

IMMERSE: Chronicles

Week 6 – The Jews and the Nations

July 28, 2024

As we continue in the book of Ezra...

- The Governor of the Jewish people, Zerubbabel, led the first return in 537/536 BC to build the new Temple in Jerusalem. Solomon's Temple had been destroyed in 586 BC. Construction began with setting the altar on its "bases."
- They offered burnt offerings and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles which celebrates God dwelling with them (as He had in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple).
- They laid the foundation of the Second Temple. Many people rejoiced. The older people wept as they reflected upon the magnificence of Solomon's Temple.
- Opposition to the building of the Temple began – from without (Samaria and others) and from within the kingdom of Judah (due to apathy). Construction was stopped.
- Inquiries began re: the authenticity concerning Persian King Cyrus' decree for the Jews to be released, the First Temple's implements returned, and for funds to help Israel with the rebuilding.
- The Prophet Zechariah and the Prophet Haggai came on the scene approx. 520 BC. Haggai chastised the Israelites for ceasing the construction of the Temple. Both Zechariah and Haggai helped with the construction.
- More opposition. A Persian governor wrote King Darius to further check out King Cyrus' decree.
- The Persian King Darius replied and told the Persian governor and his companions to stay away from the Temple site, to leave the Jews alone, to let them rebuild the Temple on its original site (Ezra 6:6-12). He ordered them to help the Jews by paying the expenses of the workers, by providing animals for the sacrifices, and by providing whatever other items the priests requested so they could please God (Ezra 6:8-10). He closed by threatening to severely punish anyone who did not obey his edict (Ezra 6:11-12)!
- The Temple was completed in 516 BC. It was dedicated. And, Passover was observed.
- The second main wave of exiles under Ezra (priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants) returned 78 years later in 458 BC.
- Ezra was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses. The Persian King Artaxerxes looked upon Ezra with great favor granting Ezra all his requests.
- Ezra 7:10 - ...*Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

- King Artaxerxes gave Ezra a letter recognizing his status as a priest, scribe, and expert in the Word of God. The King allowed the Jews to freely decide whether they wanted to stay in Persia or return. He made a generous personal contribution to God. He allowed Ezra to collect freewill offerings and made provision for other Temple support as needed. He exempted the priests and Levites from taxes. King Artaxerxes told Ezra to teach the Word of God to his people. He also authorized Ezra to punish those who disobeyed the Word of God (Ezra 7:11-26).
- Four months following his arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra was given a report of widespread sin among the Jews. Even the priests and Levites were involved. Instead of being the separated people God had called them to be, some had intermarried with the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzite, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. And they were involved in their

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wicked ways. Ezra's response – tearing his garment and his robe, pulled out some of the hair on his head and beard (marring his appearance). Ezra displayed devastation and horror!

- Ezra began to pray and confess the sins of Israel's people including himself. Turn to Ezra 9:5-15....OBSERVATIONS!!
- While Ezra prayed, confessed wept, and bowed before the Temple, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered in his midst. The people wept bitterly.
- One of the men, Shechaniah, spoke to Ezra on behalf of the people, *We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.*
- Ezra was concerned with the formation of Jewish identity. The Jewish people could have been eliminated during the captivity/exile. Mixed marriages could obliterate Jewish covenantal identity and introduce foreign gods!
- In dealing with the mixed marriages, Ezra addressed the need for those who had taken pagan wives to confess to the Lord, to do His will, to separate from the peoples of the land and from their pagan wives. The entire assembly answered with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do." (Ezra 10:10-11).
- The book of Ezra has demonstrated not only how the Lord returned His people to their land, but also now that they had returned, how the Lord sought to keep them faithful to Him and His Word. The proper worship of God is highlighted throughout the book of Ezra.
- The resounding line in Ezra, "the hand of the LORD my God was upon me" (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) connected with his accessing Persian administrative documents. The decrees, proclamations, letters, lists, genealogies, and memoranda, many written by the Persian administration, speak to the sovereign hand of God in Israel's restoration. God had orchestrated the captivity and would continue to work through a pagan king and his successors to give Judah hope for the future return (from all nations)!! God's sovereignty

overrides any of the kings of this world as we see His plan unfolding for Israel which impacts the world!