

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,
2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

I. WHY STUDY EZRA

- A. Because it is in the Bible, and is an important part of the narrative of Israel's history
- B. Because it describes the fulfillment of one of the great promises of God - that Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt, and that a command would be made by Cyrus¹
- C. Because the decree in Ezra 1:1-2 is a key event in Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the seventy year captivity of Israel.
- D. Because it tells a story of people building for God, and how the LORD enabled them to build in the face of great opposition.
- E. Because it describes the heart of a man who loved God, and the trials he faced, and how he dealt with them. Ezra is a role model to be seriously considered.

II. THE MAN EZRA

- A. Jewish tradition holds that Ezra was the writer of I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.
 - 1. These four books were originally one work.
 - 2. Some believe that Nehemiah wrote that book, rather than Ezra
 - 3. Ezra's name appears often in Ezra and Nehemiah
- B. Ezra's name is the Hebrew word for "help"
- C. He was a priest under Zerubabel (Neh 12:1).
 - 1. Ezra was a descendant of Aaron the priest
 - 2. Zerubabel was a descendant of David, and rightful ruler of the returning Jews
 - 3. He is also a picture of Christ, and is referred to in that manner (i.e. Haggai 2:23)
- D. He was a scribe (Ezra 7:6, 7:11, 8:1, Neh 12:36), and is called by this title ten times in scripture.
- E. He preached from a pulpit, and is an example of what a preacher does (Neh 8:4-8)
- F. He was the great grandson of Hilkiah the priest who was instrumental in Josiah's revival which had taken place 160 years earlier.
- G. Ezra returned to Jerusalem in around 457 B.C.
 - 1. The captivity of Judah was from about 606 to 536 B.C. (70 years)
 - 2. This means that about 80 years (536 to 457 B.C.) elapsed from the end of captivity until the return of Ezra (noted in Ezra 7)

III. THE BOOK OF EZRA

- A. Ezra is a book which includes many lists, numbers, and inventories. It is detailed in nature.
- B. The last two verses of II Chronicles and the first three verses of Ezra are virtually identical, providing absolute proof that these two books are interconnected.
 - 1. The verses just prior to the last two verses of II Chronicles are a description of the destruction of the temple (house of God) and the wall.
 - 2. II Chronicles ends with hope - Ezra is the fulfillment of that hope
- C. The three main events in Ezra are the decree of Cyrus and subsequent return, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the return of Ezra to Jerusalem and how he handled the people's sin. Ezra is not mentioned in this book until Ezra 7:1.

¹ Isaiah 44:28 - That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. [This prophecy predates Cyrus by 200 years.]

- D. Ezra begins with the edict of Cyrus in about 536 B.C. As a response to this edict, Zerubbabel returned with 42,360 Jews.
- E. In 457 B.C., Ezra returned with 1754 men, and an offering (Ezra 7).
- F. Ezra gives an account of these two distinct periods - 536-516 (Zerubbabel) and 457-432 (Nehemiah and Ezra)

IV. OUTLINE OF EZRA

- A. Chapter 1 – The proclamation of Cyrus and response to it
- B. Chapter 2 – The census of the 42,360 people that returned with Zerubbabel out of captivity
- C. Chapter 3 – The altar is built and the work on the temple begins
- D. Chapter 4 – The work is halted by adversaries
- E. Chapter 5 – The prophets Haggai and Zechariah speak (520 B.C.), and the work is restarted
- F. Chapter 6 – Darius endorses the work and the temple is completed
- G. Chapter 7 – Ezra goes up from Babylon to Jerusalem with Artaxerxes' endorsement (457 B.C.)
- H. Chapter 8 – Census of those accompanying Ezra; account of the journey and arrival in Jerusalem
- I. Chapter 9 – Ezra's discovery of Israel's sin; his appeal to the LORD for wisdom and mercy
- J. Chapter 10 – Resolution of the sin of taking of strange wives is overseen by Ezra

V. CYRUS, AND OTHER KINGS NAMED IN EZRA

- A. Cyrus is a key figure in the story of Ezra, and the Bible, who is mentioned in Daniel, Isaiah, Ezra, and II Chronicles. He is almost always referred to as the King of Persia. He issued the edict for Israel to return home at the end of the 70 year captivity.
- B. There were several kingdoms and kings who were in power between the days of Isaiah and the days of Ezra.
 - 1. The Northern ten tribes of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.
 - 2. The Assyrian empire fell to the Babylonians and Medes 609 B.C.
 - 3. Babylon conquered Jerusalem in three phases, the last of which resulted in the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.
 - 4. Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered Babylon in about 536 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had been one of its kings.
 - a. Belshazzar had replaced Nebuchadnezzar when Daniel saw the writing on the wall the night Babylon fell (Dan 5:5).
 - b. Dan 5:30 - In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.
 - 5. The Persians were then conquered by the Greeks and Alexander the Great in 336 B.C.
 - 6. The Greeks were subsequently conquered by the Romans in about 146 B.C.
- C. The other kings who followed Cyrus
 - 1. Ahasuerus is the name of several kings, one was the father of Darius the Mede (Dan 9:1). The Ahasuerus mentioned in Ezra 4:6 is probably the son of Cyrus, King of Persia.
 - 2. The Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7 may not be the same man as the one of Ezra 7:1. The Artaxerxes of Ezra 7:1 is probably the grandson of Darius
 - 3. Darius is also the name of several Persian kings.
 - a. One was the son of Ahasuerus (Daniel 9:1)
 - b. One was the king of Persia following Smerdis, who followed the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6, who followed Cyrus.



Statue of Cyrus the Great

The Kings of Ezra

Cyrus (1:1) 538-529 BC
Cambyses 529-522 BC
Darius (4:24) 521-485 BC
Ahasuerus - Xerxes (4:6) 485-465
Artaxerxes (4:7) 465-425 BC
Nebuchadnezzar (5:12) - 606-562 BC

Note: Most kings went by several names, and often used the name of a former king.

- D. Daniel was still on the scene in the first year of Cyrus, and could have been the man who told him God’s will regarding Jerusalem (Daniel 1:21)

VI. QUESTION TO STUDY FOR NEXT WEEK

- A. In Daniel 9:25, God promises that there will be 69×7 or 483 years between the “commandment to restore and build Jerusalem” and “Messiah the Prince.”
- B. Is the edict of Cyrus that we see in Ezra 1:1-2 the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 9:25? If so, why? If not, why not? Give several reasons either way.

Answer:



Assyrian Empire 746 to 609 B.C.



Babylonian Empire 609 to 539 B.C.



Persian Empire 550 to 330 B.C.

I. BACKGROUND OF EZRA CHAPTER ONE (Ezra 1:1)

- A. At the beginning of this chapter, and the entire book of Ezra, the people were captives taken by Babylon but now in the hands of Cyrus, King of Persia.
1. They had been deported in three stages² – 606 BC, 597 BC, and 586 BC.
 2. Babylon fell to Darius in 539 B.C. (Daniel chapter 5)
 3. Jeremiah promised that they would be captive for 70 years (606 to 536 is 70 years).
 - a. Jer 29:10 - . . . after seventy years . . .
 - b. Jer 25:11 - these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years
- B. The “first year of Cyrus” is 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1)
- C. Prophecy was fulfilled concerning Cyrus, which had come from Isaiah more than 125 years before Cyrus’ birth
1. That he would command that the temple foundation be laid (see Isaiah 44:28) - and it was commanded thus (Ezra 1:2)
 2. That he would let the captives go free without demanding payment for them (see Isaiah 45:13) - and He did (Ezra 1:3)
 3. That God would break and/or open brass gates to allow him to conquer (see Isaiah 45:1-2) – and He did. Babylon’s walls had over two dozen solid brass gates, including two huge brass gates that kept the entrance where the river flowed thru the city. The night of the drunken party in Daniel 5, those gates were providentially left unlocked.
 4. That God would “loose the loins of kings” (Isaiah 45:1) - and He did (Daniel 5:6 - Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.)

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

II. THE DECREE OF CYRUS (Ezra 1:2-4)

- A. He Gave God Credit: He acknowledged that the LORD God of heaven had given him power, and instructed him to build a temple.
1. The name “LORD God” is found in the KJB 532 times, beginning in Genesis 2, and ending in Rev 22:6.
 2. It is undoubtedly the God of the Bible that Cyrus gives credit
- B. Obeyed God’s Command: The specific object of the decree is that a house be built
- C. Invited Cooperation: The invitation applies to “all his [God’s] people” (3)
1. Those who will go
 - a. “Let him go”
 - b. “. . . and build”
 2. Those who will remain
 - a. “Help with silver and with gold and with goods . . .”
- D. He Gave Everyone a Choice: We have the opportunity to serve God by going, or by supporting those who go
1. Every one of us should be busy in the Lord’s work (“all His people”)
 2. Some will go; others will send those who go - which are you?
 3. Nobody is exempt from the Lord’s service
 4. Cyrus is an example of a man who obeyed

Ezra 1:2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

² An excellent book on Bible Chronology is the work of Dr. Floyd Nolen Jones entitled *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 2004, which can be found at www.masterbooks.net. It is KJV based, and very thorough in its approach to dates.

III. THE RESPONSE TO THE DECREE (Ezra 1:5-11)

- A. THE RULERS: The leaders and the people responded (5)
 - 1. They did something! (They rose up to go build) (5)
 - 2. God had raised up their spirits (5)
 - 3. They knew what was expected by the LORD
- B. THE REGULARS: The people “about them” responded also (6)
 - 1. They added strength (6) instead of discouragement: we should too.
 - 2. They contributed their wealth (6)
 - a. Vessels of silver; gold; goods
 - b. Beasts and precious things
 - c. They willingly offered to the work
- C. THE REGAL: The king responded/contributed to the work (7-11)
 - 1. The vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar (7)
 - 2. Sheshbazzar (8) is probably another name for Zerubbabel (see Ezra 2:2)
 - 3. The partial Inventory
 - a. 30 chargers of gold
 - b. 1,000 chargers of silver
 - c. 29 knives
 - d. 30 basons of gold
 - e. 410 silver basons
 - f. 1,000 other vessels
 - g. The total number of vessels (some were not listed) was 5,400
- D. These deeds are all miracles of God that are done by Him to allow His will for His work to be done.
 - 1. It is a work of God when people participate
 - 2. It is a work of God when people give
 - 3. It was amazing that all these vessels were protected for 70 years, even enduring the overthrow of Babylon

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which

Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

9 And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

10 Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand.

11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

IV. APPLICATION

- A. What specific work has God commanded for our church to do?
- B. What king made the decree for that work to be done?
- C. What things are necessary in order for that work to be accomplished?
- D. In what way, or ways, does each church member have opportunity to be involved in that work?

V. ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S QUESTION

Question: Is the edict of Cyrus that we see in Ezra 1:1-2 the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 9:25?

Answer: It could not be, if the term “week” means “seven years” because the decree by Cyrus in Ezra 1:1 takes place 536 years before the appearance of the Messiah, but Daniel’s prophecy indicates a period of 483 years.

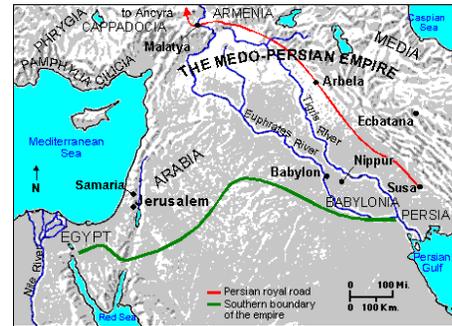
VI. QUESTION FOR THIS WEEK

Question: Did Esther, the woman who replaced Queen Vashti, become the queen before, or after the decree by Cyrus in 536 B.C.?

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy

I. THE COMPANY THAT RETURNED (TO REBUILD) – A PARTIAL CENSUS (Ezra 2)

- A. In Ezra 2, God provides a partial list of people and property that went out of captivity.
1. The Bible is an accurate historical record, and God includes lists of names in the Bible and preserves their accuracy for future generations.
 2. The English spelling of Hebrew names - there are no rules: the names may be spelled differently in one place or another - i.e. Reeliah and Raamiah are probably the same person.
- B. There are a number of lists of names in Ezra and Nehemiah, and some lists are duplicates of others (for example, Ezra 2:2 and Neh 7:7 are somewhat duplicate lists, with changes).
1. Nehemiah 7 reports to be a record of the census taken by Ezra 1 (see Neh 7:5-6)
 2. Nehemiah's record is different from that of Ezra, but very similar
 - a. For example, Nehemiah lists "children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight" in Neh 7:15, but in Ezra 2, no group is numbered at 648.
 - b. DO NOT believe critics who call these things errors in the Bible. God has a reason and the critics will apologize to Him one day.
- C. There are nine categories of returning Israelites named in Ezra 2, mostly ordered by importance.
1. The people (of Israel) (2-35)
 2. The priests (36-39)
 3. The Levites (40)
 4. The singers (41)
 5. The children of the porters (42)
 6. The Nethinims - temple servants (43-54)
 7. The descendants of Solomon's servants (55-58)
 8. Those of uncertain ancestry (59-60)
 9. The children of the priests who were polluted (61-63)
- D. 42,360 persons, in total, made up the congregation (64)
1. This is the exact number mentioned in Neh 7:66
 2. The total of the numbers in Ezra 2 is about 10,000 persons lower than 42,360. Clearly, there were groups unlisted, and those who tagged along but not recorded in the census.
- E. 7,337 servants and maids also accompanied the party (65). This is the exact number mentioned in Neh 7:67
- F. Two hundred singing men and women also accompanied the group. (65)
- G. Notice that the presence of priests, Levites, and servants was necessary to restore the temple sacrifices.
- H. The animals that went up are also recorded, but there are clearly not enough to carry many passengers.
1. 435 camels (67)
 2. 6,720 asses (67)
- I. The offering for the temple which was carried along was quite valuable.
1. 61,000 drams of gold (69) = about 3,800 ounces or 238 pounds — \$5 million today
 2. 5,000 pounds of silver (69) — \$1.5 million or more today
 3. 100 priests garments (69) (Nehemiah 7 gives quite a larger number)
- J. The entire company of people and animals was about 49, 897 people and 7,155 animals
- K. The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem is approximately 900 miles by road, as a northern route must be taken to avoid the desert.
1. Most of the people walked, as there were not enough animals to carry everyone.
 2. If they walked 6 hours a day for 43 days at 3.5 mph, they could have traveled 900 miles
- L. Chapter two concludes with this company dwelling in their cities (70)
- M. A number of men have written books which address the comparison and contrast of Ezra and Nehemiah. Be careful: some of these men question God's word.



II. THE CONVOCATION (ASSEMBLY) OF RENEWAL: RESTORATION BEGINS (Ezra 3:1-7)

- A. Note that Ezra 3:1 begins with the Seventh Month (as does Neh 7:73)
1. The ark rested in the seventh month (Gen 8:4)
 2. The tenth day of the seventh month was ordained as the day of atonement (Lev 16:29)

- a. It is the Hebrew day known as Yom (day) Kippur (atonement) - it is the most holy day of the Hebrew year.
- b. Le 23:27 "Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement"
3. A seven day feast followed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Lev 23:34) which was known as the "feast of tabernacles." It recognizes God's deliverance of Israel from captivity in Egypt. (Lev 23:43)
4. The trumpet of Jubilee was sounded on the tenth day of the seventh month (Le 25:9) in the fiftieth year
- B. Undoubtedly, the people who had returned would have longed for the days when they had a temple where Atonement could be recognized. But, the temple and altar had been destroyed. It had been commanded that the people assemble in Jerusalem at the temple on this day each year.
- C. The gathering (Ezra 3:1) – the time had come to assemble before the Lord, as had been before the captivity. Everyone understood the importance of renewing their relationship with God
- D. The project
 1. Jeshua the priest, and Zerubbabel the governor build an altar (2). Christ is our priest and king.
 2. The altar of sacrifice was the center of everything else, just as the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the heart of our faith and salvation.
- E. The motive – the people were afraid of their enemies and knew they needed the LORD's help (3)
- F. The offerings – burnt offerings (3, 4), freewill offerings (5)
– They were diligent to offer, and did so continually
- G. Preparation for the temple was made (6-7)

III. THE CHALLENGE OF REBUILDING (Ezra 3:8-13)

- A. There was much work to be done, and one year after returning from captivity, in the second month, they began to make progress in that work (Ezra 3:8)
- B. Everyone worked (from 20 years old) (8)
- C. The laying of the foundation was accompanied by musicians to praise the LORD (10-11)
 1. "They sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD
 - a. Because he is good
 - b. For his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.
 2. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."
- D. The great response to the sight of the foundation (12-13)
 1. Some wept because they remembered what had been lost
 2. Some shouted for joy because they had hope that more would be accomplished

MEN OBEYED IN EZRA 3

- **Moses**, the man of God (2) had recorded God's command to build an altar
- **David**, the king of Israel (10) had ordained the praise of God at the laying of the foundation

IV. APPLICATION - WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO START OVER?

- A. Before the temple could be rebuilt, a forsaking of home and a great journey was necessary – somebody had to sacrifice and pay the price of going. God honored these by remembering their names for all eternity.
- B. The people established homes before they began the process of rebuilding the temple. (2:70)
- C. Before bricks were laid down, sacrifices were offered up
- D. Results did not come immediately, and when they did the memory of what had been before and the amount of work yet to be done were both a discouragement to the people (3:12-13)

V. ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Question: Did Esther, the woman who replaced Queen Vashti, become the queen before, or after the decree by Cyrus in 536 B.C.?

Answer: Almost everyone agrees that Esther became queen some time after Cyrus' decree in 536 B.C., but the exact date is questioned. Uner says 482 B.C. Jones says 515 B.C. Halley says 478 B.C.

VI. QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK

Question: Who returned to Jerusalem first, Ezra or Nehemiah? Were they ever there at the same time? How do you know?

Ezra 4:1-2 Now when **the adversaries** of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel . . .

I. THE ADVERSARIES

- A. Any time you do anything pleasing in God's eyes, you are also being watched by "the adversaries."
- B. The Hebrew word used in Ezra 4:1 (for 'adversary') is also translated "enemy, trouble, distress, affliction, foe, and sorrow." It can mean "pebble" or "flint" meaning that it is hard (and maybe annoying).
- C. Christians, churches, pastors, missionaries, and all those who serve God have adversaries.
- D. 1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour . . ."

A TRUE STORY

In Salt Lake City, in the 1990's, I served as the assistant pastor at Anchor Baptist Church. One morning, a woman entered our offices and asked the pastor how she could help our church. She was from the LDS Church (Mormons) and wanted to be a blessing to our ministry. Her church had sent her over. She offered to paint, mend fences, or pick up trash – whatever we needed. You might not know that the Mormon church teaches their converts and members that Baptists are apostate, and that we are the friends of Satan and the enemy of Mormons.

II. THE EFFORT OF THE ADVERSARY (1-16)

- A. The goal of the adversary is to stop the work. If you have stopped serving God, what stopped you?
- B. The adversaries will leave you alone until you try to do something for God.
- C. The adversaries are dishonest liars – "Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." (Ezra 4:2)
 - 1. They are liars
 - a. They offer to build, but in truth they hate anything built for God.
 - b. They do not seek our God as we do
 - c. They do not sacrifice to our God
 - 2. They are deceivers - their intention is to stop the work, not to help it.
- D. Zerubbabel wisely informs the adversary that they have NOTHING to do with our God or our work.
 - 1. God's work is to be done by God's people. (Ezra 4:3)
 - 2. If somebody wants to be part of God's work, they need to first become one of God's people
- E. The adversary will eventually show his true colors (Ezra 4:4-5)
 - 1. They will weaken the hands of the people
 - a. Through discouragement
 - b. Through opposition
 - c. Through confusion
 - 2. They will trouble the people
 - a. Trouble – to disturb, alarm, threaten, dismay, cause to be nervous
 - b. Threats, introduction of bad news, slandering the saints, etc. etc. etc.
 - 3. They will recruit help (legal or otherwise) against the work and workers (5)
 - a. Hired Counselors (could this include attorneys?)
 - b. In this case, a letter is prepared which is sent to the government
 - c. Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and companions (7) were involved
 - (1) Mithradath was the treasurer of the king (Ezr 1:8)
 - (2) Bishlam's name means "in peace" and Tabeel's name means, "God is good"
- F. The adversary will accuse God's people, and use the government against God's work (Ezra 4:6)
 - 1. Ahasuerus is the name of several different kings.
 - 2. This Ahaseurus is probably the successor of Cyrus, who may have taken office in 529 B.C.

THE LETTER TO THE KING

Ezra 4:11 . . . Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.

12 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.

13 Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.

14 Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.

16 We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

- G. The letter's author
 - 1. Written by Rehum the chancellor (a judge), and Shimshai (the secretary) (Ezra 4:9)
 - 2. It is "against Jerusalem" to the king (government) (8)
- H. The letter's contents
 - 1. The people accused – The Jews are the culprits
 - 2. The place hated – The city is rebellious and bad
 - 3. The practice condemned – Walls and foundations have been set up
 - 4. The problem will cost money – The plan is to refuse to pay taxes (13)
 - 5. The policy involved – We are only interested in helping the king (14)
 - 6. The past recalled – These people have always been a problem (15)
 - 7. The plea summarized – If you let this happen, it will cost you dearly (16)

III. THE RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM THE ADVERSARY (17-20)

- A. The king read the letter (18)
- B. It is true that the city was rebellious in the past (19)
- C. There were once kings in Jerusalem (20)
- D. Stop the work (21)

IV. THE WORK IS CEASED (21-24)

- A. A "stop order" is issued (21)
- B. The reason is to protect the king from damage (22)
- C. The adversary was thrilled, and quickly enacted the king's command (23)
- D. Now, they use force and power to stop the work (which they claimed to want to help) (23)
- E. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. (24)
- F. When you read Haggai and Zechariah, you will find that God is not pleased that the people have stopped working. The fact is that they used the opposition as an excuse to do little or nothing when they should have sought God's deliverance and continued to build.

V. QUESTION FROM LAST WEEK

Question: Who returned to Jerusalem first, Ezra or Nehemiah? Were they ever there at the same time? How do you know?

Answer: Ezra. Artaxerxes was king when Nehemiah returned, and he reigned after Cyrus. And, in Nehemiah 8:9, Ezra and Nehemiah are both in Jerusalem at the same time.

VI. QUESTION FOR THIS WEEK

- A. **Question:** According to Haggai chapter one, what "excuse" did the people use to stop trying to build the LORD's house? Second, what was the condition of the people as a result (were they prospering, etc.)? And finally, what three words of counsel did "the LORD of hosts" give to the people? (Hint: Consi ____ Y ____ W ____).

Darius, king of Persia, was the son of Hystaspes, of the royal family of the Achaemenidae. He did not immediately succeed Cyrus on the throne. There were two intermediate kings, viz., Cambyses (the Ahasuerus of Ezra), the son of Cyrus, who reigned from B.C. 529 and was succeeded by a usurper named Smerdis, who occupied the throne only ten months, and was succeeded by this Darius (B.C. 521) Smerdis was a Margian, and therefore had no sympathy with Cyrus and Cambyses in the manner in which they had treated the Jews. He issued a decree prohibiting the restoration of the temple and of Jerusalem

Ezra 5:1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.

I. GETTING THINGS GOING AGAIN

- A. Over and over in chapter 5, we see the word “then”
 - 1. Then the prophets prophesied (1)
 - 2. Then rose up Zerubbabel (2)
 - 3. At the same time came the governor (3)
 - 4. Then said we unto them (4)
 - 5. Then Darius made a decree (6:1)
- B. In chapter 4, the adversaries appeared and the work stopped
- C. In chapter 5, effort is made to restart the work
- D. The preaching and hearing of the word of God is what made the difference - people heard and responded, and things got going again.

II. THE PROPHET HAGGAI

- A. Haggai is well known for the phrase, “consider your ways.”
 - 1. When things are not progressing, we should consider OUR ways (God is not at fault).
 - 2. Twice in Haggai (1:5 and 1:7) the LORD of hosts says, “consider your ways.”
- B. He is the first of the prophets to prophecy after the captivity
- C. His emphasis is that the people work to rebuild the temple.
 - 1. He encourages the people to “build for God”!
 - 2. The two chapters are two different messages from God.
- D. His prophecy worked!” Ezra 6:14 says, “And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.”
- E. Haggai prophesied in the Fall of 520 B.C. (Approximately)
- F. His message consisted of four separate addresses over a period of four months
 - 1. A message of rebuke
 - 2. A message of courage
 - 3. A message of assurance
 - 4. A message of prophecy (encouragement)
- G. Haggai 2:7 is a prophecy of Christ – the Desire of All Nations

III. MESSAGES IN HAGGAI

- A. A message of negligence (1:1-15)
 - 1. The people had an excuse (it isn’t time yet).
 - 2. God rebuked them for the delay (3-11)
 - a. They were suffering difficulties, disappointment, and disaster because of their disobedience.
 - b. They were not satisfied
 - 3. They actually listened!!! (12-15) and God encouraged them
- B. A message of nerve (1:13 to 2:9)
 - 1. The presence of the Lord came when they obeyed (1:13)
 - 2. God stirred them (1:14) to be strong
 - 3. Power of the LORD was evident (2:7)
 - 4. The anointed of the LORD (2:7)
 - a. Christ would fill the house, and God used Herod to improve upon it just a bit.
 - 5. The glory of the LORD (2:9)
- C. A message of “non union” (2:10 to 2:29)
 - 1. Holiness is not spread by contact, but uncleanness is (2:12-13)
 - 2. The people are not clean, but are guilty (2:14)
 - 3. The consequence was insufficiency (2:15-17)
 - 4. Now, things are different (because they obeyed) (2:18-19)
 - a. “Is the seed yet in the barn?” – i.e. have you given up planting?
 - b. Don’t give up - God will now bless
- D. A message of Notification (2:20-23)

1. The overthrow of Gentile kingdoms (2:22)
2. The LORD Jesus Christ will be King (2:23)
 - a. Zerubbabel is the current ruler and a symbol of Christ
 - b. This is the restored Israel in the 1,000 year reign of Christ

IV. THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

- A. Zechariah's name means "Jehovah has remembered." It was a very common name. There are almost 30 men with this name found in the Bible.
- B. His writing is dated in the Bible and is concurrent with that of Haggai.
- C. He was a priest. Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo, a priest who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (see Neh 12:4, 16, Ezra 5:1, 6:14).
- D. Zechariah was probably young, and born in Babylon.
- E. Jesus refers to a man named, "Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar" and the name seems to be too close to consider as someone else. Compare Matt 23:35 with Zech 1:1. Perhaps Zechariah died a martyr's death.
- F. Zechariah is the longest of the minor prophets, and has the most difficult and rich imagery and visions. Halley says it is the most difficult of the Old Testament books to interpret. It is also called the most "Messianic." Ryrie says that Zechariah prophesied more about the Messiah than any other prophet except Isaiah. Zechariah has more visions than any other minor prophet

V. MESSAGES IN ZECHARIAH

- A. Be Not Like Your Fathers – Zech 1:1-6
- B. A Vision of Four Horns and the Carpenter (1:18-21)
- C. The Apple of God's Eye (Zech 2)
- D. The Removal of Reproach (Zech 3)
- E. The Vision of the Candlestick and Gold (Zech 4)
- F. The Judgment of Sinners and their System (Zech 5)
- G. A Vision of the Four Chariots (Zech 6)
- H. A Practical Question about What Motivates Worship (Zech 7)
- I. Ten Formal Declarations Concerning Jerusalem (Zech 8)
- J. A Prophecy of the Coming King and Future Events (Zech 9)
- K. Vision of Israel's Future Restoration (Zech 10)
- L. The Condition of Israel at the time of the Messiah (Zech 11)
- M. The Judgment of the Nations and Deliverance of Jerusalem (Zech 12)
- N. The Purifying of Israel (Zech 13)
- O. The Day of the Lord and the Last Battle (Zech 14:1-11)
- P. The End of the Story of the World (Zech 14:12-21)

VI. QUESTION FROM LAST WEEK

Question: According to Haggai chapter one, what "excuse" did the people use to stop trying to build the LORD's house? Second, what was the condition of the people as a result (were they prospering, etc.)? And finally, what three words of counsel did "the LORD of hosts" give to the people? (Hint: Consi_____ Y____ W_____).

Answer: 1.) Haggai 1:2 The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. 2.) Haggai 1:6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. 3.) Consider your ways

VII. QUESTION FOR THIS WEEK

- A. **Question:** 1.) Who prophesied first? Haggai or Zechariah? How do you know? 2.) How long after the people had returned to the land did Haggai and Zechariah prophecy?

Ezra 6:14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. **And they builded, and finished it**, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

I. OUTLINE OF EVENTS IN CHAPTER 5 & 6

A. Chapter Five

1. The prophets speak (5:1) and the work starts again (5:2)
2. Tatnai, Shetharboznai, and companions question the work (5:3-4), but God prevents them from stopping the work (5:5).
3. Tatnai writes a letter to Darius the king in an attempt to stop the work (5:6-17)

B. Chapter Six

1. Darius decrees that inquiry be made, and a roll is found (6:1-2), and a decree issued (6:3-5)
2. Tatnai is prohibited from further restricting the work (6:6-7); the work is funded (6:8-10)
3. And, if anyone tries to hinder the work, they will be punished (6:11-12)
4. Tatnai complies, and the work prospers (6:13-14)
5. The house is finished on day 3, March, in the sixth year of Darius (6:15)
6. The house is dedicated and the passover is kept (6:16-22)

II. HOW WAS THE TEMPLE COMPLETED?

- A. Prophets spoke and the people obeyed (5:1)
- B. The Jews began to build, in spite of the opposition (5:2)
- C. The question asked by the adversaries was:
 1. Who gave you authority to do this? (5:3)
 2. Who is involved (i.e. who is willing to take the blame?) (5:4)
- D. Only because of God, the adversary could not cause them to cease (5:5)

III. THE LETTER TO KING DARIUS (5:8-17)

- A. The work is progressing rapidly (5:8)
- B. We made them give us their names (5:9-10) so we could tell on them
- C. They said they are the servants of the God of Heaven and that Cyrus decreed that they build (13)
- D. They said that Cyrus sent them, with the vessels, back to Jerusalem (14-15)
- E. Look into the records and see if they are telling the truth (16-17)

IV. THE ANSWER FROM THE KING (6:1-12)

- A. The Jews were right! Cyrus did decree that the temple be built (6:2)
- B. It were specifications given - 90 feet by 90 feet (6:3) with stones and timber (6:4)
- C. And, the king was supposed to pay for it (6:4) and restore all the vessels!
- D. And to the adversaries it is said, "Be far from thence!" (In other words, get lost) (6:6-7)
- E. And, pay the bills (6:8)
- F. And, supply all their needs (6:9-10)
- G. And, if you don't do all that I said, I will tear down your house and hang you on it (6:11)
- H. And finally, I curse anyone who opposes this house (6:12)

V. THE RESULTS OF THE LETTER

- A. Before the letter:
 - 1. The work was threatened and opposed
 - 2. The work was self-funded and in doubt
- B. After the letter:
 - 1. The work was protected by the king
 - 2. The work was funded by the king, and supplied

VI. THE FINISHED WORK

- A. The work was finished just in time for the dedication and passover
 - 1. Adar (the month) is the month between the March new moon and April new moon
 - 2. The year was Darius 6 (516 BC?) - The work had stopped until Darius 2 (Ezra 4:24)
 - 3. So, the work took three to four years to complete
- B. The people dedicated the house with joy (6:16) and an offering
 - 1. 200 bullocks
 - 2. 200 rams
 - 3. 400 lambs
 - 4. 12 he goats for a sin offering - one per tribe
- C. They established service in the temple (6:18)
- D. Then, they kept the Passover (6:19-21)
- E. The Lord turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them (22) to strengthen their hands

*Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD,
and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*

I. TIME PERIOD OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

- A. There are many questions about the dates of the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, and they have been studied by many men in centuries past, including Sir Isaac Newton.
- B. The problems in determining dates are caused by uncertainty in connecting secular history with scriptural accounts. For example, which secular king is Artaxerxes of Persia in Ezra 7:1? There are several kings with the secular title of Artaxerxes.
- C. Newton proposed an interesting Chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah which establishes the following dates:
 - 1. The Decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:1 - 536 B.C.
 - 2. The Completion of the Temple in Ezra 6:19-22 - 516 B.C. (Twenty years later)
 - 3. Ezra is sent to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes in Ezra 7 – 467 B.C. (Forty nine years later)
- D. So, if we trust this Chronology, we can presume that about fifty years have elapsed between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. Other chronologies make this time period even longer.
- E. Suffice it to say that there was about a fifty year gap after the temple was built when nothing happened that is recorded in the Bible.
- F. Notice also that it was the 20th year of Artaxerxes, 14 years after Ezra 7:1 (454 B.C.), when Nehemiah 2:1 records that Nehemiah is sent to rebuild the wall.
- G. To summarize, it took 20 years from the decree to rebuild the temple, about 70 years before Ezra was sent to Jerusalem (after the decree), and 85 years from the decree of Cyrus until the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.
- H. Then, nothing happens at all in the scriptural account until the Lord Jesus Christ is born 450 years after the walls are rebuilt..

II. QUESTIONS

- A. Why did it take so long to rebuild the temple and walls? Why are there periods when nothing is happening?
- B. Why did things change so quickly when Ezra became involved?
- C. What can God do in the heart of a pagan king to get him to cooperate with God's work?
- D. Why did God do such great things in the heart of Artaxerxes?

III. INTRODUCING EZRA THE SCRIBE – EZRA 7:1-10

- A. Notice his interesting genealogy as a priest
 - 1. Aaron the chief priest begat Eleazar (5)
 - a. Eleazar was the third son of Aaron (Ex 6:23)
 - b. Eleazar replaced Nadab and Abihu who were slain by God for false worship (Nu 3:4)
 - c. Eleazar replaced Aaron as high priest (Num 20:25-29)
 - 2. Eleazar begat Phinehas (5) (Ex 6:25)
 - a. This is not the Phinehas who was the son of Eli in the time of Samuel's birth
 - b. His name means "mouth of brass"
 - c. He thrust a javelin through both an Israelite and Midianitish woman which stopped a plague in Israel which was caused by the wickedness of the people (Nu 25:7-9)
 - 3. Phinehas begat Abishua, who begat Bukki, who begat Uzzi, who begat Zerehiah, who begat Meraioth, who begat Azariah, who begat Amariah, who begat Ahitub, who begat Zadok
 - a. Zadok was high priest in the days Solomon (I Ki 4:4)
 - b. Zadok remained faithful to David when Adonijah rebelled and Abiathar the priest went along.
 - c. Zadok is probably the man for whom the Sadducees are named
 - 4. Zadok begat Shallum, who begat Hilkiah
 - a. Hilkiah was the the high priest in the reign of Josiah (I Chron 6:13)

- b. To him and his deputy (II Kings 23:5) along with the ordinary priests and the Levites who had charge of the gates, was entrusted the purification of the temple in Jerusalem.
- c. While this was in progress, he discovered in some hidden corner of the building a book called the "book of the law" (II Ki 22:8)
- d. This remarkable discovery occurred in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (B.C. 624) a discovery which permanently affected the whole subsequent history of Israel
- 5. Hilkiah begat Azariah who was high priest in the days of King Hezekiah
- 6. Azariah begat Saraiah who begat Ezra
- B. His background – Ezra was born in captivity in Babylon (6)
- C. His role – Ezra was not only a priest, he was a scribe (6) who copied the law and knew it well
- D. The secret of his success – The hand of the LORD his God was upon him (6) and the king granted “all his request.”
- E. His character – Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. (10)
 - 1. Note the sequence: seek – do – teach
- F. Ezra traveled to Jerusalem 14 years before Neheimah (467 B.C.) on a five month journey (8-9)
- G. With him he took people, priests, Levites, singers, porters, and Nethinins (temple servants)

IV. THE LETTER FROM KING ARTAXERXES FOR EZRA – EZRA 7:11-26

- A. The letter is address to Ezra from the king (12)
- B. The decree – “All they of the people of Israel” are allowed to go up with Ezra (13)
- C. Ezra is sent to inquire of the condition of Jerusalem and Judah (14)
- D. He is given silver and gold by the king, and the people - to be used for the temple (15-16)
- E. He is to buy animals for offerings (17)
- F. Leftover money can be spent any way Ezra sees fit (18)
- G. The vessels of service are being sent with him (19)
- H. Anything else he needs can be bought using the king’s money (20)
- I. He establishes generous limits (21-22)
- J. He declares that all should be done diligently, to avoid the wrath of God against him (23)
- K. They are declared to be toll and tax exempt (24)
- L. Ezra is authorized to appoint magistrates and judges (25)
- M. Finally, penalty is prescribed for disobedience to the king’s decree (26)

Roger Williams, who founded Rhode Islane, wrote a book entitled *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution* which uses Artaxerxes as one evidence that there should be a separate civil and religious order where the state and church are separate, and where all denominations are allowed.

V. CONCLUSION – EZRA 7:27-28

- A. Ezra gives God the glory for working in the king’s heart (27)
- B. His goal is to beautify the house of the LORD (27)
- C. Ezra obtained strength, favor, and guidance from God – he says, “as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me.”
 - 1. [the LORD] hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me. (28)
- D. Is the hand of your God upon you?

Ezra 8:15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days . . . 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. (Ezra 8:22)

I. THE PEOPLE THAT WENT UP FROM BABYLON (Ezra 8:1-14)

- A. The first fourteen verses of chapter 8 provide a list of those who traveled with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem. Names and numbers are given. Males are counted, but surely there were others who went along (i.e. families).
- B. The “sons of” about fifteen different men are named, by their family name
- C. One thousand four hundred and seventy six anonymous males went, along with just under twenty men whose names are given. But, no Levites are in this number.
- D. The names are often unknown elsewhere in the Bible, but some are repeated in Ezra and elsewhere, and some are names that are impossible to trace because other men have the same name. But, God knows each of these men by name and by heart.
- E. Suffice it to say that about 1,500 men and male children went with Ezra, and we do not know how many women and young girls would have also gone along. We know there were “little ones” because of Ezra 8:21.

II. THE GATHERING AT THE RIVER AND SEARCH FOR LEVITES (Ezra 8:15-20)

- A. The purpose of the journey was to improve (beautify) the temple, and it was important for the Levites – the priests – to be part of that work. Only they were qualified for some duties, and it was their job to attend to the temple on a daily basis.
- B. But, when the company paused at the river (which was probably somewhere near the starting point of their journey) they found no Levites among them. (15)
 - 1. The place called “Ahava” is only mentioned in Ezra 8.
 - 2. Ahava means, “I shall subsist” but we do not know where this place is located.
- C. Camp was set up (tents), three days rest were taken, the people were observed, and it was discovered that no sons of Levi were present. (15)
- D. Ezra assembled a council of eleven wise men, three of which had the same name (Elnathan). (16)
- E. These men were “chief men” (authorities) and “men of understanding” – good counselors. (16)
- F. The council was sent back to Iddo (there was a man named Iddo who was Zechariah’s grandfather) with the task of bringing ministers for the house of God (17).
- G. Only because of God’s blessing, the Levite named Sherebiah and his sons and eighteen brethren decided to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem (18) along with Hashabiah, Jeshaiiah, and twenty others also agreed to go (19) – a total of about forty or more men, and 220 Nethinims (there are servants in the temple).
 - 1. Sometimes, people need a bit of prodding before they will agree to do what God has called them to do.
 - 2. And, it was only because God blessed that these 260 or more men were agreeable.

III. THE FASTING AND PRAYER FOR GOD’S RIGHT WAY (Ezra 8:21-23)

- A. After the company is completely gathered, the next thing to do was to prepare for the journey by humbling themselves before God in fasting and prayer (21)
 - 1. Fasting – God has the right to tell us what to do; even when we can or cannot eat.
 - 2. Fasting – Everything we do, even partaking of food, is second in importance to God
 - 3. Nobody moved from the place until God was in control and His will was known.
- B. They were seeking THE RIGHT WAY (21)
- C. Their need was safety from enemies who would rob and hurt them. But they were more worried about making sure the king knew that God could protect them, and that they believed that God would protect them. They wanted to be sure that they were safe. (22)
 - 1. Ezra 8:22 The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.
- D. God heard and answered their prayer and gave them wisdom about what to do (23)

IV. THE DIVISION AND SAFEKEEPING OF THE TREASURE (Ezra 8:24-30)

- A. The Lord gave wisdom, and Ezra divided the treasure among twelve Priests so that no one man would have all of it, and that they could go twelve different directions if attacked. (24-25)
- B. An account was written of how much each of them were given, and they were given the responsibility of returning that amount when they arrived in Jerusalem.
- C. Their task was – to watch – to keep (guard) – to return what they were given (29)
- D. They accepted the responsibility (30)

V. THE JOURNEY AND ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM (31-36)

- A. They departed on Month One, Day 12 (31)
- B. For the third time, they mention that the hand of their God was upon them (31)
- C. They were delivered from the enemy and from robbers (31)
- D. They arrived, and rested three days (32)
- E. On day four, the treasure was delivered to the house of the LORD (33) – it was all weighed and written down (accounting).
- F. Then they offered an offering to the Lord (35)
 - 1. Twelve bullocks - one per tribe
 - 2. Ninety six rams - eight per tribe
 - 3. Seventy seven lambs - seven each for only eleven tribes, or another unknown significant number
 - 4. Twelve he goats - one per tribe
- G. Finally, they delivered the king’s letter and “furthered” the people and the temple (36)

VI. QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Approximately how many miles did Ezra and his company need to travel in order to return to Jerusalem?

Ezra 9:6 O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

I. HERE WE GO AGAIN (Ezra 9:1-2)

- A. The history of Israel prior to Ezra chapter 9 is marred by one recurring event - Israel's wilful disobedience towards God's commands. This is the reason that they had been taken captive, and were currently subjected to the authority of Persia.
- B. To make matters worse, the LORD had granted them great mercy by causing the King of Persia to show them favor and facilitate the rebuilding and beautification of the new temple. Now, they have started back down the same road as before, and are falling back into sin.
- C. Specifically, Ezra learns that, "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." (Ezra 9:1-2)
 - 1. They have not separated themselves from the godless people around them
 - 2. They are doing the same things as those people
 - 3. They have married the sons and daughters of those people - even the rulers are guilty
- D. God had specifically prohibited the children of Israel from marrying outsiders
 - 1. Ex 34:16 And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods.
 - 2. De 7:3-4 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.

II. THE AFFECT OF THE SIN OF THE PEOPLE UPON EZRA (Ezra 9:3-5)

- A. One amazing fact is that this was not Ezra's sin, and he personally was not guilty. Still, he is incredibly affected by it and suffers as if it were his own. This fact reveals Ezra's heart - he cared for Israel and when they suffered, he suffered.
- B. He exhibits his grief in a Hebrew way - tearing his clothing and plucking his hair. (3) Then, he sat down in astonishment. "How could this be?"
- C. Others who "tremble at God's word" gathered around him, and they sat together silently until evening. (4) These were men who truly feared God and feared disobeying Him.
 - 1. Isa 66:2 For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.
 - 2. Isaiah 66:5 Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.
- D. Next came heartfelt prayer by Ezra (5). Kneeling with hands out he humbles himself before the LORD (5)

III. EZRA'S SEVEN PART PRAYER (Ezra 9:6-15)

- A. **Humility:** He openly acknowledges that it is a shameful thing that has been done (the sin)

- and that he does not deserve God's help (6)
- B. **Accountability:** He declares that he is included ("our iniquities") and that the sin is incredibly horrible (grown up to heaven) (6)
 - C. **Admission:** He openly realizes that their situation is their own fault, caused by sins in the past (7)
 - D. **Gratitude:** He gives the LORD credit for His goodness and grace in recent days as they have been allowed to return to Jerusalem. (8-9)
 - 1. The guilty are part of a remnant - most did not or would not return
 - 2. "A nail in this holy place" – They had something permanent
 - 3. "Lighten our eyes . . . reviving in bondage" – God had encouraged them and they had taken it for granted and sinned once again.
 - E. **Confession:** He freely acknowledges that they have sinned (10) and that it was not out of ignorance but that they knew what God's command meant (11-12)
 - 1. Joshua had warned them also, "Josh 23:12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: 13 Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you."
 - F. **Submission:** He realizes that they should have been punished much worse (13) and that there is no excuse for what they have now done (14) and that they deserve to be punished for this sin also.
 - G. **Dismay:** He is ready for whatever God chooses to do, and admits that they cannot expect anything good from God while the sin is present (15). They cannot "stand" before God, but kneel before Him waiting for mercy and guidance.

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. What is our personal attitude towards sin? Do we expect God to overlook our sin and to come to the rescue any time we have a need, even though we refuse to walk with Him?
- B. Are we like the people of Israel before Ezra's arrival? Do we ignore God's word and walk about in our ignorance with no care about anything but our own desires?
- C. Could we accept the fact that God may become angry with us? If He were, how would we respond?
- D. Do we have the heart that Ezra had, where we are willing to become part of those who are guilty, even though we ourselves did nothing wrong? Or, are we quick to stand back and let God judge the wicked and to think that it does not matter as long as we escape?

V. QUESTION OF THE WEEK, AND ANSWER FOR LAST WEEK

- A. Answer to last week's question: The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem is approximately 900 miles by road
- B. Question for Next Week: At the time when Ezra prayed in Chapter 9, had the wall (i.e. Nehemiah's wall) around Jerusalem been rebuilt yet? How do you know?

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

I. HOW INTERESTING!

- A. The last chapter of Ezra may seem anti-climactic to some, since it may appear that nothing big has been accomplished.
 - 1. Nothing is being built
 - 2. No enemies are being defeated
 - 3. No visible signs of progress are evident (i.e. no monuments, etc.)
- B. But, the events in Ezra 10 are like nothing that has happened in Israel for a very long time prior.
 - 1. For the first time in a long time, the people deal with sin instead of holding onto it
 - 2. Other than the response to Haggai and Zechariah, it had been hundreds of years since the people had obeyed God by repenting of their sin
- C. The end of Ezra is a milestone. For once, the people truly turn from their sin and obey God.

II. THE PEOPLE RESPOND TO EZRA'S PRAYER (10:1-5)

- A. Israel assembles before Ezra, weeping, after his prayer (1)
- B. They confess their sins (2) but they see "hope"
- C. They intend to make a covenant with God to PUT AWAY their sin (3)
- D. They give Ezra absolute discretion to carry out the plan (4)
- E. Ezra gets them to swear that they will follow his lead (5)

III. EZRA AND THE PEOPLE DEAL WITH SIN IN THE CAMP (6-14)

- A. Ezra begins by going to the priest (6)
- B. It is proclaimed that all Israel must gather together in Jerusalem (7)
 - 1. The penalty for not appearing within three days is forfeiture of all property and removal from the congregation (8)
- C. On the 20th day of the 9th month, all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem (9)
 - 1. They sat in the street before the house of God
 - 2. It was raining heavily
- D. The sin is publicly named by Ezra (10)
 - 1. It was a public sin and must be dealt with publicly
 - 2. This declaration was the opportunity for the people to confess their guilt (11)
 - 3. AND, DO HIS PLEASURE – the solution is to stop the sin and obey God (11)
- E. The people confess (agree) that they have sinned (12) and to do what Ezra has said
- F. The complexity of the situation and the discomfort of the rain require more time (13)
- G. A plan is made to have appointed times for the leaders to meet and deal with the sin (14)
- H. The realization is that they must do this to avoid the "fierce wrath of God" (14)

IV. SIN IS REMOVED FROM THE CAMP (15-19)

- A. Jonathan and Jahaziah are given charge of the matter, with two Levites to help them (15)
- B. Only about ten days lapse before the meetings with the offending men are started (16)
- C. Within about 40 more days, the men had all been judged (17)
- D. Some people were particularly accountable because they should have known better (18)

- E. And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass. (19)
 - 1. Agreement to right the wrong
 - 2. Confession of guilt
 - 3. Sacrifice for sin

V. A FINAL LIST OF NAMES (20-44)

- A. These are the names of those who had sinned, but also of those who had repented
- B. The solution was not simple because some had children by these wives (44)

VI. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

- A. There are a number of INCORRECT ways that people tend to deal with their sin
 - 1. Some simply accept the sin and continue to do it
 - 2. Some grieve and feel sorry over it and then continue to do it
 - 3. Some give up part of it and compromise, holding on to the rest of it
 - 4. Some give it up for a while, and then go back to it
 - 5. Some pretend that it is not sin at all
 - 6. Some pretend that God doesn't care about their sin
- B. Ezra chapter 10 is a model of how God would have us to confront sin
 - 1. Call the sin what it is – it is not a “mistake” or “accident” it is wilful disobedience.
 - 2. We must confess that we are guilty of the sin
 - 3. We must forsake all of the sin in its entirety, not partially.
 - 4. We must make things right that our sin has made wrong
 - 5. If the sin was public, the confession should also be public
 - 6. Confession without forsaking of sin is not a solution

VII. ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

- A. Question: At the time when Ezra prayed in Chapter 9, had the wall (i.e. Nehemiah's wall) around Jerusalem been rebuilt yet? How do you know?
- B. Answer:
 - 1. Read Ezra 7:7 to find out what year Ezra went up from Babylon. This is the same year that the sin was discovered in the camp in chapter 9, and dealt with in chapter 10. The _____ year of Artaxerxes
 - 2. The wall was built as of Nehemiah 6:1, following Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem which was after the _____ year of Artaxerxes found in Neh 2:1
 - 3. So, it was _____ years before/after Ezra's journey that Nehemiah went to Jerusalem.
 - 4. Unless we are talking about two different kings named “Artaxerxes” . . .