

*The Good Hand Of The Lord Was On Ezra*¹

Text: "... in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra ... the son of Aaron the chief priest; ⁶this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. ⁷Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. ¹⁰For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:1, 6-10).

Introduction:

1. ***The title*** of this lesson is "The Good Hand Of The Lord Was On Ezra"
 - a. The idea suggested by this title is that Ezra was successful in his endeavors because the Lord's good hand was blessing him.
 - b. Notice passages in Ezra that refer to the hand of the Lord doing things.
 - 1) "The king granted him all his request, ***according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him***" (Ezra 7:6).
 - 2) "On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, ***according to the good hand of his God upon him***" (Ezra 7:9).
 - 3) "So I was encouraged, as ***the hand of the LORD my God was upon me***; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me" (Ezra 7:28)
 - 4) "And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia; that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. Then, ***by the good hand of our God upon us***, they brought us a man of understanding ..." (Ezra 8:17-18).
 - 5) "***And the hand of our God was upon us***, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road" (Ezra 8:31).
2. ***The theme*** of this lesson is that "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him" (Ezra 8:22). The same idea, in different words, occurs in the New Testament. "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off" (Romans 11:22).
3. ***The procedure*** during this lesson will be to look first at the nature of the times and character of Ezra, then to think together about the times in which we live and the character qualities we need to be good servants of God.

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- a. Under the category of the nature of the times, we'll look at the conditions and challenges of the people of God.
- b. Under the category of the nature of character, we'll look first at Ezra's character – what he was, why he was that way, what he did, and why he was successful. Then we'll ask you to examine yourselves, what are you? why you are that way? what do you want to do? and how may you expect to become successful at achieving your goals?

I. The Nature of the Times When Ezra Lived

A. General conditions of the people of God

1. They were scattered and away from their fathers' homeland because of their forefathers' failure to obey the Lord. (That's because they had intermarried with the people of the land when Canaan was conquered, and the people of the land had led them astray.)²
2. They were poor and struggling in the land of their captivity and in their homeland upon their return.
3. They needed leadership to direct them in their service to the Lord.

B. General challenges before the people of God

1. They needed to return to settle in the land of their forefathers.
2. They needed to conform to the word of the Lord.
3. They needed to rebuild Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and restore ancient Jewish practices.

II. The Character of Ezra

A. What he was ...

1. **“the priest**, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven” (NKJV, 7:21). Thus, a descendent from Aaron, through Phinehas (Ezra 7:1-6), and also through Seraiah, the high priest who was slain when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (2 Kings 15:18, 21).
2. **“a skilled scribe** in the Law of Moses” (NKJV, 7:6) “a teacher well versed in the law of Moses” (NIV, 7:6 See also 7:11, 12, 20). The scribal tasks implied three things ...
 - a. *He was a student*, and as such had a duty to himself to study the will of God as revealed in his word, that he might hide it in his own heart (Ezra 7:10).
 - b. *He was an interpreter* with a duty to his own generation in teaching his fellow exiles what he had learned. In this way he gave the “sense” of the word (Neh. 8:2-8).
 - c. *He was a copyist*, which meant that this learned man had a duty to his own people in multiplying and preserving intact the very words of God (Ezra 7:10, 11).

²**Exodus 34:12-16**, “Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.” **1 Kings 11:1-2**, “But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites; from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.”

3. **An able administrator and reformer.** He conducted the Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem in peace and safety, and established himself their leader, and reformed them with a vigorous hand.
 4. **A man of influence** among his fellows. He communicated the will and word of God to others.
 5. **A man of character, as** indicated by the facts that he was ...
 - a. A man of deep humility and self-denial (Ezra 7:10-15; 10:6)³
 - b. A man of great learning with a fervent zeal for God's honor (Ezra 7:10; 8:21-23)⁴
 - c. A man of great trustworthiness (Ezra 7:13, 26)⁵
 - d. A man anxious to commend his cause to others (Ezra 8:2-20)
 - e. A man who knew how to pray (Ezra 8:21; 10:1)⁶
 - f. A man deeply grieved over the sins of the people (Ezra 9:3; 10:6)⁷
 - g. A man who spared no pains to bring the people to repentance.
- B. Why he was what he was ...
1. He "had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (NKJV, 7:10) He had "devoted himself to study and observance of the law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (NIV, 7:10).
 2. "the good hand of his God upon him" (Ezra 7:9).
- C. What he did ...

³**Ezra 10:6**, "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity."

⁴**Ezra 8:21-23**, "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.' So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."

⁵**Ezra 7:13, 26**, "I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you ... Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment."

⁶**Ezra 8:21**, "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions." **Ezra 10:1**, "Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly."

⁷**Ezra 9:1-3**, "When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.' So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. **Ezra 10:6**, "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity."

1. He led a return of Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. He took courage (7:28) and gathered leading men of Israel to go with him (Ezra 7 – 8; 458 B.C.)
 2. He reformed the people, objecting to intermarriage with foreign wives who had previously led the Israelites astray (Ezra 9 - 10; 458-457 B.C.)
 3. He is associated with Nehemiah in the reading the book of the Law, (Neh. 8:1-8; - 444 B.C.) and the subsequent celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, and the observance of a day of penance followed by a general confession of sins (Neh. 8:13 - 9:37).
 4. Traditional history says that it was Ezra who instituted the Great Synagogue, became its first President, settled the Canon of Jewish Scripture and began the building of synagogues in Jewish provincial towns.
- D. Why he was successful ...
1. He “had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (NKJV, 7:10) He had “devoted himself to study and observance of the law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (NIV, 7:10).
 2. “the good hand of the Lord was upon him” (7:9)
 3. “the king granted him everything he asked (7:6)

III. *The Nature of Our Times*

- A. General conditions of the people of God in our times
1. Like Israel of old who claimed to be God’s people, but whose lives were like those of the nations around them, so also most Americans claim to be God’s people today, but the quality of Christianity in this country is so shallow that there is virtually no distinction in behavior between the world at large and those who profess Christianity.⁸
 2. The worldview of modern humanism dominates the thinking and behavior of nearly all aspects of our culture.
 3. Generally, our nation is blessed with material prosperity, but cursed with spiritual poverty. We are very much like the ancient Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14-22).
- B. General challenges before the people of God in our times
1. Christians need to learn what it means to be dedicated to God and distinct from the world.
 2. Christians must learn to distinguish between the worldviews of modern humanism and biblical theism and to conform our behavior to that of biblical theism. More specifically,

⁸“If you put the U.S. up against the Scriptures, we’re in trouble. I think we’re very close to the judgment of God. The problem of America is not the unbelieving world. The problem of America is the people of God. You see, right now there are just as many divorces in the churches as outside the churches. There are just as many abortions inside the churches as outside the churches. There’s only a one percent difference in gambling inside the churches as outside the churches. George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the churches, and he said there is virtually no difference between the two. So we have brokenness in the churches [and] no reconciliation.

How then should we live? This is a long answer to a short question, but it depends on the people of God. . . . it’s God’s people who hold the destiny of America. Don’t fuss at the world. It’s acting just like its nature. We’ve got to be salt and light again. We’ve got to have an observable difference.

So God’s attention right now is on His own people, and if I gave one statement, it would be, “The future of America rests in our hands.”

Dr. Henry Blackaby, “What do You See as the Future for the United States?” speech given at the Billy Graham Training Center, Asheville, N.C., May 22, 1999, as cited by *Family News From Dr. James Dobson*, September, 1999, p. 9. (Dr. Blackaby is a special assistant to the presidents of the North American Mission, International Mission and Sunday School boards of the Southern Baptist Convention.)

- a. Christians need not only to educate their own children in spiritual values, but also to do whatever possible to privatize all public education in order to minimize the teaching of humanistic values in the country.
 - b. Christians need to spend more time planning for eternity rather for retirement.
 - c. Christians need to think more about being of service to God rather than enjoying the pleasures of life, etc.
3. Generally, Christians need to lead our nation into spiritual prosperity, and not be so concerned with material prosperity.

IV. *What about your character?*

- A. What do you want to be? – “What you are to be you are now becoming!”
1. What are your long term goals? Do you want to be a servant of the Lord?
 2. What are your short term goals? How are you preparing yourself to be and accomplish what you want?
- B. Why do you want to be that?
1. Is it to get attention? Are your reasons selfish?
 2. Is it to serve the Lord? Is it to be a blessing to others?
- C. What do you want to do?
1. What are you capable of doing? Do you have strong desires to achieve your goals? Do you have good composition, communication, personal relationship, or computer skills?
 2. How can you best serve the Lord? Through business, education, scientific pursuits, politics, medicine, preaching, etc.!
- D. How do you know you can be successful?
1. Be like Ezra, prepare your heart to seek the will of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in your world. Devote yourself to study and observance of the word of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and precepts.
 2. Consider the goodness and severity of God (Ezra 8:22; Romans 11:22)⁹

Conclusion:

1. Take courage, trust God, plan to do excellent in God’s service
2. **2 Chronicles 15:1-2**, “Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: ‘Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.’”

⁹“The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him” (Ezra 8:22). “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22).