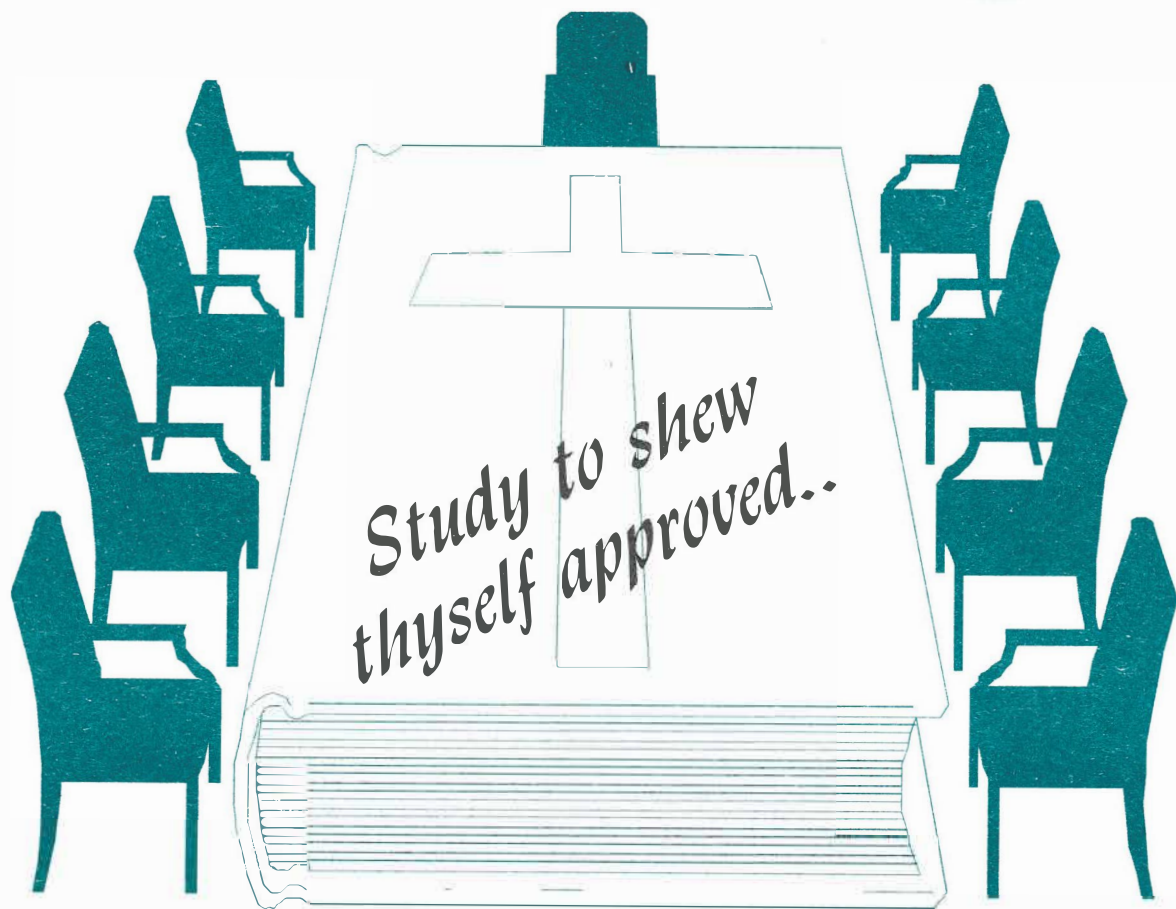


Holiness Heritage



Large Print Adult Edition

Israel and the Captivity

June, July, August 2024

Holiness Heritage

Sunday School Quarterly

Summer Quarter
June, July, August 2024

Israel and the Captivity

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Large Print Adult Edition

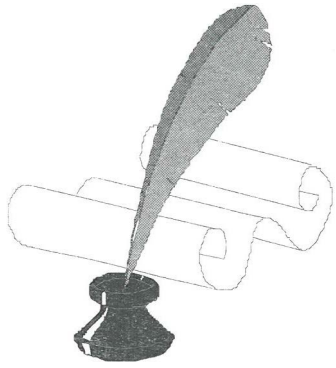
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We Believe:

1. The Scriptures are inspired by God and are the Divine rule of faith and conduct. We use the King James Version of the Bible.
2. The Triune God consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
3. The virgin birth, sinless life, death, physical resurrection and deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. The fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Man has a sinful nature and is unable to save himself.
5. The salvation of man through faith in Jesus and His blood.
6. The ordinances of the church are baptism in water and holy communion.
7. The baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance.
8. The church as the redeemed and "called out" of God.
9. The Divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry.
10. Divine healing for the body as a provision of Calvary.
11. Sanctification of spirit, soul, and body.
12. The believer should live a life of holiness and separation from the world.
13. The second coming of Christ.
14. The millennial reign of Christ.
15. The final judgment.

While this list does not cover everything that we believe, this statement of faith covers the fundamental doctrines that we hold to be true.



From the Editor

No, you are not going crazy. We have not had a time warp. Yes, we messed up! More specifically, "I" messed up. Many were a little confused when they received the Spring Quarter of Literature on the books of 1st and 2nd Corinthians and the cover said: June, July, August 2023 with the title of "Prophets, Priests and Kings". The title page on the inside was correct with March, April, May 2024 and the correct title of "Paul's Letters to Corinth." The actual contents of the lessons were correct. A mistake was made in the printing of the covers of the Adult Sunday School Literature. This affected the regular and large print adult student books and leaflets as well as regular and large print adult teacher books. It did not affect the Teen, Junior, Primary or Beginner literature.

I clicked on the wrong file from a previous quarter and inadvertently copied it to the print server. It was just one click and drag and I changed the cover of about 10,000 books. The person doing the printing trusted that I sent the correct file and printed what I had put in the folder. The literature was already printed and mostly collated into booklets before I noticed the mistake. At that point, we did not have enough paper stock on hand to reprint them if they were to be shipped on time. So, I made the decision to ship them with the wrong covers. We sent a letter out with each order describing what had happened but our phone stayed busy the next week or so explaining my mistake. Hopefully this did not cause too much confusion with anyone throwing away the new literature because of the old dates on the covers. It was my mistake and I sincerely apologize.

My mistake took less than 10 seconds. It is amazing how much was affected by one little mistake. Fortunately, this time, no lives were eternally changed by my mistake. But I wonder how many times a seemingly small mistake on our part affected people's lives for eternity. A fit of anger, a gossiped word, a little untruth, a lack of dedication, a carnal moment . . . So small but sometimes with such huge ramifications. "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

We are going to try to make sure that we don't make another mistake on the literature and I am going to try to make sure that I do the same in my life. Some things cannot be fixed with an apology. Some things have eternal weight and I want to make sure I do them right!

June 2, 2024



The Reign of Asa

Theme: The reign of Asa is an illustration of the importance of maintaining a right relationship with God. When we fail spiritually, we fail in every part of life.

Golden Text: *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - 2 Chronicles 14:1,2; 15:1-8

14:1 So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years.

2 And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God:

15:1 And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded:

2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

3 Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.

4 But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of

Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.

5 And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries.

6 And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity.

7 Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.

8 And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD.

Introduction

We have studied quite of bit of the history of Israel and Judah under the Kings in a previous quarter. In this quarter we will study the reigns of Asa, Joash, and Hezekiah. We will also take a look at the judgment of God that comes upon Judah for her continued sin and idolatry.

In this lesson we learn how Asa began his reign by doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. Sadly however, he failed to maintain his right relationship with God and success became failure. How important it is that each of us realize that a good beginning is not sufficient; a good finish is imperative. Let us learn to be "faithful unto death."

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Instructions Received

2 Chronicles 14:1,2; 15:1-7

Asa was the son of Abijah who had been the king of Judah. In Abijah's reign there had been a war with Jeroboam and God had given Judah a mighty victory because they cried out to Him and relied upon him. When Abijah died, Asa became the king of Judah. We are not told many details about Asa and his personal life. We are told that his mother was Maachah and that he reigned a total of 41 years in Judah. We are also told that he began his reign by doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.

In the first part of chapter 15 we are told that God anointed a man named Azariah and sent him to Asa with a message. He reminded the nation of Judah that God was faithful and would be with them but only as long as they remained faithful to Him. The people were told that if they forsook the Lord, he would forsake them. Azariah reminded them that for a long time the nation had gone without the true God and without teaching priests, and without the law. He reminded them that when they got into trouble they called out to God and He responded to their cry. God had given them victory and peace in a time of terrible turmoil. When other nations were suffering destruction and vexation, God had given Judah rest and prosperity. The prophet encourages the people to be strong and not to become discouraged because God will reward their work.

It is a wonderful thing for God to speak to us. We must never take for granted the graciousness of God to

be mindful of us and speak to us through his Word and by his Spirit. Think about it! What can we do to commend ourselves to God? How could we ever deserve God's attention? The Psalmist cried out, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him." (Psalm 8:4) Yet, God loves us and sends us messages through his prophets, preachers, and teachers who are anointed by the Holy Ghost and bearers of His Word.

How do you respond when God sends instructions to you? Paul commended the Thessalonians because that when they "received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." (1 Thess. 2:13).

We are fully aware that preachers and teachers are human beings and as such are susceptible to temptation and sin; we do not proclaim the infallibility of God's men. However, we do proclaim the infallibility of God's Word and the fact that he does anoint men as divine spokesmen of His Word and will. The Scriptures make it clear that those men who live holy lives and speak faithfully the truth of God are to be respected, honored, and obeyed. So, how do you respond when God sends instructions to you? Do you become angry at the messenger? Do you decide he is not your "boss" and disregard the message? Do you criticize the minister and the church because you refuse to surrender your stubborn will to God in obedience to his Word? Thankfully, Asa and the people of Judah listened to the words of Azariah and turned their hearts to obey God.

II. Idolatry Removed

2 Chron. 15:8-9; 14:3-5

Notice verse 8, "When Asa heard these words..." Asa was the king and had the supreme political authority in the nation. He could do whatever he wanted. Still, when he heard the prophecy of God's man, he recognized it for what it was and humbled himself to obedience.

Receiving God's instructions requires action. When people say they are receiving God's Word but show no evidence of change in their life, they are not receiving God's Word. How many times people say to the preacher, "My, that was great preaching; just what we needed," then they go out the door and do not apply it to their everyday life. God is not interested in your compliment of his message, he wants you to implement it, act upon it, and obey it. Asa took immediate steps to do God's will. He promptly began removing the idols from the land. He began to tear down the altars for strange gods. He broke the images and cut down the groves that were used for idol worship.

We read in 1 Kings 15:12 that he "took away the sodomites out of the land." It is a sad commentary on our beloved nation that strong forces are making headway in seeking to legalize same sex marriages when such behavior is so explicitly condemned in the Scriptures. When revival came to Judah, the sodomites: the homosexuals, were not allowed to continue living their perverted lifestyle.

The farewell address of Joshua to Israel in Shechem stills rings true today: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served...or the gods of the Amorites...: but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." No

one can serve two masters. We must remove every idol, every worldly passion, every imagination that would lift itself up against the knowledge of God. If we will truly receive God's instructions, we must remove all other idols.

III. Institutes Righteousness

2 Chron. 15:10-18

There are a number of factors that show true revival had come to Judah through the leadership of Asa. He was inspired by the instructions he had received from God by the prophet Azariah and he took action against idolatry. Notice these things:

A. Courage- Vs. 8

The Bible said that Asa "took courage." It is certain that Asa knew about the idolatry in the land and knew that it was evil. No doubt he felt at times that something should be done, but we all know how difficult it is at times to stand up and take action. We fear what will happen to us. We fear what others will say and how they will react to our actions. Whatever the case with Asa prior to the message from the prophet, afterward he had a Godly courage. Listen friend, when God sends you a message through the pastor, evangelist, or teacher that hits you right where you live and you know that action should be taken, don't become angry and defensive, don't go away unmoved and irresolute; TAKE COURAGE! Know that God is telling you what you should do and giving you the directive and authority to do it. Take courage dad and do what has needed to be done for a long time in your home. Take courage mom and take action in your home with your husband. Take courage young person and deal with that besetting sin that constantly defeats you. Take courage preacher

and stand up for righteousness in your church.

B. Cleansing- vs. 8

The courage led Asa to perform a vigorous cleansing in the land of Judah. We have already mentioned the breaking down of idols and their altars, the banishing of sodomites, the cutting down of groves. This cleansing was essential to the instituting of righteousness. You cannot build righteousness over top of iniquity. The sin must be dealt with and removed. Salvation requires the cleansing of sin and the changing of man's nature. It is not just reformation where outward things are changed while the sin remains deep within. Paul charged the Corinthians (and us as well) to "cleanse" themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1)

C. Communion- vs 8

We read that they "renewed the altar of the Lord." There had been a removal and now there was a renewal. It is proper and necessary to remove the evil and its influences in our lives, but those evil influences must be replaced with Godly communion and spiritual devotion. The altar was a place of sacrifice where men humbled themselves and offered themselves to God. The altar is still a place of sacrifice and every Christian should regularly kneel at the altar in their church to remind themselves that they are to be a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." The altar is also a place of fellowship where frail human beings can commune with a holy, powerful God. As we offer ourselves wholly to God, he accepts us through Jesus

his Son and smells a sweet savor as our worship ascends to Him.

D. Consecration- Vs. 12

We read that they "entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God...with all their heart and with all their soul. Real revivals of righteousness always involve covenants, commitment, and consecration. We want God to make and keep promises to us and we must make and keep promises to Him. Have you given yourself fully to seeking him? Jesus stated the requirement: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first comandment." (Mk. 12:30)

E. Celebration- Vs. 15

"All Judah rejoiced at the oath." What a statement! Commitment and celebration in the same sentence. We usually view and present commitment as something hard and unpleasant while the fact is that those who really commit themselves to God feel overflowing joy. When Judah vowed to seek for God, He was found of them and gave them rest. The reason some Christians are so sour and miserable is because they are not fully surrendered to God. "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice, let them shout for joy...and be joyful in thee. (Ps. 5:11)

○ *Illustrations* ○

There's a difference between interest and consecration. When you are interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you're consecrated to something, you accept no excuses, only results.

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**Daily Bible Reading for this Week:**

**Sun** ☐ . . . 2 Ch. 1-3 ☐ . . Jn. 10:1-23  
**Mon** ☐ . . . 2 Ch. 4-6 ☐ . . Jn. 10:24-42  
**Tues** ☐ . . . 2 Ch. 7-9 ☐ . . Jn. 11:1-29

~~~~~  
Wed ☐ . . 2 Ch. 10-12 ☐ . . Jn. 11:30-57
Thur ☐ . . 2 Ch. 13-14 ☐ . . Jn. 12:1-26
Fri ☐ . . 2 Ch. 15-16 ☐ . . Jn. 12:27-50
Sat ☐ . . 2 Ch. 17-18 ☐ . . Jn. 13:1-20

June 9, 2024



Joash, the Boy King

Theme: Though Joash was providentially spared by God and one of His faithful priests, he failed in his later years and came to a sorrowful end.

Golden Text: *"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:13)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - 2 Chronicles 22:10-12, 23:1-3, 10-11

22:10 But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.

11 But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, (for she was the sister of Ahaziah,) hid him from Athaliah, so that she slew him not.

12 And he was with them hid in the house of God six years: and Athaliah reigned over the land.

23:1 And in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds . . . into covenant with him.

2 And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem.

3 And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the LORD hath said of the sons of David.

10 And he set all the people, every man having his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about.

11 Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king.

Introduction

When we read the Bible, we find that mankind has suffered much evil throughout the years; immorality, unbelievable acts of violence, and gross sin are not new. In today's lesson we read of a tragic massacre of innocent people because of the selfish ambition of one woman.

However, right in the midst of a tragic demonstration of evil, God's grace is evident. We must never despair when we look at our evil world. The devil would have us convinced that wrong will prevail and that God has abandoned us to our own devices. The truth is this: God is still on the throne! He has not lost control of the world and it billions of people. Where sin does abound, God's grace does much more abound.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Concealment

2 Chron. 22:10-12

After Jehoshaphat's relatively righteous reign, Judah had suffered under the evil reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah. Jehoram had married a daughter of Ahab and Jehoram walked in the ways of his wicked father-in-law. The Lord smote Jehoram with an incurable disease and he died. The Bible states that Jehoram "departed without being desired." What a sad commentary on a life with such potential! He died and no one missed him or mourned for him. He was not even buried among the kings. Ahaziah was no better when he came to power. He also walked in the wicked ways of Israel's king Ahab. The Bible states that his mother Athaliah was his counselor, along with the princes of Ahab. Through their evil counsel he joined forces with Israel and was caught in the judgment of God against them. Jehu executed God's judgment by slaying Israel's king Joram and Judah's king Ahaziah as well.

A. Athaliah's Tragic Slaughter

Now we read of a truly horrific incident. Athaliah, the king's mother, learned of Ahaziah's death and decided to secure the throne of Judah for herself. She rose up and began to slaughter all of the royal seed of Judah. It is hard to imagine such a heinous crime. Athaliah had absolutely no conscience or convictions and she was no doubt inspired by and probably possessed by demons. We are told how many young men and boys were massacred by Athaliah but she wanted to do a thorough job so no one would be able to rival her for the throne.

It is important to recognize the plan and work of Satan in this slaughter.

The devil hates God and does everything in his power to thwart God's plan. God promised that the seed of the woman would bruise Satan's head and this was another attempt by Satan to destroy the godly seed and keep the Messiah from coming.

Thankfully, God is all powerful and his plan will not be circumvented by the devil and his demonic host.

B. Jehoiada's Timely Rescue

When it seemed that Satan had won a stunning victory, God's ultimate victory was assured by the quick and decisive action of Jehoiada's wife Jehoshabeath, who was the daughter of former king Jehoram and the sister of Ahaziah. She became aware of the tragedy that was taking place and whisked the infant Joash away from danger. Joash and his nurse were hidden in a bedroom until the slaughter was ended and he was spared. Jehoiada and his wife then took Joash to live with them in their priest's quarters in the house of the Lord. They kept him for six years and raised him in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4)

II. Coronation

2 Chron. 23:1-15

For six years, everything went fine for Athaliah and she had no idea that one of the royal sons was still alive. For these six years, Jehoiada the priest and his wife cared for the child Joash. I wonder how much they told him about the tragic circumstances that left him without parents or siblings. I wonder if they told him about it at all. I imagine that they had told him some of it because he needed to know that he was really a king's son, of the royal line of Judah and not just a poor orphan boy being raised by an uncle and

aunt. However that may have been, when Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada decided it was time to take public action.

A. Joash is Anointed.

Jehoiada had great wisdom and planned the coronation with care. He knew Athaliah's character and knew she would not hesitate to have the boy killed if she had the slightest opportunity. Jehoiada enlisted the support of faithful men who helped him gather the chief fathers of Israel and the Levites to Jerusalem where Jehoiada made them aware of the fact that a king's son remained alive. They all agreed that Joash was the rightful heir to the throne and made a covenant with Jehoiada to hold a proper coronation. They were divided into three groups to protect the young boy and to guard the house of the Lord to make sure no enemies were able to kill Joash. When everything was in order, Joash was brought forth to the people. The crown was placed upon his head and he was anointed to be the King of Judah. The people began shouting their acclaim and rejoiced that they again had a true king from the royal line of David. It was truly an amazing day of celebration for everyone had thought that all the royal seed had been destroyed.

B. Athaliah is executed.

When Athaliah heard the noise in the streets, she went to investigate. What she saw shocked and infuriated her. There was Joash, crowned and anointed, surrounded by the leaders of Judah. The trumpets were sounding, the people were shouting and rejoicing and the musicians were playing and singing their praise. Athaliah was beside herself with rage. She rent her robe and began screaming, "Treason, treason." Now there is an ironic thought. Here stands a woman who rose up against the royal seed of Judah and destroyed them without con-

science. If ever an act of treason had been committed, Athaliah had certainly done it. Now, when her own plans are being overthrown, she cries out that treason is being done. It's interesting how people will justify what they do to others but be very upset and angry if anyone does the same to them.

Athaliah was taken from the house of the Lord and executed by the horse gate. Finally, after over six years of terror and injustice, Judah once again had a true king on the throne.

III. Consecration.

2 Chron. 23:16- 24:14

A. Righteousness.

Jehoiada was a faithful priest and a godly man who had been thrust into leadership because of his care for Joash. Joash was too young yet to make the decisions necessary to rule the kingdom and Jehoiada served as his advisor and mentor.

Verse 18 says that Jehoiada made a covenant with all the people "that they should be the Lord's people." I like that phrase, "the Lord's people." There is not a better way of saying it. It has been God's desire from the beginning that people would love him and serve him because they loved him. God wants us to choose to belong to him; to be His. While there are many theological terms and doctrines in the discussion of salvation and sanctification, the bottom line is this: at salvation we become the Lord's man or woman and sanctification is simply the living out of that relationship. We are not our own, we are bought with a price, therefore we glorify God in our body which is God's. How simple that is!

Notice the first thing the people did when they covenanted to be "the Lord's people." They went in a group to the house of Baal and broke it down. They destroyed the altars, idols and priest of Baal. True righteousness

will always involve the breaking down of sinful practices and habits.

Immediately after tearing down the idolatrous temple, they went about restoring the true worship of God according to the Law given to Moses. There will always be a negative and a positive aspect in religion. We will avoid sin and adopt righteousness. We will hate the devil, the flesh, and the world system, and we will love the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. We will try to frustrate the devil and to please the Lord. This was a wonderful day of rejoicing and the Bible said that they now had "quiet." Oh the feeling of peace and rest that comes to those who renounce sin and embrace righteousness!

B. Restoration.

As Joash grew to manhood, he assumed the rulership of Judah. He had the godly counsel of Jehoiada to guide him and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. There came a day when Joash noticed that the house of the Lord was in desperate need of restoration. Athaliah had broken up the Lord's house and stolen the dedicated furnishings and utensils to use in the temple of Baal. Joash started a collection for the purpose of repairing the Lord's house but the Levites did not follow through very well. Finally, Joash decreed that an offering chest be placed outside the gate of the Lord's house. The people gave generously and cheerfully and the House of the Lord was repaired and restored.

IV. Compromise.

2 Chron. 24:15-25

Sadly, the story of Joash does not end on a positive note. After his amaz-

ing rescue from certain death and his upbringing by a faithful priest, Joash did not have the personal commitment to continue living for God when Jehoiada, his step-father and counselor died.

A. Idolatry (17,18)

When Jehoiada died the princes took the opportunity to persuade the king to allow a return to worshipping idols in the groves and high places. Joash, though he knew better, gave in to the pressure and idolatry was revived in Judah.

B. Rebellion. (19-22)

God sent prophets to condemn the backsliding but Joash would not listen. When Zechariah cried out by the Spirit of God against Judah's sin, they stoned him at Joash's command. What a turn of events! Joash ordered the death of the son of the man who was responsible for Joash's life and kingdom.

C. Judgment. (23-25)

Syria attacked and defeated Judah, spoiling the temple. Joash's own servants conspired against him and murdered him; what a pitiful end.

○ *Illustrations* ○

Newspapermen went down from London to report firsthand the marvelous happenings of the great Welsh Revival at the turn of the century. On their arrival in Wales one of them asked a policeman where the Welsh Revival was. Drawing himself to his full height he laid his hand over his heart and proudly proclaimed: "Gentlemen, the Welsh revival is inside this uniform!" That is the way every revival needs to start.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 19-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 13:21-38	Wed	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 25-27	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 16
Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 21-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 14	Thu	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 28-29	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 17
Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 23-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 15	Fri	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 30-31	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 18:1-18
			Sat	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Ch. 32-33	<input type="checkbox"/> Jn. 18:19-40

June 16, 2024



Hezekiah Hears from Heaven

Theme: Hezekiah, when he was faced with a crisis, cried out to the Lord. He was in a desperate situation and when he prayed to God, he heard from heaven.

Golden Text: *"Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness." (Psalm 143:1)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - 2 Chronicles 32:1-8

1 After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself.

2 And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem,

3 He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him.

4 So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?

5 Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance.

6 And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying,

7 Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him:

8 With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

Introduction

In a previous quarter, we studied about the revival that took place under Hezekiah's leadership. He was a man who had a heart for God and His Law. He removed idolatry from the land by tearing down the idols and groves. He reinstated the Feast of Passover and renewed Judah's care for her priests and spiritual leaders.

Today, we continue by studying Hezekiah in his later years. He faces three different crises in our lesson today. In two of them he conducts himself wonderfully but in the third he fails miserably.

Let us learn from this look at the life of Hezekiah the need to continue in the faith. We must never trust our own power and ability; we must trust God.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Defense

2 Chron. 32: 1-23

A. Judah Invaded (1)

Verse one of 2Chronicles 32 says, "After these things and the establishment thereof..." We mentioned in the introduction the previous lesson concerning the revival that took place in Judah under the leadership of Hezekiah. He had followed the Lord wholly and taken drastic actions to restore righteousness in Judah. You would think that such godly actions would be followed by words like this, "and they lived happily ever after." Sadly, these words are only found in fairy tales as far as life on this earth is concerned. It was after Hezekiah took holy action that the enemy came against Judah.

We as believers have experienced this same thing many times. When we are stirred by the Holy Ghost and take holy action the devil gets riled up and attacks us with fresh vigor.

So it was that the Assyrian troops came into Judah and encamped against their cities thinking to overcome them and take them as their own. The Assyrian army was quite a force to be reckoned with. They had already won many victories and had been victorious against Israel. They had taken carried the people of Israel away captive and had every intention of doing the same to Judah. As far as they were concerned, Judah would be an easy target for they could not muster anywhere near the military force or might that Assyria had. You will notice that the Assyrians entered Judah and first besieged a city called Lachish which was about 30 miles from Jerusalem. However, Hezekiah knew that Assyria would not be content with Lachish; they had "purposed to fight

against Jerusalem." (Verse 2).

Our enemy often makes his advance in seemingly insignificant areas of our lives and we are not alarmed. We give in a little here and a little there, never intending to be completely overcome. We must be aware that Satan is never content with "small" conquests. His goal is to capture your capital city, your heart and soul.

B. Judah Fortified (2-8)

When Hezekiah became aware of the enemy's invasion, he immediately took steps to fortify and defend Judah. Notice some of the steps he took to protect Judah:

1) He stopped the water from flowing out to the enemy camp. This was a brilliant move. What army can exist without water? Why should the enemy come into the land and be plentifully satisfied with its water?

Have you ever considered the fact that part of our battle with Satan should be **to stop the things that help him**. Sometimes our critical and rebellious attitudes nourish the enemy. Sometimes we need to stop our tongues; they are refreshing the enemy. When your enemy attacks, stop anything that would benefit his cause.

2) He built up the wall that had been broken down. The wall around a city was designed for the protection of the people, not to restrict their happiness. When we view "standards of holiness" and "rules and regulations" as a restriction and try to tear them down so we can have "freedom," we are being foolish. Those walls are not to hurt us but to keep the enemy out. Build up that wall in your home, dad. Build up that wall, mom. Build up that wall, pastor.

Notice that he built the wall "up to the towers." That is significant because

the towers were the highest point of defense. Usually there were towers at each corner of the wall. The wall then, was raised up to the same level as the towers to provide proper defense.

What do the towers represent? What is our highest level of defense against Satan? The Word of God. The Bible is the tower of our defense and we must build our walls up to the elevation of God's holy Word.

3) He build another wall outside of the city wall for extra protection. I like to think that this wall typifies a believer's personal convictions worked in his heart by the Holy Ghost. Every Christian should have convictions of holiness in his own heart and life.

4) He prepared weapons of war to fight with. Not only must we stop doing things that aids our enemy, we must build up our spiritual arsenal with holy weapons of war: salvation, righteousness, truth, the gospel of peace, faith, the Word of God, the power of the Holy Ghost, and prayer. (See Eph. 6).

5) He reminded the people that God was their strength and might. We must always remember that if God is for us, there is no enemy that can defeat us.

C. Judah Threatened (9-23)

We read of the threats of Assyria against Israel and understand the attempt of the enemy to intimidate.

1) Boasting. They boasted of all their previous victories and told how no other nation was able to withstand their might.

2) Blasphemy. They even blasphemed God and spoke against Him as just a "god" like all the other nations claimed to serve. The account given in 2 Kings 19 tells how the messengers from Assyria brought threatening letters to Hezekiah. He took them to the house of the Lord and spread them out before God. Hezekiah prayed a powerful prayer beseeching God to vindicate His own holy name that all the world

might know that there really was a God of Heaven that was above all the gods of men.

3) Broken. When Hezekiah prayed, God heard and answered through the prophet Isaiah. God sent an angel to smite the host of the Assyrians. In that one night, the angel of the Lord smote 185,000 warriors of Assyria. Isn't that amazing? One Angel destroyed that many warriors. Just think what a legion of angels could do.

God wrought a mighty deliverance for Judah because Hezekiah cried out to Him in his distress. May we learn to go directly to God in our crisis.

II. Disease

2 Chron. 32:24; 2 Kings 20:1-11

A. Sickness

We are not told how much time passed after Assyria's invasion and defeat by God and Hezekiah's sickness. We are simply told that he was "sick unto death." Isaiah came to him and told him to set his house in order for he was going to die.

B. Supplication

We then read that Hezekiah "turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord..." Again, when faced with a crisis, Hezekiah turned to the Lord. He really meant business with God and the Bible says that he "wept sore." Fervent prayer is prayer that is on fire; not yawning prayer or words said out of habit with no real thought about what is being said.

Before Isaiah had left the palace grounds, God spoke to him and told them that he had heard Hezekiah's prayer and had seen his tears. He was going to raise Hezekiah up and in three days he would be able to go to the house of the Lord. Beyond this great healing, God also promised to add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life.

C. Sign

Hezekiah heard what Isaiah said but

he wanted a sign that it was really true. It seems that he could have waited for three days; he would have known by then if the words were true or not. Still, his faith needed a boost. God agreed to give a sign and said that the shadow in the sun dial would go backward ten degrees. In other words, he was turning back the time and rewinding the sun. This is just another proof that God does have full control of the sun as well as the rest of the universe. He set certain laws into motion that continue by his power; but at any time he can interrupt and override those laws by his Sovereign authority.

III. Decline

2 Chr. 32:25-30, 2 Kings 20:12-18

A. Prosperity

Because of his faithfulness to God, Hezekiah was blessed with many riches. We are told that he had "exceeding much riches and honor." He had treasures of silver, gold, precious stones, spices and jewels. He had storehouses full of corn, wine and oil. He had flocks and herds in abundance. The Bible states that "Hezekiah prospered in all his works."

B. Pride

Sadly, it is recorded that "his heart was lifted up." How difficult it is for men to survive prosperity! More people are overcome by prosperity than by poverty. When material things increase we too often begin trusting in them and finding our security in things instead of in the Lord. We read in 2 Kings 20 about Hezekiah's decline:

1) Deception (12)

Messengers arrived from Babylon with a letter of congratulations for Hezekiah's recovery and with presents.

2) Disclosure (13-15)

Instead of crying out to God for help as he had before, Hezekiah took matters into his own hands and showed the men from Babylon "all the house of his precious things... all the house of his armor...and all his dominion." God sent Isaiah to him to inquire about the men from Babylon. Hezekiah told Isaiah that they had been shown everything in his house.

3) Doom (16-18)

Isaiah then told Hezekiah that Babylon would invade Judah and take it captive. His own descendants would be taken away as captives and servants in Babylon. What a pitiful end for such a prosperous and victorious life! When faced with the crisis of invasion, Hezekiah trusted in the Lord and experienced victory. When faced with sickness and death, Hezekiah cried out to God and was healed. Now, when the enemy came gently he trusted in self and sealed Judah's doom.

Illustrations

At Waterloo, Napoleon was the strongest in every way. He had the most men, the most guns, and the best, and he knew how to use them, and his officers were all "men of renown." And as the tide of battle ebbed and flowed over the bloody field, he was so sure of victory that he actually sent three messages to Paris saying that he had won the victory. Unfortunately, pride will get you every time.

"Get someone else to blow your horn and the sound will carry twice as far."

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun ☐... 2 Ch. 34-36 ☐... Jn. 19:1-22
Mon ☐... Ezra 1-2 ☐... Jn. 19:23-42
Tues ☐... Ezra 3-5 ☐... Jn. 20

Wed ☐... Ez. 6-8 ☐... Jn. 21
Thur ☐... Ez. 9-10 ☐... Acts 1
Fri ☐... Neh. 1-3 ☐... Acts 2:1-21
Sat ☐... Neh. 4-6 ☐... Acts 2:22-47

June 23, 2024



The Return to Jerusalem

Theme: By God's grace and providence, Israel was permitted to return to their homeland. Their first order of business was to restore the Temple of God.

Golden Text: *"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after." (Jeremiah 30:17)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Ezra 1:1-6

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Introduction

In our last three lessons we have studied some of the final years of Judah's history in their homeland of Israel. Because of their idolatry and disobedience, God allowed them to be taken into captivity by the kingdom of Babylon. Judah had been given every opportunity to turn from their waywardness and sin and they had experienced a number of revivals under godly rulers. They also had the example of the 10 Northern tribes of Israel which had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians by 722 BC. For over 100 years Judah existed as a nation knowing what had happened to Israel. Still, they did not take seriously the warnings of the prophets and persisted in their idolatry. Now, they had also been taken into captivity and yet God's grace provided for their return to their homeland.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Proclamation Made

A. The Decree (Ezra 1:1-4)

Even before Judah had been taken into captivity, God had already planned for their return to their homeland. Jeremiah had prophesied concerning Judah: "This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (Jer. 25:11) This prophecy was given at least 20 years before the captivity was completed. Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecy and realized that the time of deliverance was near when he was a president in Darius' kingdom. (Dan. 9:2). Even more amazing is the fact that Isaiah had prophesied in about 712 BC, over 100 years before the captivity; that God was going to use Cyrus to "perform" his "pleasure" in allowing the children of Israel to return to the homeland and rebuild the temple that had been destroyed. (Isaiah 44:28, 45:1)

This prophecy is so startling in its detail that critics have decided that someone else wrote this passage and only attributed it to Isaiah. After all, they surmise, no one could know that Israel would be allowed to return and rebuild the temple, and they certainly could not know, ahead of time, the name of the king who would not only allow them to do so but would command them to do so. It is hard for unbelievers to accept the fact that God does know what is going to happen and sometimes he tells his people ahead of time.

When Cyrus became the king of the Medo-Persian empire, God "stirred up" his spirit, and he issued a proclamation calling for volunteers to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord. The long years of struggle and

disappointment were coming to an end. Now, the call had gone out for those who were interested in fulfilling God's plan to return and rebuild. Cyrus boldly asked, "Who is there among you of all his people" who will go up to Jerusalem and accomplish this great task? You will notice when you read his proclamation that he not only appealed for people to actually pack up their belongings and make the journey to Jerusalem, he also addressed those who for whatever reason did not feel inclined to go on the expedition. He told those who decided not to go, that they were to help those who were going by giving them silver, gold, goods and animals. They were also to make a freewill offering for the rebuilding of the temple of God.

It seems like a good principle to apply in the cause of Missions work does it not? There are some that are called to actually take a journey to a far land, live there, and build God's work there. Those of us that are not specifically called to take the journey are not absolved of all obligation in the matter. We are called to support those who actually go to do the work. We are to help them with money and material needs. We are to give our freewill offerings to build the work of the Lord around the world.

B. The Departure (1:5 - 3:6)

We read in verse 5 that the "chief" among the fathers, the priests, and the Levites rose up and declared their intentions to answer the call to return and rebuild the house of the Lord. Oh, how vital is it is that people respond to the call of God! Too often, God is pleading for laborers to do his work and no one will rise up to do it. Too many are comfortable with their life as it is. They are making money, living in

a nice home, and driving fine vehicles. They have many of life's luxuries and are not interested either in doing God's work themselves or in giving sacrificially to those who are doing God's work. Hear the call of God – Who is there among you who will rise up and do the Lord's work?

Thank God, there were elders and spiritual leaders who were willing to pull up their stakes, take up their tools, and pack up their families to make a God ordained journey to do God's will.

The man who led this expedition was Zerubbabel. Not a lot is known about him but he is named in the genealogy of Christ as Zorobabel in Matthew 1:12 and Luke 3:27. He is called the "governor of Judah" in Haggai 1:1 and clearly from the accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah was the leader of the people when they returned to Jerusalem. He certainly stepped forward at a crucial time, took the leadership role and was blessed for it. When a count was taken, there were 49,897 in the company to return to Jerusalem including people of Israel, their servants, and 200 singers, evidently those who were designated to lead in worship and praise to the Lord with singing. Not only did other people of Israel give willingly for the support of those traveling, Cyrus himself brought out the vessels of God that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar and returned them to be used in the rebuilt temple. When the people arrived and got settled in their cities, they gathered in Jerusalem and there they built an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings according to the law of Moses. They also kept the feast of Tabernacles and reinstated the ceremonies involving the feasts and festivals of the law.

II. Foundation Laid

Ezra 3:7-13

We read that in the second year and

in the second month, they began their work on the house of the Lord. Zerubbabel was the leader along with Jeshua the priest. They felt the burden of the Lord's work and spearheaded the effort to rebuild the temple. When the foundation was laid, they had a time of celebration.

A. Celebration

The priests adorned their priestly apparel and took up their trumpets. The Levites used cymbals to praise the Lord. There were singers who sang "together by course" in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord. It is interesting how often musical instruments are used throughout the Old Testament in Israel's worship of the Lord. They played their music and sang with their voices to express their love and thanks to God. I believe that our churches should resound with godly music and singing. People who are living right should not be ashamed to use their musical talents and ability for the Lord.

As the music and singing filled the air with holy praise, the people began to shout with their voices. They cried out loud and shouted their praises to the Lord for bringing them back to their homeland and that the foundation of the Temple had been laid. Yes, it was only a beginning, but it was a beginning. There can be no advance or accomplishment without a beginning, no matter how small or insignificant the beginning may seem. Many of these people had never worshiped God in a temple at all. Many of them had never worshiped God in Jerusalem. They were thrilled and excited about what was taking place. This was the beginning of a new life for them and they were overjoyed.

B. Lamentation

While some were in celebration, some were in lamentation. While some cried in rejoicing, some cried in regret.

Those who were old enough to remember the former temple were sorrowful because they could not believe that this new undertaking could ever equal what they had in the past. Those “good old days” were so magnified in their minds that they could not really enjoy this new endeavor. After all, there was no way that this temple could rival that old glorious one. While we should treasure the wonderful memories of a glorious past, we should never allow them to paralyze us today. There is still much to do, much to experience, much to accomplish. All that can be done has not been done. Instead of crying over what we used to have, let’s rejoice in every effort to continue having it today.

III. Opposition Raised

Ezra 4:1-24

A. Adversaries

When any good work begins, there are always some who are against it. There are always adversaries and opponents who will do everything in their power to hinder and stop the good work being done. A church business meeting was in progress and the time came for a vote by the raising of hands. One elderly man had drifted off to sleep and now suddenly his hand shot up in the air and he cried out, “I’m ag’in it.” The pastor said, “Brother, we haven’t even stated the motion up for vote yet.” “It doesn’t matter,” the man replied, “whatever it is, I’m ag’in it.” There are some people in our churches just like that. They may be for some agenda of their own, but for the most part, if there is something put forward that is new or different, they are against it. You will notice that this opposition did not raise up during the

two years the people had been in Jerusalem previous to the start of the work. As soon as the foundation was laid, the opposition raised. As soon as progress was made, the adversaries showed up.

They began by trying to join the work as fellow citizens who also worshiped the Lord. The devil will do his best to infiltrate the Church and cause havoc from within. We must not be deceived by compromisers who claim to “believe just like we do” but they do not show the evidence of holiness and righteousness in their daily lives.

B. Accusation

When the efforts of the adversaries failed to stop the work of building the Lord’s house, they tried writing letters of accusation to the king of Persia. The letter accused the Jews of rebellion and insurrection when nothing could have been further from the truth. Remember, Jesus said that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is called the “accuser of the brethren” so don’t be amazed when he accuses you. Keep on doing God’s work in spite of hell’s opposition.



Cripple him, and you have a Sir Walter Scott. Lock him in a prison cell, and you have a John Bunyan. Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington. Raise him in abject poverty, and you have an Abraham Lincoln. Strike him down in infantile paralysis, and he becomes Franklin Roosevelt. Deafen him, and you have a Ludwig van Beethoven. They all overcame their adversity.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun ☐ Neh. 7-9 ☐ Acts 3
Mon ☐ . . . Neh. 10-11 ☐ . . . Acts 4:1-22
Tues ☐ . . . Neh. 12-13 ☐ . . . Acts 4:23-37

~ **Wed** ☐ Esth. 1-2 ☐ . . . Acts 5:1-21
 ~ **Thur** ☐ Esth. 3-5 ☐ . . . Acts 5:22-42
 ~ **Fri** ☐ Esth. 6-8 ☐ Acts 6
 ~ **Sat** ☐ Esth. 9-10 ☐ . . . Acts 7:1-21

June 30, 2024



Haggai: Reordering our Priorities

Theme: The prophet Haggai was inspired by God to remind the Jews that their priorities had become misplaced. We must guard our priorities as well.

Golden Text: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Haggai 1:1-10

1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not

enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

Introduction

Last week we studied about the proclamation of Cyrus, King of Persia which called for volunteers among the Jews to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the House of the Lord. Over 49,000 returned and began to settle again in their homeland.

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua the priest, the people began working on the temple and the foundation was laid. There were adversaries that rose up to oppose the work and the project was halted. For a number of years the Jews neglected the task they had originally returned to Jerusalem to accomplish, the rebuilding of the Lord's House. God then stirred up Haggai and Zechariah to rebuke the Jews for their neglect and encourage them to revive their work on the Temple.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Work Ceases

A. People Discouraged

We mentioned briefly last week the opposition that arose against the work of God's people. We must remember that there will always be those who have no desire to do the Lord's work or will. Their hearts are not surrendered to Him and their hands are not either. There are people even in our churches that will not lift a finger to do God's work. They are too busy and preoccupied with their own life to be bothered with work for the Lord. What is really hard on those of us who do have a heart for God and his work, is the fact that not only will there be some who will not participate, there are also some who will do everything in their power to hinder and stop any work for God. The adversaries that arose against the Jews were people were not using any of their own time or resources in the work anyway. It could be expressed by the old saying, "it was no skin off of their teeth." They were not spending any time, money, or energy on the work so why would they care if others did? When people know they are not doing right, it "bugs" them that other people are doing right. Instead of the deadbeats getting stirred up to work, they use their energy to discourage the ones that are trying to accomplish something for God. Ezra said that the adversaries "weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them in building." He also said that they "hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose." The enemies had one goal: stop the work on the House of the Lord. They lied, they falsely accused the Jews, and they tried physically to stop the work. Letters were written to the king of Persia

that described the Jews as "rebellious." The adversaries told the king that if these people were allowed to rebuild their city, the citizens would then refuse to pay taxes and customs thereby stopping the king's revenue from the Jews. The king believed the false accusations and sided with the adversaries against the Jews. With the king's authority behind them, the enemies of Judah were able to stop the work on the House of the Lord.

The people of Judah were very discouraged by the opposition. It was a difficult task to rebuild the House of the Lord from the rubble of destruction. They had limited workers, materials and resources. When you add the furious opposition that arose, it is easy to see why the people became discouraged. After all, they were just human like we are. Still, this work was important! This was God's work! This task had been decreed by Cyrus but actually was not the will of the king but the will of God who inspired the king to decree it. However, even though the work was important, the people gave up in the face of the opposition and the work ceased. The sounds of cutting timber, shaping stones, and building were no longer heard. Day after day went by and the work site was vacant and silent.

B. People Distracted

When the work on the House of the Lord stopped, the people began to work on their own projects. The Temple was no longer their first order of business. When they returned to their homeland, they came for one reason: rebuild the temple of God. They knew that they would need places to live. They knew that eventually they would need to plow the ground and plant crops, but their priority was to com-

plete the House of the Lord. Now, when they had become discouraged and had ceased to work on the Temple, they became distracted. Other things began taking their time and energy.

We as believers must be careful that we do not allow our lives to be distracted by less important things. Our adversary, the devil, will try every trick in the book to hinder our spiritual lives. He will fight us, accuse us, and degrade us. He will deliberately try to distract from the work of the Lord.

II. Word of God Comes

God spoke to Haggai the prophet “in the second year of Darius the king.” The work on the temple had begun in 536 BC and had ceased in about 534 BC. Now it was 520 BC. Fourteen years had passed and God was upset with his people. The Word of the Lord came to Haggai and he began proclaiming the message to the leaders of the people.

The Word of God through Haggai opened with a strong rebuke concerning the Temple of God which was still not built. He states that the people were saying, “the time is not come that the Lord’s house should be built.” Clearly, the people were no longer interested in completing the temple. They no longer felt any pressure or motivation to work on the temple. As far as they were concerned they could live without it. After all, most of them had lived without a temple all of their lives. Even though they were back in their homeland and had come especially to rebuild the temple, now fourteen years had gone by since the work ceased and they had no desire to resume the work. Listen to the rebuke: “Is it time for you to dwell in your ceiled (comfortable, luxurious) houses and this house (the temple) to lie waste? Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of

hosts; Consider your ways.”

A. Priorities have been misplaced.

God gives a strong rebuke through the prophet to let the people know that their priorities had become misplaced. They had no time for God’s work and God’s will but they had all the time and money in the world for their own houses and well being. God rebuked them for building and living in comfortable houses while the House of the Lord was incomplete. God said in verse 9, “mine house is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.”

We are suffering terribly in the Holiness movement from this same failure. We have many who need to reorder their priorities. In this passage, God is not condemning the people because they live in comfortable houses, he is rebuking them for being MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR OWN HOME AND WELFARE THAN ABOUT HIS WORK.

God’s message to Judah and to us this: **Put First Things First.**

Yes, God knows that we need shelter, food, clothing, money, cars, and material things. The Bible nowhere forbids the owning of property and material things. The Bible does however teach that Spiritual matters are to take first place and all material and physical needs are to take their place afterward. Jesus commanded in Matthew 6:33 that we “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Your salvation is a matter of priority. Faithful church attendance is a matter of priority. Time in prayer is a matter of priority. If you pray for 15 minutes a day you are only praying for 1 percent of your time. Consistent Bible Study is a matter of priority. Tithing is a matter of priority. Giving offerings is a matter of priority. Witnessing is a matter of priority. Doing the will of God is a mat-

ter of priority whether in regard to dating, marriage, education, career, vocation, or calling.

B. Priorities have directly influenced your temporal, earthly life.

Haggai tells them in verse 6 that their misplaced priorities have cost them in their harvest, their food supply, their clothing and even their savings. In verse 10 they are told that because of their misplaced priorities, God has stopped the dew and the rain causing a drought and famine. Isn't it interesting: There are people who neglect spiritual things and put their time and energy into temporal, material things because they want more and more. They think to get more materially, you must focus on it in exclusion to anything else including spiritual matters. God makes it clear that the exact opposite will happen. When you strive for material wealth in exclusion to spiritual matters, you do not really prosper at all. You never really get ahead. By contrast when you put the Lord first, he will bless and multiply what you do have.

C. Priorities have directly affected your spiritual life.

Because of Judah's distraction with their own welfare and neglect of the house of the Lord, they were in a state of coldness. They had no zeal for God. Their love had faded and they needed revival. They needed to put first things first. When you allow your priorities to get out of place, you will suffer spiritually. In verse 12 we read that the people "obeyed the voice of the Lord." God then spoke again and promised them saying, "I am with you, saith the Lord." If we will obey Him and order our priorities properly, He will be with us and bless as well.

Praise God, the people and their leaders listened to and obeyed the Word of God and three weeks later they resumed the work of rebuilding the House of the Lord.

When the people proved their desire to obey God and build his house, He sent his word again by Haggai and promised that "the desire of nations" would come, referring no doubt to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. God also promised that he would "fill this house with glory." What wonderful promises! Even though their effort seemed feeble in their own eyes compared to the Temple that used to exist, God honored their obedience and gave them the assurance of a Savior as well as promising that His glory would fill their temple just as it had filled Solomon's temple. God even declared that the glory of this temple would exceed that of the former temple. Though they found that hard to believe, it really did come true. Over 500 years later Jesus Christ, God's Son walked into this temple (remodeled by Herod) and read from Isaiah the prophecy concerning himself and his ministry.

Illustrations

An acquaintance of mine nearly lost his life in a flying accident a few years ago. I had breakfast with him some time after that accident, and I asked him how his accident and his lingering physical problems had affected him. He said, "Bill, I see life so much more clearly now. My relationship with Jesus Christ is now of supreme importance." Sometimes we just need to get our priorities right.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:	Wed	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 8-10	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 8:26-40
Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 7:22-43	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 9:1-21
Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 3-4	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 7:44-60	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 9:22-43
Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> Job 5-7	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 8:1-25	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Acts 10:1-23

July 7, 2024



Zechariah's Message of Victory

Theme: God used Zechariah to proclaim the ultimate victory of Israel by the power and Spirit of God. Our victory also, will only be accomplished by God's Spirit.

Golden Text: *"And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."* (Zechariah 14:9)

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Zechariah 1:1-6; 4:6-9

1:1 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

2 The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers.

3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.

4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.

5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?

6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants

the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

4:6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

Introduction

We have studied how that the work on the House of the Lord had ceased and the people had become preoccupied with their own houses and needs. God anointed Haggai to speak boldly to the Jews about getting their priorities right and renewing their efforts to build the Lord's house. Two months after Haggai first prophesied, God raised up another prophet, Zechariah. He also began to boldly proclaim God's word for the Jews. Zechariah not only spoke of the victory that God would give to Israel as far as the completion of the House of the Lord, He also spoke important words concerning the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Past Rehearsed

Zechariah 1:1-6

As was mentioned in the introduction, Zechariah first began to prophesy about two months after Haggai had spoken the Word of the Lord to the Jews about resuming the work of building the House of the Lord. Zechariah means "the Lord remembers." We are told that he was the grandson of Iddo the priest. Zechariah was born in Babylon during the time of captivity and had now returned with the first group of Jews in response to the proclamation of Cyrus. At the beginning, the workers were greatly inspired and worked fervently to build the Lord's House. However, they became discouraged because of the opposition that arose and they ceased working. In their state of discouragement, they became distracted and became concerned only with building their own houses and planting their own crops. Thus God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to stir the people to resume the work he had called them to do.

A. Warning Proclaimed (1:4,5)

Zechariah began his message by rehearsing the past history of God's people. He told them that God had been sorely displeased with their fathers. God had sent prophets that cried to the people to turn from their evil ways and doings "but they did not hear, nor hearken." Zechariah reminded them that God had tried to revive the people before they had to suffer destruction and captivity but that they had refused to listen.

It is tragic when people refuse to pay attention to the Word of God. I have witnessed cases where a person was clearly spoken to by the Word of God and by messages from the Holy

Ghost, yet they resisted, refused, and rejected the call. What will it take for God to get your attention?

B. Word Performed (6)

Zechariah then reminded the people that the Word of God had been performed and had come true just as He had said. "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes...did they not take hold of your fathers?" In other words, "See what happened? It came to pass just as I said it would." You would think that we would learn that God's Word will always come to pass. There is no escape from Truth. We may not like it; may not want it; may not obey it; but we will not escape from it. The consequences of disobedience are sure and severe. God's desire for this generation of Jews was that they would turn unto him with all their hearts and do his will. He promised that if they would turn to him, he would turn to them. (Verse 3) In chapter seven we read another indictment of the former generations of Israel. In 7:11-14 God states that the people of Judah "refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears . . . and made their hearts as an adamant stone . . . therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried and I would not hear, saith the Lord. But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations . . . and their land was desolate after them."

My, what a tragic end! God spoke; they refused to listen; his Word was performed and they were scattered into captivity. God clearly wanted this new generation of Jews to learn from the mistakes of the past. Surely we

could learn from the past as well. Those that reject God and his Word do not prosper, but those who believe and obey are blessed and triumphant.

II. Promised Restoration

After the past was rehearsed, Zechariah began to proclaim God's promise of restoration for His people. This message takes up the remainder of the book of Zechariah and was proclaimed in two parts.

A. Prophetic Visions (1:7- 6:15)

The first part of Zechariah's message came to him in eight visions which he describes.

1) The Rider on the Red Horse.

(1:7-17) The Angel of the Lord comes riding on a red horse and then stands among the myrtle trees. While he stands there messengers arrive who have been sent through the earth to see its state. The messengers report that the nations of the heathen are in peace and at rest. God expresses his anger with those nations feeling secure and promises to punish them and to restore Jerusalem.

2) 4 Horns and 4 Carpenters.

(1:18-21) There are 4 horns that scatter Israel and then 4 carpenters are sent to punish the enemies of Israel.

3) A Man measures Jerusalem.

(2:1-13) Zechariah sees a man who has come to measure Jerusalem and is told that the city will be rebuilt and inhabited. This prophecy speaks not only of the current rebuilding but also about the Millennial state of Jerusalem as well.

4) Joshua, the High Priest.

(Ch. 3) This vision speaks of the sin of Israel and of their cleansing by God's grace. It foreshadows the ultimate cleansing of Israel by their Messiah.

5) Golden Lampstand and 2 Olive Trees.

(Ch. 4) In this vision, Zechariah sees a golden candlestick with a bowl on the top and 7 pipes to 7 lamps. On either side is an olive tree. According to verse 6, this speaks of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the oil that flows through the lamp and creates the light. Also, the olive trees seem to indicate an abundant supply of oil.

6) Flying Scroll.

(5:1-4) Zechariah sees a large scroll about 30 feet by 15 feet. It proclaims a condemnation and judgement of sin.

7) The Measuring Basket

(5:5-11) The basket of grain represents sin and wickedness. When the cover is raised, there is a lead figure of a woman inside. The lead piece is thrown back into the basket, the cover is replaced, and 2 other women carry the basket away. When Zechariah asks where the basket is being taken, he is told it is being taken to Babylon. This seems to speak of the establishment of Babylon as the seat of wickedness and rebellion throughout the history of the earth.

8) The Four Chariots.

(6:1-8) These chariots seem to refer to God leading in the destruction of Israel's enemies to the North and South; probably Babylon and Egypt.

B. Future Victory (Ch. 7-14)

Zechariah tells again why Israel was scattered in chapter 7 and then prophesies the restoration of Jerusalem in chapter 8. He tells how the city will be inhabited and blessed by God. Then he begins to prophesy concerning the distant future of Jerusalem and Israel and gives some very important information concerning the coming Messiah.

1) Messiah's Rejection

Zechariah is often overlooked but it is a very important book of prophecy. It contains clear prophecies concerning the first coming of Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah.

The Triumphal Entry - In 9:9 we read a startling prophecy: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." This prophecy was completely fulfilled in every detail when Jesus rode the colt into Jerusalem and the crowd shouted, "Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The Betrayal - In 11:10-13 we read that Christ's covenant with Israel was broken when he was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. It is also mentioned that the money would be cast into the potter's field afterward. These two specific prophecies were completely fulfilled by Judas the traitor who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver and then threw the money down before the religious leaders who "cast the money into the potter's field" by buying a potter's field with the blood money. (Matthew 27: 3-7)

The Crucifixion - In 12:10 we read the prophecy that Israel would one day look upon him "whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him . . . and be in bitterness." This prophecy clearly declares that Christ would be pierced and we know that he was pierced by three nails as well as with a spear. It is sad that these prophecies all detail Israel's rejection of their Messiah. The One who would be sent to rescue and redeem them would be rejected and slain.

2) Messiah's Reign

Zechariah not only spoke of the Messiah's coming to Israel, but also of his coming in end time. There are very important prophecies relating to the

time of the tribulation and the final revelation of Jesus Christ to Israel.

Jerusalem Besieged - In 12:1-3 we read of the time when the nations of the earth will surround the city of Jerusalem with the intention of completely destroying it.

Battle of Armageddon - It is at this time of besiegement that what we know as the Battle of Armageddon will occur. In 12:8,9 we are told that God will defend Jerusalem and destroy all the nations that come against her. We read in 14:1-5 that the Lord will fight against the nations and his feet will stand upon the Mt. of Olives when he comes with his saints. We then read in 14:12-15 that the Lord will smite the enemies of Jerusalem and that their flesh will be consumed while they stand and their eyes and tongues will melt in their heads.

Revelation of Christ to Israel - We read in 12:10-13:1 that Jesus will reveal himself to Israel as their Messiah and they will believe and be saved. (See Romans 11:25-27)

Millennial Reign of Christ- (See Zech. 14:8-11 and 16-21.)

○ *Illustrations* ○

During the 1930's and 1940's, the London newspaper Sunday Express carried an astrology column by R. H. Naylor. Within a few weeks he predicted that France would never rule Spain, a united Ireland was imminent, and there would be no war in 1939. He explained that Hitler's horoscope showed he was not a war maker. So much for the horoscope! However when God prophesies something, it will come to pass.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:			
Sun	☐ . . . Job 20-21	☐ . Acts 10:24-48	☐ . . . Job 28-29
Mon	☐ . . . Job 22-24	☐ Acts 11	☐ . . Acts 13:1-25
Tues	☐ . . . Job 25-27	☐ Acts 12	☐ . . Acts 13:26-52
			☐ . . . Job 30-31
			☐ . . . Job 32-33
			☐ Acts 14
			☐ . . . Job 34-35
			☐ . . Acts 15:1-21

July 14, 2024



Esther Becomes Queen

Theme: God has a great master plan for individuals and nations. We should be willing to be used by God, for even when we don't see His plan, He is working.

Golden Text: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* (Rom. 8:28)

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Esther 1:1-5, 10-12, 19

1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)

2 That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

3 In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:

4 When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.

5 And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of

the garden of the king's palace;

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded . . . the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

11 To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.

12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

19 If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she.

Introduction

We have been studying about the Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the House of the Lord under the leadership of Zerubbabel. While the rebuilding was going on in Jerusalem, there were still thousands of Jews who had not returned to their homeland. They had settled in the land of captivity and had houses, lands and families. Remember, it had been almost seventy years since Judah had gone into captivity and some had been displaced even longer than that. Our lesson today takes us back to the land of captivity, Persia, where we find that God had not abandoned his people but was still working for them.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. A Riotous Dinner

Esther 1:1-9

Cyrus had been king when the Persian empire emerged after the defeat of Babylon. He made the decree which allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem to build the temple. After he died, his son Cambyses reigned for a little over seven years. Darius I reigned next and then Ahasuerus who is also known as Xerxes. (Xerxes is the Greek form of his name.) Some historians say that Xerxes held this extravagant royal feast in order to persuade his nobles and princes to support his planned attack of Greece. He was not satisfied with the size of his kingdom and wanted to extend it even though he already ruled an area from India to Ethiopia in Africa. Other historians believe that Xerxes held this feast when he returned in defeat from his war effort against Greece. Whatever the motive may have been, this was an astounding display of revelry. This feast lasted for one hundred and eighty days or about six months. For these six months the king showed off his great riches and the extravagance of his wealth and kingdom. Sumptuous food was abundant. Wine flowed like water. It was a riotous dinner. When this feast ended, the king called for another feast that would include not only the nobles and princes but all those who dwelled in Shushan, the "small and the great." This continuation of his royal banquet lasted another seven days. The court and garden were lavishly decorated with colorful hangings and beautiful stones. Again, the royal wine flowed in abundance as the people drank from golden vessels of which none was exactly alike. This entire time was characterized by

fleshly and sinful excess.

Human nature has not changed. Though few people have the resources to practice revelry to the level that Xerxes did, thousands live their lives for no greater purpose than to drink themselves into a stupor and drug themselves into oblivion. In the parable Jesus told about the prodigal son, he said the runaway wasted his substance on "riotous" living. One great shame of America today is that people live riotously; living only to gratify the base desires of the flesh. May God help us as His people never to become "lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God."

II. A Rash Decree

Esther 1:10-22

A. The King's Vice (10,11)

The king had been feasting and drinking wine in excess for some time. Verse 10 says that the "heart of the king was merry with wine." In plain words, the king was drunk. When a person is drunk, he is not in his right mind. How much evidence must we have before we believe the awful dangers and effects of alcohol? The Bible makes it clear that strong drink is to be avoided. Any drink of alcohol has a detrimental affect on the mind. People do stupid things under its influence. People do abhorrent things under its influence. The king was drunk and in his stupor he called for the Queen to come and parade her beauty before him and his drunken lords. There is no doubt that drunkenness and immorality go hand in hand. The effect of alcohol overrides whatever restraint there may have been when it comes to immoral and unlawful actions. The king's lewd desire overcame any sense of propriety that he had.

B. The Queen's Virtue (12)

Vashti, by contrast, was not under the awful effect of strong drink and her sense of modesty rose up against the king's carnal command. Yes, she was under the king's authority. Yes, she was legally bound to obey him. However, when his command violated her personal purity and virtue she stood up for what was morally right over what was politically or legally right.

While some commentators are of the opinion that Vashti did wrong in refusing the king's command, I believe she did the right thing. No one should be exploited morally or physically by the desires and commands of another. Every child of God should take seriously the matter of holy modesty and moral purity. No authority has God's approval to cause anyone to act in an immoral or impure manner. We must have convictions based on God's Word and refuse to compromise them no matter what pressure may come.

C. Vashti's Eviction (13-22)

The king was furious with Vashti because she would not obey his command. His advisors told him that something must be done to punish Vashti and to make her an example to the other women of the kingdom, otherwise, the ladies would all rebel against the authority of their husbands. It's interesting that no one had the courage to tell the king that his command was inappropriate and should never had been made in the first place. The king should have apologized for asking such a ridiculous thing of his wife. Instead, Vashti was condemned and evicted. She lost her position as queen and was banned from ever coming into the presence of the king again.

III. A Royal Dispatch

Esther 2:1-18

A. Maidens Collected (1-14)

About four years had passed (see

2:16) and the king's anger had long since faded away. Now he missed his queen and regretted his rash decree. When he confided in his servants they suggested that he gather all the young unmarried ladies of the kingdom. Then from among them he could select a new wife who would also be the queen in the kingdom. The king was pleased with the idea and a royal dispatch was sent throughout the kingdom requiring all of the young ladies to come to Shushan, to the palace.

It is at this point of the story that we meet a man named Mordecai who traced his ancestry back to tribe of Benjamin in Judah. Mordecai had been taken captive in the Babylonian invasion so he must have been an elderly man by this time. He had an uncle who, along with his wife, had died, leaving a young girl named Esther. When Esther was left all alone and evidently at a young age, Mordecai, her cousin, took her in and raised her as his own child. By the time of the king's royal dispatch, she had grown into a "fair and beautiful" young lady. When the young women were being gathered, Esther was taken among them to Shushan and placed in the custody of Hegai, who is called the "keeper of the women." It must have been an agonizing day for Mordecai (and for Esther as well) when Esther was taken from him.

We are told that Mordecai instructed Esther that she should not mention that she was a Jewess from among the captives of Judah. We are not told what motivated Mordecai to give her such an instruction but it may have been that he thought the fact that she was Jewish would hinder her chances of becoming queen. He probably felt that her Jewish heritage would automatically cause prejudice against her. At any rate, she obeyed his instructions and kept her nationality quiet.

When she arrived at the palace, she quickly became a favorite of Hegai and he gave her and her servants the best quarters in the house. Every day Mordecai would walk by the women's house to find out how things were going for Esther.

This process took quite a long time. Each maiden had to go through twelve months of treatments and procedures. At the end of one year, the maiden was given whatever she required and was sent to meet the king. Eventually, the king would decide which young lady he had chosen to become his wife and queen of the kingdom.

B. Esther Chosen (15-18)

When Esther's turn came to go in to the king, she did not ask for anything more than what the chamberlain, Hegai, provided. Clearly, she was not an arrogant, prideful, young lady. She exhibited a kind and courteous manner. She was not demanding. She was not bitter and hateful. Remember, Esther had gone through terrible tragedy in her life. Her father and mother had both died, leaving her alone. She had been brought up by Mordecai her cousin. While he obviously loved and cared for her, he was still not her actual father. Besides all this, she was being raised in a foreign land where the worship of the true God was not practiced. Now, she had been compelled to come to the palace as one of hundreds of maidens who could be favored or rejected simply at the whim of the king. She could have been angry and spiteful but she was not. Her cousin's teaching about God had certainly had a great affect on her life and character.

When Esther went before the king, the Bible says that he "loved Esther

above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti." The king was no doubt impressed by Esther's beauty but surely there were many among the young maidens who were very beautiful to look at. There clearly was something more impressive about Esther. We know that God was working behind the scenes and that certainly makes a great difference. Yet, Esther had a lot to do with her being chosen by the king. She had the qualities of character that were important not only to the king but to all those around her. She had a steadfast faith in God that served as a foundation for her attitude and behavior. Little did she realize that this momentous event in her life was but a small beginning of what God was going to accomplish in and through her.

Each of us must be careful to trust in the plan and purpose of God. We must not allow bitterness over adverse circumstances to grow and cause us to fall from his grace.



Illustrations



Those who study bees tell us when a honeybee drives its barbed stinger into flesh, it becomes so firmly imbedded that the only way the bee can escape is to leave the stinger behind. This, however, is sure to cause the death of the bee. It receives such a wound that it cannot possibly recover. So it is with us if we allow ourselves to hold on to bitterness. It will hurt us much more than the one we are bitter against.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun ☐... Job 36-37 ☐. Acts 15:22-41
Mon ☐... Job 38-40 ☐. Acts 16: 1-21
Tues ☐... Job 41-42 ☐. Acts 16:22-40

Wed ☐... Ps. 1-3 ☐. Acts 17: 1-15
Thur ☐... Ps. 4-6 ☐ Acts 17:16-34
Fri ☐... Ps. 7-9 ☐. Acts 18
Sat ☐... Ps. 10-12 ☐. Acts 19: 1-20

July 21, 2024

Lesson
8

Queen Esther's Courage

Theme: There are times that being obedient to God and his will demands courage on our part. His will for us may seem hard at times but it is always for our benefit.

Golden Text: ". . . Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Esther 4:8, 10-11, 13-16

8 Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to show it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.

10 Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer,

16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Introduction

Last week we studied about Esther being chosen to be the queen of Persia. It would seem to be a fairy tale type story: a young girl whose parents had died and who was raised by her cousin and his family in relatively poor conditions, had been chosen to be the Queen. This must surely be one of those stories that next says, "and they lived happily ever after." Sadly, this was not the case. All did not go well for Esther and her people just because she had become the queen for there was an enemy of the Jews who desired their total destruction. Little did Esther know that the glory of being queen was going to bring her to a fearful decision.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Haman's Pride

Esther 3:1-5

Soon after Esther became the queen, a man named Haman was promoted by the king to be his Prime Minister. The Bible does not use that specific title but it fits the position well. Haman was second in authority only to the king himself. We are not told a lot about Haman except that he was the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite. Haman is so described in four places: 3:1,10; 8:5; 9:24. Haman is called the "Agagite" in 8:3. The significance here is a connection of Haman's family to the royal family of the Amalekites who were enemies of Israel even in the time of Moses.

Now that Haman had been promoted to such an honorable position in the kingdom, he expected everyone to bow to him and reverence him as their superior. He was full of pride and wanted all the nobles and citizens to exalt him. He lived to feel important. He had no greater desire than his own praise. The king had even commanded that his subjects bow and give reverence to Haman whenever he passed by. We are told that the one man who would not bow and reverence Haman was Mordecai, Esther's cousin who had raised her. Mordecai evidently was among the king's servants for he had a place in the king's gate. When Haman passed by all of the king's servants would bow except Mordecai. The servants were alarmed at his behavior and rebuked him for not bowing and thus breaking the king's commandment. He told them that the reason he refused to bow was because he was a Jew. This seems to be a clear declaration that Mordecai worshiped the One, True, God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and therefore refused to bow in worship to any mortal man. Day after day, he refused to bow and the servants continued to criticize him for his behavior but he remained steadfast. Of course, Haman soon noticed that this one man was not bowing to him as he passed by. Haman was furious and by investigation found out that the man was Mordecai and that he was a Jew. Those who are motivated by selfish, fleshly desires hate those who refuse to submit to them. Haman's pride was such that he was not satisfied for 95 or 99 percent of the people to bow to him. He would not be content until every single person in the kingdom bowed and did reverence to him.

II. Haman's Plot

Esther 3:6-15

It is interesting to note that Haman's anger would not be satisfied by punishing Mordecai alone. Haman was so full of rage and hatred, that he took aim at the whole race of Jews who were in the land. No doubt this was another devilish plan devised by Satan himself. Satan had always desired the destruction of God's people and he especially wanted to destroy the godly lineage which would bring the Messiah to Israel. He tried to destroy it quickly with Cain's murder of Abel. He tried again when Israel was in bondage to the Pharaoh of Egypt and the people were horribly abused and the baby boys were to be killed. He tried again through Athaliah who destroyed all of the royal seed except for Josiah who was secretly rescued. (2 Kings 11:1) He tried again through Herod who slew all the baby boys two and under after the birth of Jesus. Satan has always hated God and his people. He

has always devised plans of destruction for them and he has not yet given up for he will try yet in the end times to destroy the nation of Israel from the face of the earth.

So Haman decided that he would not only remove Mordecai from the scene but all of the Jewish people as well. He went before the king and began to accuse the Jews as people who rebelled against the laws of the land and the commands of the king. He never did tell the king the truth about why he was so anxious to destroy these people. He knew in his heart that his hatred was based on one very petty matter: the fact that Mordecai would not bow and reverence him. This was no legitimate reason to exterminate an entire group of people! Haman had no conscience whatsoever and a man who hates will also lie. He was full of hatred for the Jews and wanted them destroyed so bad that he was even willing to pay the expenses of such an extermination. He offered as much as ten thousand talents of silver which some have estimated to equal almost ten million dollars in today's money. He certainly was passionate in his hatred of Mordecai and the Jews.

It is unfortunate that the king did not exercise more wisdom in this matter. Without any questioning or investigation he promptly gave his approval to this vicious plot. One would think that a king would be more careful about a matter with such enormous consequences: an entire nationality was going to be annihilated. Instead of protesting and refusing to be part of such a plot, the king issued written orders to all the provinces commanding his people to "destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day . . . and to take the spoil of them for a prey." The posts, or mes-

sengers, were sent out and told to hurry to get the decree into the hands of the rulers and the people. Everywhere the decree went, there was consternation and fear. Even those living in the palace were perplexed by this shocking plot to destroy the Jews.

III. Haman's Plight

A. Mordecai's Concern - Es 4:1-9

The Bible says that when Mordecai became aware of what was happening, he "rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry." He even came unto the king's gate in his mourning apparel and none were allowed to enter the gate clothed in sackcloth. Mordecai and the Jews throughout the nation were stunned and dismayed by the command for their destruction. There was no reason given for such a terrible thing to be done and they wept and fasted in sorrow. While there is yet no mention of God's name in this book, it is clear that these people were calling out to God for understanding and for deliverance. They probably felt a lot like Jehoshaphat when the Moabites and Ammonites came against Judah with a mighty host. Jehoshaphat called the people together and prayed, "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." (2 Chron. 20:12)

B. Esther's Courage

1) Predicament (4:10-14)

One of Esther's maids told her about Mordecai being clothed with sackcloth and she sent him clothes to put on but he refused them. He sent word to Esther telling her about the decree for the Jews destruction and charged her to go in before the king to make intercession for them all. When Esther

heard what was going on, she was astonished and dismayed. Certainly, she wanted to help her people but the law of the Persians was such that if anyone went into the king's presence uninvited they were apt to be put to death. The only way the person could live was if the king held out his golden scepter in acceptance of them. Esther had not been called for by the king for a month and was fearful that he would be displeased with her if she approached him uninvited. Mordecai reminded her that she would not escape the destruction just because she was in the palace. He also told her that God would bring deliverance in one way or another, but it was very possible that God had ordained that she become queen just for this situation. Esther was in a predicament. No doubt human nature said, "Keep quiet. Don't take such a chance with your life. Those people will have to look out for themselves and you look out for yourself."

2) Prayer (4:15-17)

Esther's answer to Mordecai was powerful. There were two important parts: 1 - She called for prayer. She knew what had to be done but refused to rely on human strength and reasoning. She needed Divine assistance. It is foolish to attempt anything without enlisting the aid and anointing of God. 2- She consecrated herself to do right even if it cost her life. She knew the risk she was taking but she was willing to do it after prayer had been made to God. It is important to note that while we depend on God for miracles, there is often a task required of us as well. Would God have delivered the Jews if Esther had not been willing to go before the king?

3) Purpose (5:1-3)

Esther prayed and fasted for three days, along with the Jews in Shushan. On the appointed day, she dressed in her royal apparel and quietly entered the king's court. Imagine how her heart must have been pounding as she approached the king knowing that her life was at stake. My what purpose! What Courage! Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is doing what is right even when you are afraid. Esther had determined that she would stand up for her people and if it cost her life, so be it.

When the king saw her, he smiled and held out the golden scepter in royal acceptance. It is hard to imagine what relief Esther must have felt to know that she had been accepted by the king and would not die. She still did not know what would happen concerning her request, but she had been accepted and that was enough. What a privilege we have: we have been invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16)

Will you respond to God's Word and God's will with courage or cowardice?

Illustrations

Do you recall the young lady who, as valedictorian of her high school graduating class, testified for Jesus Christ? At first the principal flat-out said, "No." Only a threatened lawsuit changed that. Then she was asked to rewrite her speech and tone it down. She did not. The speech was given as she had originally planned. We should stand up with courage.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun ... Ps. 13-15 Acts 19:21-41
Mon ... Ps. 16-17 Acts 20:1-16
Tues ... Ps. 18-19 Acts 20:17-38

Wed ... Ps. 20-22 Acts 21:1-17
Thur ... Ps. 23-25 Acts 21:18-40
Fri ... Ps. 26-28 Acts 22
Sat ... Ps. 29-30 Acts 23:1-15

July 28, 2024

Lesson
9

Coincidence or Providence?

Theme: There are times in life when we wonder why things happen as they do. In the end we will realize that God was working in every situation.

Golden Text: *"Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them." (Esther 9:5)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Esther 4:13-14; 7:1-6

4:13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

7:1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.

2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the

kingdom.

3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

Introduction

We have mentioned previously that the book of Esther is the only book in the Bible in which the word "God" does not appear. Critics have used this fact to deny the inspiration of the book and to claim that it should not be part of the Bible. While God's name does not appear, God's hand certainly does. Today we will see how God worked in a number of circumstances and situations which on the surface seemed to be only the coincidences of life. We must realize that nothing happens without a purpose. Our difficulty is that we cannot always SEE that purpose and we become discouraged. The Christian's life is governed not by coincidence but by providence.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

We want to take a look at twelve incidents in the book of Esther and see where God was working behind the scenes to accomplish his plan.

1) The King's Rash Decree

This begins when King Xerxes has his riotous party which we have already studied about. After 180 days of feasting, drinking and revelry, the king was in a drunken condition. He then got the bright idea to call for Vashti, the queen, to come and parade her beauty before his drunken lords and nobles. The word came to Vashti and she refused to appear. She refused to gratify the fleshly desires of the king and his governors. The king was furious with Vashti for disobeying his command. His advisers told the king that he should remove Vashti from being queen as punishment for her rebellious behavior. They said they were afraid that all the women of the kingdom would begin to follow her example and be disobedient and rebellious to their husbands at home. The king listened to them and took their advice. He banished Vashti from his presence and removed her from being queen. Now, was this coincidence or providence? Did this happen just by chance? Why did the king request such a foolish thing of his queen? Why did she refuse? It certainly was not normal for the queen to disobey the commands of the king. Why did the king become so angry that he actually removed her from being queen? His anger at being defied would quickly have passed and all would have been well. Instead of a brief spat that caused no long term damage, there was now a serious situation: the kingdom had no queen.

2) Esther Chosen as Queen

Later, the king regretted his rash

action of removing Vashti from being queen. His advisers stepped forward again and suggested that he send for all the young maidens of the kingdom to be brought to the palace. The king would then meet each of the young ladies and choose a new queen from among them. It is at this point of the story that we meet Esther. Esther's parents had died when she was a child and she had been raised by her cousin Mordecai. She was a young Jewish maiden and was very beautiful. When all the maidens were gathered, Esther was among them. I speculate that there were many tears shed by Mordecai, by his family, and by Esther. What a tragic occurrence in this young lady's life: to be drafted and taken away to the palace without her consent.

This seemed like another in a long line of setbacks for Esther. She had already been bereaved of both her parents and raised by a relative, though clearly she was loved and cared for. Now she finds herself among scores of young ladies much like herself who would much rather have been at home planning for a life with a husband and family by their own choice. Yet, out of the many maidens, Esther is the one chosen to be the Queen. What an amazing development! What were the natural chances of this happening? Was this coincidence or providence?

3) Assassination Plot Foiled

We read in 2:21-23 that two of the king's chamberlains hated the king and hatched a plot to kill him. Mordecai became aware of the plan and sent word to Esther who then told the king about what Mordecai had discovered. When they investigated the matter, they found it to be true and both the traitors were executed. The whole

incident was duly noted by the court historian who wrote the full account in the king's chronicles. Was this coincidence or providence? How did Mordecai happen to be the one who became aware of the evil plan? Why was it considered important enough to be recorded in the king's journal?

4) Haman's Promotion and Plot

Soon after Esther became queen, Haman was promoted to authority second only to the king himself. We studied last week about his pride and how he demanded that everyone bow and reverence him. Of course, Mordecai refused to bow and reverence Haman for he worshiped only the true God of Israel. Haman was furious and convinced the king that the Jews should be destroyed because they were a rebellious and disobedient people. This certainly seems like a tragic circumstance for the Jews. How could God allow this to happen if he were still in control? Since we already know the rest of the story we can see that this awful plot against the Jews did not take God by surprise. Was this coincidence or providence?

5) Mordecai's Charge to Esther

When Mordecai became aware of Haman's evil plot, he sent word to Esther that she must go before the king and plead for her people. Esther told him that she had not been summoned by the king for 30 days and reminded him that if anyone entered the king's presence uninvited he faced death. If the king did not extend the royal scepter in approval and acceptance, the person would be executed. Mordecai then said to Esther, "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" In other words, Esther, it may very well be that everything that has happened to you up to this point for was this very purpose: that you would be in this place of honor and authority and have

the opportunity to save not only your life but those of your people as well. These are profound words indeed. How we need to remember that life is not an accident. Everything that happens to us is being worked together for Good by our God. Was this coincidence or providence?

6) Esther Received by the King

While Esther stood quietly, not knowing whether she would live or die, the king looked up and saw her standing in his court. Imagine her relief when she saw a smile cross his face and watched as he lifted the scepter and held it out to her in acceptance. Was this coincidence or providence?

7) Esther's Delay

When the king received Esther in his court it looked as though God had definitely answered their prayers. The king invited her to make whatever petition she desired and it would be granted. You would think that she would quickly blurt out her petition that her people be spared from Haman's evil plot but she did not. Why? Why did she invite the king and Haman to a banquet instead of clearly stating her urgent request? Only God and Esther know why she acted as she did at that moment. Evidently, she didn't feel the liberty to speak out at this time about Haman's plot. Was this coincidence or providence?

8) Haman's Gallows

When Haman heard that he alone had been invited to join the king and queen for a banquet, he was elated beyond measure. As he left the palace in a wonderful state of excitement, he passed by Mordecai who again refused to bow. Even though he felt he had the favor of the queen, he could not stand it that Mordecai refused to bow to him. He went home and immediately ordered a

gallows to be built so that Mordecai could be hanged on them. He made up his mind that when he was at the king's banquet he would ask permission to execute Mordecai, for he could not wait until the decreed day of destruction to see Mordecai slain. Was this coincidence or providence?

9) The King's Sleepless Night

That very night, the king could not sleep. He was so frustrated that he called for one of his servants to bring the book of records and read to him. He just knew that would put him to sleep. As the servant read, he read about the time Mordecai had uncovered the assassination attempt and saved the king's life. They discovered that Mordecai had not been properly rewarded for his loyalty and decided something must be done. By this time it was morning and Haman had already arrived in the court because of his eagerness in securing the death of Mordecai. Was the king's sleepless night a coincidence or providence? What about the section that they read, was that a coincidence or providence?

10) Mordecai Publically Honored

When Haman was asked what should be done to the man the king delighted to honor, he immediately thought that he was that man. He suggested that the man be robed in royal apparel and placed upon the king's own horse. He would then be led through town wearing a crown with a noble proclaiming loudly, "this is a man the king delights to honor." The king was thrilled with the suggestion and told Haman to carry out every detail for the honor of Mordecai. Can you imagine the horror Haman felt? The man he hated most

in the world was about to be honored publically and he himself would have to carry it out. Was this coincidence or providence?

11) Esther's Petition

Esther had invited the king and Haman to a second banquet and it was here that she finally made her request that the king spare her life and the lives of her people. The king was shocked that Haman would try to attempt such a thing and ordered him to be executed. It just so happened that there was a brand new gallows standing behind Haman's house so he was taken and hung on the gallows he built to hang Mordecai on. Was this coincidence or providence?

12) Mordecai's Promotion and the Jews Protected

When Haman was executed, Mordecai was promoted by the king to Haman's position of Prime Minister of the kingdom. He then decreed that the Jews would be able to protect themselves against any attack. Esther 9:16 says that they "stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies." They celebrated their deliverance with a day of gladness and feasting and sent portions one to another. God had proven himself faithful to his people. Trust in His Providence!

○ *Illustrations* ○

"Coincidence is when God works a miracle and chooses to remain anonymous."

"When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't."

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:			
Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 31-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 23:16-35	Wed <input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 37-39 <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 26
Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 33-34	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 24	Thur <input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 40-42 <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 27:1-26
Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 35-36	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts 25	Fri <input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 43-45 <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 27:27-44
			Sat <input type="checkbox"/> ... Ps. 46-48 <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 28

August 4, 2024

Lesson
10

Ezra, a Skillful Scribe

Theme: God not only provided for the restoration of the temple as His house, but he also desired the reformation of Israel as His holy people.

Golden Text: *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." (Ezra 7:10)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Ezra 7:1, 6-7, 10, 25-28

1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

7 And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may

judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem:

28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Introduction

We studied earlier about the first return of Jews to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel. At that time, almost 50,000 people returned with the specific goal of rebuilding the temple of God. After many years of distractions and opposition they completed the work in approximately 516 BC. The events of the Book of Esther then took place in Persia between the first and second returns of captives to Jerusalem. Now, we move forward to about 458 BC, about 58 years after the completion of the Temple. A devout scribe named Ezra is inspired by God to return to Jerusalem to teach the people the Word of God.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Commission

Ezra 7

In chapter 7, we meet Ezra, a descendant of Aaron in the holy line of priests. He is called "a ready scribe." The word "ready" means skillful, and speaks of great ability in teaching the Law of God. He is called, "Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven," in 7:12. We read in 7:10 that Ezra had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." It is noteworthy that Ezra was not just one who wrote out the Scriptures as a Scribe, and not only one who taught others the Scriptures as a Priest, but he sought after the Law of God to **do it**. For a man to be a truly faithful teacher or preacher, he must first love God's Word and obey it in his own life and then be careful to teach it and preach it accurately to others. There are those who want to tell others how to live and what to do or not do, but they are not too concerned about living it out themselves. Such leaders are a reproach to the cause of Christ and will suffer in the day of judgment as hypocrites.

Clearly, Ezra felt compelled by God to return to Israel and be a teacher of God's Law among the people. No doubt, they had heard about the difficulties the Jews had encountered in their work of rebuilding the temple. They had heard about the eventual completion of the temple and knew that the people needed priests and teachers to instruct them in the law of God. Ezra went before the King, (Artaxerxes, or Xerxes as he is known in history) and requested that he would send them back to their homeland to encourage and strengthen those that

had already returned.

The king agreed to his requests and issued a letter stating his commission.

1) Anyone who desired to return to Jerusalem was allowed to do so.

2) They were officially sent by the king to care for the welfare of the people according to the law of God.

3) They were given gold and silver by the king and his nobles and were permitted to receive free will offerings from among the people.

4) They were permitted to purchase what ever they needed for their trip as well as livestock for offerings in the Temple when they arrived.

5) They were also given vessels for the service of the temple.

6) The king actually decreed that his treasurers were to freely give what ever more Ezra might need in order to complete his trip and provide for the House of God.

7) The treasurers were told that they were not allowed to impose any taxes or tributes on the ministers of God's house including the priests, Levites, singers, porters, and Nethinims.

8) Ezra was authorized to establish civil law and appoint judges to teach and enforce the law.

9) The Jewish government was authorized to punish law breakers by imprisonment, banishment, or even death.

What an amazing commission from a heathen king! Only the providence of God could be responsible for such a generous blessing from Xerxes. Ezra says in 7:28, "I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me." When the group was assembled, there were 1,496 that had decided to return to Jerusalem with Ezra.

II. Preparation

Ezra 8:1-30

A. Social Preparation (1-14)

Ezra began his preparations for the journey by taking a census of all those who were going to return with him to Jerusalem. The list in chapter 8 is evidence that Ezra was a very careful, meticulous scribe. He made a detailed genealogy of every one in the group.

B. Spiritual Preparation (15-30)

1) Call for Ministers.

When Ezra finished his census, he found that there were no sons of Levi in the group. This was not acceptable to Ezra for he wanted to obey God's Law and it called for sons of Levi to serve in the temple. He then sent men to bring ministers for the house of the Lord. In response to Ezra's call, 38 men who were descended from the sons of Levi joined the group. Also, there were 220 from among the Nethinims that volunteered to go to work in the temple of the Lord. The group now totaled 1,754 men.

We should never underestimate the value of ministers and men of God. I know that many churches think they can get along better without a pastor; at least that way they can do what ever they want with no authority to say otherwise. However, it was Jesus Christ who gave the gift of pastors to His church when he ascended up on high. (Eph. 4:8-15). We need men who have been called by God and anointed by God to do his work. Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers have been ordained by God to serve Him in this world. A God-called man has authority and anointing that others do not have. May God help us to respect and honor those who He has called to lead his people.

2) Command for Prayer.

In verse 21, we read that Ezra proclaimed a time of fasting and prayer so

the people could seek God for "a right way" for them and their children. Ezra had been offered military protection by the king but had been "ashamed" to accept it. He had already told the king that the hand of God was upon them and that His wrath would be against any who rose up as enemies to his people. Instead of taking the protection of human military might, Ezra chose to depend upon the holy omnipotence of God. Verse 23 is so powerful: "So we fasted and besought our God for this; and he was intreated for us." In other words, we prayed, and God answered. Oh, the glory of a God who hears and answers his people! We do not pray in vain. We do not trust in vain. The very doubt that keeps us from fully trusting our God, keeps us from the confidence of his answer.

3) Consecration of Vessels.

Ezra separated 12 priests to be consecrated caretakers of the holy vessels of God. He placed the consecrated offerings and vessels into the care of the consecrated men and exhorted them to "watch" and to "keep them" safe. All who are called of God to do his work must always remember that we will give account to God for what he has entrusted us with. It is a solemn duty to be placed in charge of consecrated houses of God and consecrated offerings of God's people. God will not tolerate dishonesty or fraud. God's money and property are not to be handled lightly or irreverently.

III. Reformation

Ezra 8:31 - 10:44

Ezra records that they began their journey on the twelfth day of the first month and that the "hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way." With God's help and protection, they completed the journey and arrived in Jerusalem.

A. Intermarriage

When Ezra arrived, he quickly appraised the situation and found much to be concerned about. One of the most pressing problems had to do with the intermarriage of the Jews with the heathen peoples around them. They had married women from among the Canaanites, Egyptians, and Amorites who had been condemned by God for their idolatry and immorality. Thus, the holy seed of God's people had been "mingled" with the unholy people of the lands about them. Ezra was shocked to learn that the princes and rulers of Israel were the most guilty in this matter of unholy intermarriage. The ones who knew the most about God's law and who were leaders of the people had transgressed the most. It is tragic when those who are in leadership disobey God's Word in their own lives and lead others into disobedience as well. Ezra says that when he heard about this, he rent his garment, plucked hair from his head and beard, and sat down astonished. Ezra, as a faithful scribe of God's law, recognized the gravity of this transgression. Many people feel no hatred of sin. They are not repulsed by it, they are attracted to it. They are not convicted by it, they caress it and cover it. A true understanding and love of God's Word will beget an abhorrence of sin and wrongdoing. Ezra was joined by others who felt the horror of what was done and who "trembled at the words of God."

B. Intercession

Ezra fell upon his knees, spread his hands out to the Lord, and began pouring out his heart to God. He confessed the terrible iniquities of his people. He admitted that God's people had directly disobeyed God's com-

mands that they should never marry among the sinful people in the lands about them. Ezra's prayer is compelling and filled with godly sorrow for the sin of Israel.

C. Instruction

While Ezra prayed fervently, a great congregation gathered before the house of God, weeping and repenting. Ezra made a proclamation that all the Jews should gather in Jerusalem within three days. Ezra then preached to them concerning their sin and commanded them to repent and separate themselves from their strange wives. The people repented and agreed to do as they were commanded. The task was not an easy one and it took over two months to actually execute the orders of separation. Remember, God will not tolerate the mixing of holiness and sin. God's people must come out from and be separated from this world and its evil.(1Jn2:15)

○ *Illustrations* ○

On July 20, 1993, while cutting down oaks in a Pennsylvania forest, Don Wyman got his leg pinned beneath a fallen tree. No one could hear his yells for help. After digging for more than an hour to try to free his bleeding, shattered leg, he hit stone. He would bleed to death unless he did something drastic. Wyman made his decision. Somehow he had the fortitude to amputate his own leg below the knee with his pocket knife. Like Don Wyman, men who want to follow Christ face tough choices. We have sinful habits we want to keep as badly as our leg. It takes strength to cut off our wickedness like Ezra did in today's lesson.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun ☐... Ps. 49-50 ☐..... Rom. 1
 Mon ☐... Ps. 51-53 ☐..... Rom. 2
 Tues ☐... Ps. 54-56 ☐..... Rom. 3

Wed ☐... Ps. 57-59 ☐..... Rom. 4
 Thur ☐... Ps. 60-62 ☐..... Rom. 5
 Fri ☐... Ps. 63-65 ☐..... Rom. 6
 Sat ☐... Ps. 66-67 ☐..... Rom. 7

August 11, 2024



Nehemiah's Great Commission

Theme: God has always sought for "a man among them who would stand in the gap and make up the hedge." Nehemiah was such a man and we can be also.

Golden Text: *"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land . . ." (Ezekiel 22:30)*

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Nehemiah 1:2-4; 2:1-5

1:2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

2:1 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king.

Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.

2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,

3 And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

Introduction

Nehemiah was a contemporary of Ezra and led the third and last return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. He served as the king's cupbearer, which was a very important position for poisoning was a favorite method of assassins. Nehemiah would taste the drink before giving it to the king and of course if there was poison, he would suffer instead of the king. The book of Nehemiah complements the book of Ezra and provides additional information about the reformation of the people of God as well as giving the account of the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem which had been broken down. Clearly, Nehemiah was a devout man of prayer.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Nehemiah's Burden

Nehemiah 1:1-4

Ezra had led an expedition of over 1700 people for the express purpose of restoring true worship among the people of Israel in Jerusalem. Years before, Zerubbabel had led almost 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem and after some delay, they had accomplished the task of rebuilding the Temple of God. The task of rebuilding the temple, reinstating temple worship, and reforming the people was an enormous one. The opposition was intense for there are always enemies of God who do not want His people to have freedom of worship and peace.

While Nehemiah served the king in Shushan, some of men of Judah that had been to Jerusalem returned and Nehemiah inquired of them concerning the people and the work in Jerusalem. He was told that there was great affliction and reproach. No doubt he was told about the years of opposition the people of God had encountered. He was told how the work on the Temple had ceased for quite some time and that they had finally completed its rebuilding. He was told about Ezra's arrival and how he was dismayed at the spiritual condition of the people for they had mingled themselves among the heathen around them and failed to keep themselves pure before God.

When Nehemiah heard this disturbing report, he was crushed in his spirit. He records that he "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." Nehemiah, though he had remained in Persia, was deeply concerned about the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem. He felt the significance of their purpose: they were

going home! He felt the magnitude of their task: they were working to restore the holy Temple, the holy city, and the true worship of the Holy God. When he heard of their affliction he was burdened for them and began to fast and pray. Notice: 1) He was burdened for his brethren. We must remember that we are all in this together. We are brethren. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. 2) He took his burden to the Lord. The single greatest thing we can do for our brethren in affliction is to PRAY. Yes, we should give them words of support and encouragement. Yes, we should assist financially when it is needed. Yet, the most important and effectual thing is prayer. For the "effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

II. Nehemiah's Prayer

Nehemiah 1:5-11

1) Comfort. Nehemiah was heavily burdened by the bad news he had received. There was nothing personally he could do to relieve the affliction of the Jews but he knew that God was a mighty tower of strength and comfort. Prayer comforts the one praying. There is no doubt at all that pouring out one's heart to God brings divine comfort to the heavy heart. How many times have we said, "I don't know what people do, when they don't have the Lord to turn to?" "Where could I go but to the Lord?" Prayer brings comfort to the one being prayed for. Oh, the times that we have felt the comfort of God's Spirit right in the midst of trouble because someone was praying.

2) Confidence. Nehemiah knew where he could go for help. He fasted and prayed to the "Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God,

that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments.”

3) Confession. True prayer from the burdened heart will include confession. Often we become lifted up in our pride and act as though we are so holy we should be worshiped when in actuality, we are frail, human creatures who too often fall short of the glory of God. When we come into the holy presence of God we become aware of our awful weakness and failure. Though Nehemiah had not personally participated in Israel’s sin of rebellion and disobedience, he identified himself with it for he was part of the nation and people. Instead of pleading his innocence, he pleaded God’s mercy.

4) Courage. Nehemiah prayed not arrogantly but courageously. He knew that God keeps his word and he reminded the Lord of his promises to Moses. Yes, God had said that if his people sinned, he would scatter them among the nations and it had happened just as he said. But, God had also said that if the people would turn back to Him and obey his commandments, He would gather them and bring them back to the place that he had chosen. He prayed the promises of God. I know that God has not forgotten the promises he has made, but it certainly is not wrong for us to pray God’s promises back to him. He wants to know that we know his promises and are willing to meet his conditions.

5) Continuance. Nehemiah states that prayed before God, “day and night.” Just a “lay me down to sleep” prayer will not do the job. Just a “Bless this food” prayer will not do the job. We must persevere in prayer if we are serious about getting an answer.

III. Nehemiah’s Request

Nehemiah 2:1-8

At the end of Nehemiah’s prayer in

chapter one, we find an important detail. His last request of God was that He would “prosper” his servant and “grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” He then adds a line of explanation: “For I was the king’s cupbearer.” All right, so what is the big deal here? While Nehemiah prayed so fervently for the Jews in their affliction, he became aware that **God was dealing with him to actually go and help them himself.** This is a “dangerous” thing about prayer and may be why some do not really pray fervently: they are afraid that God will want to use them to help answer their own prayer.

Nehemiah felt the conviction that God had called him from his comfortable situation and from a job that he enjoyed to go and work with the afflicted Jews in Jerusalem. There was so much to be done and they needed his help. Thank God, Nehemiah was willing to go.

He went into the king’s presence to perform his duty as cupbearer and the king noticed Nehemiah’s sorrow. It’s interesting that Nehemiah could honestly write that he had not been sad in the presence of the king at any time before. **I wonder how many of us could say that about our attitude at work.**

The king had wisdom and discerned that Nehemiah’s sorrow was not trivial and superficial but deep sorrow of heart. When the king asked Nehemiah about his trouble, he poured out his grief at the conditions in Jerusalem among his people. The king replied, “For what dost thou make request?” Nehemiah sent a quick prayer up to God and then made his request.

He asked that he be allowed to return to Jerusalem for the specific purpose of building and fortifying the city. He also asked for letters of recommendation and approval from the king so that he would not be hindered in mak-

ing his journey. Finally, he asked for the king to provide him with the timber that was needed for the construction. The king agreed to all of Nehemiah's requests and he, without delay, started on his way.

IV. Nehemiah's Task

Nehemiah 2:9-20

The king sent a military escort along with Nehemiah for he was traveling alone and not with a large group of Jewish exiles. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he rested for three days and became acquainted with the leaders and the situation. Then one night, he took a few men and went out to look over the condition of the city. He viewed the broken and burned walls. He examined the crushed gates. He saw the devastation first hand and probably he felt quite overwhelmed at the extent of the damage. He had not yet said anything to anyone about his real mission.

Often there is wisdom in waiting. We must realize that God's will not only includes the course of action we must take, but also the timing of those actions. Some have correctly heard God speak the track they were to follow, but they missed the timing he desired. Nehemiah wanted to be prepared for the task before he rashly publicized it.

He looked over the situation and then tackled the task head on. He called for the priests, nobles, and rulers and proposed that they begin the work of reconstructing the city and its walls. He reminded them that as long as the city remained in such deplorable condition, they were a reproach to their nation, their God, and themselves.

Nehemiah told them that God had

commissioned him to come to Jerusalem for this specific task and that the king had given his approval and assistance in the matter. The leaders were inspired by Nehemiah and they said, "Let us rise up and build." They caught the vision of Nehemiah and realized that they had procrastinated too long already in the matter of rebuilding the walls of the city. Verse 18 says that they "strengthened their hands for this good work." The word "strengthened" is "chuwt" in the Hebrew, meaning "to string or join together." I can just see those men standing and listening to Nehemiah as he expresses his vision to rebuild the walls. They are seeing how difficult the task will be. They are thinking of the tons of debris, the long hours, the back breaking labor, and they stand with their hands hanging in discouragement. Then Nehemiah tells them that God sent him and gave him favor with the king. He reaches for the hand of the man next to him and says, "Let us rise and build." Their heads lift, their eyes brighten, they reach one to another and clasp hands. They stand in a circle with faith shining on their faces: "strengthened."

Illustrations

A man went to an asylum for the criminally insane. He was a bit surprised to find that there were three guards to take care of a hundred inmates. He said to one of the guards, "Aren't you afraid that the inmates will unite, overcome you, and escape?" The guard said "Lunatics never unite." Locusts do. Christians should. If we don't, we don't know where our power is.

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:		Wed	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 74-76	<input type="checkbox"/> . Rom. 9:16-33	
Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 68-69	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Rom. 8:1-21	Thur	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 77-78	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom. 10
Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 70-71	<input type="checkbox"/> . Rom. 8:22-39	Fri	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 79-80	<input type="checkbox"/> . Rom. 11:1-18
Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 72-73	<input type="checkbox"/> . . Rom. 9:1-15	Sat	<input type="checkbox"/> . . . Ps. 81-83	<input type="checkbox"/> Rom 11:19-36

August 18, 2024

Lesson
12

The People Had a Mind to Work

Theme: God's work is important, even more important than our own ambitions. God uses people to do his work, but too many are not interested in participating.

Golden Text: "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work." (Nehemiah 4:6)

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Nehemiah 3:1; 4:1-7

3:1 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.

4:1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he

shall even break down their stone wall.

4 Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:

5 And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

Introduction

Nehemiah had heard of the affliction of the Jews who had returned to their homeland and went with the king's blessing to lead them in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he surveyed the destruction and encouraged the rulers and the people to rise up and build. They knew that the walls were important. A city without walls was wide open to the attack of the enemy. The walls were needed to provide the citizens with safety and security. However, to rebuild the walls was a daunting task and they knew that the job would not be easy. "The people had a mind to work" is a wonderful statement of purpose. Do you have a mind to work?

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. The Work Begins

Nehemiah 3

As we concluded our study last week, we left the rulers and priests gathered together with Nehemiah who encouraged them to take up the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. When Nehemiah told them of his burden and also of the king's support for the work, the men agreed as a group that the work needed to be done. They said, "Let us rise up and build."

Nehemiah had received a vision of the work from the Lord and now he had been able, with God's help, to pass the vision on to others. They had now caught the vision of rebuilding the walls of the city and were ready to enlist the help of the Jewish people.

Each step in this process is difficult. It is not always easy for a man to get a vision from the Lord concerning the work He wants done. When God's man does receive such a vision, it is often difficult for him to get the leaders of the church or ministry to catch his vision. When the leaders catch the vision, it is often difficult to get the people as a whole to grasp it and be willing to work toward the revealed goal. We are all so absorbed with our own lives that it is hard for us to see beyond our own business to the Father's business.

Likewise, it is one thing for people to embrace the "vision," it is another thing for them to volunteer for the work. It is interesting to note that it was to everybody's advantage to have the walls of the city rebuilt. This was not for Nehemiah's benefit alone. This was not just for the safety of the rulers and priests. The walls would protect every citizen in Jerusalem. Yet, when the work to be done will result in the bene-

fit of all, it is difficult to get most people to join in the work.

After all, a clean church is to everyone's benefit but how easy is it to get people to help clean the church? A camp meeting is a blessing to everyone in the area, but how easy it to get people to work at the camp ground? A Christian school blesses an entire generation of youth and therefore, their parents and grandparents, and their children to come but how easy is it to get people to work in a Christian school? On and on it goes: God has a great work that will be to all of our benefit, so let us rise up and build. Will you put your shoulder to the wheel? Will you put your hand to the plow?

When the leaders declared their intentions, Sanballat and Tobiah laughed at them and scorned their ambition. Nehemiah's answer is worth noting. He said to them, "The God of heaven will prosper us, therefore, **we his servants will arise and build, but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.**" Listen to it: God will bless his people in their work, so we who are truly God's servants will do his work. Those of you who refuse to participate and scorn the work of those who do participate have no portion, or right or memorial in the finished work. What a declaration! If you are a servant of the Lord, join in his work. If you refuse to lift a hand in His work, you are forfeiting your claim on his blessings.

Chapter 3 begins with these words, "Then Eliashib, the high priest, rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded..." As soon as the vision was translated to a task, the high priest led the way in putting the aspiration into action. The rest of chapter 3 details who rose up to work and the part of

the work they did. We will move on after one further observation: everyone was working on the same project, but they had different areas of labor. We work in different areas and ways but let us always be doing God's work.

II. The Work Hindered

Nehemiah 4

In verse one we again read of Sanballat who had already expressed his scorn concerning the Jews and their plan to rebuild the walls. Now that the work had actually begun, Sanballat was furious and he began to oppose the work by stirring up feelings of hostility against the Jews. He slandered the Jews to his "brethren and the army of Samaria," and made fun of their efforts. "Do these feeble Jews really think that they will fortify the city and be able to worship in safety?" Tobiah spoke up and declared that if a fox bumped into their wall, he would knock it down. In other words, their work would be of such inferior quality that a small animal could destroy it. Nehemiah's response is inspiring; he does not respond to his enemies with sarcasm or malice, he PRAYS to his God. Instead of being bogged down in a battle of words with those who ridiculed the work, he called out the Lord for his aid and went on with the work. The devil uses many different tactics to stop God's work. He will slander God's people. He will mock their efforts. He will do anything to distract them from their purpose. Sometimes, he even succeeds in getting them to argue and fight among themselves and defeats the work from the inside.

Nehemiah reports that the wall was halfway finished, "for the people had a mind to work." **The people had the work on their mind and they had their mind on the work.**

They were committed to the completion of the walls and were concentrat-

ing on accomplishing that end. We can do a lot for God and his kingdom if we have his work on our mind and then keep our mind on his work.

Again, the enemies rose up in opposition. When they realized the Jews meant business and that the work really was being done, they conspired to come and fight against Jerusalem. Again, Nehemiah responds by praying first. He prayed to God for His divine protection and then he placed sentries to watch and guard against the enemy.

The hard work and the opposition took its toll on the people and the report came that "the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed." They were becoming discouraged.

1) Worn Out

The wall was halfway built and the laborers became weary in the work. The middle of the task is the most difficult time. At the beginning there is great excitement and zeal for the work is new. At the end there is great excitement and zeal for the work is accomplished. In the middle of the work it is easy to drag. The Christian is just like that. Salvation is thrilling and heaven will be exhilarating but in the middle we sometimes drag. Satan works to "wear out the saints." So, we are exhorted, "Be not weary in well doing." Habakkuk cried out for God to revive the work "in the midst of the years."

2) Weighted Down

In verse 10 the report came that there was "much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall." When the load of the work seems so overwhelming, it causes us to become discouraged. We feel weighted down with the load of life. I do want to make it to heaven, but it seems so far away. It's too hard to get there from here. One man said, "Life by the yard is hard; by the inch it's a cinch." The weight of the "rubbish" must be dealt with a bit at a time. To view the whole

task is too much. Take it a step at a time. Deal with the pressures one at a time. Don't let the "rubbish" accumulate to the point that you are weighted down and overwhelmed.

3) Wrought Up

In verses 11 and 12 the threats of the enemy are rehearsed. Our adversaries are threatening to come upon us unaware. They mean to kill us. It was discouraging enough to be threatened by the enemy, and then even some among the Jews offered depressing remarks as to how there was no place to hide from the enemies' attacks. When those of our own people, our own family, our own friends, and even our own church speak such defeat it doubly difficult to bear. Soon we are worried and wrought up by the "nay sayers" and "dooms dayers," who like the 10 spies in Numbers 13 "discouraged the heart of the people."

III. The Work Completed

Nehemiah 4:14-6:16

While discouragement is a common curse on God's people, there is a cure for it.

1) Remember the Lord.

When Nehemiah realized how discouragement was affecting the work, he called the people together and exhorted them "Be not afraid of them, remember the Lord." Think about this statement: Discouragement is faith in the devil. Doesn't that sound shocking? Think about it: when you are discouraged, you are expressing more faith in the devil than in God! Remember the Lord! When you remember his power and grace you will regain your courage.

2) Realize there is a Cause.

Nehemiah reminded them that what

they were doing was vital to their brethren, their wives, and their sons and daughters. They were not building the wall for the fun of it. They were building the wall because their life depended on it.

We must realize that we are living the Christian life and enduring the hardships for a purpose not just for the fun of it. We are trying to make it to heaven. We are fighting for our soul and the souls of our children. We must realize that there is a cause for this struggle.

3) Remain faithful to Duty.

Verse 15 says that they "returned, all of us, to the wall, everyone to his work." Instead of giving up in discouragement, they took new courage. With one hand they worked on the wall and with the other hand they held a weapon to ward off the enemy. In 6:15 we read that the "wall was finished," and even their enemies "perceived that this work was wrought of our God." You and I are engaged in a great work. We must not be distracted or discouraged but dedicated to the end.



A man gave out tracts for years on a certain corner. Because there were no results he gave it up. Five months later he saw a man giving out tracts on the same corner. Striking up a conversation he learned that the man had been led to Christ through a tract given out there six months before. "Many a time I've come back to thank the man, but I never could find him. I concluded he must have died and gone to his reward, so I decided to take his place on the corner." Don't be discouraged!

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun ... Ps. 84-86 ... Rom. 12
 Mon ... Ps. 87-88 ... Rom. 13
 Tues ... Ps. 89-90 ... Rom. 14

Wed ... Ps. 91-93 Rom. 15:1-13
 Thur ... Ps. 94-96 Rom. 15:14-33
 Fri ... Ps. 97-99 ... Rom. 16
 Sat Ps. 100-102 ... 1 Cor. 1

August 25, 2024

The Restoration of God's People



Theme: God is not just interested in places of worship; he is more interested in people who worship. The Jews now needed to rededicate themselves to God.

Golden Text: "Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." (Psalm 106:1)

Scripture Reading for the Lesson - Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6; 9:1-3

8:1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he

opened it, all the people stood up:

6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

Introduction

We have studied at length about the rebuilding of the Temple and the reconstruction of the city walls in Jerusalem. Many years had passed during this time of rebuilding and now the major part of the effort was accomplished. The city limits of Jerusalem were smaller than before, but at least there was a city with walls and a house of God. As important as the rebuilding was, there remained yet a very important task: the restoration of God's people. Through the years of captivity their devotion to God and his law had declined. They needed revival and the agent of revival is the Word of God. When the Word is obeyed the people are revived.

Exposition of Today's Lesson

I. Call for Peace (Ch. 5)

A. Oppression (1-10)

In the midst of the work of rebuilding the walls, Nehemiah became aware of a serious problem among the Jews. Remember, the first group of exiles had returned with Zerubbabel in about 538 BC and Nehemiah came in about 444 BC. Therefore, a little over 80 years had passed. In that time, the people had settled in the land and started rebuilding their lives. As is always the case, there were some who were more business minded and aggressive in their approach. They were not just interested in having a home and some crops, they immediately worked to control more and more property and goods. In addition to the hardship of just making a living from the land, the people also had to pay tribute or taxes to the king of Persia for they were considered a Colony of the Persian empire. When hard times came, as they always do, the people were put in a terrible bind. Drought caused the crops to die. Without their crops they had no income and no food for their own families. Since they had no food, they needed to buy it. Since they had no crops for income, they had no money to buy the corn with. The rulers who owned more land had no doubt saved their surplus grain since they had more than they needed for their own use. Now, they began to offer the grain for sale. Since the people had no money, they mortgaged their own houses and lands in order to buy corn. Then when taxes were due, the people had to mortgage even more and borrow money to pay the tribute. The problem kept multiplying and soon they

were force to give up their own children as slaves in order to pay their debts. The situation was desperate. These were all God's people. They were all Jews. They were "brethren." Yet, the rulers had oppressed their own people for their personal gain.

In their desperation, the people began to cry out for relief. They had families that needed food. They had no money to pay tribute. They had sons and daughters in slavery that they could redeem to freedom.

Nehemiah was "very angry" when he heard about the situation. He called the nobles and elders together and "rebuked" them for their actions. They had exacted "usury" or interest from their own brethren in direct contradiction to the law of God. (See Exodus 22:25; Lev. 25: 35-37)

Nehemiah reminded them that they were mistreating their own brethren and that God was not pleased. Also, they were bringing a reproach on God's name among the heathen around them by such behavior.

B. Restitution (11-13)

Nehemiah pleaded with them to restore the lands, houses, and usury that they had taken away from their own people. The rulers and priests promised to do as Nehemiah had requested. Nehemiah made a covenant with them that they would keep their promise and they said, "Amen, and praised the Lord, and did according to this promise." So peace was restored among the people of God.

We must all remember that as children of God, we are brethren. We are to "esteem each better than themselves." (Phil. 2:3) If we bite and devour one another, we directly disobey Scripture and we bring a reproach on the cause of Christ.

II. Call for Purity (Ch. 8 & 13)

A. The Book of the Law (8:1-12)

When the walls had been completed, Nehemiah did a thorough genealogy of the people and then called an assembly. Ezra, the scribe, brought the book of the Law and began reading it to the people. They had gathered with their wives and children to hear the Word of the Lord. Ezra began reading in the morning and read until midday and the people were "attentive" unto the book of the Law. Verse 8 says that they read the law of God "distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." Ezra and the priests not only read the law, they explained and expounded it to the people in a way that they could understand. The preacher/teacher's task is to make God's Word understandable. We are to take things that may seem difficult and make them seem simple, not take things that are simple and make them seem difficult.

1) Repenting

When the people heard and understood the law of God, they were smitten with conviction for they had not obeyed God's Word. They began to weep and mourn in their sorrow. They were sorry that they had disobeyed and they repented. The Word is "quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit..." God's Word will cause godly sorrow and therefore, repentance. Oh, how we need for God's word to be preached and taught with power and conviction. Oh, how we need to hear it with tender hearts and ready minds.

2) Rejoicing

Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites calmed the people and told them to rejoice for this was a holy day unto the Lord. They were told to feast and to give gifts to those who were needy and

to remember that the "joy of the Lord" was their strength. When there has been repenting, there will be rejoicing. God's Word and Spirit do not convict us to cause despair. Conviction works repentance. Repentance works righteousness. Righteousness works joy, "for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17)

B. The Feast of Tabernacles

(8:13-18) During the reading of the law, they became aware of God's instructions concerning the feast of tabernacles which had not been kept for many years. With joy they proclaimed to all the congregation to take branches and make booths to dwell in as a memorial of the time when they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. The people responded heartily and it is recorded that they kept the feast of tabernacles in a way not seen since the time of Joshua.

C. The Temple of God

(13:1-31) We skip ahead now in our study to the further steps taken by Nehemiah to purify God's people in accordance with his Word.

1) Mixed Multitude (1-9, 23-31)

One of the greatest problems faced by Nehemiah in the matter of restoring God's people was the mixing of the Jews with the heathen round about them. First, he separated from among the Jews, the "mixed multitude" of Ammonites and Moabites who were not to enter the house of God according to the Law. Next, he became aware that Tobiah, the associate of Sanballat, and an Ammonite as well, had been given a chamber in the temple to live in. Nehemiah threw all of Tobiah's stuff out of the temple and had the chambers cleansed and rededicated to the Lord's use. Lastly, Nehemiah dealt with the problem of mixed marriages among the Jews. He

caused them to be cleansed from the strangers. He found that one of the priests had married Sanballat's daughter, so he "chased" him away and removed him from being a priest. Where there is true revival, there will always be a cleansing and a renewal of our purity before God.

B. Ministers (10-14)

Nehemiah found that the ministers of God were not being supported by the people, but were having to work full time in the fields in order to live. He contended with the rulers and called for the people to bring their tithes into the storehouse so the ministers of God would be cared for and freed to do the work they were called to.

C. Merchants (15-22)

Nehemiah became aware that some were laboring on the Sabbath and doing business as if it were any other day of the week. They were harvesting, processing and selling on the Sabbath day. Nehemiah rebuked them for "profaning" the Sabbath and commanded that the gates would be shut at dark the evening before the Sabbath and not reopen until the day after. For the first couple of times, there were merchants and sellers lodged outside the walls of Jerusalem and Nehemiah threatened to "lay hands on them." He was quite a guy. By the way, the merchants and sellers stopped coming.

III. Call for Praise (Ch. 9)

When the Jews had heard and obeyed the Word of God, they were assembled with "fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them." They read God's Law, and confessed their sins, and worshiped the Lord. The Levites stood up on the platform and cried out, "Stand up and bless the

Lord your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise."

God's people will praise Him. When they had spent some time fasting and praying; some time humbling themselves before God; some time confessing and forsaking their sins; they were primed for praise. Commitment draws us closer to God. Confession clears our heart and conscience and opens the line of communication with God. The Commandments and consolations of God's law stir our soul and worship becomes spontaneous. I love that word: spontaneous. It comes from the Latin and means literally, "of one's free will, voluntarily." Webster says it means: "done or produced naturally and without constraint; taking place without external force; instinctive, automatic." **Real praise and worship comes not from external force but from internal force.** The people were not forced by their leaders to praise, they were forced by their hearts. Shame on you when your song leader, pastor, or evangelist has to act as a "cheerleader" to get you to praise the Lord. Stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever!

○ *Illustrations* ○

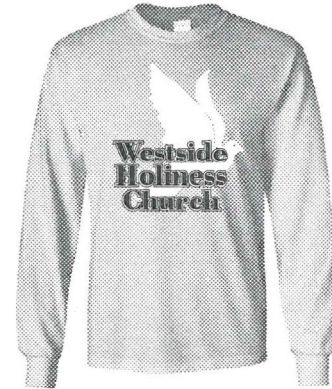
One Sunday, members were praising the Lord for what he had done in their lives. Mr. Segault had said that the roof of his house had caught on fire, but fortunately, a neighbor had seen it, and the possible disaster was averted with only minor damage. A minute later, a woman stood up. "I have a praise, too," she said. "I'm Mr. Segault's insurance agent."

Daily Bible Reading for this Week:

Sun	☐. Ps. 103-104	☐. 1 Cor. 2	Wed	☐. . Ps. 110-112	☐. 1 Cor. 5
Mon	☐. Ps. 105-106	☐. 1 Cor. 3	Thur	☐. . Ps. 113-115	☐. 1 Cor. 6
Tues	☐. Ps. 107-109	☐. 1 Cor. 4	Fri	☐. . Ps. 116-118	☐. 1 Cor. 7:1-19
			Sat	☐. Ps. 119:1-88	☐ 1 Cor. 7:20-40

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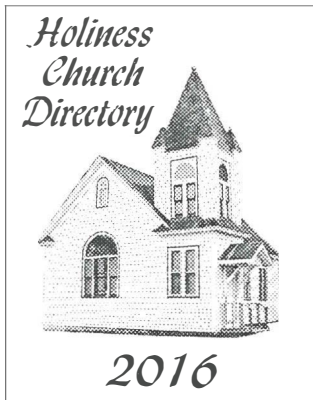
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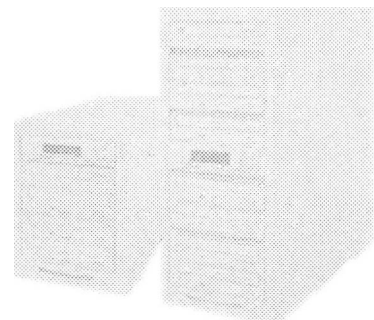


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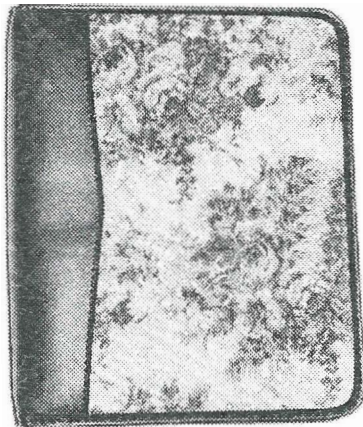
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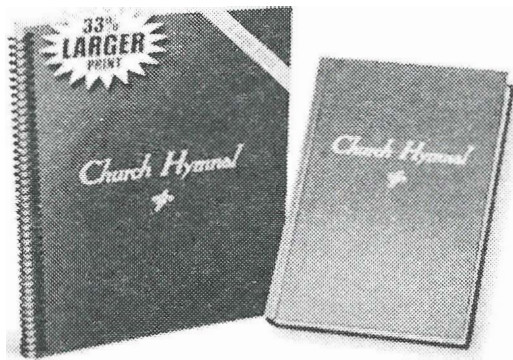
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