



Sermon Notes

US N°. 39

Date: Nov. 13th, 2011

Title: It starts with a sacrifice

Series: #3 of "The Post-Exilic Community"

Scripture: Ez. 2:1 -3:7

1. Ez. 2:1-70. "Roll Call" – the list of survivors who voluntarily returned to Jerusalem.
 - a. Ez. 2:1-39. By clans and families
 - i. This was about a 4-month journey from Babylon to Jerusalem.
 - ii. *"This beginning introduces us to one of Ezra-Nehemiah's distinguishing characteristics: lists, primarily of people... The people who will build the house of God are the central focus of the book... It is these people - listed with tiresome specificity - whose story Ezra-Nehemiah narrates."* Tamara Cohn Eskenazi taken from the Jewish Bible Quarterly
 - iii. The Jewish Bible Quarterly asserts that, "While the Books of Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers go to great lengths in describing the construction and dedication of the Tabernacle (cf. Ex. 25-31, 35-40; Lev. 8-10; Num. 7), and the Book of Kings allocates significant space to the First Temple construction and dedication (cf. 1 Kg. 6-8), Ezra-Nehemiah offers only a three-verse description of the dedication of the Second Temple (cf. Ezra 6:17-19). On one level, this contrast may highlight the deficiencies of the Second Temple as opposed to the Tabernacle and the First Temple. One also might argue that the brevity of the account in E-N, coupled with the astonishing attention given to the people who arrived to rebuild the Temple, suggests a different conclusion: The Torah and the Book of Kings highlight the physical structure of the sanctuaries, and the heroes who built them. Now in Ezra-Nehemiah, the people are at the center of the activity, as Eskenazi asserts, receiving literary endorsement by the inclusion of the lengthy name list in Chapter 2... Sensitive to the discrepancy of the long list of returnees enumerated by Ezra and the large number of those who remained behind, the Sages considered the Jews' general reluctance to return to Israel as one of the underlying theological causes of the destruction of the Second Temple: *"It is written: If she be a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver; if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar (Song 8:9). Had you made yourself like a wall and had all come up in the days of Ezra, you would have been compared to silver, which no rotteness can ever affect. Now that you have come up like doors, you are like cedar wood, which rotteness prevails over (i.e., a wall is of one piece, a door, a gate at least of two. Had Israel come from Babylon, not in parts, but at once, Jewry in Palestine may have been found worthy of a restoration of the Sanctuary) (Yoma 9b)."*
 - b. Ez. 2:40-54. The Levites
 - i. Note the sons of Asaph, a song writer of renown (1 Ch. 6:39, Ps. 50, 73-83)
 - ii. Highlights the importance of the priesthood.
 - c. Ez. 2:55-58. The servants
 - i. The descendants of Solomon's servants, some of whom originated from other nations that had been conquered.
 - ii. The Nephinim – "the given ones" – most likely descendants of the Gibeonites who became temple slaves during the time of Joshua. (Josh. 9)

1. *Jehovah's Witnesses* employ the term, *Nephtim*, in reference to modern Christian elders serving in positions immediately under the oversight of their governing body.
- iii. God doesn't require spiritual giants to get the job done.
- d. Ez. 2:59-63. The impure
 - i. Genealogy counts in the Old Testament, only true descendants of Aaron could serve before the Lord.
 - ii. Take note that they're not excluded from the people of God but from the special service before the people of God.
 1. The elders of the church are also meant to be set aside for special service that requires special and elevated standards. (cf. 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1:7-9)
 - iii. Zerubbabel acknowledges a means that they could be restored, direct consultation of God via the *Urim and Thummim* (cf. Ex. 28:30, Num. 27:21)
- e. Ez. 2:64-70. The Freewill offerings of those who came to Jerusalem according to their ability.
 - i. 61,000 gold drachmas is roughly the equivalent of 1,200 lbs valued at about \$32 million today, 5,000 minas of silver which is about 6,300lbs valued at about \$3.2 million, & 100 priestly garments.
 - ii. It takes sacrificial giving on the part of the people to put in place an infrastructure to worship God.
2. Ez. 3:1-7. New Beginnings
 - a. The people were probably in the land for about 3 months having left in the spring, traveled for about 4 months and celebrating the Fall Feast of Tabernacles.
 - b. Worship starts with an altar on which sin is first and exclusively dealt with through blood sacrifice. This is where we too must start, our own sins being forgiven such that we become the new People of God.
 - i. FB Meyer writes in his devotional book, *"This is the first thing that must be done before our temple-building or other undertakings can be crowned with success. It was well that the returned remnant made this their care; it augured well for their future. The new start that God Himself was giving would have been invalidated without that altar, which meant forgiveness for the past, and renewed consecration for the future. Where is the altar in your life? Where the burned sacrifice which betokens entire surrender of consecration? It cannot be too often insisted on, that since Christ died for all, all died in Him. We were not only saved by His death, we were included in it, but we must appropriate and identify ourselves with it. We must look up to God and say, "I desire that this death should be mine, to the world, to sin, to the flesh; make it so by the power of the Holy Ghost, that in Jesus I may be truly dead unto sin, but alive unto Thee." Perhaps that last clause will help some souls most. Do not perpetually dwell on the dying side, but think much of the living side. Yield yourselves to receive God's life, which is the life of the Son of God in the surrendered nature. Be very sensitive, and "quick of scent," to every movement and prompting of the Holy Spirit. Seek the things which are above, where Christ, your life, is seated. So you will find your energy drained away from self to Christ. Because He lives you will live also..."*
 - ii. God works from the inside out, altar then Temple. Ez. 36:26-36, *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your impurities. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for*

*your iniquities and your abominations. Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!" 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I **will also enable** you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.' Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it."*

- c. Worship starts with obedience to the Word. They knew what to do and how to build the altar because the Word told them what and how to do. It wasn't their preferences, it wasn't a poll, it was obedience to a Word outside of themselves. We are a people that must in submission to His living will.
 - i. Is. 55:11, *"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*
 - ii. Jn. 8:31-32, *"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."**"*
- d. Despite, or because of, the fear of the surrounding peoples, the Jews established the worship of God through the altar. Ps. 56:3, *"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."*
- e. These people are fragile. We see, just after arriving from Persia, how frail this new group is:
 - i. they're small in number,
 - ii. probably living in less than perfect dwellings in and around a city without walls and gates,
 - iii. and surrounded by unfriendly peoples of other nations.
- f. The Feast of Tabernacles was meant to remind Israel of their wilderness experience post-Egypt; during this week they were to live in lean-to's or huts ("*booths*"), which conjured up so vividly their precarious existence during the wilderness years, to remind them of how fragile their life was at that time. But the Feast also reminds the people how Yahweh daily cares and provides for His people despite their evident weaknesses.
 - i. Keep in mind that God also dwelt in a tent at this time, a sacred tent around which the rest of the tents of Israel were to encamp. Eventually God came and Tabernacle'd with us in the fragile form of a man as well (*cf. Jn. 1:14*), a tent that we today should also encamp around.
- g. God also intended that their worship be corporate. Authentic community is just what it was for our dad's churches, but now we have to be intentional to achieve community. Front porches are out, back yards and decks are now "*in*." There are more video games, videos, TV, Internet, etc. that doesn't involve face to face interaction. We don't take time to be with each other unless it competitive soccer, football, etc. However, our relationship with Christ is personal but not private. Sanctification rarely takes places with you and your notebook; you have to live honestly *coram Deo*.

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