

God's Work

A Story of Revival, Ezra 7:1-26

Introduction

- So, we're 7 ch. into a 10 ch. book & we're meeting our human author for the 1st time.
 - Ezra led the second wave of Israelites back to Jerusalem around 457 B.
 - His influence at that time in history cannot be overstated.
 - As a leader in "the new exodus," he was called "The Second Moses"
- Ezra chapter 7 reads like an autobiography or a memoir, describing his personal & professional preparation, his experiences with the reigning king, & his state of mind as he stepping into his new role in the new Jerusalem.
- Personal narratives are an important part of the Bible.
 - They introduce important human characters in the Biblical story line and make the work of God more relatable.
 - The book of Psalms is full personal reflections & the first-person accounts of Paul humanizes the Book of Acts. (Read Ezra 7:1-6, 10, 11-14, 23, 25-28)
- Who was Ezra?
 - **He was a key figure in reestablishing God's people after the exile.**
 - This passage contains 3 descriptions of Ezra that are important for understanding how God works through His people & through His Word.

Body

I. Ezra Was a Priest and a Scribe. (v. 1-10)

- A. The position of priest went all the way back to the time of Moses & Aaron.
 - 1. Priests served the spiritual needs of the people according to the Law.
 - 2. Ezra traced his family history back through the high priestly line.
- B. The role of scribe was relatively new in Jewish circles.
 - 1. David the King used a scribe and Jeremiah the prophet used one too.
 - 2. The role was one-part religious & one-part political (v. 6)
- C. Ezra brought a unique passion to his role as scribe.
 - 1. He was devoted to studying or searching out the Bible.
 - a. Our Bible has 66 books, but Ezra's only had 5, the 1st 5 books of the OT, the Law of Moses.
 - b. This was his job, but it's clear from the story that it was much more.
 - 2. He was devoted to practicing it or obeying it in his life.
 - a. Ezra worked at pulling the meaning out of the text.
 - b. Ezra was personal example of Bible application.
 - 3. He was devoted to teaching it or sharing it with Israel.
 - a. In Nh. 8, Ezra read the Law to the people & explained it all morning.
 - b. These times instruction sparked the fires of spiritual renewal.
- D. At this point we should observe that personal dedication to God's Word comes before public transformation.
 - 1. God's outward, dramatic movement is never the first step in revival, it's always preceded by God's inward movement through His Word.
 - 2. "Preach the gospel to yourself before you preach it to others." (Jerry Bridges)

II. Ezra Was Appointed by the King (v. 11-26)

- A. He was commissioned by King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem. (v. 11-14)
- B. He was given the authority to appoint magistrates and judges who would judge the people of the province of Judah according to God's law.
- C. The king's law was brought in alignment with God's law.
 - 1. Politically – this brought stability to a region that was surrounded by unrest (Egypt & Athens revolted against Artaxerxes)
 - 2. Morally – this allowed the Israelites to obey God without conflict.
- D. Additionally, we should observe that God's Word is meant to be shared.
 - 1. The Law was meant to be a witness to nations around Israel (Dt. 4:6)
 - 2. JC fulfilled the Law in every respect. (Mt. 5:17)
 - 3. The Law achieved its ultimate purpose by pointing all to faith in Jesus Christ. (Ga. 3:23-25)
 - 4. The 10 Comm. teach that we have all fallen short & must be redeemed!

III. Ezra Was Overwhelmed by Gratitude. (v. 27-28)

- A. He praised God for putting the temple in Jerusalem on the king's heart.
- B. After everything that had gone on between God and Israel, he was grateful that God's lovingkindness has been extended to him of all people.
- C. Finally, we should observe that if God can work through Ezra, then he can work through anyone – even you.
 - 1. We think these people are special, so they are in the Bible, but it's really the opposite; they're in the Bible so they are special.
 - 2. One of the most successful prophets was Jonah who hated every minute of his mission and one of the most successful apostles was Peter who made all kinds of mistakes!

Conclusion

- All in all, Ezra's introduction here demonstrates that **God works through people who are dedicated to His Word and willing to share it with others.**
- We're familiar with the stories of pastors, leaders, & missionaries who make a big impact for God, but what about ordinary people? Lavinia Barlett is one of those people you've probably never heard of.
 - She was a women's Sunday School teacher in Charles Spurgeon's Church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, in London in 1800s.
 - As a single woman in the Hampshire area, she organized a boarding school for girls and taught them the Bible along with their studies.
 - She moved to London when she got married & continued teaching the Bible. Even though she was "not educated enough to teach city folk," and struggled with poor health, she grew her class of women at the Metropolitan Tabernacle to 800 women and 1000s mourned her death.
 - Her name is often overlooked, but her impact as someone who was dedicated to God's Word & willing to share it with others will never be forgotten.
- As Pastor A.W. Tozer once said, "God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible—what a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves."