

## God's Hand upon God's People

### Part 2

**Text:** Ezra 8:24-36

#### **Introduction:**

1. 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), God's work and God's people (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31).
2. "Chapter 8 (like chap. 2) provides the register of those who returned as Ezra's companions (Vs. 1-14); and then records the preparations at the river Ahava for the journey (Vs. 15-30; the journey itself (Vs. 31); and the arrival in Jerusalem (Vs. 32-36)." (M.K. Hall)
3. In this chapter, we see God's hand of protection and preservation upon His people as they make the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem.
4. Ezra 8 is a testament of:
  - The record of the returning remnant.
  - The godly leadership of Ezra.
  - The protecting power of God.
5. We are breaking the chapter into six segments for our study. We will review the three points from last message then consider the final three.

#### **I. THE SURRENDERED FOR THE JOURNEY (VS. 1-14)**

This section of the chapter provides a record of this new remnant of people who returned with Ezra. Ezra gathers approximately eighteen men who are heads of Jewish families who influence those within their family groups to join the expedition. The result was a total of approx. 1,515 men, plus women and children, who agreed to go with Ezra to Jerusalem. This genealogy reminds us that this remnant was:

**A. Submitted to God.** These dear men and women had heeded the call to join Ezra and return to Jerusalem. This was a huge **step of faith** for these people as most of them probably grew up in Babylon and were comfortably settled there. Many others chose to remain in Babylon and never return to the promised land.

**B. Recognized by God.** God allows some to be named heroes of the faith in this life to inspire and encourage us but that is not the case for most of us. The most important thing is now whether we have a name known by others in this life but that we are known to our God and that He will reward us for faithful service.

#### **II. THE SERVANTS FOR THE JOURNEY (VS. 15-20)**

##### **A. The Problem concerning Servants (Vs. 15-17)**

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Ezra discerned that there was a shortage of Levites for the service of the house of God. Not much has changed since Ezra's time. One of the biggest challenges we face is the labor shortage in the harvest field (Matt. 9:37; Luke 10:2). I remember as a young man telling an Evangelist that God had called me to the ministry. He replied, "Well, there are plenty of vacancies!"

### **B. The Provision of Servants (Vs. 17-20)**

God provided "men of understanding" and men willing to serve in the work.

## **III. THE SEEKING BEFORE THE JOURNEY (VS. 21-23)**

Before undertaking the long and dangerous journey to Jerusalem, Ezra leads the people in earnestly seeking the Lord. Ezra was a spiritual, godly leader who took steps to prepare the people of God for a spiritual undertaking.

### **A. Their Method for Seeking God (Vs. 21, 23)**

1. The Fasting of their Seeking (Vs. 21)
2. The Focus of their Seeking (Vs. 21c, 23)  
They were earnestly seeking God for:
  - a. His Direction (Vs. 21)
  - b. His Protection (Vs. 22, 31)

### **B. The Motivation for Seeking God (Vs. 22)**

Ezra was conscious of their testimony before the Persian monarch. They had rightly testified of the power of God to preserve, protect and keep His people. To then request a band of soldiers for protection would appear to contradict that claim. Instead of seeking help from an earthly king, Ezra resolved to seek help from the King of kings.

## **IV. THE STEWARDS FOR THE JOURNEY (VS. 24-30; 33-34)**

Ezra ensures that a group of godly men are in place to oversee the offering and the temple treasures. We can learn some important lessons from Ezra's appointment of these men to this role. Ezra appointed:

### **A. Multiple Men (Vs. 24)**

1. Ezra appointed 12 of the "chief of the priests" to oversee the temple treasury. He names two men as leaders "Sherebiah" and "Hashabiah" and they were assisted by "ten of their brethren with them".
2. The key point is that the responsibility for the offering and the temple treasures did not rest with one man but with multiple men. This is very wise and appropriate. The love of money is "the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10) and money matters can quickly bring the worst out in people if not handled in a spiritual manner.

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3. The Apostle Paul understood this important principle as illustrated in the collection that was taken up for the poor saints in Jerusalem. A team was involved.
  - a. 1 Cor. 16:1-4 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, **whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send** to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, **they shall go with me.**”
  - b. 2 Cor. 8:16-21 “But thanks *be* to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. (17) For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you. (18) And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches; (19) And not *that* only, but who was also chosen of the churches to **travel with us** with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and *declaration* of your ready mind: (20) **Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:** (21) **Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.**”

### B. Responsible Men (Vs. 25-27; 33-34)

1. Evidently these were men who could be trusted with such a big responsibility. They were looking after “the offering of the house of our God” which had been contributed to by the king, his court and the saints of God as well as the temple “vessels”.
2. They were responsible for:
  - a. 650 talents of silver. A talent was 75.5 pounds or 34 kg. That’s 22,100 kilograms of silver (24 tons). That’s a lot of silver and a lot of responsibility!
  - b. 100 talents worth of silver vessels (3,440 kg).
  - c. 100 talents of gold (3,440).
  - d. 20 basons of gold of a thousand drams. The “dram” was a Persian gold coin (1 Ch. 29:7; Ezra 2:69; 8:27 Neh. 7:70-72) and was possibly worth about one British pound or two U.S. dollars in today’s money.
  - e. Two vessels of fine copper as precious as gold.
  - f. The offering was weighed not only at the beginning but also at the end of the journey, thus drawing attention to Ezra’s concern that all the currency and valuables should be accurately accounted for.

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3. They discharged their responsibilities faithfully. Compare Vs. 29 & 33-34.
4. We learn from this passage, as well as many others in the Bible the principles behind careful record keeping and the involvement of a plurality of spiritual men in the management of church finances.

### C. Spiritual Men (Vs. 28)

1. Ezra reminds them of their set apart position and the sacredness of the temple treasures. There is a vital connection between the priests and the vessels in that both are designated holy. “Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord” (Is. 52:11). Ministry is a high and holy calling.
2. Every true believer today is a member of the “holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).
3. God’s work needs holy men and this is especially true in the management of church finances. Carnal, covetous men can tear a church apart over financial matters. Illustration: Carnal treasurer who was pinched financially and caused division over the pastor’s stipend.
4. Illustrations:
  - a. The men Moses appointed to leadership positions in the nation of Israel – “Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people **able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness**; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:” (Exodus 18:21)
  - b. The first deacons – “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven **men of honest report**, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” (Acts 6:3)
  - c. The deacon’s qualifications – “Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, **not greedy of filthy lucre;**” (1 Tim. 3:8)

### D. Watchful Men (Vs. 29-30)

1. They were to watch over the temple vessels and resources. How important it is to have spiritual watchmen in all aspects of the work of God who are alert to spiritual dangers.
2. They were to guard (“keep”) the temple vessels and resources until they had been safely delivered to the house of God in Jerusalem.
3. Note: By way of application, pastors are called upon to watch over and seek to protect the souls (vessels) of those under their care. Heb. 13:17 “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: **for they watch for your souls**, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.” The word ‘bishop’ means ‘overseer’.

## V. THE SAFETY ON THE JOURNEY (VS. 31-34)

These verses are a testament the preserving hand of God upon His people through that long and dangerous journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. The journey was 900 miles (1,448 kms) and took close to four months (Compare Ezra 7:9 & 8:31-32). God had answered their earnest prayers for safety for themselves and for their families from the enemies that lurked by the way (Vs. 21-22). We note the preservation of:

### A. The Saints of God (Vs. 31-32)

1. Preserved throughout the journey (Vs. 31a)
  - a. They were leaving Babylon and were bound for Jerusalem. God sustained and kept them all the way to their destiny in Jerusalem.
  - b. What a touching picture of the Christian life and the comforting assurance that God preserves those He saves.
    - i. Phil. 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath **begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:**”
    - ii. 1 Peter 1:5 “Who are **kept by the power of God** through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
    - iii. Jude 1:24 “Now unto him that is able to **keep you from falling**, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,”
2. Preserved from the enemy (Vs. 31b)

The biggest threat to their safety on this journey was the enemies that lurked by the way. We are reminded of:

- a. The Reality of the Enemy – Ezra knew there were enemies that would try and obstruct their progress and plunder their goods. Enemies who hated the people of God and desired their destruction. How the enemy hated to see the people of God returning out of captivity to the place of blessing and victory in the land of promise. In the two and a half thousand years that have transpired since Ezra’s day, the enemy’s intentions have not changed. For the believer we need to be reminded of the spiritual axis of evil that we have to deal with in our Christian journey.
  - i. The world.
  - ii. The flesh.
  - iii. The devil.
- b. The Subtilty of the Enemy – note the enemy’s character is highlighted in the description “such as lay in wait by the way”. The reference is to an ambush.

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- i. In the Old Testament the same phrase is used of a murderer – Deut. 19:11 “But if any man hate his neighbour, and **lie in wait for him**, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:” Micah 7:2 “The good *man* is perished out of the earth: and *there is* none upright among men: they all **lie in wait for blood**; they hunt every man his brother with a net.”
- ii. The same word picture is also used frequently to describe a military ambush – Joshua 8:4 “And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall **lie in wait against the city**, *even* behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready:” The word is translated “ambushes” in Jeremiah 51:12 – “prepare the **ambushes**”. See also Judges 9:34, 43; 20:29, 33, 36-38.
- iii. In the New Testament the figure is used to describe false teachers – Eph. 4:14 “That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they **lie in wait to deceive**;” Messing with false teachers and false doctrine is very dangerous. The context of this passage is the gifts God has given the local church, including the office of the pastor, to ensure doctrinal stability and maturity in the local church.
- iv. We would do well to keep this picture of the enemy in our hearts and minds and remember that the devil is constantly lurking around, watching for an opportunity to strike and destroy. David let his guard down one night and was targeted by the enemy who was lurking and watching for such an opportunity to bring down a man of God.
- v. **Notice that the two “hands” in this verse (Vs. 31).** There is the “hand of our God” and the “hand of the enemy”. Praise God His hand prevailed over the enemy’s!

## B. The Sacred Vessels of God (Vs. 33-34)

1. The offering and temple treasures are delivered safely to the house of God in Jerusalem because of the faithful, priestly oversight of the “chief of the priests”.
2. We can be comforted with the thought that as God’s vessels, we are kept by the High Priestly oversight and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 7:34-25 “But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath **an unchangeable priesthood**. “Wherefore he is able also to **save them to the uttermost** that come unto God

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by him, **seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.**”

Note: The context of this verse is the fact of Christ’s superior priesthood in Melchizedek in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood.

### VI. THE SACRIFICES AFTER THE JOURNEY (VS. 35-36)

#### A. The Offering of Sacrifices (Vs. 35)

1. The Sin offering
  - a. Twelve bullocks are offered for Israel according to the number of the 12 tribes. Significant considering the fact the northern 10 tribes had been carried away into Assyria.
  - b. Twelve goats are offered for a sin offering. The sin offering here was the acknowledgement of the sins of the nation as a whole which had led to the exile.
  - c. Concerning the sin offering, Keil writes, “the sin-offering preceded the burnt-offering, as the necessary basis of an acceptable burnt-offering.”
2. The Burnt Offering
  - a. The Burnt offering (Lev. 1:1-17) was of the “sweet savour” offerings described in Leviticus. They were the first 3 of the 5 offerings described in the first part of Leviticus. The burnt offering speaks of Christ’s total devotion to God in giving His very life to obey and please His Father. The central thought is that of an offering that is well pleasing to the Father.
  - a. The seventy and seven lambs suggest infinity and the infinite value of the blood of Christ as the Lamb of God. The number seven speaks of perfection and we are reminded of the total perfection and sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice.

#### B. The Offering of Service (Vs. 36)

1. They served the king (Vs. 36a). These were law abiding, king honoring people.
2. They furthered the people of God. The word ‘furthered’ has the root meaning “to lift”. The arrival of these saints of God was a spiritual lift to the remnant in Judea.
3. They furthered the house of God. How we need people who will have a heart to help lift the load in the work of God’s house!

**Conclusion:** Are you seeking God’s hand of blessing on your life, family and church? Nothing could be more important than being in the center of God’s will and His hand upon your life.