 - That's why the Bible so often pairs fasting with prayer
 - Fasting is the process of turning down the noise
 - While prayer is a process of turning up the volume on God's voice
 - We do both in an earnest desire to seek the Lord and expect a reply, because we've made the sacrificial effort to seek His will
- Having received confidence of the Lord's protection, Ezra and the camp depart for Jerusalem

[Ezra 8:24](#) Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and with them ten of their brothers;

[Ezra 8:25](#) and I weighed out to them the silver, the gold and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes and all Israel present there had offered.

[Ezra 8:26](#) Thus I weighed into their hands 650 talents of silver, and silver utensils worth 100 talents, and 100 gold talents,

[Ezra 8:27](#) and 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 darics, and two utensils of fine shiny bronze, precious as gold.

[Ezra 8:28](#) Then I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the utensils are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers.

[Ezra 8:29](#) "Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leading priests, the Levites and the heads of the fathers' households of Israel at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD."

[Ezra 8:30](#) So the priests and the Levites accepted the weighed out silver and gold and the utensils, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

[Ezra 8:31](#) Then we journeyed from the river Ahava on the twelfth of the first month to go to Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was over us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the ambushes by the way.

[Ezra 8:32](#) Thus we came to Jerusalem and remained there three days.

[Ezra 8:33](#) On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the utensils were weighed out in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, 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.

[Ezra 8:34](#) Everything was numbered and weighed, and all the weight was recorded at that time.

- Ezra comes up from his period of fasting and prayer with a plan to ensure everything of value is set aside for the Lord, even before they begin the journey
 - He assigns to trustworthy individuals responsibility for about 28 tons of precious cargo destined for the temple
 - The gold, silver and bronze utensils for the temple represented immense wealth
 - The Jews of Babylon had apparently become quite wealthy in the course of their lives
 - Remember, the Jews were not always slaves in Babylon
 - But they were forced to remain as citizens in the land until the kings released them to return to Jerusalem

- As the company moves toward Jerusalem, we're told the Lord was faithful to protect them
 - Interestingly, we're not told what happened, but it seems that they experienced ambushes along the way
 - Nevertheless, the Lord did protect them
- After resting in the city three days, the people go to the house of the Lord to inventory all the materials brought down from Babylon
 - Among those who greet the party are the son of Jeshua
 - But notice, there is still no clear leader, like a king
 - Ezra will become a leader of sorts on account of his commission from the king and his teaching authority
 - But the nation still awaits a leader who will guide them into greater works of faith
- Meanwhile, Ezra will begin to make an immediate impact on the people as he comes to learn of their sin and the need for correction under the Law of God