

Ezra 3-4 –5 January 2023

“Spiritually Building From Nothing”

Introduction

*Only Chronological books left are Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, w/ prophets Haggai, Zechariah, & Malachi

*In the Kings/Chronicles, Israel went into Babylonian Captivity in 3 waves, now they return the same way

1. Ezra 1-6 is the 1st wave (536-516 BC)
 - a. Led by Gov Zerubbabel & Joshua the priest
2. Ezra 7-10 is the 2nd wave (457-432 BC)
 - a. Led by Ezra the priest & scribe
3. Nehemiah is the 3rd wave (445-425 BC)
 - a. Led by Nehemiah
4. Book of Esther happens between 1st & 2nd waves

*Chap 1-2 we saw God always initiates a work & the faithful are called to join Him in the work

*God stirred their return to their land & faithful go

*Now we see the steps needed to ‘build back better’

***Today let’s look at 3 steps in building our lives from the very start**

1st step in building: Build the spiritual heart of the project first (Chap 3:1-6)

Read Chap 3:1

1. 500-900 miles would have taken >4 months
2. Month 7, day 1=Feast of Trumpets (New Year)
3. We'll see that they're sincerely celebrating from a spiritual sense of unity, not just political

Read Vs 2

1. Joshua is the High Priest & Zerubbabel is Gov
2. "As written in Law..."
 - a. They're trying to do what's right
 - b. They're trying to follow in spirit & in truth
3. They're told to do it at Jerusalem (Deut 12:5)
4. They're told to do this offering (Lev 23:25)
5. Great example for how we begin a great work
 - a. With simple obedience to what we know
 - b. With the heart of the work in mind (altar)
 - c. With the spiritual part first & preeminent

Read Vs 3

1. “Set it upon its bases” – found the same spot as the previous altar
2. Fear b/c they’re moving back into a place that has people that have congregated for last 70 yrs

Read Vs 4

1. This is 15 days later & lasts a week (Lev 23)
2. Commemorated having no home while wandering after leaving Egypt
 - a. “If we lived in tents for 40 yrs, we can live in destroyed cities for a little while we rebuild”
 - b. Remember the days of small things, be content

Read Vs 5-6

1. So this was their emphasis, to begin by building their spiritual foundation FIRST
2. The blessing of the beginning days is that there’s no one that need course corrections
 - a. Can just press ahead with what’s right

2nd step in building: Plan for & execute the main project (Chap 3:7-13)

Read Chap 3:7

1. Persia had granted them the money for this
2. NOW they order the main material to begin
3. So their plan includes getting the best wood

Read Vs 8

1. Notice there's no separation between the spiritual and political authorities
 - a. They're drive toward the same goals

Read Vs 9-11

1. As the building begins, the equipping of the priests begins
2. As we build, we must realize: 'the motivation to build will only be there if we're building the people'
 - a. Build people & the building will happen

Read Vs 12-13

1. Can understand the sadness of remembering the loss of the temple & many people
2. But be careful that the past doesn't paralyze us
 - a. Don't be paralyzed with fear or depression
 - b. Turn to Hag 2:1-9 – Yes there'll be major difficulties but the Lord has good things planned for the future!
 - c. Even to bring Messiah to this very Temple
 - d. Read Zec 4:8-10 – Live in present as small as it is

3rd step in building: Refuse distraction & dilution of the mission (Chap 4:1-24)

Read Chap 4:1-3

1. These are the Samaritans that have mixed true Jehovah worship with pagan practices
2. If these Samaritans were true worshippers
 - a. Then they would have restored Jerusalem
 - b. Would have been worshipping only there

Read Vs 4-6

1. Ahasuerus is the king during the time of Esther
2. From Cyrus (chap 1:1) til Artaxerxes (chap 4:7) is a period of about 70 yrs
3. Chap 4 is a long timeline of Samaritan resistance the whole way to Artaxerxes.
 - a. Once we get to chap 4:24 we will snap back to the days of Darius
4. If they truly wanted to worship God, they wouldn't hinder the work even if they weren't part
 - a. Don't hinder other Christian's work
 - b. Don't get distracted from our own work

Read Vs 7-9

1. As the Samaritans write this letter, remember they're composed of all these people from all over

Read Vs 10-13

1. The two accusations are:
 - a. Israel always rebels against overlords (vs 12)
 - b. They won't pay & submit to you (vs 13)

Read Vs 14-16

1. “B/c we're helped by you, we're just trying to help you out” (vs 14)
 - a. They're not trying to help Persia, but what's in their own best interests
2. They're asking for the accusation to be verified
 - a. Their accusations are accurate – that's why it took God's involvement with Cyrus to get this started some 80 years before

Read Vs 17-23

1. King Artaxerxes agrees & has work stopped

Read Vs 24

2. Timewise go from verse 5 to 24: Samaritans constant hinderances caused Jews to stop building

Conclusion

So, lessons for establishing a spiritual foundation and building for our lives

- 1. Build the spiritual heart of the project first**
 - a. Our first move in a new place or on a new mission should be to establish the most direct godly elements first (our worship of Jesus)
 - b. Do most direct, most simple godly things
- 2. Plan for & execute the main project**
 - a. Plan it out – plan for the best supplies
 - b. Equip the priests first – meaning, without the blessing & favor of God, none of it matters
- 3. Refuse distraction & dilution of the mission**
 - a. Let the Word of God be our guide for whether or not to adjust course along the way
 - b. Do be frustrated or anxious about adversaries – they’ve always been there and always will be for the Christian
 - i. Don’t fear him that can kill you, fear Him that can kill your body AND soul (Luke 12)