

FAITH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

May 23, 2010

Ezra Journeys with God

Focal Passage:

Ezra 7

Cross References: Daniel 4:1-3; 34-37; 6:25-28; James 1:5; Matthew 28:19-20;
John 3:18; 5:25-29

Central Idea: Ezra was called upon by God to help bring worship back to Jerusalem, and in the process, he received God's favor to provide all that was needed.

Lesson Idea: When we journey with the LORD, He will bless us with His favor and provide what is needed to accomplish His will.

Historical Context: The northern tribes of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were defeated by the Babylonians who, in 605 BC, took the strongest and brightest of its citizens as captives to Babylon (remember Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from Daniel 1?). Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The people of God were in Babylon for 70 years (as Jeremiah predicted), but then the Persians took over the Babylonian empire. Cyrus, king of the Persians, issued an edict in 536 BC that the Jews could go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and worship the LORD their God. Many of the Jews refused to go, because they had assimilated into the culture of Babylon. But a group of Jews went back under the leadership of Zerubbabel who helped them rebuild the Temple.

Ezra was a priest who went from Babylon to Jerusalem in 457 BC, about 80 years after the first Jews returned. In chapter 7 Ezra received favor from the king and was able to lead a large group back to Jerusalem. He attributed his success to God. When he got to Jerusalem Ezra was disturbed by the lack of concern for the commandments of the LORD by the people already there. Ezra began preaching and leading the people to repentance.

Most scholars believe that Ezra wrote 1st and 2nd Chronicles as well as the book of Ezra. In fact the last two verses of 2nd Chronicles are identical to the first two verses of Ezra indicating that Ezra could be seen as a continuation from Chronicles.

Bible in a Year Daily Readings

May 16-23, 2010

May 16 2nd Chronicles 32 - 34
May 17 2nd Chronicles 35 - 36
May 18 Ezra 1 - 4
May 19 Ezra 5 - 7
May 20 Ezra 8 - 10
May 21 Nehemiah 1 - 3
May 22 Nehemiah 4 - 7
May 23 Nehemiah 8 - 10

Highlights of the Week:

2 Chron 32: Angelic rescue of Judah
2 Chron 33: Manasseh: bad to good
2 Chron 34: Boy king Josiah
2 Chron 36: Babylonian exile begins
Ezra 1-6: Rebuilding the Temple
Ezra 7-8: Ezra comes to Jerusalem
Ezra 9-10: Against mixed marriages
Nehemiah: Rebuilding the wall

Note: The scriptures printed in this lesson come from the New American Standard Bible version.

Ezra 7:6-10

The Good Hand of the LORD

- 6 *This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.*
- 7 *Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.*
- 8 *He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.*
- 9 *For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.*
- 10 *For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

DISCUSSION:

After listing his genealogy in vs 1-5 to show his priestly lineage, Ezra then recounts his trip to Babylon and how God was with him.

Even though the Jews had first gone into Babylonian captivity around 150 years before this point, what does vs 6 indicate about their religion while in captivity?

How do you think the King could tell the hand of the LORD was with Ezra?

How does your life indicate whether the hand of the LORD is with you or not?

What was significant about the types of people who went with Ezra as listed in vs 7? Who in the church today has similar roles to those people and what are their roles?

Vs 9 indicates that Ezra's travel went well because the "good hand of his God was upon him." Vs 10 seems to indicate why. What reasons are given for God's favor on him?

How could vs 10 be a description of your life?

Ezra 7:11-24

The Favor of the King

- 11 *Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel:*
- 12 *"Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now*
- 13 *I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you.*
- 14 *"Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand,*
- 15 *and to bring the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,*
- 16 *with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem;*
- 17 *with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.*
- 18 *"Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God.*
- 19 *"Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem.*
- 20 *"The rest of the needs for the house of your God, for which you may have occasion to provide, provide for it from the royal treasury.*
- 21 *"I, even I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the provinces beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it shall be done diligently,*
- 22 *even up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt as needed.*
- 23 *"Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons.*
- 24 *"We also inform you that it is not allowed to impose tax, tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim or servants of this house of God.*

DISCUSSION:

Although King Artaxerxes was not Jewish, God still used him to issue a decree that aided Ezra in his efforts to reestablish the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly people like Daniel and Nehemiah and Ezra had influenced the royal family to realize that the God of the Hebrews was a powerful God, and at times even realized that He was the only true and living God (see Daniel 4:1-3; 34-37; 6:25-28).

- What are some things in these verses that indicate Artaxerxes respect for Ezra's God?

NOTE ABOUT VS 22 (From *Expositor's Bible Commentary*): A talent weighed about 75 pounds. A hundred talents was an enormous sum, about 33/4 tons of silver. A "kor" was a donkey load, about 6 1/2 bushels... the total amount of wheat, 650 bushels. The grain would be used in meal offerings. A "bath" was a liquid measure of about 6 gallons; therefore the amount of oil was 600 gallons. "Salt without limit" (NIV) is literally "salt without prescribing (how much)"

All the provisions in vs 22 would be needed in the Temple worship rituals which God had prescribed in the Law. How have you seen God provide what was needed in your life to accomplish His purposes?

In vs 23 the king demands that God's commands be done with "zeal" or "diligence" (NIV). How much zeal do people have for obeying God today?

- How much zeal do you have?

Vs 23 also shows that Artaxerxes had a healthy fear of God's wrath. Not too many years ago, even people who didn't believe in Christ seem to respect and honor the God of the Christians. Do you think that has changed? Why or why not?

- How can we influence a secular society to respect and honor the true and living God?

Ezra 7:25-28

Wisdom and Strength

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

26 *"Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment."*

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

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

DISCUSSION:

Why did Artaxerxes trust Ezra to appoint leaders in the land?

- This year's VBS memory verse is James 1:5. What does it promise us about wisdom from the LORD?

Ezra was also told to teach the laws of the LORD to "anyone who is ignorant of them." How is that responsibility similar to ours as found in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20?

- What would happen to those who refused to observe the LORD's commands?
- What happens to people who reject the Lord Jesus? (see John 3:18; 5:25-29)

Vs 27-28 tell of Ezra's response to the king's letter. He is thankful that the king allowed him to go to "adorn the house of the LORD," but to whom does Ezra give the credit?

- How does God extend his lovingkindness in your life?

What was the ultimate result of God's action in Ezra's life?

APPLICATION:

Whenever God calls someone to a task, He also equips them for the task.

Is there anything that God has called you to do that you have hesitated doing, because you don't feel adequate or don't feel you have the proper resources?

As you journey with Jesus, God will provide wisdom and resources to accomplish His will in your life.

Seek God's will for your life and commit yourself to being obedient and faithful every day. Ask God to provide what is needed and trust Him to do so. And when He provides, be sure to give Him the praise.