

Church of God Sunday School

EZRA TAUGHT GOD'S LAW

Ezra 1:1-11; 7:1 – 10:44; Nehemiah 8:1-9

For many years God's people (the Jews) had lived in Babylon as captives. When Cyrus the Great of Persia became king, one of the first things he did was allow many of the Jews to return to their homeland. Cyrus also commanded that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt. The sacred vessels that had been taken from the temple by King Nebuchadnezzar and placed in the treasure house of his god were given to the king's treasurer. These were returned to the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

Many, many years passed, and Artaxerxes (*ahr-tuh-ZUHRK-seez*) became the king of Persia. There was a Jew named Ezra who had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it." Ezra was a "scribe in the law of Moses" (someone who was highly trained in the Law of Moses). Not only did Ezra desire to obey the Law, but he wanted to teach it to God's people.

King Artaxerxes granted Ezra's request and sent him to Jerusalem with a letter that stated Ezra was to appoint judges and magistrates over the Jewish people. Those who did not know the laws of God were to be taught. Also, silver and gold and treasures from Artaxerxes' own treasure house were given "for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem."

Ezra was so thankful! He said, "Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem."

For the journey to Jerusalem, Ezra was joined by more than 1700 people (including priests and Levites). Before they left, Ezra proclaimed a time of fasting and prayer to ask God for a safe journey. (He was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to protect them, for Ezra had told the king that God would take care of them.)

God heard their prayer and "delivered [them] from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way."

Ezra and the other Jews reached Jerusalem. After resting for three days, they brought all the treasures from King Artaxerxes to the temple. They offered burnt offerings to the Lord.

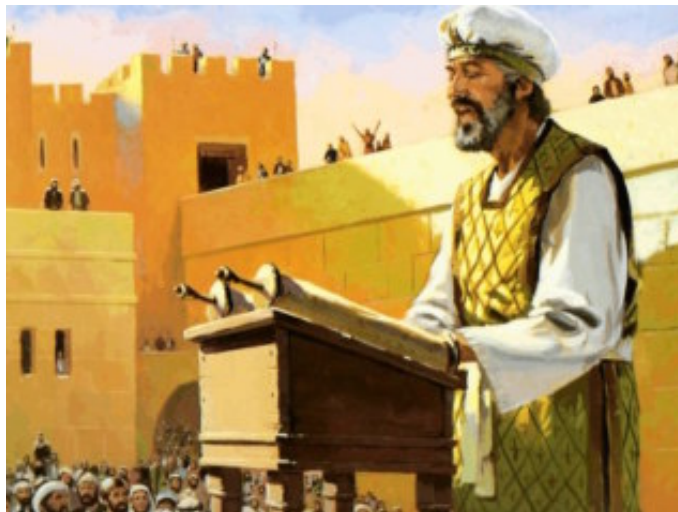
Soon Ezra began to see the sad spiritual condition Israel was in. They had failed to obey God's laws. One law they had broken was marrying wives from heathen nations. (God had forbidden this because He knew the heathen wives would turn the hearts of His people away from Him and to idols; Deuteronomy 7:1-5.)

Ezra was so upset by this news that he tore his clothes, tore out hair from his head and beard, and then sat down astonished until time for the evening sacrifice. When Ezra arose for the evening sacrifice, he fell on his knees and spread out his hands before God. Ezra pleaded with God to have mercy for he knew God would not bless over sin.

While Ezra was weeping and praying before the house of God, people began to gather around him.

These people also began weeping for they realized they had sinned against God. A proclamation was made, commanding all the "children of the captivity" to come to Jerusalem "within three days." Anyone who did not come would lose his property and would be separated from the other Jews.

At the end of three days, the people gathered together, "trembling because of this matter, and for the great [heavy] rain." At the request of the people, Ezra read from the "book of the law of Moses." When Ezra opened the book, "all the people stood up." For about six hours the people stood to hear the Law read and explained. Great care was taken to make sure that the



people understood the Law.

It was decided that all those who had disobeyed God's Law by marrying heathen wives would appear before the rulers and be judged "until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us."

This was such a serious matter that it was necessary that those heathen wives be "put away" (divorced). This might seem harsh, but God knew that heathen wives who worshiped idols would influence their

husbands and children away from God. So great was the desire of the people to please the Lord, they promised to do this and "offered a ram of the flock for their trespass."

MEMORY VERSE:

"Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it"
—Ezra 7:10

Word Search

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- EZRA
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- TREASURES
- JUDGES
- BABYLON
- SCRIBE
- SACRIFICE



Who Am I?



"I took the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem and put them in the treasure house of my god."



I was the king of Persia who sent many Jews back to their homeland.



"I wrote the Law that Ezra read to the people."



"I was a scribe who wanted to teach God's Law to the people."



"I gave Ezra a letter and treasures for the temple."
