

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Ezra 8:24-36

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, July 28, 2013
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 28, 2013**, is from **Ezra 8:24-36**. **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 8:24-36

(Ezra 8:24) Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kin with them.

Ezra selected 12 priests because they would be carrying items for the temple. These 12 priests would also represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Ezra chose priests with the best or most trustworthy reputation, but he also treated them as equal to one another. Each of the 12 would know exactly what each one carried. Each priest would need to entrust the large number of items with people they trusted.

(Ezra 8:25) And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king, his counselors, his lords, and all Israel there present had offered;

The vessels were silver and gold and most likely some were of bronze. Each of the priests would also be responsible for silver and gold of various types that can be measured by weight. Not only did the Israelites offer gifts for the temple in Jerusalem, but the King and his responsible leaders did likewise.

(Ezra 8:26) I weighed out into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and one hundred silver vessels worth... talents, and one hundred talents of gold,

The original language text is not clear for interpretation where the three dots occur above. Some estimate that a talent weighed approximately 74 pounds. Today, the hundred talents of gold would be worth about 20 million dollars. If one priest proved dishonest or if one priest was robbed, the Israelites would be less likely to lose everything.

(Ezra 8:27) twenty gold bowls worth a thousand darics, and two vessels of fine polished bronze as precious as gold.

During their travels to Jerusalem, it would be easy to keep track of items when they were numbered and weighed. Each of the 12 leaders would disperse to responsible priests and Levites and amount for each priest or Levite to carry or disperse among others. By keeping these careful records there would be little likelihood of a thief being tempted to try and steal and think that he could possibly be successful as a thief.

(Ezra 8:28) And I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your ancestors.

Ezra did not need to say to them “do not steal.” Instead he emphasized that he had set them apart for a special purpose in serving God and in caring for items that had to be set apart for a holy use in serving God. They would be accountable to God as well as to

other priests in the temple when they arrived in Jerusalem. They would not violate their trust and fail to care for items that belonged to God.

(Ezra 8:29) Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of families in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD.”

They would carry these items until they reached the house of the Lord itself. Before the chief priests, the Levites, and the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel, they would count out and return exactly what had been entrusted to them before they left Babylon. Ezra trusted them to be honest, because these men were well known for their leadership. Knowing how people can be tempted, however, he may have announced this procedure in advance to help those who might be tempted to steal; so they could reason, remember, and resolve to remain faithful and do their duty.

(Ezra 8:30) So the priests and the Levites took over the silver, the gold, and the vessels as they were weighed out, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

Ezra emphasized that the priests did exactly as he commanded them. They would not only need to be honest with what he gave them, but they would also need to protect these possessions and be willing to

fight if they were attacked by enemies or thieves on their way to Jerusalem.

(Ezra 8:31) Then we left the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem; the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes along the way.

Ezra dated events exactly for posterity and perhaps as reports to the priests in Jerusalem and to the pagan king who had entrusted these precious possessions to him. Archaeology indicates that the Persian kings, among others, kept very careful financial and military records. Ezra gave God all of the glory for their safe return to Jerusalem. God had indeed protected them as Ezra said He would

(Ezra 8:32) We came to Jerusalem and remained there three days.

God guided them and protected them, but the journey was still long and hard. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they rested three days and perhaps spent part of that time finding family members, friends, and fellow townspeople who had returned to Jerusalem before them.

(Ezra 8:33) On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver, the gold, and the vessels were weighed into the hands of the

priest Meremoth son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui.

Ezra reported that when they arrived they did exactly as he said they would do. They went to the house of the Lord and gave to the priests and Levites all of the temple offerings that they had brought with them. Ezra probably recorded and reported the names of these priests to the king as witnesses in case there was ever any question about whether or not he had done his duty to the king as directed.

(Ezra 8:34) The total was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

The weight was recorded and they arrived with everything they had set out to deliver. An inventory was made before they left for Jerusalem. The second inventory was made in Jerusalem, and the two inventories were compared: there was no loss. If there had been any loss, no doubt Ezra would have reported it and what they did to recover what was lost.

(Ezra 8:35) At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male

goats; all this was a burnt offering to the LORD.

A burnt offering may have been burned whole. In other offerings, parts not burned or given to the priests were roasted and given to the family that had brought the offering. Probably a great feast day is implied here, plus a sin offering for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, for they had returned because God had forgiven their sins. The sin offering was also for any sins they might have committed along the way back to Jerusalem.

(Ezra 8:36) They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River; and they supported the people and the house of God.

The king's commissioners or satraps were not Jewish and were probably pagan – worshiping their national gods beyond the river. The king wanted them to give financial aid to the Jews in Jerusalem, and they complied as the king ordered.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How many priests did Ezra select to take the gold and silver offering to the temple? Why do you think he

chose as many as he did? What were their qualifications?

2. Why do you think he weighed out the gold and silver offering when he gave it to these leaders?

3. Why do you think Ezra told these leaders that they and the offering they carried were “holy to the LORD”?

4. Why do you think Ezra told them that they should guard the items he gave them until “you weigh them before the chief priests ... within the chambers of the house of the LORD”?

5. What did Ezra do when they presented the offering to the priests (see Ezra 8:33, 34)?

Write your comments, suggestions, and thoughts on the [Bible Lesson Forum](http://biblelessonforum.com/) at <http://biblelessonforum.com/>. Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson* at [International Bible Lessons](http://internationalbiblelessons.org) at <http://internationalbiblelessons.org>. — © Copyright 2013 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.