

Kings and Prophets 17-08-10

This is Thursday, the 10th of August, 2017. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets. And after an extended look at the prophetic book of Daniel and a couple of weeks reviewing the order and content of the minor prophets, we are picking up in the historical section, you could loosely put this on the king's side of the kings and prophets, but it's sort of minus king.

When I was a child, there was a mythical hero called Dr. Minus Mind and it took me a while before I realized that that was a bad thing, minus mind. Well, this is Israel minus king, but it falls under the king's side of our kings and prophets study. But we'll be picking up tonight in Ezra chapter 1. We're going to be looking at the book of Ezra and Nehemiah.

More about that shortly, but let's begin as we always do by taking a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to the glory of the Lord Jesus. Ask God's blessing on us and cultivate the ministry and the presence of God's Holy Spirit as we spend this time together. Shall we pray? Father, it is such a wonderful realization to know that we are in the grip of your grace, we are sustained by your fatherly care, we are secure in our standing before you in the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for him and for his tremendous work and love expressed on our behalf in bearing our sins and making it possible for us to be renewed and restored and entered into your family. We thank you for the opportunities that you give us both by way of challenge and in our blessings to remember who we are and why we have been placed in this time and at this place on earth. And we pray that tonight as we study this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, that each one of us will be motivated and encouraged and challenged to think about it and to make application based on it in a way that will fulfill your plan and purpose for us, draw us closer together as your people, and enable us to more fully reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in his name. Amen. As I said, we're going to begin tonight looking at the book of Ezra.

And Ezra is an interesting entry in the canonical list of books we have in the Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are a single book. You remember that 1 and 2 Samuel are a single book, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

And Ezra and Nehemiah historically has, in the Hebrew Bible, always been a single book. It wasn't until the 1500s in the modern era that any Hebrew Bible divided Ezra and Nehemiah. In the Septuagint, it is a single book, at least initially.

Later editions of the Septuagint in the post-Christ era, the A.D. era, began to separate it. Jerome and some others, the Latin Vulgate, began to draw separation. But you remember how the Masoretes would count all of the letters and count all of the words? Well, in the Masoretic enumeration, there is no entry at the end of Ezra.

Both books are counted and accounted at the end of Nehemiah. So it treats it as a single book. Why is that important? Because the continuity of the story is preserved.

And the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries at least they overlap, and we find in the book of Nehemiah a mention of Ezra as his contemporary, helps us to understand the flow and the purpose of this account. And it's a very interesting slice of post-exilic history. And it spans quite a distance.

It begins in the days of Cyrus. And you remember Cyrus is mentioned prophetically back in the days of the exilic prophets. Well, Cyrus becomes the ruler of the Persian Empire in about 550 B.C., and he conquers Babylon and the Babylonians.

You remember his general Gubaru goes under the wall when they drain the water out, and that's the end of Belshazzar, and Daniel moves into the days of the Medo-Persian Empire. And Darius the Mede, who is Gubaru, has a little over a year of rule. And then Cyrus takes over and sort of backdates his rule to encompass the short time that his general is honored with that privilege.

So 539 is the time of the conquest of Babylon. And so if he came to the throne in 550, this is going to be 11 years into his reign, he conquers Babylon and takes over that entire Babylonian Empire. Well, about a year later, 538 is when he issues the decree that allows the Jews, in fact directs the Jews, to go and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

This is where Ezra picks up. So we're right in line, we've just finished Daniel. Daniel is around at this time.

You remember 605 is when he and his three friends were taken captive, and we're now down in the, if you go 70 years after that, you end up at 535 or so, right? And this is 538. And we remember the prayer that Daniel prays, and he says, the 70 years are nearly up, and oh Lord, won't it be great when we all go back to the land? And God says, let me give you the longer view, because this is not going to be a restoration of the Davidic and Solomonic glory. And we've reviewed all of that.

So that's the time where we are right now, as Ezra picks up. And this is going to span his successor, Cambyses, who is the one who finally conquers Egypt and puts it in its place. And then Darius I, and during the reign of this Darius, not Darius the Mede, but Darius I, there's going to be a rediscovery of this edict of Cyrus.

Everything had kind of ground to a halt, but they say, hey, wait a minute, we've got authorization from king before last to get this temple project going and restore the fortunes of the people in the land, so let's dust this thing off and get going. And so under Darius I, around 515, which is 23 years later, they get going again after a hiatus. And then, of course, following Darius I, his successor is a guy named Xerxes.

What do we know about Xerxes? He's, like many guys, he winds up being famous for his wife.

And his wife is, of course, Vashti, who gets deposed and then comes Hadassah, or Esther. Right? That's Xerxes.

And he's going to follow along from Darius' reign. Darius is going to end in 486, and then you're going to have Xerxes. And it's during Xerxes that you have that decree.

Remember, Haman gets the decree passed that is going to end the Jews. And Esther, with God's help and Mordecai's prayers, is able to get a corollary decree issued that gives the Jews the right to defend themselves against the execution of the first decree. And that is what allows them to actually, for the first time, retain their own property, defend their own land, take possession of their own family inheritance, and defend it against all comers.

They have always been vassal citizens. They have never had that right. And in my personal view, that is the decree that really allows them to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

That is the decree from which Daniel's 69 weeks are counted. And it ends up exactly to the year with Jesus at the age of 12 making his first public appearance. You don't have to do funny math.

You don't have to take 365 and multiply it times 69 weeks of years and then divide by 365 and do a whole lot of fancy math. I don't think most people coming to the Word of God would be able to do that, nor did they know exactly how long. You have to actually divide by 365.25 to get that math to come out in 30 AD or whatever it does.

But it's very simple. Count the Passovers. How many years are there? In Israel, how do you define a year? It's the Feast Cycle.

So how many Feast Cycles are there in 69 weeks of years? That's how many years there should be between the decree and the coming of Messiah the Prince. Well, from Xerxes' decree at Esther's behest until Jesus at the age of 12 in the temple is exactly that many years. No extra math required.

That's how many Passovers had ensued. So that's Xerxes. That takes you all the way down to 465 and following that you have Artaxerxes, Darius II, a couple of more Artaxerxes and so on.

But we just want to place Ezra and Nehemiah in their historical context. So this is going to be the beginning of the return to the land. Now, let's think about entering the land and we've alluded to this a time or two.

What was the nature of the first entrance of God's people into the land of Canaan? Be careful now. The first entrance. Genesis 12, get thee up out of thy kindred, go to a land that I will show you, wherever you plant the sole of your sandal it's going to be yours and your descendants.

Abraham is the first guy to go there, right? And he finds out that there's at least one believer already there in Salem, right? But what is the nature of that entrance? Is it glory and conquest and hail stones from heaven? He gets run around some. He digs wells and then when his son

and grandson try to go use them, other people have claimed them and covered them up. It's a little bit of a struggle.

He doesn't just immediately walk into a land flowing with milk and honey all ready for him, does he? He does prosper. You have his nephew Lot going to Sodom and Gomorrah, right? Then you have Isaac, then you have Jacob. And what is the nature of the leaving of God's people from that land after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been there a good while? How do they leave? What are those conditions? You think about the last half of Genesis pretty much being devoted to the story of Jacob slash Joseph, right? And how does Jacob leave the land? Why does he leave the land? Famine.

And how long was the famine going to last? Seven years. Remember the seven fat ears or heads? I used to always imagine that as ears of corn until I realized that there was no such thing as corn, certainly not in the Middle East. Golden corn, that's not it.

The word corn in the King James means food and it can mean any kind of grain. It does not mean the golden maize corn that would not be eaten by anybody in Europe or Asia or the Middle East until the continents were connected. So the ears or whatever it is that they're eating one another there are heads of wheat or barley or some such.

But you remember that. It's seven ears. And the seven cows, the seven lean cows eat the fat cows or however that was, right? Seven ears.

How far into the famine is it before Jacob finds out his son is alive and he goes down to live in the land of Goshen? This is a tough one. I know this because I have to. They'd revoke my card if I didn't.

It's two years in. The famine is two years on and there's five more years to run. That's when Pharaoh sends wagons and carts and hauls Jacob and everything he owns down to Egypt as sort of his gift to his vizier, his second in command, Joseph.

That's how they leave. So now think about it. Abraham goes in and he has to sort of claim it.

Everywhere he walks that's a land claim but he doesn't really possess the land, does he? He possesses as much as he can graze his flocks on. Same with Isaac. Same with Jacob.

And Jacob leaves because of famine. The land does not support him. But this is a part of God's plan.

You have this wonderful foretaste of Jesus in Joseph being essentially killed by his brothers, the bloody coat. As far as the father is concerned, the son is dead. Looking forward to the Lord Jesus and yet in saving the Gentiles and preserving them for how many years? How long has Joseph been blessing Egypt before Jacob-slash-Israel gets the benefit? What did I just say? How far into the famine? Two years.

Egypt has been enjoying the blessings of Joseph's saviorship for two years before Jacob and his crowd come down and join in. Egypt gets the blessing of Joseph for two years before Jacob and the rest of them come down. The seventy come down and enjoy the last five.

When the five years is over, what happens? Jacob and all of his sons and grandsons and great-grandsons all move back up to Canaan, right? Oh no, they don't. They have a land claim. God has given them a deed in trust for all of the land for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but they do not go up and claim it, do they? They stay down in Egypt and so what happens over the course of a few centuries? Now they are enslaved.

What happened after Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus down to Egypt? How long did he stay down there? Until the death of Herod, right? And it's safe to return. Remember the purge of the babies? And when they hear that Herod has died and the purge is off, then they go back up and go up to Nazareth and the Galilee area. But he did not stay in Egypt.

Jesus didn't grow up as an Egyptian. He goes back out of Egypt. I have called my son and he went.

Well, Israel doesn't value the land promise that God gave them and they don't leave. They are comfortable in Egypt. It's pacific.

They are cared for and like a frog in water, getting hotter and hotter. There is less and less freedom, more and more oppression until by the time of Moses, they are heavily enslaved, right? So we are looking at the entrance and exit into the land of promise. Abraham comes in, Jacob goes out.

Moses leads them out but that whole generation dies in the wilderness except for two. Joshua takes them back in, right? Now what is the nature of that entrance? Of course, liberal scholars notwithstanding, it is not a gradual filtering. It isn't a gradual, we have more and more flocks and we are taking it over.

Look at how our pottery slowly replaces the proto-early iron and all the rest of it. They go in with God's mighty hand. The Jordan is parted.

There is fire and brimstone from heaven raining down on their enemies. There is supernatural knocking down of walls in Jericho and so on. It is a mighty, miraculous deliverance like unto what they saw 40 years earlier when they left Egypt.

Miracles leaving Egypt, miracles entering the land. Potent presence of God in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Interestingly, the pillar of cloud and fire does not lead them across the Jordan into the land because who do they have instead of the pillar of cloud and fire? Yeshua.

Joshua. One of the few biblical figures about which there is not a single negative word said anywhere in the Old or New Testaments. Joshua.

Daniel is the other. Daniel and Joshua, there is no negative word. There are a couple of others.

Caleb the son of Jephunneh is one. Benaiah the son of Jehoiada is another. But of your major biblical figures, Joshua stands out.

In all of that career, there is not a single negative anywhere in it. And he is God's leader for those people and he again foreshadows Christ. Joseph brings them out of the land to a place of safety.

Joshua brings them back in after that period of bondage. Well, how do they then leave the land after that? What's the next exodus from the land? The next departure? Northern Ten Tribes, it's the Assyrians taking them, deporting them, distributing them, dispersing them, intermarrying with them, pretty much ending their identity in 721. And then Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian, in 605, 597, 586, out they go.

And what is the reason? It is spiritual famine. It is spiritual infidelity. This is what we have seen all of the prophets rail against, right? God's judgment is coming because you are adulterous.

That's Hosea. Joel, God's locusts are going to come and eat up any prosperity you think you have. Amos, God's going to use the discipline end of the rod on you, and so on.

And we have seen all that all the way down. It was copiously documented in the first 39 chapters of Isaiah. Ezekiel talks about it.

Remember, he is lifted up by the hair of the head and taken down and shown all of the pollutions and abominations in and around God's house. And what is the latter part of Ezekiel? God's going to make a new and better house, the Millennial Temple. Well, so now, after that departure from the land, how do they return? Well, if you think, as we tend to do in Biblical chiasmic terms, they are going to return to the land.

There is not a Joshua leading them into the land. There is not a pillar of cloud and fire leading them out of Persia, is there? It is going to be gradual. It is going to be somewhat sheepish.

It is going to be fraught with difficulties. And there is no miracle anywhere. You can read and read and read all of Ezra and all of Nehemiah.

There is no miracle there is no prophet who stands up with a great word from the Lord other than exhortation. You are going to have Haggai and Zechariah and they are going to be mentioned here as telling the people what they need to do. It is a simple message.

It is not authenticated with miracles. It isn't acted out with sashes and burying things and chopping up hairs and setting things on fire and laying siege to model towns or any of the rest of it. It is a simple verbal message.

So, that is our context for the Ezra and Nehemiah history. Actually it is interesting because in the Hebrew Bible you have the book of Samuel, the book of Kings, the book of Ezra and

Nehemiah, then the book of Chronicles. Ezra and Nehemiah follows on after Kings and before Chronicles.

So, as we take a quick look at the book now, and that is about all the introduction we need. That is basically your historical context and your Israelite context in the sense of where they are spiritually, what their history has been. God could have chosen to raise up another Joshua and lead them with a mighty hand.

He doesn't and there is a reason for that that we are going to see. So, as I say it picks up in the time of Cyrus. This is going to be 538.

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah was fulfilled. The Lord stood at the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it in writing, saying. Now this is not his first year as king of Persia.

This is his first year as king of the whole Babylonian empire. That is 11 years into his Persian kingship. Now he is the shoulders and arms of silver here.

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, verse 2. All the kingdoms of the earth of the Lord God of heaven has given me, and he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Now how Cyrus got this command, we are not told. But evidently he believed it and took it to heart because he says, who is among you of all his people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel.

He is God which is in Jerusalem. Whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, goods and livestock, beside the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem. So for those who like to date the whole 70 weeks of Daniel prophecy from the decree of Isaiah, go restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

It says go and build the temple. So this is not the criteria that is given to Daniel. So the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

This is a conscious harking back to the building of the tabernacle. You remember that God put his spirit in Bezalel and Aholiab and the other tabernacle workmen to fashion the things that would create the first version of God's house among his people, which was the tent. And again, when you think sort of chiastically, there is first the tabernacle.

Why didn't God just wait and say, no, I'm just going to be the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. I'll talk to Moses. We'll get you through this time of transition.

And when you get into the land, I'll lead you to a place and we'll build me a house. That doesn't happen for centuries. From 1440 BC or 1400 when they go into the land, all the way down to the days of David, which is less than 1000 BC and the 900s is when Solomon actually gets the

temple built.

So it starts out as a tabernacle. Then there is Solomon's temple. That gets knocked down.

Then there is the second temple. And toward the closing days of that temple, what they call Herod's temple, it actually starts here. You then have another tabernacle.

So you see the chiasm there? Tabernacle, building, building, tabernacle. What tabernacle am I referring to? The second one. What does Immanuel mean? God with us.

What does John tell us? What did the word do that was with God and was God? It became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory. The glory like filled the tabernacle and filled Solomon's temple.

And it's not going to fill this temple, but when Jesus comes, he reveals the glory of the Father. And especially on the Mount of Transfiguration, you begin to get hints of what's going on. What's the tabernacle of God now? It's us.

It is we. So there is this time of the traveling presence of God and that's us. It's not in a fixed location.

People do not have to travel to Mecca or to Jerusalem or to a holy site to find God and to hear from God. God travels among men and he travels in us. And it's our privilege to speak God's truth and to represent God's glory to the world.

So let me give you sort of an outline of this book of Ezra-Nehemiah to kind of organize our thoughts about it. It's going to fall into five parts. And the first part is restoring the altar and laying the foundations.

That's going to be Ezra 1-6. Ezra, the first six chapters, this is the first return. It's a very partial return.

It numbers roughly 40,000 people in total. We're going to get a list of some of them in chapter 2 here. But this is Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel. Babel is Babylon. Zeru is from that Sera Hebrew root we've seen before that means seed.

He is the seed of Babylon. He's the son of Babel. Zerubbabel.

He's born in exile. He's born in captivity. He is going to lead this first group.

So that's going to be chapters 1-6. And what are they going to do? He and Joshua the high priest are going to come back and get God worship reinstated. And they're going to start with an altar.

And they're going to lay the foundations of the temple according to Cyrus' decree. And they're

going to try to get it built. That's going to be in the first six chapters.

The next four chapters, 7, 8, 9, and 10, there has been a hiatus of time, a couple of dozen years. And the first incursion didn't get it done. They weren't able to rebuild the temple.

They didn't fulfill Cyrus' decree. And so Artaxerxes is going to commission Ezra. Ezra doesn't get started in chapter 1. He doesn't get started until chapter 7. Ezra the priest is going to return to Jerusalem and he is a scribe as well as a priest.

And it's his job to teach God's law to the people who have returned. And you get the idea that the reason they didn't finish the mission is there is a spiritual lack. If these people were motivated by God and empowered by God and enabled by God and provided for by God, then when they went back they would have completed the task that God gave them the way Joshua did.

But they don't. They stall out and there are reasons for it that we'll talk about here in a minute. So Ezra 7-10 is Ezra getting back to the land and trying to teach the law of God.

And he realizes that there is a lot of compromise. He sees these mixed marriages. He tears his clothes.

And he convinces his fellow countrymen that they have got to dissolve these marriages and return to physical purity. It's a physical thing. He doesn't go through and ask how many of you are God fearers and how many of you are idolaters.

How many of you have brought your wives idols with you? How many of you have got teraphim? He just says if you're married to a foreign gal, dissolve the marriage, kick the women and children out. We've got to purify the nation. The idea of it appeals.

The idea of it makes sense. God is not blessing. We're stalled out because there's sin in the camp, so to speak.

That's his view. So that's what you have in 7-10. So that's our first two sections now, right? And that's pretty much the whole book of Ezra.

It's only got 10 chapters. So now as we move into the second part of the original book, Nehemiah verses chapters 1-6, just like Ezra, the first six chapters 1-6, this is Nehemiah. And he is cup bearer to the Artaxerxes that sent Ezra back.

And he finds out that there's no walls built in Jerusalem. So think about the sequence now. Zerubbabel goes back to build the altar and start laying the foundations of the temple.

Ezra gets there to try to fix up the spiritual problems, teach the law, get people to purify their lives. Nehemiah goes because the city is indefensible. It can't stand on its own.

So, Artaxerxes commissions him to be governor, to go back and fight off the opposition they

have on all sides. They've got Samaritans to the north. They've got the Ammonites over to the east.

They've got Arabs to the southeast and south. They've got Philistines still to the west. And he's got to try to make Jerusalem defensible.

This is the civil side of things. This is of your political military aspect rather than the spiritual things that preceded. So he cancels debts among the Jews.

He is a good governor and he gets this wall thing underway. Just like Ezra, the next section is chapters 7-10. And they find the list of people that returned with Zerubbabel that we're going to see in Ezra chapter 2. That same list is rediscovered and it's reiterated.

And you think, what is up with this list? When we get to it and go through it, you're going to say, well, this is a list of how many guys from what family or what town. I can't make heads or tails out of this. Well, it must be important.

What is one of the things we have observed over and over and over again? If God repeats a thing, what do you think? It must be important. We saw that this history that we've been reviewing in Kings and Prophets is important because God gives it to us not once, not twice, but parts of it we're given three times. Remember, there's Kings, Chronicles, and Isaiah overlaps a lot of the Hezekiah portion of the story, right? So that's got to be important.

Well, we get this list of returnees with Zerubbabel not once but twice. And for an interesting experiment, see if you can Google and find a commentary or commentator or an explanation for what is important about that. I'll give you what I think next time.

But this will be like a little homework assignment. Look at Ezra chapter 2 and the list of people that return with Zerubbabel and see if you get any spiritual steam in your boiler out of that. I didn't.

So don't feel bad if it doesn't really compel. But it's here for a reason and I think there's some suggestions on why it is. Anyway, that's going to be seven through ten.

The list of the ones that return with Zerubbabel is discovered and Ezra is there. This is Nehemiah's mention of Ezra and how we know they're contemporized. He is going to read the law to the people and they're going to celebrate tabernacles, the feast of tabernacles, the feast of booths.

And what does that celebrate? Returning to the land. We haven't had time to build our cities yet, but we're in the land and here we are dwelling in tents. God has tabernacled among us, now we are tabernacling in God's land, our heritage.

They are going to put on sackcloth and ashes, they're going to repent of their sins, and they're going to rehearse the reasons for which the captivity happened in the first place. And they are

going to try to renew the covenant. You've seen people that want to renew their marriage vows and so they'll have another wedding.

Well, this is kind of like one of those. And they want to distinguish themselves, they want to be separate. And this gets back to the mixed marriage question.

We want to get away from the nations, we want to separate, come out from among them and be separate, be holy. Well then we have sort of a postscript in Nehemiah that's not paralleled in Ezra in terms of structure. This fifth part is chapters 11-13.

And Nehemiah wants to get the numbers up in the city. And so he's going to try to repopulate, he's trying to get more people in there so the thing can sustain itself. He returns to Susa, he's been in Jerusalem twelve years, Nehemiah has.

And he goes back to Susa, you remember this is the Persian capital. And he spends time back in Susa and then he's going to come back. And when he comes back after his R&R in Susa, which of course is his hometown.

He goes to Jerusalem and it wears him out. He goes and recharges his batteries. And then when he goes back, he finds out that the people with all of this noble dedication to the covenant are breaking it right and left.

And so as their governor, he calls them back to the covenant and prays to God to forgive them and to restore his favor and so on. That's the Ezra-Nehemiah book in a nutshell. Now, you can discern in this really in each of those sections a different phase of the return.

The first one is we've got to get a cohesive group of people, not just stragglers, but a group with a leader to go back into the land. By the way, you'll see in Ezra chapter 1, it mentions that Cyrus, king of Persia in verse 8, brought them out by the hand of Mithridath the treasurer and counted them out to Shesh-Bazar, the prince of Judah. Some people think Shesh-Bazar is another name for Zerubbabel.

Others think that it's two different guys. I tend to go with the two different guys theory because Zerubbabel is also a Babylonian name. We know that Daniel and Mishael and Hanani and Azariah had a Babylonian name and an Israelite name.

They didn't have two Babylonian names. And I think Shesh-Bazar is the overseer of the captive Jews. Zerubbabel is the guy appointed to go take the first group back to the land.

The ones who don't go or don't want to go still need somebody to be their overseer, and I think that's Shesh-Bazar. I think he's over the Jews in Persia proper. And this group that is led out with the idea of staying there, that Zerubbabel would probably be detailed and have a comparable or parallel role for that group.

Nobody knows for sure, but that's my two cents. That's why the resources are given to Shesh-

Bazar because they're still in the land when this decree is issued. And so then they say, okay, it would be almost a Moses-Joshua type of thing where they're organized and provisioned and everything under Shesh-Bazar, but the guy who actually leads them back to the land is a different guy.

So that's the first group. That's your first six chapters in Ezra. Then there is this attempt to give them some spiritual impetus, and this is Ezra, the priest.

That's what the priests do, right? That's their job, is to teach the Word of God, to call them to their covenant responsibilities, and they are still under the law of Moses. And they're supposed to go back and get these things done. So Ezra goes.

Then in the third section, Nehemiah chapters 1-6, you've got to rebuild the city. The temple finally is going to be completed, and so then you complete the city walls. Then you have another attempt to purify the people, but when Nehemiah comes back, you kind of close on a sour note, because he comes back and finds out that they've all fallen apart.

And it is the spiritual issue. Think about this. They're coming out of the captivity.

What is the big reason for the captivity? Why did God destroy Judah and send them to Babylon? We are told. Remember there is a detailed reasoning of it in the closing chapters of 2 Kings. Flip back to 2 Kings chapter 21.

Remember, for the sins of Manasseh, God says even though Josiah has had reforms, even though good king Hezekiah has been here, the sins of Manasseh are too great. You're going to be judged. And Hezekiah says, well, I'm just glad it won't happen in my lifetime.

And he dies, and the judgment that had been pronounced even in Hezekiah's days. But Manasseh really puts the seal on it. So you look in 21 verse 10.

The Lord spoke by His servant the prophet, saying, Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, and has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him. God says, I would have been better off leaving the Chemosh and Molech worshippers in here, sacrificing their children in the fire, because that's what Manasseh is doing. Look back in verse 3. He rebuilt the high places Hezekiah his father had destroyed, set up altars for Baal, made a wooden image like Ahab had done, worshipped all the hosts of heaven, built altars in the house of the Lord where the Lord had said, I'm going to put my name there.

He built altars for the hosts of heaven in the two courts, house of the Lord. He made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, witchcraft, consulted spiritists in verse 6, and mediums, did much evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. And you remember the king represents the people.

The people are all joining in on this. It's not him doing it by himself, or it would have been him alone that was judged. The people think this is great.

He's a popular king, and hosts of people in Judah follow him in this and support him in it. So verse 11, Because Manasseh has done these things. Verse 12, Thus says the Lord God of Israel, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.

I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance.

Remember the ten northern tribes are already gone. This is the remnant of God's inheritance. He says, I'm going to forsake them.

Into the hand of their enemies they will become victims of plunder to all their enemies, because they have done evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt. You can have your sins unforgiven. Your sins can be forgiven, and then they can be unforgiven.

We like that part that says God will separate our sins as far as the east is from the west. If you become disobedient, if we become apathetic, if we become indifferent, if we become evil, God will forget our sins. This is taught both in the Old Testament and in the New.

It is taught here. All of the sacrifices in the great days of David and the early days of Solomon, the days of Hezekiah, the reforms that were done along the way, God calls to mind every sin they have committed since they came out of Egypt. Why does He do that? He just told us.

They have turned to evil. They have sought it out. They have cultivated it.

They have practiced it. They have amplified it. They have magnified it.

They have turned to all the hosts of heaven. They have broken every one of the commandments. And God says, I am forgetting all of your sins since the day you left Egypt, and I am judging you for all of them.

What's your New Testament parallel to that? Do you remember? Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the two servants? One owes his master a tremendous debt, and he can't pay it, and the master forgives him. But then his servant owes him a small debt, and he doesn't forgive the servant his debt. What's the end of that story? What does the master do to the original first servant that owed the huge debt? Hails him into prison until he pays every farthing.

He unforgives the debt because of the evil attitude the servant has. And Jesus holds that up as an example for us. Forgive us our trespasses.

What does it say in the Lord's Prayer? To the extent that we forgive those who trespass against us. You do not forgive others, you are not forgiven. And that parable and this passage tell us

that you can't be unforgiven.

We like to avail ourselves of God's grace, but God's not silly about it. And if we insist on committing the sin of the high hand, we will be called to account for things that were formerly forgiven. That's what the Bible teaches Old Testament and New.

That is why they go into captivity for every sin they have committed going all the way back to when Moses first brought them out of Egypt. Remember they're not three days out, and they start to grumble. What? No leeks? No garlids? We're hungry, we're tired, we're thirsty.

The Meribah, God remembers it all, and He says I am judging these people for all of it. I was taking them to the land, I'm kicking them out of the land. God basically undoes everything He did in delivering them out of bondage and into the land.

He takes them out of the land and puts them back in bondage. He undoes everything that He did for them as a nation. That is why they're in captivity.

So, here's my question now. As the people come out of captivity, as they review those messages that we rehearsed over the last couple of weeks, the nature of God's judgment, what are the elements of God's judgment that are in there? There is justice in judgment. There is mercy in judgment.

There is the opportunity for repentance in judgment. The one thing that God will judge every time is pride. Remember Obadiah, Obed-Edom, Edom's sin of pride, and it's a sideways message to His own people.

Don't get proud. Don't get on your high horse and think you've got it all figured out. God resists the proud.

God gives grace to the humble. It's the Old Testament version of that in Obadiah. So, judgment, judgment, judgment.

They're coming out of the judgment. They're coming back into the land. Rightfully, Nehemiah says, look, we need to remember the reasons for which we went into captivity in the first place and make sure we don't reiterate those mistakes, those errors.

So, it's important to identify what they are. So, one of the things we want to look for as we go through this book, Ezra slash Nehemiah, is have the people of God learned the lesson of the judgment? Every prophet told them about the nature of that judgment, why they were being judged, what part was being judged, how to escape the judgment even in the midst of it by repentance, by faith, by obedience. God knows them that are His.

He will not suffer the righteous to be moved even in the midst of judgment. If you turn, why will you die, O house of Israel? There is an aspect in every one of the minor prophets that prophesied to them before and during the captivity, the major prophets that talked to them. So,

have they learned those lessons? You remember our constant interpretive aid, as goes the nation in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in the New Testament.

Why do we have the whole Old Testament to learn from? Because the way God deals with the nation is the way He deals with us. And if we find ourselves in recovery after a judgment, whether we've brought it on ourselves or God has brought it to wake us up, what are the lessons that we need to learn? If we are in fellowship with and seeking to speak the truth in love with others who are coming out of a very dark place and a dark time, perhaps through apathy and indifference to their spiritual life, perhaps through practicing evil and they have turned, they've changed their mind and they're going to come out, it is helpful for us to know these truths so that we can give biblical answers to the question, well, what should I do? How can I repair the damage that has been done, both in my relationship to God and my relationship to others? How does God restore His people? What is my role in that restoration, whether I'm the one being restored, coming out of that dark time, or whether I am able to help and give godly counsel to somebody that is? A lot of us are probably not coming out of a terrible dark time of judgment, but you can't just say, well, I don't need to know that because it doesn't apply to me. If we were Robinson Crusoe, we could probably safely ignore it, but we are a community.

And those who are strong, and if we like to think we're strong, what is our role? We're supposed to be helping those who are trying to get strong, right? And so we need to know these things. We need to understand them. Even as we pray for others, if you're going to pray intelligently, if you're going to pray in a way that God can honor the prayer and respond in the affirmative, we need to understand what God will and will not do.

What that person has to do to qualify for the grace of God and the restoration of God and the fulfillment of the promises that God has made. They are not unconditional promises. Well, what are the conditions? We're going to see that both in the positive and in the negative in this Ezra and Nehemiah trip, the post-captivity opportunity for Israel to learn the lessons of the judgment.

And it is going to be extremely helpful for us in terms of perspective as we look at ourselves, as we look around ourselves in the circumstance, in the milieu, in the relationships, and the people that we come in contact with, our nation in the widest scope, the world in the broadest scope, and then our interpersonal relations to know how to be wise, how to be truly helpful, how to pray effectively, how to witness and to counsel one another effectively. We need to know the truths that are contained here. So this is going to be a wonderful, largely post-prophetic look.

But the prophets that we have left, the post-exilic prophets, are going to tell us what went wrong here. And things go wrong. It isn't glorious.

It isn't the return that God called them to. It isn't what Haggai and Zechariah called them to. And Zechariah especially is going to point out the problems.

And we'll see that in the context of this Ezra and Nehemiah history as we go forward in the next few weeks. But as we leave the study for tonight, isn't it amazing that in every different circumstance, entering the land, leaving the land for preservation, leaving the land under judgment, entering the land victoriously, entering the land quietly and thoughtfully after a chastisement, God always provides truth. He always provides His guidance.

He is never silent at these momentous times for His people. And the same is true for us. God is never silent.

There's never a situation in our life about which He does not speak and to which He does not send comfort, strength, encouragement, whether it is through fellow believers, directly through the Holy Spirit and His Word. God never leaves His people searching for an answer that doesn't come. If we can't hear God, it is our fault.

Remember our memory verse, why is it God doesn't hear? The Lord's arm is not shortened that He cannot save. His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear. Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.

Your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear. As these people, many of them prayerfully try to come in and restore the fortunes of Judah, and God does not act, there is no miracle. There is no Shekinah glory filling the rebuilt temple.

Why is that? We're going to find out. And it's a wonderful observation and very much a resource for us both as we look at ourselves and as we seek to be valuable fellowship for others. But we'll close here tonight in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You that You have not left us orphans even as the Lord Jesus has returned to sit at Your right hand and to intercede on our behalf. We have Your Holy Spirit.

We have the presence and power of Your Word, the tremendous amount of content that is here. And we pray that we will not lose those pertinent truths in the volume of it, the things that we need to know for our own sake first and foremost. And then as we seek to be of service to fellow believers that Your Holy Spirit will bring to our minds these portions that are pertinent, applicable, meaningful, and reflect Your guidance and direction for us in circumstances both those in which we dwell and those that we see around us near and far.

And we pray that as a result our thoughts, our actions, our prayers, our goals, and our values, and our daily walk will reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus who embodied the fullness of all of these things and was never far from Your heart as He performed Your will in His life, in His death, in His resurrection, and even now at Your right hand. We pray all these things in His name. Amen.