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“THE HANDS OF GOD”

#1 - HIS HAND SUPERINTENDING US

“You Laid Your hand upon me.” (Psalm 139:5)

French sculptor, Auguste Rodin, 1840-1917, is probably best known in America as the creator of *The Thinker*. Another of his well-known works is *The Hand of God*. It is a large marble hand thrusting upward from a marble base. In the hand are the nude entwined bodies of the first man and woman representing their creation. The great, “life-giving hand itself is a symbol of the Creator,” so says the museum.

Years ago, it was advertised that the sculpture, *The Hand of God*, was to be on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Dr. E. Schuyler English, a biblical scholar, author and a prominent figure in the evangelical Christian community, went to view the work of art. It had not arrived at the museum and he was told that when it did arrive they would telephone him. Several months went by and then Dr. English received the telephone call and the museum representative said, without introducing himself, “The Hand of God is Here!” Dr. English replied, “The hand of God is right here with me also!”

In the study of these “man forms” applied to God by Himself and by ourselves, we must keep in mind two basic truths as respects God: “*God is Spirit*” – (John 4:24) and God is transcendent - as Isaiah 55:8 states, God's “*thoughts are not our thoughts, nor God's ways our ways.*”

Scripture speaks repeatedly of God's hands. In Psalm 139 there are three references to the hands of God that are very revealing and instructive. Notice the reoccurrence of the words, “*his hand*” in the following verses:

“O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid **Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there **Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.**” (Ps.139:1-10)**

David, in Psalm 139, is extolling the all-pervading presence and wisdom of God. He says that God knows:

- When he sits and when he stands – v. 2
- What his thoughts are – v.2
- When he lies down – v.3

- What he says – v.4
- He is behind and before him – v.5

He then makes the first of three statements about God's hand saying, "*You have laid Your hand upon me.*" (v.5) He continues in verse 10 with two more statements regarding God's hand: "*Your hand shall lead me*" and "*Your right hand shall hold me.*" (v.10)

These three references to God's hand give us much insight into the concern and care that God has for His children. Here are three different positions of God's hand, three different postures of His hand of which David was aware. Each placement of God's hand, relative to David, is instructive and encouraging. Let us meditate upon each of these statements for each one communicates a different truth to us.

"YOUR HAND UPON ME" - HIS HAND SUPERINTENDING US

The primary meaning of the hand of God upon a person is the idea of conveyance or transference of something from God to the individual. In some cases it meant authentication, recognition or identification with and of devotion to God.

In the New Testament Jesus laid hands on the little children (Mark 10:16) and on the sick (Matt. 9:18; Mark 6:5, etc.); the apostles laid hands on those whom they baptized that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17,19; 19:6), and to heal (Acts 12:17). The placing of hands upon a person was used in the setting apart of persons to a particular office or work in the church.

There are no scriptural grounds for the idea that the one placing the hand upon another, possessed any power in themselves, apart from God, to convey to another some benefit. The gifting or the bestowal of the blessing was imparted by God alone. The human hand was but the channel through which the hand of God worked.

The placement of God's hand upon a person or a people can mean various things. Sometimes it is a heavy hand of judgment as David experienced when he sinned with Bathsheba. He writes in Psalm 32:4 "*For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.*" Job, in his days of difficulty said, "*the hand of the LORD has done this.*" (Job 12:9)

God's hand upon us can also mean God's favor and blessing. To experience the grace of God in one's life is to have God's hand upon us for good. David enjoyed the blessing of having God's hand upon his life and speaks of it here in Psalm 139:5.

One of the clearest illustrations of God overshadowing and superintending one's life and service is seen in the life of the prophet Ezra. Ezra led a group of Jews from captivity in Babylonian back to Jerusalem. There were three waves of returnees from the 70 years of Babylonian captivity. Zerubbabel led the first wave and began rebuilding the temple; Ezra led the second wave and restored the worship and Nehemiah led the third group and rebuilt the walls of the city.

Six times in two chapters Ezra attributes his success to "*the hand of God*" being with him. The six times that we read "*The hand of God was upon him*" are as follows:

God's Hand Was Upon Him Granting Him Favor.

"The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him." (Ezra 7:6) And, *"you are being sent by the king"* (Ezra 7:14)

Artaxerxes was the king of Persia, which is now Iraq, where Babylon was located. He was a pagan king. Ezra needed permission from his captor to go to Jerusalem. Ezra petitioned him for permission and assistance to go to Jerusalem and lead in its restoration, and this heathen king granted his request because God's hand was upon Ezra.

We see the sovereignty of God supervising Ezra's mission to Jerusalem, moving Artaxerxes to grant Ezra's petition. Truly, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."* (Proverbs 21:1)

God is no less capable and desirous of supervising our lives. He wants us to *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33)

God's Hand Was Upon Him As He Journeyed.

"On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him." (Ezra 7:9)

It was a four month journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. He and his party were sustained because *"the hand of God was upon him."* Whom God sends, He sustains.

God oversees all our days and all our ways! Psalm 121:7-8 contains this promise: *"The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore."*

God's Hand Was Upon Him Encouraging Him.

"So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me." (Ezra 7:28)

Ezra had a stupendous task ahead of him and it was made more difficult because he was surrounded by pagans who were his enemies. However, he was aware that God's hand was upon him, that he was God's hand-picked leader to accomplish God's purpose at this time in Israel's history, and despite his super-human assignment, he was encouraged by the awareness of the hand of omnipotence upon him.

Remember that the will of God will never take you to where the hand of God cannot reach you. Our worst days are never so bad that we are beyond the reach of God's encouragement, and our best days are never so good that we are beyond the need of encouragement. Let's be encouraged and let us also be encouragers!

God's Hand Was Upon Him Supplying Manpower.

"By the good hand of our God upon us, they brought usmen." (Ezra 8:18)

God did not expect Ezra to go unaccompanied or unassisted to fulfill his assignment. He needed human help even though he had the divine hand upon him and his ministry. In Ezra 8:19-20 we read of two hundred and fifty-eight men who were gathered to help Ezra.

The hymn, "Onward! Christian Soldiers" contains these words, "Like a mighty army moves the church of God." We are never alone even though we may, at times, be short-handed as far as visible human help is concerned. We are part of "a mighty army" and God always has His Aaron and Hur (Exodus 17:10-12) who come along side to hold up our hands when we get weary. Thank God for His unseen hands upon us, but He knows that we also need "seen" hands.

You do know the electrician's motto, don't you? "Many hands make light work!" Please forgive me – but in the Lord's work, many hands are needed to get the Light Message out!

His Hand Was Upon Him Answering Prayer.

"For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer." (Ezra 8:22-23)

Ezra had testified to the godless king saying that God could take care of him and he did not want to ask the king for that which he believed God would supply. What then, did Ezra do? He prayed to God! *"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."*

We are so prone to ask for assistance from our fellow-man before we ask of God. Turning to Him should be our first recourse for He is certainly our finest resource!

His Hand Upon Him Protecting Him.

"Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. So we came to Jerusalem...." (Ezra 8:31-32)

Ezra had assembled a company of 250 fellow travelers for the expedition to Jerusalem. After a three day encampment at the Ahava River, where they paused for fasting and prayer, they began their journey to Jerusalem. Ezra testified that *"He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road."*

There were many who did not want to see Jerusalem restored. There are those today, many centuries later, who want to see Israel defeated and Jerusalem occupied by other than Jews. And Christians have enemies today who would be happy to see the Church of Jesus Christ overthrown. It is comforting to know, however, that Jesus said, *"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."* (Matthew 16:18)

SUMMATION

Do not overlook the simple words in Ezra 8:32 *“So we came to Jerusalem.”* The journey was completed! How did they do it? *“The hand of our God was upon us.”* There is no better way to travel than under the umbrella of the overshadowing hand of God!

From beginning to end the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra. Why did he enjoy the blessing of God's provision in his life? Is there anything we can glean from Ezra that would help us in being and doing everything that God desires of us?

Yes! Ezra 7:10 contains these words: *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”* There are several actions which Ezra took that commend themselves to us as Christians who desire to live for God's glory:

(1) **He prioritized his life.** *“Ezra had prepared his heart.”*

That is past tense – *“Ezra had prepared.”* Before he prepared his heart he had to prioritize his life; he had to determine to put first things first, else he would not have embarked upon the discipline of heart preparation! Priority means precedence; to arrange in order of importance or urgency.

Jesus' command is: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:33) Kingdom principles, when wholeheartedly adopted, prioritize one's life.

(2) **He prepared his heart.** *“prepared his heart.”*

To prepare one's heart is to humble one's self, confess all known sin, hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6) and be ready and willing to be totally submissive to whatever God reveals.

(3) **He perused the Scriptures.** *“to seek the Law of the LORD.”*

The New International Version renders the statement as follows: *“Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD.”* Why would he, or anyone, do that? Two reasons: First, in order to know the Lord of the Law and second, to know the Law of the Lord. To know the Law of the Lord, which is the Word of God, is to know the will of God. Ezra desired to know what God willed for him to do.

(4) **He practiced the truth.** *“and to do it.”*

He applied the truth to himself before he announced it to others. I believe that the average Christian knows more of the Word and will of God than they practice. James wrote: *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”* (James 1:22-25)

(5) **He propagated God's teachings.** *“and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*

He was a channel, not a reservoir of God's river of truth. Not all are to be a public proclaimer on a platform but all are to go public with their Christianity and by lifestyle, if not lips, be messages and messengers of Glad Tidings.

It is not to be wondered that God's hand was upon David and Ezra. Isn't it humbling to know that the Holy God would desire to touch us and place His mighty hand upon us and use us to advance His work in the world? Doesn't this truth about God's hand upon us supervising us warm your heart and encourage you to do exploits for Him?

When David said, "*You have laid Your hand upon me*" (v.5) he was moved to exclaim in the very next words: "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.*" (Psalm 139:6) Don't you feel that way also?