

Kings and Prophets 17-08-17

This is Thursday the 17th of August 2017. 17 day, 17 year, 8th month. We're continuing our study of kings and prophets.

We're in the post-exilic time. We're in the book of Ezra, picking up the narrative of the people of God as they emerge from the Babylonian captivity. We'll be resuming in Ezra chapter 2 tonight, and we'll take a moment at the outset to ask God's blessing on us as we spend this time in fellowship and in the communion of His Spirit as we look together at His Word.

Shall we pray? Father, we're so grateful for this time of concentration and focus on the truth of Your Word. We know that it is the nourishment, the manna for our souls that enables us and empowers us. It is that which Your Holy Spirit uses to lead us and to guide us and to enable and empower us.

We pray that each one that is participating tonight will receive a blessing from this portion of Your Word in that way, that it will be a source of motivation and encouragement, that it will shine light on each of our paths as we seek to live our lives in a way that will reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name, amen. Well, you will remember from our introduction last time that there are three major returns from the exile.

The first one begins immediately following the first great decree authorizing such a return, and this is the one under Cyrus. Cyrus gives this command in 539 or so B.C., and very shortly thereafter, we like to think it was around 538, the authorization to rebuild the temple is given and provision is made for it. We saw this last time in Ezra chapter 1. You've got the decree there in chapter 1 verses 2 through 4, thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, where are the people? Get on with it.

So he authorizes this, and that's 538. So in verse 5, the heads of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all those whose spirits God had moved. What a great phrase, those whose spirits God had moved.

Don't you wish that any time we have a major decision or an important turn to take that God would move our spirit so that we knew that was our calling, our task, our assignment, the direction in which we should go? Well, actually that is possible, and it's one of the reasons we're meeting tonight to study God's word, is this is the way that God leads and guides us and moves our spirit, is taking the content of His word and bringing it to bear, making it pertinent, applicable, meaningful to us as we examine our options and look at our opportunities and our challenges. What is it that enables us to live a life that truly pleases God? It is God's own power active in our lives. God is at work in us to will and to do for His good purpose.

How does the power of God come into the life of the believer? As we have said so many times, it is via things that come from God, God's spirit and God's word. Nothing of us, all of Him. So if we find a lack of the power of God or the direction of God or the illumination of God in our lives, it's

not a big puzzle to solve.

We need to cultivate the presence and power of His spirit, and we need to cultivate an understanding and devote some time in reflection and meditation to His word. That's how His power comes into our lives, and honestly, by no other means. Even the fellowship that we enjoy that is such a blessing to us is enshrouded in and empowered by God's Holy Spirit and speaking the truth to one another in love.

And it is spirit-enabled fellowship and truth content in that fellowship that benefits us and blesses us. So this is what happens. Here, God's King predicted in Isaiah who would come.

The heart of the King is in the hand of the Lord. He has a benevolent attitude toward these long-time exiles who have spent the better part of two generations now in captivity. And Cyrus says, "The God of heaven has given me all of these kingdoms, and He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem." Well, if Cyrus got the command, why doesn't Cyrus put a shovel over his shoulder and march on down to Jerusalem? What does he mean when he says, "God has commanded me to build"? Well, it's kind of like when we say, "Solomon built the temple." He is the one who is going to see that it gets built.

And we've noticed this kind of language in other contexts going all the way back to Genesis 1, haven't we? When it says that God created and God caused and God commanded, if God is doing these things by command, it's not out of the realm of possibility that there are those who understand, heed, and carry out those commands. It doesn't mean that God did not do it any more than it would mean that Cyrus didn't really build the temple. He did.

He's God's man on the throne. He's God's provision for the people who are now coming out of this exile. So he provides three things here in chapter 1. If you wanted to summarize Ezra chapter 1, there are three things that are stated here.

Number one, there is authority from God through Cyrus to rebuild the temple. Cyrus says God has given this command. So the first thing is there is authority.

They stand on solid ground in seeking to carry this out because the authority is from God brokered through the king. The second thing they have in this chapter is encouragement. Look at verse 6. All those who are around them encouraged them.

Now did they say rah rah? Did they wave a flag in the air? What was the nature of their encouragement? When the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and the Levites, those whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, what kind of encouragement did they receive? Support. And that's the third thing here. There is provision.

This encouragement is in and of itself a motivation and a support but it takes a material form. There's no kind of encouragement you can give that is any more effective than material support. It can be physical gifts.

It can be physical presence. It can be the devoting of time, of attention, of presence. But genuine encouragement is more than a Hallmark card.

Not to say there's anything wrong with a Hallmark card. That in itself is a physical expression. You don't just text somebody and say, thinking of you dot dot dot.

You took the time. You picked out a card. You signed it.

You licked a stamp. That expression can be quite meaningful. Here this encouragement takes the form of gifts.

Silver and gold, goods and livestock, precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. Notice there are many willing offerings but then there are these substantial means of getting it done. Sometimes an offering or a gift can be sort of a token.

You could never adequately express your thanks to someone but you give them a token. You can never adequately, I would not ever want to think that my love was boiled down to the price of a necklace or a watch or some other gift. These are tokens and they're expressions.

They're willingly given and willingly offered but the value doesn't correlate with the sentiment. Your love can be deep and strong and there's really nothing. It's kind of like our love for God.

David says in the Psalms, what can I possibly bring to God to express my love for Him? But it doesn't mean that the token isn't valuable in and of itself and stands in for and represents something larger. There are two kinds of this encouragement here in terms of provision. There is this substantial provision, this silver and gold, goods and livestock and precious things beside the willing offerings.

Maybe there are people who are poor in the captivity and too poor to go back, unable health-wise for a variety of other circumstances and maybe they've only got a few shekels that they can contribute. They've just got a few minas in effect, a few cents. But they contribute because they want to express their support for this project and God honors the sentiment regardless of what the ability is to give.

The cheerfulness of the gift is what God appreciates. King Cyrus, look at this, in terms of provision. Cyrus brought out the articles from the house of the Lord which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods.

These things had been trophies, trophies of victory. Notice the house of Nebuchadnezzar's gods is still standing despite all of the time that Nebuchadnezzar spent with Daniel and the three friends. He may have acknowledged the God of Israel, but he didn't tear down the house of his gods, nor did he say, now that I believe in your God, all of you can go home.

Did he? So those houses are still standing. Cyrus, king of Persia, brought these things out by the hand of Mithra, the treasurer, gave him the shesh bazar, the overseer of the captives of

Judah, it would appear. Thirty gold platters, a thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins, a thousand other articles.

And if you compare this to the list of what Solomon originally invested the temple with, you realize that the depredations of those intervening kings between the time that the kingdom divided. You remember several times invading kings and generals were paid off with articles from the temple. So by the time Nebuchadnezzar sacks it, there's not a whole lot left.

This is a tiny fraction of what had originally been in the glorious initial years of Solomon's temple. But what is there, Cyrus pulls out and gives them back as a start. Articles, gold and silver, five thousand four hundred, shesh bazar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Then we get to chapter 2. Now this is such an interesting chapter. I read somebody saying that this is one of the worst chapters in the Bible to try to do anything with because it's just a big long list. But I find it fascinating and I'm hoping you will as well.

So let's dig right into it. We had a little bit of an introduction last time and see if you begin to be infected with the excitement I have as we read this list. These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, every one to his own city.

Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Sariah, Eliah, Mordecai, that's not the same Mordecai by the way, Bilshan, Mizpah, Bigvi, Rehum and Ba'anach. The number of the men of the people of Israel, the people of Perosh, 2,172. The people of Shephethiah, 372.

The people of Arah, 775 and so on. Now first of all, etc. would be appropriate here.

The names and numbers are relatively meaningless to us, right? So why the list? And since all scripture is God breathed and is profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction in righteousness, it reminds me of the story Dr. Criswell told about the preacher who was trying to get his congregation interested in some of the minor prophets such as we've been covering. And he was in a little country church and people were having a hard time staying awake as he went through Zephaniah and Haggai and Zechariah and so on. And he came to Zephaniah and he said, Zephaniah, where do we put Zephaniah? And the guy in the back of the sanctuary said, he can have my seat, I'm leaving.

And out he went. And there's a real danger of that in these long lists of well, we're just going to skip over it. And it's in the Word of God and as I mentioned last time, not just once, but twice.

And I will tell you if you keep your finger here and turn over to Nehemiah chapter 7, it's initially perhaps troubling because what do we believe about the scripture? Inspired or not? What would you say? Let me hear you say it. Inspired or not inspired? Inspired, right? Is it inerrant? Is it without errors? I believe so. I think we've got the occasional scribal mistake, but our view on

inerrancy in case we haven't covered it recently is in the cases where our particular copy of the Word of God has not preserved a perfect copy of the autograph, what has God done? He's left us enough clues that we can reconstruct what it needs to be, right? Sometimes it's a little bit of a puzzle and we have enough clues, we have enough information that we can solve the puzzle.

None of the discrepancies, none of the seeming scribal errors or whatever are in any of the sections of the Word of God that deal with faith and practice. There's no scribal error when it comes to the nature of Christ's work on the cross or what it takes to be saved or whether or not we are members of the body of Christ or what the nature of our walk before God should be. Nobody is debating whether or not we should cultivate the presence and power of God in our lives through the filling of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word of God.

There's no debate. There's no uncertain scripture in that regard. Typically, the places where we do find differences or obvious difficulties in the text are in lists, in numbers, particularly in the Old Testament.

We'll find differences in names and things like that and we think, well, is this something that's going to trip me as I try to walk before the Lord? Probably not. Nevertheless, the Word of God has integrity and it has integrity down to the smallest detail. So here's what I want you to do.

This is going to be a little bit of a two-handed exercise here because we want to stay in Ezra chapter 2 and we want to turn over to Nehemiah chapter 7. Now what is the relationship between these two books that we covered last time? What are they in the Hebrew text? There's one book, right? It's a single continuity. It's a single scroll. The Masoretes when they did the statistics didn't put any totals at the end of Ezra.

The totals for both of these books in our Bible are at the end of a single book in the Hebrew text and it was that way for centuries. It wasn't even divided in the Hebrew Bible until 15 something in our own day. So we have two different copies of this list.

Hear me now. Two different copies of the list in the same book. Same book, two different versions of the same list.

Now just to give you a sample, let's just start here with verse 2. Ezra 2 verse 2. Those who came with Zerubbabel were... And then we've got a list of about 10 or 11 guys here. Yeshua is 1, Nehemiah is 2, Sarai is 3, Rehemiah is 4, Mordecai is 5, Bilshan is 6, Mispar 7, Bigvi 8, Rehum 9, Ba'ana 10. You add Zerubbabel, he makes 11.

Pretty simple. This is not too hard of a list of guys. Turn over to Nehemiah chapter 7 and look at verse 6. These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity.

Those have been carried away. Same verbiage. Verse 7. Those who came with Zerubbabel are 1 Yeshua, Nehemiah 2, Azariah 3, Rehemiah 4, Nehemiah 5, Mordecai 6, Bilshan 7, Mispar 8, Bigvi 9, Rehum 10, and Ba'ana 11.

So that makes a total of 12. In the first verse of the list we've got an extra guy and he's the fifth one there, Nehemiah. Nehemiah in Nehemiah 7-7 does not appear in the list in Ezra 2-2.

There are similar discrepancies all down the list. If you have a New King James you will see in your list starting in Ezra 2-2, see there Yeshua, Nehemiah, and then Saraiah, the third guy. See the little 1 next to his name? If you go over to your text note it says that this is Azariah in Nehemiah.

You say okay, well Azariah, Saraiah, maybe it's just a shortened form of his name and that's okay. But then look at the next guy, Eliah, he's got a little number 2 next to him and that's Rahamiah over in Nehemiah so the spelling is different, one's an L and one's an M. Well as you track this down and read carefully through, particularly in a New King James or another well annotated translation, you will see that there are like 19 discrepancies between these two lists in the course of going through it. Sometimes it's the names, sometimes it's the numbers.

And as we scoot down to the end of the list, and let's just go back to Ezra 2, when you get to the end of the list you'll find that there is a total given in verse 64. What is the total in verse 64? Everybody is carefully enumerated, every group between verse 2 and verse 63 is numbered. Nobody's not numbered, there's no amorphous groups in there.

All of them are totaled, they are subtotaled. So the total is given in verse 64, the whole assembly together was 42,360. Now if you go back and add up all of these groups, you will see that there is all of the subtotals given starting in verse 3 with the people of Parosh, 2,172, and you go all the way through until you get to verse 64.

Add all those up, you get 29,818. Now I'm an English major, but I'm pretty sure 29,818 is not the same as 42,360. There is a difference there of over 12,500 people, 12,542 to be exact.

So what is up with this list? Now if you do the same thing in the Nehemiah chapter 7 list and add up all of the subtotals, you'd say, well, I'm probably going to get 29,818 over there. No, you don't. The numbers are different enough that if you add up all of the subtotals in the Nehemiah 7 list, you get 31,089.

But he still gives in Nehemiah 7 the grand total of 42,360. Well at this point we say, my Bible has got mistakes in it. We shut it, we go home and start investigating other religions, right? Because these two lists are given as the same group leaving at the same time with the same leader, with the same purpose, going to the same place doing the same thing.

They are in the same book, and yet they differ by a significant amount. Nehemiah has got 1,765 people that are not in Ezra. Ezra has got 494 people that are not in Nehemiah.

I'll tell you a curious fact, and I'll confess I don't exactly know what it means, because if you add up the 765 people that are in Nehemiah 7, you get 1,765 people that are in Nehemiah and aren't in Ezra. If you add them into Ezra, and if you take the 494 that are in Ezra but not in Nehemiah, and you add them to Nehemiah's total, both totals in Ezra and Nehemiah, if you

take the extra guys in Nehemiah, add them to Ezra, take Ezra's extra guys, add them to Nehemiah, you get an exact total in both books of 31,583. Exactly.

Not even off by one. Still well short of the 42,360, right? But the totals, if you say Nehemiah caught a few that Ezra missed, Ezra caught a few that Nehemiah missed, put them all in there, those numeric totals are identical. So, stranger and stranger.

Here's my suggestion to you, because there is manifestly a problem in one or both of these lists, and it's been addressed in various ways. If you go look and see how people have tried to explain this, there are several different avenues of approach. One of them will say, well, let's look closely at the context, at the language.

In Ezra 2, he says in verse 1, these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity. In unequivocal terms, he says, here's your list of people that came back. No bones about it, here they are, and he gives the names and the numbers.

In Nehemiah, if you look a little bit earlier in chapter 7, look at verse 5. Nehemiah says, my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people that they might be registered by genealogy, and I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and this is what I found written in it. So, Ezra says, here's everybody that came back. Nehemiah 7 says, I found a list, and this is what it said.

People say, see, this list in Nehemiah 7 is faulty. Well, it may be, but I don't think that that's a little bit of an easy cop-out, I think. But that's one way people resolve it.

By the time Nehemiah looks at it a few years later, or they revise the list, maybe some people died on the way, maybe there were a few kids born, maybe there was some changes. But if you look closely, we don't have time to do it, it's really fascinating, the more you look at it and compare it number by number, and then look at the types of scribal errors that easily account for the difference. Many of the numbers are off by one stroke.

There will be a difference of literally one in the number in Ezra and the number in Nehemiah, it's just off by one person. In others, it's off by 1,000. There's a huge difference in one of the names where I think it's, you'll have to look down and compare, but one of them is off, the number is the same, but one of them starts with 3,000 and the other starts with 2,000, so it's off by 1,115 guys in one thing.

But the lists are manifestly different, and it appears when the more you study them that neither list is error-free. They like to think that that first list of guys that came back with Zerubbabel makes a total of 12, because this would comport, if you go back and look at the list that came out of Egypt with Moses, there is one man listed from each tribe, and they think, well, it's sort of an echo of that, and with the 12 names, you have the fullness of Israel represented. I'm not totally persuaded by that argument, because who is it that's returning? What does Ezra tell us? He says, these are the ones that were carried away and who are returning to Jerusalem and

Judah.

The ten northern tribes had been gone for 150 years when that happened, right? 721, the ten northern tribes were carried off by Assyria, and so the people in the Babylonian captivity are almost entirely from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, right? So the number 12 would have to be some sort of a symbolic thing and not actual representatives from Dan and Naphtali and the other tribes. So I don't find that terribly compelling, but there are 12 names in the Nehemiah 7 list where there are only 11 in Ezra 2. But you compare and there are name differences. Some of them, it's a difference of an N and an R, and those are easily confused letters in the Hebrew alphabet and somebody could have misread the list, could have been a bad copy.

Some of the numbers, most of them are off by one stroke. But let me just cut to the chase here, because one of the most widespread rocks that gets thrown at our Bible is that it's full of mistakes. And sooner or later, if you get into any sort of a discussion with somebody who knows anything, they're going to say, your Bible is full of mistakes.

Look at Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. Even within a few pages, the thing doesn't match itself. So what do we do with this? Well, I have two or three points to suggest. First of all, does the Bible ever record erroneous information? Does it record somebody saying something that is not true? What did the serpent say to Eve in the garden? You will not surely die.

Well, he's lying. In the day you eat thereof, you will surely die. But the serpent is trading on a technicality here, right? Because in the literal 24-hour day that they ate, they did not die.

They exited the garden. They wore the skins that God gave them for clothing. They went outside the gate that was guarded by the whorling sword.

They raised a family. They had Cain. They had Abel.

They had Seth. They had many other sons and daughters. People tend to forget the Bible says they had a plethora of sons and daughters after those first three.

So they did not die in the day in the sense that the serpent chose to interpret the Word of God. What did God mean when he said, in the day you eat thereof? In the day that you eat thereof, your death is certain. You are dead.

It's just now. It's a process. Death has begun.

Death is in your members. We begin to die from the time we're born practically, right? So what the serpent said is true in a narrow sense. What God said is true in an absolute sense, right? But many times in Scripture, things that are not true are recorded as true or as something that someone said.

So these are obviously flawed lists. So if they're in the Word of God, the flaws, and notice scribes down through the years did not correct these lists toward each other and make them

match. All Hebrew manuscripts agree in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. Nobody has tried to fudge them and get them to match.

This is always the accusation in the Gospels that, well, they've been corrected toward each other trying to make them match. And in a few cases you can show that in a minority manuscript somebody has added a phrase maybe from memory from reading another Gospel account. But these two lists stand here and evidently by God's will and purpose we've got these differing and flawed lists.

I would suggest to you that there is a purpose in this. What is the purpose of the list? What is the goal for even referring to this list? And for Nehemiah going back, what does he say? Look at Nehemiah chapter 7 verse 5. God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people that they might be registered by genealogy. It was important to establish identity amongst the returnees.

Why? What are they returning to? They're returning to the land of Israel land. And how is land ownership established? By tribe, by clan, by family. So substantiating your tribe and your clan and your family gives you title deed.

You know, people that do genealogy are always lamenting and bemoaning the fact that, especially during the Civil War, a lot of courthouses got burned and a lot of old records were lost. Well, you can only imagine in the sack of Jerusalem. Do you think that the Babylonians cared two hoots and a rain barrel about any sort of land records or genealogical records? These things had to be preserved by the individuals, by the people, by the families and clans and tribes in the stuff that they carried with them because all of the courthouses in Judah were destroyed, razed, burned, leveled, occupied by others.

This stuff was treated as trash by the occupiers and the occupiers. So how did the captives occupy their time in Babylon? Part of it was laboriously reconstructing their records and maintaining their records. It's sort of like the birthright.

They would do it by memory. They would try to write it down so it would not be forgotten. Remember, two generations have passed and these are the grandsons and great-grandsons of those who were taken into captivity years earlier.

So to return to their land, they've got to, it's just like you show your birth certificate. I am in fact Samuel Curtis Hall and I'm the guy that's entitled to whatever he's entitled to or I'm guilty of whatever he's guilty of. That's your identity.

So this was their land claim. What else are they returning to? Why are they returning at the decree of Cyrus? What's the stated purpose? Why does Cyrus send them back, these 42,000? To rebuild the temple. Well, if you rebuild the temple, who's going to run the thing? Who operates and oversees all of the ritual and protocol at the temple? Who does that? The priests.

Who can be a priest? You've got to be a son of Aaron and not just any old son of Aaron. You've

got to be of the priestly line, right? You've got the Kohathites. You've got the sons of Nerari.

You've got other Levites who are not in the Aaronic line. And so you've got to figure out who is qualified by birth, by lineage, to be a priest. That's why when you get close to the end of the list in Ezra chapter 2, as we saw last time, verses 2 through 20, these are the list of the returnees by their families.

So Parosh, he's a clan head. Shephatiah and Arah and Yeshua and Joab, they are clan leaders. And it's kind of interesting, in verse 6 it says, the people of Pahath Moab, of the people of Yeshua and Joab.

Pahath means governor or overseer or ruler. And you remember there was a time when Moab was brought into Judah because it was conquered and brought into subjugation. And so there were legitimate Judahites who lived in Moab and were a part of the administration.

And evidently this Pahath Moab is a remnant of that earlier time when these families were a part of the government there. But all the way down to the people of Hashim in verse 19 and the people of Gibar in verse 20, these are family names. Then starting in verse 21 and going through verse 35, they are listed by their towns.

And look at verse 21, the people of Bethlehem, 123. That's a pretty small start for the town that's going to eventually bring about the birth of the Messiah. It's one of the smaller groups there.

Not the smallest, but one of the smaller ones. One of the least of the towns of Judah, Bethlehem, 123. And Netopha and Anathoth and Kiriath and Reimah and Michmash and Bethlehem Ai.

Notice in verse 28, Bethlehem Ai, those were actually somewhat north. But in the time of Josiah when there was expansion and Judah had some of its largest late kingdom borders, these towns were included in it. So you've got inhabitants of Bethlehem Ai that are returning.

And near Nebo and so on. So down to verse 35, and you see verse 34, people of Jericho. So then in verses 36-39 you have the priests.

The priests, the sons of Jediah of the house of Yeshua, 973. This is one of the larger groups. This is a pretty fair chunk of everybody that's coming back.

When you add the priests and Levites and the rest of them together, it's well over a tenth of everybody coming back. And why would that be? What's the purpose of the return? These are the ones who have the most invested in it. They are the ones most concerned.

They are the ones, if this temple gets rebuilt, they are the ones that have got to get it up and running. So you need a healthy complement of priests and Levites and the Nepheneim, the servants that support the thing. And so that's what the rest of the chapter entails.

So those again are the reasons for this list. Land claim and service qualification. Got to move back into the land and got to establish that you're qualified for service.

We saw last time that there were some who came back, look at verse 62, they sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found. So they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean, not qualified. And the governor said they would not eat of the most holy things.

In other words, they could not serve as priests until a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim. And this is generally, they said, well, later on maybe you can be restored. And in fact, if you look at Chronicles, one of these families actually is listed in Chronicles as though they got restored to the priesthood.

But I'm not quite sure by what means, because the Urim and Thummim never occur. In fact, this is chronologically the last reference to Urim and Thummim in the Bible. And I get the idea that this was sort of an artful political stall.

Well, the only way we can determine that is with the Urim and Thummim. So whoever has a priest that's got those, why, you guys are back in. And evidently at least one family found their way in by another method.

But what about this discrepancy? The whole assembly together was 42,360, where by any total you run anywhere from, if you add Ezra to Nehemiah, add Nehemiah to Ezra and get the 31,583, you're still 10,777 names short. If you take the totals as they stand in Ezra and Nehemiah, you're still 11 or 12,000 short. So what makes up the difference in these lists? This has also been subject to multiple interpretations and explanations.

Some people say, well, this was the wives and children. The problem with that view is, just round it off to 30,000, and if you've got only 12,000 dependents, you've got a huge, overwhelming preponderance of young men who aren't married. And if all the rest of them are women and children, who are all these young men going to marry once they get there? It just seems like it's not very practical, and it would mean that roughly only one in three of these guys is probably married, if they're just counting women and firstborn sons even in this remainder.

It's not a very satisfactory explanation, but nobody can say for certain. I will tell you what I think, and I can't find anybody that agrees with me, so I'm once again a single set of footprints out in the unbroken snow. This is what I think.

Do you remember what happened when Israel marched out of Egypt? Who went with them? A mixed multitude, right? Now, these whom Cyrus has authorized and provisioned and encouraged to go and rebuild the temple are leaving a place where they have lived for two and three generations, right? In some cases, maybe they've got sons and daughters that have intermarried with the people of the land or whatever. But this early returning group, I think of those who can register a claim to being Israelite. Even these that can't qualify for the

priesthood are Israelites, the descendants of Barzillai.

Nobody disputes that they're Israel, just that they can't establish that they qualify as priests because they can't trace their line back to Aaron through his priestly descendants, right? But nobody disputes that everybody listed on these two pages in your Bible is genealogically a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But their total doesn't add up to the total that came back. So my suggestion is there were people who were either proselytes from the Babylonians for whom the prophecy that God gave Abraham that you will be a light to the Gentiles.

And these people have come to faith in God and they say, yeah, I can't qualify for a land claim. I can't qualify to serve even as a servant in the temple. But I want to go to God's land.

We've got some resources. I'll buy some land. I'll rent some land.

We'll be tenant farmers. We will set up a trade. We can work in bronze and iron.

We can be skilled laborers. We can assist with construction. We can help you rebuild the cities and towns.

We know construction. We've learned this stuff in Babylon. We're tradesmen.

We're knowledgeable. And we want to go to the land that your God is returning you to. I think these 10,000 to 12,000 spares are those people.

And they're not going to be in the list on the genealogical register, but they will be included in the total because this is how many people have come back. Now back to the question, why the erroneous entries in the list. And there are clearly, demonstrably, no question about it, there are errors in at least one of these lists and probably both.

Certainly where one differs from another, something is wrong. So what does that say about inerrancy and so on? Two points. The first one we already made.

The Bible records errors that people make. And certainly the list that Nehemiah uncovers, if this is a faithful copy of what he uncovered, then scribes made mistakes in the copy that he had and that copy is recorded. Personally, just for what it's worth, I think that there are errors in both lists.

It is notoriously difficult and there are demonstrable scribal errors in almost every genealogical list. If you've got any kind of collection of numbers in the Hebrew text, the way that they annotated numbers, plus the fact that over the course of the captivity, the way they wrote numbers changed. And so people who were reading an old list with the new math would misread it.

People who knew the old math but got a hold of a more recent update would misread that. And where they were using strokes and later on they reduced it to letters or vice versa. There's just great opportunity for error.

Why would God allow that? Why didn't he supernaturally superintend? Why didn't he inspiration, infallibility, all the rest of it, inerrancy? Why did that not pertain here? I would submit to you that what we are about to see in the remainder of this book, Ezra slash Nehemiah, is signaled by this shortfall in human effort. Because what they are going to do, and again I am largely alone in this and you can consult others, I don't claim that I've got the one right answer in interpreting this book, but I will tell you the more I study it, the more convinced I am that this is a record of a good start with authorization, with encouragement, and with provision. And people march forth with a tall spirit, but it does not last.

And it is a litany and it is a record of division, of failure, of loss of momentum, of stagnation. You remember I told you last time, they are going to go and arrive with Zerubbabel and they are going to start, they are going to lay the foundation of the temple just right after the decree is given. But then the work stagnates and it lays fallow for 16 years.

For 16 years, there is no sound of a hammer anywhere. Nothing is done. And it isn't until there is a call to action by Haggai and by Zechariah that people say, oh yeah, I guess that is why we came.

We've been so busy building our own houses, we just kind of forgot about the temple. And we are going to see that in Haggai next time. But this is a signal, the problems in this list, and that's the reason the book lists it twice.

It says look, just between Ezra and Nehemiah, it's only a few years. But in that time, look at the accretion of error and the difference and the uncertainty, because it's human effort. It's a human attempt to establish what only God knows for certain.

It's just the inevitable shortfall of the flesh. And it's recorded here on purpose, unadorned, uncorrected, to show us how dangerous it is to trust in man and make flesh our strength. Remember our memory verse? Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, whose heart departs from the Lord.

And that's what happened. They have this divine authorization, this divine provision, this divine impetus, but it quickly devolves into squabbling and deceit and opposition and the worst kind of bogging down in the details and in human conflict and what God called them to never happens. We're going to see it next time in Haggai.

But anytime somebody says your Bible is wrong, look at these two lists. The Bible is right. This is a record, a graphic record of the limitations of human effort.

Heart in the right place, well meant. But we're going to see as we go forward. There is a great lack of unity when it comes to worship.

You see a leader praying, you see a leader falling on his face, but the rest of the people aren't there. Do they meet for worship? Do they assemble? Are they united before the Lord? Are they like it was in the days of Joshua? No. Just the opposite and worse.

It's much more a harbinger of what you see in the days of the Lord Jesus and the days of the apostles. Strife, division, envy, jealousy, bitterness, apathy, indifference, outright hostility to the forward movement of God's plan. And what God promises them in Haggai never happens.

We're going to see it next time. If you want to read Haggai at a time, it's not that long of a book, but you look at Haggai and then you read the account in Ezra and Nehemiah, look at the difference in the potential and in the reality. And it's something for us to watch for in our own lives.

If we begin to work in our own strength and abandon the way that God's power comes into our lives, we are so blessed and so gifted in this age. Israel is a demonstration and a picture for us of the limitations of the human flesh. That's why God is going to bring them all back.

It wasn't their fault that they didn't have access to the presence and power and ubiquitous infilling and indwelling and enablement and empowering and gifting and baptism and regeneration and all the other wonderful things that come from the Holy Spirit. They are a demonstration in that day of how short our human flesh falls without God's enablement and God's power. We are the opposite.

We have access to all of those things and we can greatly surpass, by availing ourselves of God's provision, those limited achievements of the Old Testament. It's a new covenant. We are a new creation in Christ.

Old things are passed away, all things have become new. You say, well, it seems awfully unfair for the Old Testament saints. That's why they are all coming back.

What is the new covenant God makes with the house of Israel and the house of Judah? I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. This is the communication of God's truth.

This is God's Word. In the olden times it came by dreams and visions, revelations of God. They are going to have the Old Testament, the New Testament and some third testament in the millennium.

They are going to have God's Spirit and they are going to have God's Word. They are going to have the active presence of Jesus Christ and the sons of David ruling and they will catch up. They sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, but they are coming back.

That's why it says all Israel will be saved. They are going to come back and they are going to get the chance in the millennial kingdom to catch all of this up. With access to the same resources God has given us, now it will be determined where they stand and what they do.

That's why they are coming back to this earth. That's why we are not remaining on this earth. We are going to be in the heavenly realms because we have already taken that test.

We have already had our shot with the Word of God and the Spirit of God. So now is the appointed time. Now is the day of deliverance.

Now is the opportunity for us to avoid these very demonstrable mistakes and errors made in Israel by Israel. Even with their heart in the right place, they just fall short. There is no reason and no need for us to do that.

We've got these wonderful provisions from God. It's just a matter of focus, of decision, of commitment, of consecration, of prayer, and instruction, and fellowship. Those wonderful gifts that we are called to throughout the New Testament, especially in the letters of the Apostle Paul.

So even though this looks like a mess here, it's a wonderful encouragement because we are not under the glass ceiling that Solomon spoke about in Ecclesiastes. We are free with the freedom that Christ has given us, and that freedom comes in and through His Holy Spirit and His truth. So I hope this at least gives us a little bit of traction here as we look at the remainder of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The context will greatly inform our understanding of Haggai and Zechariah, which we'll be weaving into this account. And right in the middle of it is the time of Esther. And we'll get once again to see the nature of that story as it fits into this larger context.

But we'll close here for tonight in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the wonderful privilege we have of living in this age, of being a devoted gift from Your hand to Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A trophy for His victory on the cross over sin and over death, His personal possession. We pray that we can be worthy of that calling and that opportunity, that we can work out that deliverance in fear and trembling, that You will be at work in us to will and to do. Your purpose is on this earth that we can shine as a light and attract those who are hungry and are seeking for the truth of the Lord Jesus, salvation and deliverance in Him and through His name.

We pray that we'll have the opportunity to share that faith and that even without a word, our example will burn brightly as a beacon to You through the way, the truth, and the life. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.