

## Ezra 7-8—Know God and Make Him Known

BY PASTOR JASON SNIDER

### I. Introduction

- A. That title has been the mission statement for many churches over the years. As is the case, this is something that must continue to be the purpose and mission of the church until Christ returns. These work hand in hand.
- B. Through the passage of time, things change and that is inevitable. In some sense, the rebuilding of the altar and the temple were the easy part. Any problems they had were directly related to themselves not the building project. They struggled to know God and make him known drifted off into fear.
  - 1. So, the rebuilding of the temple revealed that the people needed to be rebuilt or reformed. It revealed a much deeper problem as we will see. Were they continuing the purpose and mission of God?
- C. Under the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people of God came back to the Lord and got back to work to finish the temple. In other words, they repented of their fear and trusted the Lord and did what he said. All seemed well but from the end of chapter 6 to the beginning of chapter 7 we have a period of some 57 years or so.
  - 1. What happened?
    - a) We will explore the details next week, but this week it like your doctor calling you to come into the office. You know something is wrong but you don't know what it is. So too here.
    - b) God is sending Ezra because they have a need and they don't even know it.

### II. Main Point

- A. That's where the main point comes in—the Sovereign God of heaven raised up Ezra to know, to do and to teach God's word for the purpose of making him know to the people.

### III. Outline

- A. Who is Ezra?
- B. Where and how will Ezra go?
- C. Who Went with Him?

### IV. Exposition

- A. As I mentioned in the introduction, a number of years have passed since the end of chapter 6. We don't know what was going on in Jerusalem during this time but we do know that the events of the book of Esther happened. Ahasuerus was the king between Darius and Artaxerxes. It's likely that the Prophet Malachi had given his scathing address during this 50 year period. Whatever happened, we will get to see more of the details next week but for now we begin by seeing who it is that God has raised up to send to his people.
  - 1. Verse one—now after this—points us back to the finishing of the temple and the restored worship. They had just dedicated the temple and they had celebrated the Passover but did they continue this good restart? What has been their pattern? What is your pattern?
  - 2. But God loves his people and he doesn't leave them to their own demise. During the reign of Artaxerxes God prepared and sent a man named Ezra.
    - a) This is the first mention of him, so who is Ezra?
      - (1) There in verses 1-5 describe the lineage of Ezra. As you see there at the end of verse 5 that his line can be traced back to Aaron, the brother of Moses.
        - (a) This was extremely important according to the law. The priests must come from this line.
          - i) But is that enough? If someone showed up here today and said, "I'd like to preach today. I am the grandson of Billy Graham" would that be enough to allow him to preach? Not for me.
          - ii) In this case, God has preserved a man from this line to accomplish his purposes. But more than a family line is necessary.
        - (2) The second thing we see about Ezra was that was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses.
          - (a) That is he was well-versed.
            - i) One thing this tells me is that God also preserved the word while the people were in exile.

- ii) Scribes would have been those who made new copies before the old ones deteriorated.
- (b) To be skilled in the Law did not mean it merely came to him naturally.
  - i) Notice there in verse 10—Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD.
  - ii) Preparation is necessary. Some people over spiritualized preaching to say that preparation isn't necessary. Just get up here and the Holy Spirit will give you what need to say.
    - (1) That is not a biblically accurate understanding.
- (3) The most important thing about Ezra isn't so much who his family line is or that he is skilled in the law of God. There are plenty of biblical scholars who could say they are from a long line of gifted thinkers and they are skilled in linguistics and able to keenly evaluate the Biblical content yet have no desire and love for God to do what it says.
  - (a) God will not merely be examined but he will be proclaimed and worshiped.
  - (b) Notice there in verse 10—Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.
    - i) This is the man God has raised up to send to Israel.
    - ii) Does this give any indication to what they are in need of? Most likely.
    - iii) He is a man who knows God and obeys God and helps others to know and follow the Lord.
  - (c) Do you want to give yourself to one the most important things you can do in life?
    - i) Give yourself to knowing God through his word and doing it and making him known. Those are eternal.
    - ii) One thing the title of the sermon assumes is that we are not only to know him but to obey him.
    - iii) It's hypocritical to know God's ways and yet not do them.
      - (1) In fact, it is necessary for making him known.
      - (2) Wednesday night, we discussed that the church is to be distinct. Paul instructs the church in (1 Corinthians 5:11) But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.
        - (a) If we allow members to live like this we give the watching community a wrong understanding of who God is and what the gospel can do.
      - (3) We must be doers of the word, not hearers only—James 1:22
      - (4) And do not forget the necessity of faith. As I read in Hebrews 11 this week—By faith Abraham obeyed.
        - (a) My relationship with God rests in Jesus' obedience not mine. But faith that rests in Jesus obeys Jesus gladly and when we disobey, we repent and seek his forgiveness daily.
- (4) So, Ezra isn't a fake. He studied the word, he obeyed the word and he taught the word.
  - (a) That gets us to the last part of who he is—he is a priest who teaches others how to walk in God's ways.
  - (b) The source of his teaching will be the Scriptures. Notice how the Bible is described.
    - i) There in verse 6 it is called the Law of Moses.
    - ii) In verse 10 it is called the Law of the LORD.
    - iii) On down in verse 25 the Scriptures are described as the wisdom of God.
    - iv) Which is it? All of that.
      - (1) Circle back to verse 10 where it says—the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given.
      - (2) We believe the Scriptures are breathed out (given) by God to such people like Moses to write. Therefore, to read the Bible is hear directly from God.

3. That's part of who Ezra is. We will see more as we go. But I want to bring this to bear on us. Are we the people of the Book?
  - a) Do we live as Jesus instructed us—to hunger and thirst for righteousness?
    - (1) I must confess, I sometimes get discouraged because my focus is on the wrong thing.
    - (2) I want to be fruitful for the Lord but fruit isn't merely up to me.
    - (3) As I walked around in here this morning praying for the gathering, I did not ask God to send more people. I asked him to send the Holy Spirit. I asked him to give us a desire to be godly and righteous.
  - b) How about you? Are you seeking to be righteous and godly?
    - (1) Do not believe the lie that God doesn't care about all of that.
    - (2) As we will see, God cares deeply about the details.
    - (3) If Ezra's actions are any indication, God cares about the small things very much.
- B. That's who Ezra is but where is he to make God known and how will he get there?
  1. To know God always comes with a desire to make him known. Take a look there in verse 6—this Ezra went up from Babylon. And verse 9—on the first day of the month he began to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem.
  2. Ezra was prepared and sent to God's people in Jerusalem. Let's see how God did this miraculous thing.
  3. The answer to how Ezra got to Jerusalem is simply stated in verse 9—for the good hand of his God was on him.
  4. Let's see what it means for the good hand of God to be on him.
    - a) So, he has grown up in exile. It was fifty years since the temple was rebuilt. It's been even longer than that when the first remnant returned.
    - b) For some reason, his family stayed behind on the first journey.
    - c) But now, he wants to go—not return—to Jerusalem. He's likely never been there before because it seems likely that he was born in exile.
    - d) We must understand the good hand of God being on him meant that God had been at work in Ezra's life long before this day arrived.
      - (1) He didn't give him a crash course in the Law of God the week before like a J-term.
    - e) The second part of the answer as to how Ezra got to Jerusalem was stated there in verse 6—the king granted him all that he asked, FOR the hand of the LORD his God was on him.
      - (1) Not only did God give him safety in traveling but also favor with the king of Persia to be allowed to go.
        - (a) Again and again, God is orchestrating the events of the world to accomplish his purposes.
    - f) Beginning there in verse 11 we see that the king gave him a letter granting him authority to go to Jerusalem and to teach the people the law of God.
      - (1) This is still amazing even though we have seen it happen several times already. God continues to move the heart of powerful kings to accomplish his grand purposes.
        - (a) But there's a problem we might not see. Maybe this isn't that amazing anymore.
        - (b) Maybe the people have either forgotten the previous times God did this or the younger generation wasn't told about them.
          - i) Did they continue to know God and make him known?
          - ii) How do we guard against losing the awe and majesty of God?
          - iii) It's very hard. Have you lost the desire for the glory of God?
      - (2) One way not to lose it is by gladly walking in the ways of God.
        - (a) As this letter seems to indicate, Ezra was open about his faith even before the king.
          - i) How in the world does this king know so much about YHWH and his ways?
            - (1) Was it not from Ezra?
          - ii) What opened the door for this to happen?

- (1) It seems pretty clear that Artaxerxes is the son of Ahasuerus and would have been versed in what God did for the Jews in Susa as Esther was probably his mom.
  - (b) The hand of the Lord is on Ezra to live out what he believed to be true—much like Daniel did in exile.
- (3) As you can see there in verse 13—the king made a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests of Levites in his kingdom, may go with Ezra to Jerusalem.
  - (a) Therefore, part of the details by which God’s good hand was upon Ezra shows itself in this decree by the king.
  - (b) Furthermore, a new wave of exiles are given the opportunity to go as well.
  - (c) This is amazing...or is it not?
- (4) If that were not enough evidence, we read that Ezra and his company were sent to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of Ezra’s God which is in your hand, the king and his seven counselors send silver and gold in abundance.
  - (a) Notice there in verse 14 all this language about freely offering this to the God of Israel.
    - i) It’s not merely because I’m supposed to do this but gladly and intentionally give!
  - (b) They are instructed in verse 17 to use this silver and gold to buy bulls, rams, and lambs and so on to offer on the altar of the house of your God.
  - (c) Not only are they sending tons of silver and gold but more vessels are given for the service of the house of God.
    - i) To circle back to the illustration I shared in the beginning—not only did we get our stained glass windows back but 50 years later they are sending us more stained glass windows for the entire building!
    - ii) Not only that, in verse 20 whatever is further required for the house of God shall be provided out of the king’s treasury.
- (5) Yet we still have more evidence to behold that God’s good hand was upon Ezra because there in verse 21 the king made a decree similar to Darius’s decree.
  - (a) Do you see it? All the treasurers in the province Beyond the River are to provide Ezra with whatever he needs up to these amounts.
    - i) He also warns them to do this or God’s wrath will be against the realm of the king and his sons.
  - (b) In verse 24 there are more surprises—they cannot impose tribute, custom, or toll on the priests, Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.
    - i) In other words, they were tax exempt!
    - ii) I confess—I’ve lost my amazement that we continue to receive tax exemptions as a church.
      - (1) I think we will have a decision to make someday to keep them and be told what we can and cannot say or let it go to be free of government interference.
      - (2) But for now, we ought to be amazed that Artaxerxes and the United States have it as a law.
  - (c) I bet when you’ve prayed that part of the Lord’s prayer that says—your will be done on earth as it is in heaven—did not expect such things as this.
    - i) Even king says it like that in verse 23—whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven.
      - (1) The house—on earth—for the God of heaven.
        - (a) Do you want that? How do you know what God who is in heaven wants here on earth?
        - (b) His word is sufficient.
- (6) There’s so much to see that God is doing it’s hard to cover it all.
  - (a) Ezra is to appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River.

- i) Those who know the law of God and the law of the king.
  - ii) And if they don't know the law of God, Ezra is supposed to teach them.
    - (1) And according to verse 26, Ezra was given authority to enforce these things under penalty of death or banishment or confiscation of goods or imprisonment.
- 5. Can we just take a second to stand in awe of the good hand of God to accomplish such things that seem impossible to us?
  - a) God did not strain to do this. This is easy.
  - b) Why do we not trust the Lord?
  - c) It really doesn't make any sense not to.
- C. Well, we've seen the man God raised up to send back to Jerusalem to bring the law to bear of the people. It wasn't enough that they were restored to the land and have rebuilt the temple. The people need the word continually. Will it work? That we shall see. But for now let's see who God sent back with Ezra and how they all made there safely.
  - 1. The first 14 verses of chapter 8 give us a list and genealogy of those who went up with Ezra from Babylon.
    - a) Among these, I would point out is of David's line there in verse 2. This should give them some level of messianic hope.
      - (1) God had promised that a son of David would come and reign over them and bring peace.
        - (a) That when Isaiah 11 will happen—the lion will lie down by the lamb...the cow and the bear will graze together in the field...the nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra.
        - (b) This is just one among many but this son of David going back to Jerusalem is filled with hope because Jesus will be born of this line.
  - 2. But Ezra notices that the sons of Levi are missing.
    - a) As their journey began, it says there in verse 15 that they gathered at the river near Ahava.
    - b) The Levites had an important role to play in teaching and in worship.
      - (1) So, Ezra—paying very close attention to the details—sends men of insight to find those missing among them.
        - (a) The question arises—why did they not come to begin with.
        - (b) That's a good question.
        - (c) There's no answer given. My guess is there really isn't a good answer.
        - (d) Whatever the case, the men Ezra sent brought back a man of discretion, with his sons and kinsmen.
  - 3. There have been opposition to Ezra's desire to go to Jerusalem.
    - a) To ask the king for such things was very dangerous. Go read how even a queen like Esther knew the risk.
    - b) Then they were missing the Levites to serve the priests in the temple.
    - c) And now, they have a dangerous 1000 mile journey ahead of them.
    - d) Notice there in verse 21 that Ezra calls for a fast.
      - (1) What is fasting? I think the verse describes it well—that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from him a safe journey.
        - (a) I would like to call for a fast among us as we seek a solution to our issue we will discuss next Sunday. I'm going to leave the details of how you might do that to yourself. I would only ask that you consider one day out of this week to fast and pray for God to give us all wisdom and unity in our decision.
      - (2) Notice there in verse 22 we are given some insight as to why he did this—For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him."
        - (a) Do the details matter? Does integrity matter? Does practicing what you say you believe matter? YES!!!
        - (b) What did God do? Did he see their humility and hear their prayers?
    - e) You might ask—why did they need protection?

- (1) Well, if you recall the king had given them very much gold and silver.
- (2) If you can imagine what Wells Fargo went through in the wild west even with someone riding shotgun, you will know they didn't drive an armored truck back to Jerusalem.
- (3) Just to give you an idea of how much by our weights and measurements
  - (a) They were carrying 3 3/4 tons of gold and 24 1/2 tons of silver.
  - (b) Go walk around Trinity Lane with that kind of money and see what happens.
- (4) Ezra with great detail weighed out the amounts and divided it among the leading priests.
  - (a) Their integrity will be tested immediately.
  - (b) They are commanded there in verse 29 to guard it and keep it until it could be weighed before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Jerusalem.
- (5) They departed from the river on the twelfth day on the first month.
- (6) Just as we expected God to do, they all arrived safely in Jerusalem and he delivered them from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.
- (7) The silver and gold were weighed—not counted—to make sure all was there and it was.
- f) After a few days, the new exiles offer up sacrifices to God as a sin offering.
- 4. Let's end here—do you know God? Do you hunger and thirst for him even in the smallest details? Do you seek ways to help others know him?
  - a) If you don't know him, I would demand that you repent and believe in Christ. Bow the knee to King Jesus. You can know God through Christ by faith.
  - b) For those who have lost their awe of God, I encourage you to repent of not having that desire.