

Ezra 4-7 | 4/15/2018

- Opposition to the building of the temple | Ezra 4:1-5, 4:24
 - **Read Ezra 4:1-5, 24**
 - During this time the enemies of the Israelites who had settled around Jerusalem gave them opposition in rebuilding the temple.
 - They even offered to “help” however the Israelites knew full well not to accept that offer.
 - These people had mixed religious views and were superstitious, God did not want them to be involved.
 - However, the opposition was somewhat successful as it caused a 16-year delay in the rebuilding of the temple.
 - This lasted past the death of Cyrus and into the reign of King Darius.
 - These Israelites had just come out of their 70-year exile and had been allowed to return home.
 - They promptly restore the altar and begin worshiping God properly once again.
 - **But then they encounter worldly opposition which causes them to pause growing and strengthening/restoring their relationship with God.**
 - **They allowed the world to pause their spiritual growth. They turned to their social issues instead of what was most important.**
 - **Christians must not allow the world to delay us in strengthening/restoring our relationship with God.**
 - Christians too can fall into a similar situation, where we might begin to lay our foundational relationship with God having built the altar and beginning to grow.
 - Only then allowing the world to distract us, to cause us to put on hold our spiritual growth.
 - **What can cause Christians to delay building and growing their relationship with God? What do we allow to get in the way?**
- Ezra 4:6-23 These verses speak to future events much later but are included as Ezra is speaking to all of the opposition that the Israelites encountered when it came to rebuilding the city.
 - In 4:6 he speaks of Ahasuerus/Xerxes who ruled during the time of Esther (486-464 B.C)
 - In 4:7-23 he speaks of Artaxerxes who ruled during the time of Nehemiah (464-423 B.C)
- The rebuilding of the temple resumes with God’s intervention | Ezra 5:1-2
 - **Read Ezra 5:1-2**
 - After the delay we see that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah enter the picture.
 - God uses these prophets to prophesy and proclaim His word to the Jewish people, to get them to continue and finish the building of the temple.
 - God gave the instruction to rebuild the temple through His prophet Haggai
 - Several of the OT books align together as is the case here with Ezra and Haggai.
 - Books of the OT were written in different perspectives some were from kings, some were from priests and others were from prophets.
 - Haggai was a prophet of God that had a very short but important recording in Scripture.
 - God calls out the Israelites for their selfishness | Haggai 1:1-15
 - **Read Haggai 1:1-11**
 - After the Israelites once again were falling away into their own selfishness and not being obedient to God, He spoke to them through His prophet Haggai.

- They did not think it was time to rebuild the house of the LORD, perhaps they were too concerned about the opposition they were receiving and decided to wait.
- God reminded the people that while they were living in their nice cozy homes that had a roof and walls, that God's house was lying in ruins.
 - They cared more about themselves than they did God.
- **How often do Christians do this same thing? How often do we put ourselves first before God?**
- The Israelites responded to God in obedience and they once again feared the Lord. | Haggai 1:12-15
 - ***Read Haggai 1:12-15***
 - The Israelites came to their senses and they obeyed God.
 - And not only did they obey Him, but they feared Him.
 - The root of all of the problems for the Israelites was that they no longer feared God.
 - They no longer respected Him and therefore they no longer obeyed Him.
 - Jeremiah 2:19
 - "Your evil will chastise you, and your apostasy will reprove you. Know and see that it is the evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God; **the fear of me is not in you**, declares the Lord God of hosts."
 - **To fear God is to see Him for who He is as a God of power, but also to respect and revere Him.**
 - This is the root of all of our problems as well.
 - The moment we no longer fear God is the moment that we begin to turn away from God
 - If we do not fear God, we will not obey God.
 - **Having no fear of God is found at the root of all rebellion and disobedience.**
 - However now they have turned back to God and they now fear Him and therefore they now obey Him.
 - God worked in the hearts of the Israelite people and they have now begun again rebuilding the temple.
- **What do you think of the lack of fear that the Israelites had in relation to their disobedience to God and the subsequent punishment that followed?**
- **Can this lack of fear/respect cause issues in our relationship with God today?**
- God prevents another attempt to stop the rebuilding of the temple | Ezra 5:3-5
 - ***Read Ezra 5:3-5***
 - Again, we have another attempt to stop the rebuilding of the temple.
 - This time it was by another governor who didn't like what the Jew were doing and therefore sent a letter to King Darius asking who authorized this.
 - However, this didn't turn out the way that the governor had desired.
 - King Darius had his scribes go and find the original decree of King Cyrus, which approved of the rebuilding of the temple.
 - **So now King Darius issues a decree reaffirming the previous won from King Cyrus and the Jews are allowed by law to finish the temple once again.**
- The completion of the temple and the recognition of God's providence | Ezra 6:13-16,22
 - ***Read Ezra 6:13-16,22***

- With the divine intervention of God, the temple has finally been completed.
- It was completed February/March of 516 B.C
- The Israelites rejoice and recognize God's providence, which was at work in the minds of the Assyrian king's.
- God wanted the temple to be restored and it was going to happen, because it was His will.
- **The Book of Esther begins here before chapter 7 with Ezra.**
- Ezra's great purpose | Ezra 7:1-10
 - **Read Ezra 7:1-10**
 - Ezra's Background.
 - This chapter gives us a very good description of Ezra and it's important that we understand who he was.
 - Ezra traveled up from Babylon, which is where the Israelites had been exiled.
 - Ezra likely was born there as he would have been too young to have been around when the exile took place
 - The hand of God was on Ezra
 - As God has been working through this time with the nations and kings, He is also working with Ezra. His hand is upon him, guiding him to fulfill His will.
 - **Ezra has made an impression on the King Artaxerxes of Persia because of the hand of God.**
 - Everything that Ezra requested for his trip to return to Jerusalem to re-establish God's Laws was given to him.
 - Ezra was priest from the line of Aaron.
 - A partial genealogy of Ezra is given here which shows that he has descended from the first priest of the Israelite people Aaron.
 - Ezra was therefore capable of performing all of the traditional priestly duties.
 - Ezra was a scribe and an expert in the law of God.
 - Ezra 7:6
 - "—came up from Babylon. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given..."
 - A scribe in general was one who would recount and write various records.
 - It was a highly regarded position in both public administration and also was part of the official staff as royal advisors.
 - Unlike today where everyone can read and write and has access to volumes of information that was not the case back then.
 - It was far less common to have someone that could actually do these things and do them well.
 - The roll of a scribe during this period of Jewish history
 - The roll however for a scribe in the case of Ezra and the Israelite people was that a scribe would be considered an interpreter and copiers of the Law.
 - **It was their job to retain the Scriptures.**
- God's ordained purpose for Ezra
 - **Ezra having the hand of God upon Him was called to take a second wave of exiles back to Jerusalem.**
 - This second return was approximately 60-70 years after the first return under Zerubbabel where he was the first to return to begin rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and he also completed the temple.
 - This return like that of Zerubbabel was also done under the decree of a king.

- This is of course a different king, which is Artaxerxes I.
 - As we will see that although it is under the decree of a king it is certainly only because it is Gods' will.
- Ezra's return consisted of approximately 2000 people.
 - The second return under Ezra was considerably smaller but no less important than the return under Zerubbabel.
- Ezra's was called to re-establish God's Law and Word within the Israelite people.
 - **God gave him this ability so that He could use him to turn His people back to His Word. To essentially return them to the Bible.**
 - Obviously not the Bible as we know it today but everything that God had given them up to that point.
 - This was nearly all of the Old Testament as Ezra is one of the last OT books to be written.
 - They needed to be reminded of God's truth, to turn back to living their lives by His Word and commands.
 - The people needed someone who could teach them God's Word once again.
 - **They had rebuilt the altar and returned to worshiping God, but they also needed to return to His Word**
 - One must also commit themselves to God's Word to fully understand His will for their lives. To understand just who He is.
 - If Christians neglect the Word of God, we too will go astray.
 - Just like the Israelites if Christians neglect their relationship with God, if we neglect His Scriptures we too will go astray.
 - **We must rebuild our spiritual alters to God, restore our relationship with prayer and worship. Then we must also return to His Word.**
 - His living Word keeps on the right path when we obey His word and let it fill our hearts.
 - If we have found ourselves having gone astray, we can also follow a similar path as did the Israelites.
 - **Why do you think God found it necessary for His people to return to the Scriptures even though they had already rebuilt the "church" and were worshiping Him?**
 - **What is the impact when the Scriptures either neglected or embraced?**
 - **If we leave out the Scriptures, or rarely study it, what impact does that have on our relationship and spiritual walk with God?**
- Ezra was determined to study, obey and teach the laws of God.
 - In verse 10 we can see clearly the status of the heart of Ezra when it came to God's Word.
 - Ezra was determined to study, obey and teach the Word of God.
 - 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."
 - Ezra determined in his heart to study the Word of God.
 - Ezra knew full well the importance of Gods Scripture of His holy Word.
 - Ezra committed himself to studying the law so that he could fully understand and comprehend God's instructions.
 - Ezra obeyed the Word of God
 - Ezra after committing his heart to studying the Law he also obeyed it.

- **Ezra didn't simply study for intellectual purposes. He studied for application in his own life. He "did it".**
 - God did not give the Israelites His Word for purely academic purposes.
 - God's instructions were a set of commands, laws and guidelines for how the people were to live their lives.
 - Ezra understood this, and he actually applied God's Word to his life in his actions and his words.
- Ezra used his knowledge of Scripture to teach others.
 - Ezra being an expert in the Scripture did not choose to keep this information to himself.
 - He chose (and was chosen by God) to teach others God's Word.
 - **Nehemiah 8 gives us the framework of how a preacher shares the Gospel.**
 - So that he would be that witness to the Israelite people, so they could also apply God's word not only to their hearts but also in their actions through obedience.
- Ezra's example for all Christians
 - As Christians when we look at the example that is set forth by Ezra we cannot look at him and think that his actions regarding his dedication to God's Word is solely a responsibility of a select few.
 - Christians should mimic his example of studying, obeying and teaching the Word of God.
 - **When God chose His servant to turn His people around so that they could have a closer relationship with Him.**
 - **He didn't choose one whom disregarded His truth.**
 - **God sought someone who had a desire to study, obey and share His word with others.**
 - **Verse 10 for the Christian:**
 - **The Christian sets their heart to study the Scriptures, to obey them and to teach it to others.**
 - All Christians have a responsibility to study the word of God.
 - The Bible for us today is no longer something that only a select few can own or even read.
 - We are very blessed to be in a day and age where there are no shortages of Bibles. There are no shortages of finding a translation that we can actually read.
 - Unfortunately, all too often we neglect this.
 - We at times do not treat God's Word with the respect nor give it the attention that it deserves.
 - Even though we have numerous copies that doesn't mean that it should undermine it or we should treat it any differently than those centuries ago who would kill to have a copy.
 - **We need to have a mindset that is one of desire and passion to study and learn as much as we can about God's Word.**
 - All Christians have a responsibility to obey the Word of God.
 - God's Word to us is not purely for academic purposes or for intellect.

- It is also our instruction manual just as it was for the Israelites so many years ago.
- We are to be doers of the Word of God
- James 1:22
 - “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- All Christians have a responsibility to teach/share the Word of God.
 - We all have a responsibility to share the Word of God.
 - 2 Timothy 4:1-2 (HCSB)
 - “I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of His appearing and His kingdom: Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.”
 - **We should all desire to study and to know more about His Word for the purpose of sharing it with others.**
- **Why does it seem “difficult” at time for Christians to prioritize studying, obeying and teaching God’s Word?**
- **What is the impact to the life of a Christian (and others) when these are made a priority**