Kings and Prophets 17-12-28

This is Thursday the 28th of December 2017, three days left in the year. We continue our study of kings and prophets. We're going to pick back up with the historical account that we saw as the context for the prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zachariah, and that is in the book of Ezra.

We'll be picking up at chapter three. Chapter three of the book of Ezra. Let's take a moment as we begin our fellowship together in God's word by going to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we're grateful for this portion of your word, and as we look at it together, we pray that your spirit will nourish it to each heart, that we will not only come to a better understanding of how you have dealt with your people in times past, but see how it relates to your dealings with us and our conduct and our priorities as we seek to live our lives in a way that pleases you. We thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you for this time of year where we celebrate his first coming, and we are excited to anticipate his return for us to take us to the place where we can potentially reflect your glory and be of service in the immediate kingdom that is to come and in the kingdom that you yourself will create in the new heavens and the new earth.

We pray that each one will find a blessing and will be built up and edified as we look at this portion of your word together. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, if you have found Ezra, you might just pause to reflect on the history that is contained in the portion we have already covered. And you'll remember that in Ezra chapter 1, this was back in the days of Cyrus. There was the decree that allowed Zerubbabel and the rest of them to come back and begin the restoration of the temple.

And the rebuilding of the temple actually began toward the end of chapter 2. They ran into some opposition. In Ezra chapter 4, you remember the mixed population of the land. I mentioned the similarity of the Cherokees who had removed early and come out to what would become Indian territory.

And those who stayed behind and fought for their land and lost and then had to come out. And there were some that were already there and some that were rejoining them. Two different governments, resentment on both sides.

And it kind of reminds you that at the same time that there can be a great opportunity, there can also be obstacles. When great things are hanging in the balance, many times the potential for problem is as great as the potential for achievement. And great things are done in the face of great resistance.

Resistance sometimes. You can think about Paul over in 1 Corinthians chapter 16. We'll get there some months from now.

He says, A great and effective door has been opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

And so the reverse is also true. If we're facing a lot of obstacles and a great challenge to our faith, great things are usually hanging in the balance.

And so as we meet those challenges by faith and rely on the resources God has given us, it's motivating to realize that there is probably a lot on the line as we wage these wars against our invisible adversaries and against visible circumstance. So in Ezra chapter 4, the people of Samaria used to be the former northern kingdom and now is a mixed multitude of people that came in once the Assyrians took it over and later the Babylonians. So they offered to come in and help build the temple and they claimed to worship the same God.

And it all seems good at the beginning, but these people are truly a mixture and their notions of the God of Israel are radically different than who God is. It's an admixture. It is a syncretized view of God.

It is God mixed with a lot of other things, much as we see today. We have a God that is put forward as being the God of the Bible that is a far cry from the God the Bible reveals. And so these people came in and said, Oh, let us help.

And this was actually kind of a dangerous offer because if they mingle with the Jewish remnant who is a group of faithful people who are trying to do God's work and they are listening to Haggai and listening to Zechariah, this syncretistic, admixture-ish, corrupted view is going to spread and potentially infect them. And so they might begin to intermarry and all kinds of ne'er-do-well things take place. So the people who are coming to do the work need to maintain their sanctification, their separateness.

It doesn't mean that they have to isolate themselves. They don't have to go create a community like some segments of Christianity have done. You have several different ones that in the early days of this country went off by themselves and just said, We're going to be isolationists.

You had your Quakers and your Amish and your various kinds of ites along those lines. But Paul talks about this also in 1 Corinthians. We'll see it in chapter 5 where he says, I wrote to you not to keep company with sexually immoral people, but it doesn't mean that anybody that you suspect of that you can't talk to or have any truck with because you'd have to leave the world.

In the unbelieving world, you're going to run into that all the time. He is talking about maintaining the sanctity of these things within the fellowship and to not tolerate that and let it break down the church. But when you're dealing with the world, you have to inevitably get your sandwich made by somebody who may be of a strange lifestyle.

Well, he says, I didn't mean you have to separate from the immoral people of the world or you'd have to leave the world. And those who are covetous or extortioners or idolaters, you couldn't live here. You can't just cut yourself off from all contact.

We are in the world. We're just not of the world. And within the fellowship and within the family and within the brotherhood of believers, you've got to make sure you keep that stuff out, that

it's disciplined and if people will not recover and remove themselves from it, then they need to go.

And the same was true in these days. And so, in short, when you get to Ezra chapter 5, the foundation had been laid and then the work had gone fallow and God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to light a fire under these people to get it finished. They had come back in about 535 or so to start the rebuilding, 534.

They started to get it underway and then it flagged and fell to the ground and it didn't do anything for 16 or 18 years, right? And part of it was this dispersal of effort and arguing with the Samaritans and arguments about who has authority and who doesn't and one thing and another, it all kind of just died under its own weight. Haggai and Zechariah, we just got through studying those prophets, they called the people back to the work. But even more importantly, they called the people to the work as a vehicle and as a context in which to draw near to God with their hearts.

It wasn't just, please get this work done. It's, you should be doing this work as unto the Lord. And there was an even stronger spiritual call and we've seen that throughout those two books.

Well, we're coming back now and so, long about 517, 516, under the influence of these two great preaching prophets, people picked up the fallen torch, picked up the fallen tools, organized themselves, got together and pushed through and resumed the work and that's what Ezra chapter 5 through Ezra chapter 6 verse 12 is really all about and they finally got it done. So by the time you get to Ezra chapter 6 verse 13, they have completed the work. Look at 613, on the 12th day of the last month of 515, the temple was completed and the easiest way to remember this and depending on who you read, it's kind of like the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away into Babylon.

Was it 587? Was it 586? Depending on how you count time and how you parse the ancient records but the easiest thing to remember is Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and took the people away in 586. Just use 586. If somebody says 587, God bless them, maybe they're right.

It's easier for me to remember one number. So 586. Now, what did Jeremiah say? What did Daniel read in Jeremiah? How long is the discipline going to last? 70 years.

Well, guess what? After starting the foundation 18 odd years earlier, they finally get it done in 516. 70 years from the destruction of the temple, the new temple is, they have the ribbon cutting and it's open for business. Now, they established an alternate foundation years earlier and Joshua began restored sacrifices and so on but the temple itself wasn't finished until 516.

So, God bless them, they got it done. 70 years later, and if you look at chapter 5, verse 1, the prophet Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. That's what we've

just reviewed.

That was our context. So now, we're back. And in chapter 6, verse 13 through 18, Tatani, the governor, now remember, if you read through your nativity stories here over Christmas and you read the line of Christ on each side, Mary and Joseph, one of the individuals in that line is his name starts with a Z and ends with Ababel.

He is in the line of David. He could have been the king if there had been any throne to return to. He's the closest thing to a king they've got when he returned with the people, right? But, of course, there is no throne and there won't be a throne until the Lord Jesus establishes it and occupies it at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

So, by this time, Tatani is the governor. Shether Bosni and under the authority of King Darius, the elders of the Jews built. They prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, Zechariah the son of Ido.

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. The temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. And this is basically 516-515 is his sixth year.

So, then they move into the dedication and there's no glory cloud. If you remember when King Solomon dedicated this back in 1 Kings 8, there was just blood running as high as the horse's bridles in terms of sacrifices. There were so many sacrifices, they couldn't be counted.

There were 142,000 peace offerings. That's 1 Kings 8-63. 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep.

Now, why does it mention these peace offerings? Was this just wanton slaughter of the animals and all these carcasses and skins and everything are going up in smoke? What is a peace offering? The peace offering, the fellowship offering is a meal. A portion of it goes to the Lord and people eat the rest. So, this was the meat for the feast that Solomon sacrificed.

It wasn't just a gigantic, wasteful slaughter. It wouldn't have been in any case, but the sacrifices honored God. But the great amount of it, these 142,000 offerings, this was feasting that went on and celebrating the presence of God in their midst.

These guys, if you read Ezra 6, offered a grand total of 712 sacrifices. It's a greatly soberized and scaled down version. There's not as many of them.

Remember, there was about 50,000 that came back with Zerubbabel. And this is quite a smaller number. But they offered 12 male goats as sin offerings, 12 being the number of the tribes.

They realized that they are all that's left of the original nation. And so, they don't say, well, we're just Judah, or we're just Judah and Benjamin. They have priests officiating for the 12 tribes.

They say, we're the remnant that is left of the whole nation. Joshua, the high priest, consecrates

the priests and Levites for their ministry. And David had set up those 24 courses.

We saw that in our Christmas review of Zacharias and Gabriel's appearance to him. And so, they're just a few weeks away from Passover. So, in Ezra 6, 19 through 22, the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month.

Remember, the first month is the month of Nisan, and that's Passover month. They purified themselves. They were clean.

They slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren, the priests, and for themselves. And remember, there's not a hugely great number of them. So, it's not like they've got to go back down to large flocks and herds and have massive amounts of these.

There is a modest population, especially of the faithful, who are going to keep the Passover in and around Jerusalem. The Samaritans probably aren't their free thinkers up there. And then they keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread with joy.

And you remember, when the foundation was laid, there was weeping. Those who remember the old temple cried. But this is 20 years later, and it doesn't mention any crying here.

I think in times past, I actually had this kind of confused. And I thought at the dedication of this temple, there were people that were moaning about it. But this study has helped me separate those two events.

The laying of the foundation was done with mourning, but the completion of it is with joy. And there's a bit of an emblematic feature here, because the Lord Jesus is going to come 500 years hence, and He's going to lay the foundation for salvation, and there's going to be mourning associated with it. But when He returns to finish that complex, as it were, there's going to be great joy, along with great sacrifice.

There will be blood running as high as the horse's bridles. And there's this tongue-in-cheek invitation to the Feast of God in Revelation, if you remember that context. So it's a sobering thought that there is going to have to be a necessary purging and cleansing so that that kingdom can be set up.

So this is the first time that these exiles have had the chance to celebrate that feast. 70 previous years, there's been no way to really keep this. They didn't have the altar, they didn't have the priesthood.

So this has to have really been an emotional time for those people. And there are very few people who would have ever kept a Passover, especially given the decline of temple worship just prior to the destruction of the city. And so these people are... You see this.

We live in northeast Oklahoma, and there are a lot of Indian tribes here. And there are a lot of

people who have been busy recovering their heritage and saying, you know, these are the old songs, this is the old language, these are the old ways. And to restore those is deeply meaningful to people who recognize that they have roots that go back a ways.

There are people who still observe and celebrate parts of their European ethnic heritage, dishes that their grandmother or great-grandmother used to make, and the old recipes and the old ways. There is a recollection of where you came from. Don't remove the old landmark.

Remember the pit from whence you were digged and so on. And there's nothing wrong with that. There is a healthy God ordained that we have these roots.

And there's a beautiful picture of it in Israel. So here are these people remembering and especially their spiritual heritage. And this, I think, transcends any ethnic or genetic.

I saw a lady on TV, some advertisement for Ancestry DNA or something, and she said, well, you know, I just thought I was a Heinz 57 and then I had myself tested and I found out I'm 25% Native American. So now I'm going back and trying to figure out what does that mean? You know, who am I? That's all well and good. And I have an interest in genealogy and I respect my forebears and all that.

But what I really appreciate is spiritual heritage. And if you don't have one, to create one and pass it on to your children. Maybe you're going to be the progenitor, like Abraham was, of a spiritual heritage that's going to go forward.

Tira, we had an interesting excursion back into Genesis because somebody was alleging that Abraham was an idolater until God clubbed him over the head with efficacious grace and predestined him to be a believer. And, well, the Bible says that Abraham was an idolater. Well, you go back and look at what it says about Abraham.

And this is later on in the prophets, as I recall, where God is talking to Israel and he says, your father was an idolater and your mother was a harlot and so on. And there's another place that says your fathers from whom Abraham came were idolaters. If you look at it carefully, it never says Abraham himself was an idolater.

It says his fathers were. You are descended from idolaters, God tells Israel, and it's true. But the guy that broke the mold was Abraham.

And that's why God said, Abraham, you get up out of your kindred and your family and go. And you remember he stalls out in Nahor because his brother and his father stop there and he sort of disobeys the command and stalls out. And you wonder if maybe that's the reason if he'd gotten on down into the land he might not have had to wait until he was 100 years old to have a son.

But the point here being that these people are recovering their spiritual heritage and roots and restoring their covenant functions. They're keeping the feasts once again which are a part of

their covenant with God. And this is a wonderful thing.

And so they invite the Jews and the proselytes to share in the Passover, even the ones that couldn't prove their lineage. And this is really a good instinct that it's okay. It's kind of like, I observe this and bless their hearts.

I've got a real soft spot for Southern Baptists. But there's some Southern Baptist churches that practice closed communion. Unless you have a membership residing in that church, they want to skip you when the Kool-Aid and the crackers are passed around.

Other churches practice open communion. And they say, look, if you're a professing believer, I don't care who dunked you, when, where or how. If you say you're a Christian, we'll take your word for it.

Share with us in this ritual observance. And there's an analog here where they could have said, well, we're only taking people that can prove and document that they are Israelite. But the proselytes and the people who don't have their documentation anymore, they say, come on in, celebrate with us.

And that's a nice tribute to their flexibility and to their desire that this be a time of celebration, not a time of separation. And so they're doing really well at this point. And so all they require is that as long as they're circumcised, that goes back to Exodus 12, 43 through 49.

No foreigner can eat the ordinance of the Passover. Every man's servant who is bought for money when you've circumcised him, he can eat it. Doesn't matter what nationality he's from.

If he's circumcised and he's your servant, he's a member of your household, he can eat of the Passover. And this foreshadows the opening of the plan of God to the Gentiles, because we end up with this idea of circumcision of the heart. And so the temple is dedicated.

The people are dedicating themselves. The building is dedicated. Now there is personal dedication.

And during the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they took the yeast out. The yeast was a symbol of evil. It was a time to purge out the old leaven, as it were.

And God had put it in Darius' heart to not disturb them. And as it says in Proverbs 21, the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. And so God made that possible.

So this brings us now to chapter 3. And this is really where we pick up our story. Ezra has been rehearsing history because the people came back a couple of decades earlier. And the temple... Ezra is not on the scene for all of this.

This is history, the dedication in 516 that we have just reviewed. But now we pick up in the present. And this is going to be down in about 458 B.C. We have jumped decades as we enter into Ezra chapter 7. What we just saw, remember the year? What was it? When did the temple

fall? 586? When is it rededicated? 516.

Ezra is going to now embark on a journey and return with some people to the land in about 458 B.C. It's about 60 years, 58 years. It's roughly 6 decades later in chapter 7. So let's take a look at Ezra chapter 7 and just read ourselves into the picture here because now we're back in our narrative. Ezra chapter 7. Everything we've seen in the first 6 chapters is history.

Now, after these things, and after these things you can put a note, 57 years. After these things, after 57 years has gone by. In the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra the son of Sariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shalom.

Remember in the preceding chapter they said you can celebrate the Passover with us even if you can't reproduce your lineage? Well, Ezra is a very qualified man because he's got a direct line back to Aaron. Ezra is a priest as well as a scribe. And you look at this, Shalom, Zadok, Ahithob, Amariah, Azariah, Marioth, Zeruiah, Uzzi, Buki, Abishua, Phinehas, Eleazar, Aaron.

So, his credentials are sterling. This Ezra, verse 6, came up from Babylon. By the way, there's some pretty well-known guys in that lineage.

If you recognize some of those names, Hilkiah was the high priest during the reign of Josiah. Remember when they found the book of the law and had that attempt at reform? It was led by the king and the people sort of superficially followed, but after Josiah it all fell to the ground. But that Hilkiah is one of Ezra's ancestors.

That was 2 Kings chapter 22, if you remember. That's that Hilkiah. You can just put a line out there to 2 Kings 22.

Zadok, further down, that is David's Zadok. Zadok, the son of Ahithob, and that's the one that was faithful to David when everything was going wrong. The Absalom rebellion, the Adonijah attempt to usurp the throne from Solomon and so on.

2 Samuel chapter 15 and chapter 17, 1 Kings chapter 1 and chapter 2, that's that Zadok. So you're thinking, man, this Ezra, he's got some famous people in his background. And Phinehas back there, the grandson of Aaron, that's the Phinehas of Numbers chapter 25.

He's the one that was... Remember when the Midianites were coming in, and Cosby or whoever it was, and one spear through two bodies, and Phinehas? That's Ezra's great, great, great, great, great, however many granddad. So this is a line of faithful men. And many times God will maintain families that have this ongoing heritage, generation after generation of faithfulness and diligence.

And they have followed God's exhortation to train up their children and pass on this godly heritage. So this is Ezra. He is of no mean family.

This Ezra, verse 6, came up from Babylon. Notice now we're in the 450s, and let's say he's, I

don't know how old he was, let's say he's 40 years old. So he would have been born in 490-something.

It's 100 years after the fall of Jerusalem. And people started coming back in the 530s, remember? 535-ish. And he has been born after some people.

He wasn't born in the land. He's born in Babylon. He's of that initial group that stayed behind.

They didn't come with Zerubbabel. They didn't come back. And you remember, there weren't very many priests that came with Zerubbabel.

So what Ezra does, he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month, he came to Jerusalem. And the letter that authorizes this, I'm not going to go into. The letter of Artaxerxes for Ezra is all in here.

We don't really have time to cover that in detail, but it makes provision. And it gives him authorization. It gives him the freedom to go.

Verses 13 and 14. All those of the people of Israel, the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem, may go. They can go with you.

So this is a wonderful decree. They are free to go. They are authorized to go.

They have provision to go. They have resources that are assigned. Verse 15.

The silver and gold the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel. He even gives him the sacred articles that are still left. After Zerubbabel came back, not everything was taken.

And so in verse 19, the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God deliver those there as well. So the last of the booty from 586 is taken back by them. And there is an element of self-interest in Artaxerxes' decree here.

If you look at verse 23. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? I don't want your God doing something to me like he did to the Egyptians or to the Midianites or the Moabites or the Amalekites or any of the rest of them.

I want him to be favorably disposed. So if you're his people, I want you to do everything you can to make him happy so that he's on my side. And so as a result of this, skip down to verse 27, there is celebration.

Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. Notice beautify. It's been built, but there are extra resources to begin to really refurbish it now.

The thing is 60 years old and it's time to enhance it and beautify it and embellish it. He's extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, before all the king's mighty princes. I was encouraged as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me.

As the hand of the Lord my God was upon me. This is really sort of a thematic element in these chapters. Ezra 7 and Ezra 8. The good hand of the Lord was upon me occurs six times.

Six times. And if you want to note them just so you can watch for them, we saw it in verse 6. This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a skilled scribe in the law of Moses.

Notice he is a student of the word of God. And he's not necessarily a military leader or a great spokesperson and leader of men. He's a scholar.

He's a scribe skilled in the law of Moses. The king granted him all his requests according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. So that's 7-6.

That's the first time you see it. Then again in verse 9. On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon. On the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem according to the good hand of his God upon him.

Verse 28 that we just read. I was encouraged as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me. We're going to see it in chapter 8, verse 18, verse 22, and verse 31.

8-18, 8-22, 8-31. Six times. The good hand of the Lord was upon me.

Or words to that effect. The hand of the Lord. And of course when you talk about God's hand we know that this is an anthropomorphism.

I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness. God holds the seas of the world in the hollow of his hand. And so on.

God's hand is metaphorical for his power, his provision, his care, and so on. The summary is given in verse 7 and so many times. You see this in Genesis, the creation account.

God created man in his own image after his likeness. Male and female created to them. Then you have the more detailed account of the creation.

We have the summary account of Ezra's return in chapter 7. And then you have a more detailed account of it in chapter 8. So he says, I left in the first of the first month and got there in the first of the fifth month. It was a four month journey. Well now in chapter 8 we're going to get a more detailed account of who joined him and how they got there.

Look at 8.15. I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava. And they look around for this. And they think maybe this was just a canal or a man-made waterway or something.

But they're just getting ready to leave Babylon. And there's a lot of ancient canals and things

that were done on the river there. And so they're just getting ready to cross.

And he looks around and he says, I found none of the sons of Levi. The total group, if you look at this and count everybody up, that is leaving to go to Jerusalem is only about 1,500 people. Remember there were 50,000 that came back with Zerubbabel.

But people had gotten content and at home in Mesopotamia. And a lot of them just thought, well, you know, I don't want to go back to Europe. I don't want to go back to where my people emigrated from.

People whose ancestors were brought over here as slaves, they say, well, now that we're free, I don't want to go back to Africa and try to resume a life of my ancestors. I'm in a new place. Let me just live here.

So a lot of the Jews never left Babylon or the Persian Empire later on. There are a lot of families who decided that they're going to go and rejoin. If you compare the list of names here in Ezra 2, 3 through 15 with the ones here in Chapter 8, you can see that they're relatives.

This contingent 60 years later say, well, you know, a lot of the family went there. I've heard from them. We've exchanged letters back and forth.

We'll go join them. So they're joining with other people. And you get the idea that, again, that this faith kind of runs in families.

And those who want to go back and honor God and go back to the land of their covenant promise are related to the people who were willing to go the first time. So they leave on the first day of the fifth month. We got that from Chapter 7. But they stop.

And in verse 15 there, they stop for three days. And Ezra kind of gets to look around. He says, wait a minute.

We've got nobody. We're going to refurbish the temple. We've got no Levites.

We've got nobody qualified to go do that. Nobody from Levi came. And it's interesting because even back in the days when Zerubbabel left, there was only about 2% were Levites, if you do the math.

Go back and add up all of them. It was a relatively small. You figure, well, there ought to be quite a few more than that because all you've got is people from the tribe of Judah, a few Benjamites that would have gone into captivity, and maybe some others that could actually go back to the other tribes.

But there ought to be a healthy number of Levites, especially when they're going back to the land to lay the foundation of the temple and get that started. And yet there was only 2% of them that were Levites. Well, here he goes back.

He sends a committee of 11 men to go back and say, hey, aren't there any Levites that are willing to go? Well, they managed to recruit 38 of them. This committee is named there in verse 16. But there are 220 temple servants who say, well, we'll go.

So a lot of the workers, a lot of the servants will go, but only 38 Levites. His trip is done in trust. Remember he says, well, I was ashamed to request an escort from the king because we're talking about how our God is able to do everything.

Verse 22, I was ashamed to request an escort. So we fasted and entreated our God, and he answered our prayer, and we had a safe trip. But you begin to see that Ezra is a great guy for studying the law, but he's going to almost... We begin to see signs of incipient Pharisee-ism where we're great at parsing the words of the law, but when it comes to actually putting it into practice, we're having trouble with the practical side, the faith side.

And he's ashamed to go ask for an escort. Well, shame isn't associated with men of faith. He didn't say, I decided we didn't need an escort because I was trusting in the God of Israel.

He says, I was embarrassed to ask for an escort, and so with great trepidation and fear and shaking knees, I went on, and thankfully God preserved us. But you get the idea that his sense of relief betrays a significant lack of faith. He isn't Joshua crossing the Jordan.

He's not Moses leading the triumphant people out of Egypt. He's fear and quaking and looking at eyes behind bushes all the way to the land. So there's a little bit of a shadow over this entry.

So then he weighs out gold and silver to 12 of the priests and gives them, and 12, of course, emblematic of the nation, gives them all of this money, and he says, verse 28, You are holy to the Lord, the articles are holy, the silver and gold are a freewill offering to the Lord. Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders, the priests, the Levites, and the head of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem. So the priests and the Levites receive the silver and the gold and the articles by weight to bring them to Jerusalem in the house of our God.

He divides the money among these 12, and you get the idea, he says, you guys, it's in 12 piles instead of one, so that if we do get attacked, maybe some of you will get away, it's in 12 piles. It reminds you of Jacob when he's very reluctant to go meet his brother Esau, and he says, well, I'm going to send them in companies, and if Esau attacks the first ones, I can tell the others to flee, I'll send gifts, and I'm really in much trepidation over this. Jacob is not the great man of faith, that's why he's wrestling with the man until dawn.

So they return, and on the 12th day of the first month, 12 days after he started out, they've stopped for 3 days, and then there's another 9 days, and now they're ready to go, because it took them all these days to divide the stuff into 12 piles, and so forth. They came to Jerusalem, they stayed there 3 days. Verse 33, on the 4th day, the silver and gold and the articles were weighed into the house of God by the hand of Meromoth, and so on.

And the children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity,

offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel. And in verse 35, you get the idea that these people are having the same experience that took place 60 years earlier, when they finally got the temple underway. This is the first time these people have been able to offer legitimate sacrifices in the land of their forefathers, and it's a deep emotional experience for them as well.

And they offer these offerings, and they're grateful for their safe journey. And so then they rest, and are there to give their support. Well, this brings us to chapter 9. Chapter 9. And this is where we are going to see, when these things were done, notice who delivers the news.

Now this is not in and of itself a bad thing. We've seen in Corinthians that members of the house of Chloe come to Paul and say, all is not well in Corinth. Here, when these things were done, the leaders who were already on site, actually, that are now on site, the leaders that have come with Ezra, they say, look, we've been surveying this situation now that we've arrived and had a chance to meet people.

And the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites who are already here have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For 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." Well, this is something we're going to need to look at, and we're going to cover it both here and 14 years later with Nehemiah, and as we then get into the book of Malachi.

It's likely that Malachi delivers his prophecy. Nehemiah has a first and second coming, which is real interesting. And in the interim between his first coming and his second coming, you have most likely.

It's hard to date Malachi because it doesn't have a marker at the beginning like we've seen in many of the prophets. It's the word of the Lord that came to the prophet so-and-so, who ministered in the days of king thus-and-so, or the kings thus-and-so, thus-and-so, and thus-and-so. Malachi is unmarked in that way, so we have to try to place it based on context.

And I will show you how nicely Malachi dovetails into the time of Nehemiah and is actually going to close out the prophetic ministry even as the narrative closes out in the Old Testament. They both come to a terminus ad quiam there. But this is going to be the big issue now.

Why did Ezra come to the land? To refurbish the temple, to restore people to that worship, and he has got that underway. But almost immediately he's going to be deflected into there's sin in the camp, so to speak. He says, Now, he does not accuse anybody of idolatry, or of countenancing idolatry, or of perpetuating idolatry, practicing idolatry, promoting idolatry, permitting idolatry.

They are entirely accused on the basis of association with non-Israelite people. So, if you keep

your finger here and turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 7, and we've looked at this before, but it's worth review. Deuteronomy chapter 7. When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess.

So, what are they doing? They're saying, well, we have come back to the land to possess it. So, you get the idea that they say, well, since we are coming back to the land, we're going to apply some of the same scriptures that were given to our forefathers when they came back to the land after slavery in Egypt, bondage in Egypt. We've been in bondage in Babylon, so to speak.

We are coming back, so we think the same stuff applies. When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess and has cast out many nations before you. Wait, that's different.

God has not cast any nations out before them. This is not conquest. This is not the initial promise.

This is not Joshua. This is not the sun standing still. This is not the Jordan parting and fire from heaven.

There wasn't even a glory cloud at the dedication of the temple 60 years earlier. This is a different circumstance, and it reminds me of believers today who want to invoke scripture that was given to God's people in the Old Testament. There are things that pertain, like the Ten Commandments, like Genesis chapter 9, you shed man's blood, by man shall your blood be shed, and this sort of thing that are transcendent truths.

But there are others that you cannot import from earlier days. We don't forbid the shaving of the corners of our beard. We don't forbid the mixing of two kinds of thread in our cloth.

I suspect that nearly all of you have got some mixture of polyester and cotton on your body somewhere. That's an Old Testament scripture, and it's a prohibition. You will not make your cloth out of two kinds of thread.

Well, we do it all the time. Everything would fall off of us. How would you get elastic in your socks and in other garments, important garments, if you didn't mix it in with whatever cotton they're made of? We have to discern what applies and what doesn't.

This is a failure of discernment. Look at this. The Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, when God has cast them out, and they are greater and mightier than you.

They are not nations, and they are not greater and mightier than these people now. In fact, I dare say that it would have been virtually impossible to find at this late date, a thousand years later. What was the year that God liberated Israel from Egypt on the conventional chronology? 1440, and they entered the land in 1400.

What year did I say it is now? The temple was completed in 516. It's 60 years later. It's 458, 455, the 450s.

It's a millennium later. This is like going back. What year have we got here? 2018 coming up? Well, let's go back to 1018 and find something that pertained in 1018, when you had, I don't even, I'm really fuzzy on that period of history.

I don't know if you had Vandals or Goths or Visigoths. I think that was older. I don't know who was lurking around.

I know you had the Islamic hordes were fighting back and forth in those days because Mohammed had unleashed them all in the 600s, you know, Anno Domini, 6th, 7th century after that. And so you've got, I don't know, Turks and maybe the, I don't know where the Ottoman. I'm really fuzzy.

I don't know anything about that time. What I do know is that I would not take anything that pertained to them and now make it a rule of faith and practice for myself. But they are.

They're harking back to this. And so they have taken some of their daughters for themselves and their sons so that the holy seed is mixed with the people of those lands. He doesn't say so that worship of God has been corrupted and they're setting up idols.

He says the holy seed where we're trying to maintain racial purity. Ah, come on. Do you know how much intermarriage there has already been? You know, look at David.

He's got a Canaanite and a Moabite in his immediate ancestry. Rahab is a blatant Canaanite. Ruth is a blatant Moabite.

He married women who were of questionable or non-Israelite heritage and fathered sons who went on to be the fathers of kings. So this is the ugly rise of legalism and of taking rules that do not apply. This is what the Jews are going to do later on when they try to make the law apply to Gentile converts.

Well, they've got to be circumcised. They've got to keep the law because they are now people of God. And they don't understand that there has been a turn.

There has been a change. And the fact that you do not have God present, the Ark of the Covenant is not in the Holy of Holies. The Shekinah did not fill this temple.

And they have not come back with these seven nations cast out and God saying, have no truck with them. Go on. When the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them.

So what they should really do, if there's any Perizzites and Hivites and Moabites and Jebusites and all these other ites here that are listed in Ezra 9.1, well, if they're going to follow Deuteronomy, they should kill them all. They shouldn't just not marry them. They should

execute them.

God says, wipe them out. Make no covenant with them. Show no mercy to them.

Nor shall you make marriages with them. It's all of a piece. You can't take a portion and say, well, make no marriages with them, but we're not going to kill them anymore.

We're not going to wipe them out anymore. If you're going to take this command, then you take the whole command. You don't take little bits and pieces of it.

And what they're doing is partially invoking the thing. Why? They will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods, so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. Guess what? It's already happened.

That cow has left the barn. That bird has flown. That bell has been rung.

It's too late to prevent that. God has used a different means to purge idolatry out of Israel, and it is the 70-year captivity. And idolatry is not a problem anymore.

And therefore, the reason for not contracting marriages with these people has also gone away. The reason for it is specifically given, so that they will not lead you into idolatry. Well, guess what? These people are not idolaters anymore.

The ones that these people have intermarried with, who is it that's in the land now? People who came back because they wanted to build the temple. They came back with Zerubbabel, and the Levites who came back said, we will leave everything that's been built in Babylon, and we will come back here and be pioneers and re-establish worship. But in the days of the captivity, they married a Babylonian woman, or they married some other person that might have been taken captive and was an equal slave or whatever.

And they're not of pure Jewish ancestry. Well, that's no longer an issue because worship of God is now becoming open to proselytes. Anybody can be a proselyte.

Nobody anywhere accuses these people of idolatry, or of unfaithfulness, or of spreading heresy in the camp. It's strictly they're corrupting the Holy Seed. That's the only accusation that is ever made here.

And we're going to see that this is going to recur all through Ezra and down into the days of Nehemiah, and Malachi is going to address it. He's going to take it head on, and he's going to talk about it. And so we'll see this.

But our lesson for tonight has come to a close. So what have we learned as we've looked at this? Ezra is a tremendous student of the Word of God. He knows his Bible.

And he comes from a sterling lineage. Nobody can fault. He is the opposite of these that are intermarrying and are coming under a cloud because, well, your line is not pure.

Now, they allowed people to celebrate the Passover when the temple was dedicated 60 years earlier. But you get the idea that that initial grace and toleration has begun to atrophy and begun to stultify and dwindle. And there is a rigidity and a legalism that is beginning to form.

And now we're going to look into your background. And if you're a woman and you're not an Israelite, you're not only you, but whoever married you is in trouble. And the children are in trouble.

They're essentially illegitimate in the eyes of those of us who think that everybody's got to be Israelite in your heredity. And who knows how many of these people, if they trace their lineage back before 586, had all kinds of skunks in the woodpile. But, well, that's all gone now.

We're just looking at the present. So, notice the misunderstanding and misapplication and partial proof texting that they are doing back to Deuteronomy 7 and parallel passages. And this is coming and whispering into Ezra's ear.

The leaders come and say, well, these people have not separated themselves from the people of the lands. The holy seed is mixed with the people of these lands. The hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.

What trespass? So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and I plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard and sat down astonished. And everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. Notice, remember when Daniel was grieved and heavy of heart and made all of that confession of his own sins and the sins of the people? Whose sins is Ezra shocked at here? The people they have come to visit.

The people that are already there. Those who are either those who came with Zerubbabel or descendants of those. This is probably a generation later.

You figure a 40-year generation, these are the sons and daughters. And they're looking around saying, well these people are a bunch of mixed bloods, half-breeds, and look at who their family members are. And so everyone who trembles at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

And notice he's very pleased to be able to talk about the fact that there is an evening sacrifice there. Who established the evening sacrifice that he is sitting down until? It wasn't Ezra. It was those who under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah got the temple finished and got worship going.

Reestablished the feast cycle. That evening sacrifice is being done by the very leaders and rulers that they are accusing being foremost in this trespass. These are the guys that got the sacrificial system going and it's been going for over 50 years now.

These are the ones who are now being impugned. So now they're back to measuring time by the sacrifices. Who's performing those sacrifices? The accusees.

At the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting having torn my garment and my robe. And notice he mentions this twice. Ezra feels like, let me just tell you how distressed I was.

In verse 3, I tore my garment and my robe. And in verse 5, 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, Oh my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated.

When was the last time we saw Ezra being ashamed and humiliated? Remember back in chapter 8 verse 22? When he wanted to ask for an escort but he was too embarrassed and ashamed to do it? It wasn't that he was a mighty man of faith and knew they didn't need it and went out confidently knowing that the good hand of God would be upon him. It's his embarrassment that keeps him from asking for a guard. I am too ashamed and 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. But when he's saying this, it's not him. Look at his lineage.

He's golden all the way back to Aaron. So when he says our, he's really saying their. Since the days of our fathers to this day, we have been very guilty for our iniquities.

We, our kings and our priests, have been delivered into the hands of the kings of the land, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, to humiliation as it is this day. Now for a little while, grace has been shown from the Lord our God to leave us a remnant to escape and to give us a peg in his holy place that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. We were slaves.

God did not forsake us. All of this is true. It's all wonderful stuff.

And he's steeped in the law. He's a scribe as well as a priest. He knows all of this inside out.

He's read Kings and Chronicles. He's read the former prophets. He extended mercy to us on the side of the kings of Persia to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild us through him, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, the uncleanness of the people of the land, with their abominations. Where did God say this? Has Haggai been harping on the uncleanness of the land? Has Zechariah been harping on the uncleanness of the land? Have any of the other exilic or post-exilic... Has Ezekiel been talking about that the people in the land need to be purged out? When's the last time God talked about the people needing to be purged? Deuteronomy, a thousand years ago. But he is taking a portion of scripture and grabbing it like a lance, getting

on his horse, and tilting at the windmill of mixed marriages.

This is my battle now. I'm astonished until evening. I've torn my clothes all to shreds.

O God, I'm so embarrassed and humiliated because of what these people have done. And we've forsaken your commandment. And when he quotes the commandment, where are the commandments that Haggai preached 60 years earlier? Where are the commandments that Zechariah... We've just seen 14 chapters.

What was their call? What was the commandment of God? Purify your hearts. Serve me with a whole heart. Sanctify yourselves.

You're building a house that you're going to sanctify to me. Sanctify yourselves. Well, this is a call to the people to sanctify themselves.

Ezra is saying, I've got to sanctify that guy. Look at those people. He's been here now for weeks.

They've divided the spoils. They've offered these sacrifices. They've taken inventory.

They've done a whole bunch of things. And now this report comes to him. Now he's shocked.

He didn't walk in and say, look at the idols on every corner in Jerusalem. Look at the abominations. They're weeping for Tammuz in the temple courtyard.

None of that is taking place. How does Ezra find out about it? Somebody comes and whispers in his ear and says, you know, these leaders and these priests, they've married. See that woman? You know, she's beautiful.

Oh, yeah, I met her the other day. You know, she's descended from... I don't know who they were actually descended from. Because how can they trace Jebusites hundreds of years later? How can they trace any of these people all this time later? But they can say, well, they're not Jewish.

They're not Israelite. They didn't come back with us. They were already living here.

God only knows what their extraction is and their ethnicities and their forebears. Well, one thing is certain. They are not practicing idolatry.

Ezra doesn't come back and say, and behold, I saw an idol here and there. And I saw high places. I saw groves.

I saw altars. I saw priests to these other gods. I saw temples to the gods of the land.

None of that is in evidence. The only way he finds out about it is somebody says, these guys have married women that are not Israelite. If they're not Israelite, they're descended from idolaters.

And God said, don't marry the people of the land a thousand years ago. So it's all based on that. And so now this is what Ezra chooses to confess.

And I will tell you, I've looked at this and looked at this. I've tried to make the traditional interpretation of it work, that Ezra is a godly man calling the people back. Look, if this was a problem, what happens when there is a problem? What does God do? Who does God send? When there was a problem with the hard attitude of the people who were coming back to rebuild the temple, who did God send? They already had priests and they already had leaders.

Who did He send? He sent prophets. And the prophets railed against the spiritual problem. There is no revelation here to Ezra that there is a problem.

And there is no prophet decrying spiritual degradation or lack of morals or anything else. It's not a prophet. It's a guy who is a scribe, who reads the law a lot.

And he is the Pharisee saying, Oh Lord, I thank you that I'm not like other men. And look at all of these sinners. And look at this Jesus.

He communes with sinners. He eats with sinners. How can He do that? He couldn't possibly be the Messiah and be consorting with these types.

Here is where it starts. Here is where that attitude begins. They are not dry behind the ears from getting back from the exile.

And the legalism is beginning. It is only going to grow. We have to be careful to be humble.

And if we think there is a problem, does He go to the Lord in prayer? Does He call these people who tremble at the word of the Lord and say, Let's go to our God and ask Him what He says. Let's ask Him what we should do. There is no appeal to God anywhere.

There is this confession of the sins of others. Oh Lord. And a lot of prayers get prayed.

And I've heard them prayed in public. Oh Lord, please help so and so see the error of his ways. Oh Lord, please convict so and so and turn them back to the right path.

Oh God, get after that. Fix that. Fix those leaders of our nation.

Oh Lord, you know, Whomp up on them. Do that. And there is this outward looking type of intercession that finds fault and asks God to intervene with the shortcomings and the problems in other people's lives and isn't humble and inward looking and saying, Oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner, as we beat our breasts.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me so that I can be whiter than snow. And this is where it starts.

And if you have any doubt that this is what's going on, wait till we get the Malachi. And he

misquotes scripture here. He's a scholar of the law and he does like the Pharisees.

Remember Jesus told them, You search the scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life and it is they that testify of me. You study them daily. You memorize huge chunks of it.

And the Messiah is standing in front of him and you can't even see him. You're as blind as you can be because you've gotten myopic and nearsighted studying the scriptures. Ezra is the archetype.

Ezra, in my view, and I'll apologize to him for a thousand years if I'm wrong about that, but I'm telling you everything points to this being a misstep and a bad move on his part. What shall we say? We have forsaken your commandments. What are the commandments of God? Nothing on the tablets about this.

And when he quotes this, Therefore do not give your daughters as wives for their sons. It's Deuteronomy chapter 7. This does not apply. Let's just finish this chapter real quick.

After all that has come upon us, verse 13, for our evil deeds, our great guilt, since you our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments and join in marriage with the people of these abominations? Notice it says committing is in italics. There's nothing in Hebrew that says they are committing any abominations at all. That's been added.

It's people of these abominations. It's people who in the past were associated with them. Well, guess what? Nobody is more guilty of this than the Israelites themselves.

Why do you think you're coming back from captivity? Your fathers were idolaters. Not just in the ancient days of Tira and Ur of the Chaldees. Your fathers went into captivity because of idolatry.

Gross idolatry. If you're worried about marriages, they shouldn't be marrying other Israelites. They shouldn't be marrying other people of Judah.

They're all idolaters. That's why they all went into captivity. Worried about people of these abominations? Your people are of these abominations.

You just got through confessing it in your prayer. Do you not see that you're being bigoted on the basis of their ethnicity, if you will, based on some long-ago, thousand-year-old idolatry? Your idolatry is only 100-odd years ago. 150 years ago, everybody in Judah was an idolater.

That's why you went out. So it does not follow. People committing these abominations.

Will you not be angry with us until you have consumed us, so that there will be no remnant or survivor? God's commandments are not, at this point, don't intermarry with the people of the land. It is, love the Lord your God with all your heart. If these people are doing that, and if the leaders of the land who have restored these sacrifices and have been faithfully practicing them

now for decades, if these are the people who have done the evening sacrifice by which you, Ezra, are measuring time, you need to stop and ask yourself the question, is there a current practice of abomination, or are you pulling something in that you shouldn't? Oh Lord God of Israel, verse 15, you are righteous, we are left as a remnant as it is this day.

Here we are before you in our guilt. No one can stand before you because of this. Seriously? Can't Ezra stand before him? Ezra is coming before him in prayer.

Ezra's got no problem of a bad marriage. All of the people that came back with him from Babylon evidently don't seem to have this problem, haven't intermarried with the residents. So, why is he saying, nobody can stand before you because of this? It's like, is there sin in the camp? Achan has hidden something under his tent, and so nobody can stand.

He seems to act like, well, we're ruined because of this. But where is it? Did Salmon mess up when he married Rahab? Did Boaz mess up when he married Ruth? Even then, that was past. It was over.

They're no longer conquering the land. The line of David himself has got two major violations of this alleged command. Well, David can't be king.

Look at his ancestors. It does not follow. We're going to pick up next time at chapter 10, while Ezra is praying and confessing and bowing down before the house of God.

And all these other people are coming, and there's going to be this big pity party, and there's giant weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth going on over this issue. Unlike anything that took place when the genuine prophets were genuinely prophesying, Haggai and Zechariah calling the people back, but they're more than ready because this is an easy fix. Dedicating your heart on a daily basis, walking in the ways of the Lord on an ongoing daily basis, is hard.

Doing an act of contrition is easy. This is why you've got so many Catholics who are more than happy to go down and light a candle and say a bunch of Hail Marys and then go live however they want. Momentary acts of contrition are easy.

Living however you want for six and a half days and then going to church on Sunday is easy. Anybody can do that. And people justify themselves all the time.

Well, I'm a good person and I go to church. But you let yourself off the hook. Well, I don't necessarily do anything good myself, but I put money on the plate or I do this or I do that.

And it is the call of God through the prophets not to send a bunch of people away as they're about to do, but to love the Lord your God, redeem the time on an ongoing basis, take every thought captive for Christ as our command. It's a whole different thing. But for us, by way of application, we need to watch for slipping into doing works where we feel justified instead of that constant daily heart pursuit.

Romans 12, 1 and 2. Present your bodies a sacrifice. And I like to think that that's the daily sacrifice every morning and every evening. Start out the day being the lamb on the altar.

End the day as the lamb on the altar. The morning and the evening sacrifice. Two lambs a day.

Present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is your reasonable service. Not some occasional thing.

Daily. Be not conformed to the world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

That's a much more difficult task than any act could be. So we want to avoid what I submit to you is an error on a godly man's part. He comes from a distinguished family.

He means well. He knows his Bible backwards and forward. And when he gets there and is presented with this problem, he sits down astonished.

And there is a problem in his application. There is a problem in his perception of where the Word of God does and does not apply. Maybe it was a little bit too much time in the books and not enough time out in the world.

Maybe he was in a bit of a bubble back in Babylon. I don't know what it was. But we're going to see when we get to Malachi.

This ain't right. And God is going to speak against it. How? Not through another scribe, but through a prophet.

His last, his penultimate Old Testament prophet. The last one is going to be John the Baptist. But Malachi is going to speak, and then there's going to be a 400-year gap.

Like unto the 400 years that God tells Abraham about, your descendants, there's going to be this 400-year... Well, there's going to be another 400-year gap right before the Messiah comes. And the last prophet before that... And remember, after the 400 years, who is the prophet? Moses. Who's the prophet after this 400-year gap? John.

So we'll be seeing that coming up, and we'll resume our study in Ezra chapter 10 next time. Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. We thank You for how powerfully You illustrate for us in the lives of these believers who had a zeal for You, but not always according to knowledge.

You've submitted these things for our inspection and our instruction. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister them to our hearts in a way that is constructive and beneficial, that the seed will sink deep into the soil of our souls and produce that fruit of righteousness that reflects Your glory and reproduces and multiplies itself. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.