



## Sermon Notes

US N°. 41

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Title: The Prophets

Series: #5 of "The Post-Exilic Community"

NB: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent 2011 + Series' notes

Scriptures: Is. 9:2-7, Ez. 5:1-17

### 1. Ez. 5:1 – The Word comes

- a. We left off with Ez. 4:24, "Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." This is hiatus of about 16 years. The people had grown discouraged, disinterested and dissatisfied. The conclusion that it must not be God's timing because there are obstacles and set-backs is a common one among His people. We have the not-so hidden belief that doing God's will should be easy and we end up spiritualizing our own laziness.
- b. So God sends His prophets. God is not content to let us get away; He pursues the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep, because He is a Good Shepherd and will not accept the loss of even one precious soul without a fight. Prophets bring the word of the Lord to the people, either of warning or comfort.
  - i. Haggai – his name means "festive," about a 4-month ministry, around 520 BC. He addresses 3 major problems (disinterest, discouragement, and dissatisfaction) among the exile community.
  - ii. Zechariah – his name means "Yahweh remembers," starts 2 months after Haggai. We understand that chapters 1-6 were written early on (~520 BC), chapters 7-8 written about 2 years later, and chapters 9-14 were written about 480 BC.
  - iii. An interesting side note to these prophets is their submission to the priesthood. They did not operate as "lone rangers" commanding the people with an attitude of autonomy that seems to insulate so many "prophets" ministering today.
- c. We read that God "who was over them..." which is a gentle reminder of who's Boss, ultimately we'll see in the narrative that God even directs the Persian king. When the Lord no longer has His place in the heart, what occupies a person if not his own personal interests? (Hag. 1:4) Thus God must call His people back by withholding His blessings.
- d. A discussion of the difference between *logos* and *rhema* is important due to the high-level of criticism and misunderstanding that persists to this day. Let's be very clear that we do not believe that any "rhema" can replace the "logos" that is revealed in the scriptures. There can never be a "rhema" that supersedes or is superior to the written "logos" of the Bible, where there is ever a conflict the written word of God must out. This is also not to say that "logos" is not for today as well, to suggest that it is only "rhema" words that apply in the now is a misrepresentation of the Word. All of the Word is for us today; sometimes a particular word will get a particular "hammer strike" in our daily lives.
  - i. *Rhema* (cf. Strong's #G4487) literally means an "utterance" or "thing said" in Greek; it is a word that signifies the action of utterance for now.
  - ii. *Logos* (cf. Strong's #G3004) means something said including the thought; by implication a topic (or subject of a discourse), also reasoning (the mental faculty) or motive; by extension a computation; specifically with the article in John the Divine Expression, that is, the Christ. Originally it was a word meaning "a plea", "an opinion", "an expectation", "word", "speech", "account", "reason," it became a technical term in philosophy, beginning with Heraclitus (ca. 535–475 BC), who used the term for a

principle of order and knowledge. Ancient philosophers used the term in different ways. The sophists used the term to mean discourse, and Aristotle applied the term to refer to "*reasoned discourse*" or "*the argument*" in the field of rhetoric. The Stoic philosophers identified the term with the divine animating principle pervading the Universe. After Judaism came under Hellenistic influence, Philo (ca. 20 BC–AD 40) adopted the term into Jewish philosophy. The Gospel of John identifies the Logos, through which all things are made, as divine (*theos*), and further identifies Jesus as the incarnation of the Logos.

- iii. Consider one writer's criticism of an extreme perspective of "*rhema*": *"Some Faith Movement/Charismatic Groups distinguish between the 'Logos' as the 'written word' of God and the 'Rhema' as the 'spoken word' of God. Thus, they speak in terms of receiving 'words from God' or 'words for the now, 'which they call Rhema words. In contrast, the Bible itself, the written word of God, is associated with the term Logos. While on the surface Rhema words are said to require conformity to the Logos word (written word), in practical terms, they become more significant to the life of the believer than the Logos (written word) because they provide direct guidance for our current circumstances and choices on a day to day basis. Ultimately, this effectively results in the Rhema word being superior to the Bible particularly in terms of deciding 'what we ought to do in the present situation.' But, taking the form of 'what the Lord personally reveals or confirms in your spirit,' the Rhema word also becomes superior in terms of doctrine. Since the Bible is 'long, cumbersome, and complicated' and 'no one agrees about what it says,' the Rhema word comes in and bypasses all that confusion and arguing and analysis by letting the Holy Spirit reveal to each individual what is right without all that impossible effort of endless Bible analysis. Over time, our right or authority to do anything becomes vested in the 'Rhema' word, and the infinitely debatable meaning of the Logos word reduces the Bible to irrelevance for both day to day living and in terms of doctrine. To exemplify how those in the Faith Movement apply this doctrine, imagine that you come to speak to a person about doctrine. That person may then respond by asking you, 'did God tell you to talk to me about this?' If you say that God did not speak to you directly with a Rhema word, then you will be viewed as acting on your own authority and dismissed. But perhaps you respond by saying, 'Yes, in the Bible God instructs us to do such thing.' In this case, the other person will dismiss you as arrogant because you claim to know what the Bible teaches in an area where others disagree and have difficulty proving what's correct. Thus, effectively, only a Rhema word from God is sufficient. This in turn makes it necessary that everyone receive personally 'words from God' on a fairly regular or at least 'as-needed' basis. (However, as we will cover more in depth momentarily, Christians must be very careful to avoid asserting that God has spoken to them directly or given them 'a word,' when that is not the case.) And conversely, the Bible is insufficient for doctrine and daily living, because it is inevitably flawed by human disagreement over its meaning. So, while presented merely as a supplement to the Bible, the Rhema word actually functions as a replacement for the Bible."* (Source biblestudying.net)
- iv. Another writer says, *"Yet I cannot get over the fact that Jesus came to change all this. He came to announce good news for the poor, freedom for the captive and tell people that the unrelenting power of God to change you was here and available because He himself was going to die for us. How did he do this? He spoke - rhema. He referred to the Old Testament - logos. He told stories. He shared Himself. He broke the accepted rules of the day. He would probably have been as bored in a church service as I am with pontificating preachers who neither proclaim rhema and turn logos into monotonous utterances. Hmm... why if Jesus is so interesting is the church so boring?"*
- e. A good example of the play between "*logos*" and "*rhema*" is Joel 2:28-32, *"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My*

*maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days and I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls."* We see this "logos" become a "rhema" in Acts 2:16-24 when it was fulfilled and became a word for now.

- f. It's important that we each have a daily Bible reading plan so that we can have fresh infusions of *logos* in our lives, while permitting God to bring certain scriptures "*alive*" to us bringing life to our intimacy with Christ.
2. Ez. 5:2-5 – The Effects of the Word
  - a. The Word Energizes. Immediately after the Word came to Zerubbabel and Joshua they arose and built.
    - i. For 16 years they had been making themselves comfortable, neglecting the Temple. (cf. Haggai and Zechariah)
  - b. The Word Strengthens. The two prophets minister for 4 months alongside of Zerubbabel and Joshua, strengthening them to perform the functions God had appointed them to.
    - i. 1 Thess. 2:13, "*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively **works in you** who believe.*"
  - c. The Word is Tested. Once the Word comes, it is then put to the test. (Gen. 3:1, "*Has God indeed said...*") The regional governor, Tattenai, comes and inquires into the building. However, he could not stop them from building; he also seems like a more reasonable type of leader.
    - i. We already begin to see changes in the exiles through this prophetic inspired revival. Notice that the exiles no longer proclaim only "*Jehovah the God of Israel*" (cf. Ezra 4: 1, 3), but "*the God of the heavens and the earth.*" (cf. Ezra 5:11-12) The temple also is not merely called "*the temple to Jehovah the God of Israel*" (cf. Ezra 4:1), but "*the house of God*" (cf. Ezra 5:11, 13, 15-17). The people of the Lord set themselves over against the nations, as serving the God which the nations ought to serve, and, in the same way, in our day, we present our Father to the world, as "*our Savior god, who desires that all men should be saved...*" (cf. 1 Tim. 2:3-4). In this sense, some theologians would call the revival of Ezra 5, an evangelical revival.
    - ii. Historical note: the Persians invented horseshoes to increase the speed of their couriers; historical estimates indicate a courier could do 240 miles a day with fresh horses every 15 miles!
3. Ez. 5:6-17 – The Letter.
  - a. Tattenai was governor of the provinces which belonged to the Persian empire on their side of the Euphrates, comprehending *Syria, Arabia Deserta, Phoenicia, and Samaria*. He seems from his letter to have been a mild and judicious man and to have acted with great prudence and caution, and without any kind of *prejudice*. (A. Clarke)
  - b. Darius, famous Persian king of the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) which was a watershed in the Greco-Persian wars, showing the Greeks that the Persians could be beaten; the eventual Greek triumph in these wars can be seen to begin at Marathon. Since the following two hundred years saw the rise of the Classical Greek civilization, which has been enduringly influential in western society, the Battle of Marathon is often seen as a pivotal moment in European history. The Battle of Marathon is perhaps now more famous as the inspiration for the Marathon race.
  - i. Xerxes 1, son of this Darius, and husband of Esther leads a pay-back invasion of Greece (480-479 BC) which ends in failure setting Greece as the major dominant power within the region. Judah eventually falls under the sway of Greece...

- c. v. 8 – *“Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.”*
    - i. “heavy stones” implies cost and effort
    - ii. Pagan testimony of their diligence and success. (cf. 1 Tim. 3:7, Col. 4:5, 1 Thess. 4:12)
  - d. We, today, are called to build the house of God (church) with great stones (people, cost, evangelization (go & get), discipleship (chisel into shape), etc.)
4. Ez. 6:1-12 – The Answer
- a. The search was made clear back to the palace of Cyrus at Achmetha, ancient capital of the Medes, which is about 160 miles southwest of modern Tehran. The scroll was found with Cyrus’ orders and Darius followed through.
  - b. Vintage Yahweh, not only is the construction of the Temple to be allowed but paid for (by taxes from within the region!), and daily sacrifices are paid for as well out of the crown’s treasury.
  - c. King Darius specifically requests that prayers for him and his family be lifted up in the newly built Temple. We too should remember to pray for our leaders. 1 Tim. 2:1-2, *“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”*
  - d. The Lord usually does not exercise a bare providence. There is so often a richness, a “who would have guessed?” aspect to his ways. In Isa. 49:6, *“Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”* This occasion in Ezra 6 is very much like that in Exodus 2:1-10 where Moses’ mother not only got her own baby back, but raised him under state protection, and with a salary for taking care of her own kid to boot! God’s ways seem to be marked with such generosity. He delights to go far beyond all that we ask or think (cf. Eph. 3:20, *“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...”*).
  - e. v. 11 – Darius orders that whoever opposed the construction of Temple was to be crucified (“hung” in many translations but the Chaldean is “to be impaled”) upon a rafter of his own house.
  - f. Took 4 years to finish the construction of the Temple, nearly 20 years after they first arrived.
5. Applications for us today:
- a. Study the Word regularly, put ourselves in a place that God can speak with us and make His word alive for present difficulties. Submit to the “logos,” seek the “rhema” within it, holding steadfast to good doctrine.
  - b. Put God first in our heart. It is well that we have placed the altar, (*if we haven’t we must come confessing our sins to the foot of the Cross and accept the blood of Christ for all of our sins*), but what remains? Are there character flaws, habits, and or affections that must be brought into line with plumb line that is the Word? Nature abhors a vacuum, therefore your heart will be filled, choose well what goes in it.
  - c. Remind yourself to build with “heavy stones,” this endeavor is worth every investment and every sacrifice.
  - d. Persevere. The Word encourages us to do the impossible and it strengthens to fulfill our duty, but it will be tested, and in that day do not be found wanting. Jer. 12:5, *“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?”*
  - e. Walk, work and worship corporately. Set aside our natural, American, and even Wyoming’ian, inclinations and strive for Biblical community and fellowship.
  - f. Remind ourselves just how BIG and AWESOME is our God, may our faith & vision correspond accordingly.