

EZRA: STARTING OVER WELL AFTER GROUP FAILURE

Part VII: Thriving Spiritually As A Group By God's Provision And Ministry Of His Teacher-Leaders (Ezra 7:1-8:36)

I. Introduction

- A. For God's people to *thrive spiritually* as a **group**, several **practical** factors are necessary.
- B. These factors all came together for God's people in Ezra 7:1-8:36 in a way that offers lessons for us today:

II. Thriving Spiritually As A Group By God's Provision And Ministry Of His Teacher-Leaders.

- A. Fifty-eight years **after** the temple completion recorded in Ezra 6, king Artaxerxes of Persia granted a highly skilled teacher of the Law in Ezra, the Scribe, the right to take more Hebrews back to Israel, cf. Ezra 7:1-6; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, fn. to Ezra 7:1. We learn from Ezra 7:6c and 7:9c that **God** was involved in providing Judah's Hebrews this man and moving him from Persia to the land of Judah!
- B. In addition to this divine provision, **Ezra** was **committed** to use his skills for his people's good: he had committed himself to **study, apply** and **teach Scripture** to his people, Ezra 7:10a,b.
- C. For Ezra to be **able** to *fulfill* his task, **God** used the **king** to **arrange** for a helpful *environment* for Ezra:
 - 1. First, **God** moved Artaxerxes to grant permission for all Hebrews who so chose on their own to return to Judah from the land of Persia under Ezra's leadership, Ezra 7:11-14.
 - 2. Second, **God** moved the king to provide silver and gold to fund the return and to make provision for the offerings of the temple in accord with the Mosaic Law's directives, Ezra 7:15-18.
 - 3. Third, **God** moved the king to give the Hebrews vessels needed for the temple sacrifices once they arrived in Judah, and whatever else they needed that he had not mentioned toward that end, 7:19-20.
 - 4. Fourth, **God** moved Artaxerxes to order that the taxes collected in the Persian province of which Judah was a part were to be used as needed for the temple, and that with all diligence, Ezra 7:21-22. The king did not want to invoke the wrath of Israel's God, so he urged such a full support of the temple, 7:23.
 - 5. Fifth, **God** moved the king to exclude the Hebrew temple ministers from being taxed by Persia, 7:24.
 - 6. Sixth, **God** moved Artaxerxes to direct Ezra to appoint men to rule the Hebrews in Judea, Ezra 7:25a.
 - 7. Seventh, **God** moved Artaxerxes to direct Ezra to instruct the Hebrews in the Mosaic Law so they would obey it and keep order and peace among the Hebrews in that part of his realm, Ezra 7:25b.
 - 8. Eighth, **God** moved the king to order Ezra to deal out punishment on those Hebrews who failed to heed the Law of God he taught, and that to keep order and peace in accord with God's will, Ezra 7:26.
- D. Ezra rejoiced in the **Lord's** working in the **king** to make all these edicts and to extend to Ezra the favor of the king and his officials, Ezra 7:27. He thus took courage that God was providing him an adequate environment to make him room for an effective ministry in Judah, and led a band to go to Judea, 7:28.
- E. Chapter eight of Ezra details the journey from Babylon to Judah, and shows the Lord's provision along with the high level of motivation **Ezra** had to **do** God's will in **overseeing** the people under his care:
 - 1. First, Ezra recorded the genealogy of those present, and organized the Levites for the temple, 8:1-20.
 - 2. Second, as he had testified to the king God would provide protection for the journey without the king's escort, he led his band to fast and pray for divine protection in his four month trip to Judah, 8:21-23.
 - 3. Third, Ezra believed part of God's protection involved his decision as God's undershepherd to delegate the temple valuables out to others present to make the group less of a target for ambush, Ezra 8:24-30.
 - 4. Fourth, they traveled with God's protection and arrived as planned and ordered, Ezra 8:31-36.

Lesson: For God's flock to thrive as a **GROUP**, (1) **GOD** (a) arranged for a good ministry environment for Ezra, giving him a following, finances and other provisions along with authority to lead. (b) Then, **GOD** prepared a **GIFTED** and **ADVANTAGED** leader in Ezra. (2) **EZRA** in turn (a) **DEVELOPED** his God-given gifts and utilized his advantages (b) to study, obey and teach God's Word while (c) acting as the overseer he was with appropriate prayer, planning and the decisive application of those plans!

Application: Since **GOD** is **FAITHFUL** (Lam. 3:23b), a (1) **LAPSE** in the vitality of God's flock comes **EITHER** from (a) a failure in the people to **HEED** the God-assigned leaders God raises up **OR** from (b) a failure in those gifted and equipped to lead ((a)) to **DEVELOP** their gifts and advantages so as to study, apply or teach Scripture ((b)) **OR** to **ACT** in their oversight by prayer, good planning and the decisive implementation of those plans. (2) If needed, may we make the adjustments for group vitality!