

Fact Sheet for **“Living with God’s Reputation in Mind”**
Ezra 7:11-8:36

Pastor Bob Singer
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We have seen some key verses in Ezra that will help you think through the book. Ezra 1:2 records Cyrus’ decree to rebuild the temple. Isaiah notes this decree and Cyrus by name around two centuries earlier (Isaiah 44:28). Ezra 4:4-5 records that the people who were then living in Jerusalem tried to frustrate God’s plans. But God’s plans cannot be thwarted, and the temple was completed. A century after the decree by Cyrus the good hand of God was on a priest named Ezra. Ezra 7:10 gives the reason why. 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. Then the reigning king of Persia Artaxerxes sent Ezra to Jerusalem to teach the Law of Moses. (Read 7:11-13)

¹⁴ For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand, ¹⁵ and also to carry (1) the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, (2) ¹⁶ with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, (3) and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem.

Read 7:17-20

²¹ ¶ "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, ²² up to 100 talents of silver (3.75 tons), 100 cors of wheat (600 bushels, over 32 yd.³), 100 baths of wine (600 gallons), 100 baths of oil (600 gallons), and salt without prescribing how much.

This is just what could come from the king’s treasuries. We will see much more in 8:25-28.

²³ Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons.

Artaxerxes likely believed that each country’s god or gods controlled their territory, and he did not want to risk bringing God’s anger against himself or his sons.

²⁴ We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

²⁵ ¶ "And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach. ²⁶ Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment."

Ezra was given teeth! Here was Ezra’s response.

²⁷ ¶ Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, ²⁸ and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king’s mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

Over 1,500 men would go to Jerusalem with Ezra. When you add in their wives and children the total could have been around 5,000 people.

²¹ ¶ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. ²² 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."

Firstly, Ezra gave us a verity, a statement of truth, "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." This was just as applicable in Ezra's day as it is in ours. Meditate on this. It is indeed a verity, a statement of biblical truth.

Secondly, let's ask this question. *Why* was Ezra ashamed to ask the king for protection? Was it because Ezra was ashamed that he himself didn't have the faith to believe that God's hand "is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him"? This would mean that Ezra was having trouble relying on that verity he had told the king. It would mean that Ezra didn't have the faith to believe that God would protect them on this journey. If this is the case then why would Ezra soon give a charge to twelve of the leading priests to guard this treasure on the journey and not be ashamed (8:24-30)? There would be protection either way, either from the Persians or from the Jews. And, how should we apply this today?

There is another option. Instead of thinking of his own faith he was thinking of God's reputation with Artaxerxes, a king who did not worship only the one true God. Because of Ezra's words to Artaxerxes God's reputation was at stake. So, he didn't ask for the king's protection. Instead he sought God for that protection, and he took reasonable measures within the believing community to guard the treasure.

Here is a point of application for us. We interact all the time with people who are not Christians, but who know that we are. They hear what we say about God, and about what God wants his people to be like. They see the choices we make in life. When we fail to talk and live like God desires us to, what damage are we doing to God's reputation in the eyes of those who know us as Christians?

²³ So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

²⁴ ¶ Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. ²⁵ And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. ²⁶ I weighed out into their hand 650 talents of silver (*25 tons*), and silver vessels worth 200 talents (*7.5 tons*), and 100 talents of gold (*3.75 tons*), ²⁷ 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics (*19 pounds*), and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. ²⁸ And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. ²⁹ Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD." ³⁰ So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

³¹ ¶ Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.

When they arrived in Jerusalem they delivered the treasure to the temple and delivered Artaxerxes' instructions to the civil authorities.

What verse would be good to memorize here?

8:22 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."

Perhaps we should be more mindful of our impact on God's reputation.