

From 2001-2010 in a TV series called 24, counterterrorism agent Jack Bauer fought the bad guys of the world, a day at a time. Each episode covers a single day in the life of Jack Bauer. In contrast the timeline for the book of Ezra measured in years not days. **Chapter 7** takes up the story 60 years after last week's conclusion. The rebuilt temple dedicated. The rebuilt people of God walking in the powerful word of the Lord. Today's episode straightforward. Ezra, the priest, introduced to us in **v1-10, 27-28** travels to Jerusalem. Leading a second group out of exile. Artaxerxes the current king supports Ezra in every possible way. His support set out in the letter he wrote to Ezra, **v11-26**. On the surface the stuff of diplomacy and policy implementation. A head of state commissioning someone to implement his political agenda. Policy of repatriation begun by Cyrus. Policy of promoting peace and harmony in the vast empire. By ensuring different people groups are free to practice their religious and cultural identity. Within this straightforward story is a story of miracles. The miracle of a bible teacher sent to help the people of God walk in the word. The miracle of a powerful patron to support the bible teacher. This is God's doing. With reference to Ezra we read, *'for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.'* **v6** *'for the gracious hand of his God was on him.'* **v9** *'the hand of the LORD my God was on me'* **v28** Artaxerxes, Ezra's powerful patron, is a pagan king. Yet he freely acknowledges the God of Jerusalem, the God of heaven. Clearing every obstacle for Ezra to continue rebuilding the people of God. Brothers and sisters, behind the scenes of history, in the complexities of our daily lives, our God is miraculously achieving his purposes for the benefit of his people. Summed up powerfully by Paul, *'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.'* **Romans 8:28-30** As history is being written, day by day, God is working to make you and me more like Jesus. God is doing everything necessary to ensure our eternal future. That is the greatest good God does for us. When events are stacked against you. When nothing appears to be good in the unfolding of your life please rely on this promise. Cling to our powerful, loving miracle working heavenly Father. In 458BC, God provided Ezra to equip his people in Jerusalem to keep on walking in the word. Why was Ezra chosen.

Excellent CV. Excellent character. His status as priest. Descendant of Aaron, the first priest. **v5** Priest with a heart and desire to teach the Law of Moses, not just perform sacrifices in the temple. **v6** No run of the mill teacher. *'For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.'* **v10** Ezra devotes himself to study to rightly teach the Bible to others. A godly Bible teacher practising what he taught. A God given teacher and model of walking in the word. He formed Israel into a people of the Book. **Nehemiah 8** shows the truth and impact of that. Ezra, God's miraculous gift for rebuilding God's people. Sisters and brothers, imagine you have the responsibility of choosing the next ordained leader of your church. Who are you seeking? Skilled, godly Bible teacher ought to be top of the list. Every local church needs them to promote growth that honours God. Skilled, godly Bible teachers are not restricted to clergy. How are you going to ensure Northern Beaches Anglicans has a team of godly skilled Bible teachers? Four things to actively pursue. Pray, for it is a miracle of God's grace when godly teachers are raised up. Support those God provides by honouring, encouraging and releasing them to exercise this vital teaching ministry. Direct those appointing ordained leaders to properly examine candidates. Ensuring they are skilled Bible teachers with a track record of practicing what they preach. Consider suitable study to help you grow as a teacher of the Bible for your family and in your local church. In the 1520's, William Tyndale changed the spiritual health of the English-speaking world. Despite deep and violent opposition, he translated the Bible from Latin to English. Executed in England at the age of 42 for doing so. You may have heard of William Tyndale. I guarantee you have never heard of Humphrey Monmouth. A wealthy English cloth merchant. William Tyndale's patron. Making his work possible. Providing accommodation. Paying his expenses to live in Europe and complete his work under the guidance of Martin Luther. Smuggling 3,000 completed English translations into England from Germany. Spending time imprisoned in the Tower of London when his support for Tyndale uncovered. Pagan king Artaxerxes is to Ezra what Humphrey Monmouth is to William Tyndale. A patron. A miraculous gift of God. His role in ensuring the success of Ezra's ministry not be underestimated. His royal patronage enables Ezra to return safely to Jerusalem. Giving permission for over 2000 people to return with Ezra. Providing more abundant financial provision for the temple. Directing local leaders to support Ezra by removing political and economic barriers. Decreeing punishment for any who disobey Ezra's teaching. A miracle: powerful

pagan king acting as a patron for a Jewish Bible teacher. Brothers and sisters, gospel patrons one of the ways God sustains gospel focussed, Bible shaped ministry. Jesus had gospel patrons. Listen to **Luke 8:1-3** *'After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.'* Northern Beaches Anglicans has gospel patrons. Bush Church Aid Society; parishioners setting aside money in their wills; Christians beyond the parish financially supporting particular ministries; parishioners doing likewise beyond their offertory; generous weekly givers in the parish family. Ezra praises God for the miracle that is Artaxerxes' support. *'Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials.'* **v27-28a** Sisters and brothers, praise God for our gospel patrons. Pray God will continue to raise up gospel patrons to support gospel ministry here and everywhere. Rejoice in the miracles of Ezra 7. Keep walking in the word, sustained and shaped by the biblical teaching you receive from godly Bible teachers at Northern Beaches Anglicans.