Kings and Prophets 18-01-18

This is January the 18th, 2018. So what is that? 1-18-2-0-18. And we continue our study tonight of Kings and Prophets.

We're rapidly approaching the exit point for this long and in-depth study. I have learned a tremendous amount in it and really appreciate your enduring to the end so that you can be saved. And we're going to be resuming tonight in Ezra chapter 10.

Ezra chapter 10. We have had some intermediate archival editions for various reasons and I mentioned when I arrived here this evening that it's actually the first live Thursday night class of this year. The last time we met for Kings and Prophets was the last week of December.

So I'll give you a real quick review of where we are but not long because we're going to conclude our study of Ezra and begin looking at Nehemiah tonight in the brief time we have together. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our concentration and then we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to nourish our souls and to be quenching our thirst at the oasis of your Word.

We thank you for the truth it contains in the ministry of your Holy Spirit that transforms it into understandable thoughts and enables us to convert it into motivation and encouragement and clarity of thought as we pursue the goals and tasks that you have assigned us in this life. We thank you for the challenges that we face. We thank you for your prevailing grace and most of all we thank you for the Lord Jesus and for his example of full-hearted dedication to you and to your plan and purpose and we pray that our study tonight will help us follow more closely in his footsteps and prepare ourselves for service both now and in the ages to come.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. As I said we're picking up tonight in Ezra chapter 10. Very briefly we have people who have come back from the captivity to Jerusalem.

It took them a long time but they eventually got the temple rebuilt. Many years later Ezra comes on the scene. He is a priest and he has an interest in revitalizing the worship life.

Now that the temple is complete perhaps he's gotten reports that everything isn't necessarily going as the priestly mind might like it to in and around the temple in Jerusalem and so he sets out with a small hardy band of former captives to go to the land and he gets about three days out and stops at the canal and realizes that there aren't any priests in the bunch and it doesn't really bode well if you're going to go revitalize worship and you forgot to bring any priests. So he sends back to the city and finds some that are willing to come. There's a few priests, not many, but there are more servants and descendants of servants of the temple who are willing to come back and serve.

So he gathers them and moves on. That's one indication that Ezra is getting off to a little bit of a faltering start. The second one if you'll remember is that he did not ask for a royal escort, any

sort of armed protection for the journey and he doesn't attribute this to his confidence in God but to his embarrassment at having to ask because he told the king that he had no confidence in God and there is a difference.

It's one thing to be putting up the brave front but it doesn't actually come from the heart and we're going to see a little bit more of that as we move through the final section of this Ezra study tonight. But it's telling. Ezra's poker face slips a little bit here, I feel.

I will tell you that my understanding of this is a minority one. Feel free to grab a standard commentary and set yourself right if you think I've taken a left into the weeds or gone north. But I think the clues are there.

You don't find your mighty heroes of the faith making their decisions based on embarrassment. And what I'd like to do is very quickly summarize what we looked at last time in chapter 9. They got the supplies and the people, came back to the temple, did their reconnaissance and then he says, 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 peoples of the land with respect to the abominations of, and with respect to is, there's no Hebrew word for that, it's the peoples of the lands of the abominations of the Canaanites and the Perizzites. In other words, they're just loosely associating them with these abominations.

Nobody anywhere in this chapter says that any of these people are practicing the abominations. It's guilt by association. It's like saying, Well, you're German, so you've got to be a rascal.

Look at what Hitler did in World War II. You can't trust Germans or something of that ilk. By the way, I can use that example because I'm married to somebody that's half German and I love the Germans.

I went to Germany, it's a great country. They've got all kinds of great vines and wonderful restaurants and great places to walk. And they've got the Autobahn where you can drive as fast as your car will go.

So I'm strictly using that as an illustration. But here it is guilt by association. They've not separated themselves from the people of the lands.

Verse 2, they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons so that the holy seed is mixed. Notice they don't say anything about any Jewish girls going off and marrying the guys. It's the problem of the sons marrying wives.

And this is a reflection of what you may remember about how you figure whether you're Jewish or not. It isn't if your father is Jewish, it's if your mother is Jewish. And you can see the roots of that here in the same way that a lot of clan association in the Cherokee tribe is based on your matrilineal line.

The clan association goes through the mother. And so being something of a matriarchal and unusually so society. But here, even though it's a patriarchal society, they tend to trace Jewishness.

This is why Timothy is considered Jewish because his mother was Jewish even though his father was Greek. But be that as it may, the holy seed is mixed with the people of those lands. If you've got a New King James you have a little text note there in verse 2 and the holy seed goes back, they link you back to Exodus chapter 22 verse 31.

And if you go back and look at that context, there is no notion of a holy seed. Like there's something holy just about being Jewish. And this is another suspect idea that there is such a thing as holy seed.

There's only one holy seed that I'm willing to talk about and that is what constituted the conception of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Mary conceived the Lord Jesus you can say there's holy seed. That seed goes back to fulfill the prophecy in Genesis chapter 3. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent and so on.

But this notion of holy seed being mixed with the people of the lands, and you can see some of the misunderstanding of this notion even in the Christian church manifesting itself in a very ugly expression of racism where, well, we're sort of a holy seed. There are other reasons to talk about whether it is wise, whether it is practical, whether it makes a difference to marry within or outside your culture or your color or your country. But whatever other statements you want to make, one thing you can't say is, well, there's such a thing as holy seed.

The Bible does not support it in any case but the Lord Jesus Himself. They were to be a holy nation, but guess who can join a nation? Guess who can join the nation of Israel? Anybody who comes there looking for relationship with God. And they can be Uriah the Hittite, they can be Ruth the Moabitess, they can be Rahab the Canaanite from Jericho, they can be Naaman the Syrian, anybody.

And there have been many converts. There were mixed multitudes that came out from Egypt with Israel. There was a huge mixed multitude.

They weren't of the line of Abraham and God didn't say, well, you know, now that we're at the Red Sea, separate out all of these people that aren't of the holy seed and get a cross and then when they're part way, all flood the waters in and then the Egyptians will all go in one big wash. It's not a biblical concept and yet here it is and Ezra doesn't say, well, wait a minute now, let's talk about the nature of this alleged transgression more fully. He completely buys into it.

When I heard this thing, verse 3, tore my garment and my robe, plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. I would not have wanted to have Ezra or Nehemiah as little boys trying to raise them because both of them are hair pullers. We'll see this later on.

They're either pulling their own or somebody else's. But you do remember that in the law there is a prohibition against physically disfiguring yourself. You can rend your garments, you can put on sackcloth and ashes, but you don't disfigure your appearance.

There's a prohibition in the law against shaving the corners of your beard and doing other disfiguring things. It was something inflicted. You remember prophetically, it doesn't actually say it in the Gospels, but in the prophecies about the Lord Jesus, it says they plucked out my hair and my beard as an abuse.

It's an abusive action. It is nowhere prescribed, condoned, or practiced elsewhere in the Old Testament. But here, Job, sitting there in sackcloth and ashes, scraping himself with a potsherd, didn't pluck out his beard.

So again, these little ongoing symptomatic clues caution us in what we're covering. Plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard and sat down astonished. Now, we did have a prophet that was instructed to take some hair and chop it up with a sword.

That was at God's behest. You know, if God comes and tells you to do a thing, it's a little bit different story. But one of the other remarkable features of this chapter is God never speaks anywhere in it, nor does a prophet of God speak anywhere in it.

What is Ezra? What's his profession? He's a priest. He's a priest. We made this point last time that there are available prophets.

Haggai, Zechariah, remember? You've got other available prophets that Malachi is going to be coming. And yet, this is Ezra the priest. I heard this, messed myself up.

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. Talked about the evening sacrifice last time.

It's already been reestablished. But notice the phrase, everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel. And just put a mental sticky there because we're going to be watching for a couple of contrasts between Ezra and Daniel.

So, at the evening sacrifice he arose from his fasting, verse 5, having torn his garment and his robe again, fell on his knees, spread out his hands to the Lord God and said, Oh my God. Now, I am indebted to my brother Matt, years and years and years ago. It's got to be at least 30, 35 years ago.

He wrote me a note. It was on one of the earliest forms of internet communication. I was overseas in Okinawa and we were communicating over the source or something, you know, a 300 baud modem and dial up and all of that.

But we were sending little notes back and forth. And, you know how it is, I'd ask him in a

previous note, well, how's it going? And so, he had told me what all was going on with him. And then his last couple of lines were, I notice in reviewing what I've written, a preponderance of the first person personal pronoun.

And that phrase really stuck in my mind because, and in that context, of course, it was fine. I had asked him how he was doing. But there was a lot of, I did this and I did that.

And so he, I really enjoyed that phrase. I notice a preponderance of the first person personal pronoun. And I want you to watch for that in this prayer.

What we're looking for, because what can that be a symptom of? Certainly not in Matthew's case. But here, in this context, it's something to watch for because it is a symptom of what we call subjectivity. Eyes on self, eyes on circumstances, eyes on people.

Certainly, as we come before God, these things are going to be in our mind. It's not so much that they are mentioned. It's how they are mentioned.

It is the emphasis that they receive and the relationship that they have to God Himself and His plan and His purpose. What we're going to do here is we're going to read, without further interruption, Ezra's prayer. But I just want you to be sensitive to see if you could make a case, if forced at gunpoint, for subjectivity.

See how many times God's person and God's will and God's plan is referred to versus we, us, and I. Let's just go through this real quick. Oh my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to you, my God. Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads.

Our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day, we have been very guilty. For our iniquities, we, our kings, our priests, have been delivered into the hands of the kings of the lands, from 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. For we were slaves, yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage. He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, repair the house of our God, rebuild its ruins, give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

Now, oh our God, what shall we say after this? We have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded your servants the prophets, saying, Land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, uncleanness to the people of the land. Abominations have filled it one end to the other, their impurity. Therefore, do not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons.

Never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever. Now, what else did that say? We looked at it a few weeks ago. What was the context of that? What was the warning? Why did God forbid and

prohibit, or forehead and prohibit? Why did God say you can't marry them? Do not intermarry.

What was the big issue? They will do what? Which they did to Solomon. They will lead you after other gods. This was what Balaam counseled the Midianites, and how they tripped up Israel in the wilderness, and why Balaam basically died the sin unto death.

Because even though he didn't curse Israel and he blessed them when he was supposed to, when Balak was putting all the heat on him, later on he counseled the Midianites, well here's how you can trip them up. He sent the Midianite women in there, and they led them astray, and trouble ensued. That was the problem.

Not that they themselves have some sort of taint, but because of their idolatrous culture, they will draw you in. And Solomon, as wise as he was, with his 700 wives and 300 concubines, was led astray. As Paul summarizes it in the New Testament, bad company corrupts good morals.

But here it says, "...never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever. After all that has come upon us," verse 13, "...for our evil deeds, for our great guilt, since you our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments, join in marriage with the people committing these abominations?" Notice committing is in italics. It's the people of these abominations.

They are not committing them. The word committing is not there. These people have a historic association.

This is like saying the Germans are still exterminating people in death camps. You need fresh evidence. You need fresh examples.

You can't go back. That's just going back 70 years. We're talking about 1,000 years.

Committing is not there. Mark it out. "...join in marriage with people of these abominations." It's a historical taint.

"...would you not be angry with us until you had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?" And sadly, Ezra does not wait for an answer to that question. If he had just sat there and said, oh Lord, I wait for your reply, I strongly believe God would have given him a different answer. In fact, he's going to get that answer through Malachi.

In the meantime, he just boils right on. "...O Lord God of Israel, 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." Now, keep your finger here and flip over about a quarter of the pages in your Bible to Daniel chapter 9. We saw this when we did Daniel because we have a similar prayer of what you might call a prayer of corporate confession. This is a prayer where not only one's personal sins, but those of the

nation or group to which you're associated are mentioned.

So Daniel, having looked at the Word of God, and he mentions that first in verse 2, "...set his face," in verse 3, "...to the Lord God to make a request by prayer and supplication with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession and said, O Lord..." Now, I just want you to watch Daniel, how many times he talks about God and about God's purpose and about God's plan. I'm not saying that there aren't a lot of the same words in these prayers, but look for the tone, look for the emphasis, look for the sense Daniel portrays here.

"...O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him and with those who keep His commandments. We have sinned and committed iniquity. We have done wickedly and rebelled by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.

We haven't heeded Your servants the prophets who spoke in Your name to our kings and princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day. To the men of Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem, all Israel, near and far, countries to which You have driven them, because of unfaithfulness which they have committed against You." Remember Ezra said, all of those who trembled at the Word of the Lord? Daniel mentions the Word of the Lord, he's just been studying the Word of the Lord, but he says, Lord, we have sinned against You.

"...to us belongs shame of face, our kings, princes, fathers, we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God to walk in His laws which He set before us by His servants the prophets.

All Israel has transgressed Your law, has departed, so as not to obey Your voice. Therefore the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, has been poured out on us. We have sinned against Him.

He has confirmed His words which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us by bringing this great disaster on us. Unto the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this disaster came upon us, yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

Therefore the Lord has kept the disaster in mind and brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works which He does, even though we have not obeyed His voice. Now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name as it is this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain, because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.

Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear, open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name. For we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.

O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." So in this prayer of confession and contrition, Daniel appeals to God, reminds God of His mercies and His forgiveness and His great power in the past, and appeals to God, intercedes on behalf of the nation for God to act, for God to forgive, for God to restore. Ezra's prayer, O God, look at us and how bad everything is that we've done, and we should have known better, and now we've got to do something. Do you see an appeal for forgiveness, for God to act, for God to appear in Ezra's prayer? It's a great admission of guilt, largely the guilt of others, since Ezra himself has not intermarried with the people.

So he's really confessing on behalf of others. You don't hear any of the intermarried guys chiming in and saying, amen, preach on, pray on, yeah that's me, O Lord. It's Ezra talking about them guys, the whole prayer.

And he doesn't, I don't know, maybe it's because I'm an English major, but there's a whole different sense in Daniel's prayer that he has a personal sense of God. He is talking to God, he is in awe of God and God's past power, and he is making appeal to the God he knows, and to the God he is confident will forgive and will restore because he's been studying Jeremiah's prophecies and he knows the 70 years are nearly up. A whole different tone from what I gather in Ezra's prayer.

But here's the clincher. Chapter 10 of Ezra. While Ezra was praying, while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, remember what happened when Daniel prayed his prayer? While he was still praying, what happened? Did you already turn back from it? What happened while he was still in the midst of praying? Messenger from the throne room of heaven comes, says Daniel, as soon as you started praying, your prayers were heard.

Here I am, Gabriel, God has sent me to answer your prayer. And I apologize, but when you read chapter 10 here, while Ezra was praying and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him, weeping very bitterly. So instead of a triumphant, angelic, glorious messenger coming with words of hope from God, you get a bunch of people crying and weeping, and kids.

It's a very large assembly of people come. Now, pay close attention. If you have something to mark your Bible with, you need to mark verse 2. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, now he's in this crowd of weepers, and groaners, and moaners that have all come while Ezra's trying to pray.

And, of course, Ezra is praying out loud. This is how they did it back then. The concept of silent prayer, I told you before, even reading to yourself is a relatively recent invention, just in the last few hundred years.

People always read out loud. People always prayed out loud. Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and do what? Psalm 55, 17.

Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice. Right? Lifted up his voice and said, how do you think so many of the prayers of the Lord Jesus got recorded in the New Testament? He prayed them out loud. John's got two whole chapters pretty much of nothing but Jesus praying.

So, he's praying out loud and these people hear it, and so now they're all caught up in the Jonathan Edwards, sinners in the hands of an angry God mode here. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, we have trespassed against our God and have taken pagan wives from the people of the land, yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now, the germ and the genesis of the idea, the seed of the idea, if I can say it, is about to appear.

All Ezra has done to this point is say, oh Lord, what a grievous sin of intermarriage these guys have committed. Shechaniah says in verse 3, now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. Second time we've had that phrase, those who tremble at the word of God.

We post the command and people tremble. Right? They don't tremble in the presence of God, they don't tremble at the majesty or the glory or the truth of God, it's they tremble at the command of God, the ordinances, the laws, the trembling at the law, capital L. So, let us make a covenant with our God. Now you think about the biblical covenants that you know about.

One of the first ones that is explicitly mentioned is in Genesis chapter 9 after the flood. Remember the sign of that covenant? So, when Noah made the covenant saying, oh Lord, we promise to be good so you won't send a flood anymore. Oh, is that how it happened? Who made that covenant? Who initiated that covenant and put his bow in the sky? God did.

Abraham. Your descendants will be as numerous as the sand of the sea and stars in the sky. Split some animals, sit out there, keep the birds off of them, God comes, goes between the pieces.

Who initiated that covenant? Who made that covenant? God. Did Israel march up Mount Sinai and chip out a bunch of commands on stones and bring them back down and say, here is the covenant we make with God. Who made the Sinai covenant? Who wrote it? God did.

David, man after God's own heart. God says, I will establish your throne. You'll never lack a man to sit on it.

It's going to be an eternal throne and an eternal king. Who initiated that covenant? God did. Every meaningful biblical covenant is authored by, initiated by, and guaranteed by God Himself.

Who initiates this covenant? Shekinah, a previously unknown and hereafter unknown. We're only going to see one more note that even peripherally bears upon him, but it's a powerful note. Shekinah says, let us make a covenant.

This is the beginning of, in my judgment, Phariseeism. I make a covenant with God. I'll divide and give Him a tenth of all of the cumin and the cinnamon and the peppermint and the spikenard and whatever else I've got in my spice cabinet.

I'll divide the barley seeds. I'll divide, I'll do this. I'll make a covenant.

The richness of Jewish traditional laws about how far you can walk and how many times you can brush mud off your garment and all the rest of those things we've seen in the past, you see the origin of it here. I will do something for God. I will covenant with God.

Now, there is provision in the law to make a vow, but it's very nonspecific. It certainly isn't corporate and you don't write one and then make it binding on everybody else. A vow was personal.

A vow was between you and God in the Old Testament. People weren't even supposed to know what it was. Remember Paul shaved his head at Cancria because he had a vow? Nobody knows what that vow was because it was between God and the Lord.

I will make a covenant with God, Paul and the Lord. But here Shekiniah says, Let's make a covenant with our God to put away these wives and those who have been born to them according to the advice of my master and those who tremble at the commandment of our God and let it be done according to the law. Let it be done according to the law.

Arise, for this matter is yours. Notice responsibilities in italics. Shekiniah says, This is kind of your idea.

We heard you praying. We've seen your shock and dismay at these marriages. So, get up now.

This matter is yours to prosecute. We're with you. Go on ahead.

We're right behind you. Here's the idea. Run with it.

Be of good courage and do it. Who's the one that's supposed to be saying be of good courage and do it? Who told that to Joshua? Be strong and have a good courage. Be not afraid.

The Lord your God is with you. Shekiniah is with you. He's right behind you.

Be of good courage and do it. So, Ezra arose and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So, they swore an oath.

There's only one oath of allegiance, if you will. There's only one commitment in Israel and that is the commitment to God's original law. All that the Lord hath said we will do.

Do this and thou shalt live. Right? But Ezra and Shekiniah conspired to create an addendum to the law. We're going to do something right now.

So, Ezra rose up from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib. When he came there he ate no bread, drank no water. He mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.

Mourning the guilt of others. None of the guilty parties seem to be participating yet. They issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the that they must gather at Jerusalem and that whoever would not come within three days according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated.

He himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. By the way, none of this is in the law. You do not have the right to separate an Israelite from his hereditary property based on saying be here by a certain time or you forfeit your property.

That's against the law of Moses. And in any case, if they forfeited it, they should get it back in the year of Jubilee, right? You do not forfeit hereditary land. But Ezra says show up in three days or you're going to lose it all and you'll be expunged from the community.

The law of Moses actually says what are, you know, banishment offenses, separated from the people offenses. This is not one of them. All the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered and you can see the beginnings here of the Pharisaical and Sanhedrinal notions of control of the people by beating them overhead with the law of Moses and their interpretation of it.

This is classic proto-Pharisaism in my judgment. So the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month on the twentieth of the month and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain.

I commend your attention. We don't have time to turn there, but do you remember not long ago when we were looking at the book of Zechariah and we got to chapter 14 and it was talking about the Millennial Kingdom and how all the nations of the earth, Egypt and the other surrounding nations should send tribute and observe the Feast of Booths. Remember that? It was a real odd thing.

People of Egypt are all supposed to observe the Feast of Booths and if they don't, what is the penalty? If anyone does not come up and celebrate the Feast of Booths, on them there shall be no rain. What happened in the days of Ahab when Israel, the northern kingdom, was so wicked? What did God do to get their attention? He shut up the heavens for two plus years and there was no rain. Right? So if God is so unfavorable, why is there a heavy rain? Not since the flood has there been heavy rain as a judgment.

Heavy rain is a blessing. Heavy rain is a bounty. It fills the wadis.

It waters the agriculture. It raises the Nile. Egypt does well.

Prices go down. It's a boom time when you have a lot of rain. Well, they're standing there in a heavy rain.

Oh yes, the Lord is very angry with us. Our sky has turned to bronze and our fields to iron. Well, not exactly.

We seem to be getting a drenching here. And so the account here says that they were trembling because of the matter and because of heavy rain. They're all shivering in the drenching rain that they're standing out in.

So Ezra stood up and said to them, trying to pontificate through the drenching downpour, you know they talk about raining on a parade. If you're trying to give a real hellfire and brimstone speech, it's tough to do in a pouring rain. To really rouse and enthuse people on a thing when there's just a drenching downpour.

They didn't have rain gear to carry in those days. You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore make confession to the Lord God of your fathers and do as well.

Separate yourselves from the peoples of this land and from the pagan wives. Notice no indictment for idolatry or for pagan practices. It is wholly and entirely marrying people who have an ancestry.

No allegation of wrongdoing. It isn't other than marrying somebody they should not have married. And the basis for that is extremely shaky.

When God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to prophesy, did they say anything about, and by the way, don't pollute yourself with the people of the land. What was the whole message? Remember that it was a message of the heart. Make sure your heart is right as you undertake this work.

Have the spirit of honoring God as you finish this building. Look ahead to the coming of Messiah as you do this work. There's nothing of that here.

It's all you've committed a vile infraction of a thousand year old instruction to a whole different group of people in a whole different circumstance. The assembly answered and said with a loud voice, Yes, as you have said, so we must do. It's a lot easier to, as I mentioned three weeks ago, it's a lot easier to pick one thing and do it as a penance or as a penalty.

I was looking at an account of Catherine the Great and the way that whole thing came about in Russia. And the previous empress had done a whole bunch of bad things. Locked people up and had them murdered.

And she started having a guilty conscience because she had this little kid locked up and wouldn't let anybody talk to him. He had no language. He was not allowed to be told who he was.

He was just this precious little kid and he was just supposed to grow up in total isolation. Well, she actually saw him at some point and it pricked her conscience. And so she went to the priest and she said, I confess this wrong.

Give me a penance. And the guy said, well, you've got to go to this place and bow a hundred times and do this. She said, I'll do it.

Because then she could absolve her conscience. Go do a thing and this lifelong wrong is no longer a burden on your heart. Well, that's what this is, in my view.

Many people, it's the season for heavy rain. We're not able to stand outside. Notice, God has not interrupted the seasonal rains to give them any kind of special message.

There's not an impending famine. This is not the work of one or two days. There are many of us who have transgressed in this matter.

Let the leaders of our entire assembly stand. Let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at a point in time where we're going to have to rotate them through and issue divorces, basically. The paperwork is all about divorcing and banishing all of these families.

So what are they doing? Who are the ones that God most often commends sympathy toward in the law of Moses? Who does He tell them to leave the corners of the fields ungleaned for? Widows and orphans. What are they creating by divorcing these many thousands of families? Widows and orphans. In trying to heed a thousand-year-old piece of the law that no longer pertains, the letter of the law, the spirit of the law that says, don't abuse women who have no husband and children who have no father.

Look out for them, care for them, provide for them. This is just the opposite. They're creating scores, untold, so many that they can't fit them all in.

They've got to rotate them through and banish them away. Notice in verse 15, and these men's names are recorded for a reason. Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jehoziah the son of Tikva opposed this.

And Meshulam and Shabbatai the Levite gave them support. These four guys saw that this was wrong and spoke up. And God has recorded their names in eternal Scripture for that reason.

So the descendants of the captivity did so, as were the priests, heads of the father's households, wrote them all down, sat them down on the first day of the 10th month to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month, they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives. And now we're going to get the list.

Now here's what's really interesting. Now we get the list. And you know, we've found wonderful significance.

There's no wasted words in Scripture. And we've seen in the genealogies and in the records of the chronicles and so on, that there are riches to be mined from the giving of lists of names. I'm only going to give you one nugget out of this list, because honestly, we are moving toward the close of our study.

If I was doing Ezra verse by verse, we'd take them all. But let me just give you one observation, and it's a fairly easy one to make. These are the ones who are found to have had these pagan wives, and they gave their promise in verse 19 that they would put away their wives, and guilty presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering.

Now look at this listing as it goes on down. And all the rest of this just looks like accented and phonetically marked names, right? I would like to draw your attention, if I may, to verse 26. Of the sons of Elam.

Stop right there. Sons of Elam. Ring a bell.

Where did we see that? Beginning of the chapter, verse 2. Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam. Remember that? Of the sons of Elam, Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel. Who is Jehiel? Who is Jehiel? Shechaniah's father, right? Shechaniah the idea man, he's the son of Jehiel of the sons of Elam.

This is Shechaniah's father who has taken a foreign wife. Now Shechaniah himself is not the product of one of these marriages. Jehiel had a good Jewish wife, let's call her an Israelite wife.

Shechaniah was born. Then we don't know what happened. Maybe the original mother died.

Maybe Jehiel took a second wife. We don't know exactly what happened. But Jehiel now has a wife that is not of Israelite extraction.

What does this mean to Shechaniah? It starts with calm and ends with petition. Calm petition. Who inherits from Jehiel? Well, Shechaniah, but here's all of these children from a second marriage.

So now go back and read the words of Shechaniah in verse 2. Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said, We have trespassed against our God and have taken pagan wives from the people of the land. Yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them.

Get rid of the wives and all of the kids. What does this do for Shechaniah? He's now likely the sole heir of the sons of Elam through Jehiel. So you can make the case.

It's not ironclad, but the fact that we're given Shechaniah's extraction in verse 2 and then we're

given these details in verse 26 suggests to me that there were other motives at work that motivated so many of the Israelites to say, Yes, let's get rid of these foreign wives and their offspring because there's fewer people to divide the land among. The available resources now, you've just found a pretext to eliminate the competition. And Shechaniah comes up with this and it turns out his father has a foreign wife with sons and they are now banished and Shechaniah is left.

Shechaniah doesn't leave, so he's not one of those sons. He's not married to any of these foreign wives. So again, you begin to see that there are mixed motives at best, impure motives, and certainly collectively there is a taint in this entire project.

All these had taken pagan wives, verse 44, and some of them had wives by whom they had children, and Jehiel is one of them. This is why Shechaniah says you've got to get rid of the wives and any offspring. Well, that closes the book of Ezra for us.

And what conclusions can we draw? My suggestion again is that there is a way that seems right to a man. There is a genuine desire to do good and to be good, but we really have to examine our hearts and make sure that we have a heart like Daniel had. Lord, to you belong mercy and forgiveness.

To you belongs the covenant power, the plan, and the purpose, and a yielded and submissive approach to God in confession and asking God what should we then do. In no part of these chapters in Ezra is there any appeal made to God in terms of expecting a response. What shall we do, O Lord, isn't there.

Daniel has a different heart and he gets an entirely different kind of answer and a different result. God cracks open the walls of history and shows Daniel all the way down the corridors of time to the glories of the kingdom of the Son and the kingdom of the Father because Daniel has that heart for truth. We tend to have a confirmation bias.

We see what we want to see. Paul Simon's immortal line, a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. If we are genuinely followers of Christ, if we are genuinely not proud and are going to be given grace as the humble, we have got to examine ourselves and make sure that our motives are pure, that our pursuit of God's truth is honest, that we're not trying to rub the lamp and get the genie to grant our wishes.

God is not a genie. We are servants of the living God. We are brothers and sisters in the fellowship of Christ.

And when we come before God to acknowledge whether it's our own faults or those of our culture and our society and our nation and the situations that we find ourselves in, we inevitably, it's just like the ancient people walking down a road. You pick up dirt that needs to be washed from your feet, really often through no fault of your own. But nevertheless, we wash our feet.

We wash each other's feet. We forgive one another. And you think about the prayer of the Lord Jesus, forgive us our trespasses as, to the extent that, in proportion to the way that we forgive those who trespass against us.

And we have to really pursue and cultivate that humility that prevents us from making what I consider to be the Ezra mistake. Believing that it is a righteous crusade, believing that it is a worthy cause and a biblical principle at stake, when in fact it does damage, it splits families, God is not in it, God never speaks, God is not glorified, there's no indication that this resulted in any great revival or any great renewal or renaissance or rehabilitation of anything. They split these families and ran all of these people off.

Nowhere is there any accusation of actual wrongdoing. It's who they are, not what they're doing. And that's always wrong.

If you want to lament slavery in this country, lament the white Christian attitude that cradled bigotry, that cradled abuse. There were many who did not, and of course they're largely unsung and unknown. We hear about the worst.

You don't hear about the guy that obeyed all of the traffic laws, you hear about the guy that was speeding and ran into another lane and killed somebody. You don't hear about all of the sober drivers, you hear about the drunk who wiped out a family. And so history recalls the worst of what happened in the South.

Untold hundreds of thousands of black individuals were transported from the darkness and the lack of gospel message in Africa to this country under horrible conditions. But those who survived and came, God turned cursing to blessing for many of them because they came to faith. And the black church was and is one of the strongest repositories of faith in this country.

And they may not have a lot of doctrinal tomes on their shelves, but the truths that they have, they work them and they live by them. And it is going to surprise many, many erudite middle class white Christians in the resurrection to see how many faithful people of humble origins and not much education and maybe disadvantaged because of culture or race or whatever else have, through faith, moved mountains. These individuals that are being blindly separated and purged from Israel, the one place where they can get the truth about God, the men who did this will be held to account.

And you notice there was no great blessing here. God had already revealed to Daniel, don't think that you can turn a magic key in the lock and you're going to get the kingdom back. The prophets came and preached a message of the heart.

There is no message of the heart in these actions. It is a message of legalism. It is a message of callous application of the letter of the law in a self-righteous and that guy over there needs to change his ways kind of an attitude.

And we should be warned. We should be cautioned and we should be careful and we should

humbly go before God and pray the prayer that David prays in the Psalms. Try me and see if there is any wicked way in me.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

By doing that and getting the beam out of our own eye, we will see clearly to help others if they've got a speck in theirs. But we can't get anywhere with the kind of bull in the china shop, brute force application of righteousness. And you see this in our culture today.

There are Christians who blindly go forth in the name of right and actually do harm to the cause of Christ because people with common sense say, if that's what your faith tells you, that's not the faith for me. And it isn't what faith tells them. It's what human energy tells them.

It's what subjectivity tells them. It's what the Ezra prayer tells them. And I would encourage an occasional review of just laying these two prayers side by side.

See if you can find the difference. See if you can perceive the heart that is exposed when Daniel prays. That's what we're after.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. We'll begin with Nehemiah next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the powerful sword of the Spirit that exposes us to the quick, to the joints in the marrow, and helps us judge the thoughts and intents of our own hearts. We pray that as we ponder this example from your word, that your Holy Spirit will help us to see areas in our own lives where we may have unwittingly run afoul of this all-too-common human failing, and that in our zeal for some parts of your word and your truth, we may have neglected others that are more central and more applicable to our lives before you. We pray that as a result we can more fully reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, that we can present ourselves as unblemished sacrifices before you, and discern the better things grow in grace and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in his name. Amen.