

The Life that God Blesses

Do you want to change the world? Do you really want to see God's blessing on your personal life, your family, your service for the Lord and on His church?

We all know the answer we should give but lets think about the implications of this before we answer. During the 58 years between chapter 6 & 7 the walls of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt, leaving the city vulnerable to attack. The parallel to our spiritual life is that now our body is the temple of God but **we cannot delay in building protection around us to do God's work**. To do that, **we need God's blessings** and those **blessings come** as we study the Bible, do the Bible, and teach the Bible. The church and the world need people who know God, not just know of Him.

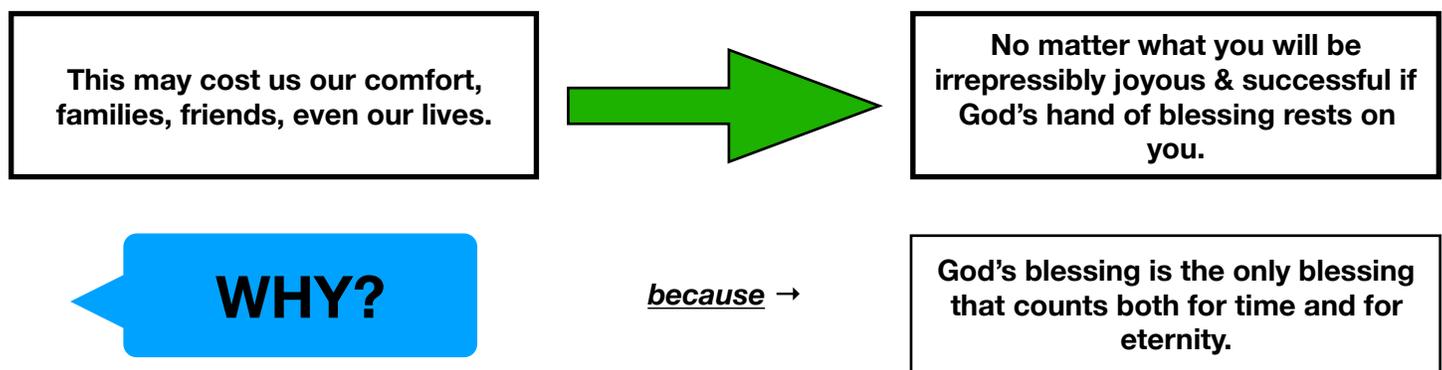
So God raised Ezra & Nehemiah up to rebuild & bring spiritual reform to His people. Both men were born in Babylon and were close to the authorities, namely King Artaxerxes. They enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle but both men were not satisfied because they were burdened with the low spiritual state of the exiles that had returned to the land. Just as we should be in our "Babylon" here on earth in the midst of many who need discipling to live a life of blessing to God!

This was a task that required and still requires today sacrifice on our part when the Holy Spirit moves in our soul. Both of these men were burdened and so much so **they were willing to give up their comfortable situations** in Babylon and endure the hardship and hassles to bring reform to God's people. The only way they could do this was in a phrase that occurs three times in chapter 7 and five more times in the rest of Ezra and Nehemiah, **"God's hand was on these men."** Another way of saying God's hand is God's blessing. If we want His blessing or hand to rest on us, we would do well to study their lives.

We can't bring any Hope to anyones life without God's blessing because we will only sound like a judgmental Pharisee to people who will then want nothing to do with us. Do life with people and be that "weirdo" they care about! Be weird/different from others around them that only encourage sinful behavior. Be the one that encourages God-like behavior with your words and actions!

To have God's hand of blessing on us, we must study, and obey His Word, with a view to teaching others and glorifying God for everything as He supplies the mercy, grace and power to do so.

1. All of us should seek God's blessing on our lives above all else *because...* (Mark 8:36)



"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" ~ Mark 8:36

Because - **God's blessing flows through family lines** (Ezra 7:1-5)

Verses 1-5 trace Ezra's line of descent back to Aaron, the brother of Moses, chief priest of Israel. As we saw in 2:62 those that could not prove their descent were not included in the priesthood. So **the fact that Ezra descend from Aaron was very significant**. The community's hopes would have been fed by the presence of a person with such a significant ancestry among them because it showed them God's faithfulness. God had raised up leaders for His people at the new exodus just as He raised up leaders for His people at the first exodus. But more importantly, Ezra's ancestry tells us more about God than it does about Ezra.

You may ask yourself, "If God's blessing flows through family lines, that's not fair! What if I came from a godless family? What hope is there for me to experience God's blessing?"

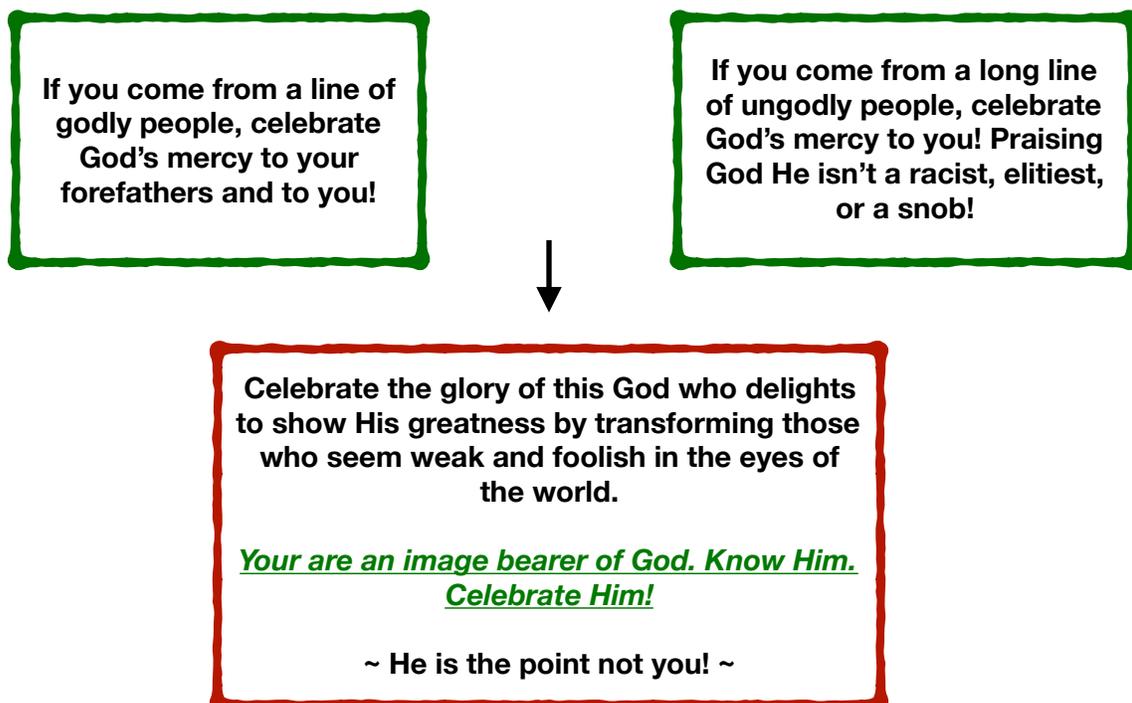
First of all, don't ask God to be fair with you! That's a bad prayer; you want mercy, not fairness. But second, there is great hope for you!

1. The Bible teaches that all humans are made in the **image and likeness** of God (Gen. 1:26-28)
2. The Bible teaches that all humans sin and **fall short** of God's glory (Rom. 3:23)
3. But God! The Bible also teaches that all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus will be **saved!** (Rom. 10:13)

That third point **teaches** that "family curses" are only for those who don't call on the Lord **AND** for those that do love God, calling on Him, **WILL SEE** their life and the lives of their family **CHANGED!** So, we can either disobey the Lord and deprive our descendants of God's blessing, OR we can be bold in obeying the Lord and bring His blessing on our descendants.

God's blessing flows through family lines, so remember we never obey or sin in isolation. Our faith affects those after us!

Your heritage is about God, NOT you.



Because - **God's blessing refers to God's doing above and beyond what human effort can produce or expect!** (Ezra 7:11-26)

We will skip around a bit for this next piece. So get ready for some Bible calisthenics! In **verses 11-26** there are actually two decrees from king Artaxerxes granting five things:

1. He **authorized** Ezra to go to Jerusalem and insure that God's law was both taught & observed. (v. 14, 25)
2. He **provided** a generous grant to buy supplies and temple vessels for the temple worship. (v. 15-20)
3. He **commanded** the treasures in the provinces to supplement anything else that Ezra needed. (v. 21-22)
4. He **exempted** all temple officials and workers from taxation (v. 24)
5. He **authorized** Ezra to set up a judicial system to see that these laws were obeyed AND that violators were punished (v. 25-26)

All of this was probably far more than Ezra expected from the pagan king which he served with distinction. But from the king's perspective it was probably a wise and cost-effective policy. He already had trouble with Egypt revolting and figured that if he granted political and religious self-governance to the Jews, they would live contentedly under his reign. He was also superstitious and didn't want to incur the wrath of the God of heaven (v. 23) hoping God would be nice to him and his sons.

We can obviously see God using a pagan king's evil superstitions & political strategies to bless His people through His servant Ezra, which leads us to the **why**. These extraordinary blessings were granted to Ezra for a reason. Let's look at some more verses about Ezra:

v. 6 - "...skilled in the **law of Moses**..."

v. 10 - "...to study the **law of the Lord**..."

v. 11 - "...a man learned in matters of the **commandments of the Lord**..."

v. 12 - "...a scribe (expert) in the **law of the God of heaven**..."

v. 14 - "...according to the **law of your God**, which is in your hand..."

v. 21 - "...the scribe of the **law of the God of heaven**..."

v. 25 - "...according to the **wisdom of your God** that is in your hand..."

v. 25 - "...all such as who know the **laws of your God**..."

v. 26 - "Whoever will not obey the **law of your God**..."

As you read through these verses, it's obvious that because Ezra knew & applied the Word of God in everything he did as he served the king that God blessed him more than he dreamed of! And the answer becomes quite clear. **Those who...**



...will see the "hand (blessings) of God" on their lives! We serve a God that fills our cup to overflowing!

Psalms 23:5, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

2. God's blessings come to those who study and obey His Word! (Ezra 7:6-10)

Ezra 7:6 tells us that not only did Ezra come from a significant ancestry, **he was also Godly and seeking the kingdom of God**. The phrase "skilled in the law of Moses" tells us that Ezra was swift in the Scriptures. Meaning he **knew** the contents of the Bible, **understood** the contents of the Bible, and brought the Bible **to bear on pressing** issues. The Lord had blessed Ezra with abilities and he had honed the abilities given to him to the point that he could be described as skilled.

Ezra is credited with writing Psalm 119 & in verse 74 it says, "*Those who fear You will see me and rejoice, for I put my hope in Your Word.*"

So how can we be like Ezra? All of us don't necessarily have an aptitude for the scriptures in the sense that we get it right away. But **we have the Holy Spirit to give us insight** to the meaning of the text, so that must mean we need to practice in our studies. Just like anything else you would work at because you enjoy it. So, ask yourself, "**Do I enjoy God?**" "**Do I find my joy in His promises?**" Or "**Do I find my satisfaction in things of this world?**" Be honest with yourself and if your answer is one of the first two, then that is a cue to get on your knees and beseech the throne of God to renew the flame in your soul for His Word, **so you can glorify Him with your life**.

Start practicing by setting aside a set amount of time at a specific time of the day, and before we start **ask the Father to help you understand** by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus.
Then and only then will we start to understand and see things in scripture we didn't before.

Then, look for someone to disciple you & get a good commentary by reformed authors to help understand sections of scripture. **BUT start** in God's Word & end in God's Word so you can know what pieces of man's literature is from man himself and what was revealed to man from God - it's called **developing discernment**: pray for it, discipline yourself in study, and do this FREQUENTLY.

Ezra knew this and was busy as he was serving the king; **he had to have placed priority on the study of the Scriptures**. **Verse 6** says and **7-8** show us that he was **actively seeking the kingdom of God** in the place where God had him. Where are you actively seeking the kingdom of God where He has you now? Seeking can look like **praying for opportunities** in conversations with people **to bring God's Truth** into it or asking Him **how to best serve those around you to reflect Jesus**. Either way you must be in the Word regularly so the Holy Spirit can bring God's Word to your mind in those situations. **When you spend time in the Word, make sure that your bottom line is obedience**. Verse 10 says, "Ezra set his heart" not only to study the Word but "to practice it". *The study and obedience of God's Word are the foundation for teaching it to others.* It would be nonsense to say that you want God's blessing while you are knowingly living in disobedience to His Word. **The goal of Bible study is** not fill our head with facts, although they are important, **it is to change our hearts and lives into conformity to Jesus Christ**. When this happens people will see the difference like King Artaxerxes saw in Ezra. Ezra's obedience was obvious to this pagan king. **You won't be perfect so let yourself be characterized by repentance**. In this way you will, "...work out your salvation in fear and trembling..." (Phil. 2:12), "...walking humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).

4. The final end of God's blessing should be our glorifying God for His abundant mercy.
(Ezra 7:27-28)

Remember in the beginning that **the hand of God on our lives is not about us**? It's about Him! In **verse 27**, Ezra gives thanks to the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this in the heart of the king to beautify & rebuild the temple of God. Well think of this.

In Psalm 46:7 & 10, **God is pleased to be known as the God of Jacob**. Why?

Why would God be pleased to be known as the God of a people who are permeated with shortcomings & faults, conniving others for things they don't have, even bargaining with God promising to follow Him if He would take care of and protect us. (Gen. 28:20-21 & 32:22-32)?

*Because when flawed people who devote themselves to worshipping the God of heaven through studying, doing and teaching His Word being changed by the power of God - **IT IS HIM & ONLY HIM** that can change peoples hearts & lives!*

Blessing in our lives comes despite of ourselves, rather it is by God's mercy & grace that anything comes to us at all. So **take courage** as Ezra did in **verse 28** blessing God for extending His steadfast love before those who may have authority over us **giving us confidence & courage in Him to lead** men and women who desperately need to see the power of God in their lives in **STUDYING** the Bible, **DOING** the Bible & **TEACHING** the Bible.