

Ezra – The Good Hand of the Lord (Ezra 7 & 8)

GC Knoxville – May 10, 2020 – Mother’s Day

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A. Open

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|----------|----------------------|----------|------------|---------|---------|
| 1) Touch | 2) Hold | 3) Point | 4) Protect | 5) Feed | 6) Give |
| 7) Pet | 8) Throw/Catch, etc. | | | | |

Our story today has to do with hands – in particular, God’s hand!

B. Ezra Backdrop – A Span of 94 Years

539 B.C. Persian King Cyrus issues a decree that allows the Exiles Return.

538 B.C. Zerubbabel leads 50,000 Exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

515 B.C. The Temple construction is finished.

458 B.C. (57 Years after completion of Temple / 80 Years after first group came back)

Ezra leads a second group of 1,500 – 2,000 from Babylon to Judah to bring financial and spiritual support to the work and to help rebuild the city.

445 B.C. Nehemiah led the third group back to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.

C. Ezra 7:1-5 (Lived from 480-440 B.C.)

- 1) His Ancestry – some heavy hitters! Lineage all the way back to the first High Priest!
 - a. Hilkiah – High Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem during the reign of King Josiah, and discovered the “Book of the Law” in the Temple.
 - b. Zadok – Whose name means “Righteous, Justified”; High Priest of Israel during the reigns of both David & Solomon.
 - c. Phineas – Grandson of Aaron, great-nephew of Moses; noted in Scripture for his zealous slaying of Zimri, thus halting a deadly plague afflicting the Jewish nation. He too, became a priest.
 - d. Aaron (16 “son of’s” later) – brother to Moses; Red Sea crossing, manna from Heaven, 10 commandments, etc.

A blessing of a godly ancestry doesn’t guarantee the godliness nor success of one’s descendants. However, when embraced, it’s an incredible beginning! Ezra didn’t squander his rich, godly legacy, but used it to honor the Lord and serve His people!

D. The Good Hand of the Lord

1) 7:6 – “...this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.”

- a. A scribe going up to the King
- b. You wouldn't expect a priest to approach a mighty king and ask for permission to take a group of Jewish exiles to Jerusalem.
- c. God's favor on him – “granted all him all that he asked”

2) 7:9-10 – “for the good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

When you consider that Ezra was born in Babylon, you appreciate his pursuit of becoming a true student of the Scriptures. More than likely, some of the priests had brought copies of the Old Testament scrolls with them to Babylon, and these became very valuable to the exiled spiritual leaders of the nation. Ezra, devoted himself to the study and teaching of the Word of God.

Reasons for God's good hand on him:

- a. **Set his heart** – As Ezra faced the huge challenge of leading thousands of captives back to Jerusalem, he knew that it was more than he could handle alone. He prepared his heart for God to do a great work through him. God needed to be His source of wisdom, the materials and protection. Ezra knew he would need to be attuned to the leading of God throughout this process.
- b. **To study God's Laws (His Ways)** – Once his heart was ready, he began to seek out the wisdom of God by pursuing the law of God. He studied the word of God to know God's heart and expectations.
- c. **To do it** – Ezra not only knew the word of God, but he obeyed it! He studied the word of God for the purpose of carrying out what he found. He discovered God's will and purpose and then did them.
- d. **To teach it** – As Ezra discovered truth, he desired to teach it to others. He was determined to obey them the truth, and was also determined to teach others to obey the law of God as well. He was faithful to declare publically what he had learned privately before the Lord

3) 7:27-28 – “Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. **I** took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and **I** gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.”

- a. First person language here; continues through 9:15.
 - b. Recognized God as his source – offers praise and worship
 - c. “Took courage” – courage is not an absence of fear, rather in the midst of fear.
 - d. Took leading men with him; God with us makes all the difference!
- 4) 8:18 – “And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18; also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.”
- a. Brought Ezra a man named Sherebiah – plays a key role in Nehemiah too, making public confession and sealing the covenant.
 - b. God’s good hand made sure he was partnered with the right person/people in accomplishing the mission. People brought into our lives!
- 5) 8:22-23 – “For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.”

If the good hand of God wasn't with them, everything would fail. But to receive the blessing and help of God, they had to humble themselves and seek His face, so Ezra called for three days of fasting and prayer, asking God to protect them on their long journey.

When you consider the factors involved, you see what great faith Ezra had. Several thousand Jews, inexperienced in travel and war, carrying huge sums in gold and silver, led by a scholar, not a soldier, and traveling through dangerous territory that was infested with bandits!

Ezra could have asked for armed guards, but he felt that a request for protection would dishonor the Lord in the eyes of the pagan king. He had already told him that God's good hand was upon him and the Jews, so how could he then ask for human help? Walking in faith!

- a. They fasted and prayed.
 - b. God answered!
- 6) 8:31 – “Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.”

They covered about 900 miles over a period of four months, and the good hand of God protected them and all they had until they had arrived.

- a. Hand of our God delivered us!
- b. Kept us away from the ambushes of the enemy.

E. Some Takeaways for Today

- 1) It all begins with Ezra 7:9-10, framing for us the kind of person, attitudes and actions that *the good hand of the Lord* rests upon!
 - a. Setting one's heart towards God.
 - b. Digging into the Scriptures to learn of God's character and walk in His ways.
 - c. Life Transformation vs just information.
 - d. Purposely passing God's ways on to others!
- 2) When we apply these things in our lives, we can watch God provide:
 - a. Favor (7:6)
 - b. Courage (7:27-28)
 - c. Partnering with the right people (8:18), and provision
 - d. When combined with fasting in prayer, divine deliverance and protection (8:22-23, 31)