

EZRA: THE HAND OF GOD

Monday, February 20

Reading: Ezra 7-8

Ezra 7:6 *This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.*

About 57 years has elapsed since the completion of the Temple. God would now send Ezra the priest to help with the spiritual condition of the returned exiles. King Artaxerxes had experienced much trouble in the region around Jerusalem and perhaps thought that a leader like Ezra could stabilize the Jewish people so they would not join with his enemies.

Ezra was the right man to be the spiritual leader for God's people. He was from a distinguished family of priests who had served as high priest to King David (7:1-5). He was also an expert in God's Law (7:6). Most importantly, "the hand of the Lord his God was on him" (7:6 and repeated at least 5 times in this book). The key verse concerning Ezra's character is found in Ezra 7:10:

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." (NKJV)

Ezra had the right attitude. He had "prepared his heart" to seek God. Next, he applied what he learned to his own life ("to do it"). Only then was he was ready to "teach" God's Word to the people of Israel.

With the king's letter and provisions in hand, Ezra gathered around 4000 to 5000 people for the four month journey to Jerusalem (7:8-9). Before they leave, Ezra holds a prayer meeting to seek God's blessing and protection on their journey. They were carrying a large amount of money with them and he did not want to ask for soldiers to accompany them. He wanted their protection on this journey to be a testimony to the faithfulness of God. The Lord answered their prayer and after the long journey they arrived safely at Jerusalem.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Notice Ezra's approach to the Word of God. (1) He prepared his heart to study God's Word - to dig in and discover what God said. (2) His goal was to seek the Lord - to really know Him from the heart, not just head knowledge. (3) Ezra took what he had studied and put it into practice - he did what it said! (4) After he had applied the Word to his own life, he was ready to share and teach it to others. Is this an accurate description of your study of God's Word? What might you need to change to be a better student of the Word of God?
2. Over and over it is repeated that "the hand of the Lord his God was on him." Why is this such an important thing for us to know? What do you see in Ezra's life that shows why God's hand was on him? What principles can you learn from this for your life?

READING THE STORY: Ezra 7-10