

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Ezra 7:6-10 & Ezra 8:21-23
International Bible Lessons
Sunday, July 21, 2013
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 21, 2013**, is from **Ezra 7:6-10 & Ezra 8:21-23**. **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.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Ezra 7:6-10

(Ezra 7:6) This Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that

the LORD the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.

Ezra wrote Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra first appears in his history in chapter 7 of the Book of Ezra. He is a scribe, so we know the books of the Bible up to that time were carefully studied and copied during the Babylonian exile. Their history up to that time was also carefully recorded to serve as a warning to subsequent generations not to commit sins against the Lord or rebel against God's laws. God received all of the credit and glory for all Ezra achieved. We know from archaeological study that kings required careful records to be kept of activities during their reign, and Ezra copied some of these records as well as created some records to be sent back to the king. The Persian king is not given the credit for being generous; rather, he was generous because the hand of the Lord directed his decisions. God can move any pagan leader to do His will in behalf of His people.

(Ezra 7:7) Some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants also went up to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

Ezra worshiped the true God and God directed his choices and moved on others to give him what he needed to serve God or go back with Ezra to serve God

in Jerusalem. Notice the word “some.” Not all of those who were priests or who had other duties associated with temple worship returned with Ezra. Later, when Nehemiah returned, he brought more priests and Levites with him back to Jerusalem.

(Ezra 7:8) They came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

It took the Israelites four months to travel 900 miles following the trade routes to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra named the families and the towns to which they returned. They spread throughout the towns of Judah and Benjamin in order to work and support themselves, but they would gather at the temple in Jerusalem to worship God.

(Ezra 7:9) On the first day of the first month the journey up from Babylon was begun, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the gracious hand of his God was upon him.

During four months of travel, no doubt Ezra kept a daily journal and continued to study the Law of God so he could lead God’s people rightly. The Book of Ezra gives the reason he succeeded in all of his endeavors; first, because God is gracious (the people did not deserve this opportunity to return to

Jerusalem), and second, God directed, guided, and protected Ezra and the people each day.

(Ezra 7:10) For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Why was God's hand on Ezra? Ezra had made the choice to study the Law of the Lord and after diligent study God knew that Ezra was ready to teach others to do His law. Ezra had also made the choice to obey the Law of God as he learned it; therefore, he would teach by example as well as by word. Ezra was, then, prepared to persuade to obey and enforce God's law, even among the disobedient and unlearned in Judah.

Ezra 8:21-23

(Ezra 8:21) Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions.

Ezra now wrote in the first person. Before they left Babylon, Ezra declared a fast day for all those returning to Jerusalem. They prayed for a safe journey and the protection of children and their possessions (which included immense wealth when they took items set apart for temple worship).

(Ezra 8:22) For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him.

Just as Moses did not request an escort from Pharaoh to help them reach the Promised Land safely, Ezra did not request the protection of a pagan king. Ezra had told the King about the nature and character of the true God, and then Ezra acted on the truths he taught and trusted God would keep them safe, which God did. Ezra's decision not to ask for soldiers to protect him does not need to be binding on all people, for later, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem with soldiers from the king to protect him and those who traveled with him. Ezra, who wrote Nehemiah, did not criticize Nehemiah for a lack of faith. God works differently with different people and in different times.

(Ezra 8:23) So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Ezra told the king that God would be gracious to him if he served God. He also warned the king that the power and judgment of God is against those who turn from God. He prayed and fasted and asked God to demonstrate the truth of his teachings to the king and others, which God did when Ezra and God's people travelled safely to Jerusalem.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What was Ezra's occupation? Why is this important?

2. How long did it take Ezra and those who accompanied him to travel to Jerusalem?

3. Who did Ezra and the Book of Ezra credit for their freedom to return to Judah from exile and for the help they received?

4. What did the Book of Ezra say about Ezra's heart? How might you restate what was said about Ezra's heart so you could apply it to a Christian living today?

5. What reason did Ezra give for not asking the king for a band of soldiers to conduct them safely to Jerusalem? Then, what did Ezra do before he departed with God's people for Jerusalem?

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