

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 16, 2016

Ezra 1:1–2:70. The efficient and formal causes of Cyrus’ heart (“spirit,” attitude) to aid Jews.

1 John 3:5–10. Abiding in Christ.

Psalms 106:1–15. Faithful God and faithless Israel.

COMMENTS:

Ezra 1:1–2:70. The Book of Ezra tells the history of the Jews’ return from Babylon. The Book of Ezra is named for the book’s principle character. This scribe revived the law of Moses as the basis for Jewish religious and social life during the period of restoration following the Babylonian exile. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra-Nehemiah is one book. It occurs in the third and final section (called the “Writings”) and precedes Chronicles, which is the last book of the Hebrew Bible. The English Old Testament follows the Latin in separating Ezra-Nehemiah into two books. The English Old Testament with the Greek and Latin places Ezra in its proper chronological sequence, following 1 and 2 Chronicles, as the tenth of the historical books. Note that the last verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22–23) are the same as Ezra 1:1–3a. In fact, Chronicles ends in the middle of a sentence that only occurs in full in Ezra. This overlapping may indicate that the books were intended to be read together. **The theme** of Ezra is that God used pagan kings and godly leaders to restore His people by reinstating temple worship and reviving the law of Moses. Ezra’s theological focus is how God accomplishes His will through different human agents. God restored His people by moving the pagan ruler Cyrus to release Judah (1:1–2) and by inciting the Jewish people to volunteer (1:5). The Lord inspired Cyrus to permit the return of the Jews to worship their God. Those who volunteered for the first expedition are listed. The foundation of the temple was laid, and the people worshiped God. But opposition from their enemies stopped the work. The Lord stirred up the people by the prophets Zechariah and Haggai to complete the work in spite of inquiries from the Persian governor. King Darius authorized and funded the project, which was completed with great celebration. **Note the phrase in verse 1:** “*the LORD stirred up (aroused, רָעָרָע) the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia*” (NKJ). While Calvinists proclaim that God does everything, like make men think certain ways (= God as formal cause), this is not what the text says. Whose spirit is it? Cyrus’! As we have noted in metaphysics of human intellect and will, man is the formal cause and God is the efficient cause. Cyrus was the formal cause of the content of his intellect in how he viewed the Jews, and the Lord is the efficient cause in using that mind and will for His own purposes. In other words, Cyrus had a good disposition toward the Jews (formal cause), which God energized (efficient cause), as He energizes all human intellects and wills. As we have noted, “free will” really is better understood as “free choice” of choosing between the interaction of the intellect and the will in the theoretical and practical levels, both of which are determined as far as their natures, namely to know and to seek the good. What choices one makes is the formal cause and determines the nature of the person. Every time we actualize evil, we set the proclivities of our appetites (rational and sensitive). In other words, when we actualize evil, we become more evil, and when we actualize divine good from participating in the life of God, we gain more virtue (right thinking, right wishing, right affections, and right emotions). As far as Cyrus, if God arbitrarily placed content in the intellect and changed the inclination of Cyrus, then God would effectively destroy Cyrus

as a human being because that would destroy the very nature of what it means to be a human being with an immaterial, and so, free intellect and will. In such case, man would be an animal or a puppet. God is the author of all natures and this means that He sustains all intellects and wills along with their *natural* properties as the efficient and existential cause; it is man who determines the content of his intellect and penchant of His will. Again, in our text, the spirit/attitude is Cyrus' (he is the formal cause of its contents)—it belongs to him, and God as the existential and efficient cause just added more energy or zeal to what was already there—He “stirred it up.” There are no instances in the Word of God where God ever moved a will contrary to its intrinsic nature and developed proclivities. In every instance, as this one, God is simply energizing established natures to use for His plan and purpose. Without classical metaphysics there would be no way of explaining this passage in a coherent and self-evident manner that corresponds to the nature of things, God, and reality as such. In such a case, one would be left with siding with Calvinism or Arminianism, both of which offer little to no understanding of this passage, or many other critical texts.

1 John 3:5–10. The meaning of verse 6 is of no small controversy: 1 John 3:6, *Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.* A widely held explanation of this verse is that a believer “does not sin habitually,” that is, sin is not his way of life. However, the Greek text here has no words to represent phrases such as “keeps on” or “continues to” or “habitually.” These phrases are based on an understanding of the Greek present tense which is now widely in dispute among New Testament scholars. It is recognized that it cannot be shown anywhere in the New Testament that the present tense can bear this kind of meaning without the assistance of other words. Such a view is invalid for this verse and also for 1 John 3:9. Nor is John saying that sinless perfection must be achieved, and that those who fail to do so lose their salvation. Such a notion is foreign to John’s argument and to all of Scripture. John’s point is simple and straight-forward. Sin is a product of ignorance and blindness toward God. “No one who sins has seen Him or known Him” (6b). Sin can never come out of seeing and knowing God. It can never be a part of the experience of abiding in Christ. “No one who abides in Him sins” (6a). It is best to understand this passage as meaning that as long as one abides in Him, he cannot sin—because there is no sin in Christ as per the previous verse (5). In other words, since there is no sin in Christ (5), the believer who abides in Him does not sin (6). The only way to sin is to stop fellowshiping with Christ.

Psalms 106:1–15. In spite of God’s faithfulness to Israel (Ps. 105) her history was filled with faithlessness and ingratitude. Psalm 106, a confessional psalm, traces some of the Israelite’s rebellious activities and God’s judgments on them. The psalmist then prayed that the Lord would deliver His people from their captivity. This psalm praises God by reciting Israel’s history from the exodus to the judges’ time. God forgave many rebellions. Israel failed to believe at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:10–12). They complained about food in the wilderness (Ps. 106:13–15; Num. 11). Dathan and Abiram rebelled (Num. 16). Israel worshiped the golden calf (Exod. 32). They proved cowards at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 14). Israel joined Moabite women in sexual sin and idolatry (Num. 25). Israel complained at Meribah (Num. 20:1–13). They accepted Canaanite ways (see Josh. 23) and repeated apostasy in the judges’ time (Judg. 1:16). As we have noted, man always seeks what he thinks is good. In every one of the cases above, Israel sought evil as good rather than the Lord and His good. *Quo Vadis?*

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don