Clips from Psalms

Psalms 106:16 - 18

Israel's Rebelliousness and God's Deliverance

"They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of Jehovah. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked."

The book of Ezra picks up the history of God’s people at the approximate point that Daniel chapters 9 and 10 leave off (see Daniel 9:1-2 and 10:1). The people of God have been in Babylonian captivity for 70 years as was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:8-11 and Daniel 9:2). Daniel 9:1 reads, “1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans,” (Daniel 9:1). The events of Daniel chapter 9 occur around 494 BC. Babylon has fallen at the hands of the Persians and Medes. Judah has been in Babylonian captivity for sixty eight years. Sixty six years have passed, at this point, since Nebuchadnezzar had his dream of the great and excellent image (Daniel 2). The Jews had two more years of captivity before they would be released by Cyrus (Ezra 1:1ff). Isaiah had prophesied of Cyrus by name approximately 200 years prior to his coming to office (see Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1). Consider the following dates and events leading up to the content of the book of Ezra:

562 BC Nebuchadnezzar, with the help of the Medes, conquers Nineveh and marches on Judah and Egypt. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, is routed and made a vassal king. Daniel, and many others, are taken captive to Babylon. The seventy years of Babylonian captivity, which Jeremiah prophesied about, now begins.

554 BC Nebuchadnezzar strikes Judah again taking Ezekiel and 10,000 others captive (Ezekiel 1:1-2; Jeremiah 29:1).

543 BC Judah falls to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar utterly crushes Judah. Jerusalem is laid siege to and many lose their lives. All that Jeremiah warned would happen did occur.

494 BC Babylon falls to the Persians and Medes. Cyrus places Darius, the Mede, over the Chaldeans (Daniel 5:31). Events of Daniel 9 occur at this time. Daniel is 88 years old (given that he was captured at age 20). The people of Judah have been in Babylonian captivity for 68 years.

492 BC Cyrus takes over as king of Babylon - Seventy years of Jewish captivity in Babylon comes to an end.
Cyrus was a man who would be responsible, by divine decree, for allowing the Jews to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple. No doubt Cyrus was familiar with this prophecy. According to the book of Ezra Cyrus performed his duty faithfully.

The book of Ezra is comprised of an approximately 80 year time frame. During these years God fulfilled his promise to cause the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city, walls, and temple (Jeremiah 29:8-10). The walls of the city, however, would not be completed until twelve years after the events of the book of Ezra by Nehemiah. Throughout the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel we find dual prophecies that foretold the restoration of the kingdom of God in Judah and the establishment of an everlasting kingdom in the church age (see Isaiah 44:26 and Ezekiel 36:32-36). Zerubbabel returns to Jerusalem in 493 BC with approximately 50,000 people to rebuild the temple under the authority of Cyrus, the Persian King. The work of building the temple has a strong start, however, it is not long until the Samaritans discourage the Jews. The construction of the temple is brought to a halt and remains that way for approximately 15 years (compare Ezra chapter 4:24 and 6:1ff). God sends the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to his people to motivate them to return to the work of building his temple (Ezra 5:1ff). Neglecting the temple construction for fifteen years was sinful due to God having commanded that they build it (Ezra 6:14). It would take Zerubbabel and the people twenty one years to complete the temple (compare Ezra 1:1; 3:8, 10; and 6:15 to Haggai 1:15). Between chapters six and seven of Ezra, 57 years pass with no mention of that time. It is generally agreed that the events of Esther and the institution of the feast of Purim occur during these days.

The book takes its name from Ezra who is a scribe and priest (Ezra 7:11). Ezra is not actually mentioned, however, until chapter seven. Ezra returns with about 7000 people and reforms Judah with the law of God. Ezra, by the providence of God, has the duty of "inquiring concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your hand" (Ezra 7:14). Ezra proves to be a ready man for this important work (Ezra 7:6). He is depicted as a man that loves the laws of God (Ezra 7:10) and knows that there are consequences to face when one sins (Ezra 9:3). Ezra is also a praying man (Ezra 9:5ff; 10:1), bold in the faith (Ezra 10:10), and diligent to accomplish the work God had providentially provided for him (Ezra 7:27; 9:1 – 10:44).

The Lord’s people had violated the Mosaic Law in that they married foreign women (compare Ezra 9:1-2 with Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Ezra chapter 10:18-44 reveals that 100 men had been found guilty in this trespass. It takes the priestly scribe only three months to straighten the mess out (compare Ezra 10:9 to 10:17). Ezra achieves his overall purpose of religious reform in a matter of one year (compare Ezra 7:9 with Ezra 10:17). Though Ezra was successful in reforming Israel there were deeper challenges that would take the ongoing efforts of other spiritual minded people. Twenty to thirty years later Nehemiah finds the people in the same sinful condition as Ezra had found them.

John Robertson

Psalms 60

"O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; oh, restore us. 2 You have made the land to quake; you have torn it open; repair its breaches, for it totters. 3 You have made your people see hard things; you have given us wine to drink that made us stagger. 4 You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow. Selah 5 That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!

6 God has spoken in his holiness: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth. 7 Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter. 8 Moab is my washbasin; upon Edom I cast my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph." 9 Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? 10 Have you not rejected us, O God? You do not go forth, O God, with our armies. 11 Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man! 12 With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes."