**Repent, Return, Restore Rebuild**

**Post-Exilic Books**

**Sermon #1**

Here was your situation:

You were enslaved, in prison, captured, lost

How did you get here?

You rebelled/were disobedient

You went after other gods

You said that what God has for you is not enough.

What is the solution?

You need to first to Repent and then to Return

So that God can

Restore you to him and Rebuild your life.

Who is this story about?

It is about God’s people

It is about Judah

It is about each of us individually

It is about the Church

It is about any individual church

Outline of RRRR:

I. Historical Background: Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Ezekiel

II. Ezra Part I God Uses Cyrus and Darius

III. Haggai Repent and Rebuild

IV. Zechariah Repent, Return, Restore, Rebuild

V. Esther

VI. Ezra Part II God Uses Artaxerxes

VII. Nehemiah Return and Rebuild

VIII. Malachi Repent and Restore

Deut 30:1-10 This is the theme of the post-exilic books.

**30**When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, **2**and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, **3**then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+30%3A1-7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-5712a)] and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. **4**Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back.**5**He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.**6**The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

All this is found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (but we will use Jeremiah because we just did Ezekiel)

Jeremiah 2:4-13

v. 5 God: What fault did you find with me? Yet you strayed…

You followed worthless idols and became worthless.

You become as valuable at the things you follow.

God was not enough for you. Like Adam, you wanted more.Are you willing to accept what God gives you?

You (v. 6) and the priests (v. 8) do not ask “Where is the Lord?” I was not sophisticated enough to you. I did not appeal to your fancy. I became quaint to you.

2:11-13 Q: How do we become worthless? Answer: By seeking the blessings of the world rather than the blessings God offers. You exchanged God for worthless idols ($, job, pleasure, comfort, safety, praise of man, )

v. 11 Has a nation ever changed its gods? Even the pagans are at least loyal to their national deities! But not you!

v. 13 Q: Have you “dug your own cisterns”—looked for satisfying water elsewhere than in the living water from God?

Q: What was/has been your cistern?

Jeremiah’s message: 3:14-18 3:22 4:1-4 4:8

Return, Repent

3:14-18 Return and I will choose you. I will bring you back from the northern land and I will make a new covenant.

3:22 Return from backsliding. To backslide is not to leave God. It is to no longer do what you did before (evangelism, prayer, zeal, etc.). Sounds like Rev 2:1-7 Ephesus disciples lost their first love.

4:1-4 What “unplowed ground” do you need to break up? What area in your life have you allowed to become hard and unpenetrable to God’s Words?

The result: Disaster from the North (Babylon) 4:5,6 a lion = Babylon

Jeremiah 7:30-34 The Valley of Slaughter.

But… And this is the message of this sermon series

Ultimately, Jeremiah is a prophet of good news!!!!

Jeremiah 23:1-8 God will gather a remnant and place shepherds over them.

v. 5 a righteous branch. Notice, the Hebrew for branch is *nazer* so when Jesus is called the branch, this is fulfilled in that he is the “branch” of David/Jesse (Isaiah 11:1,10), but also in that he is a Nazarene.

About Matthew 2:23, I will have to say that this one gave me a problem for   
several years. I finally figured it out just a few years ago. In the Hebrew, the word Nazareth is *nazaret*,the same as the word branch. It is very interesting that God caused the Messiah, Jesus, to be raised in Nazareth because Nazareth means branch. There are several Old Testament passages which prophesy that the Messiah will be called the branch, which can also be interpreted as Nazarene. It is interesting and wonderful that Jesus was both the branch of Jesse and a Nazarene. This is one of hundreds of amazing pieces of evidence which proves conclusively that the entire Bible is inspired by God. The relevant passages are   
Isaiah 11:1,2 Jeremiah 23:5 Zechariah 3:8 and Zechariah 6:12. You should   
not be surprised that a Jewish person who r

v. 6 a king. The Lord our Righteousness.

v. 7-8 a double prophecy.

[Jeremiah 25:12-14 70 years Jer 29:10-14 70 years]

Jeremiah 30:1-11a

v. 3 I will restore you.

v. 9 They will serve David their king (Jesus)

v. 10 No matter how far you have wandered, you will return and rebuild.

The six books we will be studying are the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Application for us:

All this is about our relationship with God, as a church and individually. We, too, sinned and went into captivity. We, too, were protected while in captivity. We, too, ultimately repented, returned, were restored and rebuilt. Notice Ezek 36:24-32 is equally (or more so) about us. This story is our story. It is about our relationship with God.

**RRRR Sermon #2 Historical Introduction: Ezra Ch 1:**

Ezra 1:1-3 – In order to fulfill the prophecies in Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 29, Jeremiah 23 and 30…

Cyrus says it is time to repent, to return, to be restored to the land and to rebuild my city.

This really happened:

Cyrus Cylinder in British Museum in London -

“I returned the statues of the divine patrons of every land…to their own sanctuaries. When I found their sanctuaries in ruins, I rebuilt them. I also repatriated the people of these lands and rebuilt their houses. Finally, with Marduk’s permission, I allowed statues of the dive patrons of Sumer and Akkad to be returned to their own sanctuaries.”

This was all prophesied!!! When God decides, it happens!

Isaiah 44:6-8 Rhetorical question: Is there any god like me? Let them foretell like I do!

v. 9 The idols are nothing!!! Money is nothing! Jobs are nothing! Pleasure is nothing!

Isaiah 44:24-45:7 God says (in 710 BC) I will use Cyrus to do this!

v. 26 I will fulfill what I prophesy!

v. 26 It will be inhabited (return)

v. 26 rebuilt v. 48 Let it be rebuilt!!!

45:4-5 let my kingdom be restored! Cyrus mentioned some time before Hezekiah died in 698 (159 years before Cyrus captures Babylon)!

Is God awesome or what?

Ezra 1:1, 5, 6 - The Lord moved: the king, his people and their neighbors even helped them.

Ezra 1:7-8 Even the worldly people are helping God’s people to Return.

Get the vision! Crazy stuff will happen

Ezra 2:1 The first wave of those captive in Babylon returns. God is restoring his people to the land, as he restored us to him. Ezra 2:68-70 Time to rebuild.

Many freewill offerings. Catch the vision.

Ezra 3:1-6 Despite opposition, they begin to rebuild God’s kingdom by laying the foundation.

This is what we have done here. It is amazing. It is encouraging.

Ezra 3:7, 10-13 It was amazing. People came from Sacramento, SF, Fresno and even as far as LA to celebrate the great beginning.

But…

Ezra 4:1-5 Satan has not fallen asleep. Opposition will come.

v. 5 536-520 BC The work stopped.

Are we going to let that happen to us?

**Repent, Return, Restore Rebuild**

**Sermon #3**

**Haggai Sermon**

Background:

The “church” desperately needs revival.

520 BC A new Persian king, Darius, tells the Jews: Build the temple!

Ezra 6:1-12 This is embarrassing Darius is telling the Jews to finish the work that Cyrus had authorized. Get to work.

The purpose of Haggai and Zechariah is to see to the building of the temple.

Haggai a Jewish leader and a prophet. Haggai is the older of the two. He is the practical one. Zechariah is the visionary. We need both.

The Message of Haggai: Build up the house of the Lord, not your own house.

Submessage: Discouragement and persecution are not sufficient excuse to neglecting the work of the Lord.

Haggai 1:1-4

v. 1 In the second year of King Darius November, 520 BC

v. 2 “The time to build has not yet come.” We are too discouraged. We need to be strengthened first. The leadership is not what it needs to be. We do not have the budget. Covid has stopped us from sharing our faith. I am recovering from an illness. The economy is in deep trouble. I need to pay off my debts. I need to take care of my parents….

The Lord’s answer: v. 3 Hmmm…… This is very suspicious. You have been building up your own houses, yet you do not have the ability to build up my house?

When the church is doing well, we are fired up, but when things are not going so well, we use it as an excuse to attend to our own affairs.

Is it wrong to have paneled houses? Answer: Yes, if it means that the temple has no paneling!!! Yes, if it takes you away from the more important thing, which is building the temple.

“The temple” for us is the kingdom of God, but more specifically the local church.

Is it wrong to pursue an advanced degree? Is it wrong to put an addition on your house? Is it wrong to move to another city simply for a better job? Answer: Maybe. If it means abandoning the work on the temple, probably yes!

Haggai 1:5-11

v. 5 Give careful thought to your ways. How has it been going lately? What has your life produced?

You planted much, but harvested only a little. Why might that be?

You eat, but never have enough.

You drink, but always seem thirsty.

You earn money, but never have enough.

Why? You sought personal wealth and gain. You received the opposite. If you want blessings in your life (Q: Who here wants blessings?) It is through giving first to the building of God’s house.

“Indifference to the things of God produces calamity.”

v. 7 Again: Give careful thought to your life/ways.

Pause: Let’s do that right now.

Haggai 1:9 “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little.” Can anyone relate?

v. 9 Why? “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.”

What are you busy with? Covid gave us an excuse to retreat into our caves. Well… It is time to come out.

v. 10-11 God will withhold blessings if it will help us to repent, return, be restored and have the temple rebuilt.

So, what should we do? V. 8 “Go up into the mountain and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.”

Application??? Share your faith. Study the Bible with people. Start a HOPE program on your own. Sponsor a Bible group in your home. Use your gifts to serve God’s people and the lost.

To the men: We are builders. We also need to take care of our families. I get it. God gets it! But… You can NEVER use that as an excuse for not building God’s house—for being involved in helping the church to grow. What have you done lately?

Zechariah 1:12-15. So the people set to work building the temple!

Zerubbabel: governor/royal family

Joshua: priest

Haggai: prophet Unified. Prophet, priest and “king” all worked together.

(Jesus is prophet, priest and king, and in Zechariah he will join the three)

v. 13 God says to us, I am with you!!! That is what I want! That’s what I want to hear! I am actively blessing you.

They wanted blessings, but they had forgotten how to get them.

Haggai 2:1-9 and 15-23 But we will get discouraged along the way, so God provides encouragement for doing the work.

Haggai 2:1-5

God knows that doing the work can be tiring and discouraging. God knows that we can be discouraged by the size of the task and by our limited resources.

v. 3. This new temple seems puny. We remember the glory days. Our self-image is taking a nose dive here. 150 in the campus group in Boulder. We planted churches. Everyone was planning on going on a mission team.

v 4,5 Be strong, Michael. Be strong, Monida. Be strong, Jeff and Nana. Be strong, Kevin, Katie and Andres! This is what I covenanted with you.

v. 4 My spirit is with you just like it was in the glory days. Do not fear. Whether the beginnings are big or small means nothing to God. We can do amazing things if we will put off our materialism, do the work of the temple and rely on God. Do not be deceived by the outward circumstances.

Last January Jan and I were discouraged. Gal 6:9 Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due time…

Haggai 2:6-9 I love 2:6 “In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry lands.”

Let’s say it together out loud!!! “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. Do you believe it?

v. 7 All nations will come. A kingdom prophecy. If we repent, return….

v. 8 The silver and the gold….. the things you are giving up to the temple…. The things all your neighbors think is valuable. They are mine. The money will be there. We will have a building soon.

Oh, and I love v. 9 as well….

The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.

We will plant a church in Stockton in 2025. Who is willing to go?

We will have to raise up leaders to replace those who go! We will have to raise money to support the work. Who here will help to build the temple?

Historical side note. If you look at the temple, you might not agree, but the second temple period was far more spiritual and glorifying to God than the first temple period. Idolatry was virtually eliminated.

[Side note: Haggai 2:10-14 When a pure thing touches an unclean thing it becomes unclean, but when an unclean thing touches a pure thing it does not become pure. Sin is catching! Salvation is not by osmosis.]

Haggai 2:15-23

v. 15 Consider how you started. Four members. No baptisms for 9 months. Eight at church. No singles group, no teen group, discouraged, barely hanging in there.

Not to be negative, but…

v. 17 I was not blessing you.

v. 18 From this day on. June 25, 2023, From this day I will bless you.

v. 21 I am going to shake the heavens. Dozens at first, but then literally hundreds will come to this church. You will plant churches, not only in Merced, but also in Stockton, Modesto and Visalia. You will build a teen ministry, a singles ministry and a marrieds ministry. Your HOPE projects will be known all over the Central Valley.

v. 23 On that day, you will be my signet ring.

The end of the story:

Ezra 6:13-15 516 BC The temple was completed. Almost exactly 70 years after it was destroyed in 586 BC. God is great!!!

Give careful thought to your ways. Have you been giving great effort to building up God’s house? Has God been blessing you as you had hoped?

Let’s go up into the hills, bring down wood, and, with the blessing of God, let’s build God’s house here in Merced.Will you join us in the work?

**Zechariah I The Messiah Is Coming: Get Your House In Order**

**Or… Repent, Return, Restore, Rebuild IV**

Dated prophecies: Nov. 520 BC – Dec 518 BC

Contemporary of Haggai

Zechariah is apocalyptic—vivid symbolic visions.

Zechariah has many predictive prophecies, both messianic and kingdom prophecies as well. More per verse than any in the Bible except Daniel.

Context: Jerusalem is in ruins. Judah has been punished for her idolatry and God is trying to restore them to their past glory. The foundation for the temple has been built. But the exiles who returned from the captivity have stopped work on the temple to build their “paneled houses.” (Haggai) There is serious need for a revival.

Put yourself into this situation personally and put us there as a church post-Covid.

Theme of Zechariah: The Messiah is coming; get your house in order.

Message of Zechariah: It is time to build the temple. Repent, Return, Restore, and Rebuild God’s kingdom a constant theme.

Similar to Haggai, but the style is very different. Haggai: Practical In-your-face.

Go out into the hills, bring down wood and build my house. Repent. Get off your butt and build the temple, you lazy, thankless people.

Zechariah: much more subtle.

Q: Is your (spiritual) house ready for guests right now? If Jesus knocked on your spiritual door, would you secretly be scurrying around, putting everything which is out of order into order so as to create the (false) impression that everything is in order?

What if your spiritual mother-in-law showed up unexpectedly? Zechariah: Are you ready for Jesus to come back?

**Outline of Zechariah:**

I. 1:1-6 Prologue: Repent, Return, Restore and Rebuild

II. 1:7-6:8 Eight visions. Highly apocalyptic, not so prophetic

III. 6:9-15 Coronation of Joshua/Jesus A prophetic apocalyptic vision.

IV 7:1-8:23 Two Sermons

V. 9:1-14:21 Two Oracles concerning Jerusalem. More prophetic, messianic, less apocalyptic.

**I. Prologue**

Zechariah 1:1 November, 520 BC

The situation: The temple lies in ruins because the people had sinned. They had lost their place with God. The temple—the means by which God dwelt among you, has been destroyed.

The situation: Your life lay in ruins because you had sinned. You had lost your place with God.

1:2-6 Repent!

v. 2 God so angry with their forefathers. When he called them to repent, they stubbornly refused to do so.

V. 3 What is the solution? Repent and return Return to me so I can return to you.

Then I will restore you to me and your life/temple will be rebuilt. (prodigal son)

Q: Do you need to repent and return? How so? If you do, you will be restored to God and he will rebuild your life.

v. 4 Do not be like them… turn

v. 4-6 What is God saying here? These faithless Jews are no longer around, but my Words are still around and what I decree will happen, will happen.

I didn’t move, you did!

v. 6 Whether we repent and return to God or not, one thing will never change—the Word of God.

v 6. Good news. They repented and rebuilt the temple. What about you? Are you building God’s temple? The temple was actually completed in April, 516 BC. They repented, returned, were restored and were rebuilt.

Zechariah 1:1-6 tells us the end of the story before it tells us the story. The rest of the book is like a flashback.

**II. Eight Visions**

We will cover visions # 1,2,4,5 today.

Zechariah 1:7-17 The first vision: A messenger on a red horse. (very similar to Revelation Ch 6)

v. 11 The world is at peace. A good thing? Not in this case. Jews are in captivity to Persia.

v. 12 How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem? When will you restore my people to you? You have withheld your mercy for 70 years! (as prophesied in Jeremiah 25:8-15, Jeremiah 29:10-14. God has great plans for you personally, individually, and for us as a church, but if we continue in sin, he will bring judgment on us. For them it was 70 years.

Zech 1:14-17 God is upset. Why? because Jerusalem is still not restored.

God is jealous for you.

God, jealous? You bet. If you go after other gods, he is very jealous. He is angry at what Satan has done to enslave you.

v. 16-17 This, in essence, is the theme of Zechariah. God is restoring his kingdom. A kingdom prophecy.

Jews: He will rebuild the temple, and, later the city in safety (measuring line)

For us: The Messiah is coming: Get your house in order!

v. 16 God: I will return to Jerusalem and rebuild my house! Do not look at outward appearances. Wherever the church or your life is at. God will return with mercy.

Application: If your situation or church seems stagnant, do not look at the outward appearance. God can and will work in your life.

Will you let God in? Will you repent and return, so he can restore and rebuild. The Messiah is coming. Time to get your house in order.

1:18-21 Vision #2: The vision of four horns.

The four horns are four nations which scattered Israel. Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and Persia. The message: God used these nations to judge his people. Now they will get their come-uppance: God will judge these nations. Trust in God.

Skipping Vision #3 for now. We will do kingdom prophecies next week.

3:1-10 Vision #4 Joshua (the high priest) accused by Satan and exonerated.

3:1-2 Q: Who does Joshua represent here? Joshua = Jeshua in Hebrew = Jesus in Aramaic. This is a vision concerning Jesus himself.

Zech 3:3-10 The symbolism could be a bit confusing here.

Is this about Joshua and Judah in the year 520 BC? Yes

Is this about the Messiah? Yes

Is this about us and about the church? Yes

In case you were not sure: The branch (3:8,9) is Jesus. (Jeremiah 23:5, Jer 33:15-16) The Messiah is coming to Jerusalem!!!

v. 2 What do we see about Satan here? He is trying to prevent you from repenting and returning so that God cannot restore and rebuild. He is trying to discourage you.

Are you accused (Zech 3:2, Rev 12:10) Or are you the deceived type (Jn 8:44)?

Rev 12:10 “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them day and night has been hurled down.”

Q: What would Satan say to you? What would he accuse you of? What would he deceive you about?

It is too hard.

You can’t do it.

You have failed again and again. Your time is up.

God does not really love you. He is trying to use you.

You are a failure. God cannot love you.

Everything you start, you fail to finish. It is better to not even try.

v. 2 God’s response: The Lord Rebuke you!

Let’s say that together!!!

v. 3-5 I have good news for you. God will take off your filthy clothes when you are baptized and clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27 For all of us who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ)

v. 4 fine garments. A wonderful life A great ambassador for Christ.

v. 5 I am not so sure about a clean turban…

v. 6-7 God: But this will only happen if you will repent and return, I will restore and rebuild.

v. 8-9 The Messiah is coming. Get your house in order.

3:10 Have you invited your neighbor to sit under your vine by sharing your life and faith with him yet?

4:1-16 Vision #5 My personal favorite of the eight.

4:1-6 What is he seeing? The golden lampstand with a bowl and seven lamps and the two olive trees.

He is seeing, figuratively, the Mehorah in the temple, with an olive tree on either side.

Oil = the Spirit of God = Holy Spirit (Heb 1:9, etc)

Memory verse: Zechariah 4:6. Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.

The twin olive trees represent the permanent, unending, river of power which can flow into our lives if we remain tapped into God.

If we live out vision #4, then we will experience vision #5 When we repent and are baptized, God gives us the Holy Spirit.

How does this make you feel? John 7:37-39 “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me (whoever repents and returns), as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

Streams of living water!

Get the picture.

What Scripture is Jesus talking about here? Zechariah 14for one!!!! (Ezek 47)

Vision #5 is how God will complete what he promised in vision #4.

But will you do your part?

Zechariah 4:7-14

v. 7 The capstone is Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10,11)] Jesus will do this.

v. 8 the work will be completed under governor Zerubbabel.

4:10 Do not worry about small beginnings. Got it!!!

Stressed? Harried? Worried? Think about the two olive trees and the seven lamps!!!

4:12-14 The two trees, are symbolically, the priesthood and the kingship/governorship, which were combined forever in Jesus Christ. Jesus is priest and king! (Messiah is Hebrew for annointed).

Summary:

The Messiah is Coming: Get your house in order.

God wants to rebuild the temple.

The key? Repent and Return and God will restore and rebuild.

He will make your garments spotless—as white as snow.

But you need to repent and return.

He will fill you with an endless supply of oil—the Holy Spirit.

Will you not repent and return so that you can get your spiritual house in order?

**RRRR #5 Zechariah Sermon #2**

**Your Kingdom Come**

Kingdom Prophecies in Zechariah:

Zech 2:1-13

Zechariah 6:9-15

[Zechariah 8:1-7] not covered this morning

Zechariah 9:10-13

[Zech 12:1-9] not covered this morning

Zechariah 13:1-6 On that day…. Pentecost.

Zechariah 14:1-25

And more….

**I. Zechariah 2:1-13 Vision #3 The man with a measuring line.**

God will make his kingdom into a city without walls.

The church will become very great and will spread across the world. God will protect his kingdom like a flame around a wall-less city.

2:1-2 Q: What is measuring a city about? Rev 11:1-6. Ezekiel 38:7-16 It is about relying on God, not on ourselves, for our protection and security.

We should not rely on statistics, on tactics, on our hard work, on our government. We should rely on God.

Our weapons are not the weapons of the world, and in a worldly battle we would lose. Love does not stop bullets.

2 Cor 10:3-4 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

2:3-5 No walls. We don’t need them.

v. 5 God is our wall!

Question: Is God your wall, or is your 401K your wall?

What are the worldly “walls” we tend to build to protect us from the troubles of life?

We do not buy guns to protect us against our enemies.

We do not try to intimidate or manipulate those we disagree with. We love them

Worldly weapons: Looking out for #1. Physical and emotional walls.

2:6 Repent and return! The “North” is Babylon/captivity. We were all once in the “North.”

Only come back, escape Babylon (sin) and come into my city (the kingdom of God). This scripture is being fulfilled before our very eyes in this day.

Last week Flo and Andres fled from the land of the North.

Come, Zion! Come, Destiny!

They repented and returned. God is restoring and rebuilding.

2:8 How does it feel to be the “apple” of God’s eye?

Illustration: Like the bullies at school surrounding you, but then your dad walked in. You are the apple of his eye. No problem.

2:10-13 Kingdom prophecy. I will live among you (in the form of the Holy Spirit) Many nations (v. 11) Be in awe of what God is doing. Close parallel here with Ezek 36:24-38 and Ezek 37:11-14

Let us keep our world vision. Let us begin to support world missions here in Merced.

I went to Haiti and the Dominican Republic in August, as well as Ghana, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire and Senegal in Feb and March.

Pray for your brothers and sisters in Congo, Indonesia, Mongolia, Brazil,…

5:1-4 Vision #6. The flying Scroll. 30’ x 15’ scroll!

Judgment on sinners and the enemies of God’s people.

5:5-11 Vision #7 The woman in a basket. Judgment on sinners.

She is being taken to Babylon/captivity. (where Judah went when she sinned)

Similar to Revelation 17

6:1-8 Vision #8 The four chariots. Judgment! (again)

See Revelation 6:2-7 for a parallel passage about judgment on sinners and on the enemies of God’s people

These three visions in summary: God has your back!

**II. Zechariah 6:9-15 The Coronation Scene**

v. 11 Set a crown on high priest Joshua. Wait a minute… High priests do not wear crowns. Kings do.

v. 12 This is a messianic prophecy. A new high priest will reign as king. He is called branch/nazer. He is the Nazarene. He is Jesus.

He will build a temple v. 13 He will be a priest on a throne. That is our Jesus!!!

He is the perfect high priest, who knows the language of God and the language of people. Hebrews 4:15-16. Heb 5:8-10.

He (Jesus) is the temple-builder. John 1:18 He came and tabernacled among us. We beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only Son of God.

He is building a great temple. Ephesians 2:19-22.

v. 15 Those who are far away will come.

Some of you were VERY far away, but here you are. God is building you into a temple! How does that make you feel?

v. 15b And you get to help build that temple. What part of the temple are you working on?

Daisy building the north wall.

Michael building the south parapet of the temple.

Jan helping to set the cornerstone in place.

Zech 7 & 8 Two sermons.

III. Zechariah 9:9-17 A kingdom prophecy.

Read Zech 9:9-13

Zech 9:9 fulfilled on “Palm Sunday” when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Zech 9:10 No more chariots, no more war horses, the battle bow broken.

King Jesus will bring victory without war. Remember, the weapons of the kingdom of God are not the weapons of the world.

v. 10 God will proclaim peace to all the nations.

And like Jesus told his followers in Acts 1:8 Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

“The River” is the Euphrates River.

9:11 By the blood of Jesus, we were freed from a waterless pit.

What waterless pit were you freed from?

9:13 Judah (Judea) → Ephraim (Samaria) → Greece That is exactly how the church spread. A very specific prophecy.

9:13 Judah/The Church will be bent like a bow. God will use us to do great things. He will prepare us for spiritual battle.

Read Zech 9:14-17

9:14 A kingdom prophecy cont. Doesn’t this contradict 9:10? Is God a God of peace? Isn’t Jesus the prince of peace? Matthew 10:34-36

God’s desire is for peace and the Kingdom is a place of peace, but with the world there will be war because the kingdom of God is at war with the world (spiritually). Only in heaven will there be complete peace.

Victory for God’s people in apocalyptic language.

9:16 We will sparkle!!!

9:17 We will be attractive and beautiful

What will be the grain and new wine for you? How will God make you thrive?

Next: Let’s just read Zechariah 14—the ultimate kingdom prophecy. Like Matthew 24, it is about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, it is about the church, and, most of all, it is about final judgment and the establishment of the New Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:1 This is a Day of the Lord.

From the Isaiah class:

**The Day of the Lord is “The moment when Jehovah grasps the reigns, which he seems to have held slackly before, when the currents of his moral rule, which have been running sluggishly, receive a mysterious quickening, and the Lord’s work on the earth is at last fully performed.”**

The Day of the Lord is a day that God’s kingdom comes with power to build up or to destroy.

Zechariah 14:1-7 This is primarily about AD 70 when God came and judged the Jews who had refused to accept the coming of their Messiah.

v. 5 As prophesied, The Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella to escape Rome.

Zech 14:8-11 But God will raise up his church, and living water—the Holy Spirit will flow.

v. 9 God will be king of this kingdom. Jerusalem—the Church—will be raised up.

v. 10-11 Jerusalem—the Church will be raised up (v. 10) and secure (v. 11).

Geba at the northern extremity of Judah to Rimmon at the southern extremity of Judah. The Arabah is a large, flat, and very fertile area.

The Church will be a mountain lifted above a plain. It will be lifted up by God, it will prosper and it will be secure.

v. 12-21 Finally, god will come and he will judge the nations. Remember that this is apocalyptic imagery. Do not try to take this literally.

v. 12-15 Those who chose not to be with God in this earth, will be without God in the end.

v. 16 God used Feast of Tabernacle imagery here.

This was a celebration of God dwelling with his people in the wilderness.

This is about Jesus who is God-with-us. Emmanuel.

v. 18 But those who decided not to attend the Feast of Tabernacles in this life will be shut out for eternity.

My suggestion: Let’s attend the Christian Feast of Tabernacles by worshipping Jesus, and celebrating God-with-us Emmanuel and the Holy Spirit who is also God-with-us. [Note: Matthew starts with God-with-us Matt 1:23 and ends with God-with-us Matthew 28:20 surely I am with you always]

v. 20 For those of us with God in his eternal city. We will be holy to the Lord.

Even the pots and the bells will be holy!!!

v. 21 No more merchants. God’s enemies will be shut out of the kingdom for eternity.

Summary:

The kingdom of God is a city without walls, as God is our protection.

It is a place where God lives among his people, and to which all nations come.

It is a place where priest and king are one in Christ.

The ruler of that kingdom is a perfect high priest who mediates for us before God day and night.

The kingdom is a temple being built by God, but using human hands to do the construction.

It is a place where those who were very distant are brought near.

It is a place where peace reigns because of the blood of Jesus.

It is a place where people in a waterless pit now have rivers of living water flowing through their lives.

It is a place where we will sparkle.

It is a place in which, at the end, we will dwell with God forever in an eternal Feast of Tabernacles.

**RRRR VI Zechariah III On That Day**

Read Zech 7:1-3

7:1 4th year of Darius 518 BC Temple has been started but not yet completed. People of Bethel come to ask a question.

v. 3 Should I mourn? Do you detect an attitude. Do I haavvveee to fast? (note: for so many years) Do I haaavvvveee to serve the poor, to share my faith, to go to Bible group, etc. Do I haaaavvvvveee to go to midweek? Do I haaavvvveeee to wear modest dress, even in the summer?

Child: Do I haaaavvvvveeee to clean my room?

God: Wrong question!

There were three fasts begun as a remembrance of God’s punishment on Judah:

1. The 5th month: to remember the destruction of the temple in 586.

2. The 7th month: to remember the assassination of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:25)

3. The 10th month: to remember the capture of Jerusalem in 597.

Their question is, to some extent, a good question. Now that the temple is well on the way to being completed, does it even make sense to continue to mourn over the earlier destruction of Solomon’s temple.

God’s response Zech 7:4-7

Should we stop fasting in the fifth month?

v. 5 Was it really for me that you fasted?

v. 6 You were feasting for yourselves.

Religion can be about self. What about you?

Are you religious or are you worshipping and glorifying God?

God: You were doing it as a hypocrite anyway, so what use were your fasts?

God: Give me your heart, not your religion. This is not an uncommon biblical teaching. God will judge the heart before he judges the actions.

[Psalm 51:15-19. Note v. 19 THEN you will delight in the sacrifices and burnt offerings. God wants our devotion, but it must come from a broken and contrite heart.

Like Samuel said to Jesse, father of David. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. 1 Sam 16:7

Zech 7:8-10 God’s solution to legalistic religion: *Act like God* (Exodus 34:6-7). Show social justice.

Zech 7:9-10 is a great memory verse.

Are you struggling with lack of motivation in your walk with God? Solution: Go out and help a needy person. Practice social justice. Go visit an older person. Volunteer to help at the campus retreat. Make dinner and bring it to your neighbor.

Q: Did God answer their question? No!!! Why not? Because it was an insincere question. It was a smoke screen. Do you want God to answer your question about this job, this purchase, this plan? Make sure he has your heart first.

Church: What do you think? Did he tell them to continue the fast on the 5th month?

[By the way: God’s answer to their question is found in Zech 8:18-19 No. Stop fasting. It is time to celebrate. But I am not going to tell you.]

Zechariah 7:11-14 God’s answer for now.

What you need to do is to repent and not act like your earlier countrymen

v. 14 Look where it got them!

Zech 7:13 “When I called, they would not listen; so when they called I would not listen.”

Hold on to that thought.

We say: God is not hearing my prayers. God is not listening to me!

v. 14

Q: How has your life been working for you lately? You have been listening to God’s voice, showing mercy and compassion, helping the foreigner and the poor, reaching out to the lost, encouraging the weak? Good.

If not:

Like Mark Wilkinson would say: “How’s that working for you?”

Remember, God still has not answered their question. (8:18-19)

The second sermon.

Zech 8:1-9 The Messiah will come to Jerusalem. Remember lesson #1 Repent, Return, Restore, Rebuild.

8:1-2 God can’t wait for it to happen. I am jealous for my people until the temple is built. God is zealous. Are we?

God says to his people, after you repent, you will be restored to me and I will rebuild Zion.

v. 3 I will return to you. We are the “city of truth (or Faithful City).” What a thought. This prophecy was partially fulfilled in April, 516 BC when the temple was completed, but to a fuller extent in about 30 AD when Jesus came to Jerusalem.

We are (or should be) the City of Truth—the Faithful City. That is the kingdom of God.

v. 4 men and women of ripe old age…. Each with a cane in hand… Safety security (like the vision of the measuring line).

Q: Is he talking about restored Judah and Jerusalem or is he talking about the church? (v. 7 from the countries of the east and the west)

v. 9 (like Haggai) Folks, let’s build the temple!

When God calls, let’s listen. Let’s go and start a Bible talk in Turlock. Let’s give generously so the work here can thrive. Let’s start a singles ministry! Let’s plant a church in Stockton.

Zech 8: 10-23

v. 12 The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit. Get the picture!

v. 16 What should we do, practically, to make this happen?

Speak the truth in love to one another. Be in each other’s lives.

And Act justly to one another.

v. 19 The official answer: stop fasting! Celebrate being in the kingdom. Like Jesus’ disciples vs. John’s disciples. John’s disciples were fasting but Jesus’ disciples were celebrating.

It is time to party, folks!!!

v. 20-23 Did this happen at the time of the restoration? Not exactly. It is about the church.

God will bless our evangelism v. 23. A great Bible group. 10:1 visitors!

Last week: 6-7 workers on campus got 70 phone #s. Imagine what August and September are going to look like!

Bonus Material: On That Day

Zech 12:10-14. A prophecy about the Messiah and about the church.

Pour out spirit = Acts 2: Pentecost. Joel 2:28-31

pierced = the sword in Jesus’ side John 19:31-37. V. 10 Note, God says, “they will look on ***me***” Here we see the deity of Jesus.

12:11 Hadad Rimmon This is where Josiah, the most righteous of all the kings of Judah, and the last good king, was killed in battle in 609 BC and where there was great mourning in the land. (2 Kings 23:29-30, 2 Chron 35:24-25 Jeremiah composed a lament for this occasion).

When Jesus dies and his apostles abandon him it will be a time of great mourning, but…..

13:1-6 Further prophecies about the kingdom of God.

v. 1. **On that day**… The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-41)

Folks: the fountain is open. The waters of baptism are awaiting. We can be or already are fully cleansed.

Remember that day for yourself. Or anticipate it and make it happen.

v. 2-6 I will bring prophecy to an end. Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke through the prophets… but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son. This is a specific prophecy that prophecy will cease in the church age.

The Bible will be brought to completion. No more new revelation.

Zechariah 14:1 This is a Day of the Lord.

From the Isaiah class:

**The Day of the Lord is “The moment when Jehovah grasps the reigns, which he seems to have held slackly before, when the currents of his moral rule, which have been running sluggishly, receive a mysterious quickening, and the Lord’s work on the earth is at last fully performed.”**

The Day of the Lord is a day that God’s kingdom comes with power to build up or to destroy. This passage is like Matthew 24 and Luke 21, which is both about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, but also about the second coming of Christ.

Zech 14:1-7 This is primarily about AD 70 when God came and judged the Jews who had refused to accept the coming of their Messiah.

v. 5 As prophesied, The Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella to escape Rome.

Zech 14:8-11 But God will raise up his church, and living water—the Holy Spirit will flow.

On That Day God will be king of this kingdom. Jerusalem—the Church—will be raised up.

v. 10-11 Jerusalem—the Church will be secure.

v. 12-21 On That Day Finally, God will come and he will judge the nations.

Those who chose not to be with God in this earth, will be without God in the end.

v. 16 God used Feast of Tabernacle imagery here.

This was a celebration of God dwelling with his people in the wilderness.

v. 18 On That Day But those who decided not to attend the Feast of Tabernacles in this life will be shut out for eternity.

v. 20 On That Day For those of us with God in his eternal city. We will be holy to the Lord.

v. 21 No more merchants. God’s enemies will be shut out of the kingdom for eternity.

Should I mourn and fast?

Maybe. Actually, you should celebrate because a fountain has been opened.

But…When God calls, listen. Then when you call, God will listen.

Let your hands be strong and start building. In that day ten people will take hold of your hand and come to God.

On that Day, we will be celebrating an eternal Feast of Tabernacles with God.

So maybe a fast is appropriate, but let’s come together, let’s listen to God.

Let’s repent and return, then God will restore and rebuild.

RRRR VII Esther I

**Notes on Book of Esther:**

Only book in the Bible to not mention God.

Only book not found in Dead Sea Scrolls.

Yet (to quote a famous Bible scholar Gary Simmons, “God is everywhere in the book.”

Probably included by the Jews because it is the motivation for the festival Purim.

Purim is a festival celebrating the salvation of the Jews from a Persian pogrom/mass execution under Xerxes and Haman by the saving act of Esther.

Today and next week, I will do what the Jews do for Purim, which is read (nearly) the entire book.

Theme #1 of Esther: God is in control. He is always working behind the scenes to save his people.

Theme #2 of Esther: God uses a righteous woman to save a remnant of Israel.

There is messianic significance to Esther, as Esther is a prefigure of the Messiah, because, like Jonah, like Moses she offers her life to save God’s people from death.

Esther 1:1-3 From India to Cush - largest empire in the world at that time! 127 provinces

3rd year of Xerxes’ (485-465 BC) reign 482 BC. Xerxes the Great, son of Darius the Great. He is the emperor who won the Battle of Thermopylea (famous from the movie 300) in 480 BC, 55 yrs after 1st return from captivity (Cyrus)

The temple was rebuilt in 516 BC, but the city has no walls! Where’s God? People scattered / unfocused / limbo / stuck. Been there? Christian for 15 / 25 yrs, but in a rut.

They have partially repented and partially returned, and God has partially restored and partially rebuilt. Esther is a photo of the situation between Ezra Part I, Haggai and Zechariah and Ezra Part II, Nehemiah and Malachi

Esther 1:4-12 Vashti refuses Xerxes. She is beautiful, but also prideful.

Esther 1:13-22 The queen’s conduct will become known to all the women… All women will disrespect their husbands. This is all worldly thinking, but there is some wisdom here. Vashti deposed as queen.

Esther 2:1-7

Xerxes furious. Not exactly Christian behavior.

v. 4 Xerxes: I get to choose the most sexy and alluring girl in the kingdom. Sure!

Our two protagonists: Esther (Hadassah), who is very beautiful and Mordecai Esther’s cousin (Esth 2:15) /foster parent. Mordecai great grandson of Kish who was carried into exile in 597 BC. Both names come from pagan Persian gods Mordecai/Marduk, Esther/Ishtar. Way out of their comfort zone in exile. Where is God is all this?

Esther 2:8-14 Esther is prepared to meet Xerxes. How does she feel? Honored or scared to death? A young girl ripped whose parents have died, ripped from her family and her people to be paraded in front of a lecherous king.

v. 9 God is watching over Esther.

V. 10 Notice her submissiveness to Mordecai. She is young and inexperienced, but she is a humble and righteous woman.

2:15-18 v. 16 Four years after the scene with Vashti.

Esther is very humble. Xerxes chooses her. God is in control.

God is always working, even in very stressful and dangerous times, even if we cannot see it.

2:19-23 Esther keeps her nationality secret. Being Jewish was a risky thing. Esther submissive to Mordecai. Mordecai happens to overhear a conversation. Uncovers a plot to assassinate Xerxes and saves his live. (by the way, Xerxes was assassinated in 564 BC)

Again, God is in control. God is working. Faith is belief in things unseen.

Can you see God working behind the scenes is subtle and surprising ways in your life?

Here we see God working behind the scenes to save his people. This is biblical predestination. But Mordecai gets no credit and favor from Xerxes.

Esther 3:1-4 Enter the villain, Haman! Totally prideful. Chief minister to Xerxes. Mordecai, the Jew refuses to bow to Haman.

In this messianic story, Haman is Satan. He is the equivalent of Pharaoh in the story of Moses or Herod is the story of Jesus.

Esther 3:5-15 Haman conceives a plot to commit genocide on the Jews in Persia!!! If we are different from those around us, non-Christians might not appreciate that! Jews under a death penalty.

There is an analogy to the Jews in Egypt whom he saves through Moses (who willingly left the palace to save the Jews), to sailors on the boat with Jonah (who willingly offered his life to save the Gentiles), but also to us who were dead in our sins.

God’s solution: He sends a Savior/Messiah prefigure Esther who will willingly offer her life to save the Jews.

But remember Zechariah 2:1-13 God has measured Jerusalem and the Jews. “Jerusalem will be a city without walls.” God will take care of his people if we repent and return to him. Or remember Zechariah 12:2-5.

Esther 4:1-8 Mordecai learns of the decree. Calls out to God to help his people.

Mordecai does two things: 1. He prays—calling on God. 2. He takes action. He does not just sit around waiting for God to do something.

Illustration: That time at CU getting housing….

Esther 4:9-11 Apparently, there was a law of the Persians that anyone who came into the king’s presence without being asked could be summarily executed.

Esther: Do you realize what you are asking me? You are asking me to move to Bakersfield! You are asking me to change careers to help the kingdom. You are asking me to not go to Montreal. You are asking me to change my major to one that I can use to serve God.

Esther 4:12-17 Esther is in a tough spot. It reminds me of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

v. 14 A famous verse.

Look at Mordecai’s faith. Faith is belief in things not seen. Heb 11:1 God is always working, even when we cannot see it—even when things seem to be going totally against us.

Mordecai challenges Esther. Maybe God put you in this position for a purpose.

American: Maybe God put you in the wealthiest country in the world for a reason.

College graduate: Maybe God allowed you to get that degree for a reason.

Athlete: Maybe God made you athletic so that he can use you to do something great.

Beautiful woman: Maybe God made you beautiful for a reason.

God will find a way to save people here in Merced. Hopefully, He will use us, but if we are not faithful, He will find another way. Daisy, maybe sent you to Merced for such a time as this.

v. 14 So, will you remain silent at this time?

v. 16 If I perish, I perish. I love Esther’s faith here!!!

Wow! This little girl that Mordecai raised is taking a stand for what’s right! Isn’t that what we hope with our children? When faced with dilemmas, they will have such confidence in the invisible God! Impress it on them .

More important: exemplify it!

Esther is like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Willing to give their lives for the honor of God and to save God’s people.

Are you in a situation that requires much faith and belief that God is in control, despite all appearances? Lost a job? Lost a loved one? Spouse unfaithful? Broken relationship? Bad health diagnosis?

God is always working, even if we cannot see it.

Esther 5:1-8. Notice: On the 3rd day. 1 Cor 15:4 (like Abraham, like Jonah)

Esther fasts 3 days, waits outside the door.

Sure, she is faithful, but she is also very nervous.

Xerxes sees her and holds out his scepter to her. (whew!!!)

This = God sending a ram to save Isaac from death—also on the 3rd day.

Esther: Let me put on a banquet for the king, and invite Haman. Xerxes: What do you want—even up to half my kingdom. God is totally in control!!!!

Esther to put on a second banquet. What faith!!!!

Esther 5:9-14 God intervenes again.

Haman is so confident! Satan was sure that he had eliminated the problem of Jesus.

But then Haman sees Mordecai, not bowing, and vows to ask Xerxes to impale Mordecai on a pole. (the parallel to Jesus, also impaled on a pole is significant here) A foreshadow of the cross of Jesus. God is working behind the scenes.

Esther 6:1-3 Again, God is working behind the scenes. Xerxes cannot sleep. Reading the record of reign.

What did he find? The story of Mordecai saving his life.

God’s providence at work here.

Esther 6:4-9 Who just so happened to enter the court? Haman.

Xerxes: How should I honor the one who saved my life?

Haman: Put a royal robe on him and put him on a horse you have ridden.

v. 7 Irony: He is assuming Xerxes is talking about himself.

Esther 6:10-14 Xerxes: Put a robe on Mordecai!

The world expects honor and glory. This is what Haman wanted!!!, but the honor and glory will go to God’s people on judgment day.

Message: Do not seek honor and glory for yourself, but for God and he will lift you up in due time (James 4:17)

v. 12 Afterward, Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. Did not seek any special honor.

Esther 7:1-10 (Read v. 2-6)

You know the rest of the story. Haman was impaled on the pole intended for Mordecai.

This is a story about what God will do to those who are faithful to Him and those who are prideful and do not obey Him.

Esther 8-9 Xerxes allows the Jews to defend themselves and their enemies are destroyed.

The Jews created Purim as a festival to commemorate their salvation. God is big on holidays and parties. Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Yom Kippur, Purim, Hanukkuh. Let’s celebrate the victories God gives us.

Lessons from Esther:

God is in control. God is always working behind the scenes and he will use those who will faithfully trust in him.

God blesses faithfulness, but also humility. Neither Esther, nor Mordecai sought great position, but God gave it to them. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5-6 …that he may lift you up.

Last: Esther is a prefigure of the Messiah. She was a queen, she, nevertheless, willingly offered her life to save the Jews. God is saving a remnant.

**RRRR VIII Ezra Part II**

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. 15 That is why the city was destroyed (because they rebelled against Satan/the world). Not true. It is because they rebelled against God and relied on the world.

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.

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

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

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

7:8 7th year of 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!

1. 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.]l

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!

2. 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.

3. 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 8:25-27 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 9:1-4 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!

Summary:

1. God’s enemies will try to intimidate us into stopping the work or restoring and rebuilding.

2. In addition to evangelists and shepherds, God will use teachers to encourage the people and to keep the work of repenting, restoring and rebuilding going.

3. We need to continue to deal with sin in order for God to do the work of restoring and rebuilding.

4. The leaders must be zealous and humble.

**RRRR IX**

**Nehemiah God’s Leader Builds His House**

Our theme: Repent, Return, Restore, Rebuild.

The situation for Judah and for us:

We had rebelled.

We said to God that what he for us was not enough. We wanted more. We wanted to live our own lives.

We sinned.

We became enslaved to sin.

We ended up in a “far country.”

We were alone, abandoned. We were not God’s people. We were lost.

But God has a solution for Judah in the post-exilic books, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, Nehemiah and Malachi.

If we will repent and return to God. He will restore us to himself and rebuild our spiritual lives in his Kingdom.

Nehemiah fits that theme, especially the idea of restoring and rebuilding.

**Nehemiah: God Uses a Leader to Restore and Rebuild His Kingdom**

Nehemiah: God’s leader. Nehemiah and Joshua are the greatest leaders of God’s people in the Old Testament. (although David and Moses deserve mention)

Ezra: The greatest teacher.

Nehemiah: A great 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)

He returned (ch 2)

He restored and rebuilt (ch 3-6)

Let’s meet Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 1:1-3

The 20th year. The 20th year of Artaxerxes, which is 445 BC. 13 years after Ezra came with the remnant.

Nehemiah is in Susa, the capital of the Persian/Mede empire.

Tragedy. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.

This is not new information!! What have the Jews been doing the past 70+ years since the temple was completed.

There is no growing church of true disciples in Merced that we know of. The work of saving students at MC and UCM is going poorly if at all.

Who cares about the kingdom of God like Nehemiah?

Do you have concern for the current state of the world and the church?

Will you, like Nehemiah, take action to restore and rebuild?

Nehemiah 1:4-11 (review from two weeks ago)

What is the first thing Nehemiah did? He mourned and prayed!!!! This is the first instinct of all great women and men of God.

Does the fact that so many in Merced county are lost bother you? What will you do?

v. 6 See the boldness! Listen, God! Look, God! v. 8 Remember!

v. 6 See the humility.

v. 6 We have sinned in what we have done.

v. 7 We have also sinned in what we have NOT done.

Most importantly: Nehemiah 1:6, 7 Notice: “We” (even though Nehemiah did none of those things)

Also note Neh 1:9 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!

Nehemiah, God’s great leader, wept, mourned, fasted and prayed.

Nehemiah 1:11

Nehemiah moves from repentance, humility, prayer and fasting to action!!!

Did Nehemiah have control? No, but God did and he was God’s servant!

Nehemiah was cupbearer to Artaxerxes. This was a big deal. The cupbearer was a close adviser—always by the side of the king.

Nehemiah 2:1-10 Cupbearer to Artaxerxes

As in Ezra, we see God’s providence. He moved Cyrus, He moved Darius, He moved Xerxes (Esther), He moved Artaxerxes for Ezra.

God is working right now to prepare the way for restoration and rebuilding.

v. 2 Having a sad face before the king could lead to execution!!!

v. 3 “Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

Like Esther, took a huge risk for God.

Maybe God put you where you are “For such a time as this.”

v. 4 What is it you want. Nehemiah says a quick prayer.

Sometimes we need to remember that the Holy Spirit lives in us.

Matthew 10:18-22 Jesus: You will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses… But do not worry about what you will say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for you will not be speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

v. 5 Let God use me to rebuild his city.

Note the boldness: Let me go for several years. Give me tons of wood and a bunch of other stuff.

Us to God. Remember the prayer two weeks ago. God, give us a place to meet.

What does God do? He gives us a great place for $50/mo. Remember, I said let’s have an abundance mentality. Amen God!!!!!!

Is God working here to restore and rebuild or what?

Artaxerxes says yes!

But… v. 10 It will not be a cake-walk.

2:10 A foreshadow of things to come. Sanballat and Tobiah are not happy. Do not expect the world to be excited when the church is being rebuilt!!!!

Nehemiah 2:11-18 Nehemiah examines the walls of the city. God’s leader comes up with a plan to rebuild God’s kingdom.

v. 17 You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and the gates have been burned with fire. Nehemiah explains what he has observed. He gets real about the depth of the problem.

v. 18 I also told them about the gracious hand of God on me and what the king had said to me. Nehemiah explains that this is God’s mission for them. He shares his faith with them, literally!!!

v. 18 Come, let us rise up and rebuild the wall!!!!! Nehemiah, the leader, calls the people to action.

All here: Let us rise up and build the wall in Merced!!!

God’s leader develops a vision and then calls the people to join him in doing the work.

Nehemiah 2:19-20 Sanballat and Tobiah. When we get busy building the kingdom, enemies will come out of nowhere. Satan does not sleep. He tries to intimidate us. There is no way you can do this. The university does not allow this… You cannot afford to pay full-time interns.

Neh 2:20 If God is for us, no one can be against us. Romans 8:31

Psalm 18:29 David. Another great leader. With your help I can advance against a troop. With my God I can scale a wall!

With my God, I can help to build a campus ministry of 30, 50, 80!

Ch 3:1-5… The builders get building.

When God’s leader creates a true, godly vision, the people will get behind him/her.

v. 1 The priests went to work…. In this chapter the priests and Levites are leading the work. These are the Bible talk leaders…

Perfume makers, merchants, district rulers, gold-workers. Rich, poor, white collar, blue collar, every gift is needed.

v. 20 Baruch zealously repaired another section. Are you zealously working on the wall?

Nehemiah 4:1-5. Again, when we get busy and zealous building God’s kingdom, opposition will arise. Count on it!!

4:2 Sanballat ridiculed them…

v. 3 Tobiah… even a fox climbing on it would break down the wall.

You cannot build a church here of 200, 400. No one has ever built a campus ministry of 100 in such a small town. Your plan to help foster youth is a joke.

v. 4 What does Nehemiah do? He prays.

Nehemiah 4:6-9 Halfway done.

Sanballat and Tobiah are now getting concerned. They form an alliance to oppose the building.

v. 9 They prayed.

Nehemiah 4:10-15 Real, valid causes for concern arise. Reasons to be discouraged or worried.

Let’s take a time out. Let’s stop building for a time. We have to take care of our problems. Illustration: The singles in San Diego. We don’t want to be in an evangelistic Bible Talk. We need to take care of ourselves first.

Thursday: It’s HOOOTTTTT. I have a toothache. I have a terrible backache.

Nehemiah:

No!!!! Perhaps we need to step back and slow down in order to deal with the problems, but I REFUSE to come down from working on the wall!!!!!

v. 13 “Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places.

v. 14 Nehemiah: “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.

They did not back down (but they did not ignore the threat—they responded to it)

Nehemiah 4:16-20 Half worked and half held spears, shields, bows and armour.

v. 17 Those who carried materials did their work with one hand, and held a weapon in the other. (Our weapon is the Bible)

v. 20 Our God will fight for us. Do you believe this?????

Ch 5 (just tell the story) More problems.

Drought, famine, heavy taxes—from fellow Jews! Division.

Nehemiah takes out the time from his busy work rebuilding to confront the sin and to call the weak and uncommitted to repent.

Nehemiah confronted the selfish Jews (who were, by the way, violating Deuteronomy 23 by charging interest). Nehemiah demands social justice among God’s people.

Nehemiah 6:1-2 Sanballat and Tobiah try another tactic. Let’s have a conference. Let’s come to an agreement to compromise our religious conviction. Let’s go to Ono to come to a compromise.

Nehemiah said Oh no! to Ono.

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was completed on the 25th day of Elul, in 52 days!!!

Judges 5:2 When the princes of Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the Lord.

We need leaders like Nehemiah, and followers/members like those in Jerusalem.

Ch 7-13 The church has been planted, but the work of growing God’s kingdom has just started.

Ch 12 Nehemiah puts on a celebration. We need to have fun together and to celebrate our victories!!!

Neh 12:27-28 They celebrated joyfully. Choirs, musicians. Great fun!!!

This is October 1st for us, with our “inaugural service.” This will be a great celebration for us!

Nehemiah: God uses a leader to build his kingdom.

Nehemiah had deep convictions about rebuilding God’s kingdom.

Nehemiah prayed boldly to God.

Nehemiah took action. He developed a plan, he was real with the people about the situation, but he gave them a powerful vision

He assured them that God was with them.

He called them to rise up and build.

He called them to keep at the work despite all problems and opposition.

Nehemiah repented and returned

God used him to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

All the people rejoiced.

**RRRR X Malachi**

**Faith in God vs Faithful to God**

Last book in the Bible: What are God’s last thoughts to us?

Malachi = “my messenger” Malachi may not be an actual name of a prophet

Date: About 440 BC Between the two visits by Nehemiah.

The situation: The temple and city are rebuilt, but the people are relying in themselves. They have faith in God, but their faith is in what God will do for them, but they are not being faithful to God.

They have repented and returned and God has restored them to the Promised Land and rebuilt their city, but they have gotten into a rut and need renewed repentance, and return.

**Having faith in God vs being faithful to God.**

Outline:

Introduction: God still loves Israel 1:1-5

I The Priests have been unfaithful 1:6-2:9

II The People have been unfaithful 2:10-3:18

III The Day of the Lord is coming 4:1-6

Style: Rhetorical style with a staged debate between God and his people.

Introduction:

**Malachi 1:1-5 God: I still love** **Israel.**

I have loved you. I have been faithful to you. I have kept my covenant.

I have kept *hesed* Hesed = faithfulness, covenant love, unfailing love, loyal love.

Q: What does God want from us? Hesed!

The people: How have you loved us?

Jacob I have loved, Esau I hated. (quoted in Romans 9:13)

In other words, I have kept the covenant and the commitment I made to you, despite all you have done.

The people are feeling that God has NOT been loving them. Why? Because he has not loved them the way they wanted to be loved. He has not given them a ton of stuff and great political victory.

**I. Malachi 1:6-14 The Priests have been unfaithful.**

(and don’t forget that we are all priests 1 Pet 2:5,9 Ex 19:6)

It is time for us to look at our hearts!!!!

Read Malachi 1:6-9 for now.

v. 6 What does God want from us? He wants our honor and respect.

Does he want our money? Not really…. He wants our honor and respect.

v. 6 It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name.

v. 6 How have we shown contempt? These people were clueless about the fact that they had shown contempt for God.

Lesson: We could be religious think we are honoring God, yet in his eyes we could be showing contempt.

Me: I do not want to show contempt for God!!!

v. 7 You put defiled food on my altar.

The people: We have? How have we defiled you? When? Again, they are clueless.

v. 7 By giving me your second best—your leftovers.

Illustration. Imagine being asked to a friend’s house for a dinner and they pulled out yesterday’s leftovers. How would you feel?

Illustration: At a Bible group we asked what was the worst gift you ever got?

Jennifer: A half-filled bottle of shampoo which was diluted with water.

They gave crippled or diseased animals. This was “logical.” They gave the stuff they didn’t really want anyway.

For us: We give our “left over” time our “left over energy” our “left over” money

We give our used clothes to the poor or our unwanted canned goods to the poor.

1:8-9 God (sarcastically) to the people: Try giving that to your governor.

Many of us give more of our discipline, our effort, our heart, our attention to our jobs, our vacations, our education, our hobbies, etc.

We are never late to work, but often late to church.

“I am a student. I do not have time to study the Bible with people”

Our bills are paid, but we do not give sacrificially to God.

Q: How might we be like this?

v. 9 Rhetorical Q: Will God accept that?

Malachi 1:10-11 God: If you are going to give me your second best, do me a favor: just stay home.

Q: Is God exaggerating here?

Q: Isn’t a little better than nothing at all? Answer: No!!!!!

Isn’t it better to put $5 into the plate than to put nothing in?

Isn’t it better to be **religious** than to be a **pagan**?

Q: Why is God so upset about such half-hearted gifts? Is it because he is an egotist and wants us to stroke his pride?

No!!!!! He gave his absolute best to us. He gave his son and his spirit. It is because it represents ungratefulness.

I do not want to be in this position!!!

Malachi 1: 12-14 The key issue.

v. 13a “What a burden.”

Is that you? Special Contribution: “What a burden.”

Midweek, serving the poor, etc.: “What a burden.”

Staying pure: “What a burden”

v. 13b When you say “What a burden” God sees you sniffing at it contemptuously.

Q: How have we been like this?

v. 14 If you give half-hearted service (like a blemished animal), God calls you a “cheat.”

God: “I am a king and I expect to be treated like one.

Malachi Ch 2:10-17 Admonition for the priests. Uses divorce as an analogy for their unfaithfulness.

Malachi 2:11 Judah has been unfaithful. She had faith, but she was not faithful. They stopped trusting in God and acting on that trust.

Mal 2:16-17 v. 16 God uses the analogy of a divorce. You have been unfaithful. You have divorced me.

You destroyed the covenant between us. You have broken hesed.

v. 17 Doing good has not led to a reward. We do not believe in God’s justice any more. Where is his justice?

(skip 3:1-5 for now)

**Malachi 3:6-15 The people have been unfaithful.**

God is speaking here to the people, rather than the priests, so he keeps it simple. He encapsulates their spiritual issues in the question of giving the tithe.

3:6-7 God: Only return to me

The people: What do you mean we left you? When did we leave? What are you talking about? Who???? Me??????

Q: Can you leave God while going to church regularly?

v. 8 You have robbed me.

The people? Who, me?

I imagine them trying to think what they had stolen from God….

Q: What about us.

How have we robbed you?

v. 8b In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse!!!!!

Bring in the whole tithe.

Q: Why is a partial tithe robbing God? (not trusting God… breaking hesed)

Q: Have you been stingy toward God?

v. 10 Test me in this.

You have not trusted me to take care of your things.

**This is not about money**. It is about trusting that God will take care of us. You have held back. In your heart of heart, you did not really believe that God has your back. That’s why you gave better stuff to your boss than to me.

It is about being faithful. “Test me in this”

How? Trust fully in me.

v. 10b-12 Q: Do you **REALLY** believe God will bless you if you bring in the full tithe of your effort, your heart, your love, your money?

v. 13 You have said harsh things against me.

People? I have??? Did I say I hate God? Did I say that I refuse to worship God?

What have we said against you?

v. 14-15 Here is the key: You said It is futile to serve God.

What are we getting out of this?

Do you trust God to give you a spouse if it is best for you? Do you trust God to take care of you financially if you give generously to the work of the church? Do you believe that if you give generously to Special Missions, your gift will produce an abundant harvest in your life?

Conclusion:

Will you have faith in God—expecting him to bless you and to take care of you, or will you be faithful to God. Will you treat him with hesed—with a devoted, covenantal love?

Parting words:

Malachi 3:1 I will send my messenger (Malachi).

John the Baptist (Matthew 11:3, 10, 14)

Malachi 3:2-5 Are you sure you want God to come?

The people will get what they are asking for (God to come) but not what they want (a free ride without judgment).

Malachi 4:5 Be ready. I will send Elijah before that day. John the Baptist.

God: I will be faithful, whether you are or not.

Let us be faithful to God. Let us show hesed.