

11. Jesus in Ezra and Nehemiah

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As I went over these two Books, I realize that there is no direct connection to Jesus from any of these Books. But we can still draw several parallel points that we see in what Jesus taught.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one Book in the Hebrew Bible and they were written by Ezra the priest. As a priest, he was an eyewitness to many of these events and had an access to the historical records.

Many Bible scholars believe that the Book of Ezra was written around 440 B.C. During this time, the northern 10 tribes of Israel were taken captive by Assyria. Since they chose to worship the idols of the pagan nations around them, the Lord allowed them to be taken out of their land in order to teach them a valuable lesson.

An interesting thing about the Book of Ezra, the author Ezra doesn't even show up until chapter 7. Obviously he was not a Hollywood celebrity or self-appointed one, because if Ezra was one of those people, he would talk about himself from page 1 and throughout.

The Babylonians had conquered the Southern Kingdom, Judah and took away most of the Jewish people from their homeland and had left the region of Judah mostly deserted. It had become a Sabbath land for seventy years since they chose not to obey the Law of the Lord for 490 years.

While the Israelites were in Babylon as captives, the Babylonian Empire was overtaken by the Persians. Later the Persian kings started to allow them to return to Israel to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem.

Their return to the land of Israel took three phases:

- 1) **The first group of 50,000 led by Zerubbabel** (Ezra 2:2) came back to Israel and participated in the construction of the temple.
- 2) **The second group of 2,000 led by Ezra** (Ezra 7) joined in rebuilding the temple.
- 3) **The third group of an unknown number of the Jews led by Nehemiah** came and helped restore the city wall of Jerusalem.

A. JESUS IN THE PRECISE FULFILLMENT

Ezra 1:1-6 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

What does it mean that this pagan king Cyrus fulfilled God's prophecy that was given through Jeremiah in v1? I am glad that you had that same question in your heart. Please go to Jeremiah 29:10:

Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.

The Book of Jeremiah was written around 585-580 B.C. Our God in His infinite wisdom declared a prophecy that He would bring His people back from the captivity of Babylon 50 years before it happened.

If you think that it was a mind-boggling, try these:

Isaiah 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."'

Isaiah 45:1-4 "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held-- To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: 2 'I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.

Cyrus' name was named in the Book of Isaiah that was written 700-680 B.C. which was 150 some years before the actual coronation event happened. And Cyrus was not even in his great grandparent's mind when the Lord named his name in this ancient prophecy Book.

One of the greatest apologetics of the Bible is the fulfillment of the prophecies. You see all these prophecies that were made by Nostradamus at the beginning of the new year on tabloid magazines. They are so vague. But God's prophecies were detailed and fulfilled each time and will be fulfilled. He has a perfect track record. Jesus declared that His Word will not be changed and immovable.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

B. JESUS IN PRAYERS

Ezra 8:21-23 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

The whole approach to this trip by Ezra was layered with his prayers. He could easily ask his pagan king to provide him escorting soldiers, but he'd rather depend on the Lord's protection.

Ezra had previously expressed great confidence in the hand of God upon him and his trip. He was not about to contradict these prior words with later actions, in asking the king for an escort by soldiers and horsemen.

When we read the Gospels of Jesus, how often do we see our Lord being alone with God the Father so that He could pray? Sometimes He got up early in the morning to pray or prayed throughout the nights.

Luke 6:12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

There is nothing like difficulties and trials that bring us on our knees to the Lord. Because we worry what might happen. All these 'ifs' can only exist when we start to ignore or set aside accepting and knowing who God is. Is the problem too big for our God who created heaven and earth? Certainly not. We choose to make it that way. There is not a person or thing which can stop God and His will. Whenever we are fearful of the situations we are facing, that is the greatest evidence of the lack of our prayer and dependency on God.

The Son of God, the very God Himself completely relied on His Father. It wasn't because He didn't have the power to do what was necessary, rather He was making examples for us to follow in prayers, in using the Word of God to fight against the demonic temptations, and in everything else.

C. JESUS IN INTERCESSION

Nehemiah 1:5-6 And I said: "I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.

At the start of his prayer, Nehemiah acknowledges who God is. He is keeping his perspective correctly for his own benefit, not for God. When we know how great God is, we can see how small this situation is.

From this prayer, we can find the genuine heart of Nehemiah. He was not seeking his own comfort nor promotion. But he was interceding for others. Whenever we intercede for others with our prayers, we are like Jesus. Because at this very moment, Jesus is interceding to God the Father on behalf of us. Did you notice that Nehemiah is not leaving himself out of the wickedness of the Israelites? "I" is included in this "We."

The Lord is looking for intercessors who will cry out to God for mercy and for a return to holiness. How desperately do we need to pray and intercede for this country of which moral compass has been broken for many decades! Surely the Lord must be disappointed that His people have time for everything except intercessory prayer. I am guilty of that as well, because I am not doing enough of it.

Our Lord Jesus still intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

It strengthens us to know that Jesus prays for us, and that He lives to pray for us. This is a tremendous encouragement to anyone who feels like giving up. Jesus' intercession on our behalf is not a matter of appeasing an angry Father who wants to destroy us. It is not a matter of continually chanting prayers on behalf of His people. It means that He continually represents us before the Father so that we can draw near through Him, and that He defends us against satan's accusations and attacks.

D. JESUS AGAINST FALSE PROPHETS

Nehemiah 6:10-14 Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." 11 And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Here Shemaiah came as a prophet and gave a prophecy to Nehemiah. But Nehemiah didn't buy his phony prophecy because this man of God had enough discernment from the Lord to know that the prophecy was contradicting to God's Word.

Because these people wanted Nehemiah to hide inside of the temple. According to Leviticus, temple (tabernacle during the time of Wilderness) was only allowed Levites to be inside, otherwise it would be unclean. Nehemiah was not one of the Levites. So if he enters into it without any proper cause, he would be in sin. Not only that, but also Nehemiah knew that it is a sin to worry. I am sure that you remember what Uzziah did. He walked into the temple and burned the incense by ignoring what the Lord told them in the Law.

Jesus warned about false prophets in one of His "Sermon on the Mount":

Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

We must guard ourselves against false prophets by taking heed to their fruits. This means paying attention to many aspects of their life and ministry.

1) We should pay attention to the manner of living a teacher shows.

Do they show righteousness, humility, and faithfulness in the way they live?

2) We should pay attention to the content of their teaching in light of the Word of God in context.

Is it true fruit from God's Word, or is it man-centered, appealing to ears that want to be tickled?

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

I was in a Walmart the other day. I was passing by the book section. I saw this book. For a short moment, I thought that he was talking about the biblical "I am", was I ever wrong. I shouldn't have expected anything godly from Joel Osteen. He is a downright low life false prophet from satan. With all the influence he has, he is promoting nothing more than self-help. This is an excerpt from a promotion of this book:

Can two words give you the power to change your life? Yes they can! In the pages of his new book, bestselling author Joel Osteen shares a profound principle based on a simple truth.

Whatever follows the words "I am" will always come looking for you.

So, when you go through the day saying:

"I am blessed" ...blessings pursue you.

"I am talented" ...talent follows you.

"I am healthy" ...health heads your way.

"I am strong" ...strength tracks you down.

Joel Osteen reveals how THE POWER OF I AM can help you discover your unique abilities and advantages to lead a more productive and happier life. His insights and encouragement are illustrated with many amazing stories of people who turned their lives around by focusing on the positive power of this principle. You can choose to rise to a new level and invite God's goodness by focusing on these two words: I AM!

A total absurd garbage theology!!!

3) We should pay attention to the effect of their teaching.

Are people growing in Jesus or merely being entertained, and eventually falling away? False prophets are the henchmen of the devil, because they make people stumble and backslide from the faith in Jesus Christ.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) One of the greatest apologetics of the Bible is the fulfillment of the prophecies.

2) Whenever we are fearful of the situations we are facing, that is the greatest evidence of the lack of our prayer and dependency on God.

3) Whenever we intercede for others with our prayers, we are like Jesus.