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Ezra Returns from Babylon

Ezra 7: 1-10

Ezra returns from Babylon DIG: “Now after these things” means 60 years later from 516 to 458 BC (Ezra Chapters 6 and 7). What else do these verses mention as to the who, what, how, when, where and why about Ezra? Why was it important to link him to Hilkiah (see Second Kings 22:4)? To Zadok (see Second Samuel 8:17)? To Moshe?

REFLECT: Ezra was skilled in the Torah (7:6 and 10; also see Nehemiah Chapter 8). What subject matter are you skilled in? By comparison, how skilled are you in the Bible? Who instilled in you a love for the Word? What do you do to build upon that?

During the ministry of Ezra (to see link click [Bf](#) - The Second Return).

Compiled by: The Chronicler from Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs

(see [Ac](#) - Ezra-Nehemiah From a Jewish Perspective: **The Ezra Memoirs**).

Ezra was descended from a long line of priests that dated all the way back to **Aaron himself**, who was the first **high priest** of **Isra’el** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fv** - **The Selection of Aaron and His Sons as Priests**). **ADONAI** had appointed **Aaron**, Moshe’s **brother**, to take on that sacred role, and **He** had stipulated that only men descended from **Aaron** should ever follow in **his** steps. In this alone, **Ezra** would have been a good choice to lead **the Jews** back to **Jerusalem**, as it would have indicated that the people were reestablishing **the LORD’s** ordered worship in **the Temple**.

However, that was not **Ezra’s** only qualification as a leader. **He also** had spent **his** life studying **God’s Word** and memorized it – and, more important, **he** had spent **his** life *obeying* it. He had become an expert in **the Torah**, a teacher of teachers, and a teacher by example as well as by **the Word**. **Ha’Shem** had appointed **him** to take the lead on this important mission because **he** was well qualified in knowledge and obedience.

Zerubbabel (along with **Sheshbazzar**) had been the first to lead **the Righteous of the TaNaKh** from **Babylon** to **Jerusalem**. Now, **Ezra himself** would gather together the next wave to return to **the Land** in 458 BC (see [Af](#) - **Ezra-Nehemiah Chronology**). As before,

the trip would be long and filled with danger, but **the king** had issued a **decree** giving **his** blessing (see **Bi - King Artakh'shasta's Letter to Ezra**), and **he** had loaded **the people** with **silver and gold** to fund the work.¹²⁶

Ezra's Genealogy: The purpose here is to make clear that **Ezra**, though not **himself a high priest**, was a member of the **priestly** line that had provided **Isra'el's high priests** in the past. **Now after these things** (see **Ag - The First Return**), during the reign of **Artakh'shasta king of Persia**. **Ezra's** genealogy traces his **priestly** descendants back through **Zadok** to **Aaron**. **Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar** (see the commentary on **Numbers Eb - God's Eternal Covenant with Phinehas**), **son of Aaron the kohen gadol** (Ezra 7:1-5). **Ezra's** genealogy traces **his** descendants back through **Zadok** to **Aaron**.

Ezra was a **Zadokite priest** who was not only highly honored in **his** own day, but **the Levitical priests, who are descendants of Ezra and Zadok**, would be honored with a special ministry in **the far eschatological future** during **the Messianic Kingdom** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gs - God Shows a Vision of the Millennial Temple**). **They** were the ones **who guarded God's Sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from Him**. In **First Samuel 2:31-36** we read how **YHVH** through **Samuel** prophesied that **the house of Eli** was to be deposed and replaced by a faithful **priest**. That was finally fulfilled in **First Kings 2:26-27**. Then in **Second Samuel 8:17** we read that **Zadok** became **the high priest** under **King David** and remained loyal to **David** after **Absalom** revolted (**Second Samuel 15:24-29**). Furthermore, **Zadok** was also loyal to **Solomon** (**First Kings 1:8, 32-39, 2:26-27, 35**) and **the descendents of Zadok** remained faithful during the days of **Isra'el's** apostasy. As a result of **their** past faithfulness **they** will be given a superior role in the ministry of **the Temple** during **the Kingdom**. **The Zadokites are to come near to minister before Me; they are to stand before Me to offer sacrifices of fat and blood**, declares **Adonai ELOHIM** (**Ezeki'el 44:15-31**).

This Ezra came up from **Babylon**. He was a scribe (Hebrew: *sophar*) skilled in **the Torah of Moses** that **ADONAI** the God of **Isra'el** had given (**Ezra 7:6a**). Beginning with **Ezra**, there arose a class of specialists who were **teachers of the Torah**; scholars who studied, interpreted, and copied **the Scriptures** (see **Bl - Ezra's Reforms**). **The sages teach that Ezra could write out the entire five books of Moses from memory**.

It is important to recognize that in **the First Return** led by **Zerubbabel**, in **the Second**

Return led by **Ezra**, and in **the Third Return** led by **Nehemiah**, it was always the gracious prompting of **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh** that led the remnant home to **Jerusalem**. **The Second Return** will begin with **God’s** prompting of **the Persian king** to act compassionately toward **Isra’el** by granting **Ezra everything he requested because the hand of ADONAI his God was upon him (Ezra 7:6b)**. Similarly, in **the Third Return**, **Nehemiah** will again express the conviction that **Ha’Shem** was responsible for the gracious support of the Persian throne when **he** stated: **The king granted me the request because the good hand of my God was upon me (Nehemiah 2:8b)**.

Some of the people of Yisrael and some of the cohanim, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the (Hebrew: *nethinim*) sanctuary servants (see [An - Priests, Levites and Temple Servants Who Returned with Zerubbabel](#)) also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7). The cohanim, or the priests, were descendants of **Aaron**, the first High Priest. **His sons** and **their** descendants were to serve as the future **priests**, and **high priests** of the nation of **Isra’el** (see the commentary on [Exodus Gf - Dedicate Aaron and His Sons So They May Serve Me As Priests](#)). Only **the high priest** was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and **Temple**, and that only once per year on the Day of Atonement (see the commentary on [Leviticus Ef - Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement](#)). When you think **priests** – think **Exodus; the Levites** were descendants of **Levi**, one of the twelve sons of **Jacob**. When you think of **the Levites**, think **Genesis**. **They** assisted the priests in different aspects of **the Temple**. All **priests** were to be **Levites**, according to the Torah, but not all **Levites** were **priests**.

What compelled them to leave for **Jerusalem**? The answer for at least one of them – **Ezra** – seems to have been that **he** had a burden in **his** heart and soul for **his** fellow **Jews** in **Tziyon**. Like **Nehemiah** some twenty years later, he probably heard tales from merchants who came to Persian-dominated **Babylon** with news that things were not going well in **Yerushalayim (Nehemiah 1:1-3)**. **Jewish** law concerning marriage had seemingly been neglected. There may have been a **Temple** in **the City of David**, but **the Jews** were in danger of repeating the very sins that had sent **them** into exile to begin with. Speaking almost a century earlier, **Jeremiah** had warned **them** not to treat the Temple as a good-luck charm and change their ways (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Cc - False Religion is Worthless](#)).

It seems that the religious life in **Jerusalem**, from the time of **the Temple’s** dedication to the time of **Ezra’s** arrival had taken on an outward conformity to **the Temple’s** rituals and sacrifices. There was outward conformity and an external compliance. But it was only a public faith, and it did not relate to **the people’s** private lives. As we will see, one of the

issues that **Ezra** would have to contend with was the flagrant abuse of **Isra'el's** commandment regarding marriage (see **Bs - Those Guilty of Intermarriage**). **The people** were conforming outwardly, but inwardly **they** were living to please **themselves**.¹²⁷ Things were not much better in **Ezra's** day. **The Jews** in **the Holy City** were neglecting **the Scriptures**. A new generation, whose grandparents and great-grandparents had built **the Second Temple**, now occupied **the City**. Those fifth-century **Jews** were in need of a preacher, someone who would proclaim **the Word of God** with personal application and integrity. **They** were in need of relearning the seriousness of sin, and this **they** could only do by falling in love with **the Torah** again. **They** did not need someone to save **their** consciences with smooth words, and lull **them** to spiritual sleep with the assurance that all was well. **They** needed a teacher of **the Torah**, and for that urgent task, **ADONAI** raised up **Ezra**.¹²⁸



Ezra the Scribe: Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of King Artakh'shasta's reign. The second wave of **exiles'** four-month journey from **Babylon** to **Jerusalem**, covering almost a-thousand miles, started in Nisan (March-April) and ended in Av (July-August). **He began his aliyah** (immigration to **Isra'el**) from **Babylon** on the first day of the first month and entered Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, because the good hand of his God was upon him (this same phrase is repeated in Ezra 7:28, 8:18, 22 and 31; and Nehemiah 2:8 and 18). Because Ezra had set his heart to seek the Torah of **ADONAI**, to observe and to teach its statutes and ordinances in **Isra'el** (Ezra 7:8-10). Ezra, like David, had a **heart** after **God**. His love was for **God's Word** and **God's** ways, not his own. **He** did not leave **Babylon** to go to **Jerusalem** because **he** believed there would be a better life for **him** there. **His** ambition was not for personal gain or financial improvement; **he** wanted to see **the LORD's** people return to a way of life that gave **YHVH** honor. **His** focus was the glory of **God**.

Before the exile (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**) **the priests were the guardian of the Scriptures and the Levites**

also taught the Torah (Hosea 4:4-6). But after the exile the scribes became more important (Sir 38:34b-39:11). The rabbis teach that Ezra marked that transition and set the pattern for future scribal activity.¹²⁹

The TaNaKh does not look upon **the Torah** as a heavy weight or something negative, but as a blueprint for living (see the commentary on **Exodus Dj - The Ten Commandments**). It is truthfully the royal teaching of liberty, a divinely inspired ethical guide. Only a perversion of **the Torah** lead to the abuses that we find in the gospels. Most of the legal material in the five books of **Moses** show the application of these ethical principles to specific life situations. It is in the area of ethics where theology most affects everyday life.

Ezra set an example of the process by which a person grows to spiritual maturity and godliness. First, **he set his heart**, determined to understand **the Word of God**, probably spending much of **his** youth in the study and meditation of **the Scriptures**. The process naturally led to immediate application, as **Ezra** strove to do what **ADONAI's Word** commanded, putting **it** into practice in **his** own life first. This, finally, led to a natural role as a teacher of others - for one cannot teach what one has not first practiced. **Ezra's** life of obedience enabled **YHVH** to use **him** in a mighty way. **The good hand of his God was upon him (Ezra 7:9)**, strengthening and equipping **him** for that role.¹³⁰

ADONAI's people always need **Torah** (Hebrew: *teaching*). A great percentage of the ministry of the Church is discipling, nurturing, and teaching. More than just imparting facts, this involves training in righteousness and motivating believers to love and obey **God**. It includes learning what a biblical view signifies for practical life today.¹³¹