

+++ And Put it also in Writing

Ezra 1:1 – 2

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~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God returns to the Old Testament to begin examining one of three post-captivity historical books of the Bible. To embark, we will consider an unusually brief introductory safari report. Ezra is a continuation of the historical books, which began with Joshua. Interestingly, the pre-captivity and captivity era books are placed *after* this set of post-captivity books in the canons of Scripture; for some reason the Lord saw fit to arrange these as such — so we'll take them up His way.

Ezra and Nehemiah belong together; Nehemiah was a layman and Ezra was a priest. They worked together in such a way that the will of God was accomplished in Jerusalem. Together they are going to rebuild the walls, the temple and the city. Remember, as we concluded second Chronicles, Judah and Israel had been carried away in captivity. The city of Jerusalem was burned, the walls were broken down, and the temple was destroyed. Fast forward now to the time in which we are studying, and they have been in captivity seventy years; as was prophesied by Jeremiah. So, God is going to allow them to return to Jerusalem as promised.

Enter Ezra. Ezra is one Bible character who never receives correct or proper recognition. In fact, Ezra is all but forgotten today. Ezra is a descendant of Hilkiyah, the high priest who found the copy of the Law during the reign of Josiah. We studied that period of revival in Chronicles extensively. However, Ezra is a priest without a temple; so he spends his time, like Daniel, studying the Word of God and praying. Ezra began a great revival by personally reading the Word of God and believing it. Most fundamental conservative scholars agree Ezra wrote first and second Chronicles, perhaps parts of Kings and Samuel, too. Ezra also wrote Psalm one hundred nineteen, which exalts the Word of God above all else, he organized the

synagogue, founded the order of Scribes, helped settle the canons of Scripture, and arranged the Psalms. I would say Ezra's work is exemplary.

We all owe Ezra tribute as he was the first to begin a public Bible study. Anyone on safari knows Bible study is the germinating point for revival. Bible study — and nothing else — is what the Spiritual Safari is all about. Ezra's theme is: the Word of the Lord! I like that, friends — very much. Ezra *"trembled at the Words of the Lord God of Israel."* The Babylonian captivity did not bring the Jews to national repentance. When Cyrus allows the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, barely fifty thousand made themselves available for the work; mostly priests and Levites of the humbler and poorer class. Most of the other Jews had made nice lives for themselves down there in Babylon — and they didn't want to give that up.

We have more than enough church members running myriad church programs and gimmicks of quasi-religious activity; but only a cursory, distant interest in understanding the Bible properly, correctly and completely. Some organizations have done quite well for themselves, to be sure — but we don't see revival happening. God's people haven't truly returned to Him in His Word. I have been to churches where they didn't even open the Bible. Some congregants didn't have a Bible with them. They may have made some reference to Scripture, but the overall message was one of community involvement, politics, or psychological-selfie-stuff.

Let's not kid ourselves: everything *except* the Word of God has been and is being taught in the modern church. I think our number one prayer should be that the church will come back to the Word of God and teach sound doctrine. The place the Word of the Lord occupied in Ezra's life was clearly reflected in the total life of his people....

¹ 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.

~ Again, an emphasis is placed on the Word of The Lord! Daniel was serving in the court of Cyrus and, evidently, Daniel led Cyrus to a saving knowledge of the True and Living God. Cyrus was certainly one of the most enlightened rulers of the ancient world, according to secular history. So, we see a great world ruler who came to know God through a captive. Interestingly, Isaiah made Cyrus the subject of predictive prophecy — naming him prior to his birth — nearly two hundred years before he became king of Persia.

Isaiah 44: ²⁸ *That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid ~*

Isaiah 45: ¹ *Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut ~*

Cyrus knew what he was doing when he made the decree that the nation Israel could return to their land and rebuild the temple and city. We're told the Word of the Lord was fulfilled in this; so, we have more fulfilled prophecy here. At least twenty-five percent of the Bible was prophetic when it was given by the Holy Spirit; and a very large portion – but not all – has been fulfilled. Some say there are more than three hundred prophecies concerning the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I've never counted them, but they're all fulfilled – however many of them there are. The second chapter of Matthew is all about fulfilled prophecy.

Cyrus had been given all the kingdoms of the earth! Cyrus himself declared that God had given him those kingdoms. I wonder how many leaders today recognize they are appointed by God Almighty Himself according to Daniel chapter four verse seventeen. Well, “.... *the Lord God of Heaven*” is an expression peculiar to Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel. Up to this point in the Bible, we have only heard about the Shekinah Glory — the visible presence

of God — and the “*Lord God that dwells between the Cherubims.*” That is the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night which led the nation Israel. After the temple was built to replace the tabernacle, the Shekinah Glory filled the temple, you will remember. Then, the visible presence of God left the nation Israel in the days of the reign of Manasseh, the worst ruler in Judah’s history, as we have seen.

Ezekiel saw the vision of the glory of the Lord leaving the temple at that time. The Shekinah Glory lifted, paused, hesitated to see if the people of God would turn back to Him, and turn from idols. When they didn’t turn to Him, the Shekinah Glory withdrew to the city wall, paused again, but the people did not turn back to God. Next, at the top of the Mount of Olives, the Shekinah Glory stopped and waited again; but God’s people would not turn to Him. So, the Shekinah Glory was caught up back to Heaven. Caught up.

The next time the Shekinah Glory was in the temple was in the form of a human man with a whip in His hand as He overthrew the tax collectors and money changers. Of course, they rejected Him then and crucified Him. Well, since He has returned to Heaven He is called “*the Lord God of Heaven*” by Ezra! That’s what the Lord Jesus Christ is today: the Lord God of Heaven! Jesus is the Man in the Glory in a Glorified Body. We don’t know what we’re going to be yet but, some day, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.

That’s a great hope the Christian has. Our hope is in the living Lord Jesus Christ. If we take our eyes off of the Word of God and look at the world, we’ll begin to sink under the waves — just like Simon Peter did. See, the Word became Flesh – the Lord Jesus Christ. If we keep our eyes on Christ, then we can walk on water. The water speaks to the Word of God, too, by the way. So, let’s look for Christ on every page of our Spiritual Safari; you know — keep our eyes on Him. Only Christ can lift us out of this present-day trouble and frightful times. Even Cyrus, king of Persia — recognized God as God. Do you? ~

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