

The Puzzle Picture

Ezra – Under the Good Hand of God – Part VIII

Ezra 7:1-10

Introduction

We have just completed our study of the sixth chapter of Ezra. While on paper chapters 6 and 7 are separated by only a half an inch, in real life there was a fifty-eight year gap.

The first phrase of Ezra, chapter 7, verse 1, is,

Now after these things . . .

But, Ezra does not tell us what those things were. We do know, by piecing the time line together, that one of those things was the marriage of a king to a beauty contestant winner named Esther.

During the period of time between Ezra, chapter 6, and Ezra, chapter 7, the excitement surrounding the temple completion waned. Zerubbabel has faded into the background. The city, Jerusalem, still lies in ruins without walls or gates. The people were farming the land and enjoying their own homes. They were also, unfortunately, satisfied with mediocrity in their relationship with God and compromise in their relationship with the Gentile pagans around them. We will discover later that they actually began to intermarry with the unbelievers. Frankly, the pioneering excitement was gone!

Zerubbabel had built the temple. Nehemiah will come along later and build the city. Someone, at this critical juncture, needed to come along and build the people.

They needed a reformation. And, reformation, throughout history, always occurs when people return to building their lives according to the blueprint of the Bible.

Martin Luther, the reformer of the 1500's, wrote,

I have made a covenant with God that He send me neither visions nor dreams nor even angels. I am satisfied with the gift of the Holy Scriptures, which give me abundant instruction and all that I need to know both for this life and for that which is to come.

The Similes of Scripture

Let us think of the many similes of scripture which reveal its power in the life of the believer.

The Bible is like a . . .

1. The Bible is like a scalpel by which the Holy Spirit performs spiritual surgery. As Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12a, says,
For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . .

The Bible is like a . . .

2. The Bible is like a mirror and, when you look into its pages, you come face to face with yourself. You are struck with your depravity and all your weaknesses, failures and sins as James, chapter 1, verses 22 through 25 reveals.

The Bible is like a . . .

3. The Bible is like a window, for you also see, through this book, a holy God whose love is so deep and mercy so immeasurable that He would take a sinner, like you and me, and

make us children of His own family, as John, chapter 1, verse 12 tells us.

The Bible is also like a . . .

4. The Bible is also like a time machine which transports you back in time to observe other nations, governments, families and individuals in their struggle with timeless truths. Then it whisks you into the future and shows you the breathtaking dimensions of heaven and the terror of an eternal hell.

The Bible acts like a . . .

5. The Bible acts like a bodyguard for the heart, soul, and flesh. For we are told that the Word, tucked away in our hearts, will keep us from sinning, in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 11.

The Bible is like a . . .

6. The Bible is like a general store. II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 through 17, tells us that the scriptures have been given so that the man of God, the child of God, will be equipped for every good work. The word “equipped” could be translated, “outfitted – stocked with the supplies needed for every good work”.

The Bible is like a . . .

7. The Bible is like a suit of clothes. For Paul told Titus, in chapter 2, verse 10, that we, as believers, are “. . . to adorn the doctrine of God . . .”. Literally, believers are to robe themselves with the doctrine of God revealed in the scriptures.

Those are just a few of the similes of scripture.

The Activity of the Bible

Several of the activities of the Bible are clearly spelled out in the Word.

The Bible . . .

1. The Bible convicts a person of sin. Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 12b through 13, tell us that, *[the Bible is] . . . able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from*

His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The Bible . . .

2. The truth of the Bible regenerates and brings to life a person who was dead in sin. As Romans, chapter 10, verse 17, says, *. . . faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

And, in I Peter, chapter 1, verse 23,

for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.

The Bible . . .

3. The Bible nurtures a believer. We are told, in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 2, to *like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*

The Bible . . .

4. The Bible also produces hope. Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 15, verse 4, *For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Did you catch that? Through the encouragement of the scriptures, you might have a sense of hope.

David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 49,

Remember the word to Thy servant, in which Thou hast made me hope.

And in verse 52,

I have remembered Thine ordinances from of old, O Lord, and comfort myself.

The one thing we can see and touch that God said would, without fail, bring us encouragement is the Bible!

The Bible . . .

5. The Bible also counsels and guides the believer. It tells us, in II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16, that,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for

- ***teaching***
(this tells you what to believe),
- ***for reproof***
(this tells you what is right),
- ***for correction***
(this tells you what is wrong),
- ***for training in righteousness***
(this tells you how to do what is right).

The problem is, the average Christian will travel across town to get the teaching of the Bible, but he will not walk across the living room to get the Bible for himself.

The Bible . . .

6. Another activity of the Bible is that of reviving a believer. David also wrote, in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 50,

This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word revived me.

In our age of exposure to the truth – through books, conferences, seminars, studies, radio, and television – all of which are wonderful things, yet tragically, subtly, as Lewis wrote,

the believer, so traffics in the holy things that they lose their sense of awe of the holy things.

The Christian community is, as one professor of mine was fond of saying,
like a bad photograph – overexposed to the light and underdeveloped.

What is the solution?

There is one last thing that the Bible is for the believer. I want to inject it here. The Bible is the picture on a puzzle box. It shows you what the finished product looks like.

I do not like to do puzzles, but my wife loves it. Just give her a large cup of coffee and one thousand pieces of challenge, and she is delighted. If I come home from the office and the dining room table is covered with puzzle pieces, I know, for one thing, we

are having leftovers for supper. In fact, if I want to make some points as a sensitive husband, I will say, “Man, am I ever in the mood for Dominoes.”

There are times when I have gone over and looked at what she is doing and, without fail, I have noticed that she has the lid of that puzzle box propped up nearby. She often refers to it, studies it, searches it for clues of color. You see, that picture box lets her know what the finished product looks like – it serves as a guide to direct.

God never asks the believer to put the pieces together without providing a puzzle picture of what that looks like, how it acts, how it responds, and how it even confesses after sinning. God did not bring you into the family and then say, “From here on, you’re on your own – just give it your best shot!”

As one author wrote,

To leave a new believer on his own shortly after deciding to follow Christ, would be like putting a young person in the cockpit of an airplane and saying, “Congratulations on your decision to become a pilot – here’s the stick – now enjoy your flight.”

No! We are told how. We are given the book. And, tucked inside are living pictures with real names like David, Moses, Paul, and Ezra. These are pictures of life that you can prop up in front of you to study, look at, and refer to, in order to help you as you try to put the pieces of your own life puzzle together.

Ezra: A Model For Today

Did I mention Ezra? Can you imagine the average Christian getting to heaven and meeting Ezra for the first time? Then, the Lord coming over and saying, “This was one of the pictures I drew in the Word to help encourage you to walk with me. Did it help?”

“Uh . . . who did you say he was?”

A man named Ezra happens to be one of those puzzle pictures God intended to give you hope. He is finally introduced in the second half of the book that bears his name.

His Family Relation

We are immediately given his family relation to other high priests before him in chapter 7, verses 1 through 5.

Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, there went up

Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiyah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki,

(obviously, there was a mother here who liked rhyming names!)

son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest.

That is important news. Ezra is the descendant of the first high priest, Aaron, the brother of Moses.

Now, all of the men between Ezra and Aaron are not mentioned, but enough of them are listed to remind the nation of Ezra's significant heritage.

Verse 1 mentions Seraiah. This was Ezra's grandfather. He was the high priest who was martyred by Nebuchadnezzar when Babylon captured and enslaved the Israelites.

Further in verse 1, Ezra's forefather Hilkiyah was mentioned. In II Kings, chapter 22, you discover that, as the nation Israel was being reformed under the godly king Josiah, it was Hilkiyah, the high priest, who discovered the forgotten book of the Law. It was that discovery that brought about a national revival. I find it interesting that Ezra, generations later, will do the same thing.

Even further back than Hilkiyah, in verse 2, is the mention of Zadok. Zadok was the priest who refused to follow David's son, Adonijah, and remained loyal to old King David, even when it seemed that everyone else was following this usurper to the throne. He risked his life by following David's orders and anointing a young son, named Solomon, to the throne.

What a heritage! It is no wonder that Ezra had an immediate following when he made his decision to leave Babylon and go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the people according to the Law of Moses.

You may be here today, the son or daughter of a long line of godly men and women. Do not take it for granted! Thank God for it. Like Timothy, whom Paul reminded of his heritage when he wrote that Timothy had learned the sacred scriptures as a young man through the teaching of his mother and grandmother.

Of all the things you could give your children, give them the Word. Talk about the Lord. Relate life to them in terms of commitment to Jesus Christ. Remind them that they are uniquely created to bring glory to God.

Timothy learned, at the knee of his mother and grandmother, the scriptures which Paul wrote. They were able to make Timothy wise unto salvation.

If you are like Timothy, or Ezra, do not take it for granted. Build on it . . . take advantage of it . . . multiply it to the lives of others.

Some of you here today, however, do not come from a long line of believers. In fact, you are the only one in your family to have trusted Christ. You do not have a godly heritage, instead you are beginning the heritage of faith in Christ. You are the first one in your family to profess to know Christ personally as your Savior. You are the Aaron in your family tree! Do not regret it, revel in it and stand in awe of the wonder of God's grace. He allowed you to hear and see and believe. He saved you!

Become an Abraham Lincoln, who once said,

I don't know who my grandfather was . . . I am more concerned with what his grandson will become.

His Skillful Occupation

Now notice verse 6,

This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given . . .

The Hebrew language states that Ezra was a "quick" scribe, literally a "fast copier". However, the term referred, not so much to speed with which Ezra copied Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and, most likely, Joshua, which was also available, but that Ezra was proficient in the Law of God. In fact, the term for scribe referred to a man who was a scholar in the Torah. In reality, the thing that made Ezra stand out among his peers, the quality that made him so dynamic in the hands of God, was not his heritage, it was his heart.

His Godly Pattern

Now look down at verse 10 and read,

For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Is it any wonder that generations after Ezra would call him the "Second Moses"? They called him that because Ezra led the people into the green pastures of God's Word.

Zerubbabel had built the temple, but Ezra built the people. He led them out of spiritual darkness into

the light of spiritual truth. And, if you prop this
puzzle picture in front of you, you discover how God

| intended for Ezra to help us with the puzzle of our
own lives.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/9/1999 by Stephen Davey.

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