

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

“Restoration & Sensation”

Ezra 1:1-4 (Edict of Cyrus)

Ezra 3:1-13 (Laying the foundation of the Temple in Jerusalem)

Haggai 1:1-8

Nehemiah 4:1-8 (Rebuilding of the walls)

Job 2; Psalm 22 & 23; Ecclesiastes 3:1-22, Song of Songs 5:1-6

Jonah 3:10-4:10

Notes from Pastor Bill:

Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem

When the Persian king, Cyrus, came to power after defeating the Babylonians, he decided it was better to send all the exiled people back to their own countries and collect tribute from them for the royal treasury. Among the people given permission to return to their homeland were the Jews.

As an incentive for the people to return, Cyrus returned to the Jewish exiles all of the precious Temple furnishings and holy items that had been claimed as spoils of war from Jerusalem by the Babylonians and set up in their own temples. 42,360 people, plus an additional number of servants returned, leaving the rest behind in Babylon. This returning group has been known as “the faithful remnant.” There were actually three distinct waves of returning exiles into the Promised Land.

Once there, the people were shocked to find the city of Jerusalem and their beloved Temple still in ruins. Two leaders came separately to encourage the returnees and lead the work of rebuilding. But their leadership was not limited to the reconstruction of buildings and walls; they were equally concerned with the restoration of the vitality of Judaism. These two were named Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra was the theologian and Nehemiah, a political leader, was the construction manager.

Nehemiah’s great accomplishment was the rebuilding of the walls in just 52 days. This was accomplished even as the enemies of the Jews fought them while they were rebuilding! There was a great outpouring of energy and commitment, *“for the people had a mind to work.”* (Nehemiah 4:6)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

- Read Ezra 3:10-13. Why do you think the “old people,” who had seen the Temple of Solomon before its destruction by the Babylonians, weep? They would have been children at the time of its desecration. How does memory encourage us or discourage us when we try to restore things that have been lost?

- Nehemiah chapter 3 lists all of the workers and their families who built the wall around Jerusalem in the order in which each one took responsibility for a section. Note that many of the “builders” were not even union authorized! (Nehemiah 3:8) Anyone who could pull a rope, guide a stone, or hold a level was out there on the wall. When daily attacks threatened to slow the work, armed guards protected the workers, and finally even the “burden-bearers” started working with a load in one hand and a sword in the other. Read Nehemiah 4:16-17
- Think about the difference it makes when people are united by one vision and each one claims a part of it to make it a reality. The repatriated Jews built up a wall by working in unison. Do you think if people of faith worked in unison they could tear down a wall? If so, what might those “walls” be and how could they be brought down?

In the very middle of the Bible are a collection of books that are a representation of many of the ways in which God uses our senses, emotions, and minds to reveal divine truth. Collectively they are called “The Writings” or the “Poetical and Wisdom Books.” The Poetical books are Psalms, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. The Wisdom books are Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

The Psalms are the hymns and prayer book from the time of the Second Temple. Song of Solomon is a collection of love poems. Lamentations is a series of laments and grief poems relating to the destruction of the Temple. These are attributed to Jeremiah and are often printed immediately after the book that bears his name in the Bible.

Job engages the issue of human suffering and the sufficiency of God. Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings about how to live a good and righteous life and Ecclesiastes is a no holds barred spiritual diary covering a wealth of human emotions.

The Writings of the Hebrew scripture force us to consider matters of wisdom, philosophy, existentialism, love, worship, joy, and sorrow. Sensational stuff!

More questions and prompts for discussion:

- Have each group member pick a different Proverb and take a few minutes to read silently. Then, go around and share a pearl of wisdom from each one.
- Read Job 40:1-9, 41:1-6 to get a sense of the dialogue between Job and God. Consider the question God puts to Job, “*Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?*” (Job 40:8) Have you ever blamed God for something and by so doing exonerated yourself from any responsibility?