

# BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

## Ezra Nehemiah Esther

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*People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).*

### Ezra

#### Chapter Seven

#### *"He Wanna Hold Your Hand"*

#### Introduction

The Bible describes God's spiritual anatomy. It talks about His face; His ear; His arm; His nostrils; His mouth; and His feet.

Psalms 27:8 *When You said, "Seek My **face**," my heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."*

Psalms 116:2 *Because He has inclined His **ear** to me, therefore I will call *upon Him* as long as I live.*

Isaiah 40:10 *Behold, the Lord GOD shall come... and His **arm** shall rule for Him...*

Psalms 18:8 *Smoke went up from His **nostrils**, and devouring fire from His **mouth**; coals were kindled by it.*

Psalms 18:9 *He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His **feet**.*

God is a spirit. These references to body parts are meant to put God into terms we can understand. I like their use, because they reveal God as a Person Who I can relate to.

There is a particularly endearing use of spiritual anatomy in the Book of Ezra. You probably noticed the three-fold repetition of the phrase, *according to the good hand of his God upon him*. It repeats three more times in Chapter Eight.

We're not sure what kind of *good hand* Ezra had in mind:

1. Maybe it was the *good hand* of a Father walking with His child hand-in-hand.

2. Maybe it was the **good hand** upon Ezra's shoulder, the way you might reach out and touch someone to emphasize your care and concern for them.
3. Maybe it was the **good hand** of a pat on the back to indicate your satisfaction.

Maybe it is all of those, and any other thoughts you might have, of God's loving guidance.

*You're in good hands with God!* As we work through the chapter, you'll see Ezra reaching up, and God reaching out, so that they can hold hands.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Reach Up & Put Your Hand In The Good Hand Of God, and #2 God Is Reaching Out To Put His Good Hand Upon You.

#### #1 Reach Up & Put Your Hand In The Good Hand Of God (v1-10)

For us, it's the next chapter; but for the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem, sixty years have passed between chapters six and seven. The Jewish remnant was having a difficult time. God raised up Ezra to lead a second group of returnees from Babylon to Judah to bring financial and spiritual support to the work and to help rebuild the city.

A historical note: The events of the Book of Esther, which describes life for the Jews who remained in Babylon, occurred in the sixty years between chapters six and seven of Ezra.

We're told of Ezra, in verse nine, that **the good hand of his God upon him**. Then, in verse ten you read, **For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD**. I suggest these are two ways of saying the same thing. One was a practical, analytical description – **he prepared his heart**. The other was a poetical, intimate description – **the good hand of his God upon him**.

Read on in verse ten and you see how Ezra prepared his heart: **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.**

Ezra prepared his heart in three ways:

1. To learn the Word of God
2. To live-out the Word of God
3. To lead others according to the Word of God

The preceding verses, one through eight, are a commentary on the three things Ezra followed in his life to prepare his heart and reach out to hold God's hand.

First you see Ezra put his hand in God's good hand by learning the Word of God.

Ezra 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,  
Ezra 7:2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,  
Ezra 7:3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,  
Ezra 7:4 the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,  
Ezra 7:5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest -

It was important to be able to trace and prove your genealogy. If you could not, you could not serve. Ezra could definitely trace his.

There are two things we can say about this in our situation:

1. First, everything begins with your birth; and by that I mean your second birth – your spiritual birth. You cannot put your hand in God's unless or until you are born-again into His family, as His child.
2. Second, it's clear that Ezra came from a godly family. They were the ones who transmitted Bible knowledge to him from a young age. It's up to us as parents to instill the love of God and His Word into our kids.

Ezra 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.

A **scribe** was an expert in God's Law, especially the five books of Moses, who copied it and taught it to others. Not everyone could be

a scribe; but everyone could aspire to knowing God more through His Word.

The same is true today. Not everyone is gifted to teach and preach God's Word. But all of us can aspire to knowing God more intimately through His Word.

After you are born into God's family, you desire His Word the way a baby goes after milk. It is fundamental.

Next you see Ezra put his hand in God's good hand by living-out the Word of God.

Ezra 7:6 ...The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

He had a **request**. Studying God's Word stirred him up to do something. He had a burden to go to Jerusalem and help the remnant grow in their understanding of God's love for them.

God puts you together with other believers so you can live-out the principles of His Word. Every believer is a unique and special part of what is called the body of Christ on earth. We're called a 'body' to remind us that, like our own human bodies, we need all the members functioning properly in their right places.

- being changed to bring change -

God also gives you a gift or gifts by which you minister one to another. It is in His strength, and by His empowering, you live-out Christianity.

What is your **request**? Your burden? Your place in the body – the thing you were meant to do for God?

Finally you see Ezra put his hand in God's good hand by leading others by the Word of God.

Ezra 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.*

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

Ezra 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.

The **Nethinim** were descendants of a people known as the Gibeonites. In the days of Joshua, they had deceived the children of Israel into not destroying them. Their punishment was to be servants in God's tabernacle.

Sometimes we think serving God is punishment! It's not; it is the greatest privilege we could have.

Ezra affected others. In his case, he was literally their leader. You may not be called to a position or office of leadership; but you can still lead others. Some of the Christians who have had the most profound affect upon you may not be pastors or Bible study teachers. They may be average believers whose simple faith and trust in the Lord, lived-out right before your eyes, is a living epistle. **You** can be someone's living epistle, too!

We've just gotten a brief overview of the foundational principles of the Christian life. You prepare your heart in those three practical ways.

Poetically, it's like a child reaching up to take his or her father's hand, and then being led along.

For His part, God's hand is always extended to you; He wants to hold your hand.

## #2 God Is Reaching Out To Put His Good Hand Upon You (v11-28)

Ezra spent his time preparing himself. He didn't know for what he was preparing! I'm certain it would have blown his mind to think he would lead a group back to Jerusalem to get God's people stirred-up.

God was working behind the scenes, getting things ready for Ezra. He was removing kings and raising up other kings to clear a path for His servant. We call it God's providence. Providence is the continual care God exercises over the universe He created. Providence

describes the activity of God by which He makes all events work out His eternal purposes.

Ezra described it as God reaching out to put His good hand upon you. However you want to describe it, you have an example of it in verses eleven through twenty-six.

Ezra 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 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.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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;

Ezra 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;

Ezra 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 -

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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,

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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?

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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*.  
Ezra 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.

This is a remarkable providence. It's literally true, in all its details. It seems exaggerated – it seems more than you'd expect – just to show what God is capable of in His providence. When you and I read these accounts, it is to give us confidence of just how in control of things our God really is.

We don't always see His hand reaching out to us in such an exaggerated manner. We'd like to; but we don't. Sometimes God's hand is holding a door closed that we would otherwise walk through, to our detriment. Either way, God is revealed as being active in all of our earthly affairs. We are called upon to, by faith, trust His providence as good for us.

I used to be big into riding bicycles. On one occasion, when I was about fourteen years old, I was racing my older brother Richard through town. We were headed for an intersection at a pretty high rate of speed. I was slightly ahead of him. I didn't see approaching cross-traffic. The next thing I knew, my brother crashed his bike into mine! As we got up from a mangle of metal, crying, and with cuts and bruises, I understood I would have probably been hit by a car if he hadn't acted to stop me. He thought I had a better chance in a bike crash than to be hit by a car. And he was right.

It's hard to believe God is figuratively keeping you from being hit by a car. That's why it is so important to put this poetic and intimate spin on His providence. Providence sounds almost menacing. But not when you understand it as God reaching out to put His good hand upon you.

Ezra 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,  
Ezra 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.

I freely admit that it is easier to bless God when He is opening doors than when He is closing them. I would rather be in an exaggerated time of remarkable providence like Ezra than be struggling in what seems like a defeat.

But that is exactly the point of our study. God is always to be blessed, because no matter my perception, it is always His good hand upon me, if I am walking with Him according to His Word.

Job said it best. In the midst of his incredible suffering, he proclaimed,

Job 1:21 ...“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

### Applying God’s Word

Believer: Think of your spiritual disciplines differently. Sure, you are studying God’s Word; serving in God’s Church. But what you are really doing is being led by God as you reach up to hold His outstretched hand.

If you are not yet saved... I have an anatomical invitation for you!

Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

You’re sins separate you from God. Jesus Christ died in your place, for your sins, to offer you forgiveness and eternal life. But you must accept His sacrifice as your Substitute.

Figuratively speaking, you must reach up to God, and put your hand in His.