

# Fasting and Praying

**Bible Background • EZRA 8:21–23**

**Printed Text • EZRA 8:21–23 | Devotional Reading • 2 CHRONICLES 7:12–18**

## 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

Monique recently graduated from college with a degree in social work. She was given a full-time position as an intern. Part of her job was to travel to what she called “unsavory neighborhoods.” Some of Monique’s work surroundings made her uneasy, causing her to consider her own safety. She didn’t say anything, not wanting to cause alarm after just starting in the position. However, her appetite had been affected; she was so anxious she hadn’t been eating. She found herself seeking God for answers. She heard a message concerning the purpose of fasting and decided to turn her recent eating habits into a fasting sacrifice for guidance and protection.

In the weeks following Monique’s fasting, she became calm and confident of God’s protection. Monique continued to travel to her appointments faithfully. Her superiors acknowledged her dedication, and she was later reassigned to a paying position inside the main office. The clients now came to her; no more travel through “unsavory neighborhoods.” God made a way and showed favor to Monique where all outcomes could be seen because of her faith, fasting, and prayer.

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

## Keep in Mind

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

## Focal Verses

---

**KJV** **Ezra 8:21** 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 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 that they had rebuilt the Temple; however, the people’s lives were in shambles as they had 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 bragged about having God’s protection, he led the people in prayer and fasting to ensure it in their return to their homeland. Typically, the Persians would have provided military escort for Ezra as they were carrying with them monetary contributions made by the Persians. Apparently, however, the Persian king had been convinced of God’s protection for the returning exiles.

### 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 of their belongings and the articles belonging in the Temple. They would also carry funding from the king to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezra boasted to the king about the covering of the Lord to those who feared and obeyed Him (v. 22). Ezra’s statement made such an impact on the king that he did not send the normal emissary of protection with them. Much was at stake in this journey; there would be women and children, so around 2,000 people were traveling. The trip was approximately 720 miles.

Many in the surrounding lands may have been aware of the journey that the people were about to embark upon; many may have been their enemies. There were those in the Persian kingdom who were against the support that was given to Ezra for the rebuilding of the Temple. Understandably, the route had to be considered for the safety and welfare of all who would go with them.

Ezra understood that 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.

### At-A-Glance

1. Why Ezra Proclaimed a Fast (Ezra 8:21–22)
2. What Happened after the Fast (v. 23)

**2. What Happened after the Fast (v. 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 among 12 men into equal parts. The value of that 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 that after their arrival in Jerusalem, they weighed and counted the precious articles and 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.

We may have a path imagined for our lives, but only God knows what lies ahead and can direct us safely through. He awaits the call and plea of His children, wanting His guidance to be yet another demonstration of His mighty effect on their lives.

**Search the Scriptures**

1. Who proclaimed (gave orders for) a fast (Ezra 8:21)?
2. What was the most important influence on the people's safe arrival after their 720-mile journey (v. 23)?

**Application for Activation**

Set aside a few days for fasting and prayer over a situation in your own life that you know only God can deliver or supply the need. If you do not have a need at this time, consider a family member, friend, coworker, etc., for whom your testimony about God's guidance will provide support during their time of questioning or need.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

---



---



---



---



---

**Discuss the Meaning**

1. What types of fasts are acceptable by God?
2. Why is it important to pray during a fast?

**Liberating Lesson**

As we go through life, we learn that we will face things where a solution is not readily apparent. There may not be a perfect example in the Bible for us to follow for our particular situations. Often, these answers are obtained through fasting and prayer. In these instances, God affords us the opportunity to still have access to Him to help lead us through those areas in life.

Once God begins to work in our lives, it's important that we share with others His many miracles and blessings. We should understand that others will gain faith in what God can do by our testimonies.

**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

---



---



---



---



---

**Sources:**

- Blank, Wayne. "Ancient Empires – Babylon (Map)." Jerusalem Fact File. [www.keyway.ca/htm2002/jerfacts.htm](http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/jerfacts.htm) (accessed May 9, 2011).
- Butler, Trent, gen. ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991. 1331.
- Fensham, F. Charles. *Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982.
- Kidner, Derek. *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezra and Nehemiah*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
- Middle Town Bible Church. *Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther: The Three Returns to Jerusalem*. <http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/oldtesta/oldtes6.htm> (accessed May 10, 2011).
- Grabbe, Lester L. "Mind the Gaps': Ezra, Nehemiah and the Judean Restoration." *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish & Christian Perspectives*. Edited by James M. Scott. Boston, MA: Journal for the Study of Judaism, Brill, 2001. 99, 100.
- Unger, Merrill F. *The New Unger's Bible Handbook, Ezra*. Revised by Gary Larson. Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, Moody Publishers. 2005. 218-220.

### Say It Correctly

Ahava. ah-HAY-vah, uh-HAY-vuh.  
Jehoshaphat. juh-HOSH-uh-fat,  
jih-HAH-suh-fat.  
Manasseh. muh-NA-suh.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Humbly Calling on God  
(2 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)

## Notes

---

---

---

---

---