



Module : Fasting

Session 7 : Apostolic-Prophetic Prayer and Fasting #3

Focus : Principles of Prayerful Fasting from Ezra

This study continues directly on from the previous one, in which we highlighted the necessity to PRAY God's broader kingdom-related will with fasting. We have examined five case studies in prior sessions.

CASE STUDY SIX: EZRA FASTED FOR PHYSICAL PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF THE SCRIBAL GRACE/ANOINTING

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.

***Some Background:** The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ends. As prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28), the Persian King Cyrus had sent exiles led by Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem in 538 b. c. (Persia had defeated Babylon in 539.) Despite opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and after encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was rebuilt (515). Then in 458, Ezra led the second of three waves of returning exiles. By the time Ezra arrived, the people had again fallen into sin. Ezra preached God's word and the people repented (10:9-17). Ezra succeeded because God's hand was upon him (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31)¹*

In leading the second installment of people from Babylon to Jerusalem, Ezra summoned the people to a corporate fast to humble themselves and seek God's protection on their journey. It was a significant and historical migration of the people of God out from longstanding captivity because of prior disobedience, to a place of greater spiritual accuracy (as represented by the city of Jerusalem). Herein, is more than just fasting for God's protection. It is essential for us to understand that this fast for preservation was more than asking God to ensure their personal survival and well-being. It is obviously perfectly fine to fast for physical protection on a lengthy journey of any nature, but especially one that has weighted spiritual significance. **Ezra's prayer with fasting was really a request to preserve the Divine purposes attendant with him as a scribe of God and the impact his ministry would have on God's people.** What essentially is being asked of God to preserve is the 'scribal' grace vested in Ezra, the key leaders with him and also the people. The grace of the 'scribe' is very misunderstood but is something God is restoring to His church. How does fasting fit with this whole dynamic? I have elected in this session to provide more of a prophetic application of Ezra's fast as apposed to a literal one.



EZRA THE SCRIBE: Ezra was a scribe of the Lord, well studied in the Law of Moses. He was thoroughly 'au fait' with God's Word. Whilst in Babylonian captivity, His diligence in the study of God's Word and his personal commitment to live by it was the primary factor determining God's selection of Him to lead the second wave of exiles back to Jerusalem. Read Ezra chapter 7 and note verse 10. Verses 1 to 9 explain the timing of his leaving Babylon and arrival in Jerusalem. The journey took four months. Then verse 10 reads ...

¹ Introduction to Ezra from the ESV

Ezra 7:10 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.

The word '**FOR**' in the verse above could be read as '**BECAUSE**' or '**THIS WAS SO BECAUSE**' or '**THIS RESULTED ON ACCOUNT OF**'.

Ezra 7:10 (NLT) This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the Lord and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.

Ezra had a desire to teach God's people God's Word and Ways. He prepares for this by his private enquiry into the law of Moses and he masters it, not only in **understanding but in practice**. His obedience of what he studied would be his authorisation in the Spirit to teach it.

Ezra had determined (set his heart) to ...

- (i) Study
- (ii) Obey (do)
- (iii) Teach

This is the order for ministers of God's Word, viz. (i) STUDY (ii) OBEY (iii) TEACH others. We have no right to teach that which we have not personally studied. We have no right to teach that which we have studied yet not personally obeyed. Once we have obeyed that which we have studied, we are authorised to teach others. Having obeyed the things we have studied, not only are we authorised to teach, but also are under obligation to teach.

Ezra would be requested by Nehemiah later to read the law and give explanation to it, firstly to the broader nation, and then specifically to certain leaders in the nation (Refer to Nehemiah 8 and 9). God is calling upon us to be diligent in our study and practice of His Word, because there is coming a day and time when He will call upon us to teach and proclaim His word and ways to His church and to leaders within His church. At this precise time, we had better be thoroughly prepared both - in terms of the extent to which we have applied ourselves to understand, and then secondly by obeying the Word.

The point is this: Ezra's private preparation propelled his personal purpose in God – a purpose that was really corporate in expression and impact. For us too, we all have a unique purpose in the area in which you function daily (workplace, place of study, sport, neighbourhood, etc.) You need to be thoroughly prepared to function in the area of your calling.

Ezra 'readied' himself through diligent engagement with God's Word. The same must hold true for us today. As the Psalmists (sons of Korah) said long ago, ...

Psalm 45:1c My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

Ready = māhiyr = **skilled; well-versed; quick, prompt.**

Our tongues must be skilled, well-versed and quick and prompt to declare the WORD OF GOD - THE PRESENT TRUTH OF GOD, in which we should be well-versed. We must be 'READY'!

- Ezra 7:6a (KJV)** This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he *was* a READY scribe in the law of Moses.
- Ezra 7:6a (MSG)** He arrived from Babylon, a scholar well-practiced in the Revelation of Moses that the GOD of Israel had given.
- Ezra 7:6a (ESV)** 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;

Our 'readiness' entails a skill in the WORD – an excellence in the WORD of the Lord.

- 1 Pet. 3:15** but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being READY to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;
- Col. 4:6** Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that YOU WILL KNOW how you should respond to each person
- 2 Tim. 4:2** Preach the word; BE READY in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
- Luke 12:35** Be DRESSED IN READINESS, and keep your lamps lit.

Ezra's name means 'help or assistance'. He was literally that to Israel and to God's servants, like Nehemiah. The help we desire to be to the Body of Christ will emanate from and require our strong devotion to God and HIS WORD.

To a generation far removed from His Word and ways, Jesus said He would send prophets, wise men and scribes.

Matt 23:34a "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes, ..."

Prophets ... are stewards of God law, of God's ways and enduring principles. They always come to remind us of the most ancient, eternal, timeless paths vested in God's mind for His church – paths from which we should not deviate. Prophets do not just prophesy. They are an essential part of perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry and for maturation into the perfect statute of Christ. [Haggai and Zechariah were prophets contemporary with Zerubbabel]

Wise men ... refer to the ministry of an apostle (wise master-builders), which, amongst other things, is essentially focused on the accurate construction of the design of Christ's nature and will within the Body of Christ. What prophets declare, apostles establish as accurate biblical doctrine into our belief system. By this they build as a mighty edifice the nature of Christ within every son of God. [Zerubbabel and Nehemiah would be examples of such 'wise men']

Scribes ... are not writers of books, nor do they refer to a secretarial or administrative function. Scribes are well studied in established apostolic doctrine built on prophetic illumination. They represent the third tier of ministry in that they build on what was prophetically declared and apostolically decreed as doctrine. Many regard this ministry as that of the teacher (1 Cor. 12:28), but it is teaching, not just by a teacher per se, but by any ascension gift ministry. Its focus is to inscribe God's truth, word, ways, principles into the heart and

minds of the people of God so that there will be no deviation from God's established law. Scribes seek to make what was an external law, an internal inscription upon the heart and mind of man. This would become the prescription for regulating their lifestyles.

Jer. 31:33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

This is the day of the SCRIBE! It is interesting that before Ezra proclaims the fast, he realises the absence of a teaching dynamic in the group, and calls for certain Levites skilled in teaching to accompany him as part of the group to go back to Jerusalem (See Ezra 8:15-20). While Ezra was to be the face of the scribal grace, it was really a corporate representation – many acting as one man (See Neh. 8:4).

Ezra 8:15-20 Now I assembled them at the river that runs to Ahava, where we camped for three days; and when I observed the people and the priests, I did not find any Levites there. So I sent for Eliezer, ... (and others) ... Elnathan, teachers. I sent them to Iddo the leading man ...; and I told them what to say to Iddo and his brothers, ... to bring ministers to us for the house of our God. According to the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of insight

THE ACTUAL FAST

NOW, all of Ezra's endeavours and impact in Israel was contingent upon a safe passage from Babylon to Jerusalem, a journey of four months. For this he calls the nation to a fast for between one to three days. Again, bear in mind, this scribal grace, its restoration and key role it played in Israel, was at stake.

Ezra 8:21-23

- 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.
- 22 For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him."
- 23 So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty

Ahava = Brotherhood²; I shall subsist³ (essence)⁴ ; Generation⁵

As indicated above the word '**Ahava**' has three general meanings. Let us briefly consider each one.

BROTHERHOOD : Its allusion to 'BROTHERHOOD' highlights to us how that in a corporate fast, there must be the spirit of brotherhood attendant with the people fasting. There must be no division or relational tension. Love and forgiveness must persist. This corporate brotherhood mentality in a fast is critically essential for God's will to prevail for the whole group. In Isaiah 58, a major reason for their corporate fasting being ineffective was the violation of principles governing righteous treatment of one person of another.

² Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names

³ Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names

⁴ Hitchcock

⁵ Hitchcock

Implied by this meaning of brotherhood is that Ezra established a strong covenantal bond among the group. Many of the Levites were also to have a profound influence on the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem. So the principle of sincere love and concern for the spiritual welfare of the 'brotherhood' to which they were going to minister to was paramount. A corporate fast not built on strong covenantal joining will not have the Divine intended effect.

1 Pet 2:17 Honor all people, [LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD](#), fear God, honor the king

The safest 'hood' to live in is the brotherhood.

I SHALL SUBSIST: The word 'subsist' has two nuances in its meaning. Firstly, it refers to one's capacity to 'maintain or support oneself', especially at a minimal level (to survive, manage, make ends meet). Secondly, in legal terms, it includes the idea of something 'remaining in being, force or effect' (e.g. "a tenants right of occupation subsists"); has the idea of someone or something prevailing, continuing or enduring).

Marrying these two ideas, to 'subsist' in the context of the symbolic application of 'Ahava' in the context of Ezra 8, would be to be thoroughly convinced that as you commit to the principle of MIGRATION or constant movement to greater maturity in Christ or in expressions of accuracy concerning His will, that in this process, you will 'still remain in force' – you will prevail – you will not lose force, effect or relevance, etc. Further to this, you would survive, being supplied with resource you would need and be more than sufficiently cared for by God. As you migrate, you will lose nothing.

GENERATION: The scripture notes that this fast also had as its focus 'our little ones' (Ezra 8:21). 'Little ones' denote the generation to follow. God's purposes are built generationally. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They carry through from one generation to another. In each generation, vital aspects of God's will must be captured and effected in a certain epoch of time (kairos) so that subsequent generations in their time may continue the maturation of God's vast global purposes toward the ultimate finish. Ezra's fast had attending it, the preservation of a whole nation or generation. This fast was extremely wide and vast in its scope and its success had global ramifications. God's purposes could be destroyed with the destruction of Ezra and the people he would lead to Jerusalem in that critical time. May I implore you that the next time you fast either privately or corporately, that you realise the gravity of God's purposes that are at stake.

- Aside :** (i) For those who understand the significance of the 42nd generation, a term referable to the present day church, I encourage you to set its preservation and effective function as a focus in your fasting as well.
- (ii) Fasting and prayer for the preservation of the Divine destiny of God vested within our children – our 'little ones' is proper and to be encouraged.

IN THEIR FASTING, GOD ANSWERED THE PEOPLE'S PRAYER

God granted the request of Ezra and the people. The New Living Translation captures [Ezra 8:23](#) powerfully: "So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and HE HEARD OUR PRAYER." God answers prayer with fasting. This is still true today.

IF ...

- your life is given to diligent study and obedience of God's word,
- you give attention to private preparation in the area you perceive God will use you,
- your desire to teach God's Word,
- your attitude of heart is sincere and repentful,
- your mindset humble,
- your motivation and purpose is for God's glory and Kingdom,
- your objective to see His will done,
- your intention to positively impact others beyond the pressing immediacy of your own needs,
- your passion to INSCRIBE God's principle upon the heart and mind of a whole generation and so ensure the peptual continuance of God's purposes in the earth,

THEN, surely our God will ...

- hear your prayer,
- answer you,
- grant you immunity and protection,
- activate a migratory process to position you in a place where His will for your life will start to take effect, and
- raise up others alongside you with the same passion in support of you.

**"Then you will call, and
the Lord will answer; You
will cry, and He will say,
'Here I am'**

Isaiah 58:9a

On his return to Jerusalem, Ezra was appalled by the gross violation of God's Word specifically in respect to the matter of inter-marriage with foreign nations. In Ezra chapter 9 and 10, Ezra repents with fasting again and is joined by a large gathering of people. He is then bold to correct this matter in Israel, and advised all the men of Judah and Benjamin who had married foreign wives to divorce them. We will give coverage to this issue in a subsequent session. Ezra succeeds as a scribe in INSCRIBING the law of God in the hearts and minds of the people so that they would now reflexively and spontaneously obey God's principles. (Refer to Nehemiah 8-10 to see how God uses him to educate the nation further)

Conclusion

- Prayerful fasting underpinned the developments in Ezra being used by God to accomplish His will.
- Fasting too facilitated the nation's return to the Lord and their resolve to be obedient to God's ways.
- They were protected on their physical journey returning to Jerusalem.
- The scribal dimension was preserved and God's law was installed in the heart and minds of the people.
- Accurate covenantal relationships were preserved as the medium to nurture and maintain the purity of the Divine seed and image in the earth.

These issues must be part of our motivation to fast. From the context of sincere fasting and prayer, these issues will be awakened and realised in our day too.

[To Be Continued]

Stay in Touch with us via Social Networks and my Website: Connect with and 'follow' Randolph Barnwell personally via Facebook or Twitter to receive regular inspirational & encouraging short posts and tweets highlighting key life principles from God's Word. You may also freely download notes and audio files of each session from www.randolphbarnwell.com. Additional materials on various topics are also available for download here. Visit & 'like' 'GATE MINISTRIES Durban Central' Facebook page OR 'follow' Gate Ministries Durban Central on Twitter and keep informed as to themes that will be taught each week. To receive our free bible study notes, ensure you are on our email distribution list – send a request to info@gatedc.co.za. Enquiries: randolph@gatedc.co.za or info@gatedc.co.za.