

Throughout the scriptures, the “hand of the LORD”
is often described as being *against* the wicked.
And sometimes, when the “hand of the LORD” is “on” someone – it is on them in judgment
(Psalm 32 – “your hand was heavy upon me.”)

It’s a prominent theme in the Exodus,
as God brought his people out of Egypt by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

“The hand of God” is a phrase used 7 times in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah.
Six of those times are in this passage!

But here in Ezra 7-8, the hand of God is ‘on’ Ezra *for good*.
The hand of the LORD is powerful.

Now, I want you to see how the hand of God works in these chapters.
For Ezra, there are no special signs and wonders.
There are no “miraculous” works.
God’s hand works by ‘ordinary providence’ for Ezra.

First, in verse 6, the king granted all that Ezra asked,
“for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.”
Second, in verse 9, Ezra “came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him.”
In other words, God’s ordinary protection.
Third, in verse 28, Ezra “took courage [because of the king’s letter],
for the hand of the LORD my God was on me.”

And then in chapter 8, verse 18, we hear that “by the good hand of our God on us,”
we found some Levites to go to Jerusalem
In 8:22 – “we had told the king, ‘The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him’”
so we don’t need a military escort;
And in 8:31, “The hand of our God was on us,
and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy.”

In other words, signs and wonders are not necessary
for God’s hand to work mightily for your good!
In this respect, Ezra is just an ordinary Christian going about his ordinary life,
seeking to *do* what God calls him to do –
and trusting that God will provide all that is needed!

Our Psalm of response sets up a lot of themes of our passage:

Psalm 20 is a prayer for God to bless the King – the Messiah – and protect him.

May God answer the Son of David and deliver him in the midst of trouble!

And Psalm 20 concludes,

“O by your hand, LORD, save the king,
and may he answer us when we call.”

If God saves his anointed King –

if God delivers *Jesus*, when *Jesus* calls out for help –

then we know that *Jesus* will hear us – and answer us –
when we call to him!

Sing Psalm 20A

Read 1 Peter 5

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God
so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”

At the proper time.

That’s the part that we struggle with.

We always seem to think that *now* is the proper time!

Lord, if you’re looking for the proper time,
now would be a good time for me!!

When was the proper time for Ezra?

Introduction: The Hand of God Was *on* “This Ezra” (7:1-10)

We are now in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

This means that chapter 7 takes place 57 years after the events of chapter 6.

Verses 1-10 provide a brief overview of chapters 7-8.

He leaves Babylon on the first day of the first month,

and he arrives in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month.

The first month – as we saw last week – is the month of the Passover –
the month when they left Egypt.

The fifth month was the month of mourning –

because it was in the fifth month that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

The *first day* of the fifth month is also the day that Aaron had died in the wilderness.

The first high priest had died in the wilderness on the first day of the fifth month.

Now his heir arrives in Jerusalem on the anniversary of his death (Num 33:38).

The comparison between Aaron and Ezra is not accidental.

After all, how did Aaron do at establishing a community that would follow the LORD?

It falls apart pretty quickly.

But Ezra's teaching plays a crucial role in making the Second Temple a place that is faithful to the LORD for generations (for the most part!).

Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiyah, ² son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, ³ son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, ⁴ son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, ⁵ son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest— ⁶ this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

⁷ And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. ⁸ And Ezra^[a] came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹ For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Because Ezra 7 very explicitly connects Ezra back to Aaron (in the genealogy of verses 1-5).

The point of this genealogy is to show that Ezra is of the high priestly family.

Hilkiyah (v1) was the priest in the days of Josiah –
the last good king of Judah.

Hilkiyah had found the Book of the Law in the temple,
after it had been ignored for generations.

Some people think it odd that the Jews would have ignored the scriptures.

It's much easier than you think!

In those days, there would only have been a few copies.

One in the temple – and *maybe* a few others.

Hardly anyone except for the priests could read or write –

so if the priests thought that the Law of Moses was too restrictive,
then they might not spend much time studying it, doing it, or teaching it!

And throughout the time of the Kings,

we have no hint of any sort of regular practice of studying or teaching the Law.

Verse 1 says that Ezra is the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiyah.

There may be a few generations missing,

since Seraiah is also the father of Jozadak (1 Chronicles 6)

(who was the high priest at the time when Israel went into exile in 586).

It has been 120 years since then,

so Ezra's father and grandfather are not named.

In other words, chapter 7, verse 1, connects Ezra directly back to the last high priest who died in office!

And that's the point.

Ezra is the direct descendent of the last high priest who died in office.
Yes, 57 years ago, Jeshua the son of Jozadak (Ezra's cousin)
helped rebuild the temple and dedicate it.
But there was a problem!

Last time we noticed a striking omission:

the temple vessels had been restored by Cyrus,
and all through the first six chapters of the book of Ezra,
they were highlighted again and again
as the *one piece of continuity* between Solomon's temple
and Zerubbabel's temple.

But when we heard about the dedication of the temple at the end of chapter 6,
there *was no mention* of the temple vessels!

For that matter, there was no mention of Zerubbabel!
Or of Jeshua the high priest!

At the dedication of the tabernacle in Exodus
we hear a lot about Moses, Aaron, and the ark of the covenant.

At the dedication of the temple in Kings and Chronicles
we hear a lot about Solomon, the ark, and the temple vessels.

But in Ezra, these things all disappear *just at the moment*
when they would be most important.

And as we saw last week,
this is because the book of Ezra sees the 2nd temple as incomplete.

Notice what happens here!

Ezra and the priests and Levites who came with him,
bring silver, gold, and temple vessels to the temple in Jerusalem.
And then the returned exiles offer very similar offerings
to what was offered at the dedication of the temple 57 years earlier.

No, the glory of the LORD does not appear – not yet.

But *something* has changed.

There is a slow, gradual return of the glory of the LORD,
step-by-step.

What returns with Ezra?

The Word of the LORD!

No, the ark of the covenant is not there –
the tablets of stone are not there.
But with the return of Ezra,
there is now one who will “*study* the Law of the LORD,
and to do it,
and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel!”
Ezra has set his heart
to study, to do, and to teach the Law of God!
Without the word of the LORD, the temple is incomplete.

If we are not *studying* the word of God – *doing* the Word of God –
and *teaching* the Word of God –
then we are not acting like a temple of the Holy Spirit!

That’s why I had to change the title of the sermon!
As I kept working through the passage I realized that while the “hand of God”
structures the passage –
it’s not the *point* of the passage.
The *point* is Ezra’s Great Commission: to Study, to Do, and to Teach God’s Law.

Ezra is called to make disciples of all the Province Beyond the River,
teaching them to observe all that God had commanded.

Ezra seeks “to restore the holy people formed by the Torah [the Law],
so that Israel will experience more fully the blessings (present and future)
of a covenantal relationship with God,
rather than undergoing once again the covenantal curses.” (Levering, 85).

The rest of our text fits into two basic points:
beautifying the House of God (the letter of Artaxerxes in verses 11-28),
and then Ezra’s return to the House of God in chapter 8.

1. Beautifying the House of God: The Letter of Artaxerxes (7:11-28)

a. The House of God and the Gifts of the King (v11-20)

¹¹ This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: ¹² “Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace.^[b] And now ¹³ I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. ¹⁴ For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand, ¹⁵ and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶ with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill

offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ *With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem.* ¹⁸ *Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God.* ¹⁹ *The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem.* ²⁰ *And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.*

The first part of Artaxerxes' letter (v11-20) authorizes Ezra to take with him any of the people of Israel or priests or Levites who wish to go to Jerusalem. Further, it authorizes Ezra to bring gifts to the God of Israel from the King and his counselors – and anyone else who wishes to send them.

And Artaxerxes gifts fulfill what Isaiah had said about the glory of the nations pouring into Jerusalem.

In Isaiah 60, the LORD had said,
“nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.
Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.”
Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you...
They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news,
the praises of the LORD....
they shall come up with acceptance on my altar,
and I will beautify my beautiful house.” (60:3-7)

Artaxerxes, the King of Persia, helps to fulfill this.
He sends Jerusalem's children home –
and with them he sends gold and silver
to beautify God's beautiful house!

It's a *good thing* when the kings of the earth do *good* to the church of Jesus Christ!

b. The Decree of God and the Decree of the King (v21-24)

²¹ *“And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence,* ²² *up to 100 talents^[c] of silver, 100 cors^[d] of wheat, 100 baths^[e] of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.* ²³ *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. ²⁴ *We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.*

Verses 21-24 then reveal a certain humility on the part of Artaxerxes.

After ordering the provincial treasurers to pay out large sums for the temple,
Artaxerxes hands Ezra a blank check:

“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.”

Of course, from the polytheistic perspective,
this is just playing it safe –
you never know which gods will mess with your life,
so if you are rich enough to placate *all* the gods,
why not?!

But from Ezra’s perspective,
he sees the king’s decree as subordinate to the decree of the God of heaven.

Verse 24 also makes all clergy tax exempt.

It’s important to note that *God* never requires this of nations.

In the U.S., clergy and churches are *mostly* tax exempt –
and that’s awfully nice of our government!

But there is no “thus sayeth the LORD” requiring that –
so if the government should ever remove that,
then we should just get used to churches paying taxes!

And honestly, why *should* churches be tax exempt?

Historically, the reason was very much the reason that Artaxerxes gives:
because kings and rulers want God to be on their side!

But tax exempt status and royal favor comes at a price!

Notice how verse 26 conflates “the law of your God and the law of the king.”

c. The Law of God and the Law of the King (v25-26)

²⁵ “*And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach.* ²⁶ *Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment.*”

For the most part, there would be great overlap between the law of God and the law of the King.
That's true in every country.

Most human beings throughout most of human history
have had a decent sense of right and wrong.
It can get pretty out of whack every now and then –
but good and evil do not change with the seasons!

And, at the end of his edict, Artaxerxes insists that anyone who does not obey the Law of God
should be punished.

But notice the geographical restriction:
“in the province Beyond the River.”

(And almost certainly, Artaxerxes means
“in that portion of the province where the Jews live.”)
And from what follows, it is clear that Ezra did not think that his mandate
gave him the right to enforce God's Law on other portions of the province
(for example, Syria or Lebanon).

But clearly, Ezra is called to appoint judges (like Moses did at the urging of Jethro,
his father-in-law).

This is all standard Persian diplomatic language
Persian kings encouraged all of the various religions in their realm,
with the idea that as long as each particular people served the King of Persia
they could maintain their own religious practice.
It's not really a truly religious pluralism.
Religious pluralism would allow anyone to worship any god.
Artaxerxes wants to make sure that each region – each territory –
has its own religion.

And so he insists that if the people of Judea refuse to follow the law of their God,
then Ezra should enforce it under the penalty of Persian law.

Then we see Ezra's commentary in verses 27-28:

d. A Beautiful House Is Characterized by Obedience to God's Law (v27-28)

²⁷ 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, ²⁸ and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and 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 up with me.

Ezra blesses the LORD for putting it into the heart of the king to beautify the house of the LORD
Now, sure, in one sense,

“beautifying the house” happens outwardly through the gold and silver.
But Ezra has asked permission to go *study, and do, and teach* the Law of God.

Beautifying the house *also* includes the *worship* and the *teaching* of the temple!
Beautifying the house *also* includes the *result* –
of a Jerusalem that is characterized by obedience to God’s Law.

It’s the whole *package!*

When God’s people walk faithfully with their God,
it will always include faithful *worship*, faithful *teaching*, faithful *doing* of what God says!

2. Returning to the House of God: The Travel of Ezra (8:1-36)

a. The Heads of Fathers Houses and the Slowness of the Levites (v1-20)

8 These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king: ² Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush. ³ Of the sons of Shecaniah, who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men. ⁴ Of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him 200 men. ⁵ Of the sons of Zattu,^[1] Shecaniah the son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men. ⁶ Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men. ⁷ Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men. ⁸ Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him 80 men. ⁹ Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men. ¹⁰ Of the sons of Bani,^[g] Shelomith the son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men. ¹¹ Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah, the son of Bebai, and with him 28 men. ¹² Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men. ¹³ Of the sons of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jewel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men. ¹⁴ Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

Chapter 8 then gives an account of those who returned.

Verses 1-14 give us a curious list.

Two sons of Aaron and a son of David in verse 2.

And then 12 other families in verses 3-14.

(Almost certainly designed to remind us of Moses and Aaron
and the twelve tribes of Israel!).

It’s a relatively small group – about 1500 families.

But as they move out, Ezra realizes that they are missing some folks.

¹⁵ *I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi. ¹⁶ Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for*

Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of insight,¹⁷ and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and¹⁸ the temple servants at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God.¹⁸ And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18; ¹⁹ also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; ²⁰ besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

They are missing the Levites.

The Levites were supposed to help the sons of Aaron, the high priest.

We saw in the first return, earlier in Ezra, that many more priests returned than Levites.

From a merely human standpoint, it makes sense –
the priests have the better jobs!

The Levites – not so much!

In the Law of *Moses* the Levites were primarily assigned duties in carrying the tabernacle and its furnishings.

The Law of Moses did not explain what the Levites were supposed to do once there was a temple!

So David and Solomon had reassigned their duties

(which is why verse 20 talks about the temple servants

“whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites”).

Very often, people don’t want the menial jobs.

They want the big important jobs!

So Ezra sent 9 leading men and two “men of insight”

to convince Iddo to “send us ministers for the house of our God.”

And they find 38 Levites to go along with 220 temple servants.

It may be a relatively small number –

but given that they left Babylon on the first day of the month,

and they only stay three days by the river that runs to Ahava,

that means that 258 families packed up in a week’s time

and came with them! (v31 says they left on the 12th day)

We keep about the smallness of the return from Exile –

and how it is so much smaller than the Exodus – or the first temple.

But while it may be small,

please don’t discount what it meant for these people

to *deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus!*

All right dear, let's pack up and get ready for a four month hike through the desert.
If we're quick we can get there before summer gets too hot!

And we have a week to pack!

b. Trusting in the LORD for Protection: the Importance of Fasting (v21-23)

²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. ²² For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." ²³ So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

But the bulk of what they do at the Ahava River is fast and pray.

Twenty years later, Nehemiah will accept an imperial guard.

So there is nothing wrong with having a guard!

But Ezra wants to demonstrate their trust in God *alone*.

God *is able* to protect – “the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” (verse 22)

And so Ezra and the children of Israel *fast* there at the river Ahava –

“we fasted and implored our God for [protection] and he listened to our entreaty.”

When embarking on a new phase in life,
it is appropriate to fast and pray.

The apostles appear to have fasted before ordaining new elders in the church (Acts 13:3; 14:23).

But any time that we need wisdom and safety,

it is appropriate to fast!

(And yes, I realize that this could – and maybe should – result in very regular fasting!)

c. Being Prudent: the Importance of a Wise Plan of Action (v24-34)

²⁴ Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. ²⁵ And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. ²⁶ I weighed out into their hand 650 talents^[i] of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents,^[j] and 100 talents of gold, ²⁷ 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics,^[k] and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. ²⁸ And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. ²⁹ Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD." ³⁰ So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and

the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

But while Ezra *trusts God* –

that doesn't mean that he acts rashly!

They have to travel hundreds of miles across the desert!

There will be robbers and bandits scattered throughout the region.

So he weighs out the gold and silver and puts it into the hands of 12 priests,
entrusting them with the care of the valuable items

(but also carefully weighing it to make sure that it is all accounted for).

Trusting God does not mean that you can act foolishly and expect all to go well!!

³¹ Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. ³² We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. ³³ On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. ³⁴ The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

And so when they arrive in Jerusalem,

the first thing we hear is that they deliver the silver and gold and the vessels to the priests.

Why does it highlight that “the whole was counted and weighed,
and the weight of everything was recorded”?

Because when Israel first came into the land,

Achan had taken some plunder for himself.

He took some of the silver and gold that was supposed to be given to God!

But because Ezra had carefully weighed everything,

there were no accusations of wrongdoing this time!

In other words, it is useful to have careful accounting practices in the church!

It protects *everyone!* (especially those who are handling the money!)

d. Word and Sacrament: The Offerings of the Returned Exiles (v35-36)

³⁵ At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. ³⁶ They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps^[4] and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

And so our passage closes with a celebration that reminds us of the dedication of the temple.
Though here it would be more accurate to say that it was a service of thanksgiving.

Notice the numbers:

77 lambs – Seventy and Seven – seven being the number of completeness.
But 96 rams – 96 is based on the number 12 (the number of the tribes of Israel),
but it is eight times twelve (and eight is the number of the new creation).
All together, this expresses Ezra's hopes for the new creation of Israel.

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the temple vessels had been restored by Cyrus,
and all through the first six chapters of the book of Ezra,
they were highlighted again and again
as the *one piece of continuity* between Solomon's temple
and Zerubbabel's temple.

But when we heard about the dedication of the temple at the end of chapter 6,
there *was no mention* of the temple vessels!
For that matter, there was no mention of Zerubbabel!
Or of Jeshua the high priest!
At the dedication of the tabernacle in Exodus
we hear a lot about Moses, Aaron, and the ark of the covenant.
At the dedication of the temple in Kings and Chronicles
we hear a lot about Solomon, the ark, and the temple vessels.
But in Ezra, these things all disappear *just at the moment*
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No, the glory of the LORD does not appear – not yet.

But *something* has changed.

There is a slow, gradual return of the glory of the LORD,
step-by-step.

Ezra has come to teach the Law of God.

Without the word of the LORD, the temple is incomplete.

You see this all throughout the scriptures.

The *book of the covenant* and the *blood of the covenant*
must always go together!

Without the book of the covenant – without the word of the LORD –
the offerings are meaningless.

But without the blood of the covenant – without a substitutionary death –
the words are powerless.

Think of it this way:

if Jesus had come and taught us all that he said –

but then just went back to heaven (and never died) –

then the message of Christianity would be:

just try harder – do better – and maybe you can be good enough for God!

The Book of the Covenant without the Blood of the Covenant is powerless to save!

On the other hand, if Jesus had come and died and been raised from the dead,

but God never told us what it was all about –

then, well, that would be a strange thing!

The Blood of the Covenant without the Book of the Covenant is meaningless!

Ezra has returned to study the law, the *do* the law, and to teach the law.

And Jesus says that this is what we are to be about as well!

Make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”