

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Ezra 6:13-22

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, July 14, 2013
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 14, 2013**, is from **Ezra 6:13-22**. **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 6:13) Then, according to the word sent by King Darius, Tattenai, the governor of the

province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what King Darius had ordered.

After King Darius searched the records of King Cyrus regarding the return of the Israelites, he found them and enforced what King Cyrus had decreed. He ordered the governor beyond the Euphrates River not to hinder the Israelites, but even help them financially to finish the work; which the governor did.

(Ezra 6:14) So the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia;

God sent prophets to preach and encourage the people to do God's will and finish the temple, and the people experienced God's provision and protection throughout their time of rebuilding. Historical records are such that it is difficult to date the exact reigns of these three kings. Verse 14 names three kings and these kings relate to the completion of the temple and much later to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and gates. Ezra wrote Ezra and Nehemiah, and it was easy for him to include in this verse the names of these three kings in the total history of rebuilding Jerusalem after various groups of exiles returned to Judah.

(Ezra 6:15) and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

Ezra and the temple record keeper knew the exact date of the completion of the house of the Lord. Improvements were made in the coming years, and King Herod would enlarge the temple, but it was built and completed extensively enough for temple dedication and to begin temple worship during the reign of King Darius. The Jews had been carried into captivity to Babylon in 586/585 BC, and the temple was destroyed at that time. The Israelites first returned to Jerusalem in 538/537 BC. This second temple was dedicated in 516/515 BC (70 years after the first temple was destroyed). The second temple visibly reminded the people that God was in their midst, and the temple dedication officially ended their time of exile.

(Ezra 6:16) The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

King David celebrated when he moved to the Ark of the Covenant or the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. King Solomon and the people celebrated when he dedicated the completed first temple. Likewise, all of the exiles who had returned celebrated with joy when they dedicated the second temple. Just as the Ark of

the Covenant indicated the presence of God (before the Ark disappeared prior to the destruction of the first temple), so the temple indicated the presence of God; therefore, the people had much reason to be joyful and thank God for His forgiveness and their restoration.

(Ezra 6:17) They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Such a service of dedication would inspire careful record keeping, as with the dedication of the first temple. Some of the sacrifices would be whole burnt offerings, some would feed only the priests, and others would feed the people. A sin offering of a goat was made for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, which showed they knew they needed God's forgiveness for their sins and that they did not deserve God's favor and steadfast love. Their sin offering was according to the Law of God, and the goats bore the sins of every tribe away. They included all twelve tribes in their offering, not just the tribes of Judah and Benjamin that had returned from exile.

(Ezra 6:18) Then they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

Having brought the Law of Moses back with them from exile, they divided the priests and Levites according to what time periods they would serve God at the temple. [More than 500 years later, it was during such a time period of service that Zechariah learned he would become the father of John the Baptist.]

(Ezra 6:19) On the fourteenth day of the first month the returned exiles kept the passover.

They carefully obeyed the laws of God given to them through Moses; that is, they diligently kept the ceremonial laws such as the Passover. However, as Ezra learned when he arrived in Jerusalem, many of the priests and other leaders had led the people to marry foreign wives, which was contrary to the law of God, for these wives had remained “foreign” and had not chosen to worship and obey the true God as Ruth the Moabite had done when she moved to from Moab to Israel with her mother-in-law [see the Book of Ruth].

(Ezra 6:20) For both the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were clean. So they killed the passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves.

The priests and Levites made themselves ceremonially clean through washings described in the Law of Moses; therefore, they set themselves apart as the Lord commanded them to perform the sacred killing of the Passover lamb for every family (just as Moses had commanded at the first Passover in Egypt, and would also be done by the priests and Levites before Jesus' last Passover meal).

(Ezra 6:21) It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by all who had joined them and separated themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel.

This important verse reveals that some from the nations around Jerusalem and Judea had turned from their idolatry and immoral perversions to become a part of the people of God or had turned from immorality and paganism to worship God because they feared the true God. When they turned from the worship of idols to worship the Lord God, they became qualified to eat the Passover meal. However, just as King Solomon misled his people when he married foreign wives who continued to worship their idols, eventually the priests would do the same as King Solomon, until corrected by Ezra to do the right thing.

(Ezra 6:22) With joy they celebrated the festival of unleavened bread seven days; for the LORD had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

The Lord made them joyful for many reasons; they did not just choose to express joy. The Lord received the justifiable praise for turning the heart of King Darius [who because of his conquests also took the title King of Assyria] so that he chose to aid and directed others to aid in the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What does the fact that God moved King Cyrus and King Darius to do His will to help His people make you think about what God can do today?
2. How might your answer to the question above influence the way you pray today?
3. What influenced the exiles to finish building the house of the Lord?
4. What do you think influenced the exiles to dedicate their temple with joy?

5. Why do you think they offered a sin offering for all of Israel instead of just for the exiles who had returned from Babylon?

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