

Chapter Eight

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the figures in vss. 3-14 are round numbers or exact numbers? How many do not end in a zero?
2. Do you think Ezra would suggest (vs. 22) that the church rely less on government help, and more on God's care? Are the two always mutually exclusive?
3. Note the meticulous care that Ezra takes to organize everything, and to put others in charge of all valuables. Whom was he doing this for?
4. How was God's help apparent to them in making this trip?

OUTLINE

In chapter 8, details of the trip are given: the leaders of the returnees are listed, along with the treasures which they brought with them.

- B. Lists are given of returnees, and treasures which they carried back; the treasures are delivered.
 1. The list of exiles returning with Ezra (vss. 1-14).
 2. Addition of Levites to the company (vss. 15-20).
 3. Leave-taking ceremonies (vss. 21-23).
 4. The treasures, and how they were handled (vss. 24-30).
 5. The journey, and arrival at Jerusalem (vss. 31-36).

TEXT AND VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENT

- B. Lists are given of returnees, and treasures which they carried back; the treasures are delivered.
 1. The list of returnees is given.

TEXT, 8:1-14

- 1 Now these are the heads of their fathers' households and the genealogical enrollment of those who went up with me from Babylon in the reign of King Artaxerxes:
 - 2 of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush;

- 3 of the sons of Shecaniah who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah and with him 150 males who were in the genealogical list;
- 4 of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerariah and 200 males with him;
- 5 of the sons of Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel and 300 males with him;
- 6 and of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan and 50 males with him;
- 7 and of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah and 70 males with him;
- 8 and of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael and 80 males with him;
- 9 of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel and 218 males with him;
- 10 and of the sons of Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah and 160 males with him;
- 11 and of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai and 28 males with him;
- 12 and of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan and 110 males with him;
- 13 and of the sons of Adonikam, the last ones, these being their names, Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah and 60 males with them;
- 14 and of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud and 70 males with them.

COMMENT

Verse 1 states the intention of listing only the names of heads of households, and identifying the families, or clans, from which they were descended.

Verse 2 begins the list with three persons in a special category: priests and royalty. Note the contrast with the list in chapter two, which ended rather than began with priests.

Two lines of priests were descended from Aaron: one through his third son, Eleazar, and his grandson, Phinehas: Ezra was

included in this line (7:1-5). The other was through Eleazar's younger brother, Ithamar. Both lines had a representative here.

Royalty was represented by a descendant of David.

Although no numbers are given, there were obviously other members in these three families in this first group. Twelve other priests are alluded to, two by name, in 8:24.

Verses 3-14 apparently name the "leading men from Israel" mentioned in 7:28. Twelve groups are included, possibly as reminders of the twelve tribes, though not necessarily descended from them; no effort is made to link each with a separate specific tribe. While the names of individuals are new, all but one of the clans (i.e., Shelomith) are among those mentioned in Ezra 2:1-15. The total of all the families is 1496, plus Ezra and the three names of verse two.

2. Levites are added to the company.

TEXT, 8:15-20

- 15 Now I assembled them at the river that runs to Ahava, where we camped for three days; and when I observed the people and the priests, I did not find any Levites there.
- 16 So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, teachers.
- 17 And I sent them to Iddo the leading man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what to say to Iddo and his brothers, the temple servants at the place Casiphia, that is, to bring ministers to us for the house of our God.
- 18 And according to the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of insight of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, and his sons and brothers, 18 men;
- 19 and Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his brothers and their sons, 20 men;
- 20 and 220 of the temple servants, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, all of them designated by name.

COMMENT

Verse 15 names the staging area: the river to Ahava. While its precise location cannot be identified, it may have been a canal close by Babylon, possibly at a fork in the trade routes leading north and west. Here the Israelite worshipers may have been accustomed to meeting, for such sites are mentioned elsewhere. Psalm 137:1, for example, is descriptive of Israel's days in captivity:

“By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.”

Much later, a Jewish traveling preacher far from home sought out a riverside, supposing he would find others of his religious background there; and yes, there was such a faithful company gathered for prayer; and among them was Lydia (Ac. 16:13).

A look around the encampment uncovered a startling fact: no one was there of the Levites, those assigned by God to be servants in the Temple. There were only people and priests, in the verses above. Ezra, as a priest, would be painfully conscious of this omission.

Verse 16 gives his solution to the problem: leaders were chosen to seek out recruits. Only two of the names are the same as those in vss. 3-14, showing that these were farther down in the ranks of leadership.

In *verse 17*, these leaders are sent to Casiphia (location unknown) where a number of Levites and temple servants resided. The verse is a reminder that “minister” is another word for “servant.”

Verses 18-20 tell the result: the names of leaders, and number of those who decided to accompany them (total, 258). We may wonder why this group of people would be willing to cut themselves off from their homes and surroundings so abruptly, and how they could start off on a four-month trip with just a few days' notice. There would certainly be job security for them in employment at the Temple. There is always the basic desire to do something pleasing to God. While it may not be easy for

everyone to be ready to travel at a moment's notice, there are a few in any society who are capable of this. Those who were willing to go are certainly worthy of our attention and admiration.

Mahli, in *verse 18*, is the son of Merari, and the grandson of Levi according to Ex. 6:19. This demonstrates again how the term, "son," was used in genealogies.

Verse 19, oddly enough, does use the name of Merari, which was omitted between Levi and Mahli in the previous verse.

Verse 20: the order of the temple servants, assigned to the tribe of Levi by David, has been mentioned before in 2:43.

3. Leave-taking ceremonies were conducted.

TEXT, 8:21-23

- 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.
- 22 For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him."
- 23 So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.

COMMENT

Verse 21 mentions that they fasted as a mark of their humility, in seeking God's care for their journey. Here we have definite mention that children were included in their band.

Verse 22 states Ezra's reticence to ask the king for any help further than what was already given. The reason expressed is that they had spoken of the great power of God, and to ask for

a guard would imply distrust in God's power to protect. Had Ezra opened his mouth rashly, and now found himself too embarrassed and too proud to seek necessary military protection? Was he forcing God to go to unusual measures to protect them? If this was the case, it would sound much like tempting God. It may well be that his action rose also out of a distrust of any military escort which may have been furnished; some have been known to be as thieving as any marauders they might encounter on the road. At any rate, Ezra's trust in God was greater than any trust in human help. If he had to choose between one or the other, we would judge he made the wiser choice.

Verse 23 indicates that God confirmed this decision of Ezra's.

4. They took along certain treasures, which were entrusted to priests on the journey and were delivered safely at Jerusalem.

TEXT, 8:24-30

- 24 Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and with them ten of their brothers;
- 25 and I weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel present there, had offered.
- 26 Thus I weighed into their hands 650 talents of silver, and silver utensils worth 100 talents, and gold talents,
- 27 and 20 gold bowls, worth 1,000 darics; and two utensils of fine shiny bronze, precious as gold.
- 28 Then I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the utensils are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers.
- 29 "Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leading priests, the Levites, and the heads of the fathers' households of Israel at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD."
- 30 So the priests and the Levites accepted the weighed out silver and gold and the utensils, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

COMMENT

Verse 24. Ezra sets a good example for preachers by putting all the valuables into the hands of others (more than one; twelve in fact) to assure their safe arrival; to avoid being suspected of dishonesty, or as a matter of record to give account to his Persian superiors. His choice of priests as the custodians may have been governed by several factors. If anyone were trustworthy, they would be. The articles were all for the use of the priests later on; they might as well have them in their keeping now. Also, he may have felt that marauders would be more hesitant to attack priests than ordinary citizens.

Verse 25 repeats the information of 7:15f., that the valuables were contributed by the king, his counsellors, and the people from Israel who lived in Babylon.

Verses 26, 27 give the amount and description of these valuables. *The Living Bible* converts these into American money: \$1,300,000 in silver; \$200,000 in silver utensils; \$3,000,000 in gold; and twenty gold bowls worth a total of \$5,000; plus two bronze or brass items whose purity and design made them as valuable as gold. Total weight would be about 30 tons: no small item for this band of travelers.

Verses 28-30 relate Ezra's charge to the twelve priests. Holy utensils must only be handled by holy men; what better reason for putting them into their safekeeping? The money likewise was given as an offering to God. They were responsible for them till delivery was made to the priests, Levites, and leading citizens at the Temple in Jerusalem.

5. The journey is made, and the goods are delivered at Jerusalem.

TEXT, 8:31-36

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

- 32 Thus we came to Jerusalem and remained there three days.
 33 And on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the utensils were weighed out in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui.
 34 Everything was numbered and weighed, and all the weight was recorded at that time.
 35 The exiles who had come from the captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: 12 bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, 77 lambs, 12 male goats for a sin offering, all as a burnt offering to the Lord.
 36 Then they delivered the king's edicts to the king's satraps, and to the governors in the provinces beyond the River, and they supported the people and the house of God.

COMMENT

In *verse 31* the journey is resumed after eleven days spent at the staging area; once more the book speaks of the hand of God: and the mention of the enemy and ambushes shows that God's protection was very necessary and very real.

Verse 32 speaks of three days, perhaps suggesting a time for rest and reorganization, or possibly a Sabbath observation before they reported their arrival and officially handed over the treasures.

Verses 33, 34: see the care taken in this entire operation. Of those who received the valuables, four men are named and identified by family and position. Everything is weighed as it is changing hands. Every piece receives a number, and all information is recorded on the spot.

The mention of Meremoth raises some interesting speculation. Here he is called the son of Uriah the priest. In *Neh. 3:4, 21* he is further identified as the grandson of Hakkoz. The sons of a man by the same name are mentioned in *2:61* as unable to supply genealogical records; therefore they were excluded from

the priesthood until the deficiency could be amended by God's answer through Urim and Thummim. Perhaps they were able to find the missing records; perhaps God corrected the deficiency and made His acceptance known; or perhaps there were two men named Hakkoz, and only one lacked proper credentials; at any rate, here is Meremoth, grandson of Hakkoz, discharging a high responsibility as a priest.

Verse 35 again stresses the number twelve and its multiples, as the new arrivals made an offering in behalf of all Israel; only the number 77 varies from the pattern.

We have seen that there were about 1500, plus 258, or roughly 1760 men on the trip; they sacrificed almost 200 animals; assuming that the total number of men, women, and children was about 7,000, that would be an animal for every nine men, or thirty-five people: a respectable offering.

With *verse 36* the mission is completed; all records are turned over to the officials whom the Persians had appointed over the Beyond-Euphrates area. Ezra had fulfilled his responsibility to the king (7:14), to his people and to God.

WORD STUDIES

AHAVA (vss. 15, 21): possibly means "water"; it may be akin to the Latin, "aqua."

BABYLON (vs. 1): gate, i.e., court, of Bel (the god of the Babylonians).

CASIPHIA (vs. 17): this comes from a word meaning "pale, silver, white, or shining." Perhaps it was a city known for its brightness, or for its money.

HOLY (Kodesh: vs. 28): pure, consecrated, separated. Because a thing was entirely or purely separated to one purpose, it was sacred for that use. With little change the word is used of men devoted to pagan temples and practicing the lowest vices and perversions. It makes a great deal of difference to what purpose, or God, a person devotes his life.

SUMMARY

The eighth chapter of Ezra furnishes details of the trip described in chapter seven. One note runs through it: there was a division of responsibility.

As the company prepares to leave Babylonia, we are made conscious of two priests, a descendant of royalty, and twelve heads of clans in charge. When Ezra needs recruits from among the Levites, he sends nine men and instructs them how to get them. When the trip begins, he calls for fasting and prayer and lays their whole safety in the hands of God. The treasures for the Temple he entrusts to twelve of the priests. When the trip is ended and everything has been turned over to the Temple officials, they celebrate with sacrifices and a full report is turned over to their superiors, along with the original orders.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How much time was spent getting the expedition underway?
2. How many leaders did Ezra select to go up with him?
3. What kind of persons did he trust with the gold and silver?
4. How many persons made the trip, and how did this compare with the company in Ezra two?