



## Sermon Notes

US N<sup>o</sup>. 44

Date: January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012

Title: Beginning of the New Year

Series: #7 of "The Post-Exilic Community"

### 1. Temple Dedication and Celebration Ez. 6:13-18

- a. The Temple has now been completed after 4 years of work, 20 years after having arrived in Jerusalem.
- b. The work prospered under the prophecies given through Haggai and Zechariah. (cf. Ez. 6:14) It was commanded by God of Israel who ordained the support of the 3 Persians kings for His ends (cf. Pr. 21:1).
- c. The work was completed in the month of Adar, the 12<sup>th</sup> month within the Jewish lunar calendar. Adar is the happiest month in the Jewish calendar which celebrates according to Jewish history:
  - i. The birth of Moses on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar and who died in the same month 120 years later. Presently, modern day Israel instituted a public memorial ceremony on this day for Israel Defense Forces soldiers who have not yet been brought to burial (the Unknown Soldier), linking it with Moses whose place of burial is also unknown.
  - ii. The "Feast of Purim" which is also found in the month of Adar.
- d. We read in Ez. 6:17 that 100 bulls, 200 rams and 400 lambs (as compared to Solomon's 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep in 2 Chron. 7:5) were sacrificed. Note that they sacrificed a male goat for each tribe (12), not because each tribe was represented (recall the 10 lost tribes), but because the temple was intended for the entire covenant people, whose return to the Lord and to the land of their fathers, according to the predictions of the prophets, was hoped for.
- e. After the dedication of the Temple, they then assigned the spiritual leaders to their divisions according to the Law of Moses. There is a noteworthy sequence to the work for its total completion: <sup>1</sup>construction of the altar, <sup>2</sup>observance of the sacrifices, <sup>3</sup>construction of the Temple proper, <sup>4</sup>assignments of priests and Levites to their respective divisions, <sup>5</sup>observance of the feasts and full-on worship. This sequence is mirrored in the founding of the early church. Also, we note the importance of spiritual government:
  - i. Spiritual authority or government is the divine will of God within His Church for His purposes. Eph. 4:8-11 reads, "Therefore He says: 'WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.' And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."
  1. The purpose of these gifts is to complete and mature the Church as a whole,
  2. There are five ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers,
  3. There are four functions: to equip believers, to build up the body, to bring us all into unity, and to produce maturity and completeness.

- ii. The gospel of the kingdom of God is the gospel of God's government. Therefore, if we respond as God requires we will come under His government. There is a clear biblical connection between right government & peace. And one of the basic principles of God's government is that He governs by delegated authority. He doesn't do everything Himself, He's appointed those under Him and governs through them. Rom. 13:1 reads *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."*
- iii. Authority always flows downwards from the Head, just as our response should flow upward. It's a theocracy governed by God through Christ and those He appoints within the Church. The five offices are expected to govern. Our attitude to God's appointed leaders is in reality our attitude God Himself. Jesus said in Jn. 13:20, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."*
- iv. The modern problem of authority in the Church broke out during the Reformation. It has perpetuated two errors:
  - 1. Roman Catholic - excessive authoritarianism and an excessive emphasis on a corporate Church; such that the individual loses his personal relationship with God and personal responsibility & initiative.
  - 2. Protestant - excessive individualism, he becomes a law unto himself; no responsibility to God given leaders or the body.
- v. Heb. 13:17, *"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."* It is assumed that they will know who their leaders are.

## 2. The Feasts Ez. 6:19-22

- a. We read in Ez. 6:21 that they put away all of the filth or impurities of the surrounding pagan nations and ate the Passover meal together. Prior to celebrating the feast they had to separate themselves from the pagan impurities surrounding them. We'll see more of this in Ezra and Nehemiah's ministries.
- b. The "*Feast of Passover*" is then celebrated about 41 days later, 3<sup>rd</sup> of Adar (12<sup>th</sup> month of the year) to the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan (1<sup>st</sup> month of the year). It is poetic justice that the first feast that would fall after the completion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple whose glory would surpass that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple (*cf. Hag.2:8*) would be the feast that speaks so forcefully of the Messiah in the person of Jesus.
  - i. 1 Pet. 1:18-19, *"And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."*
  - ii. Three matzoth which are striped and pierced (*cf. Is. 53:5, Ps. 103:3, 1 Pet. 2:24*) are served during the meal. The middle one is to be broken in two with one half hidden. After the meal, the children are sent out to find it. Then, every member of the family eats a small piece. This half of the middle matzoth is called "*afikomen*." "*Afikomen*" can be traced back to the Greek word (*αφικωμεν*). It is the first person plural aorist active of "*afikneomai*" (*αφικνεομαι*) and means "*we came*."
- c. The "*Feast of Unleavened Bread*" follows the next day. Yeast is a symbol of sin and Christ is the Bread of Life without sin (i.e. Unleavened Bread). Jesus was placed in the tomb during this feast (*cf. Jn. 12:24*).
- d. And although it is not in the text, we can imagine that they also celebrated the "*Feast of First Fruits*" the following day, representative of Christ's resurrection. (*cf. 1 Cor. 15:20*)

## 3. Placing the book of Esther within our chronology

- a. The book of Esther falls between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, an interim of about 59 years. Esther 1 is 34 years after Ezra 6 and Ezra 7 is 15 years after Esther 10.
  - b. Queen Vashti was deposed around 482BC (cf. Esth. 1:3) probably during a “conference” that Ahasuerus (or Xerxes 1) had called to begin his campaign of retribution upon the Greeks for the defeat of his father Darius at Marathon. The disastrous invasion of Greece with the historically famous “*Battle of Thermopylae*” (482-480BC) follows with Xerxes defeated by the hand of the Greeks, essentially establishing future Greek dominance in the region (see *Alexander the Great*).
  - c. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) returns from the wars and seeks to comfort himself, among other things, with a new wife. Esther becomes queen around 480BC (cf. Esther 2:16).
  - d. The opening (and open) hostility between Mordecai and Haman (cf. Esther 3:2-5) can best be understood in light of their respective lineages. Mordecai was a descendant of Saul of Kish and Haman was most likely a descendant of Amalek (cf. 1 Sam. 15:33) who was defeated by Saul but put to death by Samuel because Saul disobeyed God’s command. The Amalekites (later called Agagites after their king Agag) hated the Jews and although most seem to have been destroyed in previous Assyrian invasions some may have lived on as the Jewish historian in Esther 3 records that Haman was a descendant of Agag. There is once again an illustration of restoration that appears in that what Saul didn't do, Mordecai achieved with Haman in the last recorded battle between the Jews and the Amalekites. In Ex. 17:8-16 God had declared perpetual war against Amalek.
  - e. This rise of Jews within the Persian government and the growing Greek menace helps explain the officially sponsored ministries of both Ezra and Nehemiah in what will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> returns to Jerusalem.
4. For Today –
- a. Spiritual government in church is part of the God’s will for our lives. It is both a call to submit and to act, two attitudes that we struggle with spiritually because there exists a natural disposition towards both rebellion and passivity that the Divine contradicts in His call.
  - b. However, the text illustrates the compromise that has risen within the church: that of professional believers and passive members that has now become a characteristic of modern Christianity. Originally God commanded that the heads of each household to kill and prepare their own Passover lamb (cf. Ex. 12:6, 21). However beginning at the time of Hezekiah and Josiah we find that that practice came to an end as the priests and Levites killed the paschal lambs in lieu of the household heads (cf. 2 Chron. 30:17-20, Ez. 6:20).
  - i. Zech. 4:10, “*For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.*”
  - c. The importance of the blood of Christ cannot be passed over lightly. Living outside of a gory atonement culture we risk forgetting the power of blood and therefore overlooking a very real instrument for our daily and eternal deliverance.
  - d. God justifiably wants purity and separation among those He’s delivered. It must be more than lip-service; it must be a real 24/7 practice of our whole being.
  - e. The words of Mordecai to Esther still speak to those of us hesitant to act for God in front of others, perhaps even towards our own personal harm. Esther 4:13-14, “*Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.*”