

# The Restoring of God's People

## Ezra & Nehemiah

### Sermon Outline Notes

All scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV)

#### **From GLORY to DECLINE, to CAPTIVITY, to RESTORATION**

God is faithful; He had not abandoned His people.

#### **PHASE 1. From David & Solomon to captivity**

**Solomon's sin characterised the later decline of the nation.**

1 Kings 11:1-13. (Ezra is still confronting the problem 500 years later)

Soon after Solomon's death the kingdom was divided.

With some notable exceptions the kings of Israel and Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not follow His ways. Manasseh, king of Judah is an extreme example. 2 Kings 21:1-9

When Hoshea was their king, Israel in the north was led into captivity by the Assyrians in 723 BC.

137 years later Jerusalem (Judah) fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC as part of God's sovereign purpose for His people. 2 Chronicles 36:15-21

Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the taking of the people into exile in Babylon, but also their restoration. Jeremiah 29:10-14

Confident that God will fulfil his promises, he buys a field. Jeremiah 32:6-25

#### **PHASE 2. Restoration**

How was it that after 70 years of captivity the king willingly let the Jews return to Jerusalem and even assisted them?

1. God is sovereign. Ezra 1:1-4 & 7 (return of temple treasures)

2. The Persian kings were polytheistic and wanted to placate all the gods.

#### **RESTORATION TAKES ON 3 MAJOR THEMES**

**1. Rebuilding the temple:** The supreme importance of worship.

Zerubbabel the governor, and Jeshua the priest, initiate the building of the altar to re-establish the sacrifices and then the rebuilding of the temple.

The people gave willingly and the foundation was laid with great rejoicing.

However, local opposition, including turning the king against them, brought great discouragement and the building stopped. It was at this point that God brought encouragement through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Ezra 5:1-2.

The people were motivated by the vision of even greater glory to come. Haggai 2:1-9

Eventually, the temple was completed and dedicated with great sacrificing and establishing of the priestly offices according to the Law. Nevertheless, the people were largely ignorant of God's laws.

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**2. Centrality of the Law:** Behaviour must be compatible with worship. Ezra the priest is sponsored by king Artaxerxes to take more exiles to Jerusalem and to spare no expense in ensuring proper worship takes place and to teach God's laws. Ezra 7:21-26

Conviction and confession of sin follows, particularly the sin of intermarrying with foreigners.

**3. Rebuilding the city walls:** Securing identity and community. Notwithstanding all that the Jews had accomplished in their return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah, one of king Artaxerxes' officials, is greatly distressed to hear that the walls are broken down and the gates have been burned.

Nehemiah takes this burden to God (Chapter 1) and God moves the heart of the king to send Nehemiah to Jerusalem to inspect the damage and undertake the repair work

**The priorities of *Worship, Word & Walls* are for God's people in all ages and can be applied to the Church.** Many of us have lived through a period of restoration in the history of the Church.

We can easily see the parallel between the need for the Jews to restore worship and the place of God's Word (Law) and the priorities for the Church.

But what about the rebuilding of the walls? How do we interpret this aspect of restoration to the Church?

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### Questions

1. Look again at the time-line chart and ask, is there anything you do not understand regarding (a) the history of God's people at this time and (b) God's dealing with them?
2. What was God's purpose in this period of history?
3. How do you feel about God using heathen kings for His purpose?
4. Recount some of your experiences where you have seen Worship and the Word restored to the church. Do you think we are still in this process?

## Ezra and Nehemiah

