

CHAPTER 8

This chapter gives us a more particular narrative of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem, of which we had a general account in the foregoing chapter

- I. The company that went up with him (v. 1-20).
- II. The solemn fast which he kept with his company, to implore God's presence with them in this journey (v. 21-23).
- III. The care he took of the treasure he had with him, and the charge he gave concerning it to the priests, to whose custody he committed it (v. 24-30).
- IV. The care God took of him and his company in the way (v. 31).
- V. Their safe arrival at Jerusalem, where they delivered their treasure to the priests (v. 32-34), their commissions to the kings lieutenants (v. 36), offered sacrifices to God (v. 35), and then applied to their business.

~~1500~~ EZRA 8:1-20

THE JOURNEY OF EZRA AND OTHERS

Ezra, having received his commission from the king, beats up for volunteers, as it were, sets up an ensign to assemble the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah, ~~23112~~ Isaiah 11:12. "Whoever of the sons of Sion, that *swell with the daughters of Babylon*, is disposed to go to Jerusalem, now that the temple there is finished and the temple-service set a-going, now is their time." Now one would think that under such a leader, with such encouragements, all the Jews should at length have *shaken themselves from their dust*, and *loosed the bands of their neck*, according to that call, ~~2501~~ Isaiah 52:1, 2, etc. I wonder how any of them could read that chapter and yet stay behind. But multitudes did. They loved their ease better than their religion, thought themselves well off where they were, and either believed not that Jerusalem would better their condition or durst not go thither through any difficulties. But here we are told,

I. That some offered themselves willingly to go with Ezra. The heads of the several families are here named, for their honour, and the numbers of the males that each brought in, amounting in all to 1496. Two priests are named (v. 2) and one of the sons of David; but, it should seem, they came without their families, probably intending to see how they liked Jerusalem and then either to send for their families or return to them as they saw cause. Several of their families, or clans, here named, we had before, Ezra 2. Some went up from them at that time, more went up now, as God inclined their hearts; some were called into the vineyard at the third hour, others not till the eleventh, yet even those were not rejected. But here we read of *the last sons of Adonikam* (v. 13), which some understand to their dispraise, that they were the last that enlisted themselves under Ezra; I rather understand it to their honour, that now all the sons of that family returned and none staid behind.

II. That the Levites who went in this company were in a manner pressed into the service. Ezra appointed a general rendezvous of all his company at a certain place upon new-year's day, the first day of the first month.

~~1500~~ Ezra 7:9. Then and there he took a view of them, and mustered them, and (which was strange) *found there none of the sons of Levi*, v. 15. Some priests there were, but no others that were Levites. Where was the spirit of that sacred tribe? Ezra, a priest, like Moses proclaims, *Who is on the Lord's side?* They, unlike to Levi, shrink, and desire to *abide among the sheep-folds to hear the bleatings of the flock*. Synagogues we suppose they had in Babylon, in which they prayed, and preached, and kept sabbaths (and, when they could not have better, they had reason to be thankful for them); but now that the temple at Jerusalem was opened, to the service of which they were ordained, they ought to have preferred the gates of Zion before all those synagogues. It is upon record here, to their reproach; but *tell it not in Gath*. Ezra, when he observed that he had no Levites in his retinue, was much at a loss. He had money enough for the service of the temple, but wanted men. The king and princes had more than done their part, but the sons of Levi had not half done theirs. Eleven men, chief men, and men of understanding, he chooses out of his company, to be employed for the filling up of this lamentable vacancy; and here we are informed,

1. Of their being sent. Ezra sent them to a proper place, where there as a college of Levites, *the place Casiphia*, probably a street or square in

Babylon allowed for that purpose — *Silver Street* one may call it, for *ceseph* signifies *silver*. He sent them to a proper person, to Iddo, the chief president of the college, not to urge him to come himself (we will suppose him to be old and unfit for such a remove), but to send some of the juniors, *ministers for the house of our God*, v. 17. The furnishing of God's house with good ministers is a good work, which will redound to the comfort and credit of all that have a hand in it.

2. Of their success. They did not return without their errand, but, though the warning was short, they brought about forty Levites to attend Ezra, Sherebiah, noted as a very intelligent man, and eighteen with him (v. 18). Hashabiah, and Jeshaiiah, and twenty with them. them, v. 19. By this it appears that they were not averse to go, but were slothful and inattentive, and only wanted to be called upon and excited to go. What a pity it is that good men should omit a good work, merely for want of being spoken to! What a pity that they should need it, but, if they do, what a pity that they should be left without it! Of the Nethinim, the servitors of the sacred college, the *species infima* — *the lowest order* of the temple ministers, more appeared forward to go than of the Levites themselves. Of them 220, upon this hasty summons, enlisted themselves, and had the honour to be expressed by name in Ezra's muster-roll, v. 20. “Thus,” says Ezra, “were we furnished with Levites, *by the good hand of our God upon us.*” If, where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well supplied, let God have the glory, and his good hand be acknowledged as qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them.

<1528> EZRA 8:21-23

EZRA'S FAST

Ezra has procured Levites to go along with him; but what will that avail, unless he have God with him? That is therefore his chief care. In all our ways we must acknowledge God, and in those particularly wherein we are endeavouring to serve the interest of his kingdom among men. Ezra does so here. Observe,

I. The steadfast confidence he had in God and in his gracious protection. He told the king (v. 22) what principles he went upon, that those who seek

God are safe under the shadow of his wings, even in their great dangers, but that those who forsake him are continually exposed, even when they are most secure. God's servants have his power engaged for them; his enemies have it engaged against them. This Ezra believed with his heart, and with his mouth made confession of it before the king; and therefore he was ashamed to ask of the king a convoy, lest thereby he should give occasion to the king, and those about him, to suspect either God's power to help his people or Ezra's confidence in that power. Those that trust in God, and triumph in him, will be ashamed of seeking to the creature for protection, especially of using any sorry shifts for their own safety, because thereby they contradict themselves and their own confidence. Not but that those who depend upon God must use proper means for their preservation, and they need not be ashamed to do so; but, when the honour of God is concerned, one would rather expose one's-self than do any thing to the prejudice of that, which ought to be dearer to us than our lives.

II. The solemn application he made to God in that confidence: He *proclaimed a fast*, v. 21. No doubt he had himself begged of God direction in this affair from the first time he had it in his thoughts; but for public mercies public prayers must be made, that all who are to share in the comfort of them may join in the request for them. Their fasting was,

1. To express their humiliation. This he declares to be the intent and meaning of it. *“that we might afflict ourselves before our God for our sins, and so be qualified for the pardon of them.”* When we are entering upon any new condition of life our care should be to bring none of the guilt of the sins of our former condition into it. When we are in any imminent peril let us be sure to make our peace with God, and then we are safe: nothing can do us any real hurt.

2. To excite their supplications. Prayer was always joined with religious fasting. Their errand to the throne of grace was *to seek of God the right way*, that is, to commit themselves to the guidance of the divine Providence, to put themselves under the divine protection, and to beg of God to guide and keep them in their journey and bring them safely to their journey's end. They were strangers in the road, were to march through their enemies' countries, and had not a pillar of cloud and fire to lead them, as their fathers had; but they believed that the power and favour of God, and the ministration of his angels, would be to them instead of that, and hoped by prayer to obtain divine assistance. Note, All our concerns about

ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty by prayer to commit to God, and leave the care of with him, ^{<5046>}Philippians 4:6.

III. The good success of their doing so (v. 23): *We besought our God* by joint-prayer, *and he was entreated of us*. They had some comfortable assurance in their own minds that their prayers were answered, and the event declared it; for never any that sought God in earnest sought him in vain.

^{<4528>}EZRA 8:24-30

EZRA'S CARE OF THE TEMPLE TREASURE

We have here an account of the particular care which Ezra took of the treasure he had with him, that belonged to God's sanctuary, Observe,

1. Having committed the keeping of it to God, he committed the keeping of it to proper men, whose business it was to watch it, though without God they would have waked in vain. Note, Our prayers must always be seconded with our endeavours; the care of Christ's gospel, his church, and ordinances, must not be so left with him but that it must also be *committed to faithful men*, ^{<5112>}2 Timothy 2:2.

2. Having prayed to God to preserve all the substance they had with them, he shows himself especially solicitous for that part of it which belonged to the house of God and was an offering to him. Do we expect that God should, by his providence, keep that which belongs to us? Let us, by his grace, keep that which belongs to him. Let God's honour and interest be our care; and then we may expect that our lives and comforts will be his. Observe,

(1.) The persons to whom he delivered the offerings of the house of God. Twelve chief priests, and as many Levites, he appointed to this trust (v. 24, 30), who were bound by their office to take care of the things of God, and were in a particular manner to have the benefit of these sacred treasures. Ezra tells them why he put those things into their hands (v. 28): *You are holy unto the Lord, the vessels are holy also*; and who so fit to take care of holy things as holy persons? Those that have the dignity and honour of the

priesthood must take along with them the trust and duty of it. The prophet is foretelling the return of God's people and ministers out of Babylon, when he gives the solemn charge (^{<2521>}Isaiah 52:11), *Be you clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.*

(2.) The great exactness with which he lodged this trust in their hands: He *weighed to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels* (v. 25), because he expected to have it from them again by weight. In all trust, but especially sacred ones, we ought to be punctual, and preserve a right understanding on both sides. In Zerubbabel's time the vessels were delivered by number, here by weight, that all might be forth-coming and it might easily appear if any were missing, to intimate that such as are entrusted with holy things (as all the stewards of the mysteries of God are) are concerned to remember, both in receiving their trust and in discharging it, that they must shortly give a very particular account of it, that they may be faithful to it and so give up their account with joy.

(3.) The charge he gave them with these treasures (v. 29): “*Watch you, and keep them, that they be not lost, nor embezzled, nor mingled with the other articles. Keep them together; keep them by themselves; keep them safely, till you weigh them in the temple, before the great men there,*” hereby intimating how much it was their concern to be careful and faithful and how much it would be their honour to be found so. Thus when Paul charges Timothy with the gospel treasure he bids him keep it *until the appearing of Jesus Christ*, and his appearing before him to give account of his trust, when his fidelity would be his crown.

<4583> EZRA 8:31-36

EZRA'S ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM

We are now to attend Ezra to Jerusalem, a journey of about four months in all; but his multitude made his marches slow and his stages short. Now here we are told,

I. That his God was good, and he acknowledged his goodness: *The hand of our God was upon us*, to animate us for our undertaking. To him they owed it,

I. That they were preserved in their journey, and not all cut off; for there were enemies that *laid wait for them by the way* to do them a mischief, or at least, like Amalek, to *smite the hindmost of them*, but God protected them, v. 31. Even the common perils of journeys are such as oblige us to sanctify our going out with prayer and our returns in peace with praise and thanksgiving; much more ought God to be thus eyed in such a dangerous expedition as this was.

2. That they were brought in safety to their journey's end, v. 32. Let those that have stedfastly set their faces towards the new Jerusalem proceed and persevere to the end *till they appear before God in Zion*, and they shall find that he *who has begun the good work will perform it*.

II. That his treasurers were faithful. When they had come to Jerusalem they were impatient to be discharged of their trust, and therefore applied to the great men of the temple, who received it from them and gave them an acquittance in full, v. 33, 34. It is a great ease to one's mind to be discharged from a trust, and a great honour to one's name to be able to make it appear that it has been faithfully discharged.

III. That his companions were devout. As soon as they came to be near the altar they thought themselves obliged to offer sacrifice, whatever they had done in Babylon, v. 35. That will be dispensed with when we want opportunity which when the door is opened again will be expected from us. It is observable,

1. That among their sacrifices they had a sin-offering; for it is the atonement that sweetens and secures every mercy to us, which will not be truly comfortable unless *iniquity be taken away* and our peace made with God.

2. That the number of their offerings related to the number of the tribes, twelve bullocks, twelve he-goats, and ninety-six rams (that is, eight times twelve), intimating the union of the two kingdoms, according to what was foretold, ³⁵⁷²Ezekiel 37:22. They did not any longer go two tribes one way and ten another, but all the twelve met by their representatives at the same altar.

IV. That even the enemies of the Jews became their friends, bowed to Ezra's commission, and, instead of hindering the people of God, furthered

them (v. 36), purely in complaisance to the king: when he appeared moderate they all coveted to appear so too. *Then had the churches rest.*