

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Tonight, we are going to continue our study through the book of Ezra –

We are going to be in chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Two weeks, we saw a remnant of those that were in exile return to Jerusalem.

This of course happened as the Lord moved the heart of King Cyrus to issue the decree allowing them to return to build the temple.

However only about 2.5 percent of the Jews returned – the rest decided to remain in Babylon and in other Persian cities.

In chapter two we saw the names of those that returned – as they reclaimed their genealogy, in chapter three the remnant will reclaim their theology as once again they offer burnt offerings for the first time in 70 years and then in chapter four, we will see opposition.

Let's pray...

[Ezr 3:1-13 NKJV] 1 And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel [were] in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

42000 people return from exile to a land that is devastated.

The Babylonians had destroyed the entire land.

They had to build shelter; they had to begin to work the fields.

There was no army and there were no walls to protect them from intruders.

Where to begin???

The Jews “built the altar” (v2).

Sounds dumb; but it was spiritually brilliant.

The reason that it was brilliant was that if this endeavor was going to succeed, it would be by depending upon God.

Building the altar first was a bold declaration that they intended to put God first.

With God on their side – there was no reason for physical walls to protect them. God was their shield.

“They gathered as one man” is a great compliment.

Unity is something we have already, by virtue of being in Christ.

We maintain it by yielding to God’s authority, to His earthly authority over us, and to one another, in love.

In the early church – it was when the disciples were in one accord – that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them.

2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as [it is] written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 Though fear [had come] upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, [both] the morning and evening burnt offerings.

Notice that they built the altar first – there is no temple. There is no foundation - That will be rebuilt later on.

The altar was built first because it would take a lot less time to build than it would take to rebuild the temple.

But most importantly, the altar was the place where sin was dealt with.

There needed to be atonement from sin.

They needed to resume the burnt offerings for the atonement of sin. (Lev 1)

4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as [it is] written, and [offered] the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. 5

Afterwards [they offered] the regular burnt offering, and [those] for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and [those] of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first

day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

They celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles –

The Feast of Tabernacles was a feast where the families of Israel were commanded to camp out in temporary shelters, it was to remind them both of God's faithfulness to them as they made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land and it also reminded them of how their forefathers lived during the exodus.

After 70 years in exile, the Jews once again immersed themselves in keeping all of the feasts and the rituals that they were commanded to adhere to by the word of God.

7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

Besides building the altar – they also started collecting materials for the temple.

King Solomon, when he built the first temple, he also brought wood from Lebanon – as they took it to the shore of the Mediterranean and floated it down to Joppa.

8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had

come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began [work] and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

In the book of Numbers, the Law of Moses commanded that the Levites begin their ministry at the age of 30 (Num4)

David – however, changed the start of when the Levites started serving to 20 years of age.

Zerrubabel adopted this practice.

They were supposed to oversee the construction of the new temple.

9 Then Jeshua [with] his sons and brothers, Kadmiel [with] his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad [with] their sons and their brethren the Levites. 10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For [He is] good, For His mercy [endures] forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' [houses], **old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice**

when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

As the foundation of the temple was being laid –

Two things were happening, the younger people were saying, “Alright, we are getting it done – we have the altar and now we have laid the foundation for the new temple Praise God, how exciting!!!”

The older people, those that had seen the previous temple before they went into exile, they looked at the altar and the foundation and said “This is nothing compared to the first temple – there is no gold, there is no ark of the covenant – these are nothing but stones”

These old guys were caught looking back at the good old days – instead of looking forward to what God was going to do.

Turn with me to the book of Haggai –

Because the building of the temple will be on hold for almost 20 years.

[Hag 2:1-9 NKJV] 1 In the seventh [month], on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying: 2 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of

Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 3 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, [is this] not in your eyes as nothing? 4 'Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I [am] with you,' says the LORD of hosts. 5 '[According to] the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!' 6 "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it [is] a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 'and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the **Desire of All Nations**, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 8 'The silver [is] Mine, and the gold [is] Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be **greater than the former,**' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give **peace,**' says the LORD of hosts."

This building that Zerubbabel was starting – the one that supposedly didn't live up to Solomon's temple – this temple would be the same Temple that a young twelve year old boy from Nazareth would teach the multitudes and call "His Father's House". (luke 2 41-52)

The Desire of All Nations is Jesus Christ.

I think we need to be careful with our attitude about the things that God has called us to do.

I think there will be times in our lives when we might be tempted to think that we are wasting our time on things that don't seem too important.

If we are doing something that God has led us to do, it is not insignificant and unimportant.

Our job is to be obedient to what He has called us to do – not to look back and glory in the past.

[Ezr 4:1-24 NKJV] 1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' [houses], and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you [do]; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." 3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' [houses] of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

Historical Background of Northern and Southern Kingdom.

10 tribes of the North

2 tribes of the South

When the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom – one of the things that they would do is that they would relocate some of their own people into the region that they just conquered.

So when they conquered the Northern Kingdom, they brought in a bunch of foreigners. These foreigners began intermarrying some of the people (Israelites) that were left behind from the Assyrian invasion.

This was how the Samaritans started.

Now, why didn't they allow the Samaritans to help them build the temple?

Because they worshipped other gods – how were they offering sacrifices without a temple or an altar or priests???

To allow the Samaritans to partner with them would be to compromise and defile the worship.

That is why Zerrubabel and Jeshua didn't allow them to help out.

It would be like me allowing a JW or Mormon to preach here at church.

4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their

purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The Samaritans started to hire lobbyist, bribed officials in order to discourage the building of the temple.

Ok – from verse 6 – 24 we have a collection of the letters that the Samaritans wrote concerning the work of the Jews in Jerusalem.

This portion is going to be a little confusing because it is going to go encompass events that we haven't studied yet in the book of Ezra.

Even though we are just reading about the temple being rebuilt – we will see that the letters mention that the Jews are almost done with the walls – and those were not built until the time of Nehemiah.

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus (this is the guy that married to Esther), in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7 In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter [was] written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion: 9 From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions--[representatives] of the Dinaites, the

Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River--and so forth. 11 (This [is] a copy of the letter that they sent him) To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men [of the region] beyond the River, and so forth: 12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are **finishing [its] walls** and repairing the foundations. 13 Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city [is] a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed.

These officials are writing to the king of Persia and telling him – check the records.

These guys who you have allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild – they have a bad history of rebellion against the nations around them – that is why they were ultimately destroyed.

These guys don't know history.

Why was Jerusalem destroyed?

It was destroyed as a discipline from God for the rebellion of His people against Him - not against other earthly kings.

These guys had no idea Who they were dealing with.

16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

They predict the king will lose control of everything west of the Euphrates if he lets Jerusalem be built.

17 The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, [to] Shimshai the scribe, [to] the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and [to] the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. 18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. 19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all [the region] beyond the

River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. 21 Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. 22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? 23 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter [was] read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.

24 Thus the work of the house of God which [is] at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued **until the second year of the reign of Darius** king of Persia.

The weapon of discouragement struck a debilitating blow to the building of the Temple.

The Samaritans were successful in putting a stop to the construction.

The work “ceased” for the next fifteen years.

That is what the enemy attempts to do – to discourage us to stop doing the work that God has called us to do.

However, we must realize that the discouragement was only able to delay – not defeat the work of the Lord.

You see, God is going to respond to the discouragement by speaking to His people through two prophets – Haggai and Zechariah.

We will see them next week in chapter 5-6

We will study how they encouraged the Jews and see them respond to the word of God and finish the work that God called them to do.

Here is the question I have for you tonight.

What work is God calling you to?

Is there something that the Lord has laid on your heart and you started building but somehow got discouraged and suddenly stopped???

My prayer is that the Lord may put certain desires in your heart and fuel those desires, so that it's not by your might or your power but by His Spirit moving in and through you that He accomplishes His will in the world.

Amen

Let's pray...



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