



EZRA CHAPTERS 5-6



JOY THROUGH PROVIDENCE

DARIUS ARISES AND PAYS THE BILL

 God's works of Providence are carried out in His decrees which come to pass through the created universe. There is a wonderful harmony between God's ordering of all creation and our participation in that ordering through our daily lives.

Its not a matter of my will verses God's will, but the interweaving of His will with all of His creation.

As we have seen, God not only establishes and issues His decrees through mankind, He can supply the needs of His people through the hands of any man.

The Jews understood that the Kings heart was in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He will (Prov 21:1).

There is great reason for us to celebrate also. God is working all things for the glory of His name and the joy of His people - despite what is seen in a world riddled with decay and defiance and despite the pessimism of much of the modern church. God's Kingdom shall be established from sea to sea.

“I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”
(Zechariah 9:10)

THE JOY OF PROVIDENCE

Ezra Chapters 5-6

Behind the human drama here we see the constant reminder of God's Providence. It is God's Word that stirs hearts, God's Word that sustains strength and God's Word that enables celebration.

HONEST DEALINGS - EZRA 5:11-17

1. What admissions do the Jews make about themselves God?

2. What might we learn from the decree of Darius to foot the bill for the work: Has this happened before? What principles are at work here? (6:1-12)

This is what we might call "vintage Yahweh." God usually does not exercise a bare providence. There is so often a richness, a "who would have guessed?" aspect to his ways.

3. Considering 6:14-15, What are we learning about the ways in which God works?

The number of sacrifices on this occasion is paltry compared to what Solomon had offered (see 1 Kings 8:63). Note that the sin offering is "for all Israel," the 12-tribe nation, even though most of those present were from Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. Also, the ordering of the worship via priests and Levites was "as it is written in the book of Moses" (Ezra 6:18), i.e., it was orthodox worship.

WELCOMING THE STRANGER - EZRA 6:21

 **Discuss** what this verse shows about the attitude of Gods people to those willing to be part of the Covenant.

Among other things, this verse teaches us that Ezra 4:3 was not some narrow-minded nationalism. Here is a community open to others. Yet there is a price to pay: they must "separate themselves" from the impurity of the nations.

4. What Principle can we draw from this regarding those who wish to join in God's Covenant people today?

The church does not win the world by becoming like the world; it must insist that the world leave the world when it enters the church.

This text shows the post-exilic "church" was not some closed-door group of gentile-despising Jews. Yet, the way into this body was not through some loose-as-a-goose ecumenism (Ezra 4:1-3), but through costly and decisive conversion to the Living God.

FEASTING WITH JOY - EZRA 6:22

5. How had the Jews been made joyful and what was it that God used to make them joyful?

Note: The 59 year gap between chapters 6 and 7 mark the time between the completion of the temple under Zerubbabel and the return of the second exiles under Ezra. It is also the period in which the events of Esther occurred under the rule of Xerxes (Ahasuerus).

Ahasuerus is mentioned in 4:6 as simply an account of the various oppositions, as is Artaxerxes (4:7-23) who reigned during Ezra (Ezra 7:1) and Nehemiah (Neh 2:1). Note the mention of the wall in 4:12 of Ezra suggests a looking forward at the opposition that occurred during Nehemiah.