

Significant Lessons From The Seemingly Insignificant

#17 Passover In 515 BC

Exodus 12 makes it clear: The Passover was instituted to celebrate one of the most important events in the history of the nation of Israel: The People's Deliverance From Slavery In Egypt. [known as "the Exodus"] God ordained Passover and instructed His people to keep this feast every year so that they would remember what He had done for them.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have been freed from a much greater bondage: Sin & Death. We have been set free through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

- The killing of a lamb, which was to be repeated every year, pointed forward to the final, perfect complete sacrifice that would be offered on the cross by Jesus Christ.

A 2nd Exodus would occur almost 1000 years later.

1. Exodus #1 ~600,000 men left slavery in Egypt and headed for the Promised Land
 2. Exodus #2 Much smaller group of Jews [3 different waves over 100 yr. period] left captivity in Babylon, which had been conquered by the Persian Empire, to live again in their ancestral homeland, the Promised Land.
- Isaiah & Jeremiah had prophesied a small remnant would return.
 - Wave #1 was led by Zerubbabel: Rebuilt the Temple; ~50,000 538 BC
 - Wave #2 was led by Ezra: Restored Worship; ~2,000 men + families 458 BC [80 yrs]
 - Wave #3 was led by Nehemiah: Rebuilt The Walls & Gates; 445 BC [13 yrs]

Timeline Of Historical Events Leading To Restoration Period

1. The United Kingdom under King Saul, David and Solomon - 120 Years
2. Divided Kingdom: Northern Kingdom fell to Assyrian captivity about 100 years before the Southern Kingdom (Judah) fell to Babylonian captivity
3. 605 BC > Daniel and 1st group taken captive to Babylon - Temple Vessels
4. 597 BC - Exiled 7,000 men of might and 1,000 craftsman - Ezekiel taken [8 yrs. later]
5. 586 BC - Destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple - exiled remaining Jews [11 yrs. later]
6. Captivity = Daniel, an old man probably ~ 84, had been in Babylon for nearly 70 years. He knew from reading the recently completed scroll of Jeremiah's writings that the 70 year captivity God had ordained for Israel was just about over. [Jer. 25:8-11]
Dan. 9:2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel Understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet that he would accomplish 70 Years in The Desolations Of Jerusalem.
End of the 70 years: God begins to work to fulfill His promise announced by His prophets:
 - a. To RESTORE His people from Babylon
 - b. To REBUILD the temple at Jerusalem
 - c. To RENEW their hope that the Davidic kingdom would be restored

7. 539 BC > Cyrus of Persia defeated Beltshazar [handwriting on the wall]; Babylonian Empire

a. When Cyrus made his grand entrance, Daniel showed him an ancient scroll of Isaiah.

It contained a personal letter addressing him by name! Note the prophecy:

b. Isa. 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

538 BC: Cyrus' Decree: Prophecy Fulfilled

8. Ezra 1:1-3 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.

a. Cyrus' Response: Freed the captives; returned their sacred vessels;

5400 temple vessels of silver and gold; provided incentives to return home and rebuild

9. Group 1 left in 538 BC under Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. (Ezra 1-6)

Restore the House of God - God's dwelling place and the Jewish Community.

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone Whose Spirit God Had Stirred To Go Up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. [Desire to Return & Desire To Work]

Consider: When the Israelites went to Babylon, they became a different kind of people.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee has pointed out: while they were in Israel they were sheep-keepers, or shepherds. When they went to Babylon they could no longer keep sheep, so they became shop-keepers, or merchants, and some became very successful. They became so prosperous, so lost to materialism, they did not want to go back to Jerusalem even though they were still slaves and exiled from their own land. Many of them refused to return when God opened the door.

But the Spirit of God stirred up the hearts of some and made them unsatisfied with material prosperity. Mere things will never satisfy the deep-seated cry of the human spirit.

a. ~ 50,000 Jews journey ~900 miles in 4 months- Required: Faith, courage and sacrifice

b. Willing to give up their life in Babylon [captivity]

Consider: God Takes The Initiative: No one, after falling into a carnal, apathetic state, would come back to Christ unless God brought him back.

I Thess. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

Phil. 2:13 [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight.

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem found their capital in ruins, their city walls shattered and their temple a heap of charred, shattered stones.

Refusing to be overwhelmed, this remnant began in 535 BC by:

1. Building An Altar: original temple site in the midst of ruins to restore worship of God.

Our biggest problem isn't the actual problems we face; it's our relationship with God!
My altar is in ruins! If we do not fix our problem with God, we will not find the solution to any problem in our lives. You must start with your Altar, your relationship with God.

Note: It wasn't necessary to wait until the temple was completed before offering sacrifices to God. (Broken heart & Contrite spirit)

Truth: Begin with worship and surrender. Restoration will follow.

An altar almost invariably involves sacrifice, worship, and praise --

the sacrifice of apprehending the truth, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price."

2. Laid The Foundation Of The Temple

Question Will they realize the ruins are the result of spiritual idolatry and apathy?

Lack of obedience? Lack of spiritual discipline? Solution: Lay the foundation again!

Foundations of repentance, confession, prayer, His Word, obedience & faith must be solid.

Ezra 3:10-13 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.

¹¹ And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD:

"For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel."

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³ so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

Consider: Have you ever come back to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal -- a captive of sin's power -- with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were re-laid by the Spirit? Yet also with regret for the lost and wasted years?

Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the temple being re-laid.

3. Opposition Immediately Develops

Truth: When you make a commitment to the Lord, be prepared to face the enemy's unrelenting attempt to set you back. You are a prime target! [Shout awakened the enemy.]

I Pet. 5:8 Be Sober, Be Vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Satan's 1st Enemy Tactic:

a. Weaken From Within - Join The Team - Satan =Serpent to Deceive

Ezra 4:1-2 Now when the Adversaries Of Judah And Benjamin HEARD that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, ² they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them,

"Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria [681-669 BC], who brought us here."

Note: These enemies had been brought in ~130-142 years previously. It is now ~539 BC.

Consider: Satan's most dangerous trick is to lure us into compromise under the guise of cooperation.

4. Response To Opposition: Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." Satan as the serpent to deceive had failed.

b. Satan's 2nd Tactic: Weaken From Within: Tool Of Discouragement

Ezra 4:4a Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, Discouragement KILLS Our Motivation!

c. Satan's 3rd Tactic: Weaken From Within: Fear Often Follows Discouragement

Ezra 4:4b and troubled [frightened] them in building,

Discouragement quickly turns into many fears about our future.

Consider: Satan's whispers: This dark valley will never end.

You can't live the Christian life; why don't you give up. What if...?

d. Satan's Tactic: Weaken From Without:

1. Use Of Misinformation And False Accusations

Ezra 4:5 and Hired Counselors Against Them to FRUSTRATE THEIR PURPOSE

All The Days Of Cyrus King Of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Ezra 4:6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Letter Writing Campaign: Weaken With Lies: Ezra 4:12-22 Jerusalem is a wicked city;

Will stop paying their taxes; troublesome to kings & provinces; long history of revolt & sedition; threat to royal interests

Ezra 4:18, 21 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.

Now Give The Command To Make These Men Cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

Ezra 4:23-24 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, They Went Up In Haste To Jerusalem Against The Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.²⁴ Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Verses 6-23 chronicle events which happened up to 80 years after verses 1-5.

This shows the unrelenting nature of Satan's opposition. He does not give up after one setback. He keeps on countering whatever the Lord's people try to do to move ahead spiritually.

5. Success of Opposition: Ezra 5 & 6 tell the success of the enemy in stopping the work of rebuilding the temple.

The Jews had left Persia with much enthusiasm and zeal. No doubt they assumed they would return to their land, quickly rebuild the temple and the city, and then turn their attention to their land and houses. When they found completing the temple would not be as quick and easy as they had supposed, they threw up their hands and turned their attention and energies to building their own homes. [not that difficult: really wanted to build their own homes anyway] How little it takes to cause God's people to stumble.

Heb. 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed in your struggle against sin. They have not come up against an immovable object; they have encountered a little resistance. They have the assurance of God, the decree of the king, and the means provided to accomplish their task. However, they became self-indulgent and self-absorbed and pursued activities to please themselves. Israel got used to life without the Temple. Sixteen years passed and the temple lay half-completed, the foundation overrun with weeds and grass. They stood as a mute reminder of the Jews' failure to take care of God's house. Worship ceased.

God sent 2 prophets, Haggai [520 BC] and Zechariah, to move the people's hearts to finish the task. Consider Your Ways: Your Priorities Are Wrong

1. The Temple is in ruins.
2. You are neglecting the worship of God.
3. Your priorities are misplaced. You have drifted from the truth that God is first.
4. Your ways are an embarrassment to God and a blemish on His reputation.

Haggai Exposed Their Hypocrisy And Unbelief [Heart of their problem]

1. Put God First In Your Life

Haggai 1:2,4 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. Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your paneled houses, and this house lie waste? Consider Your Ways!

- a. They were so concerned to build their own houses they ignored working on God's temple.
- b. The rebuilding of God's temple was the task that had brought them to Jerusalem!

2. Cease Being Selfish - No time to work on God's Temple

I Cor. 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is the temple (the very sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received [as a Gift] from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price [purchased with a preciousness and paid for, made His own]. So then, honor God and bring glory to Him in your body.

Haggai challenged the people's selfish behavior. "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" Paneled houses represented the finishing touches. Their homes were not "in process." No weeds were growing around their unfinished foundations. Their homes were complete while the Temple remained nonexistent.

3. Believe God's Promises

a. When you stop working on God's temple, you are admitting you have no faith in God's Word or in God's power to perform it.

4. Honor God's Name

Haggai 1:7-8 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. When God is not first we are indifferent to His glory—His fame and His reputation being spread. The chief business of every Christian is to bring glory to God.

5. Obey God's Commands

Haggai 1:12-14 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, With All The Remnant Of The People, OBEYED The Voice Of The LORD Their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did FEAR Before The LORD. ¹³ Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I Am With You, saith the LORD.

¹⁴ And the LORD Stirred Up The Spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the Spirit Of All The Remnant of the people; They Came And Did Work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, Temple was dedicated in 515 BC; about 23 years after beginning the work.

Ezra 6:17-18 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁸ And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

Ezra 6:19-22 On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; All Of Them Were Clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves. It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by 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. And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.