Bottom of Form



Ezra

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, Vice-Principal

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This is a study of the life of Ezra, prepared by Dr Kevin Smith, the Vice-Principal of the South African Theological Seminary.

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Notes for slide

 When preachers want a model of good leadership, they often turn to the book of Nehemiah, since Nehemiah models many outstanding qualities of godly leadership. Few are aware of another equally good model of pastoral leadership—Ezra. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are twin volumes, since Nehemiah is the sequel to Ezra. In fact, Ezra and Nehemiah were co-labourers; their ministries in Jerusalem overlapped.

     In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery.“Your Majesty,” said Prior Richard, “do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king.”“I understand,” said Henry. “The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you.”“Then I will tell you what to do,” said Prior Richard. “Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you.”When King Henry died, a statement was written: “The King learned to rule by being obedient.”When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us, and when he returns, we’ll rule together with him.

    STUDY. His study of God’s word guided and inspired his devotion to the Lord; it did not undermine it. Why? Because he positioned himself under the scriptures, not above them. He studied with a heart of faith and an attitude of submission; modern Bible scholars often approach scripture with a proud and cold heart, and they give the serious study of God’s word a reputation for undermining a living faith and personal relationship with God. Because Ezra set his heart on doing what God taught in the word, his study enriched his faith.TEACH. He also carried a burden to teach the will and ways of God. In other words, Ezra studied the Bible with the twin goals of enriching his own relationship with God (‘to do’) and helping others to do the same (‘to teach’).

   Imagine yourself in Ezra&apos;s position:

    There is a great lesson in this for today’s church. Modern pastors are obsessed with management methods and leadership skills to grow their churches. Pastors flock to seminars oriented towards the ‘how to’ aspects of ministry, but by their prayerlessness they show that they are really trusting in human methods rather than God’s power to grow their churches. Many years ago, E. M. Bounds wrote:

  Our prayerlessness is not always rooted in laziness or indiscipline. Often the root problem is unbelief.I have found that a half-hour walk with Joshua is my best prayer time at the moment.

  The word painstaking is a combination of pains and taking

   I personally knew a pastor whose attitude was that God had called him to run the church with the Bible in one hand and the chequebook in the other. He lacked the financial know-how to manage the finances well, and he had a careless attitude towards his responsibility to do so. He failed to appoint competent and trustworthy men to manage the finances. He also neglected to implement measures to ensure that the money was properly counted and recorded. As a result, suspicions arose that the finances were being mismanaged. The pastor&apos;s integrity was seriously questioned, his credibility as a minister undermined, and many members left his church. Did he steal from the church? Nobody knows. He was certainly guilty of careless financial management, and it almost shipwrecked his ministry.Ezra was personally authorised by King Artaxerxes to spend the money; he could have taken a domineering, I-am-in-charge approach. As the leading scribe and priest in Israel, he could have adopted the attitude, &quot;I am the man of God, so just trust me.&quot; Instead, he took every precaution to be blameless and transparent with the Lord&apos;s money. He appointed the best men and implemented a system of checks and balances to ensure that the money was properly managed.

  How about us?Here are some areas for personal reflection.

 Soon after Ezra&apos;s group of exiles arrived back in Jerusalem, he heard that the priests and people of Israel had been intermarrying with the idol-worshipping people of the surrounding regions. This was the very same sin that caused the exile, and Ezra feared that God&apos;s next judgement could be the end of Israel. Even without divine judgement, the natural result of merging with other peoples threatened to bring an end to Israel as God&apos;s people.READ EZRA 9Let me be crystal clear here: the issue is religious, not racial. They were marrying people who worshipped foreign gods, and God disapproves of such marriages. This leads to two practical truths for today: (1) God approves of a marriage between people of different races as long as they both worship Jesus Christ. (2) God does not approve of a disciple of Jesus Christ marrying a non-believer.

 This was Ezra&apos;s response to the news: &quot;As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled&quot; (9:3, italics mine). He &quot;sat appalled until the evening sacrifice&quot; (9:4), when he fell on his knees and spread out his hands before God (at the temple). Then he prayed one of the Bible&apos;s great prayers of repentance on behalf of his people. What we have in chapter 9 is a short summary of his confession. It must have been an extended prayer, because people gathered around him when they saw the intensity of his prayers, and they &quot;wept bitterly&quot; (10:1). After this, he withdrew to a private place, and spent the night &quot;neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles&quot; (10:6).

 Sin grieved Ezra deeply. There was nothing contrived or put on about his response. As a student of scripture, he understood that Israel&apos;s unfaithfulness to the Lord brought exile upon the nation. As a man of prayer, he had a personal appreciation for the holiness of God and the horrors of sin. In short, Ezra had a God-centred perspective on sin.

 Only those who walk intimately with God can appreciate how heinous sin is; only they can truly grieve and mourn over it; only they can grasp his grace in pardoning sinners. If our relationship with God is not intimate, we tend to have a man-centred view of sin. We downplay its seriousness and defend its servants. When confronted with sin in the community, we choose a pragmatic course of action—how can we protect the image of the church and avoid losing members? We defend our soft line on sin under the guise of &quot;grace&quot;, when often it reveals a failure to grasp God&apos;s holiness rather than a deep revelation of his mercy.

 How about us?Sadly, mourning deeply over sin is rare in the 21st-century church. We are into happy Christianity, and talking about sin and grieving for sin makes people unhappy—so we just don&apos;t go there. And if we do talk about it, two trends

 We are into happy Christianity, and talking about sin and grieving over it makes people unhappy—so we just don&apos;t go there.Think about it: how often do you hear strong sermons about sexual purity, financial honesty, gossip, pride, racism, and so on? The Bible talked about these subjects all the time. Why do pastors address them only rarely? Because they make people uncomfortable, and uncomfortable people move to the church next door—which doesn&apos;t preach unhappy sermons.By the way, Jesus never measured his success by attendance, followership, or the happy-metre in his after-sermon opinion poles!

 If do talk about sin, we do so euphemistically. We give sins nicer names so as not to make people feel bad or awkward.Examples: It&apos;s not fornication; it&apos;s pre-marital sex. Adultery has become extra-marital sex. It&apos;s not a lie, but an exaggeration. He&apos;s not arrogant; he&apos;s driven. She&apos;s not lying; she&apos;s shading the truth.

 Under the guise of being saved by grace, we lie to people—telling them that they are children of God while they live like servants of Satan.This is neither love nor grace nor salvation—and nor is it true! That is not the gospel. It is not true according to Jesus, John, Matthew, Peter, or Paul. The grace of God, when it infuses our souls, &quot;teaches us to say &apos;No&apos; to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age&quot; (Titus 2:12). Jesus saves us from sin; he does not comfort us in it. When we tell people they can have fire insurance for hell while living like its citizens, we are loving them right into hell.

 There is only one right response to sin—mourn over it and then forsake it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

  Ezra did many things well. He was clearly a talented man and a skilled leader. Nevertheless, he recognised that his actions were not the primary cause of his successes. At every turn, he acknowledged that his successes were due to God&apos;s favour upon him. One of the recurring phrases in his memoirs is &quot;the hand of the Lord was upon us&quot;.

  God worked with, for, and through Ezra—and Ezra acknowledged the hand of God in every success. As a man of prayer and the word, he was sensitive to the Lord&apos;s hand at work. He used every opportunity to give God credit and praise for his blessings. Here is an example of Ezra directing the glory towards God: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 and his counsellors, and before all the king&apos;s mighty officers (7:27-28).

 Proverbs 3:5-6Every good thing in your life is a gift of God (James 1:17). That is a biblical view of life. Every good thing is of God. Do you have food on the table each day? It is because the good hand of the Lord is upon you. Do you have healthy children? It is because the good hand of the Lord is upon you. Do you have the privilege of working? It is because the good hand of the Lord is upon you. Do you have a degree? It is because the good hand of the Lord is upon you.

 If God is the source of all good in our lives and our world, then God&apos;s giving deserves our thanks giving! The scripture says that God loves a cheerful giver, but it also teaches that he loves a cheerful thanksgiver.Deuteronomy 8:18Thomas Goodwin said, &quot;Those blessings are sweetest that are won wit prayers and worn with thanks.&quot;Matthew Henry: Thanksgiving is good, but thanks-living is better. Family policy: count your blessings each day.

**Ezra**

1. 1. Ezra
2. [2.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-2-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)A brief history: where Ezra fits in 586 BC: The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews captive 538 BC: After the Persians conquered Babylon, the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed the Jews to return home. 538-515 BC: The first group of exiles return home and rebuild the temple (told in Ezra 1-6). 458 BC: Ezra leads a second group of exiles back to Jerusalem to restore true worship in the holy city.
3. [3.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-3-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Who was Ezra? Ezra himself was a priest and a scribe (the first great Bible scholar and teacher). He returned with the goal of restoring true worship of the Lord in Jerusalem and teaching the Jewish people the Law of the Lord. Ezra’s story is told in Ezra 7–10. It makes a great case study for pastors, since Ezra embodies and models many of the Priest and leadership traits and skills that we Scribe would expect to find in a good New Testament pastor. I want to draw your attention to seven ways in which Ezra can be a model for pastors.
4. [4.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-4-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Point 1 Ezra counted the cost of Gods call
5. [5.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-5-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Counting the cost of the call • Ezra had position, power, prestige, popularity, and prosperity in Babylon. • Why did he request permission to return to Jerusalem? • He was responding in obedience to Gods call. He made sacrifices to embrace Gods purpose for his life. • In an amazing act of obedience, he made himself nothing, but God has made him immortal!
6. [6.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-6-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)What is God calling you to do this year?• What is God calling you to do with your life? Courage is fear• What is he calling you to do that has said its for him this year? prayers!• What sacrifices are you going to have to make to Anonymous say, ‘Yes, Lord’? Too much of our To obey Christ will definitely Christianity today iscost you! Most will sing ‘yes drenched with Lord’, but say ‘no Lord’. sentiment, but devoid of sacrifice. Frank Farley
7. [7.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-7-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Point 2 Ezra set his heart to study, do, and teach the Word of God
8. [8.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-8-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Ezra, the first Bible scholar and teacher ‘… skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given’ (7:6). ‘… the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven’ (7:12). For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to Studying the Scriptures do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel (Ezra 7:10, emphasis mine).
9. [9.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-9-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Studying, doing, and teaching 1. Study: He set his heart to study the scriptures. There were no shortcuts. His expertise was the fruit of a lifetime of study. 2. Do: Knowledge was not the goal. He studied the word of God so that he could do the will of God. 3. Teach: To teach, in Hebrew, is ‘to cause to learn’. He studied to enrich others lives with the Word.
10. [10.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-10-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)What about you?God is calling us back to theBible. • Try to get yourself an ESV Study Bible (or LASB). • We should get our cell Bible Study groups back to the Bible. • Get hold of great teaching God’s Word is the material to fill your dead instrument by times. which God’s Spirit transforms the Christian. Robert M. Horn
11. [11.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-11-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Point 3 Ezra was a man of prayer and faith.
12. [12.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-12-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Imagine yourself in Ezras shoes: • You are travelling from Babylon to Jerusalem with 2000 civilians. • You are returning with some 3.4 tons of gold and 22 tons of silver—you are a prime target for criminals. • You have boasted to the king of Persia about Yahwehs almighty power, which works for his people and against his enemies. • You cannot ask for a military escort! What do you do?
13. [13.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-13-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)This is what Ezra did … Ezra 8:21-23 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. 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 He prayed had told the king, ‘The hand of our God and fasted is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.’ So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.
14. [14.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-14-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)This is what Ezra did next … Ezra 8:24-25, 31-32 Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: … 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 counsellors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. … Then we departed from the river Ahava He walked on the twelfth day of the first month, to in faith 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. We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days.
15. [15.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-15-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Sequence: believe ≡ pray ≡ act 1. He truly believed that ‘the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him’ (8:22). Therefore, 2. He organised a fast, ‘that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey. … we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty’’ (8:21, 23). Then, 3. They departed in faith. They gambled their lives on God’s response to their payers.
16. [16.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-16-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)What the Church needs today isnot more machinery or better, notnew organizations or more andnovel methods, but men whom theHoly Ghost can use—men ofprayer, men mighty in prayer. TheHoly Ghost does not flow throughmethods, but through men. Hedoes not come on machinery, buton men. He does not anoint plans,but men—men of prayer.
17. [17.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-17-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Prayer: some insightful comments Nothing is discussed more and practiced less than prayer. It is not well Anonymous for a man to pray cream and live When you pray, rather let your heart skim milk. be without words, than your words without heart. Henry Ward Beecher John Bunyan
18. [18.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-18-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)What about you?1. Do you believe God enough The mightier any is to be a man (or woman) of in the Word, the prayer? (Rom. 10:17, NKJV) more mighty he will be in prayer.2. How do you intend to set aside time to spend with William Gurnall God this year?3. Are you ready to take an umbrella when you pray for Faith makes things possible—it does rain? not make them easy. Anonymous
19. [19.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-19-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)1. What is God calling me to do this year? Am I prepared to say, ‘Yes Lord’?2. What am I going to do to ensure that God’s Word is front and centre in my life?3. What steps does God want me to take to remedy my lack of faith that causes my lack of prayer?
20. [20.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-20-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Point 4 Ezra was painstakingly honest with money
21. [21.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-21-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)The Kings Commission • Ezra returns with a small Ezra fortune in gifts: 3.4 tons of gold and 22 tons of 7:11-24 silver. • In essence, the king gave Ezra licence to use the money as he saw fit: Artaxerxes Commission some was allocated, but most was at his discretion.
22. [22.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-22-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)The Priests Plan Ezra "set apart twelve of the Ezra leading priests" (8:24) to look after the money. Every cent was 8:24-34 carefully counted and recorded before they departed. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the money was handed over to the temple priests. Once again, Ezras Plan "The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded" (8:34).
23. [23.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-23-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Ezra was a steward of Gods moneyEzra was careful to be a In the battle oftrustworthy steward of the faith, money ismoney. He took pains to usually the lastensure that the money was stronghold to fall.handled with completeintegrity and that he was Ronald Dunnabsolutely blameless in hismanagement of it. He did nottake a cut for himself, but The use of ourhanded over all the money, possessions showshaving accounted for every us up for what wecent. really are. Charles Ryrie
24. [24.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-24-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)True statements about money Money Money is like Our temporary If faith does often sea water; the stewardship not make a unmakes more a man man honest, will determine the man drinks, the our it is not an who makes more thirsty permanent honest faith. it. he becomes ownership. Anonymous Anonymous Spurgeon Blanchard Here are some insightful observations about the relationship between money and godliness.
25. [25.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-25-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)1. Do you report and pay your taxes without fudging the truth?2. If you run a business, do you handle the finance with purity?3. Do you pay your domestic worker a humane wage?4. Is your life consumed by a quest for more sea water?
26. [26.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-26-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Point 5 Ezra mourned over the sins of his people
27. [27.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-27-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Ezra 9:1-15 Ezras Response: • "As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled ... until the evening sacrifice" (9:3-4). • Then he fell on his Mourning over Sin knees and spread out his hands before God (at the temple), and prayed a great prayer.
28. [28.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-28-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Sin grieved Ezra deeply! 1. As a student of scripture, he understood that Israels unfaithfulness to the Lord brought exile upon the nation. 2. As a man of prayer, he had a personal appreciation for the holiness of God and the horrors of sin. 3. In short, Ezra had a God- centred perspective on sin.
29. [29.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-29-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)" Only those who walk intimately with God can appreciate how heinous sin is; only they can truly grieve and mourn over it; only they can grasp his grace in pardoning sinners."
30. [30.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-30-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Three trends 1. We avoid the subject 2. We rename the sins 3. We justify the sinners
31. [31.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-31-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)We avoid the subjectWe are into happyChristianity, andtalking about sin andgrieving over it makespeople unhappy—so This sellswe just dont go there. This doesnt
32. [32.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-32-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)We rename the sins " Never give fair names to foul sins. Call them what you will, they will smell no sweeter" (Charles Haddon Spurgeon).
33. [33.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-33-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)We justify the sinnersUnder the guise of being Salvation is by gracesaved by grace, we lie to alone through faithpeople—telling them that alone, but true faiththey are children of God is never alonewhile they live likeservants of Satan. John WesleyThis is neither love norgrace nor salvation—and Confessing your sins is no substitute fornor is it true! forsaking them Anonymous
34. [34.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-34-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)"Confessing sin is notinforming God; it isagreeing with God"(Derek Cleave)."Many blush to admittheir faults who neverblush to commit them"(William Secker)
35. [35.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-35-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Point 6 Ezra acknowledged the sovereignty of God
36. [36.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-36-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)"the hand of the Lord was upon us" • King Artaxerxes granted all Ezras requests, "for the hand of the LORD his God was on him" (7:6). • Ezra arrived safely in Jerusalem "for the good hand of his God was on him" (7:9). • Ezra spoke boldly before the king, "for the hand of the LORD my God was on me" (7:28).
37. [37.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-37-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)"the hand of the Lord was upon us" • The succeeded "by the good hand of our God on us" (8:18). • Ezra boldly told the king that "the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him" (8:22). • The returning exiles were delivered from enemies and ambushes, because "hand of our God was on us" (8:31).
38. [38.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-38-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Recognise the true source Trust in the Lord with all He who claims to be ayour heart, self-made man has relieved God of an and do not lean on your embarrassingown understanding. responsibility. In all your ways Anonymousacknowledge him, and he will make Every good gift andstraight your paths. every perfect gift is from above, coming Proverbs 3:5-6 down from the Father of lights James 1:17
39. [39.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-39-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Give thanks to God Thanksgiving is good, but thanks- living is better. Those blessings are Matthew Henry sweetest that are won with You shall remember prayers and the Lord your God, worn with for it is he who gives thanks. you power to get Thomas wealth. Goodwin Deut. 8:18
40. [40.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-40-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)Summary
41. [41.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/ezra-111029103510-phpapp02/95/ezra-41-728.jpg?cb=1319884576)1. Count the cost of serving Jesus.2. Study, do, and teach the Word.3. Pray in dependence, act in faith.4. Be honest in money matters.5. Confess and forsake your sins.6. Acknowledge the hand of God.