

PREPARING FOR A JOURNEY Sunday, July 21, 2013

Unifying Topic: FASTING AND PRAYING

Lesson Text

I. Proclaiming A Fast (Ezra 8:21)

II. God Will Protect Us (Ezra 8: 22-23)

The Main Thought: So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. (Ezra 8:23, KJV).

Unifying Principle: As people journey through life, they pause to assess their strengths and weaknesses for reaching their destination. How can people prepare themselves to make this assessment? Ezra and his entourage stopped on their way to Jerusalem to prepare themselves by fasting and praying for God's protection on their journey.

Lesson Aim: To introduce students to the importance for Ezra and the returning exiles of placing their trust fully in the Lord to provide for them.

Life Aim: To help students see the necessity of choosing allegiance to the Lord over all other competing allegiances.

8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

8:22 For I 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.

8:23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

HISTORY:

Chapter 8:1-14 These verses contain a list of those who returned with Ezra to Jerusalem. *"The chief of their fathers"*, refer to the heads of each household. There are several important facts to consider from this list of names.

1. First, the names that appear in this list are similar to those which appeared in the list of Chapter 2. Those who returned first under Zerubbabel had left parts of their families and relatives behind in Babylon. Now, many of these also returned under the leadership of Ezra.
2. Second, there are twelve families mentioned in this list. This is implied to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.
3. Third, there were a total of 1,496 males and fifteen heads who returned with Ezra. This was a much smaller group than the one that had returned with Zerubbabel earlier.

8:15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. The events described in this chapter are described from Ezra's personal viewpoint. After viewing the people Ezra was faced with a dilemma. There were no Levites among them who were returning. ¹The river, spoken of here, is a small stream that flows into the Euphrates. It was about 8 day's journey from Babylon. It appears they stopped to rest the people. They abode in tents (3 days), because there were so many of them. This was the only way to house the people on the trip. There were no Levites with them. This was very strange, for seventy-four Levites had gone up with Zerubbabel, but on this trip Ezra found none. It would appear that the Levites should have not been content to stay in Babylon but on hand to eagerly go back to Jerusalem to do the work of the Lord in the temple. God had called these men for a special service but they were not found on the trip to Jerusalem. The trip back to Jerusalem was halted while Ezra waited to recruit Levites.

8:16 Then sent I for Eli-e'zer, for A'ri-el, for Shemai'ah, and for Elna'than, and for Jarib, and for Elna'than, and for Nathan, and for Zechari'ah, and for Meshul'lam, chief men; also for Joi'arib, and for Elna'than, men of understanding. Ezra sent a group of messengers to Iddo to secure Levites. These chief men mentioned here were men who had enough authority that they would be accepted by Iddo as messengers from Ezra. They were men of understanding meaning wise.

8:17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphi'a, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Neth'inim, at the place Casiphi'a, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. And Iddo was the chief of the Neth'inims. The Neth'inims had been set aside to do the menial work in the temple (priest helpers). He was, also, the head of the Jews at Casiphi'a. Ezra sent the group to a place called Casiphi'a. The families of many people who used to work in the temple were living there. Ezra had sent out a commandment unto Iddo for such ministers of the house of God.

8:18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebi'ah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;— *"By the good hand of our*

¹ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/08.html>

God" meant that God was active in every detail of this adventure. Ezra began to thank God for the good fortune of the Levites coming back. The group followed through with the commandment of Ezra because they brought back a man of understanding named Sherebi'ah, along with eighteen of his sons and brothers. He was a very astute man and descendant of Mahli, the son of Levi and grandson of Israel.

8:19 And Hashabi'ah, and with him Jeshai'ah of the sons of Mera'ri, his brethren and their sons, twenty;— God also sent Hashabi'ah, and Jeshai'ah of the sons of Mera'ri, his brethren with twenty of his sons and brothers. So Levites were from the division of Mera'ri.

8:20 Also of the Neth'inim, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Neth'inim: all of them were expressed by name. They were able to secure 40 Levites and 220 Neth'inim.

LESSON:

Ezra 8:21 Proclaiming A Fast

8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. They camp outside Babylon at the river that runs to Ahava and Ezra proclaimed a fast at the Ahava River.

POINT:

Why Fast?

1. For Jesus to come back
2. For help in a new venture in ministry
3. To avert some danger or threat
4. To express sorrow and loss
5. To express repentance and grief for sin
6. Not for the praise of men

Matthew 9:14-15

Matthew 4:1-2; Acts 13:3

Ezra 8:21; 2Samuel 12:16; 2Chronicles 20:3

2Samuel 1:12; 1Chronicle 10:12

Joel 2:12-13

Matthew 6:16-18

Ezra realized the importance of depending upon God. Their prayers and fasting prepared them spiritually. This was to implore God for safety and prosperity; preparing them for the rest of their journey. He spoke of them afflicting themselves before God in this fast; seeking Him in the right way for their children and all their goods when they traveled. They wanted no harm to come to the women and children, or to their precious cargo.

Ezra 8: 22-23 God Will Protect Us

8:22 For I 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. Ezra was ashamed to ask King Artaxerxes for soldiers to protect them from the enemies. They had already declared that God would protect them. If he were to ask for the soldier's protection, then it would look as if God was not able to take care of them.

8:23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. Ezra knew God's promises to protect his people but he didn't take them for granted. He also knew that God's blessings are appropriated through prayer, so Ezra and the people humbled themselves through fasting and prayer, and God listen to their entreaty and their prayers were answered. Fasting humbled them because going without food reminded them of their dependence on God's provision. It also gave them extra time to pray and meditate on God. They therefore put God first.

SUMMARY:

²Ezra proclaimed a fast in preparation for the journey to Jerusalem. He wanted the assembled group thereby to humble themselves before God in order to ask Him for a safe journey for themselves, their children, and their possessions. Being humble before God shows one's spiritual dependence and acknowledgement that God is in total control. Thereby, Ezra did not want to ask for military protection (soldiers) because he had already publicly announced that God would take care of the people as they returned. Thus, committing themselves to prayer and fasting brought the answer they had intreated unto God (vv.24-30). They broke camp and then departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month to Jerusalem. They had a safe journey as they came to Jerusalem and after a long journey they rested for three days there (vv.31-32).

APPLICATION:

It's necessary on life's journey to be prepared to choose the right allegiance. When we choose God and His way, it will be affective for us in receiving the right answer.

² <http://ldolphin.org/daniel/ezra02.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>