CHAPTER -29

EZRA (Help)

Portion to read:- Book of ezra

Memmory verse:- Esra 3:11,12

Objective:- God desire that his people worship him and that they give priority for his things over their own. If God's people seek first his kingdom and righteousness, then God will provide for all their material needs. This is the pre-requisite for getting all God's blessings. To understand Israel's return from Babel exile one should know the rebuilding of temple and the walls of Jerusalem, the leaders who led the people of temple and the walls of Jerusalem, the leaders who led the people etc and the geographical background.

Introduction:- In the Hebrew bible, the book of Ezra and Nehemiah are together regarded as one book, as is the case of the books of Samuel and kings. The book of Ezra deals mainly with history of Israel after history of 100 years to come - about their return after 70 years, rebuilding of Jerusalem etc. The books of kings describe the fall of 2 nations firstly, the fall of Israel and the Assyrian exile followed by the fall of Judah and the Babylonian exile. Daniel and his friends were carried captives on the fall of Judah. It is considered that Daniel was the last to be afflicted in Babylon(in the den of lions)Israel was first defeated by Assyria and taken to Assyria as captives. But later Babylon overcome Assyria and thus Israel came under Babylon. The Babylon kings brought captives from Israel to Babylon, in different groups.(IIKing 17,25). But the Medians and Persians, later overcome the kings of Babylon and the people of Israel came under them.But God opened escape for Israel from the hands of Persian kings for this purpose. They were Crysis, Darius and Artaxerxes.Jews took 100 years for rebuilding their temple and reinhabiting Jerusalem. This period can be divided into 2 phases.

(A) Return under Zerubbabel - building of temple ?(Ezra 1-6)

(20 years - from 20th year of reign of king Cyrus to 6th year of reign of king Darius,

from BC 537-517)

The Persion king Cyrus, showed special mercy to the jew, as he was commanded by God. God asked him to free Israel for building his temple and to provide them all the things required for it. It was prophecied about 200 years before. Cyrus birth by Isah that God would use him (Isia 44:28, 45:1-4). Daniel being a high official in the palace also have helped in getting the permission to build temple.

About 50,000 jews returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of governer Zerubbabel. King Cyrus also gave them the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple.They travelled 700 miles through the wilderness and came to Jerusalem. God had arranged everything for their journey and building purpose, through Cyrus. The name of the exiles who returned is given in chapter 2. The people who came to Jerusalem, started building temple, even before making their own homes. They laid the foundation stone with great joy and enthusiasm. Later they build an altar and made peace with God and started worship. (3:2). But this led to many oppositions. The hearts of people started to melt. But God raised prophets Zecheriah (Jehovah remembers) and Hagaai(beloved in the feast), to strengthen people's heart. Joshua was the high priest at that time. The people's heart was strengthened by this men and they worked with great enthusiasm and completed the temple in 4 years. There was great joy, when the temple was dedicated. But the elders were sad.(Why? refer Ezra 6)

(B) Return Uunder Ezra-Reformations (Ezra 7-10)

(25 Years - BC 458-433)

It was 60 years that people of Israel came to Jerusalem, under Zerubbabel. Some people has reinhabited in their motherland. But they were in spiritual and moral backsliding. God decided to appoint Ezra for establishing them in the word of God. Ezra was a priest, belonging to the family of Aron. He had learned the law from his childhood and he was a scholar (scribe) in it

(7:6). The meaning of word 'scribe' is "one who can write speedly". Scribes were excellent in law-making (legislature).

Some Zealons people, who were still in Babel decided to return to Palestine, but some others decided to stayback in Babel. So the Zealons group setout along with priest Ezra under the leadership of the governer Nehemiah (Jevovah is the comforter), in BC-458, during the time of king Artaxerxes.(7:11.28)

This was arranged by God. Ezra was such an example in Persia that the king was full of respect for him and his God. About 1800 jews set out from Persia and came to a place called Casiphia near river Ahava, which was about 100 miles north of Babel. They fasted and prayed to God before their journey. God led them and after travelling 1000 miles they reached Jerusalem. Their journey extended 4 months. Ezra had written all the details of the things given by the king for the journey and building temple, and once he reached Jerusalem, he read it out to all the people. First of all, they engaged themselves in building the temple. Nehamiah gave leadership for the work (Neh:2). Ezra ministered for 25 years. Oppositions arose here also. But God send prophet Malachi to strengthen people. (Malachi=Jehovah's messenger)

EZRA'S SANCTIFYING WORK (Ezra 10)

Esra was deeply grieved when he saw the spiritual backsliding in the people of Jerusalem. They had married gentiles and lost their sanctity. God is very strict about his people's separation and sanctity (Deu 7:2-4). Ezra taught them the law and dealt seriously with their faults (9:7,8). He cried a lot for his people and faithfully worked for their revival. The people came to Ezra.(10:1-54) What did they do? Ezra asked them to abandon their gentile wives and children and asked them to fast and pray for 3 days and return. (10:7,8,9) In cold, rainy night of December month, they all came to Jerusalem and decided that within 3 months. they will solve their problems and make peace with God. Thus great spiritual revival came out in them due to Ezra's ministry.

EZRA-A WRITER AND A SOCIAL REFORMATINST:-

It is believed that the jews started worshipping in synagogues in Babel exile, during the time of Ezra. This was because , there was no temple for worship in Babel. (Even the bible has only 100

years of history of Israel after Babel exile. But it has prophecies about all ages. In BC 336, Alexander also was merciful towards the Jews)

After the above mentioned incident, we dont's see Ezra for 12-13 years. He might have gone back to king Artaxerxes or he was busy in writing the old testament. Bible scholars consider Ezra as the author of the following books-Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. It is also believed that it was Ezra who arranged the old testament books in today's manner. Later we see Ezra again in the book of Nehemiah where he

reads the law from the morning to noon and the people repents and turn to God. We know nothing more about Ezra's latter days.

A GLANCE OF THE EVENTS AFTER EXILE: -

BC-537 - Return under Zerubbabel

BC-516 - Building of temple

BC- 479 - Esther becomes Persian Queen

BC-458 - Return under Ezra

BC- 445 - Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem.

Questions:

1) How did Israel come under Persians?
2) Write a note on the return of exile under Zerubbabel.
3) Who were the major prophets who ministered after exile?
4) Write meanings of the following : - Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, Haggai.
5) Write a note on the return of exiles under Ezra.
6) What was the sanctification work done by Ezra?
7) Which are the books written by Ezra?
8) Write the major events after the return of exiles.
9) Draw a map and label Ahava river and Jerusalem, where Ezra ministered.