

**RESPONSIBILITY OF REPENTANCE - part 1**

As Americans celebrate Independence Day, we do well to consider God's hand upon our nation and our own lives. We must renew our dependence upon Him and His holy Word, as the only dependable guide for our lives and our future. This is what God's obedient people did in the book of Ezra. We can learn much from their example, as they pressed on to fulfill God's purposes in rebuilding Jerusalem.

**1- THE HAND OF THE LORD - was upon His people.** In Ezra 1-6 the people had accomplished much in regard to rebuilding the altar and the temple in Jerusalem. But more obedience lay ahead. Progress in their outward building project depended on progress in their inward character. God had raised up the kings of Persia, the priest Jeshua, Zerubbabel of the royal family, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and scores of others, priests, temple servants, singers, etc, to re-establish the proper worship of God.

After some 60 years, in chapter 7 God raises up Ezra from Babylonia, a scribe skilled in the law of Moses. His heart was to study the law of God, obey it, and teach it. God gave His Word to direct the lives, worship, and welfare of His people, as they obey Him. Ezra was on a divine mission from God. He is an Old Testament VIP from the priestly lineage of Aaron. Prof. Derek Kidner notes, "Ezra stands very high in Jewish tradition, where he came to be regarded as a second Moses, and more than any other man stamped Israel with its lasting character as the people of the Book" of God's written Word.

**2- THE PROVISION OF GOD - guides His people into His will.** "The king granted Ezra all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him." In God's providence His people bring needs before Him in prayer. "Let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:6). "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises" (2 Peter 1:3). God provides all we need to do His will, but that doesn't mean our task will be easy, as we work out His purpose according to His ways.

With Ezra's great abilities came explicit responsibility. He was "to make inquiries about the Law of God" such as Leviticus 19:2 "speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, 'you shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy'." King Artaxerxes charged Ezra with bringing freewill offerings of silver and gold from Babylonia: "bring whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest His wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons."

**3- GOD & GOVERNMENT - principles for living.** Ancient pagans considered religion and government to be inseparable. But Ezra understood how God reigns over all kings. Artaxerxes' royal decree granted him authority for his task, but it really came from the divine decree of Almighty God. In Jeremiah 25, 29, etc, God had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, the 70-year captivity of His people, and their return to the land. About the Scriptures, the king said to Ezra, "according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges over all the people in the province, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them you shall teach. Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether death or banishment or confiscation of goods." Government must be derived from God's eternal principles. How are God's people today being diligent to serve, to do God's will, and bring a pattern of Biblical order to society?

**4- RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE - trust and obey.** In verse 26, Ezra says, "blessed be the LORD the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me His steadfast love before the king, his counselors and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go with me." Proverbs 21:1, God turns the heart of the king.

**5- DEPENDENCE UPON GOD - in humility before Him.** Chapter 8 lists leading people as a holy record of the obedient, raised up for God's work in Jerusalem. Before departure, they held a special fast and prayer, "that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him a safe journey." The risk was great because of the public proclamation and collection of funds. Ezra had no royal armed guards, but 12 leading priests oversaw safe passage of the enormous treasure. "The hand of our God was on us; He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the way." God's provision included divine protection. And upon arrival the temple officials properly accounted for every penny. Material treasures have their importance, but God is most concerned about spiritual treasure.

**6- REPENTANCE BEFORE GOD - according to His Word.** Ezra made his purpose known, to teach the people to be obedient to all God wrote in His Word. In chapters 9-10 they respond in dramatic confession and repentance. We too are guilty of sins in thought and word and deed, of commission and omission, things we have done and have left undone. 1John 1:7-9 assure us that *if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Because of the blood of Christ. So as redeemed people, let us trust God and obey His written Word, as He provides all we need to live for Him! □