Five Things Christians MUST Do for God to Restore Our Nation

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Lessons from Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah

Rebuild the temple. The First Exilic Trip Home – Zerubbabel (538 BC)

> *"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. ""* Ezra 1: 1-3

Here is what we know about these captive Jews given a chance to return to Jerusalem.

- Some, moved by the Spirit, packed up and answered the call.
- Others stayed behind supplying provision for those who went.
- Still others:
    - had become comfortable with their lifestyles in Babylon
    - were born in Babylon and knew nothing of their heritage (did not care)

- knew how long and hard the trip would be and the devasted land that awaited (It was a four month, one-thousand-mile trip)

God initiated the return thru a pagan king to fulfill His promise to Jeremiah (32:6-7). Zerubbabel (from the Davidic line) led the people. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, the first thing they rebuilt was the altar for offerings. This was in keeping with the Law of Moses to offer burnt offerings to God – an atonement for sin–confession, seeking forgiveness.

Then they re-laid the temple foundation before trouble began about two years into the project. With all the delays caused by their enemies (16 years), the actual complete rebuilding took ~ twenty years. During the building process, God sent the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the workers to keep going in the strength of the Lord and under His hand of favor.

Lesson 1: *What God promises, He does. The timing is up to Him.*

Lesson 2. It took strong men of faith, courage, leadership, & vision to carry out God's plans.

Lesson 3. The first thing restored was (altar) burnt offering-confession for forgiveness of sin.

Restore the Word of God. The Second Exilic Trip Home – Ezra (~458 BC)

> *"For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel."* Ezra 7: 10

Ezra, scribe priest, knew many Jews now in exile for seventy years had lost the love of the Lord and knowledge of His Word (the Mosaic Law for them). It is said he memorized all of it so he could teach without having a copy in hand. In any event,

once the temple was completed, he put together another group of exiles to return to Jerusalem and re-institute temple practices as well as re-teach the law to those who had returned to their homeland.

The second great lesson we learn about Ezra is his faith and trust in the Lord no matter how great the odds or bad things could get for those making this very dangerous, long trip.

> *"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty."* Ezra 8: 21-23

Lesson 1: Teaching the Word of God is critical to lead people into a relationship with God, keep them there, and take them deeper

Lesson 2. We need to stand on our word of faith to take God at His Word in front of a world waiting on us to fail—looking for an excuse to blame God for our weakness.

Repair-Rebuild the Walls and Gates – The Third Exilic Trip – Nehemiah (445 BC)

> *"Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of*

> *Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.”* Nehemiah 1: 1-3

For thousands of years, fortified cities had great walls around them. Walls were a sign of protection and pride. Ezra and Nehemiah had not seen the complete devastation of Jerusalem—the walls in rubble, gates burned, and the temple completely destroyed. Nehemiah fasted and prayed for days—crying out to God confessing the sins of his people and begging God to hear and help. This verse represents one of my favorite prayers in the Bible.

> *O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.”* Nehemiah 1: 11

Nehemiah, cupbearer to the king, was so distraught it was evident to his king. No one was supposed to show sadness in front of a king. Instead of doing him harm, Nehemiah had the favor of the Lord on him which brought the favor of the king. Most know the story. The king granted him permission to go to Jerusalem and repair/rebuild the walls and gates. He even supplied the resources and materials to do so.

To study Nehemiah’s story is to study one of the greatest examples of leadership in the Bible. It is better than most graduate program texts on the subject. To fast forward to the end, in just 52 days, despite great opposition from their enemies while they worked, the wall around Jerusalem, and its many great gates, were in place again. Security and pride were restored.

Lesson 1: God hears the prayers of His people. Fasting shows Him how serious we are.

Lesson 2. God used a pagan king to protect and provide to accomplish His purposes.

Renewed Commitment. – Ezra and Nehemiah

> *"Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground… the Levites read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.* ***"This Day Is Holy"*** *Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the* people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." *For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law….The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers."* Nehemiah 8: 6,8,9; 9: 2

Lesson 1: The people celebrated their accomplishment and praised God for it.

Lesson 2. Again the focus was the Word of God, read aloud while the people stood.

Lesson 3: The Word of God convicted them so much they wept aloud confessing their sins and the sins of their fathers.

Lessons Christians (and churches) MUST Do to Restore Our Nation to God

- *We must remember, like the Jews, as Christians we are aliens,* ***pilgrims,*** *in this country. This is not our home. Heaven is our Home.*
- *We need strong Spirit-fille leaders willing to step up and stand out no matter the cost.*
- *We must get back in the Word of God and teach the full counsel of God—not what people want to hear. No more tickling ears!*
- *We need more prayer and fasting for:*
    - *Confession and Forgiveness*

- *Leaders in our country*
- *Lost to come to Christ*
- *God's hand of favor to return to us*
- *Jesus' love to help us love our enemies even as they hate us*

- *We must bless God and praise Him for Who He is and His faithfulness and favor He has shown to this nation.*

Today too much of the influence of the Christian church has been lost in the most needy time in our nation's history. To regain it, we (Christians) must take these lessons to heart and allow the Holy Spirit to rebuild our personal temples so that we can look, live, and love more like Jesus in a world dying for hope.

For Christ's sake,

