

Seven Bible Studies 2017

History

November 14: Ezra 1-5 (Nick Hermon)

HISTORY: Ezra 1-5

We're diving into the first half of the book of Ezra today. Ezra & Nehemiah was originally written by one author as one letter but divided up later. We left off last week with the destruction of Jerusalem (and the temple) by the Babylonians in approximately 588 BC.

This book starts off about 50 years later (around 538 BC) and the Israelites who went into exile during the destruction of Jerusalem are now starting to return to their homeland which fulfills the prophecy told in Jeremiah 25.

In these two books, there are 3-4 main individuals: Zerubbabel & Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Today's spotlight is on Zerubbabel & Joshua

Chp 1- God moved the heart of Cyrus, the king of Persia, to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The family heads of Judah, Benjamin, and the priests and Levites returned. King Cyrus returned the temple articles Nebuchadnezzar stole. Lastly, it lists the few of the 5,400 articles of gold and of silver given to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, to be returned to Jerusalem.

Chp 2- Lists the exiles who returned (42,000+)

Chp 3 is the big one- We are introduced to Joshua son of Jozadak. Joshua leads the way in rebuilding the altar and after it is built, they celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles.

Zerubbabel (whose name means "planted in Babylon") leads the way with Joshua in the rebuilding of the temple. The Levites 20+ years old supervised the building of the house of the Lord.

When they laid the foundation, they celebrated and gave praise and thanksgiving to God:

"He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever." (very similar to David's praise in 1 Chronicles 16:34)

The end of the chapter is interesting:

"But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away." (3:12-13)

I am interested to hear why you all think about the older generation crying out. Is it tears of happiness or tears of sorrow that the new is not as good as the old?

Chp 4- What is a good story without a little bit of conflict?

The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard the temple was being built and they offered to help. Zerubbabel shut them down and “they bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans.” A letter is sent to king Artaxerxes (which is included in this chapter!) and the letter of his response (also included in the chapter!) causes the building of the temple to a come to standstill

Chp 5- Haggai the prophet (check out the John Morris post on Friday) prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. This inspires Zerubbabel and Joshua to rally the people and rebuild the temple under the new ruler, King Darius. They work rapidly and the officials question who authorized them to allow them to do this. They say it was alright under King Cyrus so it should be ok. The officials aren’t sure what they are to do so they send a letter to King Darius (which is recorded in this chapter!).

Tune in next week for King Darius's response...

Comment:

Jack Dyer:

Thanks Nick! One of greatest lessons for me comes from how the “things of God” were protected on their way home; how they were placed into the hands of the leading men who were accountable upon their arrival in Jerusalem.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

No doubt some of the people would have wept with gladness to see the beginnings of restoration, but Haggai probably highlights the prevailing reaction among the older people who remembered the former glory.

Haggai 2:3 (NIV)

3 ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?’

Replies:

Dianne Collier:

Really good scripture to qualify the feelings of the older people.

Comment:

John Morris:

Zechariah also seems to address this same sentiment among the older: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:9-10a). "Small things." That's how they viewed the new temple. "Does it not seem to you like NOTHING?" (Hag. 2:3).

There's an important take away for the 21st century American church, btw. Yes, the numbers of the faithful are fewer than in time past. But how shall we respond to this? With despondency over how the church just isn't what she used to be (Eccl. 7:10)...or with joy that God is still working in the world, and a determination to be His instruments?

“Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ says the LORD, ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remains among you; do not fear!’” (Hag. 2:4-5)

Replies:

Charles Fry:

Yes. "A Remnant on Earth." That was Sunday morning's message in Novato. Starting with Joseph, a youth, a slave, a prisoner...

Genesis 45:7 (NIV)

7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

John Morris:

Wish I could have heard it.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Nick!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Excellent notes, Nick. Thank you!

Comment:

Dianne Collier:

Very good read Nick thank you.

Comment:

Sue Reddy:

Bro. Nick, we're studying Ezra, in our Wednesday night class at Itasca, IL...Carol Kahn and I was trying to figure out who was also studying on Ezra on Facebook. Thank you, Nick for posting your studies. We appreciate it so much!

November 21: Ezra 6-10 (Nick Hermon)

HISTORY: Ezra 6-10

Last week we left off with Zerubbabel and Joshua rallying the people to rebuild the temple under the new ruler, King Darius. Today we finish off the short book of Ezra

Officials are concerned and send a letter to King Darius asking if it's alright for the people to rebuild the temple. After searching the archives, King Darius realizes it was acceptable under King Cyrus and decrees that the expenses are to be paid out of the royal treasury and that whatever is needed is to be provided. Verses 11-12 go to show how serious he is about this proclamation of the temple being built.

They finish the temple and a celebration of dedication is held with hundreds of animal sacrifices. Then, "for seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread

because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria” (6:22).

In chapters 7-8, we are introduced to this week’s main character and author of this book: Ezra

Ezra was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses and King Artaxerxes appoints him to lead another wave of people back to Jerusalem. Ezra wants to rebuild the community and bring back social and spiritual renewal.

Chapters 7-8 tells of the decree of the treasury to be given to Ezra in the reestablishment of Jerusalem as well as the list of the family heads returning with Ezra.

Chapters 9-10 is a sad story that can be a bit confusing/disturbing...

Ezra hears that the people of Israel, including the priests and Levites, are intermarrying with the neighboring people.

This appalls Ezra who tears his tunic and pulls hair from his head and beard. He earnestly prays to God asking for forgiveness of the sins of the people of Israel.

It is suggested to him by Shekariah son of Jehiel, to send away the women and children and Ezra decides to do so.

They tell all of Judah and Jerusalem to gather together and if they do not do so within three days all of their possessions will be taken from them.

Everyone gathers on the square and as it is raining, Ezra exclaims that many are guilty of intermarriage.

The people agree and Ezra selects family heads to investigate the cases.

“They all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives, and for their guilt they each presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering” (10:19)

V20-43 lists the descendants who were guilty and, “All these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives” (10:44)

These last two chapters can be confusing because while it is abundantly clear that God does not want his people to marry non-believers (Deuteronomy 7:3 / 23:1-4), it doesn’t say anywhere that God decreed a national divorce.

The prophet Malachi encouraged the people of Israel to remain pure, but he also says in Malachi 2:13-16 that God is opposed to divorce.

Next week- Nehemiah

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:
Thank you, Nick!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Nick! I wonder if some of these marriage ceremonies to foreign women were conducted by pagan priests or priestesses. I get the impression that, while godly marriages are covenantal by nature, none of these marriages were and therefore putting their wives away wasn't really considered a divorce as such.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Although I perhaps would not have even come to be, except that some of my French ancestors came to North America and practiced the "Marriage du pays " and, the "placage" this does not mean that the arrangements were always right in God's sight. Especially regarding the latter type, which was when a French merchant took a wife, (sometimes several) of the native/local women, while having also a wife back at home in France. Kevin Crittenden is on to something here. These were never any type of marriage that the LORD would condone! These were simply about sexual and idolatrous things. The men were "doing violence " as Micah puts it, against the wives of their youth, in much the same way as Jewish men were doing at the time of Christ, for whatever reason they could trump up, they could slap divorce papers in the hands of their wife, and kick her out of their home. Or, as I am sure was also happening, just, abandon their wives and go shack up with these other women. Either way, the Hebrew Women would have virtually no recourse against such action by their husbands. The fact that some of the priests and other leaders were doing it, made it that much easier for anyone else to do it!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

In Ezra 8 I really appreciate the conundrum Ezra faced in v.21-22. We told the king how mighty our God is, how could we then ask for guards ;to protect us and the treasure we carried? So prayer, fasting, and planning. "and the hand of our God was over us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the ambushes along the way." (8:31). It's good to pray for safe journeys and to thank God for the outcome when we travel safely.

I also appreciate the careful accountability of weighing, assigning responsibility, tracking, counting everything at the beginning and end, the same principle of accountability Paul endorsed for the churches' funds in 2 Cor 7-9, multiple approved brethren, chosen by the churches, trustworthy, that the good work be accomplished and no doubt of the faithfulness.

I find the resolution of the mixed marriages situation challenging, not as a fact, but primarily because of reasoning to apply this event as a principle or precedent for the church. What Ezra and his fellow leaders did was a difficult judgment call (10:2-5). It was undertaken with prayer and fasting, much soul searching and consideration of the Law and history, and was a harsh and difficult decision. They did what they believed was necessary. There is no God given mandate for divorce in this passage, or any other scripture I know of. Some "marriages" of course can't be marriages, that is true, as when Herod took his brother's wife, a union specifically forbidden as incestuous in the law (Lev 20:21), but various men did marry outside the nationalistic bounds of the Law, including David in his polygamy, Solomon of course in his unwise multitude of foreign wives (not positive examples!), but also Salmon who married Rahab, and Boaz who married Ruth. In the story of Ruth her Moabite origin is very much on display, not only in 1:4, but repeatedly in the story, including 3 times in chapter 4. She was "Ruth the Moabitess." It's emphasized. David's forbear was a Moabite woman. We reason that Ruth professed faith in God, and she did claim both God and Israel in her pledge of devotion to Naomi, but the Law didn't say "no Moabites unless they proselytize", it said no Moabites in the assembly (Deut 23:3-4). I would hope that in the consideration of the cases in Ezra's day

(10:14-17) they did look at circumstances analogous to those of Ruth (or of Rahab) and didn't make a blanket ruling for the 113 or so individuals listed as having made these unions(10:18-44). As described, it was a terrible time with terrible choices.

Replies:

Steven Wright:
Amen Charles!

Marc Hermon:

This passage has made me uncomfortable also but I think that may be the point for our present times. When someone in the kingdom marries someone not in the kingdom it can cause problems for not only that person but also their possible future children as well as their spiritual leaders. It sets a dangerous precedent for watching eyes. Unnecessary uncomfortableness.