

THE REBUILDING REMNANT - part 2

The book of Ezra describes the returning remnant's mission to restore the temple and proper worship of God in Jerusalem. The experience of these exiles provides an example for us today, not only in our own projects of church buildings, but building our own lives and the kingdom of God. It takes unity, and giving of time, talents and treasures, as each person commits to accomplishing God's purposes together.

Ezra 3 describes the beginning of the temple a few months after they arrived. They had already built an altar to the Lord, to establish proper worship according to the books of Moses. When the foundation of the temple was laid, they marked the occasion with a great worship celebration.

5- PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP OF GOD - The priests, the Levites, the sons of Asaph, in their vestments and with their instruments, led a momentous worship "*to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David, king of Israel. They sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.*" Ezra says all the people shouted and praised God.

"But many of the priests and Levites and heads of father's houses, old men who had seen the first House, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many people shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away." This mixture of gladness and sadness provided the major and minor keys of the occasion.

Midst the joy of what God was doing, in returning and rebuilding, was great regret. This temple was much smaller and less grand than Solomon's. Plus, it was their sins and their fathers' sins that had taken God's hand from them and resulted in the destruction of the first temple. Does God hear your voice in church? He knows all the thoughts of your heart, and commands your mouth to praise Him. Bring regrets to the cross. Repent and receive Christ's forgiveness, enabling power, and joy, to give voice to Him!

6- GOD'S PEOPLE, SHEEP & WOLVES - Great noise of rebuilding got the attention of adversaries of God's returning remnant. In chapter 4 they said, "*let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do.*" But the leaders of Israel replied, "*you have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God, but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as the King of Persia commanded us.*"

Does this seem harsh? These people left in the land were heretics, not believers. Many were put there by other kings who had conquered earlier, and they had intermixed with the Israelites left behind from the exile. These became the Samaritans of Jesus' day. They claimed to hold to God's Word but had clearly polluted it with pagan ideas and practices. The Israelites had to establish the pedigree of Israel because Messiah was to come from them. So their practices must also be pure, according to God's Word. (Ezra 6 notes that true converts to the one true God were welcomed into God's covenant community).

Ezra warns churches today who adopt deceptive worldly philosophies and claim to follow Christ, but do not obey His Word. Pray for pastors to be true to God's inerrant written Word, worship to conform to God's principles, for our songs, prayers, and proclamations from the pulpit all to be obedient to the Bible.

7- OFFENSE AGAINST ORNERY OPPOSITION - The leaders of Israel raised up by God strived to worship God per Ezra 3:2 "*as it is written in the Law of Moses, the man of God.*" It was disobedience to God's Word that led to the devastation of the city, the temple, and the land. They were not going to allow it again. Local churches must be composed of true converts to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who gives new spiritual life and sets them free from all the lies and ties of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The returning remnant was faced with imposter opponents whose ungodly lives were threatened by the establishment of true worship of the one true God. These opponents discouraged the people, bribed officials, and wrote to the king 900 miles away. This led to an official order to stop work on the temple, for about 14 years. A lesson: Christians should be the best-informed, and strategically involved politically, to participate and protect the God-given freedoms and rights that we have, as noted in our Constitution.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy "*in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.*" Jeshua and Zerubbabel rose up to work. The governor wrote to King Darius, who affirmed the project and ordered everything paid from the royal treasury. He even returned the divinely preserved vessels of the temple. This king also wanted the blessings of all the 'gods' that he thought existed!

8- GOD'S PEOPLE ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES - Kidner notes, "God's frowning providence in allowing the opposition to raise the alarm had not simply concealed His smiling face, it had given a fresh impetus to events by evoking the faith and courage of the builders, and releasing a truly royal flow of material help." By God's provision, "out of the ruins emerged the small community concerned to be the people of God. They had all the benefits of state protection and money without state interference." The royal response rejuvenated the work, and it was completed in five years (70 years after destruction).

In chapter 6, they celebrated the Passover, "*for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king.*" God knows the circumstances and fears His people face today. By His grace, His plans will prevail, as we His people trust and obey His Word. So as 1 Peter 2:5 exults, let us get to work on God's building of His kingdom - not just structures, but living stones being built up in Christ! ☐