

# Read the Whole Bible with Pastor

## **Monday (October 23) – Ezra 3, 4**

In chapter 3, having arrived in Jerusalem after the edict of Cyrus, the sons of Israel make it their priority to rebuild the altar of God and to reestablish the sacrifices and offerings. Then they begin to regularly offer freewill offerings and sacrifices to the Lord in accord with the Law of Moses. This, along with the rebuilding of the temple foundation, teaches us the importance of the altar of God in the life of His people. At the altar the Lord gave the sons of Israel forgiveness and a taste of His holiness (see Leviticus 7:11-18; 6:18b). In a much greater way, the Lord Jesus gives us of Himself upon the altar in the Divine Service so that we may receive His holiness and forgiveness. How can we not orient our lives around this life-giving altar through regular (daily, if we can!) reception of the Sacrament of the Altar?

In chapter 4 maintaining distinction from the people of the land is of utmost importance for Israel. It would have been easier for Israel to cave and allow those of a heterodox or heretical confession (see 2 Kings 17:24ff, especially verse 29) to take part in their community. But Christ calls His people to be distinct from the world. “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven...put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Corinthians 5:6-7, 13b).

## **Tuesday (October 24) – Ezra 5, 6**

The sons of Israel resume work on the temple after having been forced to stop. It is the Word of God preached by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah which prompts God’s people to realize that when civil law conflicts with God’s law, there is only one response for a believer: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Their appeal to civil authority is only an afterthought, because the true ruler of this world is the Lord.

In chapter 6 we see how the Lord works through Cyrus and Darius to provide for the Jews to have what they need for their construction efforts. Though the odds were stacked against them, the Lord provides daily bread for His people through the ordinary means of civil government. But the prosperity ultimately came through the Word of God: “So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo” (Ezra 6:14). The Word of the Lord does not return void (Isaiah 55:11).

## **Wednesday (October 25) – Ezra 7, 8**

In chapters 7 and 8, Ezra the scribe comes on the scene. He is a descendent of the high priest and the one who was to set things right in Jerusalem. We ought to see Ezra as a type of Christ. Ezra was sent on the authority of the king to use his God-given wisdom to appoint judges and magistrates and to teach the law (Ezra 7:25). And like Joshua the son of Nun before him, Ezra camped by the river with the nation of Israel while setting things in order before entering the land (see Joshua 1-5). Our Lord Jesus is the greater Joshua and the greater Ezra. He made His dwelling among us, taking our sins upon Himself at the river Jordan in His Baptism. He appointed the twelve apostles as judges over Israel (Matthew 19:28) so that we might come

to know Him who is the end of the law (Romans 10:4) as our only source of eternal hope and security.

### **Thursday (October 26) – Ezra 9**

Chapter 9 begins the difficult two chapter ending to the book of Ezra, which deals with mixed marriage and divorce. The mixed marriages of the Israelites were indeed a forsaking of God's commandments (Ezra 9:10). The apostle Paul instructs us as well: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Marriage is a sacred institution created by God for the mutual encouragement and upbuilding of faith. When a Christian marries a non-Christian, spiritual difficulties will result.

### **Friday (October 27) – Ezra 10**

Chapter 10 is a difficult text because it broaches a topic which is painfully familiar to so many: divorce. Was it right for the Israelites to "put away" their pagan wives? Is it right for a Christian to divorce their spouse? On the one hand, the Lord hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and "Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Except in the rarest of circumstances, a Christian should never willingly divorce, because marriage is a sacred gift from God. In 1 Corinthians 7:12–16, Saint Paul even counsels Christians who are married to unbelievers to remain married, for who knows what good the Lord will bring about through your marriage?

### **Saturday (October 28) – Nehemiah 1, 2**

In Nehemiah 1 & 2, we are introduced to the final main character of the Ezra-Nehemiah story. The root of Nehemiah's name means "comfort" (see Isaiah 40). He is at the right hand of the king as his cupbearer (echoing the Joseph story), and he brings a great request before the king (echoing the Esther story). Like Esther, we see that Nehemiah has been raised up by the Lord "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). And like Joseph, he will become an important leader of God's people. So, just as with Ezra, we should see Nehemiah as a type of Christ. Nehemiah will bring some measure of comfort to God's people through the building of Jerusalem's wall, but the true comfort and peace of God's people only comes from our Lord Jesus, who sits at the right hand of God the Father, not as a simple cupbearer, but as the Lord of all things.

### **Sunday (October 29) – Nehemiah 3, 4**

In chapters 3 & 4, Nehemiah and the people work to rebuild the wall for protection against their enemies. But the enemies threaten before the work can be completed. In this, Nehemiah teaches us an important principle for facing trouble: "Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night" (Nehemiah 4:9). When faced with evil, we pray and trust God before all else. But also using the sound reason God has given us, we act prudently, not being foolish and putting God to the test, because the Lord often protects His people through the prudent avoidance of evil.