**RRRR VIII Ezra Part II and Nehemiah**

Ezra 1- 3 Cyrus allowed Judah to return (538 BCE) and begin building the temple. The prophecy of Jeremiah is being fulfilled. Because Judah has repented, they are beginning to return and rebuild.

But… Ch. 3 After laying the foundation in 536, the Jews get intimidated by their opponents, get busy building their homes and stop building the temple.

A familiar story for God’s people!

520 BC. Darius tells them to do what Cyrus ordered them to do.

518 BC, both Haggai and Zechariah tell them to Restore and Rebuild the temple.

516 BC. The building is completed. All is great. But further opposition arises (as we will see in Ezra 4:6-23), and the Jews cease rebuilding. The Jews stop repenting and returning, so God stops restoring and rebuilding.

Again, a familiar story!

Ezra 4:6 Then Ezra 4:11-23.

In this story, Artaxerxes is Satan and Judah is God’s church.

What strategy does Satan/the world apply to stop the church from being restored and rebuilding?

He threatens us with the weapons of the world….

He tries to get you fired for sharing your faith (as with me). He threatens to sue you for having “religious material” on you school web site (as with me)

What will Satan do to you to get you to back down with repenting and returning?

Parents? School work? Old friend? Illness? Mental illness? He will threated to remove our club status.

Look! These people are building a strong church and an impressive campus ministry! V. 12 God is restoring and rebuilding.

We can’t have any of that here!

v. 13 And it is going to affect your bottom line.

v. 23 So they stopped rebuilding! (a familiar story)

Ezra 7:1-10 Meet Ezra… the son of Aaron. Ezra was a priest. But Ezra was first and foremost a teacher. He is the paradigmatic teacher in the Old Testament.

Esther lies between these two, during the reign of Xerxes.

Ezra is in two parts: Part I Material around 538-536 BC and 520-516 BC of which Ezra was NOT a participant.

Part II Material from about 458 BC and later 60 years later, in which Ezra definitely was a participant.

Artaxerxes (465-424 BC)

We have seen Zerubbabel, the governor/king.

We have seen Joshua the priest.

We have seen Haggai and Zecharia the prophets.

Now we are seeing Ezra the teacher.

Jesus is prophet, priest, king and teacher!!!! He is all these things!

Ezra 7:6 He was a teacher. Ezra is the standard for a teacher in the entire Old Testament.

So, what does a teacher do?

According to Josephus, Ezra did final editing on the OT and created the canon.

Ezra 7:6 He was “well versed in the Law of Moses.

He was immersed in Scripture and knew large portions by heart.

Nehemiah 8:1-3 Ezra taught and preached for six hours! (daybreak until noon)

Neh 8:5 As Ezra read, the people honored the Word of God so much that they stood while it was being read!

Nehemiah 8:7-9 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning.

They did not just read and preach. They explained the meaning. Ezra was the first recorded hermeneutics person.

Nehemiah 8:18 Ezra taught from the Law of Moses every day!

Ezra 7:8 He arrives in the seventh year of Artaxerxes 558 BC

Ezra has returned and been restored. However, he is a teacher, not a king or an administrator.

Nehemiah is the one who will rebuild.

Ezra 7:10 He devoted himself to studying *and the observance* of the Scripture.

Ezra did not just study Scripture, his life exemplified it.

If your life does not agree with what you teach, you are disqualified from teaching!

James 3:1-2 Teachers are judged more strictly

In fact, the entire message of James is that our life must be aligned with what we say that we believe.

All of us will be teachers at some point.

Ezra 7:11-26 Letter of Artaxerxes.

Go back and restore and rebuild Jerusalem for me! v. 22 up to 6500 pounds of silver!!! (acc. to today’s price of silver, that is 2.5 million $)

v. 25 Artaxerxes recognized Ezra as a teacher. He tells him to share is faith with all the pagans/non-Jews and teach them the Bible.

Wow! God is working! What equivalent thing might he do in Merced for us?

This letter to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was written in the 7th year or Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:8), which is 458 BC.

Daniel 9:24-25 490 years from the decree for your people to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until the Anointed One, the ruler comes…. 458-490 = -32 (no year zero) = 33 AD

In this same letter, God is fulfilling a prophecy given to Daniel in 553 BC and is fulfilling his promise to restore and rebuild Jerusalem in Ezekiel 36 and many other passages.

God is really in control, and the Bible is really inspired by God!!!

Ezra 7:27-28 God moved the heart of Artaxerxes. God did it!

Ezra 8:1-14 Because of his relationship with God, he gathered men to go with him.

Ezra 8:21-23 Humble before God. Ask God for safe trip.

Ezra was so reliant on God, he was embarrassed to ask for military assistance. (Nehemiah didn’t mind asking the king). God used both. He answered!

Our weapons are not the weapons of the world.

Ezra 8:25 Artaxerxes, in the end, gave $21 million of silver (today’s value) $230 million of gold (today’s value)

Gary Simmons: Do not have a scarcity mentality. Have an abundance mentality. Think big. Be wise. Be prudent, but also be faithful. God will do crazy things, and that includes money.

Sacramento and Fresno, as examples.

Ezra 9:1-3 But… There is a problem.

Ezra 9:1-3 The people have not been faithful to God. They have intermarried. They have not separated themselves from the world.

v. 3 Ezra hated sin so much, he pulled out hair from his head and his beard.

Q: How would you describe Ezra’s response.

v. 4 “I sat there appalled.” Are you appalled at sin?? At unfaithfulness?

v. 4 Do you “tremble” at God’s words—specifically at his warnings about sin.

Some of us have too casual an attitude toward sin. Not Ezra!!!

Ezra 9:5-7 I am ashamed and disgraced (even though he was not the one doing it!!!) Look at the humility before God.

10:1-6 Ezra praying, confessing, weeping ,and throwing him down before the house of God.

Because of his example, the people wept bitterly as well.

Ezra 10:16-17 They investigated to see who was guilty of this sin of marrying outside the church.

Notice: List (v. 18-44) only has 111 people out of 42k (2:64): 0.26%.

But look at Ezra!

A quick glance at Nehemiah:

Nehemiah: God’s leader. Nehemiah and Joshua are the greatest leaders of God’s people in the Old Testament.

Ezra: The greatest teacher.

Nehemiah: The greatest leader.

Q: What are the traits that God’s leader ought to have? This is a very practical book. Not a lot of theology or doctrine.

Of course, this fits the theme of repenting, returning, being restored, and rebuilding. This is exactly what Nehemiah did. He repented (ch 1) returned (ch 2) restored and rebuilt (ch 3-6)

But for today, let’s just look at one aspect of Nehemiah’s spiritual life—his prayer life.

Nehemiah 1:5-11

See the humility.

Most importantly: Nehemiah 1:7 Notice: “We” (even though Nehemiah did none of those things)

Also note Neh 1:8 Nehemiah had been reading Deuteronomy 28-30 If we repent and return, then God will restore and rebuild.

Based on his conviction about sin, and his faith in God’s promises, Nehemiah acted!