

2. The rebuilding of the temple

June 13, 2013

In chapter 3 through 6, I find three important points that I must bring to your attention – worship, opposition, and historical discrepancy.

Let's jump into chapter 3.

A. RESTORATION OF THE PROPER WORSHIP OF GOD

Ezra 3:1-4 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. 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. 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.

Here we find the Israel remnants busy rebuilding the temple. They started with the proper worship of God that was clearly known in the Law of Moses.

The seventh month would be Tishri, our September through October, a month very sacred to the Jews according to Leviticus 23. It opened with the Feast of Trumpets; the Day of Atonement, a.k.a. Yom Kippur was on the tenth day; and from the fifteenth to the twenty-first days, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles.

But the first thing Jeshua the high priest did was restore the altar so he could offer sacrifices for the people. The Israel people were afraid of the strong nations around them who resented the return of the Jews, and they wanted to be sure they were pleasing to the Lord.

We see a parallel with Abraham, who built an altar when he first came into the land of Canaan in Genesis 12. This is an Old Testament picture of Matthew 6:33:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Jeshua also restored the various sacrifices commanded by the Law, which would include a burnt offering each morning and evening and extra offerings for special days. It wasn't necessary to wait until the temple was completed before offering sacrifices to God. As long as there was a sanctified altar and a qualified priest, sacrifices could be given to the Lord. After all, it's not the external furnishings but what's in the heart that concerns God the most.

Psalms 51:16-17 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.

Each day of our Christian life must start with worship of our great God. It is not because He wants to be praised by us all the time like some prideful humans, rather He wants us to realize who He is and how much greater and more powerful He is in comparison with the spiritual, emotional, and physical difficulties we face everyday.

As His children, as His priests, it is the only right thing for us to have the proper worship mindset at the beginning of each day.

Ezra 3:11-12 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,

It's unfortunate when the unity of God's people was shattered because generations looked in opposite directions. The older men were looking back with longing while the younger men were looking around with joy. Both of them should have been looking up and praising the Lord for what He had accomplished.

We certainly can't ignore the past, but the past must be a rudder to guide us and not an anchor to hold us back. God's people are a family, not a family album filled with old pictures; they should be a garden that brings forth next generation in fruits, not a graveyard covered with monuments to past glory and successes.

We have similar generational disagreements in the church today, especially when it comes to styles of worship – singing the traditional hymns or contemporary music. It should be a matter of balance: the old must learn from the young and the young from the old, in a spirit of love and submission.

Every local church is but one generation short of extinction. If the older believers don't challenge and equip the younger Christians and set a godly example before them, the future of the congregation is in jeopardy. To some people, "change" is a synonym for "compromise," because they themselves are stuck in their own comfort zone. To these people, young or old alike, think that worship songs should revolve around their favorites, not God.

B. OPPOSITION TO REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Ezra 4:1-3 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."

The first attack of the enemy was very subtle: the people of Samaria, the former Northern Kingdom, offered to work with the Jews to help them build the temple. These people claimed to worship the same God the Jews worshiped, so it seemed logical that they should be allowed to share in the work. On the surface, the Samaritans seemed to be acting like good neighbors, but their offer was insidious and dangerous.

Because the Samaritans, being a mixture of many races by the pagan nations around Israel, had their mixed religions with idols. They didn't worship the true and living God. They were not going to ask the Israel people to dump the idea of worshipping

Jehovah God, they wanted them to add their pagan idols in worship. That was the reason the Israel people ended up in Babylon in exile for 70 long years. They were not about to make the same mistake again.

This is a typical opposition we can expect from satan. He would not sit on his hands and watch how we serve the Lord and continue in our sanctified living. He would come to us as an angel of light to put the seed of confusion and compromise into our hearts. God's people today must maintain a separated position, not isolation, and not get involved with anything that will compromise their testimony of Jesus Christ and hinder God's work.

C. A DISCREPANCY OF HISTORY IN THE BIBLE?

Ezra 4:6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

We started the Book of Ezra with Persian king Cyrus who was on the throne in 539-529 B.C. He was the one who issued a decree to begin the construction of the temple in Jerusalem according to Ezra chapter. 1.

I want all of you to note that the names of the kings that are mentioned here are not given name or surname. They were throne names. To add to our confusion and headache, the Bible does not distinguish whether it was "Darius" or "Darius I", rather just "Darius." But wait, there is more. In many cases, it was common for these kings to have more than one throne name that often duplicated other kings' throne names.

Some agnostics or atheists who choose Ezra chapter 4-6 to argue about the historical discrepancy in the Bible. I want you to make a note of this so that you don't get caught flat-footed.

Their logic is that king Ahasuerus in 4:6 was Xerxes who was defeated by Greek and married to Esther. According to history, he was on the throne 486-464 B.C. In 4:17-23, king Artaxerxes issue a decree to stop building of the temple in Jerusalem. Artaxerxes was on the throne 464-424 B.C. Then, he showed up again in chapter 7 to issue another decree to send Ezra to Israel.

Here is a monkey wrench: Darius in chapter 5 who issued the restoration of the temple was on his throne 521-486 B.C. The atheists' argument is that how Artaxerxes whose dominion was 464-424 B.C. could stop the temple building process that was already finished in 520 B.C. Sounds logical, wouldn't you think? Does it mean that the Bible is wrong? No, it is never wrong.

In response to these atheists' argument, some Bible scholars say that king Artaxerxes' decree was to stop building of the city, not the temple in 4:17-23.

Ezra 4:17 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.

Ezra 4:21 Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

But the problem with this explanation is in v24:

Ezra 4:24 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.

It made clear that the building of the temple of God was stopped, not the city .

The most logical explanation I can find is that the Persian kings' multiple throne names, as well as unclear indications of which Darius or Artaxerxes the Bible was talking about. I enclosed a chronology chart of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther in your sermon outline notes for your further study.

Please remember what I said last Sunday. There are many verses in the Bible that we have no understanding or don't make sense to us all. That doesn't mean that the Bible is wrong, but it only proves that we are ignorant and lack understanding .

D. THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

Ezra 5:1-2 Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

It was by the Word of the Lord that the world was created; and by that same Word the Lord governs His creation and His people. Church history shows that when God wanted to arouse His people to do His will, He called people to proclaim the Word of the Lord. The preaching of Martin Luther brought about what we call "the Reformation," a movement that transformed not only Germany but the entire Christian world. The preaching of John Wesley produced a spiritual awakening in Great Britain that swept many into the kingdom of God. Historians tell us that the Wesleyan Revival helped to rescue England from the kind of blood bath that France experienced during the French Revolution.

Never underestimate the power of the faithful preaching of God's Word.

From 530 to 520 B.C., the Jews concentrated on building their own houses, and neglected the house of the Lord. The Lord chastened His people to encourage them to obey His commands, but they refused to listen. So the Lord sent prophet Haggai with prophet Zechariah to prophesy and to preach God's word to the people of Jerusalem and to reignite the fire in their hearts.

Any work of God that isn't built on the Word of God will never prosper. Moses' success as the leader of Israel came from his faith in and obedience to God's Word. His success in conquering the enemy in Canaan was based on his devotion to the Word of God. When we obey God's Word, we can expect "great reward". If we want to know the power of God, we must also know the Word of God.

Matthew 22:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."

E. TEMPLE BUILDING RESUMED

Ezra 6:15-16 Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. 16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

Can you imagine how happy they were to see the result of God's hands upon them and the temple? It was not as beautiful and glamorous as Solomon's temple, but it was the place they could come and worship the Lord.

I cannot wait until we get to move into our own building where we can worship Him without packing and unpacking. Some day, the Lord willing.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) It is not the external display but what 's in the heart that concerns God the most.

2) Our Christian life should not be isolated life, rather insulated life from the worldly influences.

3) No matter what our circumstances may be, we can trust God to be faithful.