**Ezr 1 / Eph 5**

**Main theme: Remove the dimness and come to the light, come back to your senses, and love one another in holiness**

**-Build the temple / Be sanctified (return/ Forsake sin)**

Golden verses: Ezr 1:5, Eph 5:15-20

The book of Ezra recorded the successive return of the people of Judah from Babylon. The first return was led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. (Ezr 1:1-6) The second one was led by Ezra. He taught the people to obey the laws and separate themselves completely from the women they married from the foreign nations. The main theme of these two chapters discussed on building the temple and sanctification. On one side it concerned God fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah the prophet. He moved the heart of the king of Persia to send an imperial order to let the captivated people return and rebuild their temple. On the other side it concerned Paul encouraged the saints to undergo sanctification, to pursue holiness and the light, to unite with God and offer to the Lord as a glorious church. If God's children listen and act according to the Lord's words, abandon darkness and come to the light, be sanctified and return, they will certainly see that everything works for the good of them.

**A. Be holy and be the light, return to build the temple and everything works for the good of it**

Return (Ezr 1:1-4) - Light (Eph 5:1-12)

1.【God's faithfulness】1 God’s promise is forever faithful! When the time came, God fulfilled the kind words said through Jeremiah. He moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm to work for the good of God’s people. God turned the heart of the foreign king for them to accomplish His will. (Isa 45:1-4; Pro 21:1)

※【God's unfailing love】1-2 What kind of love is God! Christ denied Himself to be the fragrant offering for us so we become children of love. The captivated people were also favored by God’s loving care so the foreign king would work for the good of it. This inspires us not to long to stay in the sinful Babylon and not to live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised again (2 Co 5:14-15) in order to repay His great love.

2.【The king allowed to return and to build the temple】2-4 King Cyrus proclaimed to the whole nation so anyone of His people might leave Babylon and go up to build God’s temple. The local people had to help them with money and goods and give freewill offerings for God’s temple. The rise up of king Cyrus showed the most high authority and work of God for the sake that He had chosen Israel. He had summoned him by his name so all the nations of the world knew the Lord was the only God.

※【Holiness and light become God's temple】3-12 The church was also chosen and redeemed by God to turn from the power of darkness to be children of light. They had to remove the darkness and shameful action and find out what pleased God to bear fruit of light to become God’s temple and proclaim God’s name. When God’s people removed the filth of Babylon and return to build the temple, God would be with them, so Cyrus made the proclamation and God’s name was greatly glorified.

**B. Set apart for God and be in one to glorify God**

Get up (Ezr 1:5-11) - Come to the senses (Eph 5:13-33)

1.【God excites them to get up to build the temple】5 The time had come! God moved the hearts of the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites. They were prepared to go up to the holy city to build the house of God because God was jealous for Jerusalem His temple. (Zec 1:14)

※【Ought to come back to your senses and do not be sunk in sleep】13-15 Our Lord was consumed for the zeal for His house! (Ps 69:9) Therefore we ought to get up quickly and not as unwise lest we may sleep in death. We ought to be like the wise to take rebuke by His light to come back to our senses. We ought to know how to count our days like the captives were moved by God’s words and love to get up to rebuild the temple in the holy city. (1 Co 15:34)

2.【All are willing to offer to God】6 All their neighbors brought in goods, livestock and valuable gifts to assist the captives. There were also freewill offerings brought for God’s temple.

※【Understand the Lord's will and praise God】16-21 The Lord’s coming is near, so make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil! Therefore do not be foolish but to understand what is the will of the Lord. The situation testified the time to build the temple has come, therefore do not get drunk and debauch. Instead, be filled with the Spirit and be consumed by the fire of love. Be willing to offer yourself and speak with psalms and hymns to make music in your heart to the Lord like the returned people sent their freewill offering to give thanks and glorify God in the name of the Lord.

3.【Set apart the instruments for God】7-11 King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had placed in the temple of his god. He set them apart and brought out from the place of captivity. He counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. The restored people had to purify themselves from ignoble; they would be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master offered to God without being slaves of sin but slaves to righteousness. (2 Ti 2:21; Ro 6:16-18)

※【Unite with the Lord and glorify God】22-23 Husbands and wives ought to be dutiful. Wives ought to submit to the husbands as to the Lord. Husbands ought to love their wives as they love themselves. This represents Christ loves the church and denies for the church. We ought to be purified and sanctified by the water and through the Word to unite with the Lord like the articles of the temple were freed from the filth of Babylon and no longer be defiled by the idols. Then we can set apart to be holy to return to God’s temple. God’s people are refined under His affliction. They will then become the glorious temple and the articles of value, spotless to reflect God’s light.

**Ecc 3 / Rev 20:7 Main theme: When the time comes, the enemies will come out; through tests and do good all your life**

**-Do good / The enemies come out**

(1)【When the time comes, the evil one will come out】1-11 But this will only be for a time. Therefore we ought to be always alert and pray to overcome by the Lord to stand firm in the truth.

(2)【Wait patiently for God promised there is a set time】12-15 While we await, we ought to do good by God and delight in Him, make every effort to arrive maturity. Mourn for ourselves and others, and pray for forgiveness and restoration.

(3)【Believe firmly till the end】16-22 Though the evil and the deceitful ones are more wicked as time goes on, we deeply believe the Lord has saved us. He saves us now and will save us in future. By that time we will see God’s words accomplish.

(4)【Stand firm in the tests】16-22 Even when the evil one is released, this is to test us so we may understand our weakness and corruption is like the beast. But due to God’s compassion and deliverance, we will not go down the pit. Therefore we dare not be arrogant and self-righteous, but tremble in fear to accomplish God’s assignment.

**Central point of the wheels: Refined and return, be the light and sanctified, pray watchfully and proclaim the Word**

Dear Lord, may You let me be refined to be holy and be the light, to understand your will deeply, to do good joyfully and accomplish the work of the temple!

**Ezr 2 / Eph 6**

**Main theme: Return and obey, be strong to overcome the enemy, be watchful to pray and proclaim the Word**

**-Return / Be strong (turn from sin / overcome the enemy)**

Golden verses: Ezr 2:62-63, Eph 6:14-19

A discussion on returning and being strong - on one side it recorded the number of returned descendants of Judah from Babylon according to their tribes. On the other side it concerned Paul encouraged the church of Ephesus to put on the full armor of God to contend bravely as a fighting warrior to withstand Satan watchfully without tiredness. Not only should the captives need to turn from Babylon and serve, they need to be brave to be fighting warriors to overcome the inner and outer enemies. God sees His people are precious and honored. Thus when the time comes, He will let them return to their land as no one can hinder the will of God!

**A. Obey and return, discern the enemy's plot and be brave to overcome them**

Turn from sin (Ezr 2:1-35) - Overcome the enemy (Eph 6:1-12)

1.【Obey and return】1-35 The descendants of the exiles of Judah whom Babylon had taken captive obeyed God’s command and followed Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the leaders back to Jerusalem and their towns in Judah. Their numbers were recorded by tribes (Ezr 2:3-19) or by their location (Ezr 2:20-35) God loved His people with an everlasting love. When they obeyed to return, they were remembered on the list. We too ought to bring out the whole family from the world of sins so their names may be recorded in the book of the Lamb!

※【Obey and serve the Lord】1-9 As an apostle of Christ, Paul taught those who were children to listen to the parents in the Lord and honor them so the children might go well and enjoy long life on earth. Fathers had to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord and not to exasperate their children. Servants had to be sincere and fear to listen to their earthly masters and to obey God’s will in the heart. Under the guidance of the leaders the exiles also listened to returned to serve the Lord dutifully without turning to the left or to the right. Both Paul and Zerubbabel were not only faithful servants of God; they had the mind of the parents full of God’s love. They led God’s children return to God’s Word and His will.

2.【Be freed from the power of sin】1-35 God’s people returned from Babylon was to be freed from the worldly sins and the bondage of the idols. They no longer were wayward but back to God. Within the list of returned, the Senaah were the most, there were three thousand six hundred and thirty of them.

※【Withstand Satan's plot】10-12 Finally Paul encouraged the church to be strong in the Lord. They had to put on the full armor of God and contend in the spirit against the devil’s schemes. When the people returned from Babylon, they too had to fight against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, and then they might be completely freed from the temptation of the idols and evil. (2 Co 10:3-5) In our spiritual war, if we overcome completely by the Lord, we will also be favored to increase in number.

**B. Be holy to perform your duty, pray watchfully and proclaim the Word** Be faithful to the holy duty (Ezr 2:36-70) - Be a fighting warrior (Eph 6:13-24)

1.【Return and be holy to perform the duty】36-58 The descendants of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers of the temple and the temple servants all returned and set apart to be holy. They broke away from the place of idol worshiping and were able to serve God in a holy manner.

※【Overcome the enemy by the full armor】13-20 The able men of Christ have to put on the full armor of God to stand against the devil just like Paul, though being an imprisoned messenger, he preached the Word with boldness. The returned priests and Levites had to put on the full armor of God with the truth, righteousness and faith as their weapons, and then they might resist the devil’s schemes and serve God in a holy manner.

2.【The pedigree is unclear without witness】59-63 Those who came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha etc could not show that their families were descended from Israel. The priests had to set apart to be holy. But there were three families whose record could not be found. This showed they did not differentiate the holy from the worldly. They mixed with the world and thus were excluded as unclean. They were not allowed to serve as priests or eat any of the most sacred food because God is a holy God, a jealous God; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

※【The faithful messenger has witness】21-22 Paul recommended Tychicus to the church of Ephesus and called him as dear brother, a faithful deacon and full of witness of God. Within the returned priests, there were some who could not find their records. They did not give any witness.

3.【Be willing to offer gifts for the temple】64-70 The returned company numbered over forty thousand. Besides, there were their menservants and maidservants, men and women singers. They all set apart to be holy and broke away from Babylon to serve the Lord in a holy manner. When the heads of the families arrived at the holy city, they gave freewill offerings for the temple. According to their ability they gave to the treasury gold, silver and priestly garments to offer to God with a thankful heart.

※【Love the Lord sincerely and be accepted】23-24 Paul prayed that the church would have peace, love and faith from the Lord Jesus Christ and that all who loved God would be favored. The returned heads of families gave their freewill offerings were also out of their thankful heart to God. They would be accepted and receive the grace and peace and to serve and worship God in one heart.

**Ecc 4 / Rev 20:8 Main theme: The enemies gathered to contend; do not fall into the enemies' trap and be in one for the Lord**

**-Contend / Be in one**

Satan comes out to make people contend and kill one another. God's children ought to have doors and gates in their hearts and do not fall into his trap.

(1)【Ought to imitate the Lord】1-3 Be willing to be oppressed and come only before God for strength to do good in one heart.

(2)【Do not be led astray by vanity】4-6 Do not probe in the worldly achievement to beckon jealousy. Be content with your food and clothing. But we should open our mouth wide to the Lord.

(3)【Do not labor for wealth and gain】7-8 Do not be a miser. Offer your treasure to God for gospel preaching and receive your rich reward from Him.

(4)【Do not be ungrateful but lead men to righteousness】9-16 Be remembered and delighted by God and men like David and Paul who never forget their origin. If we indulge in grace, we will invite God’s anger and men’s blame like Solomon.

(5)【Be in one for the Lord】9-16 God’s children ought to assemble (Mic 5:1) to study the Scriptures and pray to understand the original meaning, the spiritual meaning and God’s desire and intention. We ought to unite in the truth and fight against the enemy in one heart. First of all, request for everyone (1 Ti 2:1-4) to proclaim the gospel through prayer and by the Lord to grab to save the souls to accomplish the Lord’s work.

**Central point of the wheels: Obey and return, fight together and overcome the enemies**

Dear Lord, may You make me be thoroughly set apart from Babylon, be strong to be a fighting warrior and serve You forever!

**Ezr 3 / Php 1**

**Main theme: Partnership in the gospel, set the foundation firmly and be bold to proclaim the Word**

**-Set firmly / Proclaim together**

Golden verses: Ezr 3:11, Php1:3-5

A discussion on setting firmly and proclaiming together - on one side it concerned the returned people were like one man. They built the altar and offered sacrifices on the original foundation. They also prepared material to set the foundation of the temple with one heart. On the other side it concerned Paul commended the church of Phillipia that from the first day they were in partnership in the gospel. He also encouraged the church to be willing to suffer and be bold to proclaim the Word to be of one mind and diligent for the gospel.

**A. Build an altar and offer sacrifice, be bold to proclaim the Word and in partnership in the gospel**

Build the altar again (Ezr 3:1-7) - Partnership in the gospel (Php1:1-16)

1.【Build an altar and offer sacrifice with one heart】1-3 On the first day of the seventh month (the Feast of the Trumpets) the Israelite assembled in Jerusalem. They were favored to return as one man. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua they went up together to build the altar on its foundation (a return to the cross) in accordance with what was written in the Law. They sacrificed burnt offerings to God both day and night. They burned with the fire of love in one and were strengthened by God.

※【In partnership in the gospel】1-7 As a servant of Christ Jesus, Paul wrote to the church, the saints, overseers and deacons. Paul thanked God for them because of their partnership in the gospel from the first day until then. They were in Christ like the returned people as one man. They built the altar and sacrificed in one heart that was also God who began a good work in them. God would carry it on to completion. Both Paul and Zerubbabel brought the children of God to return to the ancient path to restore the foundation of the cross.

2.【Obey to observe the feast】4-5 In accordance with what was written on the Law, the returned people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (the fifteen day of the seventh month). God and men dwelled together and God and men rejoiced together! They sacrificed everyday according to the Law (Num 29:38) and offered the freewill offerings due to their return to thank God.

※【Consider the Lord's mind】8-11 Paul bore the mind of Christ and longed for the people as testified by God. He was completely united with God like celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. He willingly offered himself and interceded for the church in order that their love was founded in the truth to be able to discern what was best and to be pure and blameless filled with the fruit of righteousness just like the returned people offered their freewill offerings to glorify God. We too, ought to dwell and rejoice in the Lord to bear the heart of Christ like Paul.

3.【Prepare the craftsmen and material】6-7 The Israelites prepared the masons and carpenters for building the temple. They gave food, oil and drink to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia. God’s words are the living bread so the workers may be sanctified by the Word to grow up in life. Then they may become masons for building the church and valuable instruments.

※【Suffering boost up the gospel】12-16 Paul was an expert builder. He edified a lot of workers in affliction like valuable instruments for building the church. What had happened to him had really served to advance the gospel as shown in the whole palace guard. Because of his chains, the people were encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously. The builders and material for rebuilding the temple were through refinement and edification in suffering. We ought to learn from Paul to preach Christ by love and not out of envy and rivalry. Then we will see everything works for the good of it.

**B. Set the foundation firmly and suffer to proclaim the Word**

Set firmly (Ezr 3:8-13) - Proclaim the Word (Php 1:17-30)

1.【Supervise the work of the house of God】8-9 In the second month of the second year, all who had returned from captivity began the work of the temple. The Levites were appointed important jobs to supervise the building and those working on the house of God. They had to be spiritually alert to examine and supervise in the whole process of building the temple.

※【Intercession and the help of the Holy Spirit】17-21 Paul was called to be the apostle to supervise the whole church. He was full of the spiritual burden. In his various afflictions he was saved by God that was inseparable from the intercession of the church and the help of the Holy Spirit. He was in no way be ashamed. He exalted Christ and lived out Christ whether by life or by death. (Ro 14:8) The Levites were assigned to supervise the work of the temple and they also need intercession from all parties, the discernment before God and the help of the Holy Spirit.

2.【Set the foundation of the temple and praise together】10-13 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of God, the priests put on their priestly garments and blew the trumpets and the Levites sounded the cymbals to praise the Lord. The aged, who had seen the former temple, could not stopped themselves to weep aloud, while many others shouted for joy and the voice came in one. They gave thanks and praised and exalted God’s everlasting love!

※【Stand firm in truth and be diligent together】22-30 All the life of Paul was to obey God’s will as his foundation. Though to depart and be with Christ was better by far, for the church, he chose to remain in the body which is more necessary. This was to make the church to stand firm on the foundation of the truth with progress and joy and they might conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. The returned people set the foundation of the temple. The aged and the young rejoiced and praised. The church had gone through affliction and set firm in the truth in one spirit for the gospel. They too rejoiced together. The aged Paul and the young church experienced the struggle together.

**Ecc 5 / Rev 20:9 Main theme: Listen with fear and be willing to do, do not covet vanity, and heaven and earth work for the good of it**

**-Listen with fear / God helps**

Do not be afraid of the surrounding of the throng of enemies. The saints who are loved and follow the Lord to contend will have the help of heaven. Heaven and earth and everything will work for the good it.

(1)【Go near to listen and really do it】1-7 First of all we ought to listen quietly to the Lord’s words like Mary, and then we may do what the Lord sees as good, pray according to God’s desire and our words may benefit others, lest we may offer the sacrifice of fools. If we do according to what we hear from the Lord’s words, we will gain God’s promised blessings. Those who do not pay attention to the Lord’s Word or revere God will fall in the desert.

(2)【Do not be overwhelmed by evil things】8-9 Only if we will obey the Word to pray, the Most High God will search and defend us.

(3)【Do not covet on worldly wealth】10-17 These which bring trouble to men make us vomit. We ought to pay attention to the Lord’s words and save our treasures in heaven, be zealous to do good and we will have joy and peace.

(4)【Imitate those who love the Lord】18-20 They have no worry no matter rich or poor. We ought to set our mind to delight God regardless of life and death (2 Co 5:6-10) like Daniel and Paul. They suffered a lot but saw much of God’s glory. Everything works for the good of it.

**Central point of the wheels: Remove any folly, set the foundation, proclaim together and God saves and helps**

Dear Lord, may You let me have a spirit to suffer, to exalt the cross, be bold to proclaim the Word, and lead men from the secular sin.

**Ezr 4 / Php 2**

**Main theme: The enemies unite to attack; humble ourselves and help one another to deal with the enemies and work**

**-The enemies unite to attack / Deal with the enemies together**

Golden verses: Ezr 4:23-24, Php 2:14-16

A discussion on the enemies unite to attack and dealing with the enemies together - on one side it concerned the enemies tried all sorts of plans to ruin and confuse the people of Judah to build God's temple. They failed to rope in and then united to accuse and used power to force them to stop the work. God allowed all these hindrances so they might be refined not to be by the flesh, or by power but to trust in God wholeheartedly. On the other side it concerned Paul encouraged the church to bear God's mind as our mind, to humble ourselves to help one another and to work in one heart quickly.

**A. Imitate the Lord's example, discern the enemies' plot and deal with the enemies together**

Deal with the enemies together (Ezr 4:1-12) - Build together (Php 2:1-15)

1.【Do not be roped in and deal with the enemies together】1-4 When the enemies heard the people of Judah came up to build the temple for God, they were unhappy and hated them to the marrow of their bones. First they used the scheme of roping in to build together with the people of Judah. Both Zerabbabel and Jeshua set apart to be holy and were unwilling to compromise. The enemies’ plot was unsuccessful and they tried to destroy and discourage to make them afraid.

※【Bear the Lord's mind as your mind and build together】1-5 Paul led the church to be edified in their life. He reminded the saints to encourage, comfort and have fellowship with one another. This had to be in Christ and the love of the Holy Spirit to be in one spirit and purpose. The returned leaders insisted on the truth and were determined not to compromise with the enemies. (2 Co 6:14-18) Among the people of Judah, there were some who were still with some elements of the flesh and by the power just like the church still existed with the problem of selfish ambition, vain conceit, arrogance and selfishness. These were the blockades to building the temple. Therefore our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus to overcome the inner and outer enemies. Then we may build up in one heart.

2.【The enemies unite to accuse and ruin】5-8 Within the fifteen years from Cyrus King of Persia to Darius king of Persia, the enemies had used all sorts of means to hire counselors to frustrate the people of Judah to build the temple. Many times they had united to write to Xerxes against the building of God’s temple. However, they finally could not prevent God’s will. Instead they were used by God to accomplish His good will!

※【The cross overcomes and accomplishes God's will】6-10 Our Lord was sold, condemned and suffered. He was not afraid but made Himself nothing. He denied Himself and humbled to obey. By His death, He overcame the devil that controlled death. Within three days and three nights He built the temple, the church of the New Testament. (Jn 2:18-22; Heb 2:14-15) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow’ in heaven and on earth. He is the King of the kings. The kings on the earth are nothing! We too ought to humble and deny ourselves to overcome by the cross to learn from the Lord, His example to build the temple so the evil plot of Satan and the condemnation of the enemies will work for the good of God’s will. (Ac 4:27-28)

3.【Do not be afraid of the improper charges】9-12 The people of Judah returned to rebuild the temple. When they set the foundation, they met the opposition of the commanding officer and the secretary. They united with other tribes to write against them to Artaxerxes the king and gave improper charges that they were rebuilding the rebellious and wicked city. But the people of Judah only obeyed God’s will without fear!

※【Work with fear and trembling】11-15 Paul exhorted the church to obey in everything and not to be afraid. They had to continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. In this crooked and depraved generation be pure and without fault like shining stars to allow the enemies to condemn. This is nothing but to edify God’s children to pursue the inner holiness to be blameless and spotless to build the glorious temple of God.

**B. Forced to stop the work; work with the utmost strength**

Stop work (Ezr 4:13-24) - To work (Php 2:16-30)

1.【Despite the charges of the enemies】13-16 The enemies accused and convicted and stated the people of Judah attempted to betray. They feared that when the walls were restored, they would no longer pay their tribute which was detrimental to the king. Regardless of their collusion with each other to take one another’s advantage, the people did not bother. (Ps 40:4)

※【Declare the living Word】16-20 Paul was willing to accept all the suffering and even to be poured out like a drink offering. He was truly thinking of the church and hoped to send Timothy to Philippi so the church might be comforted and edified. The walls of the people of Judah were restored and this was to exhibit God’s name. No matter the enemies accused them, they received the comfort from God.

2.【Forced to stop the work】17-24 King Artaxerxes sent men to search and found that the city had a long history of revolt against kings. Thus he replied them and forced the people of Judah to stop work until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

※【Work with the utmost strength】21-30 All the life of Paul only looked out for the interest of Christ and not for himself. He cared for the church and the workers. He recommended Timothy to the church of Philippi. He served with Paul in the work of the gospel. He treated Paul as a son with his father. Paul also recommended Epaphroditus. He disregarded his life for Christ. He was Paul’s fellow worker and fellow soldier. Paul was urgent for the Word. He quickly sent Epaphroditus to the church of Philippi so they might rejoice and be edified together. On one side was the enemies colluded up and down and forced to stop work to prevent God’s work. On the other side was Paul and his co-workers matched with one another to work with their utmost strength. They were dutiful to the end without stopping. It was out of God that the people of Judah were forced to stop work in order to refine them without by power and the flesh. They would finally finish the work.

**Ecc 6 / Rev 20:10 Main theme: Pursue vanity and be punished forever; believe and follow the Lord gain everlasting blessings**

**-Everlasting punishment / Everlasting blessings**

Worldly people are inclined to vanity. To be led astray is a big disaster.

(1)【Only for oneself in honor】1-2 A man who has riches from God without understanding to repay and flow out the grace but only for himself, will have the result that what he gained will not be enjoyed by himself. Instead someone will enjoy it.

(2)【It is not beneficial with numerous offspring and long life if we live in sin】3-6 What is your benefit if you have a hundred children and live a thousand years, but you live in vanity and in darkness without joy?

(3)【It is not beneficial if we are full of worldly wisdom and only for the mouth】7-9 What is your merits to a fool if you have the wisdom on earth and you labor for your mouth but is not satisfied in the heart? Because we all go to hell after death; but if you have the wisdom to fear God and obey the Lord’s words to act in all your life, you will gain God’s promise of the everlasting blessing of the confirmed salvation. (Heb 2:2-4)

(4)【Do not turn to vanity but obey the will and do good】10-12 Men are created by God and redeemed by the blood of the Lord. We should not turn to meaningless but submit your life and obey the will to glorify God and benefit men. The Scriptures has explicitly told us that we will resurrect and be rewarded if we do good. We will be punished if we are led astray to do evil.

**Central point of the wheels: Do not live vainly, do not stop working, deal with the enemies together and work together**

Dear Lord, may You let me discern the enemies' plot, to work with the utmost strength, build up the spiritual house and glorify your name without living vainly.

**Ezr 5 / Php 3**

**Main theme: Listen to the Lord's admonition, build the temple by grace and press on toward the goal**

**-Rebuild the temple / Press on toward the goal**

Golden verses: Ezr 5:2, Php 3:12-14

A discussion on rebuilding the temple and pressing on toward the goal - on one side it concerned Haggai the prophet and Zechariah admonished the people of Judah to get up to rebuild the temple of God. The environment did not change. But they did according to the promise of God and build by faith without stopping. On the other side it concerned Paul exhorted the church to guard against the heresy of the circumcision group, to forget what was behind, to press on toward the goal and wait for the coming of the Lord. We also need to be built up and guarded due to God's gracious Word.

**A. Listen to the command to build the temple, the Lord is the surpassing greatness and everything works for the good of it**

Listen to the admonition (Ezr 5:1-8) - Gain the surpassing greatness (Php 3:1-10)

1.【Encourage to build the temple by faith】1-5 The time for the people of Judah to rebuild God’s temple had come. Haggai the prophet and Zechariah prophesied to them not to fix their eyes on the environment but to get up to build by faith. Therefore they obeyed to start. The prophets strengthened and helped them with God’s words. Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates and his associates came to check on this matter. But the eye of God watched over them so they did not stop the work.

※【Encourage to watch out with joy】1-6 When the church is edified, we ought to rejoice by the Lord and have faith because a cheerful heart is good medicine and is strength. (Pro 17:22; Neh 8:10) Paul used his own testimony to exhort the church again to guard against the danger of the heresy of the circumcised group. We ought to worship by the Spirit of God and put no confidence in the flesh. Though he had reasons for such confidence, he did not do it. The prophets encouraged the people to build the temple and they also had to be on the guard any time to avoid the work being stopped. They were strengthened by God’s words and only put confidence and joy in God.

2.【Rebuild God's temple】6-8 God made everything work for the good of His will. The governor of Trans-Euphrates and his associates reported to King Darius but did not accuse the people of Judah as rebellious. They only mentioned that they were rebuilding the temple of the great God with large stones. The work was carried on with diligence and had rapid progress.

※【The Lord is the surpassing greatness】7-10 Paul testified that whatever was to his profit he then considered loss for the sake of Christ. He no longer put confidence in the law and his flesh. He even considered everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. He had lost all things and considered them rubbish, which he might gain Christ. After fifteen years of stopping work, the people of Judah were refined by God to rebuild the temple without putting confidence on the flesh and caring only for themselves (Hag 1:9) but only to love God and build His temple as the most important. Thus when the governor of Trans-Euphrates reported this, it worked for the good of it. Paul followed the death of the Lord and experienced the great power of resurrection. Everything worked for the good of it. By God’s great power, the people of Judah worked with diligence and progress.

**B. Demolish and rebuild, set apart to be holy and press on toward the goal**

Rebuild the temple (Ezr 5:9-17) - Press on toward the goal (Php 3:11-21)

1.【After demolition then rebuild】9-13 After fifteen years of stopping work, the people of Judah humbled to testify they were the servants of the God of heaven and earth. They also testified His righteousness and acknowledged their forefathers had provoked God’s anger. Thus they were given into the hands of the enemies, the holy temple was destroyed and they were taken captive. Now they were shown mercy by God to let King Cyrus to proclaim to allow the rebuilding of the temple.

※【Forget what is behind and press on toward the goal】11-16 Paul did not take he had been made perfect, but he pressed on to pursue. He only had one thing to do: forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead, press on toward the goal to win the heavenly prize. The people of Judah were destroyed by God, but their lives were rebuilt by God to experience His righteousness and love. They too had to forget what was behind and press on toward the goal to rebuild the glorious holy temple to delight God.

2.【Set apart for the Lord】14-15 King Cyrus removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God and ordered to give them to Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel) to bring to God’s temple to be set apart for God and worship.

※【Only treat the stomach as the god】17-19 Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their stomach is their god (Ro 16:18) and their mind is on earthly things. Paul wept in tears to warn the church to learn from himself and those who did in his way. The articles of the temple had long been placed in the temple of Babylon to serve the idols and intoxicated by the earthly filth. Now they were being set apart to be holy to return to God’s temple from the ignoble to be an instrument for noble purposes.

3.【Build the temple by God's will】16-17 They reported and requested the king to make a search in the royal archives of Babylon if the king did in fact issued a decree. But the people of God built the temple in Jerusalem was according to the will of the Most High God. Thus they continued the work without stopping.

※【Wait for the Savior's coming】20-21 Our citizenship is in heaven. We wait for the Lord’s coming to turn this ignoble body to be like His glorious body. This could also change the heart of the king so the people of Judah might build the temple by the will of God without stopping. They even had the great effort of King Darius. We ought to build the temple of our heart by the Lord’s Word so we may be strengthened by faith and work with all our effort to wait for the glorious coming of the Savior!

**Ecc 7 / Rev 20:11 Main theme: Think of the ending, listen to rebuke, be far from evil and do good extensively**

**-The ending / The judgment**

The final judgment will come and no one can escape from it. Heaven and earth will change but the Lord's words are everlasting.

(1)【The wise heart will think of the ending】1-4 Worry what the Lord worries, revere God and save men and avoid men being destroyed, then you will gain a good name that is remembered in heaven and be praised on earth.

(2)【Do not covet unrighteous things】5-7 Better to heed a wise man’s rebuke but do not listen to a fool’s song.

(3)【Be patient to do good】8-10 No matter you prosper or are in trouble, bear a heart to fear the Lord and walk a wise path, and then you will be guarded with promise.

(4)【Do not swerve to the left or right and obey the Lord's order】11-14 Do not be overrighteous, more than what is recorded in the Scriptures; neither be overwise to offer with unauthorized fire by use the rules of men, the philosophy and the basic principles or make a gold calf. This is great evil.

(5)【Fear and obey the command and God bestows His power】15-22 We ought to be always watchful and pray and hold firmly to God’s Word without sinning. Do not put men’s words in the heart but press forward to the Lord’s Word.

(6)【Seek continuously and obey the Lord's words to do】23-29 Shun away from adultery and the evil way. Be humble to plead for grace. It does not depend on man’s desire, but on God’s mercy. Do not consider yourself yet to have taken hold of it, but forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead to advance to pursue to obey God’s will.

**Central point of the wheels: Obey to build the temple, press on toward the goal and be zealous to save men**

Dear Lord, may You build up my spiritual temple, to forsake everything, to treat You as the surpassing greatness, to be zealous to save men and wait for your coming!

**Ezr 6 / Php 4**

**Main theme: Stand firm in truth, work with one heart and God's grace is abundant**

**-Complete building / Stand firm**

Golden verses: Ezr 6:22, Php 4:6-7

A discussion on completion of building and standing firm - on one side it concerned God turned the king's heart and made King Darius to make several decrees to help the people of Judah to build God's temple. So the building was completed and everything went well. On the other side it concerned Paul encouraged the church to stand firm by the Lord. They ought to be in one heart, to rejoice and give everything to the Lord and be fruitful to glorify God. We only need to build according to the Lord's words, to stand firm by Him and do good in one heart, then we will see God works wonders so that everything works for the good of it for God's grace is abundant.

**A. Stand firm in one heart, rejoice and be contented and God works wonders**

The king works for it (Ezr 6:1-12) - Stand firm together (Php 4:1-12)

1.【The king declares the decree】1-7 King Darius ordered to search in the archives and surely found a scroll which was written that in the first year King Cyrus had decreed to build God’s temple with cost paid by the royal treasury and the gold and silver articles were to be returned to God’s temple. Thus the king decreed not to interfere with the work on the temple and the people of Judah might rebuild on its site.

※【Stand firm in one heart】1-7 The church of Philippi was able to stand firm in trouble by the Lord. This was Paul’s joy and crown. Paul also pleaded with the sisters Euodia and Syntyche to be one heart in Christ. He asked his fellow workers to help them. He also encouraged the church to rejoice, be gentle and to give everything to the Lord after prayer and they would receive the transcending peace. After a long period of stopping work, the people of Judah turned to God. They had set the foundation firmly and built with one heart. Thus God made the heart of King Darius turned to decree to allow them to rebuild the temple. They were given the transcending prosperity. (Pro 21:1)

2.【The king works greatly for the good of it】8-10 The King decreed again that the expenses of work were to be fully paid out of the royal treasury so that the work would not stop. Further, their daily needs, the livestock and food for the offerings had to be given without fail, so that they might offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

※【Often act the good Way】8-9 Paul encouraged the church to do good and to think about whatever was true and whatever was noble. Whatever they had learned or received from Paul, they had to put it into practice and the God of peace would be with them.

3.【Work for the good of it again】11-12 God further made King Darius to decree again whoever had lifted a hand to change the decree would be strictly punished. So they urged them to carry out with diligence.

※【Learned the secret】10-12 Paul had learned the secret to be content whatever the circumstances. He really had died completely to the environment and to himself. He was able to give thanks and rejoice anytime and anywhere. God also made the foreign king and governors work for the good of Paul to bring him safely to Rome just like King Darius worked for the good of the people. God’s will prospers without hindrance!

**B. Complete building by God and give thanks to offer**

Complete building (Ezr 6:13-22) - Offer (Php 4:13-23)

1.【Complete the temple's work due to the Lord's words】13-18 So the governor of Trans-Euphrates executed the order quickly. Due to the preaching of the prophet, the people of Judah built the temple of God and prospered. Finally they completed the work. They celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy and appointed the priest and the Levites to the duties and restored the ministry in the temple.

※【Offer the fragrant sacrifice】13-18 Paul was able to do everything through Him who gave him strength. Due to God’s words, the people of Judah were strong in their work and prospered in whatever they did. Not only was the church of Philippi able to stand with Paul in trouble, they shared with Paul on his needs continuously. Their gift to Paul was like a fragrant offering and was delighted by God. The people celebrated the dedication and were also accepted by God as a fragrant offering.

2.【Enjoy God's grace together】19-22 The restored people celebrated the Passover on the fourteen day of the first month. The priests and the Levites purified themselves and slaughtered the lamb. They separated themselves from the unclean to seek God and eat the lamb to enjoy God’s grace together.

※【Blessings upon blessings】19-20 The church of Philippi continued to send gift to the chained Paul, thus God would meet all their needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. The priest and the Levites first prepared the lamb for the exiles, then for the priests and finally for themselves. They enjoyed God’s grace together like the church of Philippi with blessings upon blessings. Glory be to God!

3.【Give thanks in joy and glorify God】21-22 The returned exiles and all who had separated themselves from their Gentile neighbors ate the lamb and enjoyed God’s grace. They celebrated the Feast for seven days with joy and gave glory to God. God made the king’s heart turned to them and strengthened their hands to complete the rebuilding of the temple to give thanks.

※【Send greetings to one another and be favored】21-23 As a prisoner, Paul continued to celebrate the Passover in his suffering. He offered himself completely and brought the gospel to Rome. He also made the Caesar’s household be favored with salvation and they also sent greetings to the church. King Darius worked for the good of the people of God. This shows the Lord is the only God and King of the everlasting generations. We ought to remember forever the great love of the Lord and bring more people to think of God’s love and to greet one another to enjoy His love together!

**Ecc 8 / Rev 20:12 Main theme: Be judged according to what each does, fear God and obey the Word gains blessings**

**-Obey the Word / Be judged**

By that time everyone will be judged according to what is recorded on the scroll in heaven.

(1)【Be wise and obedient for the future】1-9 Everything on earth will pass away, only by obeying the will of God will last. We must not be discouraged to seek grace and obey the will, to deny ourselves and turn from evil to obey His order. Then when we see the Lord again, we will not be punished but rewarded.

(2)【Fear persistently and be diligent in the Lord】10-15 Do not fix your eyes that the wicked prospers and the righteous suffers. We need to know deeply that whoever fears the Lord faithfully will finally receive rich blessings. Therefore we ought to do good and be happy all our life. There is reward when you suffer in the Lord.

(3)【Consecrate and inquire zealously to understand】16-17 By a man’s strength, we cannot discover its meaning. We may discern in the spirit and lead others to prepare for the future if we consecrate ourselves to love the Lord and obey His orders. Then the Lord will reveal to us. (Da 12:8-10)

**Central point of the wheels: Fear God and obey the Word, stand firm in one heart and work for the good of it by God**

Dear Lord, may You let the church of the last phase be able to stand firm in one heart, be joyful to do good and be able to complete building the beautiful temple to proclaim your name!

**Ezr 7 / Col 1**

**Main theme: Seek and obey the Word, make every effort to proclaim the Word, and God's hands help**

**-Seek the Word / Proclaim the Word (obey the will / understand the will)**

Golden verses: Ezr 7:6, Col 1:13-15

A discussion on seeking the Word and proclaiming the Word - on one side it concerned Ezra the teacher devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord. He also taught others to observe and was granted God's hands to help to bring back the captives from Babylon to the holy city. On the other side it concerned Paul deeply understood and proclaimed God's mystery. He encouraged the church to keep the Lord's Word persistently, to stand firm and bring men completely before God.

**A. Devoted to obey the Word, understand God's will deeply, and God's hands help**

Obey the Word (Ezr 7:1-10) - Understand the will (Col 1:10)

1.【Lead men to come out from sin】1-10 Ezra (help) was a descendant of the high priest Aaron. He was a faithful intercessory priest and a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses. He was sent to lead the Israelites, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants to come back to Jerusalem from Babylon; that was to bring men from the secular filth to return to the laws of God to serve Him in a godly manner.

※【Build a church of faith, hope and love】1-10 Paul, an apostle of Christ by the will of God and his fellow worker Epaphras also had the Law of God in their heart just like Ezra. They not only interceded faithfully for God’s children but also brought the Colossians to come back to the right path from evil. Due to the Lord’s words, they were established to be a church of faith, love and hope.

2.【Determined to obey the Word and is granted help from God】1-10 Ezra devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of God. He also taught the people to obey the decrees and laws. Thus the gracious hand of God was on him. He began his journey from Babylon on the first of the first month. By the leading of God, he arrived at the holy city on the first day of the fifth month.

※【Understand God's will deeply and is delighted by God】1-10 Epaphras was a faithful minister of Christ like Ezra. He set his mind to obey the Word and established the church. When Paul heard that the Colossian church learned from Epaphras, he gave thanks for them and prayed. He further hoped they would be able to keep the Lord’s Word in the heart and be given all spiritual wisdom and understanding to be filled with the will of God so they might be delighted by God in their actions and behavior. Ezra set his mind to obey the Word and he deeply understood God’s will in wisdom and understanding. He led the exiles obey God’s will and was delighted by God and had His help.

**B. The Lord is the head, proclaim the Word with all your heart, and give thanks to offer**

Be willing to offer (Ezr 7:11-20) - Be redeemed (Col 1:11-20)

1.【Return from captivity and the king works for the good of it】11-20 Ezra, a teacher of the Law of God was not only favored before God; he was also favored by King Artaxerxes. He was issued a decree that whoever wished to go to return with him from the place of exile. The king ordered Ezra to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of God and to take with him the freewill offering together with the king and his advisers, and the people. They were to buy the offerings and sacrifice on the altar of God.

※【Turn from darkness and is redeemed】11-20 We are redeemed from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves to be qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. This is due to the love of shedding the blood willingly by the loving Son of God. The returned people turned from the darkness of Babylon and came back to the light. This was also due to the redemptive love of God so everything worked for the good of it. We too ought to offer ourselves willingly and lead men to abandon the dark and come to the light to be redeemed and return and give thanks to rejoice together!

2.【Ought to obey God's will】11-20 The king ordered Ezra to obey God’s will to do whatever seemed best with the rest of the silver and gold. Further he had to deliver to God all the articles in the temple. He was provided from the royal treasury anything else needed for the temple.

※【The Lord is the head】11-20 The loving Son is the image of God. (2 Co 4:4) He is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being. (Heb 1:3) He has fully manifested the Father and He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. All things are created by Him and for Him. He is the head of the body, the church so we may enjoy all the fullness dwelled in Him. Therefore we ought to allow our Lord to have the supremacy in all things. Even the foreign king obeyed God’s will, we too ought to let Christ be our ruler and obey His will to act. Ezra let God be the ruler in all things. He obeyed God’s will to act. God’s abundant grace came unceasingly!

**C. Be holy and stand firm, proclaim the Word with all your heart and give thanks in praise**

Quickly work for it (Ezr 7:21-28) - Proclaim with all your heart (Col 1:21-29)

1.【Work for it quickly】21-26 Again God moved King Artaxerxes to order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra might ask for the temple of the God of heaven. The king also allowed the exiles free from the taxes. Further Ezra was to appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates by those who possessed the wisdom of God. Whoever did not obey the law of God and the law of the king had to be convicted.

※【Stand firm in holiness】21-23 Once we were alienated from God and were enemies. Now, through Christ we have reconciled with God and holy in His sight. Then we have to continue in our faith, established and firm, and not be shaken to preach the gospel to every creature. On one side it concerned exhorting the church to be holy and firm to proclaim the gospel after being favored. On the other side it concerned the people set apart to be holy to return to the holy city. God’s grace was rich and through the great help of the king, God’s glory was manifested. Ezra and Paul, the servants of God were fully gained by God to become the spokesmen of God to bless thousands and thousands of people.

2.【Full of thanks and praise God】27-28 Ezra praised the Lord God of their fathers when he saw that God had moved the heart of the king to fully support the building of the temple. He gave all the thanks and glory to God. God’s hand was on him and he was strengthened to gather leading men from Israel to go up with him.

※【Proclaim God with all your heart and effort】23-29 Paul was a servant of the gospel. He rejoiced to suffer for the church and had a share in Christ’s afflictions. He was faithful to God’s assignment to proclaim fully the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations and he had the help from God’s gracious hand. Ezra gave thanks and praised God. Paul proclaimed God with all his effort and was given all wisdom and power to bring men completely before God. The name of God was greatly manifested and glorified because of them!

**Ecc 9 / Rev 20:13 Main theme: Be judged after death, listen quietly to remove the sin and be diligent and happy to work**

**-After death / Judgment**

(1)【God knows everything what men do】1 On the day of judgment, the deep sea, death and Hades give up the dead. Everyone will be judged according to what he has done. Thus how holy ad godly should we behave?

(2)【There is hope by turning from evil and uniting with the Lord】2-6 It seems that the destiny of the kind and the evil is the same, we will meet death. In fact, it is not the same. Those who consecrate to serve the Lord and swear to do good will be mightily used by the Lord and gain rich reward in due time. (Mal 3:14; 17018) Those who are unclean and do evil will be forsaken and punished.

(3)【Consecrate, rejoice and do good by grace】7-10 We ought to take the chance while we live to work for the Lord happily with all our effort. Do not delight just in eating and drinking; obey God’s will and lead men to righteousness and be satisfied to accomplish the Lord’s work.

(4)【By grace we may avoid disasters and gain blessings】11-12 It does not depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. Be humble to live the rest of our life by grace.

(5)【Imitate the Lord and be a poor and wise man】13-16 The Lord is mocked, but He denied Himself to be our price of redemption. He is truly our Savior. We ought to learn from Him to deny ourselves to save men.

(6)【Listen quietly to the Lord's words and remove all evil】17-18 Do not lack in one thing: to listen to the Lord’s words quietly and then we may do beautiful things to comfort the Lord. We ought to search our Achen every day to remove our evil, lest we may be dragged to suffer His wrath.

**Central point of the wheels: Be devoted to obey the Word, be wise to save men, and God's hands help**

Dear Lord, may You let me devote myself to the study, to obey your Word, to understand your will deeply and lead men to enter your kingdom of light.

**Ezr 8 / Col 2**

**Main theme: Do not follow presumptuous words, obey the Lord's words and do, and take root in the Lord**

**-Be faithful to the assignment / Be careful to guard (return / be abundant)**

Golden verses: Ezr 8:21, Col 2:8-10

A discussion on being faithful to the assignment and being careful to guard - on one side it concerned Ezra gathered the returned people by the side of the Ahava canal for three days to pray and prepare. He examined watchfully and summoned a group of Levites who served in God's temple. He also assigned the faithful chief priests to measure the instruments set apart for God and give to the appointed priests to bring back to the temple. On the other side it concerned Paul was faithful and watchful for the Colossian church. He led them to turn from the captivity of the worldly philosophy and basic principles and gain the abundance in Christ. This teaches us we ought to triumph by the cross. God's gracious hands will help those who seek Him.

**A. Turn from sin by God, return and gain abundance and be freed from captivity**

Turn from sin (Ezr 8:1-24) - Stand firm (Col 2:1-15)

1.【Lead men to turn from sin and return】1-14 Ezra was chosen by God to bring the second group of exiles for over one thousand four hundred males including the descendants of Aaron and other people from Babylon.

※【Lead men to be strengthened and stand firm】1-5 Paul had been struggling much for the churches of Colosse and Laodicea and all who have not met him personally. This was the same when Ezra brought the group of priests and the people to return. The purpose was to strengthen their faith to stand firm lest they might be deceived by fine-sounding arguments so they might know that God’s mystery was Christ. All the wisdom and knowledge of God were hidden in Him. Both faithful servants brought men from all captivity of evil and heresy to become the kingdom of priesthood and to set apart to serve God forever.

2.【Summon the Levites to come】15-20 Ezra assembled the exiles to camp at Ahava canal. On one side they prayed watchfully. On the other side they prepared for the departure. He checked carefully and found there were no Levites among them. So he summoned to bring attendants to him for the house of God because the gracious hand of God was on them. Thus he gathered a group of Levites and temple servants who were registered by name by God. This was not by human selection just like Paul was sent by God as an apostle to proclaim His gospel.

※【Gain abundance and guard against any heresy】6-10 Paul encouraged the church of Colosse to take root and build up, not only to be strengthened in faith, but also to gain all the fullness in Christ so they might not be taken captive by the philosophy, the basic principles and the human tradition of the world. Ezra himself had gained the abundance of God. He also gathered the Levites to turn from the evil of Babylon and the practices of the foreign religion to become abundant in life. Then they might be zealous for the house of God and serve Him faithfully.

3.【Turn only to God for help】21-23 Ezra brought the people by the Ahava Canal to proclaim a fast and to humble themselves to seek God’s help so they and their children would be led by God to a safe journey. He was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen for help. But God answered their prayers.

※【Triumph by the cross】11-15 Paul declared that the circumcision of the New Testament was not done by the hands of men but by the cross of Christ which put us off of the sinful nature. Due to the effect of faith, we die with the Lord, we are buried with Him and raised with Him. The triumph of Christ on the cross freed us from the bondage of the Law. We triumph by the cross. Ezra led the people not by power but trusting in God wholeheartedly. They had the help of God and triumphed by grace.

**B. Be faithful and watchful, be connected with the Head, and return to be redeemed**

Be faithful to the assignment (Ezr 8:25-36) - Be connected (Col 2: 16-23)

1.【Be watchful and faithful to God's assignment】24-34 Ezra set apart twelve of the leading priests and summoned them to bring back the weighed silver and gold and the articles to the house of God. They were all faithful and watchful to accomplish the assignment. They counted and weighed. Everything was accounted for by number and weight and recorded at that time. God’s words are the weight and the standard of the truth. (Jn 17:17) The chosen workers of God no longer served Babylon. They set apart to return like the gold and silver articles. In truth and life, they are in accordance with the standard and weight of God.

※【Be connected with Christ the Head】16-19 Paul had been faithful for the church. He pointed out that the laws were the shadow and only Christ is the reality. (Heb 10:1) We ought to connect with Christ the Head without keeping the religious festival or worship the angels that are created (Heb 1:13-14) and be disqualified for the prize. Those who were appointed by Ezra were faithful articles that set apart for God to be holy. They were counted and weighed to be brought back to the house of God. Paul brought men from the foreign religion to connect with the Head and holdfast to the truth without turning to the left or to the right. They became the noble instrument of God’s temple. They did not fail in their assignment. They were in accordance with the weight and remembered by God forever.

2.【Be redeemed by grace and return to offer】35-36 The exiles returned in peace because the gracious hand of God was on them. So they sacrificed burnt offerings and sin offering to give thanks to respond to God’s great love of redemption. They also delivered the king’s orders to the royal satraps and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, who then gave assistance to the people and to the house of God. God made everything worked for the good of it.

※【Be sanctified by grace without by penance】20-23 Paul admonished the Colossians that since they had died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though, they still belonged to it and submitted to its rules which should not be observed. Such regulations only had an appearance, with their self-imposed worship, with only external ascetic practices to treat harshly on their body which was valueless in restraining their sensual indulgence. The returned exiles were redeemed by grace and not by observing the regulations of the law. Christ became our burnt offering and sin offering. All the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry was nullified. (Heb 7:14-19; 9:8-10) We ought to turn from the worldly practices and the bondage of the law by faith and grace and through the cross and to serve the Lord in trembling. Paul’s lesson was to bring the Colossians from the heresies back to the truth just like what Ezra had done.

**Ecc 10 / Rev 20:14 Main theme: Check erroneous ideas at the outset, make every effort to be perfect lest you will go down the fiery lake of burning sulfur**

**-Folly / The fiery lake of burning sulfur**

(1)【Guard against the least and the yeast】1-4 A little yeast will bring up the whole dough. A little folly can make men die and die and be thrown into the lake of fire. We ought to bear a spirit to suffer and not after the sinful nature but to obey God’s will. If we are caught in sin, we ought to stand before God for His deliverance. He will show His mercy.

(2)【Darkness reigns so pray watchfully and not be led astray】5-7 We ought to have faith and perseverance for blessed is he who keeps the truth firmly to the end.

(3)【Skill will bring success】8-11 The path of life leads upward for the wise. We ought to press forward toward the goal every day. The fool slacks and turns back. He will be hurt by the enemy.

(4)【Be godly and perfect】12-15 Be mature and become a spokesman of the Lord’s gracious words to lead men to enter the holy city lest they may go down to the lake of fire.

(5)【Be diligent and pursue in love】16-20 Do not feast and be slacking. We ought to be diligent and watchful to be transformed in the Word, the Spirit and in love. Our life ought to be abundant in the truth to glorify God and benefit men. Not only do we love our brothers, but also to love the kings and the sinners.

**Central point of the wheels: Remove any folly, gain abundance and avoid to be captivated**

Dear Lord, may You let me turn from the evil Babylon, to enjoy your abundance, be watchful and faithful and lead men to return!

**Ezr 9 / Col 3**

**Main theme: Pray contritely and zealously, exhort sincerely and avoid the disasters and gain blessings**

**-Intercede / Exhort (confess / Abandon sins)**

Golden verses: Ezr 9:5-6, 8, Col 3:2-4

A discussion on intercession and exhortation - on one side it concerned Ezra faced with the returned people and the mixed foreign tribes. He interceded contritely and zealously before God. On the other side it concerned Paul exhorted the Colossian church to reject the secular sins and live out a new creation. Their intercession and exhortation exhibited God's righteousness, His jealousy and unchanging love so as to let us be a holy, be loved and well-guarded man.

**A. Confess and intercede, abandon the old and be renewed**

Confess (Ezr 9:1-7) - Renew (Col 3-1-11)

1.【Commit evil, deprave and sin against God】1-3 The returned people, the priests and the Levites still followed the neighboring peoples in their detestable practices, thus the holy race mixed with different nations. Further, the leaders and officials had led the way in their unfaithfulness and greatly violated God. When Ezra heard of this, he tore his clothes and pulled his hair and beard. He sat down appalled.

※【Set your heart on things above and glorify God】1-4 Christ has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven and sat on the right hand of God. The saints ought to truly die and live with the Lord, and to set the minds on things above and not on earthly things. Further they shall wait to appear with Christ in glory. Though the returned people had turned from the evil Babylon, they still indulged in the sinful nature and were depraved in sin. They intermarried with the other nations. Ezra was full of the jealous heart of God. When he saw the leaders took the lead to sin, he was much distressed. He could not tolerate. Ezra bore the mind of God and he was wearied and grieved for the sins of the people.

2.【Confess and intercede】4-7 Everyone who trembled at the words of God gathered around Ezra. They worried what God worried and bore God’s heart as their heart. They all grieved together with Ezra. Ezra fell on his knees and confessed the sins of the people to God. He acknowledged their guilt had reached to the heavens.

※【Abandon the old and be renewed】5-11 Paul exhorted that in order for the church to live out the glorious image of Christ, they had to discard the old and be renewed and put the cravings of the sinful nature to death, rid of the old self and put on the new self. This new self is further renewed through the Holy Spirit and in knowledge (truth) just like the image of the Creator. (Eph 4:23-24) The returned people intermarried with the other nations and lost the glory of God. Both Ezra and Paul were like godly watch keepers. They interceded faithfully and exhorted with love to restore the people from sin to avoid God’s anger pouring onto those who were disobedient.

**B. Be contrite and obey the command, be filled with the Lord's Word and live out the new creation**

Be contrite deeply (Ezr 9:8-15) - Be filled with the Word (Col 3:12-25)

1.【Return and be favored but depraved again】8-10 In Ezra’s prayers, he recollected God’s grace on leaving them a remnant and gave them a firm place in His sanctuary so they might have a little relief to rebuild the holy temple. Now they had depraved and abandoned God’s command.

※【Live out the new creation and be filled with the Word】12-17 As the church was God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, they had to live out the new creation and clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. They had to bear with each other and bind them all together in perfect unity with love. Let the word of Christ dwell in them richly to give thanks to sing and praise God! The returned people were supposed to be holy and beloved to live out the new creation. But they broke the command and depraved. They did not keep God’s Word in their heart and thus disgraced God’s name. They were unable to sing out any word of praise. Ezra could only sigh and confess their sins.

2.【Do not violate any more to avoid being angered】11-15 The foreign nations were polluted and filled with detestable practices. When the chosen people entered the land, they also did detestable things. Thus they sinned and were taken captive. Now due to God’s compassion, they were able to turn from it. How could they break God’s command again and intermarry with the other nations to provoke God’s wrath? God is righteous and no one can stand in His presence.

※【Be godly and obedient will be rewarded】18-25 Paul then admonished the husbands and wives, the fathers and children, and the masters and servants to be dutiful in their positions. They were to treat each other with love, be godly and obedient. Then they would receive an inheritance as a reward. The Israelites had forgotten their positions before God were wives, children and servants. Thus they ought to be dutiful. But they broke God’s command and sinned after they were favored to return. They did not have a godly heart. If they did not repent, they would be repaid for their wrong and there was no favoritism. (Ro 2:11)

**Ecc 11 / Rev 20:15 Main theme: Obey and proclaim the Word day and night lest men will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur**

**-Sow the seeds / Destruction**

Those who listen to the Lord's words and obey His will, their names will be recorded in the book of life. Those who are rebellious and do evil will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. We ought to consider God's mind and save men day and night.

(1)【Follow the Holy Spirit and sow seeds often】1-2 Prepare the bread and sow seeds by faith, intercede for everyone and preach to all nations.

(2)【Wait in God's will】3-5 Pray and preach the Word at the places prepared by the Lord.

(3)【Work day and night】6-8 Work diligently for the Lord day and night, be happy and do good, and testify for the Light.

(4)【Banish anxiety and cash off the troubles and live for the Lord】9-10 Banish anxiety and cast off the troubles by the Lord. Let your heart return to the Lord, make every effort to sow seeds to save men and be prepared to welcome the Lord.

**Central point of the wheels: Abandon the old and be renewed, proclaim the Word and intercede**

Dear Lord, may You let me set my mind on things above, put my flesh to death to abandon the old and be renewed, confess and intercede for the sinning children.

**Ezr 10 / Col 4**

**Main theme: Be diligent and dutiful, confess contritely, investigate carefully and turn from sin**

**-Turn from sin / Proclaim extensively**

Golden verses: Ezr 10:1, Col 4:2-3

A discussion on turning from sin and proclaiming extensively - on one side it concerned Ezra the priest and all those who trembled at God's words brought the people to investigate and turn from sin thoroughly. On the other side it concerned Paul's last encouragement and greetings. He requested the church to pray for him that God might open a door for His message. Further he might be able to proclaim the mystery of Christ and lead men to turn from sins and be redeemed to become the kingdom of priesthood.

**A. Make a covenant and confess before God, implore to open the door widely to proclaim the Word**

Rebuke sin severely (Ezr 10:1-15) - Plead to proclaim extensively (Col 4:1-6)

1.【Turn absolutely from sin】1-5 Ezra threw himself down before God and prayed, confessed and wept. The Spirit of God inspired the men, women and children who came together to assemble to weep bitterly. Again, God moved Shecaniah and all those who feared the commands of God and Ezra to make a covenant with God. They swore to do according to the Book of the Law and to send away all those women and their children. They promised to turn from sin.

※【Pray persistently】1-2 Paul devoted himself to pray for the church and be watchful and grateful. He also encouraged the church to do the same. Ezra paid the price for the people. He confessed and interceded until they swore to make a covenant to turn away from sin. Faithful priests ought to devote themselves to prayer, be watchful and grateful. All glory and thanksgiving be to God.

2.【All the people confess and turn from sin】6-15 Ezra grieved at the sins on the exiles. He even ate no food and drank no water. He proclaimed to all the people to gather within three days. Anyone who failed to appear would be expelled from the assembly. God’s servant strongly reproached them for their serious guilt of marrying the foreign women. They ought to confess and turn from their wrong. They were greatly distressed and responded with a loud voice. Ezra appointed the officials to set a time to act so God’s wrath might turn from them. Among them were some who opposed this. But ultimately this could not be stopped.

※【Plead to open the door widely for the message】3-6 Paul was still in chains. But he was zealous for the Word. He requested the church of Colosse to pray for him to God to open a door for their message to proclaim the mystery of Christ so that more people might turn from sin and come back to the true God. Ezra gathered the assembly and solemnly settled the sins. It was God who opened the hearts of the assembly. Paul also encouraged the church to make the most of every opportunity and use wisdom and grace to act toward outsiders. Then they had witness and would gain more people. The exiles had bad company with the foreigners and were friends of the world. They were foolish and sinned. They had no witness.

**B. Investigate and turn from sin, obey the Word and stand firm, be mature and fully assured in God's will**

Investigate sin (Ezr 10:16-44) - Stand firm (Col 4:7-18)

1.【Investigate clearly the sins of the leaders】16-24 Ezra and the officials personally investigated the matter. By the first day of the first month they had finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women. Among the priests, there were eighteen of them. From the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, they had found out the offenders. They pledged to put away their wives and terminate their guilt. They offered guilt offering by grace.

※【Recommend the dear co-workers】7-9 Paul recommended Tychicus the deliverer to the church. He was a dear brother and a faithful minister. Paul sent him purposely to encourage their hearts. He also sent another dear brother Onesimus together with him so they might tell the church all the circumstances of Paul. On one side was Paul recommended faithful co-workers. On the other side was Ezra found out the guilty priests and leaders, creating a great contrast. Paul helped Onesimus to turn from sinful practice to become a trustworthy and faithful brother. The work of Ezra was also the same.

2.【Investigate the sins thoroughly】25-44 Among the people, there were eighty five who had married foreign women. Some of them even had children. Desire has conceived and it gives birth to sin. Bad company corrupts good character. We must depart completely from what had been conceived and produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

※【Be mature and fully assured in God's will】10-18 In Paul’s final greetings, he displayed his respect, magnanimity and the mutual love for his co-workers. He told the church of Colosse of the greetings and intercession of Epaphras so they might be fully assured of the will of God and stand firm in faith. He also encouraged them to read the letter in the church of the Laodiceans for this was the most holy faith which made men turn completely from sin without being enticed by the evil desire but be moved by the Holy Spirit to know deeply of God’s will to bear the fruit of the Spirit and glorify God.

**Ecc 12 / Rev 21:1 Main theme: Grab the chance to repay the goodness, seek and proclaim the Word, enter the new heaven and new earth**

**-Repay the kindness / Proclaim the Word**

Believe in the Lord and be reborn through the Holy Spirit, be renewed and triumph, be sanctified and become a new creation, and to enter the new heaven and new earth in future. But we should not take this rich grace vainly. We ought to fear God, to save men and repay His great kindness.

(1)【Grab the chance to remember the Lord】1-8 Make every effort to work for the Lord in the days of your youth and it is day when the circumstances allow. When darkness reigns, you may not be able to do it. (Jn 9:4; Mt 24:7-25) The Lord shed His blood to save all the people. We ought to learn from the Lord to deny ourselves to save men to comfort His heart.

(2)【Seek, obey and proclaim the Word wholeheartedly】9-11 First ponder, search out and seek the Lord’s words, and then we may proclaim the holy words of God which are beneficial to men.

(3)【Ought to take warning】12 Do not replace the truth of God by the philosophy and basic principles of men. (1 Ti 6:20-21) Every word of God is powerful and cannot be added or subtracted or be falsely explained by men. We should prevent from proclaiming the knowledge of the mind.

(4)【Be godly, obedient and do good often】13-14 It is never in vain to labor in the Lord. He will remember.

**Central point of the wheels: Turn from sin and seek the Word, renew in the Lord, and suffer to proclaim the Word**

Dear Lord, may You let me fear You all my life, turn absolutely from the secular, lead men to God, proclaim the gospel extensively and save souls!