

**EZRA 7-10**

**THE ARRIVAL OF EZRA**

**<sup>1</sup>After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup>son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup>son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup>son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup>son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of the chief priest Aaron – <sup>6</sup>this Ezra went up from Babylonia.**

**He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that YHWH the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of YHWH his God was upon him.**

**<sup>7</sup>Some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants also went up to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.**

**<sup>8</sup>They came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup>On the first day of the first month the journey up from Babylon was begun, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the gracious hand of his God was upon him.**

**<sup>10</sup>For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of YHWH, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.**

We are in the year 458, ‘the seventh year of King Artaxerxes’ (verse 7). It is nearly sixty years since the completion of the re-building of the temple. All we have been told about the situation in Yehud during those years was in Ezra 4:6-23 which spoke of constant hassle with their northern neighbours. For a summary of the condition in Yehud see the Introduction pages 11-13.

In verses 1-6 we are assured that Ezra ‘a scribe skilled in the law of Moses’(verse 6) can trace his priesthood back to Aaron, via Zadok, David’s chief priest (compare 1Chronicles 6). ‘Law’ is a good translation of the Hebrew Tōrāh, so long as we remember that the teaching of how we are to respond is secondary to the revelation of who God is and how God acts. It is also a ‘wisdom’(verse 25), and can also be translated ‘instruction’, or ‘way’. In verse 6 we are told that Ezra was sent by the Persian King, and that ‘the hand of YHWH his God was upon him’. He is in a perfect position to set Yehud up in accordance with ‘the law of Moses’(see page 11).

Before the exile people looked to the prophets to discover God’s will. This always involved the difficulty of distinguishing false from true prophets. The importance of Ezra is that he took a leading role in establishing the written Torah as the place par excellence where God’s will was to be found. It is now, in the fifth century that Judaism is established as a religion of the book.

This brought with it another series of problems. At its best the scribes studied the written word, wanting to find in it a revelation of the Transcendent One. They struggled with the written word, striking it like a hammer striking flint, looking for the sparks of divine illumination that issued from it (see b.Sabb. 88b). At its worst it encouraged the effort to control God’s word – the attempt at control that we know as fundamentalism.

Ezra and the group that came with him (see Ezra 8), set out in the Spring of 458 and, after a journey of three-and-a-half months arrived in Jerusalem in the middle of summer the same year. His mission was to teach the law to the people of Yehud.

After an introduction in Hebrew, the letter (verses 12-26) is given in Aramaic.

Artaxerxes, like his predecessors, had an interest in the stability of Yehud as a buffer state bordering on Egypt. Stability could only be guaranteed if the people in Yehud lived in accordance with ‘the commandments of YHWH and his statutes for Israel’ (verse 11). He is sending Ezra to see that this is happening.

**<sup>11</sup>This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to the priest Ezra, the scribe, a scholar of the text of the commandments of YHWH and his statutes for Israel:**

**<sup>12</sup>“Artaxerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven: Peace. And now <sup>13</sup>I decree that any of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who freely offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. <sup>14</sup>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, <sup>15</sup> and also to convey the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, <sup>16</sup>with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, given willingly for the house of their God in Jerusalem. <sup>17</sup>With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, and their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. <sup>18</sup>Whatever seems good to you and your colleagues to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. <sup>19</sup>The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. <sup>20</sup>And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you are responsible for providing, you may provide out of the king’s treasury.**

**21**"I, King Artaxerxes, decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, <sup>22</sup>up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred cors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and unlimited salt. <sup>23</sup>Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, or wrath will come upon the realm of the king and his heirs. <sup>24</sup>We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God. <sup>25</sup>And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. <sup>26</sup>All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment."

<sup>27</sup>Blessed be YHWH, the God of our ancestors, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king to glorify the house of YHWH in Jerusalem, <sup>28</sup>and who extended to me steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of YHWH my God was upon me, and I gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

Verse 23 expresses one of the factors motivating Artaxerxes: he does not want to rouse the God of Israel to anger.

Another motivation is his desire to consolidate the loyalty of his Jewish subjects throughout the 'Province Beyond the River'(verse 25).

Artaxerxes uses his authority to support Ezra's work in ensuring the carrying out of the law of YHWH. The 'law of YHWH' is also 'the law of the king'(verse 26).

In verses 27-28 the author begins quoting from the memoirs of Ezra (the text is in Hebrew). Ezra praises YHWH for inspiring Artaxerxes to care for 'the house of YHWH in Jerusalem'(verse 27), as he goes about gathering leaders to take to Judah with him.

Ezra lists those who came with him from Babylon to Jerusalem. Two priestly families are listed first (verse 2). Interestingly he includes Hattush, of the family of David (verse 2). The Chronicler traces Hattush back to King Jeconiah (see 1Chronicles 3:17-22). The genealogy runs Jeconiah, Pedaiah, Zerubbabel, Hananiah, Shecaniah, Shemaiah, Hattush.

<sup>1</sup>These are their family heads, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: <sup>2</sup>Of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom. Of Ithamar, Daniel. Of David, Hattush, <sup>3</sup>of the descendants of Shecaniah. Of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered one hundred fifty males. <sup>4</sup>Of the descendants of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males. <sup>5</sup>Of the descendants of Zattu, Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. <sup>6</sup>Of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. <sup>7</sup>Of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. <sup>8</sup>Of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him eighty males. <sup>9</sup>Of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred eighteen males. <sup>10</sup>Of the descendants of Bani, Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him one hundred sixty males. <sup>11</sup>Of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males. <sup>12</sup>Of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred ten males. <sup>13</sup>Of the descendants of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them sixty males. <sup>14</sup>Of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them seventy males.

**<sup>15</sup>I gathered them by the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the descendants of Levi. <sup>16</sup>Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, She-maiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were wise, <sup>17</sup>and sent them to Iddo, the leader at the place called Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his colleagues the temple servants at Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God. <sup>18</sup>Since the gracious hand of our God was upon us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the descendants of Mahli son of Levi son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and kin, eighteen; <sup>19</sup>also Hashabiah and with him Jeshaiiah of the descendants of Merari, with his kin and their sons, twenty; <sup>20</sup>besides two hundred twenty of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.**

**<sup>21</sup>Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. <sup>22</sup>For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him. <sup>23</sup>So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.**

Ezra enlists Levites for ministry in the temple (verses 15-20). He manages to get thirty-eight.

He also manages to get two hundred and twenty temple servants to work for the Levites (verse 20).

Having told the Persian King that YHWH protects his own against their enemies, he could not ask for a military escort. Here he organises a fast and prayer that YHWH would protect and care for the returning families, since they were on his mission (verses 21-23).

Only priests could handle the sacred objects. It was the duty of the Levites to see to their transportation to the temple in Jerusalem (verses 24-30).

**<sup>24</sup>Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kin with them. <sup>25</sup>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, his counselors, his lords, and all Israel there present had offered; <sup>26</sup>I weighed out into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and one hundred silver vessels worth . . . talents, and one hundred talents of gold, <sup>27</sup>twenty gold bowls worth a thousand darics, and two vessels of fine polished bronze as precious as gold.**

**<sup>28</sup>And I said to them, "You are holy to YHWH, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to YHWH, the God of your ancestors. <sup>29</sup>Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of families in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of YHWH."**

**<sup>30</sup>So the priests and the Levites took over the silver, the gold, and the vessels as they were weighed out, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.**

In verses 31-36 Ezra records the journey from exile to Jerusalem, which was carried out without incident thanks to YHWH's protection. On their arrival in Jerusalem, the sacred objects were handed over to the Jerusalem priests, and proper cult sacrifices were made to YHWH.

Verses 35-36 is an editorial note in the third person.

**<sup>31</sup>Then we left the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem; the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes along the way. <sup>32</sup>We came to Jerusalem and remained there three days. <sup>33</sup>On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver, the gold, and the vessels were weighed into the hands of the priest Meremoth son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. <sup>34</sup>The total was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded. <sup>35</sup>At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats; all this was a burnt offering to YHWH. <sup>36</sup>They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River; and they supported the people and the house of God.**

<sup>1</sup>After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

<sup>2</sup>For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way."

<sup>3</sup>When I heard this, I tore my garment and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. <sup>4</sup>Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

<sup>5</sup>At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to YHWH my God, <sup>6</sup>and said,

"O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. <sup>7</sup>From the days of our ancestors to this day we have been deep in guilt, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as is now the case.

Not surprisingly, inter-religious marriage can involve a syncretism of religious practice that waters down the purity of Judaism. This is presented as a key reason for the falling away of Solomon:

When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to YHWH his God, as was the heart of his father David.

– 1Kings 11:4

This point is explicitly made in Nehemiah 13:36.

Similarly with Ahab, who married Jezebel, the princess of Tyre:

He took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.

– 1Kings 16:33

It is this danger that stands behind the instruction against mixed marriage found in Exodus 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-6.

Ezra is shocked at the news and in verses 6-15 records the prayer that he made to God during the evening sacrifice. His prayer opens with a confession of sin (verses 6-7). It is their failure to observe the will of God that has led his people to the dire situations, including exile, that have dogged them throughout their history.

Yet in his graciousness YHWH has 'left us a remnant' by inspiring 'the kings of Persia' to give his people new life by restoring them to their land and repairing their temple (verses 8-9).

In verses 10-12 we have a confession of sin followed by words that summarise the warnings given his people by YHWH through the prophets. In regard to the prohibition against intermarriage see especially Deuteronomy 7:1-6.

If YHWH were to punish the people as their sins deserve, the remnant would be destroyed, and there would, indeed, be no hope of survival. Ezra's hope is that if they admit their sin, and do something about it, YHWH may, once again, be gracious to them (verses 13-15).

**<sup>8</sup>But now for a brief moment favour has been shown by YHWH our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery. <sup>9</sup>For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.**

**<sup>10</sup>“And now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, <sup>11</sup>which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering to possess is a land unclean with the pollutions of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations. They have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. <sup>12</sup>Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’**

**<sup>13</sup>After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, <sup>14</sup>shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you destroy us without remnant or survivor? <sup>15</sup>YHWH, God of Israel, you are just, but we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can face you because of this.”**

Covenant to separate from their foreign wives

<sup>1</sup>While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel; the people also wept bitterly. <sup>2</sup>Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra, saying, "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. <sup>3</sup>So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. <sup>4</sup>Take action, for it is your duty, and we are with you; be strong, and do it."

<sup>5</sup>Then Ezra stood up and made the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear that they would do as had been said. So they swore.

<sup>6</sup>Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the night. He did not eat bread or drink water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.

Chapter 10 speaks of Ezra in the third person. It is by way of recording the results of what the author found in Ezra's memoirs (chapters 7-9).

Shecaniah proposes that the assembly renew its covenant with YHWH, and send away any foreign wives as well as any children born of illicit unions (verses 2-4).

Ezra follows Shecaniah's proposal and insists on the assembly declaring by oath their determination to do as Shecaniah proposed.

Ezra continues his fast (verse 6).

People assembled from all over Judah and Benjamin in the open square in front of the temple (verses 7-9). Their discomfort was aggravated by the heavy mid-winter rains (verse 9).

Ezra addresses the assembly, reiterating the decision made earlier (verses 10-11; see verse 5).

The assembly agree, and a process is set out to achieve the sending away of foreign wives in an orderly fashion (verses 12-14).

It is difficult to know whether those mentioned in verse 15 were against the whole idea of divorcing foreign wives, or against the delay involved in the proposal set out in verses 12-14.

In verses 16-17 the agreed process is carried out.

**<sup>7</sup>They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, <sup>8</sup>and that if any did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all their property should be forfeited, and they themselves banned from the congregation of the exiles. <sup>9</sup>Then all the people of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. All the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.**

**<sup>10</sup>Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. <sup>11</sup>Now make confession to YHWH the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives."**

**<sup>12</sup>Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, "It is so; we must do as you have said. <sup>13</sup>But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for many of us have transgressed in this matter. <sup>14</sup>Let our officials represent the whole assembly, and let all in our towns who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every town, until the fierce wrath of our God on this account is averted from us."**

**<sup>15</sup>Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them.**

**<sup>16</sup>Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men, heads of families, according to their families, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter. <sup>17</sup>By the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.**

Another list

<sup>18</sup>There were found of the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women, of the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. <sup>19</sup>They pledged themselves to send away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. <sup>20</sup>Of the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. <sup>21</sup>Of the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. <sup>22</sup>Of the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa.

<sup>23</sup>Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

<sup>24</sup>Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

<sup>25</sup>And of Israel: of the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah. <sup>26</sup>Of the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. <sup>27</sup>Of the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. <sup>28</sup>Of the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. <sup>29</sup>Of the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. <sup>30</sup>Of the descendants of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

<sup>31</sup>Of the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, <sup>32</sup>Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. <sup>33</sup>Of the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. <sup>34</sup>Of the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, <sup>35</sup>Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, <sup>36</sup>Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, <sup>37</sup>Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu. <sup>38</sup>Of the descendants of Binnui: Shimei, <sup>39</sup>Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, <sup>40</sup>Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, <sup>41</sup>Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, <sup>42</sup>Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. <sup>43</sup>Of the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

<sup>44</sup>All these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with their children.

The list of priests who had married foreign women is given first (verse 18-22). It includes members of the high priestly family.

This is followed by a short list of six Levites (verse 23), a singer, and three gatekeepers (verse 24).

Verses 25-43 list the laity.