



## Pray for the Nation ~ INOI MO TE MOTU

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The LORD said, "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

**APRIL 2020**

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"Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will hold you up with My victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

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### **God's Word for this month ...**

The Lord said to King Solomon, "If I shut up the heavens and there is no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send a plague\* among My people, **if** My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, **then** I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:13-14 MKJV)

\* **plague** = a deadly contagious disease spreading rapidly over a wide area (Oxford Dictionary)

### **THE ABORTION BILL**

Tragically, the Final Reading of the Abortion Bill was passed by **69** votes for, to **51** votes against. **All** the amendments mentioned in *Prayer Update 965* were **defeated**.

**69 MPs are responsible for the passing of this Bill and all its consequences in the years to come.**

Some of the issues they voted in favour of were:

- Nothing needs to be done to sustain the life of aborted babies who are still alive.
- Babies may be aborted because they are not the 'right' gender or might have a 'disability'.
- Abortions may be performed by 'health providers', not just Medical professionals.
- No referendum was allowed, even though 92% of the 25,000 written submissions were *against* changing the law, and 95% of people who wanted to give an oral submission to the Select Committee were not permitted.
- Statistics on annual abortions will only be published for the first year and a half; after that they will not be published. Up until now they have been published annually. After the original Abortion Bill was passed in 1977, the

annual number rose from 2100 in the first year to a peak of 18,500 (1 abortion for every 3 live births). No wonder the current Bill limits knowledge of abortion numbers to the first 18 months after the Bill becomes Law!

***This is unprecedented in New Zealand's history!***

### **COVID-19**

Coincidentally, exactly 7 days after the above Bill was passed into Law, New Zealand is at top Level 4 of emergency measures against the coronavirus epidemic, with a nationwide lockdown and required self-isolation of everyone except essential services, for the next 28 days.

***This is unprecedented in New Zealand's history!***

- **We need to pray** according to what the verses above say: If, because of our sin and disobedience, God sends a plague, but we humble ourselves (repent and acknowledge our sin), pray and plead for His forgiveness, seek God, and **turn from our wicked ways**, He will hear our prayers, forgive our sin and heal our land. We, as God's people, need to do this on behalf of our land, to bring healing and salvation to our people and country.
- **We need to pray** concerning the many issues and consequences of the Abortion law changes, and the Covid-19 virus.

**Italy's** Evangelical Alliance held a day of prayer on Sunday March 22 as the country's death toll from the coronavirus (5,476) passed that of China. In Italy, 651 died on Monday, down from Saturday's figure of 793.

**Australia** is calling for a National Day of Prayer this Sunday (29th March). Churches across Australia, in whatever form they may meet [because of their lockdown], are asked to include prayers for the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic and its impact upon its people.

## FEAR? FEAR NOT!

To Israel, God's servants who He has chosen, God said, "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with My victorious right hand." Isaiah 41:8-10

**PLEASE NOTE:** THE FOLLOWING WAS CORRECT AT 11 MARCH, SO SOME NUMBERS WILL HAVE CHANGED SINCE THEN.

### Fear ...

There is a lot of fear in the world today, and from a worldly perspective, this is not without cause. The whole of Italy, whose population is just over 60 million people, has been in nationwide lockdown since Monday, because of spreading coronavirus cases and fatalities. 10,000 people are affected in Italy, with 168 deaths yesterday and a total of 631 deaths in Italy so far.

Connected to the fears of this spreading further throughout the world, affected nations are taking various measures to minimise the continued spread of the virus. This has hugely affected airlines, tourism and cruises, schools, businesses, employment, the economy, etc. Yesterday, the Standard & Poor's top 500 companies' shares had lost \$US **5.3 trillion** (although they have increased in value today), and it is estimated that airlines could lose \$US **113 billion**.

### Fear not ...

For those who love and serve the Lord – the ones He has chosen to be His people – the 'natural' fear of these things should turn us to a greater commitment of our lives to Him and increase our love and worship of Him. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5). Also read and apply the following verses to your life and faith in God: Psalms 32:10; 37:3; 40:3; 115:11; Isaiah 26:4 and Jeremiah 17:7.

### The Fear of the Lord

God said to mankind, "Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28). Our world prides itself in understanding and research into everything in the universe. Knowledge abounds but we seek more and more. But what we all need – Christians and non-Christians alike – is *the fear of the Lord*. People's lives are in a mess; parts of the world are in chaos and war; we face all kinds of problems – both 'natural' and manmade. We have, individually, nationally

and worldwide, departed from the Lord and His ways, and are suffering the consequences.

King David said, "Transgression [the breaking of God's Law] speaks to the wicked, deep in their hearts [but] there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Psalm 36:1). Paul quotes this in Romans 3:18 (see verses 9-18). In spite of all we have discovered about the universe God has created, and the conscience God has put within us so that we might know what is good and what is evil, we so often choose evil and suffer as a result.

Our nation, and the nations of the world, desperately need *the fear of the Lord* to fall upon us so that we turn from the evil ways of the world, and seek Him for forgiveness and healing of the world in which we live.

### Prayer suggestions

There are a lot of issues mentioned above. Pray through these issues as the Lord leads:

- The issues causing fear in society today.
- Praise God for the peace which comes through faith in Him and His Word.
- For the fear of God to fall upon us, bringing people to salvation and to walk with Him.

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### QUESTIONS

The following were major factors during the periods of restoration in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Discuss their importance in those days, and in revival and restoration today:

1. Prayer and fasting.
2. National repentance.
3. Restoration of the Word of God and the House of God.
4. Sanctifying the people and obedience to God's laws.
5. Separation from the heathen (the ungodly)
6. Opposition from the enemy but victory over the enemy.



## REVIVE US AGAIN!

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#### Some Biblical Principles of Revival (continued)

##### Ezra and Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are books of **Restoration**.

About the year 960 BC, King Solomon built a Temple to the Lord in Jerusalem. Centuries later, the people turned away from God and because of their backsliding, sin and apostasy, God allowed the Temple to be destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and God's people were taken into exile and captivity in Babylon. The wall around Jerusalem was also broken down and in disrepair. While in exile for 70 years there was little concern to do anything about this fallen state, until God stirred in the heart of King Cyrus of Persia who allowed the people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem's walls. Over some years, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led some of their people back to Jerusalem to begin this work of rebuilding and restoration.

**The book of Ezra** describes the rebuilding of the Temple under the decrees of Cyrus and Darius, the work being led by Zerubbabel and others. In spite of much opposition, rebuilding the Temple was completed about 516 BC. Ezra was a scribe and teacher associated with the later stages of the reformation.

**The book of Nehemiah** describes the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem during the reign of King Artaxerxes, the work being led by Nehemiah and completed about 444 BC.

There are many points of similarity between these two works of restoration, and many important principles of revival contained in these two books.

#### E Z R A

God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia (1:1), giving him a command to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (1:2-4). The Lord also stirred up the spirits of the people to go to

Jerusalem to do the rebuilding (1:5). When God moved on the people in this way there was a generous spirit of giving (1:6; 2:68-69; 7:16). The altar was rebuilt, and the foundation laid, amidst great praise and rejoicing (3:2-13).

##### Opposition from the enemy

Then came opposition from the enemy! It came in seven different ways:

1. Temptation to compromise (4:1-3)
2. Discouragement (4:4)
3. Fear (4:4)
4. False counsellors (4:5)
5. Frustration (4:5)
6. False accusation (4:6-16)
7. Force used against them (4:23)

As a result, the work of rebuilding ceased for 16 years (4:24). Then, once again the people were stirred into action, this time by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1-2; 6:14-15; Hag. 1:2-11). Finally, King Artaxerxes' decree to stop building was reversed (chapters 5 and 6) and the rebuilding was completed in about four years (4:24; 6:15). With great rejoicing the temple was dedicated to the Lord and the people sanctified themselves – that is, they rededicated themselves to the Lord (6:16-21).

Chapter 7 commences about 51 years after chapter 6 ends. God's Word was restored (7:10), obedience to God's laws was enforced (7:23-26), the people fasted and sought God (8:21-23; 9:3-5; 10:6), inter-marriage with the heathen was abandoned (9:1-2), and there was deep repentance amongst the people (10:1-5, 10-17).

##### Ezra's example

Ezra sets a great example for us (7:10):

- He set his heart to study the Law of the Lord. The Law had been neglected and forgotten, but Ezra sought after it.
- He set his heart to practice it (cf. James 1:22-25). Before he taught it to others, he lived it first! If we do not practice what we hear and teach, we may end up in deception; and we are hypocrites if we try to teach others when we do not practice it ourselves!

- He taught it, both by word and by example.

Note the order: first he studied God's Word (so that he knew and understood what it said), then he obeyed it, then he taught it to others. What a great example for us to follow!

### Ezra's prayer

In Ezra's prayer (9:6-15), note his confession, his identification with the sins of his nation, his claiming of God's faithfulness, and his trusting in the mercy of God.

Thus we see the temple restored, but more than that, a nation was restored to God.

## NEHEMIAH

Although the temple had now been rebuilt for about 72 years, the walls and gates around Jerusalem were still broken down. Nehemiah now arrives on the scene. Nehemiah was a man with a:

- **Concern** (1:2), while others around him seemed unconcerned.
- **Prayer** (1:4-11), while others seemed prayerless. Like Ezra, Nehemiah in his prayer identified with his people, repenting of and confessing their sins, and reminding God of His promises – claiming the promise after he had fulfilled the conditions! The earnestness of his concern and prayer are shown by his weeping, mourning and fasting.
- **Vision** (2:5), while others had lost their vision.

### Opposition from the enemy

Again, with this move of God and Nehemiah's desire to restore the gates and walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah met with persistent opposition and attempts at demoralisation:

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|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Derision (2:19)  | 6. Compromise (6:2)            |
| 2. Despised (2:19)  | 7. False accusation (6:6)      |
| 3. Ridicule (4:1-3) | 8. Threats (6:7)               |
| 4. Confusion (4:8)  | 9. Fear (6:9)                  |
| 5. Fighting (4:8)   | 10. False prophecy (6:10 - 13) |

Yet in spite of this opposition, he went ahead to **work** and to **fight** in **faith** (4:14). Nehemiah both **built** and **battled**; he worked with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other – faith and works!

### Restoration of the gates

Nehemiah and his friends rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem and its ten gates:

1. Sheep gate (3:1), which speaks of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.
2. Fish gate (3:3), which speaks of witness and evangelism.
3. Old gate (3:6), which speaks of the restoration of "old" truths.
4. Valley gate (3:13), which speaks of humbling.
5. Dung gate (3:14), which speaks of clearing out sin and filth.
6. Fountain gate (3:15), which speaks of cleansing and the Word of God.
7. Water gate (3:26), which speaks of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
8. Horse gate (3:28), which speaks of warfare.
9. East gate (3:29), which speaks of the second coming of the Son of God.
10. Muster gate (3:31), which speaks of the gathering together of the sheep.

### Principles of restoration

Nehemiah restored the wall and gates of Jerusalem (1:3; cf. Isaiah 60:18). He also restored:

1. The Word of God (8:1-8)
2. Worship (8:6)
3. Repentance (8:9) – national repentance, with weeping.
4. Obedience (8:13-18)
5. Rejoicing in God (8:17)
6. Fasting and confession (9:1-3)
7. Prayer (9:6-37). Note how he mentions God's promises, God's warnings, man's disobedience, God's punishment, and God's mercy.
8. Acts of reformation (10:28-39; 13:1-31): sanctification, obedience to God's laws, restoration of worship, sacrifice, giving of tithes and offerings, separation from the heathen ("unbelievers") and no mixed marriages with them, observance of the Sabbath day (the day of rest) to keep it holy.

We have a lot to learn from the examples of Ezra and Nehemiah!

## QUESTIONS

*(continued on page 2)*