

EZRA/NEHEMIAH STUDY 3

INTRODUCTION

So the great return pilgrimage has happened all those people and all those goods so carefully listed in Ezra ch.2 have now arrived and there has been a re-settlement in the towns and villages around Jerusalem.

What will the first priority be? There's a big question. We are looking forward with anticipation to what this week might bring from our own government as a rebuilding project much closer to home might begin to take shape - what priorities will be identified? What would you like to see happen first? In fact that will be my very first question in this week's Bible Study, but, first things first. Our passage this week is Ezra ch. 3&4, I know there is a lot of big names etc. but stick with it. Almost immediately following this most exciting beginning, opposition appears - and appears to win the day. As we leave ch.4 the rebuilding project has been shut down and by Royal decree. A complete turnaround it would seem. How

discouraging, what is God doing? How will God's people and (picking up our theme of leadership once more from study 1) how will God's leaders respond to this bitter blow - we will have to wait and see.

Interesting Aside - The Festival of Booths - this is a Jewish religious festival established in the days of Moses to focus on God's provision and guidance during their post-Egypt wilderness wanderings. Normally celebrated in our autumn for a period of 8 days people would live outdoors in little tents and there would be special thank offerings and worship. Once Jerusalem and the temple were established an element of annual national/religious pilgrimage to the temple in the great city became part of the festival. It seems fitting therefore that this is one of the earliest recorded festivals celebrated upon the return to Jerusalem.

As usual this study will be forwarded by email and will be available via our Facebook and Web pages - thanks for the feedback and may God bless us as we journey with God and His ancient people.

LESSON 3

In chapter 3 we see a clear focus for the early re-building works. Are you surprised by this? Would you have chosen a different starting point? Why? Do you think the spiritual health of our nation will feature at all in our own re-building planning?

In chapter 4 here comes the opposition! What reasons does the text give for this opposition? Having received permission by royal decree to begin the massive project, how do you imagine the letter from King Artaxerxes would have been received?

We are provoked to think of how we deal with setbacks/opposition and strange shocks in our walk with God. The era we are in provides us with plenty of real life context to ponder this. How is your faith? What is your opinion of God right now? We are perhaps premature in asking these questions now - there is so much more to read and study. However these are important questions for us and we will keep asking them throughout our

studies. It is tempting to swing wildly in our opinions - God has done this to punish the earth! There is no God or He would not allow this to happen! Keep reading, keep an open mind and see where God leads us.

Please feel free to respond via email to Mark (revmarkmccconnell@gmail.com) or Emma (revemaycarson@gmail.com) with your thoughts and responses – we would love to hear from you.

Amen