

23 July 23

Fasting and Prayer

Lesson Text: **Ezra 8:21-23**

Bible Background: **Ezra 8:21-23**

Devotional Reading: **2nd Chronicles 7:12-18**

Keep in Mind: *So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. (Ezra 8:23 NKJV)*

Aim for Change

“By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** that believers can fast and pray for God’s help in dire situations; **DESIRE** to fast and pray; and **PLAN** to fast and pray in times of need.”

In Focus

“Today’s lesson discusses how fasting and praying can move God to action in dire situations.”

Lesson Text

Ezra 8:21-23~KJV

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.

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.

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

The Lesson

The People, Places and Times

Ezra: He was a scribe, well-versed in the Mosaic Law. He led a second group of exiles to Jerusalem from Babylon, where “some of the people of Israel, as well as some of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, traveled up to Jerusalem with him in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes’ reign” (Ezra 7:7, NLT). He found they had rebuilt the Temple; however, the people’s lives were in shambles, they intermarried with foreigners, something God forbade them to do.

Background:

In today's passage, Ezra moves from a prophetic role to a leadership role. After he touted about having God's protection, he led the people in prayer and fasting to ensure the return to their homeland. Typically, the Persians would have provided military escort for Ezra, they were carrying monetary contributions made by the Persians. Apparently, however, the Persian king was convinced of God's protection for the returning exiles.

I. In Depth

1. Why Ezra Proclaimed a Fast (Ezra 8:21–22) The Children of Israel were released from their captors and allowed to return to their homeland with all their belongings and the articles belonging in the Temple. They would carry funding from the king to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezra boasted to the king concerning the covering of the Lord to those who feared and obeyed Him (v. 22). Ezra's statement made such an impact on the king he did not send the normal envoy of protection with them. Much was at stake in this journey; including women and children, around 2,000 people were traveling. The trip was approximately 720 miles.

Many in the surrounding lands may have been aware of the journey the people were to embark upon; many may have been their enemies. There were those in the Persian kingdom who were against the support given to Ezra to rebuild the Temple. Understandably, the route was considered for their safety and welfare.

Ezra understood many obstacles could arise and hinder them on their journey. He realized if they were to have safe passage, it would only happen with the help of God. He called upon the Children of Israel to fast with him to seek God.

2. What Happened after the Fast (Ezra 8:23) As a result of the fast, the Lord heard their prayer and showed Ezra the plan for a safe journey. He divided up the precious cargo into equal parts among 12 men. The value was estimated at \$35 million (which is probably different today because of the changes in currency rates and the market). This is a lot to carry by caravan over 720 miles with 2,000 men, women, and children without guards as escorts. The amount itself is insignificant; what is amazing is after their arrival in Jerusalem, they weighed and counted the precious articles, the gold and silver, and all were accounted for. Their path may not have been in a straight line or the most obvious way, but it was the way the Lord had ordained."

II. Take Aways

III. Closing Prayer



Our Read-Ahead for: 23 July 2023

Fasting and Praying

Monday: Humbly Calling on God (2nd Chronicles 7:12-18)

Tuesday: Beseeking God's Answer to Prayer (Psalm 69:9-18)

Wednesday: Humble and Contrite in Spirit (Isaiah 66:1-4)

Thursday: Fasting Directed to God (Matthew 6:16-18)

Friday: Studying and Keeping the Law (Ezra 7:1-10)

Saturday: Securing Servants for the Temple (Ezra 8:15-20)

Sunday: Praying for God's Protection (Ezra 8:21-23)