**Ezra Commentary**

**Ezra Chapter 1**

Ezr 1:1

**“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia.”** Ezra 1:1-3a is almost identical to the last two verses of 2 Chronicles. From a chronological point of view, Ezra takes over where Chronicles stops.

This first year of Cyrus refers to his first year reigning over Babylon, which he conquered in 538 BC, not his first year reigning in Persia (559 BC). Babylon was captured in October, 539 BC (Dan. 5:30-31), but Cyrus did not get there and start to reign over Babylon until March of 538 BC. Quite a lot is known about Cyrus from the Persian records. Also, “Cyrus” is an actual name, not a title, whereas in other parts of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, the “names” Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus are actually titles, not proper names.

**“by the mouth of Jeremiah.”** Jeremiah had prophesied that the Babylonian Captivity would be 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10), so Yahweh worked behind the scenes to make sure that prophecy came to pass.

Ezr 1:2

**“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says.”** This decree in Ezra 1:2-4 is written in Hebrew, so that the people returning from the Babylonian Captivity could read it, or read it to anyone who challenged what they were doing. In contrast, the copy of the decree that was kept at Ecbatana in the Persian records was written in Aramaic (Ezra 6:3-5). Ezra is one of the books that has a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, for example, Daniel does also. This kind of detail attests to the historical accuracy of the Bible. If someone wrote the whole book of Ezra at a much later date, as some Bible detractors assert, it is highly unlikely that he would go to the trouble to write some parts of the book in Hebrew and some in Aramaic.

**“house.”** The Temple was called the “house” or “house of God.” This is hard to see in many English versions because translators use “temple” to make the verse easier for the average reader. But then inconsistency makes some verses in the Bible confusing. For example, The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) happened in the Temple, the “house,” but tradition says the upper room (Acts 2:2).

Ezr 1:3

**“Among you of all his people.”** This proclamation was sent out to all the people, so the meaning is, “among you [in Persia] of all his people [the Jews].” We can thus understand it as, “Whoever among the people in Persia is a Jew.”

**“God.”** Since this proclamation came from Cyrus the Persian who worshiped gods besides the God we know as the true God, a more accurate rendering of “God” in this verse would almost certainly be “god,” not God, especially in light of the last phrase, “he is the God [god] who is in Jerusalem.” It was common at that time to believe that there were different gods in different locations, and since many of the so-called “gods” were actually demons, that was true to a large extent. Of course, that was not true of the true God, but Cyrus would likely not have thought that way, as this phrase indicates (see 1 Kings 20:28).

Ezr 1:4

**“and let each one who has survived.”** This is speaking about surviving the Babylonian Captivity and deportation from Judah, and also probably the war between Persia and Babylon when Persia conquered Babylon. **“be assisted by the men of his place.”** There are two groups of people in this verse. The people who survived the Captivity who were going to make the journey back to Judea, and the people where he lived (“the men of his place”) who were to help out those who were going back to Judea by giving them money (silver and gold) and goods for the journey.

Although the Jews were allowed to return from the Babylonian Captivity to Judea, more of them stayed in Babylon (now conquered by Persia) than returned. After the Jews were carried away to Babylon there were always more Jews outside of Israel than in it, and that is still true today. The Jews in foreign countries are known as the “diaspora.” In 1 Peter 1:1, they are called the people “of the Dispersion.”

Ezr 1:5

**“the heads of fathers’ *houses*.”** The Hebrew text seems cut off only because everyone at the time would have known what “the heads of the fathers’” meant, which was the “heads,” or leaders, of the ancestral houses in Israel. The ancestral house was the most basic organizational unit in ancient Israel. We actually see this on a broader scale in the twelve tribes of Israel. Each tribe, for example, Judah, Benjamin, Dan, and Issachar, was descended from and named after one person, one patriarch, who himself was descended from “Israel,” that is, Jacob. As such, the “twelve tribes of Israel” are the twelve tribes descended from Jacob, and that family identity was so strong that people kept it for centuries. For example, Paul, who lived over 1,500 years after Benjamin, knew that his personal ancestor was Benjamin (Phil. 3:5).

By the time of the return from Babylon, however, over 1,000 years after Jacob lived, there were more than the original twelve ancestral houses (and besides, only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were carried en masse to Babylon; the other ten tribes had been conquered and scattered by Assyria; 2 Kings 17:5). Each “house” was more like a clan or tribe than what we today would think of as a “house” with an elder father figure with grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc. The biblical “house” (household) was a very extended group, and the patriarchs of these “houses” played a very important role in the government of the people, as we see here in Ezra.

Ezr 1:6

**“All those who were around them.”** We learn from history that more of the Judeans who had been carried captive to Babylon stayed in Babylon than returned to Judah. The Judeans had lived for some two generations in Babylon, and many had made it their home. But they helped the Judeans who did return to Judah by giving them things they needed.

Ezr 1:8

**“governor.”** The Hebrew is *nasi* (#05387 נָשִׂיא), “one lifted up, chief, prince, captain, leader.” A more literal translation would be “Sheshbazzar, the one lifted up of Judah.” But in this context of the Persian Empire, it refers to the position of governor.

Ezr 1:11

**“All the vessels of gold and of silver totaled 5,400.”** This is more than the number of listed items; the list is just a partial list.

**“Sheshbazzar.”** Sheshbazzar was the first governor of Judah after the return from the Babylonian Captivity (Ezra 1:8). He was succeeded at some point by Zerubbabel (Hag. 1:1).

**Ezra Chapter 2**

Ezr 2:1

**“people of the province.”** The Hebrew reads in its common idiom: “the sons of the province.” The “province” is almost certainly Judah (cf. Ezra 5:8).

**“came up.”** Jerusalem is always considered “up” because it was where God lived.

**“everyone *returning* to his city.”** This is a general statement. There were exceptions for various reasons, but the statement is generally true.

Ezr 2:2

**“Jeshua.”** The High Priest (see commentary on Zech. 3:1, “Joshua”).

Ezr 2:21

**“Bethlehem.”** In this list in Ezra, some of the names listed are people, and some are towns. Furthermore, some of the names are disputed. For example, in Ezra 2:20, “Gibbar” could be a man’s name, or like in Nehemiah, it might mean the town of Gibeon. The scholars are divided on the issue.

Ezr 2:22

**“men.”** The Hebrew text in Ezra 2:22, 23, 27 and 2:28 reads *enosh* (#0582 אֱנוֹשׁ), “men,” referring to mortal men, or “men” in a weaker, more frail, or more sinful sense than other words for “man” or “men.” For example, *gibbor* (#01368 גִּבּוֹר) refers to a mighty man, strong man, or warrior. The rest of the list reads *ben*, “son,” but there does not seem to be an immediately apparent reason for the change from *ben* (“son”) to *enosh* in these four verses.

Ezr 2:36

**“the priests.”** 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 recounts how King David, along with other well-known men, organized the priests, the sons of Aaron, into 24 divisions. The eighth division was the division or “course” of Abijah (1 Chron. 24:10). Each division was on duty twice a year for a one-week period, and also served at the three major feasts of the year: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. After the Babylonian Captivity, only four divisions returned (Ezra 2:36-39). So these four were divided into 24 divisions, given the names of the original 24, and then continued on with their duties according to the traditional timing.

[For more on the priestly divisions and that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist was of the eighth division, the division of “Abijah,” see commentary on Luke 1:5.]

Ezr 2:43

**“The Temple servants.”** These people, the “Nethinim” in Hebrew (the word “Nethinim” is untranslated in some English versions (cf. ASV, BBE, RV; Geneva Bible, KJV, YLT), were slaves that were serving the Levites in the work of the Temple. David and his officials had established that these certain men would serve the Levites (Ezra 8:20), and their descendants were still serving the Levites hundreds of years after David.

Ezr 2:58

**“Temple servants.”** See commentary on Ezra 2:43.

Ezr 2:59

**“Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub….”** ​These are towns in Mesopotamia to which some Judean captives were taken, but for some unstated reason, they had lost their proof of ancestry. It is much more likely that in the Captivity they lost their ancestral connections than that they were foreigners or slaves who were somehow trying to pretend they were from Israel; these people were almost certainly Israelites. This would have been a huge disappointment and tragedy for these people, to be carried out of their homeland by Babylon and then not be able to prove who they were when they returned home some 70 years later, because at least at first it would have meant being excluded from the religious life of Israel.

However, in an even worse state were the priests who could not prove their genealogy (Ezra 2:61-63). For a priest to not be able to prove his ancestral genealogy meant a complete loss of priestly privileges, which meant that they were not allowed to serve in the Temple, something they no doubt had looked forward to. But it also meant they were not allowed to live off the sacrifices and offerings of the people, so they would have had to figure out how to live in Israel and what to do to support themselves. That could have been very difficult because their ancestral family would not have owned any land to which they could return and make a living.

Life is full of unexpected disappointments, hardships, and tragedies, Yet in keeping with the fact that we live in a fallen world and life can be extremely difficult, the Bible does not dwell on these people or their eventual fate, which we do not know, but simply states the situation. There is a great lesson in this for us: it is pointless and even harmful to dwell on the unexpected evils that happen in life. The godly thing to do in a bad situation is to accept it and figure out how to best move forward. The evil in life is a major reason that each person should have a clear hope of the future life. This world is evil and being upset or angry about that does not change the world but only hurts us. Having a vision of the wonderful future life that believers will have can keep us from becoming angry and bitter due to life’s evils, and enables us to endure through those evils in a godly way.

[For more on our future life on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

Ezr 2:63

**“the Urim and Thummim.”** These were stones in the breastplate of the High Priest by which the judgment of God was determined.

[For more on the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

Ezr 2:65

**“their male slaves and their female slaves.”** There were 42,360 Jews who returned from Babylon, and 7,337 slaves, so there was a large ratio of slaves to free Jews, roughly one to six. That so many slaves opted to return to Judea with their owners, when it is almost certain they would not have had to, shows that in general, the Jews had very good relationships with their slaves.

**Ezra Chapter 3**

Ezr 3:1

**“the seventh month.”** The fact that the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month shows that at that time they were using a Nisan-based calendar like the Babylonians and like God had instructed them to do at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 12:2).

**“the children of Israel were in the cities.”** The Judeans who returned to Judah mostly returned to their ancestral homes in the various towns of Judah.

**“as one man.”** This is an idiom meaning that the people were unified.

Ezr 3:2

**“Jeshua.”** The High Priest (see commentary on Zech. 3:1, “Joshua”).

Ezr 3:3

**“and offered burnt offerings on it.”** The Jews started offering sacrifices on the altar long before the Temple was finished. It is always nice to do God’s work in exactly the way He prescribes, but sometimes, such as here, the right thing to do is to do the best you can even if things are not exactly as they should be.

Ezr 3:4

**“Feast of Booths.”** This is one of the three annual feasts that the Israelites were to celebrate in Jerusalem each year. It is traditionally referred to as the “Feast of Tabernacles,” but “Booths” is more accurate (Exod. 23:14-17; Lev. 23:34-43).

Ezr 3:7

**“Joppa.”** Until Herod the Great built Caesarea into a port city and the finest deep water port on the Mediterranean, Joppa was the only port Israel had on the Mediterranean Sea. Solomon had the cedar logs for the Temple brought from Lebanon to Jerusalem via the port of Joppa (2 Chron. 2:16) and the same thing happened here in Ezra’s time.

Ezr 3:8

**“the house of Yahweh.”** The house of Yahweh is the Temple. It was generally believed that the gods lived in the temples, so the temples were believed to really be “the house” of the god.

**Ezra Chapter 4**

Ezr 4:1

**“Judah and Benjamin.”** The two tribes that made up the nation of “Judah.” After Solomon died, the United Kingdom of Israel, which was twelve tribes, was split into “Israel,” which had ten tribes, and “Judah,” which was composed of Benjamin and Judah. Israel was carried away captive by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:1-23). Years later, Judah was deported by the Babylonians but was allowed to return to their homeland by the Persians. Nevertheless, history shows us that the majority of Judeans stayed where they had settled and remained in Mesopotamia.

**“exiles *who had returned*.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “the sons of the exile,” that is, those who had been taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar but had now returned to Judah.

Ezr 4:2

**“we seek your God just as you do.”** This was not true. Although the Samaritans worshiped Yahweh, they also worshiped other gods (2 Kings 17:29-33), and they also did not recognize Jerusalem as the one place on earth that God wanted his temple, so they worshiped their gods on the mountains of Samaria, eventually primarily Mount Gerizim.

**“Esar-haddon.”** A son of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who brought those particular people to Israel. A number of successive kings imported people conquered by the Assyrians into Israel. It was not just one king who did that.

**“who brought us up here.”** When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they deported the Israelites and brought in people from other nations they had conquered and repopulated Israel (2 Kings 17:24-41). These pagans began to worship Yahweh but also continued to worship their own gods, thus creating a kind of perverted worship of Yahweh that persisted until the time of Christ. These imported people became the Samaritans of the New Testament, and the fact they were foreigners and worshiped Yahweh in a perverted way explains why they were so hated by the Jews of Christ’s time.

Ezr 4:3

**“nothing in common.”** More literally, it is “not to you and to us.” In other words, we cannot work together on this.

Ezr 4:5

**“bribed officials.”** Many translations say “bribed counselors” or something similar. The hiring of people to frustrate the plans of the Jews would include bribing counselors, but they likely hired other advisors as well.

Ezr 4:10

**“Osnappar.”** This is apparently the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.

**“brought over.”** This is a reference to the fact that the people the Assyrians brought into Israel were from beyond the Euphrates River, and had to be “brought over” it to Israel. The prophet Ahijah foretold that Israel would be carried away captive and scattered “beyond the river” (1 Kings 14:15).

Ezr 4:12

**“Now.”** This “now” is pulled into this verse from the end of verse 11.

**“rebuilding.”** The Hebrew text just says “building,” but in this context it means rebuilding.

Ezr 4:13

**“they will not pay tribute.”** Because this statement is written in an official letter to the king of Persia, we can clearly classify it as a lie, not just an exaggeration or miss statement. Lying has always been, and is still today, one of the great tactics of the Devil and his people. Jesus called the Devil, the father of lies (John 8:44). Sadly, lying in order to gain an advantage often works in this life, but be assured it will be punished on Judgment Day.

Ezr 4:14

**“eat the salt of the *king’s* palace.”** The men writing this letter say they are doing so because of the custom of the salt covenant, which binds them to the king. However, this too, was a lie, just like they lied before (Ezra 4:13).

Ezra 4:1-2 shows that those people who now saw the Jews as a threat were more than happy to work with them and even to join them in the work they wanted to do. It was only when they were rejected by the Jews that they became offended and lied about the Jews. This kind of behavior is so common in things like politics and religion, that these verses could've been written today.

[For more on the salt covenant, see commentary on 2 Chron. 13:5.]

Ezr 4:16

**“beyond the River.”** That is, on the other side of the Euphrates River. This is an exaggeration to incite the king of Persia, but one the king might have considered an actual possibility. There is very little chance that little Judah would be able to conquer the Middle East north to the Euphrates. They did not even control that territory under Solomon.

Ezr 4:18

**“translated and read.”** The Hebrew is literally, “plainly read before me,” but in order to “plainly” read the letter to the king of Persia, it would have had to have been translated, so that is why the REV uses “translated.”

**Ezra Chapter 5**

Ezr 5:1

**“Zechariah the son of Iddo.”** Zechariah was actually the grandson of Iddo and son of Berechiah (see commentary on Zech. 1:1).

**“the name of God which was upon them.”** The Jews were God’s people and bore His name. The name of Yahweh was upon them.

Ezr 5:4

**“What are the names.”** This is the reading of a Hebrew manuscript, the Septuagint and the Syriac, and it fits the context, especially Ezra 5:10, better than the reading of most Hebrew manuscripts.

**Ezra Chapter 6**

Ezr 6:2

**“the province of Media.”** At this time, Media was a province of the Persian Empire. For more on the country of Media, see commentary on Jeremiah 51:11.

Ezr 6:8

**“the River.”** That is, the Euphrates. “Beyond the River” is written from the geographical perspective of Persia and refers to south of the Euphrates.

Ezr 6:9

**“salt.”** Offerings and sacrifices were offered with salt (Lev. 2:13).

**“wine.”** The wine was used for the drink offerings (e.g., Lev 23:13).

**“oil.”** Oil, in the biblical culture it was olive oil, was used in many of the grain offerings (e.g., Lev. 2:1-7).

Ezr 6:14

**“Zechariah the son of Iddo.”** Zechariah was actually the grandson of Iddo and son of Berechiah (see commentary on Zech. 1:1).

Ezr 6:15

**”Adar.”** The month of Adar is the 12th and last month of the Jewish year. Because the Jewish month is a lunar month, and thus usually only 29 days, the average lunar year is only 354 days, not 365 days. This means that about every three years the Jewish calendar is a month shorter than our modern solar year. Over time, feasts like the feast of unleavened bread would not have first ripe grain available, because the grain would not have ripened yet. The Jews’ solution to that problem was that when necessary, they simply added another month, Adar II, to the calendar to bring the year in line with the growing season, The month of Adar usually falls in the early spring, usually around March.

Ezr 6:16

**“the children of the captivity.”** These are the people who were carried captive to Babylon in the Babylonian Captivity, and had recently been allowed to go back to Judah. So at this time, these previously captive people were in Judah.

Ezr 6:19

**“exiles *who had returned*.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “the sons of the exile,” that is, those who had been taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar but had now returned to Judah.

Ezr 6:20

**“Passover lamb.”** The word “lamb” does not occur in the Hebrew text, but the text implies an animal. Technically, it could be a lamb or a goat (Exod. 12:5). The term “Passover lamb” has become a tradition.

Ezr 6:22

**“the king of Assyria.”** The king of Persia was the “king of Assyria” at the time of Ezra by virtue of the huge size of the Persian Empire, but that is not likely why the king of Persia is called “the king of Assyria” in this verse, which, on the surface seems anachronistic since Assyria fell to the Babylonians in 612 BC. The expression is likely to contrast the kings of Assyria, who were hostile to Israel and Judah, with this king of Persia who was now ruler over the territory of Assyria and yet supportive of Israel. We must also remember that the people of the nation of Israel, the ten northern tribes who had been carried away to Assyria, were forcibly taken to Assyria, and perhaps some of them took advantage of this opportunity to return to Israel and Judah, and the text is subtly making that point.

**Ezra Chapter 7**

Ezr 7:7

**“Temple servants.”** These people, the “Nethinim” in Hebrew, were slaves that were serving the Levites in the work of the Temple. See commentary on Ezra 2:43.

Ezr 7:8

**“And he came.”** Referring to Ezra.

Ezr 7:9

**“on the first day of the fifth month he arrived.”** So the trip from Persia to Jerusalem took Ezra exactly four lunar months. This would be very close to the amount of time it would have taken the Magi to go from Persia to Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1).

Ezr 7:11

**“of the matters pertaining to the commandments of Yahweh.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “even a scribe of the words of the commandments of Yahweh,” but the word “words,” *dabar*, is commonly used of “matters” or “things,” and the genitive phrase “of the commandments” in this context means “pertaining to the commandments” or “concerning the commandments.”

Ezr 7:14

**“in your hand.”** Here used as an idiom meaning “in your possession.”

Ezr 7:23

**“for why should there be wrath.”** The ancient Persians were polytheists, but they believed that if the gods were not properly appeased they would be angered and would cause problems on earth. In effect, that was true but not for the reasons they thought. If people do not obey God, He cannot effectively protect them from attacks by the Adversary.

Ezr 7:25

**“that you have.”** The Hebrew idiom is “that is in your hand,” but the meaning is “that you have.” The idiom is unclear enough in English that the REV has the meaning of the idiom in the text.

Ezr 7:27

**“Blessed be Yahweh.”** The speaker abruptly and without introduction switches from the Persian king to Ezra. The reader is supposed to notice the change and understand the text. This kind of abrupt switch occurs quite frequently in the Bible and in certain contexts can be quite confusing.

**“the house of Yahweh.”** The Temple.

Ezr 7:28

**“from Israel.”** The men were Israelites of the Captivity and were in Persia, and Ezra gathered them to go with him back to the land of Israel. This verse is not saying the men Ezra gathered were already back in the land of Israel.

**Ezra Chapter 8**

Ezr 8:1

**“with me.”** That is, with Ezra.

Ezr 8:3

**“males”** The Hebrew text uses a word in this list that means “males,” and does not include females.

Ezr 8:17

**“Temple servants.”** These people, the “Nethinim” in Hebrew, were slaves that were serving the Levites in the work of the Temple. See commentary on Ezra 2:43.

Ezr 8:20

**“the Temple servants.”** These people, the “Nethinim” in Hebrew, were slaves that were serving the Levites in the work of the Temple. See commentary on Ezra 2:43.

Ezr 8:21

**“I proclaimed a fast.”** The fasting and humbling of oneself would have included prayers for God’s help and confession of one’s sins—and anything else people could think of doing that would remove their sin and guilt and move God to be favorable to them. It was common for a person to fast in the biblical world as a sign to God that they were serious about behaving in a godly way and that they needed God’s help (cf. Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Chron. 20:3; Joel 1:14).

**“the Ahava Canal.”** The location of the Ahava Canal is unknown, but it was the assembly point of Ezra and the Jews who were returning to Israel.

**“a straight way.”** In this context in Ezra 8:21, a “straight way” (lit. “a straight road”) is a level road without obstructions. Ezra and the people were praying for a prosperous and unobstructed journey.

Ezra saw the great importance of prayer and fasting to solicit God’s help (the fasting and humbling of self would have included prayer, even though it is unstated in the text). Ezra was leading a band of basically defenseless Jews who were carrying great wealth through a territory that had lots of tribes that would have had few qualms about attacking them, killing them, and taking their wealth (and likely the women and children as well). Ezra would have been well aware of the dangers but was too “ashamed” to ask the king for a band of soldiers to protect the caravan. Ezra had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good upon all those who seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all those who forsake him” (Ezra 8:22). If Ezra had asked for soldiers to guard his caravan, what he told the king about the goodness of God would have been seen as just empty speech. Worse, it would have been clear that the Jews did not really trust that their God would protect them, which would reflect upon God Himself, including His faithfulness to His people and His power to help and protect them. The Bible does not say exactly how Ezra knew he had found favor in God’s eyes and would be safe, but God did hear Ezra’s prayers and they traveled safely (Ezra 8:23).

Ezra models behavior that should be a part of every Christian’s life. Too often people start out on journeys without asking for God’s help and protection, but praying for a “straight way,” a smooth road for the tasks we embark on and/or engage in, is a wise thing to do.

Ezr 8:22

**“the enemies.”** The Hebrew word “enemy” is singular, but it is a collective noun; there was more than one enemy.

**Ezra Chapter 9**

Ezr 9:1

**“the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites….”** This list in Ezra would have immediately reminded Ezra of God’s command in Deuteronomy 7:1-4, in which God commands that those nations that inhabited Canaan were to be driven out and that the Israelites were not to intermarry with them, and if they did intermarry then they would be turned away from the God of Israel. Five of the eight pagan nations listed here in Ezra 9:1 are in the list in Deuteronomy 7:1 (the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, and Jebusites), and Ezra adds two pagan nations to the list: the Moabites and Egyptians. Sadly, the Israelites who lived in Israel were living according to the ungodly pagan practices of those nations. No wonder Ezra was stunned and ashamed. Even the leaders and the priests and Levites had shown no concern for the Law of God, but openly disobeyed it. Ezra knew it was because of that kind of willful disobedience that Israel and Judah had been defeated by their enemies, causing incalculable amounts of physical and emotional pain, and he was concerned that the Israelites might now be wiped out completely (Ezra 9:14).

Upon hearing about the sin of the leaders and the people, Ezra’s response was to pray. He sets a good example for us today. Many people, including God’s people, openly thumb their nose at God’s commands today and live the way they want to as if God did not see or care. It is appropriate for God’s people to pray for His mercy to intervene and prevent disasters coming upon the earth because flagrant sin opens doors for the Adversary to act against the earth and all who live on it.

The ancestry of the tribes listed can be traced in the Bible with the exception of the Perizzites. The Perizzites were a tribe of unknown origin in that by the time of Joshua lived in the hill country of Judah and Ephraim. See commentary on Joshua 9:1.

Ezr 9:5

**“humiliation *and fasting*.”** The Hebrew word *taaneth* (#08589 תַּעֲנִית) refers to being humiliated and humbling oneself, in part by fasting. That explains why some English versions have “fasting,” while others place the emphasis on the purpose of the fasting, which is humbling oneself. The REV captures both aspects of the word by using italics.

Ezr 9:7

**“shame of face.”** That is, open shame; shame everyone can see.

Ezr 9:8

**“and to give us a peg in his holy place.”** Ezra here uses an illustration from the culture in which he lived and that would have been clear to the people. Houses, and even tents, had “pegs” in the wall or posts to hang things on that kept things orderly and secure so they would not be kicked around on the floor (and most floors were dirt floors). Ezra refers to a “peg” in his holy place, in the new Temple that they had permission to build.

Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the Temple that Solomon had built, and Israel had been without a house for God for decades, which implied that God could not live among His people. Now it seemed that God would soon once again have a dwelling place among His people, and in the very spot where He had chosen to live. The fact that God would once more be among His people in His house was a “peg” that the people could cling to and draw strength from.

Ezr 9:9

**“and to give us a wall.”** There was no literal wall, but Ezra was speaking about the protection from the enemies that was promised by the Persian king. In giving the Judeans permission to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple, and even to get help with what they needed from the surrounding peoples, the king of Persia built a wall of protection around the Jews. As we know from history, that “wall” immediately came under attack from the enemies of the Jews, and the work on the Temple was stopped.

Ezr 9:11

**“end to end.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic, literally “from mouth to mouth.” The entrances to the land are seen as mouths by which one can enter the land. Thus, the meaning is “from end to end,” or “from one end to the other.”

**Ezra Chapter 10**

Ezr 10:3

**“divorce all the wives and *remove* those *children* who have been born by them.”** This seems very harsh, but in the eyes of the Israelites who were there at the time it was the right thing to do to preserve and grow the nation of Israel. Also, it helps for us to remember that at that time in the biblical culture, almost everyone came from a large family and extended family, and the divorced wives would be able to return to their family of origin and take their children with them.

Ezr 10:7

**“the *returned* exiles.”** Literally, “the sons of the exile,” an idiom for those who had been taken as captives to Babylon in the Babylonian Captivity.

Ezr 10:9

**“the ninth month.”** The association of the ninth month and heavy rains shows that Judah at this time was using a Nisan-year calendar, with the first month of the year starting at Nisan. That made the ninth month Kislev, which falls in our November/December. The “former rains” start in mid-October and are heavy and cold by December, sometimes including snow in and around Jerusalem. The “latter rain” starts in February and ends by mid-April. These heavy rains were cold, and the people were trembling (and shivering) because of the rain but also, as the text says, because they were aware that they had broken God’s law and, recently having returned from a 70-year captivity in Babylon, were scared of further divine wrath.

Ezr 10:13

**“for many of us.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “we have sinned greatly in this matter,” but reading the English that way makes it seem like the problem that will take so long is the terrible nature of the sin, but that is not the case. The problem would take a long time and the sin was “great” because such a great number of people were involved in the sin and it was difficult and would have to be dealt with on almost a case-by-case basis. The best answer to make the English read clearly is to nuance the English to make the text clear, and many English versions do that.

Ezr 10:17

**“And they were finished.”** Dealing with the men who had married foreign women started on the first day of the tenth month and ended by the first day of the first month—so they were completed shortly before the first day of Nisan—so it took almost three months. Dealing with dissolving the marriages of those men and trying to deal with the women and any children would have been a horrible business, with many tears and gut-wrenching decisions. The Bible spares us the details and just tells us the task was handled, but it was certainly not quick or easy.

There is a great lesson buried here in the Word of God: many times because of lack of wisdom or weakness we get ourselves into messes that cannot be straightened out quickly or easily. This can lead to avoiding dealing with the situation, which usually only makes things worse because, as the saying goes, not making a decision is making a decision. Dealing with life in a godly manner often means making difficult decisions and having the fortitude and persistence to see them through until completion. That is what Ezra and the leaders with him had to do.

Ezr 10:19

**“They gave their hand.”** This indicates a custom for making a pledge, perhaps even an early handshake.