



“Reading the Bible Together”

Issue 13.

ONE YEAR ON - CONGRATULATIONS!!

Books of 2Chronicles (cont'd) and Ezra:

Israel's homecoming.

February 2010.

Introduction:

ONE YEAR ON – We began reading our Bible Together Notes one year ago this month, on the 1st February 2009.

Over the last year we have read stories of our own Creation, of how our human nature lets us down, how God intervened, particularly in and through the calling of the people of Abraham. We have seen the best on humanity – I particularly still love the story of Ruth, and the worst – what about some of those Kings. We have seen God rescue His people through the Exodus. We have seen Him share His commandments with the people and be present with them in and through the life and function of the Tent of meeting, latterly the Temple. And yet we have seen how human nature, jealousy and greed brought about Israel's demise. One thing above all else seems to have brought about Israel's downfall and that is her belief, even determination, to walk alone – forget God and do things their own way. And so, at the end of 2Chronicles, Israel is carried off into Babylon by the King of PERSIA. THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENS. God sides with Israel's adversary and no longer with her. And so Israel goes into Exile in more senses than just the physical.

This month:

But Israel's story is not over. After her Exile of seventy years, and with her capital and Temple in ruins, Cyrus, King of Persia relents to the prompting of God and allows the Israelites to go home (Ezra Ch 1).

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah:

Originally it is thought these two books were in fact one. The style of writing seems to point to them being by the same author certainly. The books describe the events surrounding two great characters of this period of the great return from Exile, Ezra the Priest and Nehemiah the Governor. It is thought Ezra returned first, approx 458BC, to be followed by Nehemiah some thirteen years later. Both were intent in not just rebuilding the nation and capital physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. Plans for the Temple are drawn up, establishment of the Jewish festivals is re-instigated, and the people start to form something of their identity again, not without opposition.

A number of reforms also take place, not least Ezra's great purge on inter-marriage (see Ezra 9-10), and also the establishment of the Priesthood at the top of the political ladder. Both are pointers to a deeper issue going on, which the Bible writer's are trying to explain and answer. When Israel was taken into Exile it is difficult, I think, for us to conceive how this must have felt. It was far more than simply being defeated by a hostile army, although that was bad enough. Instead the Exile represented the unthinkable to Israel, that God, her God would turn His back on her and support and work in and through the other. This would not be dissimilar to believing God so turned His back on His Church that He would work and through those who wanted to “free” this country from religion, particularly Christian religion.

During their time of the Exile the Levites and Priests wrestled with this situation and they concluded that it could be understood in terms of a specific problem that in turn had a specific answer. The problem was, to put it simply: if we are God's chosen people then why are we in the mess we are in?

The answer provided by the Levites and Priests was: because we, the Israelites, have not been faithful. God has been angered by our unfaithfulness through our Kings, in our return God is giving us another chance, therefore we need to take it with both hands and therefore be faithful. To do this we need to cleanse our nation – ie expel mixed marriages, and re-establish our worship life, which everyone should attend as a matter of obedience. Then, and just then, there was a chance that God would show favour to His people once again.

Why is all this important:

Well, because it is believed many of our Old Testament Books, those we have already read and many of those we have yet to read, are believed to have been written or edited at this time by the rising Priestly cast. They therefore have been influenced and coloured, at least in part, by the same theological premise. Books, like Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and the like are all believed to have been read, edited and re-issued at this time, not to mention many more besides. We can either get upset by this, because we feel we may not be able to ever go back to the “original” text, or we can see God as a God not just of one age, but of every age, speaking in and through His people, often saying the same thing, but in a new and contextually relevant way. Which can lead us to believe, of course, that God indeed speaks today.

Bible Together Meetings: January meetings will be:

- Wednesday 3rd February 9.00am – 10.00am – in the Chancel as usual.
- Wednesday 17th February 8.00pm – 9.00pm – in the Chancel as usual.

Scheme of Reading for January:

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
Mon 1 st Feb	2Chron 3:1 – 5:1	Mon 22 nd Feb	2Chron 29:1 – 29:36
Tues 2nd Feb	2Chron 5:2 – 6:11	Tues 23 rd Feb	2Chron 30:1 – 31:1
(Candlemas – Simeon bless the baby Jesus)			
Wed 3rd Feb	2Chron 6:12 – 6:42	Wed 24 th Feb	2Chron 31:2 – 31:21
(Bible Together Meeting today @9.00am)			
Thurs 4 th Feb	2Chron 7:1 – 8:18	Thurs 25 th Feb	2Chron 32:1 – 32:33
Fri 5 th Feb	2Chron 9:1 – 9:31	Fri 26 th Feb	2Chron 33:1 – 33:25
Sat 6 th Feb	2Chron 10:1 – 11:4	Sat 27 th Feb	2Chron 34:1 – 34:33
Sun 7 th Feb	-----	Sun 28 th Feb	-----
Mon 8 th Feb	2Chron 11:5 – 12:16	Mon 1 st Mar	2Chron 35:1 – 36:1
Tues 9 th Feb	2Chron 13:1 – 14:1	Tues 2 nd Mar	2Chron 36:2 – 36:23
Wed 10 th Feb	2Chron 14:2 – 16:14	Wed 3rd Mar	Ezra 1:1 – 2:70
Thurs 11 th Feb	2Chron 17:1 – 18:27	(Bible Together Meeting today @ 9.00am)	
Fri 12 th Feb	2Chron 18:28 – 19:11	Thurs 4 th Mar	Ezra 3:1 – 3:13
Sat 13 th Feb	2Chron 20:1 – 21:3	Fri 5 th Mar	Ezra 4:1 – 4:24
Sun 14 th Feb	-----	Sat 6 th Mar	Ezra 5:1 – 5:17
Mon 15 th Feb	2Chron 21:4 – 22:9	Sun 7 th Mar	-----
Tues 16 th Feb	2Chron 22:10 – 23:21	Mon 8 th Mar	Ezra 6:1 – 6:22
Wed 17th Feb	2Chron 24:1 – 24:27	Tues 9 th Mar	Ezra 7:1 – 7:28
(Bible Together Meeting today @ 8.00pm)			
Thurs 18 th Feb	2Chron 25:1 – 25:28	Wed 10 th Mar	Ezra 8:1 – 8:36
Fri 19 th Feb	2Chron 26:1 – 26:23	Thurs 11 th Mar	Ezra 9:1 – 9:15
Sat 20 th Feb	2Chron 27:1 – 28:27	Fri 12 th Mar	Ezra 10:1 – 10:44
Sun 21 st Feb	-----	Sat 13 th Mar	Neh 1:1 – 2:10
		Sun 14 th Mar	-----
		Mon 15 th Mar	Neh 2:11 – 3:32
		Tues 16 th Mar	Neh 4:1 – 4:23