

# Fasting and Praying

**Key Verse:** “*So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.*”  
—**Ezra 8:23**

**Selected Scripture:**  
**Ezra 8:21-23**

## **IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE**

the important role that Ezra played in helping the people who had returned from captivity to Jerusalem to revitalize their faith and nation. Although he was not of the original number who had returned to Judah, he led a new group to Jerusalem about eighty years after Cyrus’ original decree. This was all done according to God’s will and his providential direction, as found in the meaning of Ezra’s name. He was a scribe, of the genealogy of Aaron, hence of the tribe of Levi, and his name according to *Strong’s Concordance* means “help” or “helper.”—Ezra 7:1-10

Some Jews had become very prosperous in Babylon. However, for others, their time in exile had become a period of study of the Law and the Prophets. These faithful ones, led by Ezra, were disturbed by the reports they had received concerning the spiritual poverty of the people who had returned to Jerusalem. It had become apparent from reports they were receiving that religious matters and the keeping of the Law were not being followed as they should be. This was especially disturbing, since so much effort had been put into the rebuilding of the Temple. These circumstances compelled Ezra, under the guidance of the Heavenly Father, to take his concerns to representatives in Babylon and before Artaxerxes, the Persian king.

The result of Ezra's inquiry came in the form of a decree made by the king "to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily." (Ezra 7:21) In subsequent verses, we see that the king promised to give protection to the people who would be making the journey to Jerusalem—not charging them any toll, tribute, or custom. A great amount of gold and silver that "thou canst find in all the province of Babylon" was to also be given to those taking this journey, to be used for purchasing things needed for the reinstituting of the "service of the house of thy God." (vss. 16-19) The actions of the king, as directed by God, moved Ezra to say, "Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem."—vs. 27

Before the journey to Jerusalem began, a fast was proclaimed by Ezra. "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." (chap. 8:21) This was exactly in line with the character of Ezra, who sought to know and do the divine will in all things, "according to the hand of the LORD his God." (chap. 7:6) The lesson to be found in the fast Ezra proclaimed did not relate primarily to the denial of food or sustenance. Rather, it was a way of preparing themselves to look to the Lord for guidance and direction on the long journey that they would soon be undertaking.

Thus, trust in God was placed at the forefront of their minds. They were awakened to know that their entire journey and the things they would be doing were to be based upon faith in God, and in his promises. Likewise, we also should desire to remember the words, "Giving thanks always for all things," knowing that "all things work together for good."—Eph. 5:20; Rom. 8:28 ■