

Ezra 8:21-32 “Personal Protection”

For the Children: When you get in a car, do you put your seat-belt on? Why do you do so? Perhaps because you are told to do so, and it's the “law.” Also because you realize that it's safer. But why don't we say, “God promises to protect me, therefore I don't need to wear a seat-belt!” Well, it's true the Lord promises to look after us. That doesn't mean He will stop all our bad decisions from doing harm. It does mean He will keep us safe as His children, even if we have a car accident. But the Lord also wants us to learn to look after the things He has given us – such as our bodies – so we can use them for His glory. So we should be wearing our seat-belts AND trusting in the Lord! **Questions:** Why did Ezra and his group fast? Why did they refuse an escort of soldiers? Why did they check up on the priests and Levites carrying the valuables to Jerusalem?

Introduction:

First Point: Seeking Protection from the Lord

- 1) A Momentous Event: The decision by Ezra and his group to travel to Jerusalem was not only a big change in their lives; it would help re-establish Israel, the nation from which the Messiah would come. It is therefore right and proper for Ezra to seek the Lord's guidance and protection in a most earnest manner
- 2) Fasting & Prayer: That earnestness was seen by Ezra's call to fasting and prayer. Fasting increased during the Exile (Zech. 7:1-8), perhaps due to the people's awareness of their sins and need for deliverance. Fasting was used to help subdue the flesh, prepare for meditation and prayer, and express repentance (Calvin). Fasting continued in the early NT times (Lk. 2:37, Mt. 4:2, 17:21, Acts 13:2-3, 14:23) but is not mentioned after that. It became associated with legalism (Zech. 7:5ff; Mt. 6:16). Unlike the disciples of John the Baptist, those of Jesus were too busy rejoicing in the “Bridegroom's” presence to be known for fasting (Mt. 9:15; Lk. 5:33-34) – though Jesus said they would fast after His departure. Fasting may still be observed on a voluntary basis, especially in times of war, disaster, vital decisions or when sin has taken hold of the church – though our joy at Jesus' spiritual presence may render the practice less common today
- 3) Declining a Military Escort: Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for a military escort- though the long journey was dangerous, especially when carrying valuables and with women, children and older folks present. For Ezra had been telling the king about God's powerful protection and anger against His enemies. He did not want to appear to doubt the truth of that. Nehemiah – who made the same journey as governor, not as a scribe to teach God's Law – accepted an escort as a means God used to protect him (Neh. 2:9). Both actions were right in their different situations. Christians may take precautions to protect themselves, unless this would give a bad witness or show distrust of God's care

Second Point: Arranging Accountability for God's Servants

- 1) Holy Men for a Holy Task: Ezra did not balk at making careful arrangements to transport the money offered to God and the Temple-utensils. Only consecrated priests and Levites could lawfully handle such holy things (Num. 3:8, 31; 4:5ff). Ezra the scribe was concerned to uphold God's laws. He, like true lovers of God's law, want to uphold the abiding moral principles, not just the OT ceremonial aspects (Zech. 7:8-11)
- 2) Accountable Men for a Holy Task: Ezra's desire to be seen trusting the Lord did not stop him from putting in place a system of accountability to safeguard the treasure. The items are weighed and recorded before leaving and upon arriving, in the presence of respected leaders. This was also a good witness to the Lord and showed trust in His Word, as much as the refusal to ask for an escort. The church today also maintains accountability with church-resources, to prevent theft etc
- 3) Stewardly Men for a Holy Task: Theft or loss or damage to resources that belong to God hinders service to His glory. In this case, that had to do with the Temple-service, which pointed to Christ. Christ makes all the resources of all God's people “holy,” dedicated to advancing His glory (1 Cor. 6:12). We must therefore strive to be good stewards of all we have as individuals and as a church. Trusting His Word also means accepting this stewardly responsibility to protect our resources

Conclusion: