

Let's Worship God

13th-18th May 2019

Ezra





Monday - Ezra 5:1-2 - Haggai and Zechariah

Last week we learned that work on the new Temple ceased from 536 to 520 B.C. (the second year of Darius king of Persia's reign). It was at this time that the LORD sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The Word of God pronounced by these men is recorded in the books of the Bible named after them. Haggai's book focuses on the work of building the Temple, rebuking the people for having abandoned the project, and encouraging Zerubbabel and Jeshua to resume the construction. Zechariah's book is more expansive, calling the people to general repentance (a part of which would be the completing of the Temple) and recording several visions and prophetic pronouncements. Among these are encouragements for the people once they resumed (and eventually completed) the work on the Temple, promises of blessings for Jeshua, images of redemption by grace and many promises of One who would come and perfectly fulfill the offices of prophet, priest and king. This One who brings salvation would enter Jerusalem humbly on a donkey, be sold-out for thirty pieces of silver, struck while His sheep are scattered, and pierced for His people's salvation. By so doing, He will bring salvation to those who mourn their sins, putting an end to idolatry, bringing life from death and making all things (even the most common thing) in His city holy.

Because of the rebuke of these two prophets, the people repent of their failure to finish the House of God. Now with the support of the people restored to them, Zerubbabel and Jeshua can get back to work

Haggai's and Zechariah's books are not just relics of the past, meant only for God's people in the sixth century B.C. They encourage the Church today and teach us much about salvation and our gracious Saviour.

Questions

1. Who were Haggai and Zechariah? What are some themes of Haggai's book?
2. What are some themes of Zechariah's book?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we might heed God's Word.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. Ezra 6:16

Praise: Psalm 111 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Tuesday - Ezra 5:3-5 - The Eye of God

During the days of the Persian Empire, Jerusalem was in the province "Beyond the River" - that is, west and southwest of the Euphrates. When the Jews once again take up the work of building a new Temple in Jerusalem, this arouses the curiosity of the governor of the province, Tattenai, and his underling Shethar-bozenai. This is not surprising, as the efforts of the adversaries to the project had involved convincing government officials to stand in the way of the work, which might have given the impression that ceasing the work was officially ordered. Moreover, it had been sixteen years since work was last done on the Temple. An outsider to the events, such as Tattenai, might be confused as to why the project was resuming. Was it sanctioned, or was it being done in defiance of the king of Persia? Thus, Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai and their associates investigate the matter. They determine to send a letter to the current king of Persia, Darius, asking what should be done.

At this point, a remarkable thing happens. Instead of commanding the work to cease unless express permission from Darius is obtained, the governor and his men allow the work to continue until they receive Darius' answer. Though, humanly speaking, this may reflect a reasonable or lenient spirit on Tattenai's part, there was no reason he should let the work continue. If it turns out Darius is against it, he would have been wiser to have put a stop to it. If it happens that Darius permits it, at worst, several weeks of labor would have been lost, but the project would have continued. The underlying reason Tattenai allowed the work to continue is given in verse five - "The eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews."

Psalms 33:18-19 tells us "The eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him; who hope in His steadfast love; that He may deliver their soul from death and keep them in famine." To have the eye of God upon us, therefore, means more than just that He sees all things. It means that He blesses and safeguards us as we serve Him. Philippians 1:6 assures us, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." The eye of God being on the elders of the Jews meant they were blessed, protected, and given the means to serve Him. Likewise, the LORD will bless and protect us as we endeavor to serve Him, providing us the means to continue the project of building His Temple - the Church.

Questions

1. What does it mean when the "eye of God" is on someone?
2. What does that mean for us today?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that the eye of God will be upon us.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. Ezra 6:16

Praise: Psalm 112 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Wednesday - Ezra 5:6-17 - A Letter to Darius

The letter Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai and their associates send to King Darius tells us several things. First, it tells us work on the Temple was well under way by the time Tattenai came to Jerusalem. Secondly, it tells us they asked for the names of the Jewish leadership. This would be necessary to know if it turns out the project is illegal. The letter does not say what their names were, but it does not seem the Jewish leaders were embarrassed to let themselves be known to the Persian officials, as their answer is forthright and confident. Third, the answer the Jews give reveals they had an honest assessment of the history leading to the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the construction of this one. God's covenant people had sinned greatly against Him. Therefore, He removed them from their land and destroyed their Temple. According to His promises, however, He returned them to their land by means of Cyrus who, in the year he conquered Babylon and became its king, decreed this Temple be built. Fourth, it reminds us that God is sovereign. While it was the Babylonians who destroyed the Temple, it was ordained by the LORD, and the Babylonians were His instruments, demonstrating His control over all nations and all events. Finally, the letter reveals that Tattenai and his associates were not necessarily opposed to the building of the second Temple, as some officials both before and after them were (as we saw in chapter four). Indeed, as we noted yesterday, they were even content to let the work continue until they should receive an answer from Darius.

Though their statement in verse sixteen that from the time of Cyrus "until now [the Temple] has been in building" may gloss over their own past failures, the confident answer the Jews give to Tattenai displays a trust in the LORD as the One who governs all things. It is as true for us today as it was for the Jews then that the LORD is in control. We can be confident that He will accomplish His good purposes for us.

Questions

1. What are some things this letter reveals?
2. Why can we be confident the LORD will accomplish His good purposes?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that our trust in the LORD will grow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. Ezra 6:16

Praise: Psalm 113 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Thursday - Ezra 6:1-12 - Darius' Answer

As the letter from Tattenai and his associates requested, Darius orders that research in the royal archives be done concerning the matter of the Temple. Not only does he have the archives at Babylon searched, but at other important cities as well. A scroll containing the decree of Cyrus is found in Ecbatana (about three-hundred miles north of Babylon), the former capital of the Kingdom of the Medes and now one of the capitals of the Persian Empire. Indeed, Cyrus, who had united the Medes and Persians into one kingdom, used Ecbatana as one of his major seats of power. It is not surprising, therefore, that his decree would have been found there, as it is very likely that Ecbatana is the city from which Cyrus issued it.

This record of the decree of Cyrus confirms that the Jews have told the truth. Therefore, Darius decrees that, not only should the work not be hindered, it should be supported. Tattenai is to divert taxes and tribute that would otherwise be sent to the king that these funds might be used to finance the building of the Temple. Furthermore, Tattenai is to provide any animals and other supplies the priests might require in order to make sacrifices and offer prayers for Darius and his sons. According to the practice of the Persians of that time, Darius backs up this decree with threats of horrific punishments for anyone who might defy it.

We see God's sovereignty over the affairs of men. The LORD accomplishes his will by means. In this case it was the means of Darius following in the footsteps of Cyrus. We know from history that Darius desired to emulate Cyrus. Supporting the Temple project in Jerusalem as Cyrus had done would certainly fit what we know of Darius' character. Darius' character, however, is not the sole explanation for these historical events. The LORD ordered events to bring about His will. It is He who should receive the ultimate praise for bringing these things to pass.

Questions

1. What reasons might Darius have for supporting the Temple project?
2. To whom should the ultimate credit be given?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that the LORD be glorified for what He has done.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. Ezra 6:16

Praise: Psalm 114 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Friday - Ezra 6:13-18 - The Temple Finished

Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai and the other officials of the province under them are diligent to obey the decrees of Cyrus and Darius. (Artaxerxes is mentioned here, as well, probably because it will be his decree that later permits the rebuilding of the walls of the city of Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah). Now well supplied and protected from opposition, the Jews finish this massive project in only a few years' time. By the end of 516 B.C., the new Temple is completed and dedicated. We should note a few things from this passage. First, the Temple is dedicated and the Temple ceremonies are re-established in accordance with the Law the LORD revealed to Moses. Second, during and after the rebuilding of the Temple, the people profited from the preaching of God's Word by Haggai and Zechariah. Third, the completion of the second Temple in 516 B.C. marks seventy years since the destruction of the first in 586. Not only had the LORD kept his promise to restore the people to the land after seventy years of exile, He restored the Temple after seventy years of desolation. While the people had sinful motives for abandoning the work, God used their sin for His own good purposes, so that, not only had their exile from the land ended after seventy years, their exile from the Temple also ended after seventy years.

From these things we are reminded that: 1) All things must be done in accordance with God's revealed will (especially in matters of worship), 2) God's people always profit from the faithful preaching of His Word, and 3) The LORD uses even our sins sinlessly for His own good purposes.

Questions

1. What three things should we note from this passage?
2. Of what three facts are we reminded by these things?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that God uses all things for His good purposes.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. Ezra 6:16

Praise: Psalm 115 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Saturday - Ezra 6:19-22 - Passover

As we read yesterday, the new Temple was dedicated on the third day of the month of Adar (the last month on the Jewish ceremonial calendar). With the Temple finished and the priests and Levites ceremonially purified, Passover could be celebrated less than six weeks later in the middle of the first month of 515 B.C. For the first time in seventy years, a proper Passover could be observed at the central sanctuary according to God's ordinances. The Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple, the people ate the Passover meal and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated. The people rejoiced that the LORD had governed the hearts of men like Cyrus and Darius to cause this to come to pass. It is worthy of note that the Kings of Babylon and of Persia after them had taken to themselves the title "King of Assyria" after conquering that land. The Scripture refers, here, to the King of Persia as "the king of Assyria," in order to display the wondrous nature of these events (that Assyria, one of Israel's greatest enemies was used for Israel's benefit) and to emphasize that the LORD was ending the Exile of Israel that began with the northern kingdom's fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. and followed with the conquest of Judah by Babylon a little over a century later.

There is yet another remarkable thing to be found in this passage. Not only did Israelites eat the Passover, but also "everyone who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel." In other words, at this time, many people who were not born Israelites were joined to Israel by faith, forsaking false gods and worshipping the LORD alone. This continues to occur today, as the Gospel of Jesus Christ goes forth into the world. People of every tongue, tribe and nation are joined by faith to Christ and thus become part of God's Covenant People - His true Israel.

Questions

1. What is noteworthy about the reference to the "king of Assyria"?
2. What is remarkable about who ate the Passover?
3. What does this teach us?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. Ezra 6:16

Praise: Psalm 116 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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