

God's Hand upon God's Man

Text: Ezra 7:1-10

Introduction:

1. Ezra 7 opens the second section of the Book and for the first time the Author of the Book (Ezra) is introduced to the storyline. The name 'Ezra' means 'help'. It is the shortened form of the name Azariah which means "The Lord is my keeper or helper". We are reminded of our suggested outline for the Book of Ezra:
 - The Return of the Saints (Chap. 1-2)
 - The Rebuilding of the Sanctuary (Chap. 3-6)
 - The Reformation of the Saints (Chap. 7-10)
2. It is of interest to note the importance of both prophetic preaching and precise teaching in the Book of Ezra. Haggai and Zechariah were used of God to stir up the saints with their fiery preaching. Ezra was more of an instructor in the Word. We need both preaching that challenges us and teaching that instructs us in the Christian life. Good exposition contains elements of both!
3. Ezra chapter 7 divides neatly into two parts. In verse 1-10 we are introduced to godly Ezra and then in verse 11-28 we are provided with a copy of Artaxerxes letter to Ezra and Ezra's concluding words of praise for God's blessing (Vs. 27-28).
4. Ezra 7 & 8 are a wonderful testament to the truth of God's hand upon His man and His work. Six times in these two chapters we have reference to "the good hand of God" being upon God's man (Ezra) and God's work (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31).
5. In this message we will study the first section of the chapter (Vs. 1-10) and see not just the evidence of God's hand upon Ezra but the reason for God's hand being so mightily upon him in verse 10. Ezra 7:10 reveals the secret behind Ezra's spiritual success and also teaches us how we might also know the same spiritual success for God's glory. We will divide the text under three headings to aid our study of this important section of the Book.

I. THE HERITAGE OF GOD'S MAN (VS. 1-5)

The opening five verses of the chapter detail Ezra's priestly lineage. This would help establish his credibility and authority as a teacher to the Jewish remnant. In a similar way, the Apostle Paul frequently appealed to his apostleship in his Epistles so they would be received as authoritative by the believers. In studying Ezra's godly heritage, we note that he had:

A. A Privileged Pedigree (Vs. 1-5)

1. A descendant of the high priest.
 - a. Ezra's lineage is traced all the way back to Aaron the first high priest. Ezra did not occupy the office of high priest himself but he was in family line of the high priest.

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- b. We are reminded of the privilege we enjoy through salvation of being a part of the family of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. His priesthood is far superior to the Levitical priesthood as Christ is a priest “forever after the order of Melchizedek” (See Hebrews 7). Christ is a perfect, pure and eternal High Priest. Hebrews 4:14-16 encourages us, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. **Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace**, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”
2. A descendant of notable names. A couple of names are worth noting:
 - a. Zadok the son of Ahitub – Zadok was the high priest during David’s reign. He is noted for his loyalty to king David especially in the Absalom rebellion.
 - b. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar – Phinehas is noted in Scripture for his zeal for holiness in the incident recorded in Numbers 25 when Israel committed whoredom with the daughters of Moab. Phinehas slew two of the principal offenders with a javelin – Zimri, “the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites” (Num. 25:14) and Cozbi, “the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.” (Vs. 15)
 - c. The fact Ezra had these godly people in his lineage did not automatically mean he would live for God. Praise God he did not throw away His godly heritage but lived for God himself in his day and time.

B. A Priestly Position

1. Being in the lineage of the high priest made Ezra a priest himself. It reminds us of the truth that as believers we are all priests of God with direct access to our Heavenly High Priest. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. The Roman Catholic Church greatly errs with its creation of a priest class.
2. 1 Peter 2:9 “But ye *are* a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”
3. Rev. 1:5-6 “And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his

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own blood, And hath made us **kings and priests unto God** and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

4. Whether you have a godly heritage or not in your ancestry, you have a godly inheritance in Christ and God can empower you like He did Ezra of old to live in the power of your union with Christ and impact your generation for the truth.

II. THE HAND UPON GOD’S MAN (VS. 6-9)

This section of Ezra is not a record of what Ezra could do but a testament to what God did through Ezra. The key to it all is found in the phrase “according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him” (See Vs. 6, 9 & 28). In fact, the whole of the Book of Ezra is a testament to hand of God working in history. We see God’s hand working in the hearts of heathen kings, the hand of God stirring up His people to return and rebuild, the hand of God protecting against the attacks of the enemies etc.... In these verses we see evidence of God’s Hand at work in:

A. The Plea that was Granted (Vs. 6)

1. Evidently Ezra had appealed to the current Persian Monarch, requesting permission to lead a new group of pilgrims back to the promised land. God’s hand worked in Artaxerxes heart to grant this request. This was Artaxerxes I known as Artaxerxes Longimanus of in history.
2. Approximately 58 years had elapsed since the temple had been rebuilt so there is a sizable time gap between Ezra 6 and 7 (516 to 459 BC). During that time, spiritual decline had taken place in the returned remnant. Some 78 years after Zerubbabel and Joshua had left Babylon, Ezra follows in their footsteps.
3. God raised up Ezra to go back to be a spiritual help to His people. God moved in the heart of the Persian king not only to grant Ezra permission to return to Jerusalem, he also backed the endeavor financially (See Vs. 11-28).

B. The People who were Gathered (Vs. 7)

1. God’s hand not only raised up Ezra to lead His people in the ways of God but also raised up a fresh band of faithful people to accompany him. This represented a fresh remnant that was prepared to return to the promised land.
2. This is something we see throughout biblical and church history. When God raises up a man to do His work, He also provides the helpers and supporters for his man and work.
3. It reminds us of how when Saul became king “...there went with him a and of men, **whose hearts God had touched.**”

C. The Protection that was Given (Vs. 8-9)

1. A timeframe is given for the journey that was undertaken.

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- a. The journey began on the **first** day of the **first** month in the seventh year of Artaxerxes reign (Vs. 9a). This represented a new beginning for Ezra and the new remnant about to return. Praise God that He is in the business of reviving His people and giving them fresh starts in the Christian life!
 - b. It appears it took them the first 12 days to organize the caravan and then they departed for Jerusalem on the 12th day of the month (Ezra 8:31) from the river of Ahava.
 - c. They arrive in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month so the whole endeavor took approx. 4 months from start to finish (Vs. 9b).
2. The success of the journey was because of “the good hand of his God upon him”. We can be encouraged that God’s good hand upon us is the key to us completing our Christian journey successfully for the Lord. We can be encouraged that God’s hand will be upon what He calls us to do for Him.

III. THE HOLINESS OF GOD’S MAN (VS. 10)

This verse reveals the secret behind Ezra’s spiritual success. It is the key to understanding why God’s hand of blessing was so mightily upon Ezra. If there was one word that could summarize the life and character of Ezra it would be the word **‘Scripture’**. The reason God used Him so mightily was because of his relationship to God and God’s Word. Observe four facets of Ezra’s relationship to God and His Word. Ezra was:

A. A Studier of the Scriptures – “a ready scribe” (Vs. 6a, 10a)

There are two phrases that reveal Ezra as a passionate, diligent student of the Word.

1. Ezra was Skilled with the Scriptures – “a ready scribe” (Vs. 6a)
 - a. The word ‘ready’ means “skillful, diligent”. Because Ezra was diligent in his study of God’s Word, he became skilled in understanding, interpreting and applying it.
 - b. We are reminded of the New Testament command to **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”** Interestingly the word ‘study’ here literally means “to give diligence, make haste, exert one’s self, be earnest”. (2. Tim. 2:15) Webster defines the word ‘study’ as “Literally, a setting of the mind or thoughts upon a subject; hence, application of mind to books, to arts or science, or to any subject, for the purpose of learning what is not before known.”
 - c. Ezra’s belief in the Divine nature of the Scriptures was what him the passion to study them so diligently. Notice the law of God is described as “the law of Moses, **which the LORD God of Israel**

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had given". He did not approach the Bible like he would another book written by man. He knew this was God's Word!

d. Why should we be passionate students of the Bible? Because it is the Divinely inspired, infallible, indestructible, pure, preserved, eternal Word of the Living God!

i. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "**All scripture is given by inspiration of God**, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: **That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**"

ii. 1 Thess. 2:13 "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, **ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

2. Ezra Searched the Scriptures – "to seek the law" (Vs. 10a)

a. This was more than just reading the Word of God. It reveals Ezra's desire to understand and know God's Word.

b. Do you want to be used of God? Be a Studious Scripture-soaked Saint!

c. True success is determined by our relationship to the Scriptures. There is much talk about 'success' today but interestingly, the only time the word appears in the Scriptures is in Joshua 1:8 – "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good **success.**" Ezra was a living testimony of the Josh. 1:8 promise.

B. A Lover of the Scriptures – "prepared his heart" (Vs. 10a)

The conjunction 'for' provides the reason and explanation as to why God's blessing was upon Ezra as described in the previous verses. Do you want to be used of God? Be a Studious Scripture-soaked Saint! True success is determined by our relationship to the Scriptures. The only time the word 'success' appears in the Scriptures is in Joshua 1:8 – "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then **thou shalt make thy way prosperous**, and then thou shalt have good **success.**" Ezra was a living testimony of the truth of this promise.

1. Ezra's Heart Preparation – "Ezra had prepared his heart"

a. Prov. 4:23 reminds us that the issues of life flow out of the heart. Here we get to the source of Ezra's zeal for the Word of God. He prepared his heart to find out what God had said and then to apply it to his life.

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- b. Ezra studied God's Word diligently because He loved the Word of God and most importantly the God who gave the Word. It was a vital part of His relationship with God. Someone wisely said, "If you love God for who He is, you will love Him for what He says."
- c. We are reminded of the principle of preparation for the work God has called us to. Whom God calls He prepares and the most important preparation for any work of God is spiritual, heart preparation. The head is involved in the process but the goal is truth in the "inward parts" (See Psalm 51:6). If you believe God has called you to the ministry of preaching and teaching God's Word, you need to prepare!
- d. Ezra's Heart Passion – "to seek the law of the LORD". His heart for God led him on a quest to know the mind, heart and will of God as revealed in the Word. Baker and Carpenter write concerning the word 'seek', "Its most important theological meaning involves studying or inquiring into the Law of the Lord." M.K. Hall adds, "So Ezra determined in his own heart that he would **leave no stone unturned** in his endeavour to understand and master the Law of Moses, or, as he rightly recognised it to be, "the law of the Lord."

C. A Doer of the Scriptures – "to seek the law...and to do it" (Vs. 10b)

- 1. Ezra was not just a hearer of the Word, he was a Doer of the Word. He was not just filling his head with Bible knowledge with no accompanying life change. His study of God's Word was for life change.
- 2. Notice the important order in the verse. He studied and obeyed God's Word before he taught God's Word. We need to be just as passionate about the doing as we are about the knowing when it comes to God's Word. This is a vital pre-requisite to an effective teaching ministry. Nothing undermines the public ministry of the Word so much as hypocrisy in the life of the one proclaiming it.
- 3. We understand that knowledge possessed does not automatically mean knowledge applied. There are many believers who don't lack in Bible knowledge but severely lack in the area of obedience.
- 4. The Bible warns us of the subtle danger of self-deception in this area, thinking we are right with God because we are hearers of the Word. James 1:22-25 "But be ye **doers of the word**, and **not hearers only, deceiving your own selves**. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

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D. A Teacher of the Scriptures – “and to teach in Israel” (Vs. 10c)

1. Ezra had a zeal to impart the truths of God’s Word to others. Each believer needs to learn the Word of God, not only for their own benefit but that they might be a channel of blessing to others also.
2. Even if you are not called to full time ministry (e.g., as a pastor), your aim should still be to equip yourself in God’s Word, not only for your own spiritual growth and progress but that you might also be a help to others. In fact, the Bible reproves believers who ought to have matured from milk to meat but have not.
3. Hebrews 5:12-14 “For when for the time **ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again** which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Conclusion: How important is God’s Word to you? Is it a priority to you to read, study, love and obey it? Are you allowing God to prepare you for the work He has for you?