

The exiles return

MICHAEL ALEXANDER
Central Newspaper Services

Ezra 1

With this lesson, we begin our summer quarter of studies titled, "God Restores a Remnant."

This is a wonderful opportunity to see firsthand how God works in the lives of those He loves as He endeavors to restore them to the position once enjoyed. These lessons speak directly to people who have slid back into a life not pleasing to God.

It also encourages churches that have lost their purpose and vision to return to God and be used magnificently. This study will encourage all who will study with an open mind

and an attitude of seeking God's will for their life.

THE DECREE

Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:3.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and had already taken captive many of the nation in earlier years. This was an especially terrible thing to happen to God's people.

At one time, during the reign of King David, Israel had been a world power. It was the kings of other

nations that feared the forces of God's elect.

However, times had changed since that great historical era. Sin had caused Israel to drift from God, His leadership and His protection.

Finally, God allowed the nation to be taken captive by the Babylonians and eventually, the city and temple to be destroyed. It was too much to comprehend when God's holy sanctuary was defiled and destroyed.

Nebuchadnezzar had taken the sacred utensils of the temple to use in pagan worship. How terrible!

Yet shortly after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon was defeated by the Persian Empire, led by a king named Cyrus. This

king decided to allow all captives to return to their home.

Verse three is his offer to the people to return to Judah, their home and their center of worship. God was allowing a remnant to return and re-establish the worship that had been gone for so many years.

THE DECISION

Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:5.

One might think that an offer to return to their

homeland and to their sacred place of worship would be immediately accepted and appreciated. However, the people of God had been in captivity for nearly 70 years and things change in that amount of time. They had settled in their new life and most of the people able to make the journey were not familiar with the old ways.

Just as God worked in the life of Cyrus to release the captives, He had stirred up a desire to return in the heart of the leaders of three of the twelve tribes.

The great nation of Israel had spit into the northern kingdom, with ten tribes and the southern kingdom, with two tribes many years before this event.

The northern kingdom had been in Assyrian captivity for a long time before Babylon over-took the southern kingdom, which held Jerusalem. As it turned out, the leaders convinced the people to return to Jerusalem and to eventually rebuild the temple.

Once again, God saw the needs of His people and by His mercy and grace decided to offer them another chance to serve and be faithful.

This same God is offering to everyone the opportunity to return to Him. Through His son, Jesus, He offers a new life and a home in Heaven.

Lessons based on International Sunday School lessons

SERVICES/ACTIVITIES

Hertford Baptist

Travel the vibrant streets of London on an intriguing mission to crack the elusive Character Code as sleuths and inspectors seek to solve The Great Kingdom Caper at Hertford Baptist Church Vacation Bible School.

Hertford Baptist Church, 124 W. Market St., will host children ages 3 through grade 6 at its annual Vacation Bible School, June 8-12. It will begin on Sunday at 6 p.m. with supper, followed by session 1 from 7-8:30. On Monday - Thursday sessions will meet from 8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. There will be Bible stories, music, crafts, recreation and snacks all combined to provide an adventure-filled week. Youth (grades 7-12) and adults will meet nightly at 7.

Call the church at 426-7460 for more information.

Roanoke Baptist Association

The Roanoke Missionary Baptist Association Ministerial Alliance will host its annual revival at Melton Grove Missionary Baptist Church, May 26-30. Several lecturers, pastors, choirs and congregations will take part in the services. For information, call Rev. Landon Mason at 426-7222.

United Pentecostal

Rev. Ismael Melendez and his wife Christina have accepted a pastoral appointment at United Pentecostal Church, Edenton. Special service to meet the pastor will be held on Sunday, July 1, at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Hertford Pentecostal

Barry Overman with "Higher Calling" will pre-

sent the gospel in music Sunday, June 1 at 2:30 p.m. at Hertford Pentecostal Church located at 715 West Grubb Street.

Melton Grove

The usher boards of Melton Grove Baptist Church will hold the Celebration of the church anniversary on Sunday, June 1, at 2:30 p.m. Rev. Kenneth Joyner of Bagleys Chapel Baptist Church, his choir, ushers and congregation will be the special guests.

Faith Pentecostal Holiness

Rev. Johnnie and Patricia Hunter will hold revival at Faith Pentecostal Holiness Church on Highway 32 North, Edenton, June 1 at 6 p.m., and June 2 and 3 at 7:30 p.m. Rev. Hunter is the presi-

dent of Global Life & Family Mission (GLFM), a ministry dedicated to promoting traditional family values, racial harmony, and the survival of children around the world. GLFM's main goal is the restoration of the family through the recognition of the value of

a child.

He is also the National Director of Life Education And Resource Network (L.E.A.R.N. Inc), a consortium of Christian pro-life, pro-family advocates. Rev. Hunter is an ordained minister and elder with Antioch Churches and


Ministries. He co-pastored National Community Church on Capital Hill, Washington, DC, and is the Pastor Emeritus of Church of the Living Water, Buffalo, N.Y.

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The Carpenter's Tools Mission America!

I had the privilege this past week of flying to Springfield, Missouri to work on a project for "Church Planting" with our national organization, The Assemblies of God. The Director for Church Planting in America recently visited The Carpenter's Shop and was quite intrigued that a "Medium-sized" church in Northeastern North Carolina was as diverse as it is and that we had also been about the business of "church planting".



By Wallace C. Phillips

Carpenter's Shop is made up of individuals from approximately twelve nations of the earth. There is much diversity in "The Church Where All Are Welcome". We have taken seriously the admonition of God's Word to proclaim the gospel and to establish churches. Last year we planted churches in Gates County with the beginning of Upper Room Assembly, as well as the Spanish Church here in Ahoskie known as El Taller Del Carpintero. Our plans for the future include an additional plant in the Northampton County area. What an honor to see Christ "build His church".



As my wife and I traveled to Springfield we were videoed for a national campaign for churches planting churches. Clips from our live services as well as the services in our church plants were used to create a video with other pastors across the nation to evangelize America. Mission America? I'm afraid so. It seems that even on the so-called "foreign field" we have individuals sending missionaries over here to share the gospel. We are blessed and should not need any help from other countries to evangelize this nation. We are all called as missionaries to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to those around us. Mission America? Absolutely! Get busy. You heard the Holy Spirit say to you "come... come to me". As soon as you are saved He changes his words to "go...go and make disciples."

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