

Before and After the Exile

**Learning from Our
Mistakes and
Growing in God**

Monday, May 11– Ezra 1,2

God used Cyrus, a pagan king, to finance the rebuilding of Israel's temple. What does this say about God's provision? Look at Ezra 1:6. How else did God provide, besides the Persian treasury dept? Even the exiles themselves got in on the act, as Ezra 2:68–69 indicates. In what way are the actions of those Jewish leaders a good example to us in the way that we approach giving to the Lord's work?

Tuesday, May 12– Ezra 3

Once the altar of God had been rebuilt the people once again brought their sacrifices to the Lord. What 2 things were against them in this endeavour (hint: see vs.3 and vs.6)? What excuses do we sometimes give for not worshipping and serving God? What will it take to change that? As they began rebuilding the temple they did something else in addition to the actual physical labour (See vs.10–12). Why was that important? Not everyone was happy. Why was this the case? Compare with Luke 5:36–39

Wednesday, May 13– Ezra 4

What kind of opposition did the exiles face when trying to rebuild? What obstacles do you face when trying to tell others about Jesus Christ? The opposition seemed to prevail (vs.23–24). As our nation continues to enact ungodly laws which are contrary to God's Word what will be your stance so that you do not leave the faith and "join the crowd"?

Thursday, May 14– Ezra 5

What was it that sparked the return to rebuilding the temple after it had been shut down by Israel's opponents? Did they receive more opposition? As Christians, are there times when our faith gets tested over and over and over again? What will we do to preserve?

Friday, May 15– Ezra 6

What kind of favour did the Jews have with King Darius (see vs.6–7 and vs. 8–9). Can we trust God to be faithful to help us carry out His will in the face of any opposition we might face? What helped the rebuilders finish the task God had them do (hint: see vs.14)? Why was it important for the Jews to celebrate the Passover?

Saturday, May 16– Ezra 7,8

Ezra was a priest and a scribe. Verse 10 describes him well. How can we be more like Ezra? The pagan king, Artaxerxes, placed full trust in Ezra and even commissioned him to raise up leaders and teach the people. In other words, Ezra had great favour upon him in the eyes of his king. Do you carry favour with your boss at work, or with other non-Christians in your life? If not, how might your circumstances change? Why did Ezra proclaim a fast (Ezra 8:21–23)? Are there times when we should observe fasting with our prayers?

Sunday, May 17– Ezra 9,10

Why were the mixed marriages such a major issue with God's people? Compare with 2 Corinthians 6:14–18. Read Ezra 9:5–8. What do these verses tell us about Ezra's heart in this serious matter? What can we learn from this attitude when we see contradictions to God's word rampant among His people, and in society in general? Did his example have an influence on the people (see Ezra 10:1–3)? It takes boldness to confront those who are in sin and deal with them (see Ezra 10:10–12). Are you prepared to do that? If not, what is holding you back?

Monday, May 18– Nehemiah 1,2

What was Nehemiah's initial response when he heard the bad report about God's people back in Jerusalem? Do the sins and devastations of our world move our hearts like this? If not, why might that be the case, and what can we do about it? Pay close attention to the passion of Nehemiah in his prayer to God (Chapter 1). Was Nehemiah specific about his request to the king? Why was that important? Why did he do his inspection at night (Neh.2:12)? What is significant about the people's response in Neh.2:18? Can one person do everything alone, or do we need all of God's people doing their part?

Tuesday, May 19– Nehemiah 3,4

Did you notice in chapter 3 that the repairs to the wall were done systematically and by families? How can we improve on getting whole families involved in working together for the gospel? God’s work never seems to lack those who oppose it. How did the people respond to the intimidation aimed at them by their enemies (see Neh.4:4–6)? What else did they do (vs.9,16–18)? Carrying out God’s work takes perseverance and hard work. Compare with Galatians 6:9.

Wednesday, May 20– Nehemiah 5

Not all problems come from those outside the church. Sometimes, our greatest opponents are those from within. What was the problem here? What did Nehemiah do to correct the problem? Nehemiah was a leader who walked in integrity and served with humility. Describe how this was true based on vs. 14–19.

Thursday, May 21– Nehemiah 6,7

How did the enemies try to conspire against Nehemiah? Did they give up after the first try? How did Nehemiah respond each time (see vs.9,14)? Is this your first response to attack and opposition? If not, why not? What was the response of the enemy when they learned that the rebuilding work had been completed? Does this give you fresh resolve to persevere through the trials you are facing?

Friday, May 22– Nehemiah 8

Consider the attention given to the public reading of scripture by Ezra the scribe, and how long the people listened to its message. Are you hungry for God's word like that? What will help us get hungrier for God's word? What did Nehemiah say was the secret to having strength (vs.10)? Compare with James 1:2. How often did the people hear God's word read to them during the Feast of Booths (see vs.18)? Is there a benefit to us to be in God's Word this much?

Saturday, May 23– Nehemiah 9

Why is it important for us to confess our sins to the Lord? Prayer and study of God's Word are good habits to observe. Look at vs.3 and consider how much time and attention was given to God's Word and the prayer of confession – while they stood! Go through the prayer carefully and slowly and note the various components of confession, praise, and acknowledgement of God's goodness. Do some of your prayers seem empty or shallow compared to this one?

Sunday, May 24– Nehemiah 10,11

The people put in place a number of regulations to follow God. The summation of all they committed to do can best be described by the last line in Neh.

10:39: "...Thus we will not neglect the house of our God." They further proved this by having people volunteer to move from their rural homes to live in Jerusalem. Are we willing to make sacrifices in our service to God?

Monday, May 25– Nehemiah 12,13

When the newly rebuilt wall was dedicated, what did the children of Israel do (see Neh. 12:27)? Why was this important? They even appointed special choirs. Why was music and singing such an important part of the procedure in the temple? How do we view singing and music in the church, as entertainment or filler, or as an integral part of our worship to God? Strict adherence was given to celebrating the Sabbath and for forbidding, mixed marriages. Why were both of those things important?

Tuesday, May 26– Esther 1,2

What caused the need for a new queen, thus affecting the life of Esther? Is God able to work through earthly circumstances in our lives to orchestrate His plan for us? How was Esther different than all the other woman being considered for the position of queen (see 2:9)? What is favour? Is it something that can be earned? Compare with Eph. 2:8,9 (where 'grace' is used as

another word for 'favour'). Was Esther's favour limited to the king (hint: see 2:15-17)? Let's pray for this type of 'favour influence' on our lives too. Although quickly forgotten at the time, Mordecai's actions were recorded in a book for future reference. Does this give you hope for all the little things you do that do not appear to get noticed? God never forgets one little detail!

Wednesday, May 27- Esther 3,4

Who was Haman? For a hint about his nationality, see 1 Sam.15:2-3,7-9. Haman was a descendant of Agag, King of the Amalekites, whom Saul was supposed to have exterminated. Haman is alive at this time because of Saul's disobedience. What does this tell us about the nature and effects of sin? Should we be treating any sin lightly? What role could Esther play in foiling Haman's plot? What if she didn't step out in faith, now then could God work (see 4:13-14)? God doesn't need us, but rather chooses to use us. Are you a willing participant to carry out God's plans that He has for you? How did Esther respond to Mordecai's challenge?

Thursday, May 28– Esther 5,6

God gave Esther both wisdom to know how to broach the subject of Haman's plot as well as the favour in the king's eyes to be able to carry it out, (see 5:2–5). Can God do this for us, as well? God can place us in key situations with key people to work His plan. See Proverbs 18:16. How did the Lord turn things around in Mordecai's favour, despite Haman's wicked plot? See 6:1–3 and 2:23. God can work things out in our favour, even when the odds are stacked against us. Consider also Joseph in Genesis 50:15–21 (Especially vs.20)

Friday, May 29– Esther 7,8

Notice that when the time came for Esther to make her request before the king, that she did so with great boldness and conviction (see vs.7:3–6). Compare with Hebrews 4:14–16. If Esther could find favour in the eyes of a pagan king, how much more can we expect to find favour in the eyes of the King of Kings! Is there something today that requires boldly approaching God's throne? Well, what are you waiting for? How did God use Esther's request to completely turn matters around for the Jewish people? What became of Mordecai, once the most despised Jew in Haman's eyes (see 8:2,15–17). If God could work such miracles then, and He hasn't changed (Heb 13:8), can He do it in our generation and in our town and in our lives?

Saturday, May 30– Esther 9,10

How did God help the Jews defeat their enemies? See 9:2–5. Our greatest enemies are the devil and sin. Has God given us victory over them? See 1 John 1:7–9 and 1 John 3:8–9 and 1 John 5:4–5. God allowed the pagan king, Ahasuerus, to promote Mordecai to a very high position. Why did Mordecai have the favour of this king, and of his own people, the Jews (see 10:3)? What can we do to imitate Mordecai`s example?

Sunday, May 31– Haggai 1

What excuse were the people giving to Haggai for not rebuilding the fallen temple in Jerusalem? Where were their priorities at this crucial time? Are we guilty of serving self before serving God? How did the people respond to Haggai`s correction and rebuke? Verse 13 Is a key verse for us to consider when we need encouragement to go out in faith to do the Lord`s work.

Monday, June 1– Haggai 2

People who were there when the first temple was standing might have really been discouraged at the sight of the more modest second temple. How did the Lord deal with that (See 2:3–9)? Although the people had sinned, God forgave them and promised His blessings (see 2:18–19). Will He do the same for us?

Tuesday, June 2– Zechariah 1,2

Zechariah, who was a contemporary with Haggai and Malachi, challenged God`s people to repentance. Verse 4 clearly shows they should not be like their hard–hearted ancestors. How often so we need to be reminded to repent? God is a merciful God who promises to show mercy (1:16–17). God has also promised His people that He will dwell in their midst (2:10). Where could we be if we didn`t have the Lord`s presence among us? Give thanks for that today.

Wednesday, June 3– Zechariah 3,4

What do you think the vision of the high priest with filthy clothes represents, and subsequently, God`s work to put clean clothes on him? Compare with Isaiah 61:3,10–11. The coming “Branch” is a reference to Jesus Christ who will “remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (3:9). Compare with 2 Corinthians 5:17. Zechariah boldly declares that the work of God will be accomplished by nothing other than His Spirit (see 4:6). Are we guilty at times of relying on our own strength to get things done instead of surrendering to the Lord? Consider 2 Corinthians 4:7 and Eph. 3:20. It is God working through us, and not we ourselves.

Thursday, June 4– Zechariah 5,6

Chapter 5 is a prophecy showing that the Lord will clearly deal with wickedness and unrighteousness and remove it from His people. Chapter 6 begins with a vision of how God will patrol the earth (see Psalm 24:1). Joshua, the high priest, represents the spiritual leadership of God’s people. It is possible, and even likely, that the “Branch” refers to Zerubbabel, who was in the lineage of Jesus Christ. At any rate God will bestow a crown to set them apart and many will submit to them as they build God’s temple.

Friday, June 5– Zechariah 7,8

Obedience is always better than sacrifice (see 1 Samuel 15:22–23) Are we sometimes guilty of trying to substitute “doing something for God” (ex. Tasting, good deeds) in place of just simply obeying? It was disobedience that led these people into captivity in the first place, despite all their temple sacrifices. But obedience leads to God’s blessing, which chapter 8 outlines. Obedience is synonymous with seeking the Lord (see 8:20–22)

Saturday, June 6– Zechariah– 9,10

Chapter 9 details God’s plan to defend His people against their enemies. God is faithful and He will not leave us or forsake us. He has a plan to restore and refurbish His people (ch.10)

Sunday, June 7– Zechariah 11,12

Faulty leaders who did not act in righteousness (the 3 shepherds of 11:8) will be deposed, because the needy people under their rule were not cared for properly. Do we see that today in the North American church? But God has a plan to deliver His people (12:1–9). The latter part of chapter 12 has an allusion to Christ on the cross (12:10).

Monday, June 8– Zechariah 13,14

God will deal severely with all idolatry, including any found in the lives of His prophets. God will clean house, and you and I are not exempt. This initial work began at Calvary, with Christ's work on the cross, as 13:7–9 indicates. The final chapter of this book (chapter 14) deals with the Day of the Lord. Many prophets spoke of this, and Jesus also dealt with the subject in the New Testament. We are living in the last of the last days and must be prepared for His coming. This is a time to stay in the Word, stay in prayer, and be found often at the altars of God.

NOTE: The sermon series on the Book of Malachi will conclude this Sunday June 14th. Take the last few days leading up to this Sunday to re-read this prophets book again.