

A DANGEROUS JOURNEY

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Ezra chapters seven and eight tell of a journey of the priest and scribe by whose name the book is called. Ezra began his journey with permission from the Persian king Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:6). His journey was from the land of Babylon to the land of Israel, with the purpose of teaching God's word to the Israelites there. He also carried a letter from Artaxerxes authorizing any Israelites still in Babylon to journey back with Ezra, and also to carry silver and gold and vessels for the service and beautification of the newly reconstructed temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26). "Some" of the children of Israel, priests, Levites, porters, singers, and Nethinims accompanied Ezra on his journey (Ezra 7:7). One reason that more of the Israelites did not join Ezra was likely because of the nature of the trip.

Dangers of the road

Ezra and the people were about to make their journey through the land of their enemies on the way to Jerusalem. They would be a small band of people in hostile territory (between Babylonia and Israel), and not for a short period of time. The journey took exactly four months to the day to complete (Ezra 7:8-9). It would have to be made on foot. Although it was still 500 years before Jesus Christ would begin his ministry on the earth, the Lord's "Parable of the Good Samaritan" is certainly an accurate commentary of the perils of traveling in ancient times (Luke 10:29-37). The Apostle Paul also confronted the "perils of robbers" during his frequent travels (2 Cor 11:26). Of course, the robbers were only one of the inherent dangers of traveling during those days. Wild animals, including lions, posed another threat. Samson killed one with his bare hands while traveling to Timnath of the Philistines (Judg 14:5-6). A lion killed the young prophet of Judah on the road home after prophesying against Jeroboam and his altar (1 Kgs 13:24). On top of that, Ezra and his company faced the dangers of those who were fervent enemies of the Jews. Therefore, prior to embarking on this potentially treacherous journey, Ezra proclaimed a fast at the river

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(continued)

Ahava to entreat God to deliver them safely on their journey.

Faith in God's promises

Ezra prayed for God's protection and deliverance because he was "*ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.'* So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us" (Ezra 8:21-23). Ezra's faith was in God's promise of protection to the Israelites who were faithful and obedient to Him. In Deuteronomy 20:1-4, God promised to Israel: "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (see also Deut 28:7; 30:7). Had God not *promised* this deliverance, then Ezra might have needed the protection of Artaxerxes' soldiers. But since God *had* promised this, Ezra could not doubt, especially since he had told the king about God's promise. This would have made Ezra a hypocrite. And Ezra was no hypocrite. Today, Christians have "exceeding great and precious promises" in the New Testament through Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:4). And "He is faithful that promised" (Heb 10:23), and is not slack concerning His promises (2 Pet 3:9). Therefore, we must have faith in what God has spoken to us (Rom 10:17). Otherwise, it is impossible to please Him (Heb 11:6). While treading the strait and narrow road that leads to eternal life, we need to be like Ezra and trust in the Lord and pray without ceasing.