

AUGUST 7

Ezra 5-6

As you read today, look at the charts at the end of this document. Ezra doesn't enter the story "real-time" until chapter 7, almost 60 years after the temple was completed. Pretty interesting, huh? Ezra appears to be showing the Jews that in spite of the opposition, God has remained true to His promise through Abraham to preserve them.

Ezra 5

Vs. 1-2 According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT (BKC-OT), p. 662, both Haggai and Zechariah began speaking to the leaders in 520 B.C. Although Ezra says that the reason the people stopped building the temple was the influence of the hostile neighbors, the prophets point to the people settling into comfort. The droughts they were experiencing were because they were taking care of themselves and not completing the temple. One very interesting note is that the message of the prophet Zechariah was almost entirely prophetic, pointing to the end of the age. The book of Zechariah reads like the Revelation of the OT. Part of the Lord's motivation to these people was to lift their eyes to the close of the age and Israel fulfilling its redemptive mission for mankind. God used both of these prophets to give people the courage and vision they needed.

Besides the general resistance of sin to obeying God, remember that these people who returned had worshipped God in Babylon without a temple. The synagogue system came out of Babylon. A school of scribes and copies of the Bible came out of Babylon. God blessed them in Babylon. So, why did they need a temple, especially when the Persians didn't think it was a good idea?

When you think of this, remember how much emphasis Ezra put on David planning for the temple in 1 Chronicles. There was a method to Ezra's madness. He wanted the leaders and people to model David, the king of God's blessing, through whom would come the Messiah.

Vs. 3-17 This is the opposition to Zerubbabel and Joshua building the temple. Tattenai wrote this letter, and I wonder how they got the copy of it. Tattenai seems like a very conscientious administrator. Notice that he didn't make them stop, while he was waiting for an answer. The Lord was in this.

Vs. 11-12 In the Jews' self confession, they saw themselves as servants of God; and they understood that God had deported them because of their disobedience.

V. 14 That these vessels were there with them would have been a reason for Tattenai to go slowly and check out this claim. Also, since Tattenai didn't mention Zerubbabel, it appears that Sheshbazzar might be Zerubbabel's Babylonian name.

V. 17 It is interesting to me that Tattenai had a suggestion for a fair process in this dispute. The records from Cyrus would, and did, settle the matter.

Ezra 6

Vs. 1-5 Cyrus was in his summer palace when he wrote the decree and it is amazing that they found it. They didn't even have Google. Ecbatana in northwestern Iran was the capital of the Assyrian, Persian, Median nation after the destruction of Nineveh. Ecbatana was the summer palace, and Susa, near Babylon, was the winter palace.

V. 3 This is interesting. Cyrus also gave plans or instructions for rebuilding the temple. This is new information, and we also have to account for the reaction of Darius I when he received these records. I'm willing to bet it goes back to Daniel. The history of what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar would have been well known to both Darius the Mede and to Cyrus. Darius the Mede and Prince Cyrus would have been regular guests in Babylon. The history of what had taken place in Babylon the night that Darius took the city would have been known. The event

with the lions led to an empire-wide law and command. There was a fear of Yahweh. I think Daniel was asked regarding the size and needs of a rebuilt temple. I think that Darius I probably knew of the reverence of his namesake, Darius the Mede, for Daniel and His God, Yahweh, and responded with that same sense of awe and fear.

Vs. 6-12 There is warning and threat in this command. If you want to see the warning of v. 11 spoken by another Darius, read Daniel 6.

Vs. 13-15 This again is a summary statement, not only to the completion of the temple, but also the completion of the city. Verse 14 mentions Artaxerxes who would become king twenty years after the death of Darius I. God was still in the business of causing Gentile kings to bless Israel. The Jews needed to see they could follow the Lord by faith.

V. 15 This is when the temple was finished.

Vs. 16-18 We have seen this before. Before they could dedicate the temple and hold the Passover, the priests and the Levites had to be organized and consecrated.

Vs. 19-22 They had been back in Jerusalem for 23 years when they dedicated the finished temple. According to the BKC-OT, p. 665, this Passover was 900 years after the first Passover in Egypt.

V. 22 shows that the people understood that God was working among them. Darius I was referred to as the King of Assyria since the Persian Empire was actually a result of a civil war gone wild. The Persians, Medes and Assyrians were all related; and when Cyrus and Darius the Mede revolted against Cyrus's grandfather, who reigned over the Medes and Persians from Assyria, they not only won the revolt, but decided to carry it further against the decaying Babylonian Empire.

The points that seem to be important for Ezra have to do with the faith and obedience of the people hearing and responding to the Word of God. God had shown that He would favor them before the Persians and that it would lead to the reestablishment of the temple worship of Israel. They only needed to obey.

Returning to the Word and following the Lord seems like a good idea for us too. As we work in the harvest, doing what the Lord has commanded and fitted us for, we find opportunities and conflicts too. And there will be occasions when the Lord opens doors of favor to give us unexpected fruit. But first, we have to follow Him and His Word. Then, as the prophet Zechariah reminded the returnees, we need to remember His coming and the plan being worked at now so that we will follow our Lord into the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

1 Corinthians 3:5-23

Vs. 5-9 So, here is a "spiritual" understanding of the workers in the harvest. Notice that God's goal is not the glorification of the servants, it is the building of the church. Notice too that there are two images here: a field and a building. One refers to the harvest and bearing fruit, and the other to God dwelling within us. And even in the building of the church there is the purpose of the harvest; that is, to reach the lost and bring them into the church as disciples, who make disciples. Paul's point here is that the exalting of God's servants shows that the Corinthians have missed the point of what is happening now on this planet.

Vs. 10-15 Here is a spiritual perspective on our work on this earth, on the foundation of Christ. This ministry of building upon the foundation applies to "anyone;" that is, everyone who knows Christ. It not only means how we personally build on what the Spirit has done in our lives, but it also applies to building into the lives of others. In this letter we will see that all things are to be done for the building up of one another. We saw this ministry to one another in Romans 12-15, and we'll see it again in Ephesians 4.

The word that is translated *suffer loss* is also familiar to Jesus' teaching on discipleship. Of the times this word is used besides here, it is found twice in Acts 27 for throwing the ship's cargo overboard and losing it. Once Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians saying that he had to grieve the church through his rebuke so they wouldn't suffer loss, but instead be fruitful. And then it is used in Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36 and Luke 9:25 as Jesus taught His disciples saying, *For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?* Jesus directed this warning to His disciples. It clearly doesn't mean they would lose their salvation, but that they would suffer loss. Putting everything together, if we live for ourselves in Christ, we damage our souls/lives now; and we "suffer loss" when we enter His presence, seeing that our life's activity and what we built on Christ was worthless to Him.

Whatever that "burning up" looks like, it will not be trite. We think that this judgment won't matter or be important, because we will be saved eternally and be somewhat invulnerable spiritually. How bad could it be? Besides, we'll be in heaven. Jesus used very severe images when referring to followers who slept or supposed their master was delayed. Some of those images have made Bible teachers squirm and perform interpretive acrobatics, because the punishment sounds similar to what happens to those who reject Christ. We can't lose our salvation, but we can experience punishment. Even here in these verses, what does it mean to be *saved, but only as through fire*? I don't think that will be a "fire" experience we will "yawn" our way through.

Positively spoken, we need to remember who our master is. We are here to follow Him into the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples.

Vs. 16-17 Here is a spiritual perspective on who and what we really are, temples of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that the temple was a place for people to find forgiveness and fellowship with God. The temple was only valuable because of who lived in it. It wasn't a shrine. God lives in us, but He keeps us on this planet to work in the harvest so that others can find Him. In the next letter to these same people, Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 4:7 (RSV), *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us."*

Vs. 18-23 Here is a spiritual perspective on where our focus in life should be, on Christ and the redemptive plan of God. Notice how v. 18 sounds a little like Jesus saying in Mark 8:35-36, *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* Again, this was said to the disciples.

Vs. 21-23 This is a tremendous statement, but only if we value these things. If our treasure is in heaven and we are here to serve Christ in the harvest, this is an amazing reality that opens doors of blessing and fulfillment. If our treasure is here and we are reserving heaven for when we can't enjoy this stuff anymore, what Paul has just said seems like being promised oatmeal, with nothing on it, three times a day.

Psalm 29

It is suggested that the occasion for this psalm was David sitting on a mountain, watching a thunderstorm sweep over the land. The view of God's power and majesty might have inspired these words.

Vs. 1-2 In the greatness of this storm, it seems like David caught a glimpse of God's spiritual command and holy power over all creation. Notice how vocal these verses are and that they end in worship.

Vs. 3-9 This section is easy to follow because of *The voice of the Lord*. You can sense the power of the storm in these images. Notice again how vocal this is. God still speaks to those who can hear Him.

Vs. 10-11 All of this gave David a sense of God's power and majesty. Even today, for all of the glory and splendor of humanity, it only takes one good tornado, hurricane, flood or earthquake to show us how puny we are and how needy we are of God's help and power.

Notice that verse 10 is a declaration of reality, spiritual and physical. Verse 11 is the prayer or petition of the psalm. Amen.

Proverbs 20:26-27

The common element in both verses is the searching and winnowing. I'm challenged by Paul and the Spirit's emphasis on being more tuned to the Spirit, winnowing through the events of life and the words and actions of others, searching to see what the Lord is doing around us in the harvest.