

THE GOOD HAND OF GOD

This expression is one which is found repeatedly in Ezra's account of the manner in which events in his life seemed blissfully governed by God's grace so that all he did prospered.

First the sheer fact that Artaxerxes I did not only agree that he should go to Jerusalem or have extended leave like Nehemiah but rather found him a job to do in Trans Euphrates. Artaxerxes raised him to the rank of viceroy and put all the affairs of the provinces beyond the river in his hands. This convinced him that the LORD had a great purpose in mind for his life.

Second, Ezra was convinced that the sceptre in the hand of Artaxerxes I might as well have been in the hand of the LORD—indeed the king was simply carrying out the will of God. He could see as clearly as Moses or David or Daniel before him that history was God's story and the LORD was in charge.

Third, by "the good hand of God" though there was not a single priest volunteered to go to Jerusalem initially when Ezra sent a message to the priests and was gloriously rewarded with over 250 volunteers including Mahli and Sherebiah who were so valuable and numerous Nethinims and Levites

Fourth, when he met the king he spoke directly about Yahweh and testified that the LORD would prosper all who seek His face. He had been so adamant of the care and protection of God over those who look to him that when it came to conducting 2500 people on a 4 month trek across dangerous and inhospitable terrain he could have desired a cavalry regiment to guard the van flank and rear of his exile band but had he not said "God prospers those who seek Him"?

Fifth, the very experience of travel along hundreds of miles with men women and children impressed on Ezra the experiential truth of God's prospering. "Seeking God" was not just a moment of fiery zeal before Ezra set out on this trek. The fasting and prayer that characterised that beginning was a model for the rest of his life. To his great joy not one person failed to arrive in Jerusalem. There was no reported attack of the enemy of souls on the party. There was no grumbling. The brigands they could have expected to meet on the way never appeared. The weather suited and the animals performed splendidly. The LORD prospered the man who sought His face. His sufficient testimony stand to demonstrate the principle **"SO WE ARRIVED AT JERUSALEM AND STAYED THERE THREE DAYS"**.