

Ezra 7 — The Heart Prepared — Ezra the Ready Scribe Goes Up, the King's Astonishing Letter, and the Fourfold Pattern of a Scripture-Hearted Life

Ezra 7: Ezra the priest-scribe, whose line is traced back through Zadok to Aaron the chief priest, goes up from Babylon to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes king of Persia — c. 458 BC (scriptural reckoning; scholars generally agree), roughly sixty years after the temple's completion under Darius (Ezra 6). He carries an extraordinary royal letter (vv. 12–26, written in Aramaic) commissioning him with authority, treasure, tax exemptions, and the charge to teach the law of God; the chapter turns on v. 10, where 'Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel.'

For six chapters the book of Ezra has been about a building — altar, foundation, opposition, and at last, in chapter 6, the second temple finished and dedicated "in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king" (Ezra 6:15). Then chapter 7 opens with three of the quietest, most time-swallowing words in the Old Testament: "Now after these things." Behind that little phrase lies a gap of roughly fifty-eight years. A whole generation has lived and died. The temple has stood two full lifetimes' worth of festivals. And a new Persian king, Artaxerxes, now sits where Darius sat.

Hebrew Word Studies

mahir (H4106) / sopher (H5608) (מַהִיר / סוֹפֵר) — **skilled, ready, prompt / scribe, writer, secretary v. 6.** The phrase is *sopher mahir* — "a ready scribe." *Sopher* (H5608) is literally one who counts, numbers, and writes; over time it came to mean the professional keeper and copyist of texts, the man who knew the scroll letter by letter. *Mahir* (H4106) adds the crucial adjective: skilled, practiced, swift — the same word used of a craftsman "diligent in his business" who "shall stand before kings" (Prov. 22:29), and it is precisely before a king that this ready scribe now stands. Put the two words together and you have the portrait: not a man who merely owns the law, but a man so soaked in it that he can move through it without fumbling. Readiness is not a gift that fell on Ezra; it is the residue of years. The Lord's charge to His own scribes is the same — "seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed" (D&C 11:21). Ezra had obtained the word before he was ever asked to declare it. That is why, when the king's letter came, he was ready to carry it.

tovah / yad (H2896 / H3027) (טוֹבָה / יָד) — **good, pleasant, favorable / hand, power, agency vv. 6, 9, 28.** The chapter's refrain welds two ordinary words into one theology. *Yad* (H3027) is simply "hand" — but in Hebrew the hand is the seat of power and agency; to be under someone's hand is to be under their control, their care, or their strength. *Tovah* (H2896) is "good" — not merely effective but morally and relationally good, the word God speaks over creation seven times in Genesis 1. Join them and you get "the good hand," a hand whose power is bent by kindness. The narrator will not let the phrase go: the hand upon Ezra (v. 6), the good hand bringing him safely up (v. 9), and finally Ezra's own confession that "I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me" (v. 28). Note what the hand does not do — it does not remove the four-month journey or the danger; it accompanies them. That is the biblical shape of providence: not the absence of the wilderness but a good hand upon you as you cross it. "The LORD is thy keeper... he shall preserve thy soul... thy going out and thy coming in" (Ps. 121:5–8) is the same hand, and the going out on day one and the coming in four months later is Ezra 7's proof of the psalm.

kun (H3559) (כּוּן) — **to prepare, establish, make firm, set fast v. 10.** This is the pivotal word of the chapter, and it is quieter than we expect. *Kun* does not mean to *plan* or to *intend*; it means to make something firm, fixed, established, set in place. It is the verb behind "the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved" (Ps. 93:1) and behind a throne "established in mercy" (Isa. 16:5). So when Ezra "prepared his heart," the picture is not a fleeting resolution but a heart set firm — planted, oriented, made steady toward the law of the LORD before a single word of study begins. The direction the heart is *fixed* decides everything downstream, which is exactly why the same verb shows up in the great warnings and blessings about the heart: "they set not their heart aright" (Ps. 78:8) is a heart *not* established, while "his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD" (Ps. 112:7) is a heart *kun*-ed toward God. The Book of Mormon reaches for the same idea when Alma teaches that faith begins with a heart that will "give place" for the seed (Alma 32:28) — you must prepare the ground before the word can take root. Ezra's whole life of seeking, doing, and teaching rests on this first hidden act: he established his heart. Prepare the heart, and the study, the obedience, and the teaching have somewhere firm to stand.

darash / asah / lamad (H1875 / H6213 / H3925) (דָּרַשׁ / אָשָׂא / לָמַד) — **to seek, inquire, search out / to do, make, perform / to teach, learn, train v. 10.** Three verbs, one deliberate order — seek, do, teach. *Darash* (H1875) is not casual

looking; it is the verb of diligent inquiry, of *pursuing* the law until it yields its meaning — the same word in "seek ye the LORD while he may be found" (Isa. 55:6). *Asah* (H6213) is the plain verb of doing and making, the verb of obedience that turns a studied law into a lived one. And *lamad* (H3925) means both to learn and to teach — in Hebrew the two are one root, because the teacher is fundamentally one who has learned; you can only *lamad* to others what you have first *lamad*-ed yourself. So the order is not incidental. Ezra seeks before he does, and does before he teaches — and because *lamad* carries the learning inside the teaching, the verse quietly insists that no one teaches Israel what he has not first sought and lived. This is the pattern the Savior sets for every disciple-teacher: "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:32); it is why the Lord tells His servants to obtain the word before declaring it (D&C 11:21). Seek, do, then teach — reverse the order and you get a scribe full of statutes and empty of the God who gave them. Keep the order and you get Ezra, whose teaching had the weight of a life behind it.

chazaq / chesed (H2388 / H2617) (חָזַק / חֶסֶד) — to be strong, to strengthen, take courage / mercy, lovingkindness, covenant love v. 28. Ezra's doxology hangs on two words. *Chesed* (H2617) — "mercy" in the King James — is one of the great load-bearing words of the Old Testament: not mere pity but covenant lovingkindness, the steadfast, faithful love God shows to those bound to Him, the word sung thirty-six times over in Psalm 136 ("his mercy endureth for ever"). When Ezra says God "extended mercy unto me before the king," he is naming that covenant love reaching all the way into a Persian court. And *chazaq* (H2388) — "I was strengthened" — is the verb of the Lord's charge to Joshua, "be strong (*chazaq*) and of a good courage" (Josh. 1:6), the verb of a hand made firm for a hard task. Read the two together and you have Ezra's entire spiritual autobiography in one verse: God's covenant love (*chesed*) came first, and out of it Ezra was strengthened (*chazaq*) for the work. He does not say "I was brave" or "I seized the moment." He says mercy came, and strength followed, and then he acted. It is the same order the Lord promises everywhere: "my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9); "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philip. 4:13). Ezra gathered Israel's chief men not on his own nerve but on borrowed strength — and knew it, and blessed the Lender.

From the Chapter's Architecture

I will not force this into a chiasm; it is not one. It is a frame — Hebrew, Aramaic, Hebrew — and a refrain: the good hand of God, sounded at verses 6, 9, and 28. The refrain is the real architecture. Three times the chapter stops to say that whatever happened here, God's hand was on it: on the granting of Ezra's request, on the safe journey up, on the strengthening for the gathering. The prepared heart and the good hand belong together. Ezra prepared his heart (v. 10); God's good hand was upon him (vv. 6, 9, 28). The two halves of a faithful life, and the chapter will not let you separate them.