



Rice Memorial MBC

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Fasting and Prayer

Definitions in **bold** letters are from **Strong's** Exhaustive Concordance
Other definitions are from **Webster's** Dictionary, 1828 Edition
or Roget's Thesaurus – **July 21, 2013**

Worship with us at **3201 Mary St** until we rebuild our sanctuary at 802 W. 15th,
... We're just behind Kaufman's Lumber Company in Little Rock Arkansas

Ezra 8:21-23, 31-32

Introduction: Fifty-eight years had passed since the new temple had been dedicated in the sixth year of Darius' reign (516 B.C.). The reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) had come and gone (485 – 464 B.C.). And now, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign (458 B.C.), a **second group** of Jews returned **from exile** to their homeland, led by a devout priest named Ezra.

Ezra had an impressive lineage and could trace his ancestry back to Aaron through Eleazar (Ezra 7:1-5). We do not know what his position in the Persian Empire was, but he must have been important enough to gain the **favor** of the king. He is also called "**a ready scribe** in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6). He was a learned man, **skilled** in knowledge of the law and prepared to teach it to others (cf. Ezra 7:25).

We gain insight into Ezra's spiritual stature through a statement of his goals. He "had prepared his heart to seek (study) the law of the Lord, and to DO it, and teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). He had a firm determination to master God's law. But to him this was more than academic discipline; he also **determined** to **practice it** as a **way of life**. Beyond this, he determined to teach the law to ALL Israel. Only through this could they **learn to please God**.

(Source: *The Bible Expositor and Illuminator*, Union Press Publication-Christian Life Series)

Ezra 8:1-20, These are now the **chief** of their fathers, and this is the **genealogy** of them that went up with me **from** Babylon, in the reign of **Artaxerxes** the **king**.
And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents **three days**: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of **Levi**. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, **men of understanding**. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto **us ministers** for the **house** of our God. And by the good hand of our God **upon us** they brought us a man of **understanding**, of the sons of Mahli, the **son** of **Levi**, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, **eighteen**; And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, **twenty**; Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, **two hundred and twenty** Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

NOTE: This list is parallel with that of Ezra 3:3-19, and there are many similarities. Generally, the same family names appear in both lists, although not in the same order. "The numbers here are much smaller, never reaching even a third of the totals in the other list,

and sometimes falling below one twelfth." Only in Ezra 8:5 (Shecaniah), Ezra 8:9 (Joab) and Ezra 8:10 (Shelomith) do we find new families mentioned; and two of these are disputed.

The authenticity of his list has been challenged; but Bowman mentioned that, "It has also been defended, and that it fits." "The reliability of this list is also supported by its appearance with only slight variations in 1 Esdras 8:28-40." The whole number of those accompanying Ezra on this journey, including the **Levites** and **Nethinim** finally recruited by Ezra, was placed at **1,773** males. Rawlinson placed the total number, including women and children, at about **9,000**, estimating five per family. Wlliamson, however, estimated the total number as "some **5,000**." The most remarkable name in the whole list is that of Hattush the son of Schechaniah. "Beyond any reasonable doubt, he was the **descendant** of **David** (1 Chronicles 3:22), through Shemaiah; and he was Zerubbabel's great-great-grandson." (Source: *Coffman Commentaries on the Old & New Testament* classic.studylight.org/com/bcc/)

1 Chronicles 3:1, 22, Now these were the sons of **David**, which were born unto him in Hebron; the firstborn Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second Daniel, of **Abigail** the Carmelitess...

...And the sons of Shechaniah; Shemaiah: and the sons of Shemaiah; **Hattush**, and...

Ezra 8:21-22, 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. 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.

Fast defined 6685, **fast** (voluntary abstinence from food, for a space of time, as a spiritual discipline, or as a token [sign] of religious humiliation [state of being humbled]. 1913 Webs. **Afflict defined 6031**, **deal hardly** (coarsely [without fineness: delicacy]) **with**.

Thought 1. Notice, fasting was not abstaining from WATER.

NOTE: Ezra had good reason behind this proclamation. Due to his previous remarks to the king, he was ashamed to request a military escort to Jerusalem; and, since he was transporting a vast sum of money, and as the way was always a dangerous one, he felt a special need of **God's protection**.

Fasting, as a means of seeking God's favor, was a common practice in Israel; and even in the New Testament, Jesus prophesied that his followers would **fast** (Matt. 6:16; 9:14). (Source: *Coffman Commentaries on the Old & New Testament* classic.studylight.org/com/bcc/)

Matthew 6:16-18, Moreover when ye **fast**, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have **their reward**. But thou, when thou **fastest**, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 9:14-15, Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples **fast not**? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they **fast**.

Thought 1. The Lord said some very important things about fasting through Isaiah.

Isaiah 58:3-7, Wherefore have we **fasted**, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of

your fast ye find **pleasure**, and exact all your labours. Behold, **ye fast** for **strife** and **debate**, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to **afflict** his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the **fast** that **I have chosen?** to **loose** the **bands** of **wickedness**, to **undo** the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to **deal thy bread** to the **hungry**, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own **flesh (kin)**?

Ezra 8:23, So we **fasted** and besought our God for this: and he was intreated (persuaded) of us.

NOTE: Ezra wrote this after his safe arrival in Jerusalem; but here he included this word that God had indeed answered their prayers. As a consequence of their prayers, The journey was successfully accomplished, God's gracious protection delivering them from the bands of enemies and marauders (A rover in quest of plunder; usually applied to small parties of soldiers.). (Source: Coffman Commentaries on the Old & New Testament classic.studylight.org/com/bcc/)

Ezra 8:24-27, Then I separated twelve of the **chief** of the **priests**, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.

NOTE: "The value of these gifts was well over a **million** pounds; but this is by no means inconceivable in view of the immense wealth of the Persian kings." Responsibility for transporting this vast sum of money, "Was vested in **twelve priests** and **twelve Levites** especially chosen for the task. This was in accordance with the Pentateuchal care and movement of the tabernacle furnishings (Num. 3; Num. 4)." (Source: Coffman Commentaries on the Old & New Testament classic.studylight.org/com/bcc/)

Ezra 8:28-32, And I said unto them, Ye are **holy** unto the LORD; the vessels are **holy** also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord. So took the priests and the **Levites** the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the **house (temple)** of our God.

Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the **twelfth day** of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the **hand (power)** of our God was upon us, and he **delivered us** from the hand of the **enemy**, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

NOTE: They had left Babylon on the first day of the month (Ezra 7:9), had spent three days by the river (8:15), and now embarked on a journey that would last until the **fifth month** (7:9). The entire trip lasted **four months**.

Here was a caravan of four to five thousand persons, including many women and children, who traveled unscathed through nine hundred miles of dangerous territory. Most of those in the party were not seasoned travelers and were unaccustomed to group discipline. Although some may have had weapons, these were not sufficient to fight off marauders. Only the **grace of God**, responding to earnest prayer, can account for their safety. (Source: The Bible Expositor and Illuminator, Union Press Publication-Christian Life Series)