

Many of the events told in Ezra occurred a couple of generations before he actually went there. (He also authored the two books of Chronicles.)

Ezra 8 through 10 tells of his coming to Jerusalem. He relates his faithful concerns about the spiritual condition of the Jewish inhabitants who had returned and settled there some years before. While additional families returned with Ezra, the primary purpose of his trip was to minister to the spiritual needs of the souls already there. He also delivered money provided by the king of Persia to finance the completion of the Temple. God rules the powers that be.

While already on the way he discovered no Levites had accompanied him. The Temple could not function without their services. So he stopped and called for some to come to catch up to him. Ironically they, the most religiously responsible of all the captivity had apparently held back. Apparently they preferred the knowns of captivity to the unknowns of liberty. But God nudged them away from complacency, out to an adventure in new surroundings they had only heard of from their parents.

Due to their initial hesitancy they weren't quite ready to leave. So they had to quickly "drop everything" and pack up to permanently leave. Leaving their homes in the foreign land that had become home. Leaving to go to their true homeland which they had never seen. Are we ready go, and leave all behind, at the Lord's shout? He has prepared a place for us. At great cost – at the cross.

*John 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Apparently they were the only Levites to return. (Several hundred years later John the Baptist was born to Levite parents.)

Ezra listed his other companions of faith on the journey. God also records our acts of faith and will recognize these publically in glory. Won't we rejoice to see what He has done through each of His own!

Despite his joy to return in faith, not long afterward Ezra discovered some sobering facts. A substantial number of the Jews already there had intermarried with the heathen women of the land. This had been forbidden in the Law of Moses when they had first entered Canaan almost 1000 years before. During their history in the land they had repeatedly failed in this way, with dire consequences at the hand of a jealous God. Solomon had been particularly careless in this manner. His foreign wives had turned his heart to their heathen religions. As a result God had divided the kingdom into two rival nations. Beware of marrying an unbeliever! These two nations actually warred against each other. They were ultimately carried into captivity, despite repeated warnings by His prophets.

The New Testament also warns against forming unequal

yokes, 2Corinthians 6:14. But it offers grace in such a situation.

*1Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy,*

The unsaved partner is blessed by the godly life of the spouse and their daily silent witness to Christ, 1Peter 3:1-5.

But for those whom Ezra confronted about their foreign wives it was a solemn time. Hundreds of marriage relationships were broken, with heartbreaking anguish in the parting of loved ones. Ezra's faithfulness was rewarded by the ready submission of the people to the truth he brought. Being godly, they simply obeyed. Note how Ezra left us an example of humility when he identified himself with the sin of the people and confessed it as one of them. This is the model in case of sin becoming public in an Assembly. Paul tells the Corinthians:

*1Corinthians 5:2 (DBY) And ye are puffed up, and ye have not rather mourned, in order that he that has done this deed might be taken away out of the midst of you.*

Incidentally there are two other striking instances of a believer owning and confessing the sin of a congregation as his own, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9. They are worth taking some time considering.

Note the care taken to weigh out the funds and valuable vessels before they left and again upon arrival. Accountability before God and men is befitting those who are His own and serving Him. Place the weekly collections and other funds under the care of godly responsible brothers. Partaking in the giving at meeting is as much a part of the worship as partaking of the emblems on the table. Even a little given is much in God's hands. He doesn't need it any more than He needs our worship but He demands both because we are blessed by worshipping a worthy Person, and in giving to Him from our hearts weekly. Note the care Paul exercised to assure safekeeping and trust regarding funds in 1Corinthians 16 and 2Corinthians 8.

Note how God moved Gentile authorities He had placed in power, as predicted by Daniel. They supported and protected His people that He moved to return and resettle their God given homeland. Babylonian, Persian and Median monarchs facilitated God's will, while showing remarkable respect for the God of Israel. They were blessed with immense empires and great wealth. But later the Roman Empire would become the unwilling birthplace of the promised Messiah and His Church [Assembly]. The Grecians provided the language used for the New Testament. And the Macedonian and Grecian Assemblies became the stimulus for Paul's encouraging and instructive epistles for local Assemblies.

But, "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow," Philippians 2:10. Some sooner and more willingly than others.