

And The Gates Of Hell

Long Beach Alliance Church • July 6th, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**I ALSO SAY TO YOU THAT YOU ARE
PETER, AND UPON THIS ROCK I WILL
BUILD MY CHURCH; AND THE GATES OF
HADES WILL NOT OVERPOWER IT.
~MATTHEW 16:18 (NASB)**

1) The "Almost" Final Chapter Of Ezra's Reforms

- A) As the details of Ezra's reforms come to a conclusion (Ezra 10:8ff), Ezra wields phenomenal power to enforce the Law of Moses (cf. 10:8).

- B) Ezra's quest for reform is persistent, and even lists the names of all the men who were offenders in the matter of taking foreign wives (10:18-44).

- C) Despite this being the end of Ezra's book, we will experience Ezra reforming again in Nehemiah 8:1-18. Ezra's passion for the Word of God and the purity of the covenant community made indelible impressions in Israel.

- D) Despite these reforms, despite Ezra's ability to enforce the reforms, despite Ezra & Nehemiah's passion to enforce these reforms personally (note Nehemiah 13:25ff) -- the reforms of the post-exilic period failed.

2) The Ashes Of Failure Bring the Phoenix of Messiah

- A) In the 400 years (roughly) which follow Ezra's reforms, Israel becomes more established in their religious practices, but even the religious leaders lose the heart of reform -- being transformed from the inside-out (Matthew 23:27).

- B) By the time of Jesus Christ, the temple had become the only remaining important element of Ezra's reforms. It was all about serving the building, rather than serving the One for whom the building was constructed (cf. Matthew 12:3-8).

- C) By the time of Jesus, the Law of Moses, of which Ezra was such a dedicated scribe and teacher, had been twisted into controlling the people through regulations (cf. Matthew 23).

- D) Remarkably, the Word of God had been obscured so dramatically in the 400 years between Ezra and Jesus Christ, it was largely misunderstood by both the religious leaders and their sincere Jewish followers.

- E) It was into this environment, where the Word was no longer being understood and wear the ears of the people had grown deaf, that "the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us" (John 1:14).

- F) The failure of the Jews in the Old Testament is permitted by God to reveal the total inadequacy of mankind to accomplish his own salvation. The Jews themselves actually reject Jesus Christ, the Messiah, when He comes to earth (Luke 20:9ff).

- G) God allows the failures of our lives, even to the point of great tragedy, to accomplish His perfect will. While not imposing Himself on us, He calls to us to follow Him (John 10:27), and Jesus assures us that His sheep will follow Him.

- H) Are you a child of Heaven (Matthew 18:3), has Christ called to you? Today is the day of salvation (2nd Corinthians 6:2)!