

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Ezra 3:8-13

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, July 7, 2013

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 7, 2013**, is from **Ezra 3:8-13**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lessons Commentary* (formerly, *Bible Lesson Forum*) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **International Bible Lessons Commentary Index**. The weekly **International Bible Lesson** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in **The Oklahoman** newspaper.

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(Ezra 3:8) In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in

the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their people, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work on the house of the LORD.

Ezra did not arrive with the first returnees to Jerusalem, but as an important scribe he had access to all the temple records regarding the return of the Jews in their first return from exile in Babylon and what they did upon their return. In chapter 2, Ezra included the names or family names of those who first returned, numbering almost 50,000. Their return could be compared to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses: they brought much wealth with them given by the Babylonians. Ezra named some of the names and the qualifications of those responsible for rebuilding the temple of the LORD. Some descendants of King David and the Levites returned.

(Ezra 3:9) And Jeshua with his sons and his kin, and Kadmiel and his sons, Binnui and Hodaviah along with the sons of Henadad, the Levites, their sons and kin, together took charge of the workers in the house of God.

The return was of such monumental importance under the hand of the LORD that careful, formal records were made that described the organization of leaders and workers. Ezra recorded both the names of those who obeyed God and made a positive difference and the names of some who disobeyed God by marriage to foreign, pagan wives. These foreign wives had not come to love and obey the LORD, as Ruth had done, and they misled their families away from total faithfulness to God and sincere obedience and worship according to the Law of Moses (see the later chapters of Ezra, recording what he did when he returned).

(Ezra 3:10) When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel;

King Cyrus of Persia returned many, if not all, of the items to the temple that the Babylonians had carried away into captivity. Though not specifically listed, these items no doubt included cymbals and trumpets, along with vestments for the priests. They praised God for helping them begin well by rebuilding their temple foundation. They also began well by following the directions of King David, who praised God with psalms (songs) and dancing.

(Ezra 3:11) and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.” And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

King David praised God, saying, “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (Psalms 100:5) and “Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever” (Psalms 40:11). Using David’s psalms, they also followed his directions in praising the LORD. In worship, the Israelites used musical instruments, recited the psalms responsively, thanked the LORD for His love, mercy, and forgiveness as they offered their sacrifices, declared the nature and moral character of God in their responsive praise, and shouted enthusiastically for all to hear about their love for God.

(Ezra 3:12) But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy,

The priests, Levites, and people who remembered King Solomon's beautiful temple would be quite elderly by this time. When some remembered their former temple, and probably their sins that led to God's just judgment, they wept. Those who wept could encourage those who shouted with joy to remain faithful in the coming years. Those who shouted with joy praised God for leading them back to Judea and for helping them to begin the temple's reconstruction. Both weeping and joyful shouts can be expressions of love and thanksgiving to God.

(Ezra 3:13) so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

Some, no doubt, wept for joy, but the great shouting multitude present that day of new beginnings could be heard far away. Nothing more important in the religious and spiritual life of the people up to that time of laying the temple's foundation had happened in Judea since the temple's destruction. They had good reasons for their joyful shouts, and their praises to God probably included thanks to God for freeing them from exile in Babylon, for King Cyrus' return of the items stolen from the temple by the Babylonians, for King Cyrus and the people giving funds to them to return, for animals given to them to sacrifice to the LORD, and for God's help in rebuilding the temple.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you suppose they chose Levites to supervise the construction of the house of the LORD and Levites 20 years and upward?

2. What are some events that encouraged the returnees to start reconstructing the temple as soon as they returned to Jerusalem?

3. If you had returned and seen the new temple foundation laid, would you have wept or shouted with joy? Give a reason for your answer.

4. Do you use responsive readings in your public worship? Of what value might responsive readings from the Psalms serve in your public worship of the LORD?

5. For what moral qualities of God did the returnees praise God? Can you think of other moral attributes of God that are worthy of praise today?

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