

Family Baptist Church – March 26, 2023

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Seeking Ministry Fruitfulness – Ezra 7:10 & Nehemiah 8

Ministry fruitfulness requires faithfulness.

Ministry fruitfulness requires patience.

Ministry fruitfulness requires diligence.

Ministry fruitfulness requires receptivity.

Opening illustration: Psalm 1:1-2 – “Bearing fruit in its season...”

Ministry fruitfulness requires faithfulness.

- Motivated by a relationship with God that is real and personal.
 - Seen through his commitment to Scripture.

If history is people, the history of the Second Commonwealth begins with one of history’s greatest personalities: **Ezra the Scribe**, who was descended from the priestly family of Aaron (Ezra 7:1-4). He is thought to have lived from 580 B.C. TO 540 B.C. (*A MERE 40 YEARS*) The Talmud says that if the Torah would not have been given through Moses it would have been given through Ezra (*Sanhedrin 21b*).

Ezra 7:10

¹⁰For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Ezra loved the Law of the Lord:

1. **Set** – to confirm, establish, maintain
2. **His heart** – inner man, mind, will, heart
3. **To study** – to rub, to beat, to tread, to trample with the feet (to tread a place with the feet; hence to go to a place, to frequent it)

- Seen through his loyalty to his teachers...Baruch.

As the primary disciple of Baruch the son of Neriah (who had been the primary disciple of Jeremiah), he remained by the side of his great teacher in Babylon until his passing, the Talmud says (*Megillah 16b*). This fits with the obvious reference Ezra makes to the prophet Jeremiah in Ezra 1:1.

Recording news from Babylon:

While in Babylon, *Ezra was told that a little over 40,000 Jews to return with him to the Land of Israel. Out of a population of perhaps a half million Jews that number was not very impressive. (Ezra 2:64)* Worse, they could not conscript the caliber of Jews they wanted. The greatest Torah scholars and the Levites stayed behind.

Opposition was rampant in the return from exile: Ezra 4:1-4. These opponents came from a collection of heathens (2 Kings 19:37 – worshipping the god Nisroch) who intermarried with those left in the city of Jerusalem during the exile. (2 Kings 17:24, 32)

The opposition caused the discontinuation of the temple rebuild. (Ezra 4:24)

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned in Ezra 5:1-2. Due to their encouragement, Zerubbabel returned to the work. The temple was officially rebuilt in **515 BC** (Ezra 6:14-15).

- Seen through his willingness to travel to Jerusalem to help resolve the problems.
 - Which leads us to our introduction of Ezra in Ezra 7:1-6.
- Seen through his willingness to address tough issues...not ignore them or run from them. (Ezra 9)

<https://www.jewishhistory.org/ezra-and-nehemiah/>

He arrived just in nick of time. The fledgling Jewish community in the Land of Israel was under siege and disintegrating. They were physically threatened. They were intermarrying. They were desecrating the Sabbath. They were assimilating. It sounds like headlines in this week's newspaper, but it describes the situation 2,500 years ago at a major crossroads in Jewish history. **(See 2 Chron. 36:17-21)**

When Ezra did arrive in the Land of Israel, he saw a Jewish community that had broken down spiritually. Some traditional sources that suggest the intermarriage rate was as high as 85-90%. **(Ezra 9:1-5)**. The situation was so bad that the High Priest — whom all the Jewish people looked to for spiritual leadership — had sons who married non-Jewish women.

Ezra also saw that all the Jewish-owned stores in Jerusalem were open on the Sabbath, which was the market day. The non-Jews from the neighboring towns and villages would come into Jerusalem on the Sabbath to make purchases. The Jewish shop-owners told Ezra that they had found legal loopholes in Jewish law for doing so.

It was like Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with the Tablets of the Ten Commandments in his hand and seeing the Golden Calf.

Ezra also had to deal with the political problem. They were not allowed to build the Temple and the Samaritans dominated the scene – threatening with violence anyone who would oppose them.

Ministry fruitfulness requires faithfulness.

- *Motivated by a relationship with God that is real and personal.*

Ministry fruitfulness requires patience.

- Motivated by an awareness of God's sovereignty.
- **The decree made by Cyrus, King of Persia that the Jewish exiles could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the HOUSE OF THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL: **538 B.C.** – Ezra 1:1-3**

- **The Temple construction paused: 520 B.C.** – Ezra 4:24

The second year of Darius king of Persia was 520 B.C.... approximately 18 years after Zerubbabel led the first group of Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Note: the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned in Ezra 5:1-2. Due to their encouragement, Zerubbabel returned to the work.

- **The Temple construction completed. 515 B.C.** – *The temple was officially rebuilt in 515 BC (Ezra 6:14-15).*
 - **EZRA WAS BORN AROUND 480 B.C.**
- **Ezra arriving in Jerusalem: 458 B.C.** – Ezra 7:1-6 (Ezra would have been approximately 22 years old.)
 - ...APPROXIMATELY 80 YEARS after King Cyrus issued his decree.
 - During the seventh year in the reign of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7)
- **Reading the Law in front of the Water Gate: 445 B.C.** – Nehemiah 8
 - Nehemiah 2:1 – the 20th year of Artaxerxes the king
 - **13-year gap** of time between the attempted revival in Ezra 7-10 and the realized revival in Nehemiah 8-12.
 - **Ezra would have been approximately 35 years old.**
 - **Jewish tradition believes that Ezra died five years after he read the Law in front of the Water Gate in Nehemiah 8.**

NOTE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ATTEMPTED REVIVAL IN EZRA 10 AND THE EVIDENT REVIVAL IN NEHEMIAH 8:

- Ezra 10
 - A public gathering for confession (Ezra 10:1)
 - Located in front of the house of God (Ezra 10:9)... the walls were still in disrepair
 - During rainy season (Ezra 10:13)
 - Comprised of leaders NOT all of Israel (Ezra 10:14)
 - A small group continued to oppose his leadership (Ezra 10:15)
- Nehemiah 8
 - A public gathering to listen to the Word of God read (Nehemiah 8:1)
 - Located in front of the Water Gate (Nehemiah 8:1)... the walls WERE completely repaired!

- No apparent issues with the weather. ☺
 - Comprised of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. (Nehemiah 8:2)
 - He read from the Law from early morning until midday. (Nehemiah 8:3)
 - He exalted the Word of God as their guide. (1 & 5)
 - He read the Word of God as their guide. (3 & 8)
 - He help the people understand the Word of God as their guide. (7-8)
 - He encouraged obedience to God's Word. (13-18)
 - No mention of opposition to this round of appeal!

Ministry fruitfulness requires faithfulness.

- *Motivated by a relationship with God that is real and personal.*

Ministry fruitfulness requires patience.

- *Motivated by an awareness of God's sovereignty.*

Ministry fruitfulness requires diligence. (Nehemiah 8)

- Motivated by eternity.
- They assembled all the people. (8:1)
- Ezra read from the Scriptures for 4+ hours while the people listened. (8:3)
- They built a platform to assist in the proclamation of the truth. (8:4a)
- Ezra recruited a team of fellow laborers to partner with him in disseminating the truth among the people. (8:4b)
 - He trusted these men to support the mission, not contradict it. (8:8)
- They collected tree branches (8:15) and created temporary tents (8:16-17)
- They assembled to listen to God's Law read to them for 7 days to fulfill Deuteronomy 31:9-13 and thus demonstrate their submission and obedience.

Note the number of "positions" that have impacted our churches based on Nehemiah 8:

- The use of a "pulpit" (4a) – although technically it was a platform 😊
- The concept of associations based on platform appearances (4b)
- The practice of standing when the Word of God is read (5)
- Opening in prayer (6)
- Responding to the preacher with "AMEN." (6b)
- Raising hands in worship. (6c)
- Kneeling down in worship. (6d)
- Sunday school? (7-8)

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- *Motivated by a relationship with God that is real and personal.*

Ministry fruitfulness requires patience.

- *Motivated by an awareness of God's sovereignty.*

Ministry fruitfulness requires diligence.

- *Motivated by eternity.*

Ministry fruitfulness requires a receptivity to (*appropriate, biblical*) change.

- Motivated by the power of the Gospel to transform people, places, and circumstances.
- The people responded intellectually to the Word. (8:1-8)
 - All those with understanding. (2, 3, 8)
 - Listened to the Law read and explained. (3)
 - Desired to learn more about the Law on the following day. (13)
- The people responded emotionally to the Word. (8:9-12)
 - They mourned and wept. (9)
 - They were encouraged to pursue joy through service to others. (10)
 - They were challenged to celebrate God's goodness through feasting. (11-12)
 - **Rephrased: Stop crying about your past failures (9). Embrace what God is doing in the present (10). Make appropriate adjustments to your attitudes and actions about the present (11-12). Attitudes – regarding the holiness of God and selflessness; Actions – by joining in the great work of meeting the needs of those around you.**
- The people responded volitionally to the Word. (8:13-18)
 - Notice that the obedience was led by the heads of the home (8:13-14)
 - They were moved to obey the clear teachings of the Law (Deuteronomy 31:9-13)

Deuteronomy 31:9-13

⁹Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. ¹⁰And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, ¹¹when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. ¹²Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, ¹³and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."

APPLICATION:

Ministry fruitfulness requires faithfulness.

- **What area of your life needs more faithfulness... motivated by a relationship with God that is real and personal?**

Ministry fruitfulness requires patience.

- **What area of your life needs more patience... motivated by an awareness of God's sovereignty?**

Ministry fruitfulness requires hard work.

- **How much effort are you giving toward your church attendance, giving, serving, and disciple-making... motivated by eternity?**

Ministry fruitfulness requires a receptivity to change.

- **How open are you to appropriate, Biblical change... motivated by the power of the Gospel to transform people, places, and circumstances?**

- **motivated by a relationship with God that is real and personal?**
- **motivated by an awareness of God's sovereignty?**
- **motivated by eternity?**
- **motivated by the power of the Gospel to transform people, places, and circumstances?**