



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Ezra 7:1-28

Topic

Six times in the next two chapters, Ezra describes “the good hand of his God” upon him

Title

*“He Wanna Hold Your Hand”*

Name the celebrity associated with his catchphrase:

- “I pity the fool...”
- “And that’s the way it is”
- “You might be a redneck...”
- “Won’t you be my neighbor?”
- “I get no respect”
- “Thank you; thank you very much”
- “I didn’t inhale”
- “Is that your final answer?”
- “Cowabunga!”

- “The balcony is closed”
- “Welcome to Flavortown”
- “Mmm... donuts”
- “The tribe has spoken”
- “There’s a sucker born every minute”
- “Just the facts, ma’am”
- “Ready or not, Jesus is coming!”

If Ezra had a catchphrase, it would be some variation of, “By the good hand of our God upon us.” He says something like that six times in the next two chapters.

Ezra hints in the last verse of chapter seven that the “good hand of God” is related to God’s “mercy,” which can also be translated “lovingkindness” or “steadfast love.”

The mercy... the lovingkindness... the steadfast love of God will be our theme as I organize my comments around two questions: #1 Do You Fear The Hand Of The Lord Upon You, and #2 Do You Feel The Hand Of The Lord Upon You?

# #1 Do You Fear The Hand Of The Lord Upon You?

(v1-10)

If the writer of the Proverbs had one catchphrase, it might be, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). After all, the Book of Proverbs is called “wisdom literature,” so it makes sense that “the fear of the Lord” would be foundational.

One commentator defined “the fear of the Lord” by saying it is “the continual awareness that our loving heavenly Father is watching and evaluating everything we think, say, and do.”

While that is true of our omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God, it can sound harsh - as if God is following me with His clipboard, writing down cryptic criticisms as I constantly fail.

OR - It can be understood the way Ezra understood it: As God’s mercy, lovingkindness and steadfast love comforting me and guiding me, as if His hand was literally upon me.

Let's go with that; and when we get to verse twenty-eight, I'll share something along those lines that's really precious.

Ezr 7:1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

Ezr 7:2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

Ezr 7:3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,

Ezr 7:4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,

Ezr 7:5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest -

It's a turn of the page for us, but chapter seven starts about 60 years after the events of chapter six. The Book of Esther takes place during that time.

It reads as if Ezra spent a lot of time on ancestry.com going into his genealogy.

It's super-popular today to search your genealogy. You're hoping to find hidden treasure. But you just might open door number two, and get zonked. There are a lot of articles like the one titled, *My Ancestry Test Revealed a Genetic Bombshell*, reporting how a woman found out her father wasn't her biological dad.

You may think it's better to know the truth. I like what Yondu told Starlord about Ego: "He may have been your father, boy, but he wasn't your daddy."

In Ezra's case, he could trace his ancestry directly to Aaron, the older brother of Moses, and Israel's first high priest. It was an impressive credential for someone coming to teach the Law of Moses to a group that had strayed from it. Jews still revere Ezra as a second Moses.

Ezr 7:6 this 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.

We've been pointing out God's providence. He is directly involved in human history, superintending it so that it will arrive at the prophesied end. God's involvement, however, does not violate our free will, or negate our responsibility:

- Ezra was God's guy, raised-up at just the right time. But he had to be ready to be used - prepared as "a skilled scribe" *prior* to this in order to be used.
- Artaxerxes was king; God influenced him to be a help to Ezra without force or coercion.

One thing we might say, then, about God's hand being upon us is that it means He guides us.

Your GPS will guide you, but you have to follow its prompts. Otherwise, it resets from your errors.

The plan is to get you where you need to go.  
Follow God's prompts; be thankful for His resets.

Ezr 7:7 *Some* 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.

“Nethinim” were Temple assistants that had been established by King David. One writer describes them, saying,

Some very disagreeable drudgery was always necessary. The chopping of wood, lighting of fires, sharpening of knives, drawing of water, the cleansing not only of the altar and its surroundings and utensils, but of the whole of the Temple precincts, and the performance of many menial offices for the priests, required a large staff of servants.

Are you OK with menial tasks? With drudgery?  
A lot of what constitutes ministry could be

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labeled, “Here comes the drudge.” Do it as unto the Lord.

Ezr 7:8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which *was* in the seventh year of the king.

Ezr 7:9 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.

Chapter seven is giving us an introduction of Ezra and his ministry. For now, it’s enough to note that it was a four-month, 900 mile walk from Babylon to Jerusalem. Obviously, that kind of travel in those days was brutal. But not with the good hand of God upon you.

Ezr 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.



“Prepared” is alternately translated as “always giving his time and attention to.” In his case, as a scribe, concentrating on God’s Word was a full-time pursuit. In most of your cases, it is not; you have careers and jobs; or homes to run. You can’t devote your full energy to studying.

But you can give as much time and attention to God’s Word as you can. When I first got saved, I purchased a copy of Tim LaHaye’s book, *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*. One thing he recommended was getting a basic library of books. For my first birthday after I got saved, all I asked for were those books. *Unger’s Bible Dictionary; The Whole Bible Commentary Critical and Explanatory* by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell; *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words; Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis.

I had no plans to become a scribe; I simply wanted to have the tools I needed to give as much time and attention to God’s Word as I could.

Ezra sets a good example in that he learned the Word, then lived it, and only then, taught others. It doesn't mean you need to be perfect; you never will be. It does mean we ought not be hypocrites - putting burdens on others in teaching and talking that we ourselves do not bear.

For example: If you've never suffered very much, then you have less to say to encourage those who *are* suffering. BTW, **that's biblical**. The apostle Paul wrote, "He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives" (Second Corinthians 1:4-5 CEV).

You must first be comforted by God in your own "terrible sufferings" to be able to comfort others.

This doesn't mean you can't minister Jesus to those who are suffering. But be cautious you don't put greater burden upon them by overstepping your experience.

**Do** you fear the hand of the Lord upon you? I think we would agree that Ezra did - even though it is not directly stated. To him, fearing the Lord meant preparing his heart to serve; and stepping-up when called to serve - whether in exile, or by taking a long dangerous journey, or by being the guy who would speak truth in love to God's people.

It wasn't the fear of disobeying and therefore being punished. It was the fear of pleasing God on account of God's mercy, longsuffering, and steadfast love.

True, God's hand must sometimes dispense necessary discipline. Even then, it is only those whom He loves that He disciplines.

## #2 Do You Feel

### The Hand Of The Lord Upon You?

(v11-28)

We've been taught to walk by faith, not by feeling. While in one sense that is good, I think we might be overdoing it by ignoring feelings.

Again, let's ground this in God's Word. In the New Testament we are told to have God-honoring feelings. We are commanded to feel joy (Philippians 4:4), hope (Psalm 42:5), fear (Luke 12:5), peace (Colossians 3:15), zeal (Romans 12:11), grief (Romans 12:15), desire (First Peter 2:2), tenderheartedness (Ephesians 4:32), brokenness and contrition (James 4:9).

The references Ezra makes to the hand of God are obviously an attempt to personalize our relationship and to elicit emotion. Ezra understood God as reaching out, in love and with affection; leading, correcting, holding his hand, and reaching out to lift up his head.

Keep that in mind as we work rather quickly through these remaining verses.

Ezr 7:11 This *is* a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel:

Ezra wrote this, but he wasn't boasting. This is the job description of the "priest, the scribe."

Your job description is to become 'expert' in what the Word says about being a husband, a wife, a child; an employer or an employee; a citizen. The information is easily accessible in the Bible. Learn it; live it; teach it.

Ezr 7:12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect *peace*, and so forth.

Ezr 7:13 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.

Ezr 7:14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which *is* in your hand;

Ezr 7:15 and *whereas you are* to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling *is* in Jerusalem;

Ezr 7:16 and *whereas* all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, *are to be* freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem -

Ezr 7:17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:18 And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God.

God determined to fund the project using Persian, or we would say government, money. In the church age in which we live, God's work depends upon the free-will giving of His saints.

Ezr 7:19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem.

Ezr 7:20 And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have

occasion to provide, pay *for it* from the king's treasury.

Ezr 7:21 And I, *even I*, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who *are in the region* beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently,

Ezr 7:22 up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit.

Ezr 7:23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

Artaxerxes motive was to live in harmony with the God of Israel in order to not be overthrown. While Israel's recent history had been one of captivity, Artaxerxes may have understood it was a discipline from their God. And he may have known their earlier history - when no Gentile nation could stand against them.

Ezr 7:24 Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom *on* any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God.

*No tax for ministers.* I'm going to file Form 1040-EZRA.

Ezr 7:25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who *are in the region* beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know *them*.

Ezr 7:26 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.

By “all the people” was meant Jews. Artaxerxes was giving Ezra permission to live by the Law of Moses in their own land.



Muslim immigrants want to apply Sharia law where they settle. I bring it up to illustrate. The Israelites were restricted to within their own sovereign borders - *not* wherever they lived in Persia.

Ezr 7:27 Blessed *be* the LORD God of our fathers, who has put *such a thing* as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem,

Ezr 7:28 and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. 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.

Sounds emotional to me; full of feeling. Ezra was “encouraged,” which is accompanied by feelings. He “blessed” the Lord - motivated by the joy and hope and peace that he felt.

If we allow for those emotions, we must allow for ones that are darker, negative.

The apostle Paul despaired; he was anxious about the spiritual state of believers. The psalmists describe many difficult emotions. It is part of our sanctification to *work* through our emotions, and *break* through to joy and such.

**Let** me point out something that, as I teased earlier, is precious. In verse twenty-eight, the Hebrew word for “mercy” is, by all scholarly accounts, extremely difficult to translate into English. “Mercy,” “longsuffering,” and “steadfast love” are all acceptable. But they fall short.

Several authors point out that the root word here is also the root word for “stork.” I know; that sounds off-topic, and even a little funny.

What do you associate with storks? **They are trusted to deliver babies.**

There is a long history of cultures using the stork in this manner. Here’s why, according to one researcher:

Storks are excellent parents... they care for their young faithfully and with great loyalty and devotion. They return to the same nesting sights year after year, and practice serial monogamy.

Here is another quote:

The Hebrew word for stork was equivalent to *kind mother*, and the care of storks for their young, in their highly visible nests, made the stork a widespread emblem of parental care. **It was widely noted in ancient natural history that a stork pair will be consumed with the nest in a fire, rather than fly and abandon it.**

There is a meme circulating the web that says, “I saw your picture in the dictionary today, right next to (fill in the blank).” It’s a modern version of saying, “If you look-up (fill in the blank) in the dictionary, you’ll see so-and-so’s picture.”

It’s a “picture is worth a thousand words” sort of thing.

Sometimes an example *is* richer than a definition. God's mercy... longsuffering... steadfast love... is like that of a stork caring for its young. Or, as Jesus said in the New Testament, it's like a mother hen gathering her young under her wings.

Except that, unlike birds, God is omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent. His tenderness is powerful.

I can only trust that as you reflect on this, you'll recover joy, hope, peace, and all the good feelings of a walk with God - *even if you're in the fire.*

One final question: What do you want as *your* catchphrase?