

Kings and Prophets 17-08-31

This is Thursday, the 31st of August, 2017, and we continue our study in Kings and Prophets. We are in the book of Ezra, working our way through this continued history that we began looking at in Kings and Chronicles, and its parallels in Isaiah, for example. And now that the people are returning from captivity back to the land, we're looking at what people do, what God says, how He says it, and what the response is, because obviously the captivity and loss of the land was a tremendous chastisement, a tremendous judgment.

So did it work? Did it accomplish the turning and the change of heart that God requires of us when we are found to be short, when we are in line for correction? Hopefully it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. So did that happen in this case, and if not, why not? Where did they go wrong? You can already anticipate that I think it did not go as it should have. So let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and we'll pick up this very fascinating snapshot of the history of the returning captives of Judah.

Father, how grateful we are for this time of fellowship and study in Your Word. We thank You for each one who has chosen to join us, either now or in the future. We pray Your blessing on each one that as we look at these portions of Your Word and try to understand them and see their pertinence and applicability, that Your Holy Spirit will teach us, correct, rebuke, and instruct us in the power of Your Word so that we can improve, so that we can live a more dedicated and fruitful life, that we can more fully reflect the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

We pray these things in His name, amen. Well, we saw last time as we went through the prophet Haggai this whole situation where the first wave of returnees under the decree of Cyrus were commissioned to rebuild God's house. You start over.

This is kind of what God did with Israel at Sinai. He said, build me a tabernacle. This will be the sign, seal, and center of your identity as my people, my presence in your midst.

So as the people return to the land, they have a chance to sort of recapture those early national moments. This is a potential to rebuild the kingdom, to rebuild the dynasty of David, to renew and restore the nation's status as God's representatives on earth. So what does that require? What does the nation that reflects God and represents God on this earth look like? Well, ideally, we would look a lot like that as we represent the Lord Jesus here.

Our daily lives should reflect a separateness, a called-outness, a distinctiveness that marks us out as belonging to God. Why are you different? Because I belong to God. I love Him first and foremost.

And that love in the vertical is reflected in love in the horizontal. I look out not only for my own interests, but also for the interests of others. I love my neighbor as myself.

Those two great commands that Jesus said sum up all the law and the prophets, that love for

God ought to work itself out in different priorities than people of the world. It ought to be reflected in different goals. It ought to be manifest in different values.

We should look and live differently because we belong to God. That is what He expects of His people Israel, Judah in this case now, as they return from captivity. This is what they did not do in the days preceding.

Jeremiah called them to renewal, called them back to God, and they did not heed the warning. In earlier days in the northern kingdom, Elijah and Elisha had done the same thing. The people of God went out because they refused to honor God in their daily lives.

This became more and more rank and more and more unacceptable in God's sight until He essentially in a small way did to those nations what He did to the entire planet in the days of Noah. He took them off the earth, took them out and away. So, we looked last time at the return with this command to build the house of God.

This is a great opportunity and it's a relatively simple thing. He didn't say renew the national borders. He didn't say go in as with Joshua and drive out the current inhabitants by force of arms, purge out all of the well that are living there and clean it up, clean it out and establish a new nation for yourselves.

All He did was give them the command, the mission, go build my house. And He provided for that command. He gave them the authority of Cyrus the king and provisions in abundance to do it.

They had the means, they had the motive in terms of a command from God and they had the opportunity in terms of this support and encouragement from the highest authority in the land. Unlike many of the difficult missions that have faced the people of God in all of the preceding Old Testament days, this is one of the easier things that God asked them to do. Go back to Jerusalem with all of this loot that I've caused the king to give you and to liberate from the treasuries some of the original stuff that was taken in the incursions of Nebuchadnezzar years before, take this stuff back, build me a house.

How hard can it be? Well apparently it was really hard because they got back there and laid the cornerstone with great fanfare. They were singing and shouting and rejoicing and weeping and you couldn't tell if people were laughing or crying, it was all such a great wonderful start. And within two years it utterly and completely fizzled and they let opposition stop them.

Look again at Ezra and of course last time when we looked at Haggai we saw the repeated messages from Haggai to get busy and get it done. But turn back to Ezra and just take a quick look here because the symptoms point back to a fundamental problem of the heart and this is only going to get worse. We saw in Ezra chapter 5 that Haggai and Zechariah, see 5.1 of Ezra, the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Ido, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the God of Israel and Zerubbabel who has been marking time here,

he's a great guy and a great leader but nobody is following him.

They have let the opposition bog them down and we saw that in chapter 4 where this letter was written, Rehom the commander in 4.8 and Shimshi the scribe sent this letter to Artaxerxes that these people in Judah have always been rebellious, they're nothing but a thorny problem and if you let them get any kind of rebuilding going they're going to be nothing but a problem and it's summed up in verse 16 of chapter 4. We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the river, which is a big fat lie. It's a projection based on fear and speculation and by the way the project is not to rebuild the walls or the city, it's to rebuild the house of God, that's what the commission was, that's all Zerubbabel is trying to do. But the letter says well these people are going to turn back into the ones that had to be subdued and captured and were rebellious and a series of kings had to come in and even Nebuchadnezzar had to come in three times and finally wipe them completely out, they're going to turn right back into them, give them an inch, they'll take a mile and this letter succeeds because the king sends an answer and he says in verse 21, give the command to make these men cease that the city may not be built until the command is given by me.

Now this is in the beginning of the reign of Artaxerxes. Cyrus, after he gave his decree, reigned for another eight or ten years. They could have easily completed this temple within the reign of Cyrus who gave them the original behest, right? But they frittered away that opportunity and now there's a new king who knows not Joseph so to speak and he is easily convinced by this letter that these people should not proceed and so the whole thing is now officially shut down.

They missed the window. There was a time and an opportunity, God gave the means motive and all of the provision they needed, they frittered that away, well now the authorization has expired. It's been revoked and whatever resources they had have already been diverted.

Other people seem to be living in paneled houses according to Haggai and the house of God stands in ruins. So, dallying, remember when God told Abraham to get up out of the Chaldees and go to the land, I will show you, did he do it? No. He took his daddy and a bunch of the rest of the families and they ended up up north and he stalled out, right? And God had to put some explosives under him to get him moving again.

Sort of the same thing happens here and it's going to be a thorn in the side. There wouldn't have been people up in the north to go back to, Jacob would not have had to leave to go back up and find a wife and dally around with Leah and Rachel. If they had all kept moving, if Abraham had said, look we've got a mission from God to go to this land and this ain't it, why are we stopping here? Nahor would have had no land up north and there wouldn't be a bunch of half-baked people to go get a wife from.

They would have all come down to the land. But there was delay, there was lack of impetus, lack of force, lack of completion. You were running well, who hindered you? There's the constant refrain in the Bible, you started great and then you tripped and fell flat.

That's what has happened here. Well, now they've lost their authorization and this whole project is going to lay fallow for, what, 18 years. So then Haggai and Zechariah finally say, hey people, what happened to the whole get with it thing? And so Zerubbabel and Joshua rise up and begin to build the house of God and the prophets of God were with them helping them.

They've got two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, pitching in, exhorting the people, God is with us, come on, don't let this edict of the king slow you down. They've got no fresh authorization, they've just resumed. And so then Tatenai, the governor, he's a government mucky-muck.

And he says, wait a minute, we had this whole Artaxerxes command that says this stuff ought to be shut down. What authorization do you have to continue this? And they take names. You've heard of this whole thing about we're going to be taking names? Well, they take names.

So verse 4, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so they could not make them cease until a report could go to Darius. So they couldn't get a restraining order to stop the construction.

They continued constructing while they're waiting to get some kind of official word. It's okay, Ma, I think they're going up. We're getting a delivery.

Anyway, the governor of the region beyond the river sends this letter. And they're going to try to do the same thing. Remember the last letter that got sent to the government, shut everything down.

So Tatenai says, well, we're going to write a letter. So he sends it, and he concludes in verse 17 of chapter 5 of Ezra, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house in Babylon whether this decree was actually ever issued. And you get the idea that Tatenai figures after all of this time has passed, there's not going to copy be found, and because they lack the paperwork, it's kind of like if you lose the original of a document that secures your title deed.

There's a probably half mythical story in my family about how on my dad's mother's side, everybody was French. And there was holdings back in the days of the French monarchy, and these people were well-to-do and had a lot of property. Well, then, of course, you had Napoleon off with her head and all the rest of it.

And so all of the nobility lost their holdings and all that. So a bunch of them fled and came across over to Canada. These are the Bouchard ancestors in our family.

Well, they kept all their paperwork. And so after everything settled down and they said, well, you know, this was wrongful, the whole revolution and the rest of it, the French Revolution and all of that, unfairly deprived people of their land. So if you can show proof that you own it, we'll give it back to you.

Well, the Bouchards, our great-great so-and-sos, ancestors and granduncles and whatnot, had

the paperwork. And they were also intermarried with the Langerais family. So the Bouchards and the Langerais had quite a few square miles of land in France.

And so they said, aha, we'll go back and reclaim this stuff. And so they got all the paperwork together because they had the original documents signed by the king of France. So he got on a ship and was sailing over there to set us all up to be wealthy, and there was a storm and the ship sunk.

He lived, but he lost all the paperwork, all of his possessions. He escaped just with his life, bobbing around in the North Atlantic there and was rescued. But all the paperwork was forever lost.

Well, that's the end of that. That's why we're living in Oklahoma and not in gay Paris or something. But the original documents make a big difference.

Now, here's my whole reason for that long detour. Tatanai writes this big, long half-a-chapter letter saying, These guys don't have a leg to stand on unless they can produce the decree from Cyrus. Who left with the decree of Cyrus in his pocket and came to Jerusalem and started this thing in the first place? What's his name? He's still around.

It's 18 years ago, right? Who came with the initial crowd and laid the foundation, and there was great shouting and celebration and people laughing and crying? Who was that? Who was the leader? Remember Seed of Babylon? Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel's the man. Zerubbabel got authorization direct from the king to do this stuff, right? So here's my question.

When Tatanai comes up and says, By what right do you do this building or resume this building or whatever? And they say, Well, we're going all the way back to the decree of the original king there, Cyrus. And he says, Well, where's your paperwork? Zerubbabel evidently lost it because he doesn't have a copy to show anybody. Nobody's got a copy of the authorizing documents that gave them permission to come back and build the temple.

What happened to their documents? This is like losing your birth certificate or your ID card in the military. I mean, it's horrendous. This is the most important document they've had since the scriptures.

It authorizes them to build God's house, and evidently they lost it. How do I know this? Because they can't turn up a copy anywhere in Jerusalem. They can't turn up a copy among any of the returnees that all came back was all of that fanfare, all of that singing, all of that rejoicing, all of that laughing and crying and weeping and celebrating and fasting and praying and all the rest of it.

Well, in the midst of that, they lost their paperwork. It wasn't important enough to them, evidently. So look at chapter 6 of Ezra.

So King Darius issues a decree to make a search in the archives where the treasures are stored

in Babylon. And way off in Acmetha, this is probably Ecbatana, which is the historic capital of the Median Empire, the Medes. The Medes' capital is at Ecbatana, and this is a Hebrew sort of transliteration of that.

Lucky, quote-unquote, for Zerubbabel and the rest of the guys who are supposed to be carrying out God's command, way off in the archives of their captors is a dusty copy of this. This is like losing all of the data on your hard drive, and miraculously you've got an old floppy disk that's got the copy of your legal wranglings from 25 or 30 years before, and you manage to find something that will play this old 5 1/4-inch floppy, and you retrieve this information. It's off in a dusty archive of the Medes.

Not in the Persian capital, not in Babylon. It's in Ecbatana. And some diligent guy went all the way out to the boonies and looked in the backup of the backup of the backup and found a copy of this all-important decree.

To hear most people tell it, this is the decree that you measure the 70 weeks to figure out when Jesus is coming. I don't personally hold with that, but that's what most people think. Well, they couldn't even find a copy.

So it tells you that there is enthusiasm and zeal, but not according to knowledge. And it does not endure. It does not persist.

You know they had this decree in their hands when they left Babylon and came back to Jerusalem. But in the ensuing couple of decades, it just didn't become important. And it's gone.

And they don't have it anymore. It's awful. And so they finally find it in this province of Media.

Often somewhere they find it. And somebody returns it to the king, who then says, okay, so my predecessor two or three kings back did authorize this after all. And this revokes the decree of Artaxerxes and gets them going again.

So you read that whole thing in chapter 6. And so once Tadei in verse 13 of chapter 6 gets the official go ahead, he's a good governmental flunky. And he says, okay, three bags full. If your papers are in order, you can proceed.

And so he did diligently according to what King Darius had sent. So the elders of the Jews built. They prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

Zechariah is actually the grandson of Iddo. We'll see that shortly. But as you know, son of means descended from.

And there can be any number of generations between. They built and finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

Now, do you remember the year that Cyrus originally issued the decree to finish the temple? He says, the God of Israel has told me you guys need to build his house. Go do it. Here's the money.

Here's the permission. Go. Remember what year that was? He came to the throne of this in like 538.

And everybody thinks, well, it took a couple of years. So 536, two years after, somewhere in the 536-538 area, that's when they got the authorization. This sixth year of the reign of Darius is 516.

516. So from 538-536 down to 516, this is 20 years later. They finally get it done.

Now they laid the foundation and then they had all that opposition. They get this done in roughly two years, it appears. Why didn't they do it in the time of Cyrus? What happened? Didn't strike while the iron was hot.

Did not carry through. Did not follow through. And my suggestion from this for us is, when we have a clear responsibility before the Lord, Scripture makes it clear, there's no fuzziness about it.

Am I supposed to be a good husband? Am I supposed to be a good father? Am I supposed to be a good mother? Am I supposed to be a good wife? Am I supposed to be a good child? Am I supposed to be a good employee? Am I supposed to be diligent in not forsaking the assembling of myself together? Am I supposed to be a good steward of my time and my resources? Am I supposed to be reflecting love for God in every aspect of my life, all my heart, all my soul, all my strength? Am I supposed to be putting the interests of others ahead of my own? Am I loving my neighbor as myself? These things are clear. There's no ambiguity. There's no lack of support.

There's no lack of encouragement. There's no lack of ability. But if we are apathetic, if we are lackadaisical, if we are casual, if we figure, well, there's time, I'll get around to that very soon.

One of these days, I'm really going to push through. It's like cleaning the garage for me. Oh, yes, I'm all about that.

Nothing I like better than a clean garage. But week after week, month after month, year after year goes by, and the thing, you can tell yourself you have a priority. You can say you have a goal.

You can say that you value a thing. But if it does not reflect in your life, if it doesn't happen like this, the prophet of God is going to come calling and say, hey, why is the temple of God in ruins and you're living in a paneled house? You're living to please yourself, despite what you tell yourself, despite what you say. And you've lost your papers.

You've lost the authority that got you there in the first place. Do the Gentiles have to dig it up

out of their archive and bring it back to the people of Judah so that they can do God's will? They wouldn't get there without these Gentile record keepers. It's embarrassing.

Really. Israel is supposed to be the light to the Gentiles. They're supposed to be manifesting the kind of thing where the Persians and the Medes and everybody else say, I want what they've got.

And instead, they're beholden and they're submissive and they're dependent and they're being supported and goaded on by their former captors. It's not the way it's supposed to work. God is going to get his will done and his work done one way or another, but we want to be a positive part of that, not a negative object lesson.

So they finally do get it done. So this is in 516. Now make a note, at least mentally, of that year, 516.

For round numbers, say they started in 536 with the decree of Cyrus. Twenty years later, they finally pull the thing across the finish line. And there is, once again, just like there was at the beginning, great celebration and rejoicing.

Look at verse 16 of chapter 6. Children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God. A hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

They're harking back. They say this could be the beginning of the restoration of the other ten tribes. You remember that this is mostly Judah and perhaps some Benjamites, maybe a few Joseph.

If you read closely in Chronicles, it appears that Joseph and Benjamin were both represented. Remember there's Ephraim and Manasseh. There are remnants, a few small remnants of Ephraim and Manasseh that chose to live in Jerusalem with the Benjamites and the Judahites.

So you've got your Rachel tribes and Judah. And you don't see them listed by tribe in the returnees anywhere. So you figure, well, they're offering a twelve male goat offering here, remembering they're trying to go back to the beginning.

When we built the tabernacle, we had twelve tribes, right? They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions over the service of God in Jerusalem as it is written in the book of Moses. Okay, had a hiccup here, had an eighteen year delay, but now we've got her done. And now the nation is going to rebuild.

There's going to be a spiritual renewal, renaissance, revival. It's all going to really happen now. What do you notice is missing at this dedication? What happened when Moses completed the tabernacle? What happened? Something supernatural happened.

The glory of God, so much so that nobody could get near the thing. It's interesting, everybody talks about God's Shekinah glory, and yet Shekinah is nowhere in the Bible. The word Shekinah is not in your Old Testament anywhere.

In the story of the tabernacle, the story of Solomon's temple, never mentions Shekinah. That's Talmud, Mishnah, this is Jewish rabbinical language. But Shekinah is not in your Bible.

We always talk about the Shekinah glory, but I got to looking and I thought, where is that? Well, it isn't. But the glory of God, the presence of God, enshrouded and enveloped and infilled that tabernacle. Same thing when Solomon dedicated his temple.

The glory cloud came. What did Haggai say that we saw last week? If you get this thing built, I will come and fill it with my glory. Remember that? Right over there in Haggai.

I don't have time to turn back there, but it's a short book. You can find it. God said, I will fill it.

Do you see any record of a glory cloud here in Ezra chapter 6? This is extremely disturbing. Haggai and Zechariah helped them get this thing done. Haggai said that God said, if you build this thing and do it right, I will come and fill it with my glory.

Well, they got it built, and the glory did not show. The guest of honor, the occupant of the house, did not show up. Where is he? I promise you, you can go to commentary after commentary after commentary on Ezra.

I've read so many, my eyeballs are floating. Nobody talks about the fact that God didn't show up. He's not there.

This is huge. Look at the tabernacle. Look at Solomon's temple.

This thing has been rebuilt for the first time in over 100 years. 586, it got knocked down. 516, it's restored.

How many years is that? 70 years. How long did God say they were going to be out of the land? 70 years. 586 to 516, there's your 70 years.

I said over 100. I'm an English major. It's under 100.

It's 70. 70 years. Knocked down 70 years earlier, restored in 516.

70 years. Could have been done sooner, but it wasn't. But God knew ahead of time.

The temple mount is even going to get its rest for 70 years. But there it stands. What an opportunity.

What a moment. God's not there. Why is He not there? That is the question.

If we feel like we have done what God requires, we are hitting our marks. He says, do this, and

we're doing it. He says, be a good husband, and we're trying to do that.

Be a good father, we're trying to do that. Be a good child, we're trying to do that. Be a good mother, be a good husband.

Be a good wife. Be a good employee. All of the things I mentioned earlier, the things that we know God requires.

To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. We're trying to do those things. What if God doesn't show up? What if you're Zerubbabel? What if you're Haggai and Zechariah? This is like all the people from 1846 forward who said, we've done the calculations, and Jesus should be coming back today.

1984. I've still got that big, fat book that proves 97 different ways Jesus is coming back in 84, and He did not come. 1988.

It's 40 years. The generation will not pass away from the restoration of the Jews in 48. He's going to come back, this, that, and the other, and God does not show up.

If you're expecting God, and He doesn't show up, something is wrong. Right? Something is wrong. There is not enough attention paid when studying the book of Ezra to what is wrong, and God did not show up.

Right here. So look at verse 19. The descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month.

The priests and the Levites had purified themselves. All of them were clean. They slaughtered the Passover lambs for the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren, the priests, and for themselves.

Then the children of Ezra, who had returned from the captivity, ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel. They've separated themselves from the filth of the land. What exactly that means in practice? Did they find some, you know, teraphim sitting around in their backyards, or did they, you know, sweep the streets clean? Did they find some public bazaars where there were still necromancers and so on? Did they clean out the brothels? What did they do? It just says they separated themselves from the filth of the land, and we don't know exactly what that meant, but they did something physical here.

They made some sort of change, did some kind of cleanup. I think we're safe in saying that. 22.

They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord made them joyful and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. And when they say the king of Assyria, this is a little bit of an anachronism, right? Because this is more the district. This is the region of Syria or Assyria

because the Assyrians are long gone.

They were destroyed by Babylon, and Babylon's been taken over by the Persians, and the Persians are ruling now. Even the Medes are sort of subordinate to them. So this is the king of that region.

This is like talking about the Caesar of the land. Strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. So you think, all right, that's the beginning.

This is what people have called the revival under Zerubbabel, and so on. They're back, and they're doing it. Then you turn to chapter 7. Now, after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra, the son of Sarai, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of this, that, and the other, all the way down, down, down, down, down.

Verse 6, Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a skilled scribe in the law of Moses. The king granted him his request so that he could come back with the children of Israel, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethanim, came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of king Artaxerxes.

Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, and he had prepared his heart, verse 10, to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. That's what he's going to do. Now, what you don't realize in reading this book is when it says, now after these things in verse 1, and we find ourselves now in the seventh year of king Artaxerxes, from the end of chapter 6 to the beginning of chapter 7 has been almost 60 years.

Almost 60 years. What was the date 60 years ago? What year was it 60 years ago from 2017? 1957. 1957.

That's how long it's been. Imagine that the temple got finished in 1957, and this year, Ezra shows up to teach the statutes and ordinances. Seriously? They've got the priests and Levites all fixed up.

Don't they need to know the laws and the ordinances? Don't the priests teach, and enforce, and represent, and picture with the rituals, and the offerings, and the feasts, these things? And it's nearly six decades later. It's actually 57 years. 57, 58 years, depending on what part of this renal year you want to look at.

But it's been nigh on 60 years between chapter 6 and chapter 7. What happened during that time? Nothing. Nothing happened. On this site in 1897, this plaque over the fireplace, on this site in 1897, nothing happened.

Well, on this site for close to 60 years, nothing happened. And all this time later, Ezra gets it in his heart. He hears how things are going back in Jerusalem as he is born, and grows up, and realizes nothing is happening.

They got the temple built, God didn't show up, and nothing is happening there. So he says, he's

got a burden on his heart to go and teach. He says, we'll get the law cranked up, and this will get things moving again.

So, in verse 9 of chapter 7, first day of the first month, he began his journey from Babylon. On the first day of the fifth month, he came to Jerusalem. So, it's about a four-month trek.

It takes him four months to get from where he is back to Jerusalem. According to the good hand of his God upon him, Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, he had to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. And he's got a copy of a letter from Artaxerxes that authorizes him.

In verse 13, I issue a decree. The people of Israel, the priests of the Levites, volunteer to go to Jerusalem, they go with you. You're being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the law of your God, which is in your hand.

You are to carry silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem. Silver and gold you may find all in the province of Babylon, freewill offerings of the people and priests, freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem. Be careful to buy with it bulls, rams, lambs, grain offerings, drink offerings.

Offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. Whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and gold, do according to the will of your God. Articles for the service of the house of your God, deliver them in full.

Whatever more may be needed, get that done. Now, you see this wonderful positive inclination toward the service of God and willingness to contribute substantially to worship. One of the things that has happened in this nearly 60 year interval is your book of Esther.

And this king is a product of the days of Mordecai and Esther. Remember we said that when we did the book of Esther and looked at the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and for the Jews to have autonomy and you have the whole new feast that is implemented. That was in the days of Xerxes which were 480-470 timeframe.

We are now down in 458, 60 years later. You get back up to the 516-508 timeframe that we saw in the end of chapter 6. So in the intervening space between chapter 6 and chapter 7, that's where Esther goes. Why is Ezra possessed of this art of Xerxes letter that does so much and authorizes so much and is so proactive and so positive for the worship of God in Jerusalem? This guy is in the royal line and upstream of him is Esther.

And in the government has been Mordecai. And this has created a very positive climate for God's people. God did that.

God put Esther there. God gave her the courage and the strength, put Mordecai there with the courage and the strength to do what needed to be done for God's people. That's why Ezra can come.

So between Zerubbabel and Ezra, you have Esther and Mordecai. That wonderful story. So, I love this in verse 12 of chapter 7. Art of Xerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of God of heaven, perfect peace, and so forth.

Et cetera, et cetera. Peace, et cetera. Just fill in your long involved greeting.

Get to the good stuff. I issue a decree. So, verse 27.

Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart. We know how he put such a thing as this in the king's heart because we've got the book of Esther. It's not an accident.

It wasn't just a whim. He didn't just walk out in the palace garden one day and say, you know, thank God of Israel. He needs to be worshipped a little better.

God did this. To beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.

Now, think about this. This harks back a long ways. In 538 you had Cyrus similarly positively disposed sending great amounts of gifts and authorization to go and do.

And what happened? Big celebration, lots of singing and feasting and rejoicing, weeping and laughing and then it all fell flat. Right? It got distracted. There was something missing in the heart, something missing in terms of dedication and the opposition was allowed to stop them.

Did opposition stop Joshua when he went into the land of Canaan? Did opposition stop Moses when he was leaving Egypt? Did opposition stop David when he wanted to bring the ark to Jerusalem and when he wanted to turn Jerusalem into his capital? When the men of God have got God on their side and have got their hearts right, Gideon with his 300 guys and their lamps and pitchers are enough to rout an army 100 times their size. The reason the opposition succeeded is that they did not qualify for that covenant that we saw in Haggai. I make with you the covenant I made with your fathers when I brought them out of Egypt.

If you obey from the heart, I will bless you and one of you will put to flight a thousand. If you don't, you're in big trouble. So now keep that in mind because Ezra is going to come back to the land and he's going to wonder what has gone wrong here that after 60 years preceded by another 20 years with only sporadic obedience, why are we not doing better? Why are we not really turning back into the kingdom of God that we remember from the glory days of David and Solomon? What's the problem here? And he's going to be looking to answer that question.

What is the matter with us? We've got the temple built, but we're just in terrible shape. So in chapter 8 he's going to list all of the people to come back with him. He's going to list in the middle of that the servants for the temple.

And look at verse 21 of Ezra chapter 8. I proclaimed a fast. Once they all got back. He lists everybody that came back with him.

A great crowd. Reminds you of Zerubbabel. All of these people are listed by name and by affiliation.

And here we are, a mighty host. And we're coming back and we're going to get this thing done. We're all coming back.

We're all dedicated. All of them designated by name. Verse 21.

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Havhava that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. Look at verse 22. They stopped and proclaimed a fast.

Why? Because they are afraid of being attacked in the way. But they're too ashamed to ask the king for an armed escort. Which he would have gladly provided.

You can see the proactive way that he's provided. But Ezra had talked a big fight. Read verse 22.

I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road because we had spoken to the king saying the hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him and His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him. So we've got God on our side. Nothing can stop us.

So they don't want to go back and say, oh, by the way, can we have an armed escort while we're traveling this four-month journey to get back to the land. You know, there's all kinds of hazards and hostile territory in between. But we talked this big fight to the king about how much we trust God.

So I am ashamed to ask Him. He didn't say... Now, I want you to notice. What does Ezra not say here? He doesn't say, I didn't need to ask the king for an escort because God was on our side.

He said, I was embarrassed to ask for an escort because I had told the king God was on our side. Think about that. What is in the heart? Did Joshua say, well, I didn't want to ask for help from any of the surrounding nations.

I didn't want to go back and see if any of the Midianites were still on our side from the days of Moses' youth. I didn't want to go ask for any allies even though we were facing seven nations greater and mightier than us. But I was ashamed to ask for any help because I had already written the law on the whitewashed cliffs and I had spoken all these great and mighty words.

And so I was embarrassed to ask for help. And I was just really hoping that nothing bad happened when we went into the land. There's a heart problem here and it's in this verse.

You don't say, well, I'm going to have to trust God because it's too embarrassing to ask for help.

Who cares what you said to the king? If you really believe that God is at work for good upon all those who seek Him, there's no shame anywhere. What is there to be ashamed about? We're trusting God for it and I told the king so and away we went and you know what? We made a safe trip because God was on our side.

Why would you write down? I really seriously considered asking for an escort but I was ashamed because I had talked a big fight. The issue here is not his actual faith in God, it's his, he's kind of forced by his bold words to live out what he said was his faith. Is that how it looks to you? That's how it looks to me.

I was ashamed to request of the king an escort. Well, so verse 23, so we fasted and treated our God for this. Lord, we've really put ourselves in a spot now.

We can't ask for an armed guard, so would you please protect us? But if he has the promise of God, the hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him. Well, we are seeking Him. I'm a scribe of the law, I'm a teacher of the law, I'm going to teach His word.

All these people are with me and they believe in this mission. The hand of God is upon us for good. So we don't have to stop and fast and then treat and pray and hope and oh my God.

If you've been seeking God on a regular basis all along, you don't have to make a big production out of this. You just march, wait for the water to part, go on across, watch for the hell storm to wipe out your enemies and get on with it. This is a very shaky and tenuous faith.

It talks a good fight, but when it comes to crossing the river, whoa, we've got no armed escort. Everybody fast and pray. I sure hope God's up there listening.

It does not bode well. That's what I'm suggesting. Separated 12 of the leaders, weighed out the silver and gold to them in verse 25, the offering of the house of our God.

I weighed it into their hands and I said to them in verse 28, You are holy to the Lord. The articles are holy also. The silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord God of your fathers.

Watch and keep them with you until you weigh them before the leaders and priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses in Israel and Jerusalem. So the priests and Levites received the silver and the gold and articles by way to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God. Basically what he did here is he took the resources that the king had given him and what they had collected in Babylon and he divided it up so that if they got attacked, they might be able to save some of it.

He divided it into 12 separate piles, figuring, well, at least some of it will get through. If I put it all in one, it could all be captured at once. This is how I read this, because it comes hard on the heel of the fasting and treating God.

And I separated 12 of the leaders. I divided it into 12 groups. And I said, you guys each keep a separate count of this and we'll meet back up in Jerusalem and give as much as gets there to the priests.

We departed on the twelfth day of the first month to go to Jerusalem and the hand of God was upon us and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. And we came to Jerusalem, stayed there three days. On the fourth day, the silver and gold and the articles were weighed in the house of God by the hand of Meremoth and he gave us an accounting.

It all got there. There was no graft. There was no skimming.

There was no dipping into the till here. And they offered these burnt offerings, 12 bulls, 96 rams, 77 lambs, 12 male goats as a sin offering, burnt offering to the Lord, delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and governors beyond the river. They gave their support to the people and the house of God.

So, okay, we've made it. Kind of a shaky trip, but they got there. Look at the first verse of chapter 9. When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the land with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the people of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass. When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe.

I plucked out some of the hair on my head and beard. I sat down astonished. Everyone who trembled at the words of God and Israel assembled to me.

Because of the transgression, those had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. Ezra is just in utter and complete shock. He just tears his clothes, rips out his beard, makes himself a spectacle.

Everybody who trembles at the word of the Lord, which they get from Ezra, sits and is all in shock as well. At the evening sacrifice, I arose from my fasting, and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, and I said, O my God, look at verse 6. See anything familiar? I am ashamed. I am too ashamed.

I am too humiliated to lift up my face to you, my God. For our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Now we're going to look at this in more detail next time.

But I want you to observe in the passage three things. Number one, it has been a while since they finished the temple, right? 57 years. Haggai and Zechariah may have gone to their reward

by now, right? But if God is in this, and if there is a problem, does God not point that out? Remember when Israel was getting ready to attack Ai, and God drew them up short and said, there is sin in the camp, and I'm not going to bless you until you root out Achan and his family and find that hoard of stolen goods that are Corban, and until you eliminate the sin in the camp, I'm not going to bless you.

Was there a problem when Moses was coming back from Midian and Mount Sinai and was going to go in and lead the people out, and God stopped him at the edge of Egypt? There was sin in the camp. He had not observed the ritual, going all the way back to Abraham, had not circumcised his own son. How are you going to lead the people when your own house is not in order? And God was ready to kill him at the border.

You have Zipporah, you're a bloody bridegroom, right? God sent the word. Remember when Balaam was going to go and say something over the people of Israel at Balak's request, and God stopped him with the angel in the path, and his donkey wouldn't go forward, and the donkey finally talks, because Balaam keeps trying to go forward, and he's just beating his donkey senseless. God stopped him because there was something wrong, and before he could proceed to do God's will, God drew him up short.

God sent him a message, right? And this happens over and over and over again. Saul is on the road to Damascus, getting ready to hail some more Christians into prison and confiscate their goods, and Jesus stops him in the road and says, you've got a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Let me straighten you out, in so many words.

It's hard for you to kick against the pricks. God stops him. God squares him away.

God sets him in a new direction, and his zeal now is going to be accomplishing something great. Who brings this word? Is it a prophet? Is it a priest? Is it anybody who's authorized to speak for God? It's the leaders who come in. Do the leaders come and say, look, Ezra, we've got to tell you something.

We have done wrong. We have erred, and we need to make this right, or we don't think God is going to bless us. They're convinced that they're the ones that the good hand of God is upon, and they're all righteous.

So whose sins are they confessing here? Those guys. We've looked around here now that we've arrived, we who the good hand of God is upon, and we who are miraculously preserved from all sorts of insults along the way, and we who are holy are looking around, finding that the people, and especially the hand of the leaders and rulers, has been foremost in this trespass. We need to square them away.

We need to make sure they fix their problem. I submit to you, this is not the path to the will of God. Look at the log in your own eye before you start trying to extract motes from the eyes of others.

This is all about noting the transgression of others. And Ezra is shocked. He is just shocked.

Tears his clothes. He's astonished until evening, and he goes to God and he says, Oh Lord, I can't believe what these people have done. I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face.

But look, that's number one. It's the other guys that have polluted this deal and messed us up. Number two.

What is your scriptural basis for this judgment? With respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. Now you remember very explicitly, and we looked at this last time over in Deuteronomy chapter 7, God told the people as they were going into the land, Deuteronomy chapter 7, this is in the days of Moses, it's early Deuteronomy. Moses wrote this, right? Moses got this word.

God tells Moses something. Just keep your finger here real quick, this will just take a second. Go to Deuteronomy chapter 7, and keep your finger in Ezra and compare the list.

Deuteronomy 7, When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you. There is a context here for what he says. When the Lord God has brought you into the land, and when God has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Seven nations greater and mightier than you. You're going to go up against impossible odds. God is going to drive these nations out, and you've got to trust him to do that.

When the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. When God gives you the means and the motive and the opportunity, you will conquer and destroy. You will finish this mission.

Make no covenant with them, show no mercy to them, nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. They will turn you to the gods of the land.

They will adulterate you. Now, what is the context here? He doesn't say don't adopt their practices. He doesn't say don't take their contaminated cattle, or any of the rest of it.

It's specifically marriages. What did marriages do in the ancient world? What have they done all the way down almost to the present day? They seal alliances. This is what Solomon did when he came to the throne.

He married the daughters of the surrounding kings. They've done this in Europe for generations. How do you think the Habsburgs ended up in England and so on? It's sealing alliances.

God's specific purpose in giving this command is when you go up against seven nations greater and mightier than you, don't say, you know what, these guys are too mighty to defeat. Let's make an alliance. We'll intermarry with them and they won't clobber us.

We'll go along to get along. Remember, this was the sin of Balaam when he counseled the Moabites to intermarry with the Israelites so that they wouldn't be destroyed. Remember that? And there was great discipline.

God said, you don't intermarry to seal alliances. It's not right. And that's the context here.

When you go up against seven nations greater and mightier than you, don't fall back on a human solution. You conquer them and destroy them. Don't intermarry with them so that you don't have to fight them because you're afraid they will beat you.

That's the context. And if you do that, they will corrupt you and lead you into their practices because when you don't defeat and destroy them, these Amorites, these wicked nations whose iniquity is full, they are hopeless. They are under a curse.

They have demonstrated that they're never going to turn to God. You're not going to take those bad apples and turn them good when you put them in your barrel. Those bad apples are going to turn the good apples bad.

So have no truck with them. These specific nations in the land, these seven entities are to be destroyed. Now, very quickly, keep your finger here because what is the list? You've got the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations.

Look at the list in Ezra. Okay, Canaanites, check. Hittites, check.

Perizzites, check. Jebusites, check. All of those are in the scriptures.

So you say, well, see, he's quoting Deuteronomy. This is all good to go. What comes after the Jebusites? Ammonites? God didn't say anything about the Ammonites in Deuteronomy 7. They're not the people of the land.

They're not one of the seven nations greater and mightier than you. What about the Moabites? There's no Moabites listed in Deuteronomy 7. You remember the Moabites and the Ammonites are the descendants of Lot through his daughters. Neither one of those is mentioned there.

Egyptians? There's no Egyptians mentioned in Deuteronomy 7. They started well, but they can't even get through the quote before they start corrupting and changing the scripture. God never said don't intermarry in Deuteronomy 7 with the Moabites and the Ammonites. He's got some things to say about them, but he does not say don't contract marriages with them.

Now, very quickly, just think about this. In the days of David, and you remember Jesus in the New Testament refers back to the days of David, and he says, you know, wasn't there a law that

said nobody's supposed to eat the holy loaves? And yet David, there are exceptions, and David was allowed to eat that bread, and it was okay. You're throwing rocks at my disciples for harvesting on the Sabbath because they're plucking a few heads.

What about this holy bread from the tabernacle? And David was allowed to eat it because he was hungry and he was on the run, and it was food for his men. There are circumstances in which you do not rigidly apply the law, was Jesus' point. And you've got to have common sense and look at its purpose and its meaning and not just blindly follow it, right? And Jesus referred to the days of David.

Well, guess what else happened in the days of David? It says you will not intermarry with the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites along with the Hittites and the Gergesites, seven nations greater and mightier than you. Well, who have they thrown in that's not in that original list? Well, the first one are the Ammonites. You say, well, the Ammonites are descendants of Lot, they're no good, they probably ought to be in there even though God didn't specifically mention.

If you go to the list of David's mighty men, and you can just make a note of this, 1 Chronicles 11, the first one of David's mighty men listed in there that is pertinent is Zelek. His name is Zelek. Sounds like something out of an outer space odyssey.

His name is Zelek, Z-E-L-E-K. And in 1 Chronicles 11, 39, in the roster of David's mighty men, you have Zelek the Ammonite. Now, how did he get to be a mighty man if these people are so bad you're not supposed to have any truck with them whatsoever? Do you think Zelek the Ammonite didn't live in Israel, that he didn't intermarry and have a family with the people of the land? Of course he did.

He's one of David's mighty men. He's been with him for a long time. A lot of these guys joined him back when he was in Adullam before he was ever king.

Zelek the Ammonite, 1 Chronicles 11, 39. The next one they add that is not in God's list is the Moabites. Who's David's grandmother? Ruth.

Where's she from? Not only that, but in 1 Chronicles 11, 46, another one of David's mighty men is Ithmah the Moabite. He's a mighty man. And you know Moabites can come into the assembly of the 10th generation and so on.

Here's Ithmah. Now, why are these people exceptions to this general proscription? A. The time has long passed. David is 400 years after they're entering the land against these mighty nations.

Intermarriage or friendship or alliance or integrating them into the army is no longer the threat that it posed when they were going into the land and they were tempted to try to gain the land by compromise and by treaty instead of by conquest and by obedience. Different situation. But a rigid, blind application of law would say, well, no, Moabite can never come in.

Well, they would have never let Ruth across the border. There would have been no Boaz-Ruth marriage. There would have been no Salmon.

There would have been no Obed. There would have been no Jesse. And there would have been no David.

If people didn't have a common sense understanding that this intermarriage proscription was for a place and a time and a setting that is very clear in Deuteronomy and did not pertain in later days. So you have Ithmah the Moabite. You've got Ruth the Moabites.

And, yes, you've got Zelech the Ammonite, not to mention Uriah the Hittite. And the Hittites are on God's original list. But you've got three of David's mighty men that are Ammonite, Moabite, and Hittite because the time of that proscription had passed.

And now it is your faith in God that defines you, not are you a member of a nation that is mightier than Israel and are you a threat through compromise and intermarriage that will prevent the fulfillment of God's command. So this is really a misquotation and a misapplication of Scripture that had been given 900 years earlier, taking some of their daughters as wives and their sons so that the holy seed is mixed. And my final point here, point three, go back to Deuteronomy 7. What does God say in Deuteronomy 7.6? Does He say, do not intermarry with the people of the land because we do not want the holy seed to become corrupted.

We do not want an intermarriage with the people of the land because this will produce a defilement. The holy seed is the issue. What does it say in Deuteronomy 6.7? You are a holy people to the Lord your God.

The Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Verse 8, because the Lord loves you and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand. Know that the Lord your God is faithful.

Verse 9, He keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations of the holy seed. Is that what it says? Who does God keep covenant and mercy with in verse 9? Covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments. Did Ruth love Him and keep His commandments? Did Uriah love Him and keep His commandments? Did Zelech and Ithmah love Him and keep His commandments? It's just like it says in the New Testament, in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female.

In Christ your love for Him and your faith in Him and your obedience transcends origins, backgrounds, circumstances. What the world looks at as defining people all falls by the wayside. This is what Ezra has missed.

He has a zeal, but he is shocked. He doesn't say, I saw idols set up in the temple precincts. He doesn't say, I saw people passing their children through the fire to Molech.

He doesn't say, I saw incipient restoration of the worship of the Canaanite Baals and Asheroth. These guys over here are married to somebody from a proscribed nation 900 years ago. Let me ask you something.

How many Perizzites and Hivites do you think are even left in the land at this time that have not already been intermarried? How long has Israel been living on this land? How long has Judah been in the land? How long since the days of Joshua? How many of these people, even the ones that they did not conquer, like the Jebusites, remember the Jebusites lived along with them all the way until David conquered them 400 years after they came into the land. Judah never took that stronghold until the days of David. It's been centuries.

Centuries. So is this still the issue that it was in Deuteronomy chapter 7? Is this what God is not going to bless them for? Did God send them a prophet? What's the message of Haggai? Is he saying you've married the wrong people, therefore everything has come to a halt? He says you've lost your love. You're more interested in your house than God's house.

Get with it. Get with the program. You've got means, motive, and opportunity.

Get your heart right and do what God requires. That's the issue. It's in the heart, not in some other guy's marriage.

But how convenient it is to look outside and find fault with somebody else and say that guy's the reason things aren't going right. Those people over there are why God's not blessing. It's over there.

And Ezra spends his whole time, unlike Daniel, confessing other people's sins. Daniel says legitimately here's where our hearts went wrong. Ezra says here's where those guys' marriages went wrong.

It's a whole different animal. It looks good. It looks right.

But it is a righteousness of works. It is a righteousness like the Pharisees are going to practice in Jesus' day. We're here to make sure you people do right.

And it is wrong, wrong, wrong. And this is going to be the basis both now and 13 years hence in the days of Nehemiah where they are going to wrongly drive a wedge into families and purge out people who have done nothing wrong. They came back to the land.

They left their kindred and their families. They are not Hivites. They are not Perizzites.

They are not Ammonites and Moabites. They are Persians. They are Babylonians.

They are people who came back with the returnees. The Hivites and the Perizzites weren't in Persia, for crying out loud. They weren't living in Babylon.

These are married to the returnees that came with Zerubbabel. None of them came with Ezra.

Ezra has got the holy crown.

And look how long these people have been in the land. Sixty years. Now you are going to come in and purge out the old leaven after six decades? Based on what? There is no word from the Lord on this.

And throughout the rest of Ezra and Nehemiah, and you look in vain in Haggai or Zechariah to find any mention that they have polluted themselves by intermarrying with the people of the land. But this is the only sin they confess. It is the only situation that they remediate.

Nothing but this. In the whole rest of Ezra and the rest of Nehemiah. It's the only thing they address.

And God never mentions it. God never brings it up. It's based on Scripture.

It sounds good. You can be a scribe and you can teach this and you can be shocked and astonished and you can get a bunch of other people to be shocked and astonished. God is not in it anywhere.

Why do you think the glory didn't show up at the temple? Not because they had bad marriages among some of the people. There's another more fundamental reason and it's reflected here. They have a zeal.

This is going to be the chronic problem all the way to 70 A.D. and all the way to the present day in the people descended from Jacob. They have a zeal but not according to knowledge. It has ever been the problem.

And they're not going to get this fixed until the Millennial Kingdom when God pours out His Spirit under a new covenant. Then we'll find out who's going to get with it and who's not. But I am sure and I tell you from the Word of God this whole next section of destroying these marriages and families is wrong, wrong, wrong.

God is not in it. God never mentions it. God doesn't honor it.

God doesn't say, well now the glory cloud is going to come. Sure glad you got that fixed. Everybody is celebrating.

Everybody is happy about it in terms of the ones who foisted it on the others. Did this result in a revival? Why do they have to do the same thing 13 years later? Ezra makes a big deal out of this. 13 years later they got to do it all over again because it doesn't stick and it doesn't hold.

It's not of God and it accomplishes nothing but destruction. Solves nothing. Impresses God in no way.

We want to be careful to not pick a piece of the Word of God that we like and that we find is particularly applicable to somebody else and hang all of our hopes in the future on that. We

need to examine ourselves. We need to shine the harsh light of our scriptural knowledge on our own souls and look at our own responsibilities and be sure that we are in the faith.

That we are practicing genuine priorities, genuine values, genuine goals that reflect faith and obedience in our own life. Then we will be able to speak the truth in love. Then we can be balanced.

We can be insightful. We can be perceptive as we work together to try to please God in a larger group. But it has to start individually.

You remember when Daniel confessed his own sin? You don't see Ezra doing that. You don't see these other guys doing that. It's all about the guy over there.

These leaders, shame on them. This is the beginning of Phariseeism right here. This is the beginning of all of the legalism that Jesus decried in the woe songs on the Pharisees right here.

This is where it starts and it's recorded in great detail for our instruction. Let's close here in a word of prayer. We'll pick up next week.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the convicting truth that it contains. We pray that your Holy Spirit will give us insight, help us to see in our own souls, in our own lives, where we can do better, where we can adjust our priorities, where we can de-emphasize things that distract us and deflect us, where we can focus on and emphasize those things that you would have us do and would have us be as we seek to be the body of Christ on this earth, as we seek to reflect his character and through him, your glory.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.