

Ezra: Rebuilding God’s “Two” Houses

Jack Rendel

Quotes from NIV

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Part 1

Section 1 – Return under Joshua and Zerubbabel – His (God's) People

Chapters 1 and 2

Section 2 They Build The Altar and Foundation – Worship and Word?

Chapter 3

God's people were in unity.

1 ¶ And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

It is interesting to see that the brothers of the two leaders helped them in the work.

In some nations brothers and sisters were rivals and put to death. Genghis Khan apparently killed his half brother and later his full brother, who had a larger army than he had. In Herod the Great's family, members were killing each other regularly (*Thrones of Blood*).

2 Then stood up Joshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as *it is* written in the law of Moses the man of God.

The high priest and the governor worked together on this project! It was of very high priority.

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt offerings morning and evening.

They began with worship. They set up the altar. Fear helped them to do this. They sacrificed to the Lord in the presence of their enemies. Fear of man can move us toward God.

In the NT context God searches for true worshippers, those who worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23)

4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

5 And afterward *offered* the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid.

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7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

8 ¶ Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

9 Then stood Joshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

The foundations of the temple were super-important. The temple would rest on the foundations.

In the NT context of the house of God the foundation which is laid is Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, and the prophets and apostles the rest of the foundation (Ephesians 2:19-22).

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Unfortunately they left off building for 16 years so some of the older generation never saw the temple finished.

Section 3 Their Enemies Force Them to Stop Building – An Attack from Without

Chapter 4

Section 4 The Prophets Encourage Them to Restart the Building and The King Supports Them - Victory

Chapter 5

1 ¶ Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.

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2 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

God used two prophets to get the leaders and people back to work. They prophesied in the name. The name was of the God of Israel. That God was over them. They were subject to him.

Later the apostles would preach in the name of Jesus in Jerusalem and many would turn to him and be saved. The apostles were also building God’s house, the spiritual house. Hebrews tells us that Jesus was God’s Son over God’s house.

3 ¶ At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?"

4 They also asked, "What are the names of the men constructing this building?"

5 But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

God watched over his people so they were not stopped.

Chapter 6

1 ¶ King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon.

Research is important. A newscaster was touting the qualities of his news station saying they always research carefully what they present! News 9 &10, Friday, February 11, 2005. That hasn’t always happened. (Dan Rather, pre-election 2004)

The Persian kings were also subject to law, not like Nebuchadnezzar who did according to his personal whims! This was to be very good for the ongoing work.

2 A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it: Memorandum:

Why is Assyria mentioned here and not Persia?

Part 2

Section 1 Second Group Returns Under Ezra – Scribe and Priest with Leading Men

Chapter 7

1 ¶ After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

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- 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,
- 4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,
- 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—

Ezra was in the line of Aaron, Moses brother, the original high priest under that law!

6 this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

God's law was important to him so God put his hand on him! He asked and the king gave. "Ask and you will receive," Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:7

- 7 Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.
- 8 Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king.
- 9 He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him.
- 10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Notice first his commitment: He devoted himself.

Then notice his three phase course of action: study, observe (do) and teach.

11 ¶ This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest and teacher, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the LORD for Israel:

Notice he was expert in the Lord's commands and laws, not in the tradition of the elders. Jesus condemned allowing the traditions of the elders to have precedence over God's Word (Mark 7).

- 12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven: Greetings.
- 13 Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you, may go.
- 14 You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to enquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.

The command now is not to build the house of God but to see that the people of Israel were following the Lord's commands! Wow! This was from a pagan king!

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Section 2 Arrival of More People and Delivery of Precious Metals, Articles and Orders from the King Which Were Followed by the Governors

Chapter 8

Section 3 Leaders and Other Israelites Intermarry with the Pagan Nations – Attack from Within

Chapter 9

1 ¶ After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites.

2 They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."

The leaders were at fault. Does the enemy tend to attack the leaders so that they set a bad example and others follow? That is what it seems to say. They have led the way in this unfaithfulness.

This echoes what we find in Judges 3:1-6 They intermarried and served their gods. Solomon did the same marrying wives of other nations and worshipping their gods.

3 When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.

He was so concerned he did himself bodily harm! Compare his reaction to Nehemiah's reaction (Nehemiah 13:25). I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their [hair](#). I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves.

Ezra was an expert in the law of God and a teacher, but we actually do not have any record of him teaching in the book of Ezra although I think that can be assumed. However, in the scenes in chapters 9 and 10 we do find him falling down before the house of God, weeping and confessing the sins of Israel. This example led to the people changing their ways. It was a powerful way to teach! In our leadership and our teaching can we do the same. We so often think of teaching as some speaking to a group but could we more often, at least on some occasions do something akin to what Ezra did? Give examples.

4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered round me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

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Ezra really did sense the danger that threatened Israel by intermarrying with the nations around them. Knowing God’s law and Israel’s history made him sensitive to the threat. The very fact they had been in captivity was a testimony to that reality.

Section 4 The Problem of Intermarriage is Resolved By Putting the Pagan Wives Away

Chapter 10

One of the leaders suggests a solution to Ezra. He did not tell them to divorce their foreign wives, they did. Better the solution comes from the people themselves.

Apparently there were 109 who married pagan wives so not a great number compared to the population but serious because many of them were priests and leaders.