


PROTECTION UNDER GOD'S HAND - EZRA 8:21-31

5. What principle is Ezra operating on in verses 21-23: is this wisdom or pride?

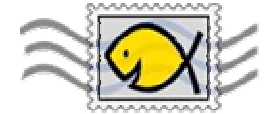
6. Look at verse 24-30. Why would Ezra be nervous?

The passage would seem to suggest that Ezra did in fact think about asking for troops to guard the way. A moment of weakness, no doubt, and understandably so. But Ezra, being a man of the book (cf, Isa 31:1), girds up his loins and addresses himself to the task like a man.

Discuss what challenges do we face today when we look to secure our journey? Where do we look for our assurance and safety and how do we discern what is wise? Should we be looking for the protection from the world? Is it an arrogant boast to rely on the hand of God? How can we apply the principle that governs Ezra in this chapter?

 Chapters 7-8 remind us of at least two very important things. First, given the 60 year gap between returnee's under Zerubbabel and Ezra, we might have been tempted to think that everybody who didn't go the first time was a non-elect pagan. We'd be wrong. God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. The meaning of today's providence is hidden from us and usually only revealed in hindsight.

Secondly, we are reminded of the comfort and necessity of a personal God. One who has hands to guide, guard and govern His people. A God who still holds us in His palm so that we will have courage in our obedience and service to Him.



EZRA CHAPTERS 7-8



THE HAND OF GOD

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Ezra Chapters 7-8

The time is almost 60 years after the events narrated in chapter 6. Not all is told, but only what is significant for the people of God.

The Book of Ezra shifts focus from restored worship (Ezra 1-6), to the reformed life according to the law/word of God (Ezra 7-10).

PROSPERITY UNDER GOD'S HAND - EZRA 7:1-10

1. What are the two preconditions for Ezra's prosperity?

Note the initial *ki* (for, because) in the Hebrew text. It explains why the good hand of his God was upon him (Ezra 7:9). God prospered the venture because of Ezra's purpose. This is a warning against sloth and carelessness, and a sloppy view of grace.

It is not a "God helps those who helps themselves" philosophy but a "God helps those who seek His will."

2. What was in Ezra's purpose that God should be with him?

The language of verse 10 speaks of a ministry that is focused in its objective (set his heart) and intense in its labor (to seek). It is both anchored and vigorous, not content with a little ministerial fiddling.

COURAGE UNDER GOD'S HAND - EZRA 7:25-28

3. What do you see in the circumstances that would give Ezra courage?

Notice in verse 28a the juxtaposition of the emphatic "and upon me" and all the biggies of the Persian empire (the king, his counselors, all the king's mighty princes). There is something astounding in how this miniscule Judean could command such favour from the bureaucracy of Persia! Ezra revels in the thought.

Discuss Considering God's intention to exalt His own glory (Hag 1), what is it in Ezra's mission that God should prosper him in the face of such political giants. (Clue - 7:14, 25, note what is in Ezra's hand and then re-read 7:10 and see what he plans to do with it). Compare this with Peter's prayer in Acts 4:29-31.

Bob & Jenny Ockenden left Australia in 1984 with a vision to establish a Teen Ranch in Scotland. They did. Then in 2004 they were given the opportunity to extend the work and establish another Ranch in Croy, near Inverness. Bob, armed with nothing more than Matthew 28:19 and a few dollars approached the owners of Kilvarock Castle, a 500 year old multi million dollar property complete with Castle Tower and Mansion and was promptly given a lease agreement. The cost of the lease? £1.00.

COMPANY & COUNSEL UNDER GOD'S HAND EZRA 8:18

Wise and faithful men surrounded the key figure, Ezra. The venture is not an "every man for himself" venture. The strength of one is for the benefit of another. Proverbs 24:3,

"By wisdom a house is built... by understanding it is established."

4. Do you see any about you who have come as a result of the good hand of God?
