

Careful and deliberate preparation for the journey to Jerusalem.

- Ezra chose 12 of the leading priests and divided the temple offerings among them
 - He weighed out and recorded the sums and revealed that an accounting would be made upon arrival at the temple.
 - The vessels and offerings were considered holy since they had been dedicated to temple service and therefore could only be handled by the priest.

The arrival

- God did bless them with safe passage
- After a few days of recovery from the trip they weighed out the offerings to the priests at the temple.
- Burnt offerings were made to the LORD. This would have been the first time in their lives to experience worship at the temple.
- Artaxerxes' letter is delivered to the rulers of the area.

Ezra encounters a crisis that threatens the integrity of the Jewish people.

- The crisis: Intermarriage with the peoples of the land
- The background: Old Testament Law prohibited marriage with the people of other nations and specifically with the people of Canaanite descent. (Leviticus 21:14; Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-11)
 - The main reason for this prohibition was to keep God's people from the idolatrous practices of these people. (see 1 Kings 11:4-8)
 - A second reason for this prohibition was to preserve the identity of the chosen people of God.

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- Ezra's response
 - Outward expressions of intense sorrow
 - Tore his clothing (Leviticus 21:10)
 - Pulled out some of his hair (Leviticus 21:5)
 - Sat appalled
 - Fasted
 - Prayed

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- Ezra's response
 - Ezra's prayer
 - Like Daniel (Daniel 9), Ezra identifies with the sin of the people around him and acknowledges the guilt of that sin.
 - Ezra recounts the past sins of the people and the judgment God has brought because of their iniquities.
 - He acknowledges the current blessings and mercies of the return to the land the rebuilding of the temple.

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- Ezra's response
 - Ezra's prayer
 - He is also well aware of the fact that they are not fully free, a lingering result of God's judgment.
 - Ezra goes on to confess the specific infraction of God's law regarding intermarriage with the people of that land.
 - He ends the prayer with the realization of the peril of this sin and appeals to God's justice and mercy.

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- Response of the people
 - Ezra's public expressions of sorrow and prayer drew a great number of people who also began to experience conviction over their sin.
 - The people propose that those guilty would make a covenant with God to put away the foreign wives and children
 - Ezra is encouraged to enforce this covenant
 - Ezra immediately made the leading priests and Levites make this commitment.

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- Response of the people
 - After a night of fasting and prayer Ezra called a mandatory meeting of all of the returned exiles.
 - A proposal is presented to have the leaders appointed in all the cities and the people who had taken foreign wives come before these judges by appointment.
 - The proposal was accepted with some objection. The process took several months from the first day of the tenth month to the first day of the first month.

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- Some observations
 - These events reveal the gravity of taking God's Word seriously and the serious consequences when His Word is broken.
 - This is a specific response to a clear and specific commandment to a select group of people. Care should be taken not to misapply this passage to marriage today.
 - Although we have few details about the procedures followed it is to be noted that the putting away of these wives and children was not done in a casual or haphazard way. Marriage is never looked upon lightly in scripture.