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The Chapters of Ezra

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Ezra

SECTION OUTLINE ONE (EZRA 1-3)

King Cyrus of Persia decrees that the Jews may return and rebuild the Temple. The return of the first group of the exiles is recorded. The offering of sacrifices is resumed, and the rebuilding of the Temple is begun.

I. THE DECREE (1:1-4)

- A. The prophecy (1:1): King Cyrus of Persia issues a decree that fulfills a prophecy made by Jeremiah many years earlier.
- B. The proclamation (1:2-4): Cyrus's decree allows all the Jews in the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple.

II. THE DONATIONS (1:6-11; 2:68-70)

- A. Gifts from neighbors (1:6): Many people, probably Jews choosing to stay in Babylon, give the returning Jews gold, silver, and supplies for the journey.
- B. Gifts from King Cyrus (1:7-11): King Cyrus donates the valuable items that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple.
- C. Gifts from family leaders (2:68-70): When the Jews arrive in Jerusalem, some family leaders already living there donate gold, silver, and robes for the Temple and the priests.

III. THE DEDICATED (1:5; 2:1-67): Nearly 50,000 devoted pilgrims return, including priests, Levites, descendants of Solomon's officials, and other Israelites. They bring along 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

IV. THE DETERMINATION (3:1-9): Upon their return the Jews soon accomplish three of their goals:

- A. The altar is rebuilt (3:1-3): Daily sacrifices are immediately resumed.
- B. The Festival of Shelters is observed (3:4-6).
- C. The Temple construction is begun (3:7-9): In the second year after the Jews return, they begin rebuilding the Temple, with the Levites in charge.

V. THE DEDICATION (3:10-13): When the Temple foundation is complete, there is a great celebration.

- A. The singing (3:10-11): The priests and Levites blow trumpets, clash cymbals, and sing praises to the Lord.
- B. The sorrow (3:12-13): Some older Jews remember Solomon's glorious Temple and weep over how much this one pales in comparison to it.

SECTION OUTLINE TWO (EZRA 4-6)

Enemies resist the rebuilding of the Temple. Artaxerxes halts the work. Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to continue building the Temple. Permission is granted for the building of the Temple to continue. The Temple is completed and dedicated, and Passover is celebrated.

I. HINDRANCES TO THE PROJECT (4:1-24): As the Jews rebuild the temple, their enemies try to hinder them in several ways.

- A. Compromise (4:1-3): Some enemies of the Jews try to make them compromise their standards.
 - 1. The request (4:1-2): Some pagans in the land offer to aid in the Temple construction.
 - 2. The refusal (4:3): The Jewish leaders decline their offer.
- B. Coercion (4:4-5): Local residents try to discourage and frighten the Jews as they rebuild. They even bribe agents to work against the Jews.
- C. Condemnation (4:6-24): The enemies write letters to King Xerxes and King Artaxerxes, accusing

the Jews of being rebellious.

1. The message to the king (4:6-16)
 - a. The slander (4:6-13): The enemies warn King Artaxerxes that the Jews will revolt when the rebuilding is complete.
 - b. The suggestion (4:14-16): The enemies suggest that King Artaxerxes check the ancient records himself to learn of the rebellious history of Jerusalem.
2. The message from the king (4:17-24)
 - a. What he discovers (4:17-20): Artaxerxes' search confirms the rebellious history of Jerusalem.
 - b. What he demands (4:21-24): He orders all work on the Temple and the city to be halted immediately.

II. HEADWAY ON THE PROJECT (5:1-6:22): Eventually the Temple is rebuilt, despite the many obstacles along the way.

- A. The prophets in Judah (5:1-2): The prophets Haggai and Zechariah spur the Jews on to restart the rebuilding of the Temple.
- B. The potentate in Persia (5:3-6:22)
 1. The rebuke (5:3-5): Again the Jews' enemies create difficulties for them. The governor of the province demands to know who gave them permission to rebuild the Temple.
 2. The report (5:6-16): The governor sends a letter to Darius, the new king of Persia, reporting the Jews' activities.
 3. The request (5:17): In his letter the governor mentions the Jews' claim that Cyrus granted them permission to rebuild, and he asks Darius to see if this is true.
 4. The reply (6:1-12): Persian records reveal that Cyrus had indeed granted the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple. So Darius gives the following instructions:
 - a. Allow the Jews to rebuild their Temple (6:6-7).
 - b. Assist the Jews in rebuilding their Temple (6:8-12): Darius instructs the governor to use tax revenues to fund the project.
 5. The results (6:13-22)
 - a. The completion of the Temple (6:13-18)
 - (1) The job ends (6:13-15): The Temple is finished during the sixth year of Darius's reign.
 - (2) The joy begins (6:16-18): The Temple is dedicated with a joyous occasion of praise and thanksgiving!
 - b. The celebration of Passover (6:19-22): All the returned exiles celebrate the Passover one month and nine days after the Temple is completed.

SECTION OUTLINE THREE (EZRA 7-8)

Artaxerxes authorizes Ezra to return to Jerusalem with more exiles. The leaders of the returning families are recorded. After gathering at the Ahava Canal, the people depart for Jerusalem and arrive safely. They deposit many valuables at the Temple and sacrifice burnt offerings to God.

I. THE PREPARATION (7:1-10): Many years after the first group of exiles returns to Jerusalem, a man named Ezra comes on the scene.

- A. Ezra and the line of Aaron (7:1-5): Ezra belongs to the seventeenth generation of the priestly line of Aaron.
- B. Ezra and the law of the Lord (7:6-10): Ezra is a scribe, well versed in the Law of Moses. Because of his commitment to study and obey the law, the Lord blesses him.

II. THE COOPERATION (7:11-28)

- A. The king's edict concerning Ezra (7:11-24)
 1. What the ruler will do (7:11-20): King Artaxerxes of Persia allows Ezra to return to Jerusalem and promises him the following:
 - a. Any Jews who wish may go with him (7:13).
 - b. Any finances he needs will be provided (7:14-20).
 2. What the rest will do (7:21-24): The king commands his officials west of the Euphrates to supply Ezra with whatever he requests.

- B. The king's exhortation to Ezra (7:25-28)
 - 1. Ezra's task (7:25-26): Artaxerxes directs Ezra to govern and guide the people, no matter who they are, in the law of God.
 - 2. Ezra's thanksgiving (7:27-28): Grateful, Ezra praises God for granting him the king's favor.
- III. THE PARTICIPATION (8:1-20): Ezra and those going with him to Jerusalem camp at the Ahava Canal before leaving.
 - A. The exiles who come (8:1-14): Ezra lists the families returning to Jerusalem.
 - B. The extras who are called (8:15-20)
 - 1. The absence of Levites (8:15-17): Ezra notices that not one Levite has volunteered to accompany him. So he sends 11 trusted men back to urge the Levites to join them.
 - 2. The arrival of Levites (8:18-20): Over 40 Levites and 220 Temple servants respond and arrive at the camp.
- IV. THE SUPPLICATION (8:21-23): Ezra calls for a time of prayer and fasting before beginning the journey.
- V. THE AUTHORIZATION (8:24-30): Ezra appoints 24 of the leading priests to transport the silver, gold, and bronze items for the Temple.
- VI. THE DESTINATION (8:31-32): After a journey of some four months (see Ezra 7:8-9), Ezra and the people arrive safely in Jerusalem.
- VII. THE PRESENTATION (8:33-36): When Ezra's group of returnees arrives in Jerusalem, they present several things:
 - A. Gold and silver to the Temple (8:33-34): All the valuables are deposited at the Temple and carefully recorded.
 - B. Sacrifices to the Lord (8:35)
 - C. Decrees to the officials (8:36): The king's decrees are given to his officials, who fully cooperate.

SECTION OUTLINE FOUR EZRA 9-10)

Ezra hears that many Jews are imitating the local pagans and have intermarried with them. As Ezra confesses this sin to the Lord, many people become sorrowful. Ezra calls the people to Jerusalem and confronts them with their sin. The people agree to divorce their pagan wives. Those who are guilty are listed.

- I. THE TRANSGRESSION BY THE PEOPLE (9:1-15)
 - A. Ezra's pain (9:1-4)
 - 1. The report (9:1-2): Ezra is told that many Jews-including some priests and Levites-are imitating the local pagans. Israelite men have even married pagan women.
 - 2. The response (9:3-4): Ezra tears his clothes, pulls hair from his head and beard, and sits down in sad shock.
 - B. Ezra's prayer (9:5-15): Ezra prays to the Lord, confessing the faithlessness of Judah and the faithfulness of the Lord.
 - 1. The faithlessness of the people of Judah (9:6-7, 10-15)
 - a. Their past sins (9:6-7)
 - b. Their present sins (9:10-15)
 - 2. The faithfulness of the Lord (9:8-9)
- II. THE CONFESSION BY THE PEOPLE (10:1-44)
 - A. The repentance (10:1-2): Convicted of their sins after hearing Ezra's prayer, the people cry out to God for forgiveness.
 - B. The resolve (10:3-12): The people promise to separate from the pagans in the land, and the men will divorce their pagan wives.
 - C. The record (10:13-44): A process is decided upon to deal with all the intermarriages. The names of all the guilty leaders are recorded.