

Fact Sheet for **“The Right Order”**
Ezra 7:1-10

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What should we be about as Christians? How can we have a great ministry?

What is the local church to be about... fun times, exciting events, good feelings, friendships? These are certainly part of it, but they are not the most important considerations.

Today we are going to be in Ezra 7, an historical portion of God's Word, but with a message that is so right for today.

These were the Persian kings in order, beginning with Cyrus who decreed that the temple was to be rebuilt:

Cyrus	(559-530 B.C.)
Cambyses	(530-522 B.C.)
Smerdis	(522 B.C.)
Darius	(521-486 B.C.)
Ahasuerus/Xerxes ¹	(485-465 B.C.)
Artaxerxes	(464-424 B.C.)

The book of Ezra opens around 559 B.C. The decree to rebuild the temple is found in Ezra 1. The Babylonian captivity was over. The Jewish people would begin to return to Jerusalem. This was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10. Isaiah also prophesied nearly 200 years before Cyrus' decree, naming Cyrus by name, about his decree (Isaiah 44:28). Both the temple in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem itself, would be rebuilt. But opposition soon came and was still there in the reign of Artaxerxes².

Now we come to Ezra 7. The time is just over a century after Cyrus' decree in Ezra 1. When the book of Ezra opened, Ezra had not yet been born. He didn't come on to the scene until the 7th chapter of the book that bears his name. It was now the 7th year in the reign of Artaxerxes³, or 458 B.C. The temple had been completed in the 6th year of Darius' reign⁴, or 515 B.C. So there is a gap of 57 years between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. During that gap reigned one king between Darius and Artaxerxes. That king was Ahasuerus, the king in the book of Esther.

7:1 ¶ Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, ² son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, ³ son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, ⁴ son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, ⁵ son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest—^{6a} this Ezra went up from Babylonia.

Ezra wasn't just a Levite. He was a descendant of Aaron, a priest. His genealogy listed here is typical of other biblical genealogies in that "son" could mean "grandson" or "great-grandson". Seriah was high priest when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.⁵ Ezra may have been his great-

¹ This is the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther.

² Ezra 4-6

³ Ezra 7:7.

⁴ Ezra 6:15.

⁵ 2 Kings 25:18; Jeremiah 52:24.

grandson. Hilkiah was the high priest under Josiah.⁶ If these were the two individuals mentioned in Ezra's genealogy, then Ezra came from a notable family.

^{6b} He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

He was a scribe, a teacher, one who could read and write, a learned man. He was skilled in the Law of Moses. The word literally means "quick" or "swift". And the reason that the king granted him all that he asked was that the hand of the LORD his God was on him. This is the first of eight times in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that mention is made of God's hand being on Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Nehemiah 2:8, 18.) The emphasis in this book was clearly on Ezra's character. It's not even a small leap to see that his character was one huge reason that the hand of the LORD his God was on him. In fact, Ezra would write, "The hand of our God is good on all who seek him" (Ezra 8:22).

⁷ ¶ And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. ⁸ And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹ For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him.

Now we come to one of the most famous and important verses in the book of Ezra.

¹⁰ For 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.

Don't miss the first word of this verse, "For". The good hand of God was on Ezra (verse 9) because he had set his heart to study the Law, to do the Law and to teach God's statutes and rules. This immediately brings to mind two other passages (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3).

What Ezra had set his heart to do is an inviolable order if you are going to have a successful ministry. This is the right order. We should follow this order in our own ministries, as well as how we do church ministry.

Why does the local church exist? What should we be about? Evangelism, discipleship, worship, teaching, prayer, fellowship, etc.

If we aren't careful a local church can focus on the fun times, exciting events, and friendships. We can make these the great goals rather than learning, applying, and teaching. And if we have things in the right order there will be fun times, exciting events, and friendships.

And think about it. So often in history great movements for God began when people committed themselves anew to learn God's Word, to do God's Word, then to teach God's Word.

And having a successful ministry ourselves follows right along with Ezra's heart. Set your heart to study the Scripture, to apply the Scripture yourself, and then encourage others to do the same.

⁶ 2 Kings 22:4.