

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
June 19, 2016**

Ezra 7:1–8:36. Ezra, the man of God.

1 John 4:1–6. The Holy Spirit.

Psalms 107:1–22. Thankfulness to the Lord.

COMMENTS:

Ezra 7:1–8:36. Chapter 7 starts out with genealogy to establish Ezra’s credentials to fulfill God’s calling, namely his priestly genealogy (see 2:62). We also see his spiritual qualification in knowledge of the law, and his commitment to living out the principles of the law as a practitioner and a teacher. God’s “gracious hand” of grace was upon his life because he was really seeking the Lord. The key to his spiritual success and thus success at life as such, was seeking the Lord for His own sake—he was no conduit-minded believer. King Artaxerxes recognized Ezra’s qualifications and issued a decree written in Aramaic. The decree said Ezra should lead a company of volunteers to supervise proper religious life in Jerusalem and establish a judicial system in accordance with the law of their God. Ezra praised God for the benevolence of the king and took courage from this sign of God’s hand on him (7:27–28). In chapter 8 we see spiritual preparation. His companions on the journey are listed by family heads. Ezra specially recruited Levites to assist him in teaching the law in Jerusalem. Of course, Ezra attributed his success to the Lord. As spiritual leaders the Levites had to meet the qualification of proper genealogical heritage as the law required. Ezra showed his dependence on God by prayer and fasting (putting God before sense appetites, even normal and licit desires like food) in preparation for his journey. He recognized that God had answered his petitions. Ezra’s company, bearing an enormous treasure, arrived successfully without incident. Ezra acknowledged that God’s protective hand had spared him from the threat of enemies. The treasure was deposited, and the exiles offered sacrifice for all Israel. So far, so good.

1 John 4:1–6. Note that “the Spirit of God” must be distinguished from false spirits. This is particularly necessary “because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The standard by which these spirits (false prophets) are to be tested is their attitude toward the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. The same holds true today with regard to the cult of the Jehovah Witnesses. The failure to acknowledge (*homologeō*, “confess”; cf. 1:9; 2:23; 4:15) that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is precisely what exposes the spirit of the antichrist, which John had already warned his readers about (2:18–27). In verses 4–6 we see that the readers had successfully resisted the antichrists (false prophets) by means of the One who is in them, a reference to the Holy Spirit who provides supernatural conviction regarding things in the spiritual realm that we do not have direct access to with our senses. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer and His ministry is always veridical, which is why we must avoid at all costs quenching or grieving His ministry. As John says, “the One who is in you” is mightier than the one who is in the world, namely, Satan (cf. 1 John 5:19). Verse 5 tells us that the antichrists are from the world and so speak from the viewpoint of the world. For this reason they get a good hearing from the world. It is always true that satanically inspired thought has a special appeal to worldly minds. However, the people who are from God (*ek tou theou*, “of God”), listen to the

apostles. The pronouns which begin verses 4–6 (You ... They, and We) are emphatic in the original and evidently mark off three groups: the readers, the antichrists, and the apostles. Each one who can be described as “from God” (i.e., actuated and influenced by God) and thus knows God listens to the apostolic voice. In the history of the church, apostolic doctrine has always been the means by which the Holy Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood can be effectively distinguished. True Christianity is apostolic Christianity. Beware any new teaching that is not grounded in the Scriptures and early Christianity.

Psalm 107:1–22. Note that all believers who have experienced God’s salvation have reason to praise God. This includes homeless aliens; war captives; those punished for their sin with personal illness; and those who have encountered dangers on the sea, famine, and other afflictions. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, thankfulness is always appropriate, for the gift of life and the wonderful eternal journey we are all on. Consider the Apostle Paul’s attitude in Philippians 4 while being incarcerated in prison: ‘rejoice, again, I say rejoice.’ Thanks be to God for everything! Love for and knowledge of God really does change everything and solve any and all problems of life. Todah!

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

Pastor Don