

Ezra – Introduction

Ezra chapter 1

“How to rebuild a destroyed nation”!

Ezra’s name means “help.”

Today – we begin our journey – a tremendous journey

An Old Testament study for New Testament people

Times and cultures may change

People and sin remain the same

Set the scene – backdrop the stage – prepare the foundation

To launch our study in the book of Ezra

I’ve entitled this opening message “The Introduction to the Book of Ezra”

Ezra 1:1-3

Assign reading of
Ezra & Nehemiah

Mon. – Ezra 1 - 6
Tues. – Ezra 7 - 10
Wed. – Neh. 1 - 6
Thur. – Neh.7 – 13

Friday
4 Quizzes
1 Exam

“The Introduction to the Book of Ezra”

Three books in the Old Testament – Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

These three books record the history of God’s people after they had been literally decimated because of their sin

In order to understand these books, we need to be aware of the preceding history

We can only imagine the horror – the terror – that people felt in the early summer of 586 B.C.

For 2½ years the city of Jerusalem had been under a constant siege

All food and material provision had long since run out

Those people walked the streets in their skeleton bodies with hardly enough strength to lift their heads.

And who would want to lift their head anyway and catch a glimpse of the gleaming Babylon armies that were on the hills surrounding the city?

Gaping at the city like a wolf that has finally cornered its prey and when at last the Babylonians breached those walls and begin to plunder and pillage, the whole atmosphere was filled with cries and screams at the sound of burnings, beatings, and breaking down.

Zedekiah, the king, was fettered, then forcibly made to watch as his children, one by one, were unmercifully bludgeoned before his eyes.

And then to finish off their vicious attack they put King Zedekiah’s eyes out so the last thing he ever saw was the death of his family.

The people themselves were ravaged – the young, the old, the sick – no one was spared.

Their houses were torn down, the public buildings were demolished, and the Temple was toppled

Solomon's Temple – one of the wonders of the ancient world was plundered. The sacred objects were rudely carried out and roughly carted off.

The Temple was burnt and last of all, Nebuchadnezzar turned loose his tens of thousands of soldiers on the walls of the city itself. They tore those walls down.

National Israel was done. The nation was finished.

Turn II Kings 25:1-10 – I want to read to you what I just described (also found in Jer. 52) This was part of the Babylonian Captivity under King Nebuchadnezzar that lasted for 70 years

God records for us these three books – Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther – when the people returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity.

When the nation of Israel was restored, never to its former glory, but with enough stability to be the womb of the Messiah Jesus Christ.

We need to understand the chronology – the time sequence

We need to understand the time frame of these books and where they fit into the whole canon of the Old Testament history

These three books are numbers 15, 16, and 17 in the Old Testament – the Old

Testament has 39 books – so 22 books follow these books

But actually these three books record the last events of Old Testament history

If we were to place them in the Old Testament in the order of history, they would be last.

Now, how many years do the three books cover?

The extent of the time is about 100 years.

If we put the three books together – recorded time – would be about a century.

Let me give you the framework we are dealing with by giving you the dates.

If you look at Ezra 1:1, we have the first date that we encounter

It is dated “in the first year of Cyrus” and you may want to write in the margin – 538 B.C.

Let’s turn over to the last date – Nehemiah 13 – verse 6 – this date 433 B.C.

Just a little over 100 years – that’s like covering a whole century

A lot can happen in 100 years

But you may ask – what about Esther?

You see Esther does not follow Nehemiah in history

Let me take just a moment and put the events of these books in proper order

Ezra 6:22 – ends with the story of the complete rebuilding of the Temple (vs. 22)

End of story and between Ezra 6:22 and 7:1 – we have over 50 years and Esther fits right into this slot.

Where did the events of Esther take place? In Israel or in Persia?

So, this is how the timeline works

Ezra 1-6

Then Esther

Then Ezra 7-10

Then the book of Nehemiah

So chronologically we are dealing with the books that record the last events in Old Testament history. They cover about how many years? 100

Ezra 1-6, then Esther, then 7-10, then Nehemiah

Now let’s discuss secondly the history these books actually record?

Historically, what do we have here?

Let’s begin with a broad sweep, hit the highlights

These three books are part of the history section of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is usually broken into four major parts

1. The Pentateuch – five books – books of Moses – Torah – the Law
2. Then the History books
3. Poetry and Wisdom
4. Finally, Prophecy

The (second section) historical section begins with Joshua and ends – Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther – a total of 12 books

The overriding emphasis of this section is the special history of Israel

This is the history of God's people in relationship to the land

We could summarize it this way.

1. How they got it – Joshua
2. How they lost it
3. How they got it back

Ezra and Nehemiah are important for they record the third movement – how they got the land back

These books can be given the theme: “Return” to the Lord”

The Remnant Returns

Ezra 1:3

Vs. 3

Go up – this is the Return

Israel is going up – is returning – going back to their land

And Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle that Return!

O.K. let's take one more step

Ezra and Nehemiah are a unity in recording the Return, but they are individual in what they record about the Return

Those two books actually record the recovery of three important institutions in the national life of Israel!

The people returned – what did they do when they got there? They did three things.

#1 – They rebuilt that temple – that is the story of Ezra 1-6

In fact, the temple – the house of the Lord – is referred to over 40 times in those six chapters

#2 – Ezra 7-10 – the recovery of the Law – God’s Word

Was it lost? No, but it wasn’t being followed and it was recovered when God supplied a man to teach it and people willing to obey it.

#3 – in Nehemiah we have the rebuilding of the wall

So the history of the Return has those three movements

Now, do you have an overall view of these books?

Return – to rebuild the Temple

A recovery of the Word of God

And rebuild that wall

Now these are their activities, but there are deep things (deeper purposes) behind those activities and for each of them, let me give you a purpose.

Why did they rebuild that temple? It took 20 years – why was it so important?

The rebuilding of the Temple was the reinstatement of the worship of the one true God.

For all those years, the only true God of the heaven had no temple in all the earth that stood as an external testimony to His existence. Not one.

Synagogues were established in the Babylonian captivity.

Temple is a temple. Church is a church. Focus is on people!

Ezra 7-10 – When they recovered the Law – what was the deeper purpose of the book?

It was to renew that covenant with God that they had broken. The Word of God gave instructions on what their part was. They decided to be doers of the Word.

And what about the rebuilding of the wall in Nehemiah? The deeper purpose of that was the matter of restoring the separation of the people from sin – His people – holy people. It wasn’t that God wanted a building, needed walls.

It was that God wanted true worship reinstated and He wanted a recovery of that covenant and separation of His people as shown by the walls.

Interestingly enough, God chose three men – one for each of those purposes
 On the first wave of captives that returned – they went back under the leadership of Zerubbabel – who was a descendant of David and a legitimate heir to David's throne.
 Zerubbabel's story is recorded in Ezra 1-6.

Ezra appears in Chapter 7

Ezra – God's man – Chapters 7-10 of Ezra

God chose Ezra to come back and help His people recover their footing in the Word of God.

And obviously, the rebuilding of the walls took place under the leadership of Nehemiah.

So for every great project,

1. God always has His leader in whose heart He plants the seeds of it
2. To whom He gives the courage and the faith
3. To carry that thing on and finish it in spite of all opposition
4. To trust God and give Him the glory

We will hear Ezra and Nehemiah say we did such and such because of the good hand of God. God's great leaders always give the glory and praise to God.

Let's review a moment:

How much time is captured in these books? 100 years

Those 100 years record what one big event? The Return to the Land – God's people return to their land.

And when they get there, what are they doing?

Three things:

Rebuild the temple

Recover the Word

Rebuild the walls

And why are they doing that?

To reinstitute true worship

To renew their walk with/living for God

To renew their separation from sin

And God has three men leading them in that

Ezra and Nehemiah – we know – and who was the other man? Zerubbabel

Lastly, let's look at the overriding theological revelation of these books.

I cannot do any better than letting Ezra tell it.

Ezra was a historian as well as a Bible teacher. There is a good possibility that Ezra not only wrote the book that bears his name, but that he may actually have compiled some of Nehemiah and that he may have authored I and II Chronicles.

Ezra 9 – Ezra in three verses will compact everything in Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, and he's going to summate it all under one attribute of God

This is a prayer of confession that Ezra was making

Let's begin reading in Ezra 9:5; 6-9

By God's grace – a remnant returns by the grace of God

Go back with me to the last chapter of II Chronicles 36

God's grace is not understood until it stands beside our sin

First and Second Chronicles are the summation of all history up to this point.

Do you know where I Chronicles begins?

Do you know what man I Chronicles begins with?

It begins with Adam.

II Chronicles 36 ends with Israel losing her land and there is in this chapter the last 30 years that she was in the land.

In this chapter, Ezra gives us the three times Nebuchadnezzar came up and took people away.

Three times he did that – not just once

Three deportations and they're marked very clearly in this chapter

Let me show them to you—

Vs. 5-8 – first deportation – 605 B.C.

Do you know who was taken away in this deportation?

What famous character in the Old Testament was carried off at this time? Daniel

Vs. 9-12 – second deportation – 597 B.C. – eight years later and there was another famous Old Testament character that was carried off this time.

Does anyone know? This was when Ezekiel was made a captive

And the last deportation – and the one we are primarily interested in – is recorded in vs. 13-21 – 586 B.C.

In the middle of this deportation, there is a little sermon summarizing Israel's sins for which they were deported

And I maintain that we will not fully appreciate the grace of God allowing these people to return unless we have the full understanding of the sin that caused God to cut them down in the first place.

Vs. 13

Vs. 14 – their first sin – they imitated the heathen

They polluted the House of God

Lesson for us – what people do in private – what people do in society – they end up doing and sanctioning in the church

Imitating unbelievers has become the great sin of the Church and many Christians

Vs. 15 – How did God respond? God sent prophets/preachers

Vs. 16a – They despised God's Word

Every time we decide to disobey God's Word, turn from God's word, excuse our sin –
we despise God and His Word

Vs. 16 – the judgment came

Vs. 17-21

Look at verse 22 = Ezra 1:1

Vs. 23

The last instruction was to let him go up – I'm with him
In less than four centuries the Messiah will be born in Israel.

This is the "Introduction to the Book of Ezra"

Ezra Sermon #2

These first six chapters record four great stories

Ezra 1-2 – (preparations) – they don't arrive back into the land until the end of chapter 2

Ezra 3 – they set up an altar and put down the foundation of the Temple (foundations)

Ezra 4-vs. 1 – adversaries – guess what chapter 4 talks about – (oppositions)

Ezra 5:2 – completion of the work in chapters 5 and 6

We will call it completions

Four headings/four stories to work with in Ezra chapters 1-6

Chapters 1-2	Preparations
Chapter 3	Foundations
Chapter 4	Oppositions
Chapters 5-6	Completions

Turn back to Ezra 1:1 – let us look at how this whole book begins

We begin our study of the book proper

Ezra 1:1a

Ezra tells us right up front, that what happens is because God is going to fulfill a promise – what God says, God does!

“What God Says, God Does!”

How do we know the Word of God is true?

How do we know that God keeps His promises

One of the (greatest evidences) (convincing proofs) that the Bible is the Word of God is fulfilled prophecy

There are no other writings in all the world that give a major portion to prophecy!
But the Scriptures are filled with predictions!
God uses prophecy as evidence of who He is and that He can be trusted!

Isa. 46:9-10, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'"

You can count on God. God is always faithful to His Word.
Not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord God has spoken – "There hath not failed one word of all His good promise" I Kings 8:56.

In no other writings from any source do we have so much prophecy!
Of all the people on the earth, we are the only ones who know where we are going!

Now look at Ezra 1 – 3 sections

These three sections will tell us what God does to fulfill His Word

First section – vs. 1-4 – proclamation of a heathen king named Cyrus

Second section – vs. 5-6 – the remnant rising up – preparing to return
Vs. 5

Third section vs. 7-11 – the restoration of the Temple vessels

Vs. 11

God's Word predicted from Jerusalem to Babylon and God's Word also predicted from Babylon to Jerusalem

Three movements in Chapter 1:

#1 – Proclamation of Cyrus

#2 – Rising up of the people

#3 – Restoration of the temple vessels

How are these three things connected?

Look at verse 1 – “so that the Word of the Lord might be fulfilled”

God predicted all three of these things!

How does God fulfill His Word?

Typically in the first place, God will raise up a chosen person – God will raise up a man or a woman

Ezra 1:1

Cyrus – this is a surprise! – in this case, it is not a man of God

It’s a heathen king – Cyrus, king of Persia

Let me point out first of all that Cyrus was God’s own choice

God raises up people and it’s His own choice.

It was no accident at all.

God is not only the God of Israel; He is God of the whole world

Cyrus – where did he come from? How did he come about?

What was the country that captured Israel in the first place?

Babylon – and the king’s name was Nebuchadnezzar

How did we come to have Cyrus and Persia?

Nebuchadnezzar didn’t last long after finishing off Israel

That was in 586 B.C. and he died in 562 B.C.

His son reigned and then his grandson reigned

His grandson – allowed his son to reign – kind of a coregent situation and

Nebuchadnezzar’s great grandson was Belshazzar!

Familiar name? – he appears in Daniel.

Daniel 5 – drunken party, the hand of God on the wall

There was great unrest in the Babylonian Empire at the time

Famine, drought, uprising, etc.

Now God predicted that Babylon would fall and it did.

As things were falling apart in Babylon – modern day Iraq – to the east in what is today modern day **Iran**, there were other events rising – Iran used to be called Persia

The name was changed in 1935

The old Persians adopted the name “Iran” – which means “Land of the Arayians”

Yes, the name change was connected to Hitler and his Arayan beliefs – superior race. Ambassador of Iran was greatly influenced by Hitler and Germany.

Now back in Biblical times – in Persia – there were two dominant tribes – somewhat rivals – living in a hostile peace – at a distance from one another there in Persia.

Northwest – tribe of Medes and southeast – the tribe of Persians

The man in charge of the Persians – Cambyses I – His dad is Cyrus I for whom Cyrus the Great is named. Cyrus II was known as Cyrus the Great.

The Medes were ruled by Astyages

As secular history/legend goes, the King of the Medes decided to give his daughter in marriage to the King of the Persians (Cambyses) in hopes of allowing the two tribes to remain intact – purely political arrangement

Before long, the new couple was expecting a child and her dad had a dream that his daughter’s pregnancy would result in a growth that dominated the entire Middle East. It overran everything in its path

When Astyages awoke from his dream, he went to a religious person for an interpretation. The interpretation was given that this son would someday rule over all the kingdoms and would overthrow his kingdom, too.

Astyages said that can’t be and when the child was born, he tried to have the child killed. In fact, he handed the child over to one of his servants to take into the wilderness to kill. The servant took pity on the child and gave him to a nomad woman and she raised him.

That child's name was Cyrus! And in the desert, Cyrus grew and learned how to shoot an arrow, ride a horse, and he learned all the manly things

In 552 B.C. his father died and Cyrus, a man of men, became leader and he went to defeat the Medes and the Medes military, for the most part, defected to Cyrus's side – 550 B.C. Cyrus did not fully take the world throne until the defeat of Babylon in 539 B.C.

Now he was the king of the Medes and the Persians

Immediately he set his sights on the greatest kingdom of the Middle East – the kingdom of Babylon. And how was Babylon found when Cyrus and his army came?

Daniel 5:1-6, 22-28

And it was by Cyrus. You know how Cyrus took the city of Babylon? From secular sources, Cyrus diverted the flow of the Euphrates River that ran right through the city of Babylon. Nobody could have breached those walls – they were too high and too wide. Whole houses were on top of the walls and on top of those homes, you could ride a chariot clear around the city – it was fortified!

But Cyrus came into the city where the river would have (water was thigh high) and sacked the city (October) – 539 B.C. (Daniel 5:30-31)

In 538 B.C., in Cyrus's first year on the throne, Ezra 1:1 declares God stirred up Cyrus.

Ezra 1:1 – Cyrus is an amazing man at this point. He is reigning over the greatest empire ever in the history of mankind up to this time.

Two million square miles

Ten million people

Taking in a million pounds of silver in tribute per year

Now Cyrus was different in several ways from all his predecessors!

Cyrus knew that the best way to keep his kingdom together was

#1 to give the conquered self rule and

#2 to allow the people to keep their own religion

In 1880 – in Babylon – an archeologist was digging in the dirt and he hit something. He stopped digging and began brushing and he discovered a large clay cylinder – written all over with Persian writings. That cylinder recorded the exploits of Cyrus, King of Persia. It was a very important find.

I want to read to you directly from the Cyrus Cylinder and this is what it says:

“The holy cities in whose sanctuaries have been in ruin over a long period and whose gods are in the abode in the midst of those cities, I returned to their houses and housed them in easy abodes. I gathered together all their inhabitants and restored them to their dwellings.”

In essence, Cyrus restored the religious centers of the conquered countries.

Those are words written over 2,000 years ago that you and I can read today in the British Museum that houses the Cyrus Cylinder, London, England. There is a replica of this clay cylinder in New York City at the United Nations.

From this, we see Cyrus’s policy regarding his subjects and one of those cities which he rebuilt was? Jerusalem. That is what is recorded for us in verses 1-4.

Vs. 1 – put it in writing – side note – 6:1

Vs. 2

Cyrus realized God had given him his position. I wonder today how many rulers of this world recognize that they are ministers of God.

Vs. 3

This is history – history lesson

Now let me show you prophecy

Vs. 1 – that name “Cyrus” is found in two prophecies of Isaiah.

Isaiah 44:21-22, 26, 28

Isaiah 45:1-6

Isaiah prophesied this at least 150 years before Cyrus was born

Why did God do this?

Isa. 45

Vs. 3 – you may know that I am the God of Israel

Vs. 4 – I am doing it for My people’s sake

Vs. 6 – for all people all over the globe may know that there is none beside Me

Let me ask you, is there any other God?

Are there any other gods?

There is no other god in heaven or earth who could predict the name of the individual who would send His people back to Israel

The release of the people

The restoration of the people

The laying of the foundations

The rebuilding of the Temple

And the raising again of the city of Jerusalem

150 years before it even happened

This is prophecy stated!

This is all given to us in Ezra 1 – to show the fulfillment of the Word of the Lord

Why is God interested in doing that?

To encourage our faith in the God we believe in! God fulfills His Word

Turn back to Ezra 1:1

When God fulfills His Word, God also does it in His own time, Ezra 1:1a – 538 B.C.

Chapter 3:10 – it is recorded they laid the foundation of the Temple in 536 B.C.

Do you remember when the first deportation took place? 606-605 B.C. How many years? – 70

In God's own time, he raised up his own man (Cyrus) – Jeremiah 29:10-14

This is all done according to God's timing. He is the only one that could do such a thing.

Ezra 1, notice vs. 1 – stirred up – He aroused, He awakened him

How did God do this?

Some ancient historians tell us that the prophecies were read to Cyrus by Daniel

God moved his heart; God raised up a man, but He also raised up a people.

Vs. 5-6 – raised up – stirred up – same verb

God is stirring up – some to go (vs. 5) – some to give (vs. 6)

It takes both for God to accomplish His will. The leader and the people must be stirred up.

What does God do to fulfill His Word?

He raises up a man

He raises up a people

You can go to Iran today and see the tomb of Cyrus

God fulfills His Word!

What God says, God does!

Ezra Sermon #3

“When God Moves People”

You read Isaiah and Jeremiah – you see predictions. You read Ezra – you see the fulfillment.

What God says, God does

The Lord fulfills His Word and you can count on Him

Let us remember where the Jews are – in captivity

In trouble, under adverse circumstances/pressure, what do you do? Pray, read the Bible, seek God. Pray.

What do you cling to – when you have nothing – end of your rope? There is nowhere to go but up – Bible – to the promises of God

While the Jews were in captivity – they read Isaiah, Jeremiah – they looked for deliverer – man named Cyrus – Isa. 44, 45

Bible-believing people – no matter what happens, we need to think in the light of Scripture.

The day that Cyrus’s name became internationally known was the heart-stopping day for the Bible-believing Jews

Ezra 1

The first thing I want you to notice is that

#1 We need pioneers in the Lord’s ministry

Blaze some trails

Vs. 5

Pioneers are the first people to move. A lot of people think/see – some even plan – but don’t move! Pioneers see the need and move out. Areas come out of need/burden
The Apostle Paul was a pioneer in the Lord’s work – Rom. 15:20.

The Recovery Begins

In Ezra, the first stage of the three stages in the return to Zion was led by Zerubbabel. Although this book bears the name of Ezra, Ezra himself does not feature in it until chapter seven, where we find him leading the second stage of the recovery. Zerubbabel and the first wave – they were the pioneers of the recovery.

We need pioneers in church work. We need men and women who not only see but plan, pray, and do. Where are the pioneers today? Who will be the pioneers for the next generation?

It had been nearly seventy years since the first deportation of the Jews by the Babylonians . . . Though the initial years must have been difficult, the second and third generation of Jews born in the Exile had adjusted to their surroundings. Though some had become so comfortable that they refused to return to Judah when given the opportunity, still others, sustained by the examples and teachings of leaders like Daniel and Ezekiel, retained their faith in the Lord's promises and their allegiance to their homeland.

Vs. 3

“Let him go up” should be understood as permission, even encouragement to go, but not a command. The Jews were free to decide. And we are free to decide. Everyday we decide.

Notice that those who went had to *decide to go*. This decision would result in insecurity, hardship, and suffering as the returnees started a new, precarious community. Obedience to God does not mean an easy life but often times great discomfort. But they had a purpose: they were concerned that the faith of their community continue.

Choosing God's way oftentimes is not the easy way – but more difficult. God's people get comfortable, get in routine – honestly, they get in a rut. We get lulled to sleep,

complacent, lazy. God's work is neglected. Often times it is a people not ruled by faith but by sight.

Everything in God's work rises and falls with leadership. When God wants to accomplish something, He calls dedicated men and women to challenge His people and lead the way. A decay in the quality of a nation's spiritual leaders (church leaders) is an indication that trouble is ahead.

Who will pioneer new works, new ministries, new territories for God?

Who will spread the Gospel?

We need pioneers in the Lord's ministry – not everyone is called to be a pioneer.

We not only need pioneers, but—

#2 We need willing people in the work of the Lord.

This is everyone's responsibility – vs. 5

Willing leaders – make a decision

Willing people – enable the work to be done

How the recovery from Babylon began is deeply instructive. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, vs. 1, King of Persia, to make a proclamation and put it in writing.

But not all were ready to leave Babylon. Jerusalem and its temple lay in ruins and held no attraction for many. A great number had grown comfortable in Babylon and preferred to remain there. It is not difficult to see parallels between those days and our own. Over against the great masses of nominal people throughout professing Christendom how few there are who are ready to bear the reproach of Christ – really active in their faith.

How many of us are really active in our faith?

Bibles open – prayer time with God – we served God this week?

This simple and uncomplicated submission to God's Word was a mark of the genuineness of the great stirrings of heart among the people in Babylon. God was at work. The Lord had spoken.

God commanded Cyrus to do this, but Cyrus did not command the people to go to Jerusalem; he granted them permission to go up.

And, as believers, we must be willing to lend a hand, our talents, give our time.

The returning group (vs. 5) is divided into several classes of priests, Levites, and laity. They had willing leaders – this is what we need to do.

Willing followers – let's do it.

This is what we need.

Thirdly,

#3 We need giving people – vs. 6

It is more blessed to give than to receive

Vs. 4

Let's face it – it takes money to do the Lord's work

God can take a little and make it a lot – and when people give, it strengthens the believers.

Sometimes the giving comes from the outside – vs. 6 – from unbelievers

When the Tabernacle was under construction, in Moses' time, the people rallied to their leaders and made available to them all that it was within their power to give, so that the work of God might prosper. And now, once again, the people rallied and gave according to their ability. Nor did they give grudgingly, for the record clearly states that, as in that earlier day, all that was given was willingly offered. – Vs. 6

Vs. 7-11 – Cyrus gave

Restoration of the vessels of God's House

What message is there in this book for us?

God provides for His work to be done.

Those vessels were made in the time of Solomon and made of precious metals –
bronze, silver, gold

They were made from the offerings – the freewill giving/offerings of the people or metal
that David had received from nations that he had conquered.

Now, some of the vessels are huge!

The largest of all was the basin – 15' in diameter – all cast in one piece – it held 11,000
gallons of water

There were basins of gold, pots, shovels, fleshhooks, trimmers, sensors, tongs

All of these vessels – there were thousands of them

All of them given to God, used by people in the service of God

They were consecrated to God

Ezra 1:7 tells us what Nebuchadnezzar did with them

These vessels were crowns of victory to the gods of Babylon

The vessels tell us a story of a collapsed country

What king in his right mind would send back over 5,000 vessels of gold and silver?

Every piece came home – Jer. 27:19-22. God said it would be restored.

The Word of God comes fulfilled in detail

It happens when God says

Through the man God says

The way God says

To those whom God says

Including all the details that the Lord gives

There is a God in heaven

He is gracious, He is giving, He is willing and . . .

God's work is best accomplished with the freewill offerings of those who worship Him.

Ezra Sermon #4

Ezra 2

Take a couple of seconds to glance over this chapter

This chapter may seem uninviting at first glance

Now, if you were going to teach a lesson or preach from this – what would you do with this chapter?

This chapter is 70 verses long – around 100 proper names, plus the names of 27 towns

It has 153 numerals in it including

736 horses

245 mules

435 camel

6,720 donkeys

Ezra 2:1-2a; 64-70

Let us pray

You may be seated.

“The Recordings of God”

Look at all of this and you say why is this chapter in the Bible?

I could do a real deep Bible study – define each name; maps out & look at every single town; cross references, etc.

When you come to chapters like this – and there are a number of these in the Word of

God, particularly in the Old Testament and the New Testament has two such chapters – Matthew 1 and Luke 3

What is the message of this chapter?

When you come to a passage in the Bible as a preacher or teacher, you typically have a couple of questions in mind – planned or not.

When looking at a passage one will ask, “What can I say about this? (looks at this chapter in despair) OR What does this say?”

And there is all the difference in the world in the messages that result pending on which question you begin with! Take the passage and work in it and see what God is saying to us.

The liberal preaches his message and uses the text to fit his message. No, folks, we must preach God’s message out of the chapter.

There is a message here – an enduring message – let’s first survey this chapter and look at the order because God has put this chapter in sections.

Vs. 1 is compact. It has the essentials – exile and release, return, replant.

This venture involved a four months’ journey (700-900 miles) plus a great deal of faith, courage, and sacrifice; and even after they arrived in the Holy City, life didn’t get any easier. But as you read the inspired record, you can see the providential leading of the Lord from start to finish: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31)

Vs. 2 beginning with names – 11 names – in verse 2

These are the leaders of the people

Jeshua – is Joshua – the high priest. He is not the Joshua of the book of Joshua.

“Jeshua” is mentioned twenty–three times in the post-exile writings. He was an important part of the leadership of the remnant and served at the side of Zerubbabel the governor.

Nehemiah here is not the Nehemiah we are familiar with. Mordecai is not the Mordecai of Esther.

Look at the end of vs.2. From this point on – Numbers (#’s)

Vs. 3 – children of various people

Vs. 3-20 – people related to families – unfamiliar names - we do not know these people. But God recorded their family names.

Now when we get down to Vs. 21 – we have a little change – The children of Bethlehem – people related to villages/towns

First, people related to families and then people related to towns – vs. 21-35

In Vs. 36 – we see a new category of people the priests – vs. 36-39

Vs. 40 – new category – the Levites – all priests are Levites but not all Levites are priests.

Small number of Levites – no land – no inheritance – stayed in Babylon because they had something there.

Vs. 41 – the singers – in charge of temple music – 128 of them

These men gave praise to the Lord – Psalm 137:1-2, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.”

Vs. 42 – porters – a porter was a gatekeeper – an usher – 139 of them – a host for the House of God

David said, “I’d rather be a doorkeeper (gatekeeper) in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Ps. 84:10)

Vs. 43 – the Nethinim

This word means “dedicated” or “given.” This word has reference to additional temple servants – large number of these people – down to vs. 54

Dedicated to serving the Lord

Vs. 55 – new category – the children of Solomon’s servants

No one knows a lot about those people, but they were evidently a special class of laborers appointed under Solomon

Vs. 58 (read vs. 58) – you see the Nethinim and these servants together – showing that they served together in the Temple

Vs. 59 – Something very interesting happens in vs. 59

Some 652 people of three families that could not produce family descent. They could not prove their family descent from true Israel, but their hearts were in the endeavor.

Vs. 61 – three priestly families

Vs. 62 – these could not prove their priestly descent

Vs. 62 – polluted – does not mean sinful – could not meet the qualifications for the priesthood so they were put from the priesthood in vs. 63 – until the high priest cast the two lots to decide verdict to get decisions from the Lord

Two little sections – where God tells us they could not prove their proper descent and we will see why in a little bit.

Vs. 64-67 – we have numerical totals

How many people 42,360 – 7,337 servants – just about 50,000 returned to Israel

Vs. 66-67 – animal totals

Vs. 68-69 – here you have their gifts for the Temple and it is a substantial amount

Vs. 70 – gives us a summation of the whole thing. We have the break down of the chapter

Read vs. 70 – At this point, they have made the four-month journey and they are there – back in the land

This chapter is a itemized account, much like an accountant's register – not very interesting unless you can see the organization of it.

Now, chapter 2 – is a record of two things

Record #1 – people's preservation – In this chapter God demonstrates that this is the record of God fulfilling His promise – that this people would never be destroyed.

Ezra 1:3a – the answer is found in chapter 2

Jer. 32:42

Jer 33:7-8, 10-11

Ezra 1:1 – by the word of Jeremiah. In general this is a record of their preservation. Chapter 2 is a record of God keeping His Word. It is the fulfillment of God's Word prophesied in Jeremiah.

In detail, it is the record of a named people

The nameless people – Sodom and Gomorrah – all the people – all their inhabitants – done – brimstone and fire from the Lord

Mass of humanity – pass on – be punished

Dead end of the Broad Road

Wide road – shoveled over the edges of the abyss

Yet when it comes to God's people – He knows their names. Their names show the marks of what they endured.

Zerubbabel – his name means “born in Babel”

Mordecai – he is related to the foreign god Marduk

Names – tainted with sin, slaves

Yet God has brought them out and God knows their names

God's people are preserved, remembered; beyond that they are numbered.

Vs. 3 -- 2,172

Vs. 7 – 1,254

Vs. 13 – no rounding off by God – God has His people right down to the last one/last child – no one is overlooked with God

Jer. 3:14, “ . . . and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.”

Ezra 2, verse 2 – they were literally led back by an heir to David's throne. This man – Zerubbabel is of direct descent of King David.

Davidic Line – when a country was conquered, the new king would typically exterminate the ruling king and all of his heirs

Nine dynasties for the northern 10 tribes – not one heir left to them

But in Judah – every single king was a descendant of David

David's lineage is immortal – God promised that to David and we see here it came back through Zerubbabel

II Sam. 7:16 – thy house, thy kingdom shall be forever; thy house shall be established forever

Jer. 33:20-21 – there is a day every day and a night every night – as long as there is day and night, the Covenant of David will not be broken.

You may ask, where is he today that will reign on His throne?

Read Matthew 1 – it is Jesus Christ – 42 generations and the apex of David's descendants is Jesus Christ – forever reign.

Miraculous preservation – send the people back under an heir to the king.

Ezra 2, verses 36, 40, 41, 42, 43, 55 – notice these are the only categories to restore the worship. God has all that is needed to do it in Ezra 2.

Some that cannot find their descent –

One thing it demonstrates – it guarantees the authenticity of the rest of the people

Those who could not prove their descent were set aside

And the obvious implication is that the rest proved their tribal heritage. They belonged to Israel.

Ezek 37 – Just like God said in Ezek. 37 – Two sticks Judah (Southern)/Israel (Northern) vs. 20-22 and we see this come to pass in Ezra 2

First of all, we see the record of God preserving His people

Secondly, record of restoration to the land

Ezra 2, verse 21 – the village we know – see if you can recall any event or names of people

Vs. 21 – Ruth – came here with her mother in law; she was the great grandma of David

Vs. 26 – Ramah – Samuel had an altar unto God

Vs. 27 – Mickmash - Jonathan won a victory over the Philistines

Vs. 28 – Bethel – Jacob - God promises him

Vs. 29 – Mt. Nebo – Moses surveyed the land that God was to give to Israel

Vs. 34 – Jericho - Joshua – walls of Jericho

#1 a preserved people and

#2 a restored people to their land

The memories that come back to our minds – could you imagine to the people of Israel?

Best of all – vs. 1 – they are restored to the city of Jerusalem – their capital – their Holy

Place of worship

Ezek. 5:5 – “Thus saith the Lord God; ‘This is Jerusalem, I have set her in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her.’”

The Bible calls Jerusalem the belly button of the earth – God’s city.

The preservation of the Jews and Jerusalem ought to be proof to you and me that God’s Word is true. They are still here today and Jews are among us and Jerusalem is in the news almost nightly.

All the “ites” (Amalekites, Amorites, Hivites) of the Old Testament are long gone, but you will today find the Jew. Termites

Our name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life

We are numbered – even the hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30)

We are led – by the descendant of David – the King of Kings – Jesus Christ.

We are ministered to by a host of God’s ministers and servants. We are guaranteed of our lineage. One of these days we will possess our heavenly home that God has promised us.

Folks, when we read Ezra 2 - Don’t get lost in names and numbers – God has a reason and purpose

Keep the big picture

Ezra 2 is the record of a miracle – God’s people back in God’s land

We are not lost in humanity – we are individuals known by God and kept by His power.

The exiles sensed that prayer was being answered and that the thing they longed to see was coming to pass.

As has been true throughout history, God moves people to provide for his work.

Draw nigh to God. God knows you

He desires to work through you – to use you in His Kingdom – for His purpose

Remember a lot of people stayed in Babylon – they had the chance to come home.

They would have been accounted for

Be available to God – believe in His Word

Some of the people were disqualified – show their genealogical records – we better have a record, a testimony of where, when, and Whom we trusted for salvation

We should have a “know-so” salvation, not a “think-so” or “hope-so.”

Do you know/remember where you were when you trusted Jesus Christ?

Ezra Sermon #5

Turn in your Bible to Ezra 3

Ezra 3 – records the important things that took place immediately after the Jews returned to Israel

Ezra 3:1-6

Let us Pray – Revival, stir our hearts

“Rekindling Revival”

This chapter records the events roughly over a two-year period after they came back to Jerusalem.

How many events does this chapter record of these first two years? Two

#1 – vs. 1-6 – rebuilding of the altar

#2 -- vs. 7-13 the laying of the foundation of the Temple

50,000 people over two years – God records two events

These are the two most important things that they did.

When the people returned to Israel, they basically found their land unkept for over 50 years, unmaintained, unused for 50 years.

Folks, when these people returned, they had to prepare the land, fix the structures, rebuild homes, find the property lines, not to mention the need to eat

They arrived about two months before winter – firewood, heat

But they didn't come home just to survive – they had a greater purpose – they are just like us – we are not here to just fill our bellies, stay warm. We have a greater purpose.

Notice in vs. 1a

One foundation was laid in vs. 1 and in verse 8 a second foundation was laid. What are these foundations?

Foundation #2 is easy. We all understand it – they are laying the foundation for a literal building – for the Temple

But Foundation #1

A renewed sacrificial system – going to restore a proper relationship with God – proper relations with God – that is what they renewed, restarted – fundamental and foundational

But because of their national sin, God had cut them down, they have been ground down to the stump

But down there in the roots, there was a little life left.

These were God's people and this chapter illustrates a revival of His people – a return to the first things.

You cannot revive that which has no life to begin with.

If you are not saved, you don't need revival – you need salvation.

This chapter for us is an amazing illustration of what is involved in re-laying the foundations of right relationship to God.

Do we need that? Absolutely!

These six verses record some of the things involved in that very process.

Vs. 1a & b – gathering together – just like we are this morning

This was a common thing. It was a required gathering in Jerusalem. There were three of those each year for the Jewish males.

However, there is one thing that is unusual in verse 1 – God gives us two words that tell us about the spirit of these people that had not been true in the old days.

They gathered together as what? Vs. 1c – one man
Demonstrated a strong sense of community

#1 - For a people to rekindle revival/renew – there has got to be unity; a corporate bond to submit personal interests for the ultimate purpose and objective for which God has left us on this earth.

It is almost true in every assembly of God's people - there is that inner core of self-sacrificing individuals sold out to the main goal and then there is that part of the assembly on the fringe that simply cannot see that there is something so much more important than personal interests.

What is the purpose/common goal of the church?

5 Things

#1 – Soul winning – every neighbor, every co-worker, every friend – we are planting seeds.

#2 – Baptizing the new believer – need to encourage believers to take this step

#3 – Discipleship – one-on-one – male to male – helping people understand and apply God's Word

We've got to do this here then help do it abroad – we are missionaries at home first then to the world.

Folks, do we realize how much every one of us is needed? So many churchgoers take deposits regularly but never allow any withdrawals. There are some that never give back. This goes on to influence others which drains the life and energy out of the church.

Have you ever dreamed of the possibilities of a church with all its members in full

accordance for God? There is a contribution that only you can make to this church. Do you understand that? The future of our church depends on everyone of us. The death of a local church is only one generation away.

Take a look at your hand. It takes 70 muscles to work the 27 bones in the hands.

Take a deep breath – 90 muscles to breath

Over 100,000 sensory cells working in harmony for you to even see me

One of things that marks revival in the Old Testament and revival in church history is a unity – a cooperative effort on the part of serious, concentrated, consecrated people.

A corporate concern, a corporate spirit – no longer going every way in pursuit only for themselves but in an unified manner.

When revival comes, we will know it – for it will be marked by unity of concern for the things of God – as one man

It really is a matter of God's people together

Folks, this is out of our hands to do – this must come from God

God stirred up these people.

The unity of spirit – we are responsible to maintain the unity of spirit, but it is the Spirit Himself who creates it

That means if our heart has been touched, our spirit has been stirred – it is a burden from the Lord that must be received and acted upon.

These people had it – they didn't always have it – but they have it now

Notice that unity was focused – this is a key. What were they doing?

Vs. 2

The first day of the seventh month was their New Year's Day, marked by the blowing of trumpets – known today as Row-sha-shana, the tenth day was the Day of Atonement, the day when the sin of the nation was atoned for and the 15th-21st days of this month were the Feast of Tabernacles.

It was marked by a solemn assembly on the 22nd day. It was a very important month. It was a sacred month.

These people had gathered together for religious purposes – they left their own personal projects behind. No matter if rain came or if the snow came – there were more important things at hand.

They understood the need to fix the altar. They understood if they didn't take care of these things, their houses wouldn't matter anyway. They needed to move forward with God.

So they gathered as one man under spiritual leadership – vs. 2

This is the only time in this book that Jeshua appears first before Zerubbabel – why? This is not a civil matter – it's a spiritual matter. Jeshua is the priest – spiritual leader.

Vs. 3a

They rebuilt the altar in its original base just as Solomon had it before
If that altar is not built, they cannot renew all of those sacrifices that have to be offered – morning, noon, and night – every day – daily worship. There will be no revival until a daily worship of God is instituted.

Vs. 3c

What was the importance of resetting the altar?

If you could have walked through the gates of the Temple, the first thing that would have

met your eyes – the first thing you would have seen - set in front was the altar

It was most certainly put in that position to tell man there is no access to God without the shedding of blood.

They rebuilt the altar – they desired access to God – a restored relationship

Vs. 3 – right in the middle – “for fear was upon them” – while they were gone – people had moved in.

No one said revival was easy. There was a rift between the returnees and those who had settled in.

Nothing moves God’s people like fearful times. When everything is going well, God’s people tend to forget Him.

These people were not fearless people. Courage is not a lack of fear. Courage is the will to act in spite of fear.

How do you respond to the fears that come when you’re trying to do what God wants? That’s the question.

They went forward with God.

A lot of time, it takes the negative to drive us to the positive.

Have you ever noticed that when you want to go forward in your relationship with God – there will be something fearful that comes to try to intimidate you, to distract you, to deter you? Press on!

One other thing—

Vs. 2c – As it is written

Vs. 4a – As it is written

Do you know what this is telling us?

Rekindling revival/laying the foundation with God involves detail and attention to the Word of God – obedience to the Word of God.

Just as it is written – they are doing it.

Can that be said of us?

I suppose that if there is anything at all that characterizes our modern churches today – it is the exact opposite of that.

We find religion today done man's way:

It's impressive

It's entertaining

It's moving

Gimmicks, attractions, advertisements, marketing – to somehow have spiritual renewal – rubbish!

You will always find in a time of revival – God's people are not looking at the innovative, spectacular, new – they are not flirting with experimentation

They are going back to those rock solid bedrock – Biblical principles

Back on their knees praying

Back in their Bibles

Back to church

To confession

They've gone to weeping over sin

They become detailed in following the Word

We have had no real revival in our day – actually, now over 100 years in our country. Dwight L. Moody made this statement . . . “The next revival will be a revival of Bible study.” Those who have tried to whip up revivals by organization, by methods, and by gimmicks have failed. Revival will come only as people come back to the Word of God.

Whatever the Bible says is so! The Bible is authoritative. If we ever are going to have a right relationship with God again – we are going to have to have a renewed spirit of faith in the Bible – a renewed confidence in the Bible. When that comes, we will have a revived people.

What's involved in renewing the right spiritual foundation?

#1 – we are going to have to get together about that instead of scattering of our energies

Put all water in the same river. Finally, it will become a rushing torrent in fulfilling the purpose of God.

Unity – return to God

#2 – Back to the altar:

Communion – daily cleansing of the blood – getting right with God

Lying, cheating, stealing – no sin left on us – no blot left behind – get real with God – confess/repent of our personal sin.

#3 – Right response to the invitation that comes from the Holy Spirit and an obedient heart to the Word of God. What will that bring? We will have a revived people and God will be pleased with us.

Give Quiz #1

Ezra Sermon #6

Turn to Ezra 3

Ezra 3 covers two years of time

How many events? Two

Rebuild the altar

Lay the foundations of the Temple

“Rekindling Revival”

Ezra 3:1-8

Vs. 1 – gathered together

Vs. 8 – Stood together

Vs. 11 – Worshipped together

It’s important, folks, that if we are going to do anything as a church that we work together in unison.

We are not just a collection of individuals

We are members one of another and we are members together in the Body of Christ

Early Church – Acts 2

They were all with one accord in one place

False Ecumenical Movement – that we come together – overlook Biblical mandates

Come together – believing and holding to the Word of God

Vs. 2 – “As it is written”

Vs. 4 – “As it is written”

Vs. 10 – “After the ordinance of David”

We are never to toss our Bibles so we can come together – we come together with our Bibles

Important priorities

They set up the altar of God – vs. 2 & 3

The set forward the house of God – vs. 8

God and God's work was first

Until that happens with a large group of people – there will be no revival

The real question is seldom one of enablement or even opportunity – it is rather one of
faithfulness – willingness

Rekindling revival requires an unselfishness – looking beyond myself

Vs. 6c

Vs. 7 – hiring of workers and the purchasing of materials; selection of skilled workers.

They purchased cedar trees – well-known trees of the Old Testament

Very aromatic, discouraged insects, resisted rot, huge trees –

100 feet tall, 30-40 girth

Floated these trees 300 miles down the coast to Joppa – 30-40-mile trip up to

Jerusalem

The emphasis really is not on the building. It is on the people who are doing it.

The people think they are building the temple when the real core is that God is building
them.

Building up the people – when people are being built up – revival is not far away

Do you realize, folks, that you can actually destroy God's people in the interests of a
building? And it's done all the time.

Ephesians 4:11-16 – The Church is not a building – the church is a people.

Every part supplying – working together – growing together

When God's people go through a major, major building project - It is intended by God to
be a time of great growth.

Let me ask you a question: Do you really understand where the church is going?

What unifies all the aspects of our ministry?

We strongly pursue the Bible here

Holiness – living to the standard

Seek lost people

Help saved people grow and mature

Are you a contributing member of the team? – Do we have one heart beat?

It is difficult to have one heartbeat in a congregation today

People are coming and going – slipping in and out – commitment is really low

Let me take a little time and develop something.

Ezra 3, verse 7 – It takes money for every building project.

Great struggle for God's people when Christianity asks for their money.

Struggle takes place – faith is wrestled with.

God doesn't want our money – He wants our heart. Our money tells on our heart.

Jesus said it best – "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Prosperity gospel – give to God; God gives to you

We don't give to get – no ulterior motives – we are to give freely.

Whatever God is doing through His people, He does in order to build His people

Not just to accomplish a project, but it is there to build the Lord's people to make them complete – mature in Christ

The heart with which we give – willing – volunteer about this

Giving is not a burdensome thing

What is the spirit in which we give?

Ezra 1

Vs. 6 – they have the spirit

That ancient attitude – they are walking in the shoes of the giants of the past

Ezra 2:68-69 – read it

It tells us what they gave but it also tells us their individual amounts that they gave!

Do you see it? After their ability

How much should we give? After our ability

As God stirs your heart – as you find that voluntary/willing spirit – you give after the ability that you have

Folks, we do not need to be concerned about anyone else's giving

I'm only concerned about one person's giving – that's mine

When we give according to our ability, God's work will prosper

The Lord Jesus taught us about giving – the poor widow.

Jesus said she's put in more than they all because they put in out of their what?

Abundance – overflow, leftovers

But she put in out of her want – even all that she had – even her living

Those who have little to give – don't despise the little gift

Don't say to yourself – there are rich people here – they'll cover me

We must give with a voluntary heart according to the ability that we have

All of this is in the Old Testament – maybe Preacher, this is just Old Testament stuff

Take your Bibles

Do you know what the major giving project was in the early church?

Acts 11:29

II Cor. 9:7

Unselfishness is needed for revival

Ezra Sermon #7

Ezra 3:7-13

They took about 7 months in gathering materials.

What was the first thing that they did when they went about to lay this foundation?

They disbursed money! – vs. 7

What we have here is the hiring of workers and the purchasing of materials – vs.

They had to hire certain skilled workers, skilled carpenters, skilled craftsmen. So money is going out to these workers

#1 Careful accounting – stewardship of God's money

We need wisdom and integrity in handling the church's funds.

These men who handle God's money are ministers of Jesus Christ in the fiscal affairs of our assembly.

#1 – good accounting

#2 – Let me point out to you in brief that the cedar trees they were purchasing from Lebanon were **good building materials**

There is a philosophy today that God's work ought to be done on the cheap.

There is a philosophy today that God's work demands the best. A building is a building!

They were building something to last – to be durable

They were not using the cheapest materials – they were using the best

There is an application:

Sometimes you get behind by trying to get ahead – Ford Pinto/Chevy Vega/Yugo.

Sometimes we don't do the Lord's work a favor by cutting corners/by cheapness nor by building cathedrals or palaces.

They could have used the trees that stood in Israel, but they didn't. Instead, they went with the extra expense.

By the way, this was not something cosmetic – not something to be seen

Most of this would not be seen

But they felt it was necessary for this building to last.

This is an example for us

Look at Ezra 3:8-9

There was enthusiasm, reflected in the “all” who came forward for the work (8b), but there was also strict attention to standards, as is shown by the double mention of “*the oversight*” of the work

What's going on in these two verses? Organization!

#1 Leaders – Zerubbabel and Jeshua – what are they doing?

The leaders are appointing overseers – that's called delegation

The leaders function by giving God's people vision and direction

A leader assesses where we are and where we ought to go and moves in that direction

#2 Overseers/Managers

The Levites were appointed to look after the details of things

They were constantly checking on the workers, materials

Management is a detailed, check-up – kind of work

#3 Laborers

The workers – they are active people – trenches – day by day – laying the stone, cutting the timbers, building the foundation

You can see the three levels there – leadership, management, the workers

Ezra 3 stresses unity, cooperation, and enthusiasm for the project. Although Zerubbabel and Jeshua were the principal leaders, they delegated the supervising to the Levites.

The leaders knew how to make decisions, but they also delegated authority to others. The work was done in an orderly and efficient manner.

Vs. 7 – hiring and purchasing

Vs 8-9 – organizing for the labor

Now, vs. 10-13 – These verses record the celebration that took place when the foundation had been completed. You could call it a kind of “cornerstone celebration” (vs. 10)

True faith praises God even before the project has materialized.

We ought to praise God as we go along with each step of the way

Vs. 10, the priests were clad in their typical vestments (cf. Exod. 28; 2 Chr. 5:12; 20:21) and they blew the trumpets. The Levites played on the cymbals (cf. Ps. 150:5)
 . . . trumpets were made of beaten silver . . . the trumpets were always blown by priests
 . . . Trumpets were most often used on joyous occasions such as here and at the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem . . .

The thing that is given special emphasis about the ceremony is the reaction of the people at that time

Notice in vs. 10-11 – we have a planned reaction

Vs. 10c – after the ordinance of David

. . . they held a praise service

Ezra 3:11 – sang what David said to sing – I Chron. 16:40-41

The word translated “sang” is literally “answered”

They sang . . . by a choir divided into two groups . . . singing responsively to one another

This was a planned, prepared, organized reaction – we do this every Sunday – we plan these services

These folks are so thrilled and enthusiastic that they act as though the entire temple has been rebuilt.

But – vs. 12 – see that “But” we also see a spontaneous reaction – an unplanned reaction – especially of the older people who had seen the first Temple

Those people wept! Wonder why they wept?

Vs. 12

There were the young people who had never seen the temple of old. This was something new to them

The other group was composed of the old-timers. They remembered Solomon’s temple and how beautiful it was.

I have a notion that some of them said to each other, “This second temple is nothing. If these young people could only have seen Solomon’s temple!”

What they were saying was not very encouraging to the young group, but it was true.

One of the problems God had to overcome was discouragement that came because of the older group talking the way they did.

The Lord says, “Go ahead and build. I am with you.” Because God was not in that beautiful temple of Solomon’s at the end—the glory had left it—but God is with you now. Go ahead and build!

There are a lot of old-timers today who discourage the work of God.

Haggai, Zechariah – dealt with this

Haggai would recognize that note and preach against it (Haggai 2:3-4); Zechariah would have to challenge those who “despised the day of small things” (Zec. 4:10).

These people were despising the day of a small beginning

These older people were making a comparison between the good old days and their present work for God

Solomon’s temple was glorious – over 2,000 tons of gold in Solomon’s Temple
19,000 tons of silver

It took 180,000 workmen, with 3,600 managers, 7½ years to build the Temple

These older folks were standing in the rubble and ruin of Jerusalem with only the foundation of the Temple laid.

They looked at it and their minds went back to Solomon’s Temple and they wept at the comparison; they wept in disappointment.

Haggai and Zechariah had to deal with this problem because that was a debilitating thing to the morale of God’s people

That kind of thing happens when we make the wrong comparisons

A church can look at what they are doing and then look at the brand new, cathedral-looking church down the street and what they are doing seems unimportant—lose their zeal

A pastor can do it

People could do it

Have you ever compared your life with someone else and it seemed their life was blessed and yours not and it took all the heart out of you?

Let us never despise a small beginning – it will paralyze activity for God.

The weeping was by the older people and while they may have felt justified in their attitude, dwelling in the past can be counterproductive.

It can have the effect of paralyzing the present and of discouraging those who are sincerely seeking to do something for God.

Let us be careful not to let the past cause us to undervalue the present.

Now go back to the Temple's foundation—this time there is no ark, no visible glory, no Temple: only some beginnings, and small beginnings at that.

People rejoiced over small gains.

We certainly can't ignore the past, but the past must be a rudder to guide us and not an anchor to hold us back.

We must rejoice over small victories and gains and keep working together for the big victory!

Vs. 13

. . . the shouting and the weeping were so intermingled, one could not be distinguished from the other.

The tears and outcries expressed the deep emotion of the occasion. The Israelis reacted similarly when they reached the Wailing Wall in their war against the Arabs in 1967.

Ezra Sermon #8

“Standing Strong in the Lord”

Ezra 3:13

Noise heard afar off

Heard – transition verb – 4:1 – they heard – the adversaries heard

Vs. 3-5, 24

That’s a period of 16 years – ceasing of that work

The foundation was laid and not much more was done for sixteen years

Now, what do we have in vs. 6-23 – a record of opposition sustained against the people of God all the way up until Nehemiah – some 90 years later

The writer runs ahead recording oppositions even after the rebuilt Temple

Vs. 6

Vs. 7a

Chapter 4 – is a record of opposition – for the entire period of time in Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah

We have it all together in this one chapter

What happened? – letter (vs. 6)

Another letter – vs. 7

Vs. 8 – another letter but we have the contents of this letter

Beginning in vs. 11– let’s read official correspondence from history

Vs. 11-16

Vs. 19 – the king searched and this is his answer – vs. 19

Vs. 19-21

Vs. 21

Vs.23

Neh. 1:3 – burned the gates, tore down the walls

Why do God's people face fierce opposition when trying to do something for the Lord?

What is the explanation for this kind of opposition? Two ways to look at it.

First, there is the human level – there was an explanation on that level

Vs. 1 – the adversaries heard – but who are the adversaries?

Vs. 2b – these people are known to us in the New Testament as Samaritans

Who were the Samaritans?

They were half-breeds – they lived in the Northern Kingdom area – after the Assyrian overthrow of Israel around 700 B.C.

The Assyrians had a policy – when they overthrew a country in order to ensure no national uprising took place – they would transport the people of the land hundreds of miles away and they put new people into the recently conquered land

The Samaritans were planted in Israel – these foreigners

Vs. 9 – lists of some of these people, vs. 10

People pulled in from the corners of the Assyrian Empire and tossed into a big
potpourri (pō' poo **rē'**) in Israel

When the Jewish exiles came back from Babylon in 537/536 – they found these people
inhabiting their land – these Samaritan people

These mixtures between the Israelites who came home and these transplanted people
Was not a pleasant situation

These Samaritans felt threatened by the construction in Jerusalem – we still have this conflict today in Israel

When these Jews returned – the Samaritans saw it as an encroachment – a threat to their way of life

This is the human level explanation of what the situation was

But what does the New Testament mean when it says – we wrestle not against flesh and blood?

There is another level – **The spiritual level**

What is the explanation when the Lord's people face opposition? **Spiritual warfare**

When we try to do something for the Lord, we are going to stir up the hostility of malicious spiritual foes – they already have their territory marked out
Prince of Persia – demonic angel of Iran

When we decide to take some of it – fierce battle – invade
The enemy does not like us.

This is why we will face opposition whenever and wherever we raise our hand to serve the Lord

In fact, opposition can be a sure sign that God is in a work

If we are not having opposition – now, we don't look for it – we may need to question ourselves.

Go back – Ezra 3:12 – I'm going to show you something – I need you to understand it!
That little work seemed so small – they wept in disappointment

But to the adversaries, the little work loomed large

The enemies knew what the rebuilding of that temple would mean

It was no small thing in the eyes of the opposition

Just as soon as you begin to

Share your faith (receive opposition)

Soul winning – knock on doors

Start a ministry – be involved in God's work

Start reading your Bible, Sunday School, Wednesday night

Prepare yourself

I've seen people get blessed but it wasn't a blessing from God; it was a distraction, a deterrent from what God really wanted them to do

Opposition can be all out of proportion to the project that you are doing, but there are spiritual adversaries that well know what the outcome of a small beginning for God means if it succeeds and they will oppose it.

It is no small thing when you invade someone else's territory.

In Ezra everything is on the human level – we don't see the spiritual warfare – the devil at work or God's angels at work

First, we saw an explanation of opposition

Secondly, let's look at the timing of opposition

Now will you notice when the opposition began – when did it begin?

Just as soon as the work began

For every beginning, there is a coordinated effort to destroy the work before it even gets off the ground

When they heard this work was going on – there was opposition!

That's what we face just as soon as we begin to live for the Lord

Just as soon as we try to get the work off the ground

Just as soon as you take the first step God's way – you will face hostility

The devil and his workers know how to “nip things in the bud”

Spurgeon warned that on the eve of any great undertaking, there would be a corresponding great opposition

I personally can look back at times I was under so much criticism and pressure and if it were not for the praying people of God, I would have quit. And if I had, it would have been the worst mistake that I would ever make.

I've learned at least one thing in opposition—plow ahead. Keep moving forward.

Take more ground.

Opposition is Discouraging

Disheartening

Depressing

Debilitating

Diabolical

Ezra Sermon #9

On the human level – the Apostle Paul had a lot of opposition.

Listen to what he wrote:

II Timothy 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works.”

Not only the human level – there is the spiritual level of opposition

Satan opposes the progress of God’s people

Satan exploits the weaknesses of God’s work

We need to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles/schemes of the devil.

The Bible teaches us not to be ignorant of his devices/ways – II Cor. 2:11

I Corinthians 16:9, “For a great door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.”

“Standing Strong in the Lord”

Vs. 2-5 – record the methods the opposition took – there were four of them
 . . . whenever God’s people try to serve the Lord, somebody will oppose them.

Let’s look at some of the methods the adversaries used against them.

#1 – The first method – we sometimes don’t recognize – Praise the Lord – they did

The first form that opposition took was an attempt of infiltration. – The first effort to stop the work of God is the offer to become allies. I want to be on your team – get on board.

There was an open offer to come and help, but the infiltration always has a personal agenda – vs. 2

They said in vs. 2 – we seek God like you do!

Notice the rebuff – vs. 3 – they are not interested at all in their help

That answer looks to be hardheaded/calloused response – you say that’s rude!

The Jews recognized that one of the first strategies that opposition may take is an infiltration by the wrong elements!

For infiltration to take place, there has to be a point of contact with you and the people who are trying to infiltrate your ranks. There has to be some point of similarity – something in common.

Vs. 3, They claimed, “We seek your God as you do.” That sounds good on the surface. Was that true?

Let’s find out!

II Kings 17 – let’s look at the history of these people

When the kings of Assyria

II Kings 17:24-28

Vs. 29

Vs. 32-34

That is the background – the God of the Bible is one of their gods

They have a point of contact

Should they socialize with these people?

Should they intermarry with these people?

An infiltration always has a point of contact but it also has a point of difference and it won't be long before that opposition begins to rip up the church.

The Bible tells us not to marvel at this, for Satan can transform himself into an angel of light.

Muslim – Islamic teaching – about Allah – many a person has said we Christians have the same God as a Muslim. That's a lie from the pit of hell: Mohammed is not greater than Jesus. He is a false prophet.

First attempt of opposition does not look like opposition, but it is.

How do you recognize the infiltration? Better know the Bible.

How do you know if it's infiltration or allegiance?

Ezra 6:21 – really embraced Israel. They had done away with the points of difference. Are you dealing with people who want to join you – that they will separate themselves away from the filth around them and wholeheartedly embrace the Bible truths Mormonism, Catholicism, Church of Scientology—

Only one mediator between God and man – it's not the priest – it's the great High Priest – His name is Jesus Christ – I Timothy 2:5

God's people today must maintain a separated position – not isolationism. God has a work for believers to do in the world.

The world wants us to accept its standard, its music, its behavior – not only the world, but churches and Christians want us to be tolerant even if the Bible is not tolerant. I'm going to stand with the Bible.

This was the first form that opposition! It didn't work, so the opposition took off their gloves. . .

Then they resorted to different means – try something else – another bait

The second method of opposition

Ezra, vs. 4-5

Ezra, vs. 4 – they weakened the hands – they discouraged them – they took the heart out of them

Generally the way you do that is with words – not weapons

Words like these: You can't do that – we've never done it that way before.

It will never work. You're wasting your time. Who are **you**? (especially those who know your history)

Rumor mill, gossip, campaign of slander – this we will face in whatever we try to do with the Lord.

The words of discouragement we will face in whatever we try to do for the Lord

We need to develop a ministry of encouragement one to another – we have a lot of encouragers here at Medora

I have a special place on my prayer list for my encouragers

I pray for them specifically; I thank God for them.

They are some people who are encouragers. How many of us love those kind of people?

Card encouragers: How many of you folks ever received a card?

Telephone encouragers

E-mail encouragers

Gift encouragers

Servant encouragers

I pray for my encouragers – I pray against my slanderers

Some people that every time you are around them, they encourage your heart!

Would that one word describe all of us – “encourager”

We need encouragers! There is nothing that will invigorate people and help them go beyond their means like the ministry of encouragement. Barnabas was an encourager.

But when there is discouragement – discouragement can overthrow the work of God
and the people of God

Notice it goes beyond discouragement now – vs. 4

The third method of opposition was intimidation

Troubled them – intimidated them. Now, it has resorted to threats, violence

Infiltration, discouragement, intimidation and

The fourth method of opposition

Vs. 5 – resorted to hiring professionals – vs. 5 – counselors

Those counselors wrote letters; they wrote accusations

They made compacts with people in high places; they were flatterers.

They saddled themselves up to important people and whisper how bad the Jews are
and what Jerusalem would do if rebuilt – made every effort to tear down the
work, to be critical – to be negative

In fact, this kind of onslaught might have set the table for Ahasuerus

Maybe that explains why Ahasuerus okayed Haman's request to kill every Jew – man,
woman and child – because he heard that they were a troublesome group –
those Jews

Listen carefully – all the way to the back row.

Nothing that is attempted for God will go unchallenged, and scarcely a tactic be
unexplored by the opposition

They hired professional counselors. They did all of this – discouragement, intimidation,
hiring, to accomplish one purpose.

The purpose was – vs. 5 – to frustrate the work of God

They kept on doing these things

All these participles (vs. 4-5) – continuous assault – this was a rolling tide of opposition

And they did this to such a degree that the entire enterprise was brought to a standstill.

Vs. 24

The word “frustrate” – occurs 53 times in Old Testament

23 of those times it is used in breaking a covenant

This word doesn’t mean to frustrate in order to get one upset and confused

Listen to this:

It literally means to bring a person to a place that he breaks with his purpose.

Break his will/desire – break his back

What will happen when you try to do something for the Lord? Very often there will be discouragement, intimidation, and the gathering of people against you

And the whole point is to get you to break with what God has called you to do!

Broken down pastors

Broken down church people

Broken down churches

You and I will have to face the choice

Whether to say this isn’t worth it – throwing up our hands and to break our original intent or we will have to face that opposition and continue ahead

There are only two choices – there are no other alternatives

If you break with what God has called you to do – impact can be far reaching

Let us persevere with God’s purpose

Daniel purposed in his heart

Joseph said, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

What are some other methods of opposition? Too numerous to name, but here is one:

Just as soon as the Lord Jesus was baptized and began His earthly ministry, He was thrust out into the wilderness to be tempted.

Temptation is a method of opposition

Temptation crosses your path to distract you and to defeat you

His whole ministry – opposition to make Him break

What was the pattern of the early working of the Church?

Acts 2 & 3 – thousands of people added to the Lord – 5,000 men who are believers

What do have in chapter 4? Immediately you have the persecution of the religious leaders! Externally – thrown into jail; threatened them not to speak in the name of Jesus

Just as soon as they overcome the external persecution, they have internal persecution
Chapter 5 – Ananias and Sapphira – somebody is lying in the church; pride in the church

Then it is back to external persecution – back in jail – warnings, beatings

Acts 5:40-42, “. . . and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

They would not break from their purpose

They are beaten then they have an internal problem – widows being overlooked – and immediately one of those deacons was martyred

Back and forth – external and internal opposition

You see things also in the ministry of the Apostle Paul

Soon as Paul preached his first message for God, what happened to him?

He had to escape with his life

Acts 9:29, “And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, . . . but they went about to slay him.”

Instantaneously with the initiation of a work – will be the immediate opposition/hindrance of that work

If we don't experience opposition, we better double check and see if we are really doing the Lord's work

Eph. 6:13

Ezra Sermon #10

I want to call your attention to five other things that the Samaritans did to stop the work of God, to cause it to cease – to cause the people to quit.

Last time – they tried infiltration, discouragement, intimidation, hired professionals

Vs. 8 records the last letter – Samaritans wrote the letter

Five other avenues of attack

Vs. 8

The **first** avenue of attack is in vs. 9-10 – it names a number of different ethnic or national groups who subscribe to that letter – vs. 9

We have a large group of nationalities that had been put in this land by the king of Assyria

Here are a number of different ethnic groups who are typically at each other's throats – and what does this tell us about opposition? We will often see this in the work of the Lord.

Where different groups will come together to gang up on God's work and workers

A confederacy of elements that are very diverse of one another, but the one thing they have in common is this – they are opposed to God's work

God is a common foe of diverse groups in the world

Sometimes very diverse elements that have nothing else in common except that they are all opposed to you

Luke 23:12, "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves."

Christianity is a common foe

First – confederacy against God's work!

#2 – now the second place in vs. 12 – notice how they refer to Jerusalem

Vs. 12 – notice name-calling – rebellious and bad city/wicked city

God calls it the City of the Great King, the Holy City

Folks, there will be name calling – that's the second avenue of attack

Thirdly in vs. 13 – the opposition will insinuate the worst about you and your motives –
vs. 13

The **fourth** thing vs. 14 – since when were they concerned about the king's honor?

Play up to the leader – hypocritically pandering to authorities

Vs. 10 – false praise of their destroyer

Flattery

The king of Assyria slew their women and children and burned their cities to the ground

Notice the **fifth** thing this letter contains

Vs. 16 – What an exaggeration!

What will the opposition do? Infiltrate, discourage, intimidate

Confederate with others, name calling, insinuate the worst,

Play up to anyone who has authority, exaggerate

When you do the work of God – plan accordingly – trouble is coming

Opposition takes many forms and the purpose is to break God's people away from the

Lord's work

Notice the duration of opposition! Vs. 5

How long – 536 B.C. when they started building the temple – vs. 7 – 425 B.C.

When we put all these years together – 110 years

What is God trying to tell us by recording this chapter as He does?

These people for the next century are going to face opposition. What is God trying to tell us?

Think it not strange when we have difficulty

That we are to continue the fight

That our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren will have to continue to fight

This is telling us something

We can consider and anticipate when serving the Lord – from now on,
we can count on it. We are going to face opposition!

Let's just get it settled in our heart

If we serve the Lord, we will face opposition today, tomorrow, and next year

The duration of opposition lasts as long as the work of God is going on!

Folks, how long are we going to face opposition? And it may get worse as we go along.

Nehemiah 4:14-21

Vs. 14

Vs. 22

There is a way to get rid of the opposition – bail out on God's work

Back to Ezra

Vs. 24

There was something that made the opposition effective?

How did the opposition succeed in their mission?

Vs. 15 – what was the leverage the adversaries used that finally put them over the top?

Their sin of rebellion

Vs. 18 – vs. 19 – the king sunk his teeth right into it

The past sin of these people

You say, "Pastor, what are they referring to?"

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel long before he destroyed Jerusalem.

He left it standing and left most of the people there

God spoke through Jeremiah – take a yoke of wood and put it on your neck and go
 around the city and tell the people to submit themselves to the king of Babylon,
 and wear his yoke and if they will do that, they can stay here, raise their families,
 raise their crops, live in their homes

The false Hananiah took the yoke and smashed it and told the people not to allow
 Nebuchadnezzar to reign over them and to rebel – II Kings 24 and 25 and Jeremiah 28

Three times the Jews rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar during his reign over them and
 the last time he said, “I’ve had it – I’ve put up with them for twenty years” and he
 reduced the city to rubble and carried off the rest of healthy Israel. Now that is what
 they are referring to here in vs. 15 and vs. 19

This is a city that does not know how to submit itself and “King Artaxerxes, if you will
 check, you will find that.”

This is a bad city

Their past sinful record is used against them and that really is the element that proved
 to be effective

They had sown the seeds of defeat by disobeying God.

The sinful things we are doing today could be the seeds of our own defeat tomorrow.

All those methods of opposition didn’t work but this one hook – the king could hang his
 hat on it

This charge held water in the king’s eyes and he called for the work to stop – vs. 21 and
 vs. 23

This is precisely how the devil overthrows the Lord’s work.

The Samaritans made great advance play on the past sins of the people of Jerusalem.

Our enemy is the accuser of the brethren and he still causes mischief by bringing up old sins.

The devil will use any carnal leverage he can find and will use it against us
He will take our past sins and beat us with them. But praise be to God who giveth us
the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ

Vs. 24

They ceased the work
Sometimes the work of God ceases

Sixteen years of inactivity – how can this be? This is God's work
When we go forward for God, let us go forward on our knees

There is a context to all of this opposition

Remember that whatever you're facing is in a much larger context of the Lord's
purpose. Don't have a small worldview

Ezra Sermon #11

Turn in your Bibles to Ezra 5

Chapter 4 was about the opposition that the Jews received—the building of the Temple was stopped – so the work is at a standstill

Sixteen years – 4:24

“God’s Chosen Men”

At the end of those 16 years, God raised up two prophets/preachers—Haggai and Zechariah

5:1

5:2

Four men that God used

Four men listed in diverse roles in the work of God

Civil head – Zerubbabel; religious head – Jeshua; and two prophets – Haggai and Zechariah. We need to look at these four men in greater detail to really understand the book of Ezra.

If you would have known Zerubbabel as a young man, you would say he had everything against him. Let me give three things from his background/past:

#1 Zerubbabel was a great grandson of a cursed king, Jehoiakim

Read I Chron. 3:16-19

Jehoiachin = Jeconiah, Matt. 1:12, Coniah. Jehoiakim took a knife (pen knife or scribe’s knife used to sharpen writing tools and to cut scrolls) and when the book of Jeremiah was read to him, he cut it and threw it into the fire. Because of his total disregard

toward the word of God – God cursed that king and his son, Jeremiah chapters 22 and 36

Zerubbabel lineage – not good

#2 Zerubbabel was an adopted son of Shealtiel (Ezra 5:2)

Zerubbabel's natural father is a man named Padiah (I Chronicles 3:19). Something happened – the Bible does not tell us. Padiah died – his brother Shealtiel adopted Zerubbabel.

So he did not grow up in the home of his natural father; he grew up in the home of Shealtiel, the oldest son of Jeconiah.

So there was tragedy in his background – negative

#3 Zerubbabel's name means “seed of Babylon.” That means he was born in Babylon/Babel.

He never knew Jerusalem or Solomon's Temple – he did not grow up in Israel.

He was a child of the Captivity.

He was a grandson of a cursed king; he was an adopted son; his very name reminded everyone of the Captivity.

Yet he has a wonderful positive history

God can do great things in people's lives in spite of the circumstances they grow up in.

God used one of those negatives that actually placed Zerubbabel in the line of David through adoption. He ended up being the heir to Jeconiah through adoption.

He will never sit on the throne – there will be no king. There has not been a Davidic king since Zedekiah and there will not be until who comes?

Messiah comes in the Second Coming and sits in Jerusalem

When it came time for the captives to go back to Judah, Zerubbabel was naturally chosen as the leader. He became the governor of these people.

(Don't read Haggai 1:1) – he is given leadership

Initially, our heart goes out to this boy – his situation was tragic.

God takes those bad things and turns them out for His good and God's glory
That's exactly what God does with this young man

It gets better

Zerubbabel had character – four qualities:

#1 – willing to accept responsibility of his position – leads the people back

#2 – right priorities

Ezra 3:2 – first thing they did back in Israel – 3:2 – they set up altar and renewed the sacrifices

Nehemiah 12:47 – little window of his authority – paid the people

This demonstrates the priorities of Zerubbabel – faithful through opposition, tough times

#3 – Ezra 4:3 – He told the Samaritans – he was a man of uncompromising position

#4 – and best of all, he knew how to sit under sound preaching and respond to it the right way. Zerubbabel was the civil leader but responded to the preaching of God's men

When Haggai and Zechariah were raised up by the Lord – 16 years after the work on the Temple stopped

They preached four messages directly at Zerubbabel – Ezra 5:1

Let's look at three of these messages – Haggai was the old prophet – Zechariah was the young prophet – Haggai started the preaching – Zechariah finished it

Put the Old Testament together

Haggai 1:1 – let's look at the impact of these messages on Zerubbabel and how he responded to them

Haggai 1:1

The **first message** is on proper priorities – Haggai 1:2-6

They had put personal priority above Divine priority – vs. 7-8

Putting God first

Vs. 12 – they obeyed

They had allowed the people of God to establish the wrong priorities in their lives.

Allowed the nation to become self-centered.

Now they are getting preached at by Haggai.

How did they respond? They said you're right; we have things backwards (vs. 14)

How do we respond to preaching? Move us to action? Move us to change?

Sermon #2

2:1 – this is one month after the first sermon – first sermon dealt with priorities – this sermon contains promises!

The main promise is this temple will receive a greater glory – this temple will receive a greater glory than Solomon's Temple!

Vs. 9 – in this temple when rebuilt – the incarnate, in the flesh, God will walk – His name Jesus. The Messiah is coming to this Temple.

Vs. 4 – he is told to be strong and he was – he started the work again and worked right through the opposition and finished the Temple

Vs. 7

Zerubbabel has tremendous character. We know this by what he overcame growing up.

We know this by

- #1 his accepting responsibility
- #2 his right priorities
- #3 his uncompromising position
- #4 his response to preaching

Now let me show something even greater about this man – that is his ultimate significance

Haggai 2:20

Haggai, you tell Zerubbabel – governor of this little start – one of these days, I will topple all nations

Ultimate fulfillment of vs. 21-22 – has that happened? NO!

Will that happen? YES!

When will it happen? Second Coming – when Jesus comes to reign on this earth

How does vs. 23 come in? Zerubbabel is standing in this passage as the sign – the continuance of the Davidic line – until the Messiah comes and takes His rightful place.

Signet – significance of Zerubbabel – standing seal of what God is going to do

Prediction of security that Zerubbabel can count on: He is in God's place, in God's work, doing it God's way

Chosen man - encouragement

Matthew 1:1; 1:11-12-

Ezra Sermon #12

(Pastor Wayne, read Zechariah, especially chapter 3 before preaching)

Turn in your Bibles to Ezra 5

The building of the Temple was stopped – for how long? 16 years

How did it start again? Two prophets

“God’s Chosen Men”

At the end of those 16 years of inactivity – God raised up two prophets (for which we have two Old Testament books) to preach

Because of their preaching – vs. 2

Jeshua or Joshua – we know very little about this man

We do know that his grandfather Cyriah (“Se rai ah”) was high priest when Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar

“Se rai ah” and 71 other leaders were taken out to Riblah and were executed – that’s what happened to his grandpa (II Kings 25:18-21)

We also know very little about his father, Jozadak or Jehozadak. We know that Jozadak never served as high priest because his father didn’t die until the Captivity – Jozadak most likely died in Babylon.

So Jeshua comes back to Jerusalem as the heir to Aaron’s line of high priest. Most likely he had never seen the high priest perform or the Temple in Jerusalem.

First, very limited background on Jeshua

Secondly, co-laborer – Jeshua had a compadre, partner

Let me show you something beautiful in the Bible

The first ten times that Jeshua appears in the Bible, he is mentioned in the same breath with Zerubbabel. This phrase – vs. 2

Chapter 2: The two came back together

The next time is in—

Chapter 3: They built the altar together

Chapter 4: They faced the opposition together

Haggai 1 They get the first sermon of Haggai together

Haggai 1:12 They obeyed the first sermon together

1:14 The Spirit of God stirs up both of them

2: They get the second sermon together

2:4 They are both told to be strong

Ezra 5:2 They began to rebuild together

Now, why did I go through all of that?

Because we have listed here one of the most unusual companionships/unique friendships! Jesus and John, David and Jonathan, Moses and Joshua

One of the most unusual harmonies in all of the Word of God – between two leaders! You have the civil leader and religious leader and the first ten times they appear – covering some sixteen years.

Every time they are working together in absolute harmony!

What the one does, the other does – there is a beautiful little touch in chapter three, because they work together – but depending on the task, they subordinate themselves one to another.

Every time Zerubbabel is listed first, when it comes to the civil affairs, but in chapter 3 when they rebuilt the altar, Jeshua comes first (3:2)

That's Jeshua's domain – now he's in charge

What we have here is the civil leader and the religious leader working together like God really intended for those positions to work – for people on earth!

God never intended any disharmony or any threat – from the one to the other!

What you see here is what will be in the future when those two offices will be combined into one perfect Person – and Who is that? Jesus Christ

Jeshua is co-laborer with Zerubbabel

Thirdly, Jeshua is the subject of two visions that Zechariah has

Turn to Zechariah 3 – see his appearance in Zechariah’s prophecy

Haggai – is easier to understand; Zechariah is not – he is a visionary, futurist

Zechariah 1:6-8 – starts eight visions – all came in one night. Read through them– they are very confusing!

You have candlesticks, horses, angels, and the Devil – all these things going on – what are these visions about?

★ It will help if we remember that all of these visions were given to Zechariah to preach to Zerubbabel and Jeshua in order to motivate them to begin to rebuild the Temple.

We find that (all eight visions – stair step – depict history) Zechariah records the first vision which is the restoration back to the land (Zechariah 1:16-17) all the way through to Millennial Kingdom in Vision #8. These visions are not intended to be dark riddles but to be understood. God is giving revelation to the future of this nation. They were given to encourage these men to rise up and go back to work.

Zechariah 3:1-2 – God has rebuked thee. Why?

#1 – God has chosen Jerusalem. That’s God’s sovereign choice.

#2 – Brand plucked out of the fire – Jeshua was retrieved for God’s future purpose

Vs. 3 – shows what the accusation of Jeshua by Satan was.

Vs. 4-5 – the high priest wore this on his head and do you know what was written on it?

“Holiness to the Lord.”

Vs. 7 – two conditions and three promises – vs. 7

That's the scene

Let's look at the significance

Vs. 8-10 – servant, branch, stone – three references to Christ

The priests are sinners. The adversary accuses him and God says, "I've cleansed his sin. Now let me hold him up a sign of what one day I will do through the Messiah."

Zerubbabel was a (signet, token) sign of Messiah's reign. Jeshua was a sign of God's cleansing of the people.

Now what do we have when we put these two men together. We have what's in Chapter 4.

Zechariah 4:1-3, 4

Vs. 11-14

Who are these two anointed ones – men?

Zerubbabel, the civil leader – the governor – the king

And Jeshua, the religious leader – the high priest

They both are standing as a testimony to things to come

These two men, together – are critical for maintaining a light for God in that nation

They were testimonies of what God was doing and what God will do.

One last vision:

Vision #8 – keep in mind what we've been over before – 6:9-10

6:11a – who wears the crown? – the king – but look who's wearing it? vs. 11b

You do not put a crown on the priest – that is confusing the offices, workers, authority – that is merging the offices. Why? vs. 12

Vs. 12-13 – Priest and king merged into one office. These two offices are perfectly merged into one Person. Who is that? Messiah. No conflict at all between civil and religious authority.

Jesus is already functioning in His High Priestly ministry – He cleanses us today – we are made holy today, but one day He is coming back to the earth – Second Coming/Advent – to begin to rule and reign – 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom
The Messiah came and died on the cross for our sins and one day He is coming to be crowned!

Let me put all this together

Two men – Zerubbabel and Jeshua – in Babylon – God takes those two men – like sticks pulled from the fire – and they are sent to Jerusalem to rebuild.

They start and the work is shut down – for 16 years by opposition

God sends two prophets

The prophets come to the defeated work and men in Jerusalem

Zechariah and Haggai – begin to preach – they help Zerubbabel and Jeshua see the significance in their work for God.

Both men – Zerubbabel – renewal of Davidic line

Jeshua – renewal of clean priesthood

Both of these are pledges of what was to come in Christ.

Let me give applications – far reaching ramifications

Many of God's people looked at what those men were doing as a small thing. In the eyes of the people – seemed small (disappointment), but the significance of a work is not in the eyes of people; it's in how God views it. It is not in the size of the work, but in the size of what it bears testimony to.

The significance of the work of Medora – is not in its size or the number of people who fill the pews

The significance of the work is in what it bears testimony to – what we are known for –

1. Bible preaching and living
2. Heart for souls
3. Genuine living – holy

The true significance of any person's life is in his testimonial character!

What is the significance of my life if I'm not bearing testimony to something much bigger than myself?

There is no significance to us individually or corporately unless we testify of something larger and greater than us.

The finest testimony that individuals can have is the testimony to those two sides of Jesus Christ

The Priest who reigns

Salvation by grace – I'm clean and that Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life – I'm obeying!

Ezra Sermon #13

Turn in your Bibles to Ezra 5

Ezra contains the record of the people of God going back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity.

Ezra 1-2 record the preparations to go to Jerusalem

Ezra 3 – Laying of foundations – religious, Temple itself

Then in Ezra 4 – Oppositions – work stopped – sixteen years

What was the primary thing they are going back to do in the first six chapters of Ezra? Rebuilding the Temple. Did they do so without any problems? Opposition? **NO**

Now the last two messages have covered four men—two prophets, a high priest and the governor

God did a wonderful work through the preaching of the prophets. Zerubbabel and Jeshua responded and then they began to build again in Ezra 5:2

They restarted the work on the Temple in Jerusalem

Can you guess what takes place next? Opposition

I've entitled this sermon "Our Response to Civil Authority"

Ezra 5:3

"Our Response to Civil Authority"

Ezra 5:6-17

This is a classic case of the people of God brushing into civil government! Of course, in our day, this has become quite a concern and how do we respond to government officials – whether they be local, state, or national?

Chapters 5 and 6 are a model to us – set an example for us in response to those occurrences

I want you to notice in vs. 3 – four words at the same time – when they began building – these guys showed up. That’s typical.

Opposition begins simultaneously at the beginning of the work of God. The same lesson as we saw before.

This opposition seems to be apparent because when civil government makes inquiry – we see it as intrusion! – red tape from our standpoint – bunch of hoops to jump through. It can seem to be kind of a hindrance to us and it may be

Let me turn this thing around. Instead of looking at it through our eyes, let’s look at it from the eyes of Tattenai or “She thar Boz Nai,” Tattenai’s assistant. Let’s get into their shoes. When these men saw that building going up – from their standpoint – what were their concerns? Were they legitimate?

It seems to me that these two men are different from the men in Chapter 4 and that Tattenai and “She thar Boz Nai” are pretty good men.

They do not behave like these guys in chapter 4! For one thing there are no threats and no effort to intimidate and the progress of the Temple was not impeded and the work went on.

Vs. 5 credits God for this so on the human level, they seem to be fair men who have legitimate concerns.

These men are appointed by “Da Rye us” to be responsible authorities in that area of the world.

It was their duty – their job – to make sure there was no rebellion in their region – to ensure peace – no revolt – no trouble

They see the great stones and timbers going up – these looked alarming to them – vs. 8 Three rows of great stones – it looked more like a fortress than a sanctuary – putting timber in that to protect against earthquakes and/or battering rams.

You build this way when you intend for something to be there for a long time.

They report the nature of the building and the materials being used.

Another thing they noticed (vs. 8) was the work was fast – fast and furious was the speed. We know for sixteen years, it had been super slow.

The people had a heart to work and the wall was going up quickly.

Will you notice another thing?

Notice the reply the people of God gave – vs. 11 – it really is a model.

This reminds us of what Jesus said – “Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves!”

Their reply was characterized by straightforward honesty. No compromise – they are upfront – and give a brief running of history. Also notice it was not a book – concise.

They did not give them too much information either.

The kingdom of God is not done any good through untruthfulness or deceit. We do not help God’s work by lying, or cutting corners.

Col. 4:5 – walk in wisdom toward them that are without – outside – unbeliever

I Thess. 4:12 and Romans 13:1

Let me show certain examples:

Vs. 13 – they elaborate on the edict of Cyrus – detailed

Vs. 14 – they mention those vessels of gold and silver

They were also asked to identify the leaders – who did they name? – only one person

Sheshbazzar vs. 14 and 16 – who is Sheshbazzar? Have we heard of him before?

Ezra 1 – mentioned twice. It is not clear in the Word of God who he is. It is either another name for Zerubbabel or that was a Persian official that traveled back with the Remnant. That is the only name they gave.

They also refer to the progress of the work – vs. 16 – Notice how they do this – vs. 16

Tattenai said it was in fury

They communicated the slowness of the work and they don't say anything about the 16 years that not much went on.

Their answer was a model of prudence and wisdom

Now, notice what they don't say – the letter has no spirit of defensiveness or martyr's complex!

Will you notice also that there is :

1. Not one challenge to civil government – no threat
2. No complaints about local officials
3. Not one mention of past problems

It's careful – it's respectful – it's carefully worded

Ezra 6 – now upon receipt of the letter, it would seem that “Da-Rye-us” acted upon it with a sense of urgency.

Now we meet the person who is the policymaker – Ezra 6

In every organization there is one of those!

6:1 – they searched in Babylon but did not find them

Vs. 2 – summer home of Cyrus

He moved between three cities – Babylon in winter; Susa/Shushan in spring;

“Ach me tha” in summer

Here is what they found. They literally found a memorandum and it is recorded in vs. 3-5 and this is what it said:

Vs 3-5

This is what “Da Rye us” found. I'm sure that relieved him – why is that?

He has been on the throne two years. (Ezra 4:24)

Let me tell you how he came to the throne.

Cyrus died in 530 BC – succeeded by “Camp by ses” – he died in 521 BC

“Da Rye us” who was an official in the Persian army and was a cousin of Cyrus!
He was in line for the throne but a usurper, by the name of Galdima, took the throne while “Da Rye us” was out with the army.

Therefore, a two-month battle in which “Da Rye us” finished off by strolling boldly into Galdima’s tent and thrust a spear into Galdima’s chest.

Galdima was very popular with the people because he suspended all taxes for the army.

So when “Da Rye us” took the throne, he was faced with great civil unrest and then for the next two years, he fought nine local kings – in 19 battles. By diplomacy and wise deployment of his troops, by a ruthless punishment of enemies, he was able to solidify the throne.

Folks, all of this secular history is behind where we find ourselves meeting “Da Rye us.” It is an ideal time to start the work in Jerusalem. “Da Rye us” gets the letter. What is on his mind? First and foremost, survival – to keep his seat – not to lose power – nearly always the motivation of a chief governmental official is to keep what he has. That’s the name of the game in this world.

How does “Da Rye us” do this?

#1 – with a large army – by force

#2 – he was generous to those loyal and severely punished those who were in revolt.

On one occasion, a man took the name of Nebuchadnezzar IV to get a following. And he took over a portion of the city of Babylon. “Da Rye us”’s troops besieged them and routed them – they took 3,000 of them and crucified them

These were his methods – to keep peace and survive

He will richly reward the loyal and ruthlessly punish the rebel

#3 – he showed real respect for his predecessor’s laws – legal precedent

He had an efficient bureaucracy – don’t get this man confused with Darius the Mede from Daniel 6 – “Da-Rye-us” I or “Da-Rye-us” the Great – postal service, network of roads, real administrator. He had the kingdom divided up in provinces and he would

have a man named a satrap over every province and under the satraps – lesser officials. Tattenai was a lesser official under the satrap.

“She thar Boz nai” was under him – “Da-Rye-us” had efficient bureaucracy, which helped keep the peace in a kingdom that stretched over 1,000 miles

#4 – he employed taxation – 20% off the top of all your increase – did not include tariffs, water fees, local taxes

“Da Rye us” used various methods to survive

Now, let me pull all of this together regarding this man

We have to understand that when we are dealing with public officials, especially those who are lost – their chief goal is to stay where they are or to climb higher and they will use whatever methodology they can to do this.

Vs. 6-12 – we have our second letter and “Da Rye us” writes it – vs. 6-8 – response to Tattenai

Vs. 8 – we are going to help them out of the royal treasuries – pay for those building materials and to pay for the salaries of the workmen and on top of that – vs. 9 – it gave Zerubbabel all the benefits of state money and protection . . .

Vs. 9 – It was at this point Darius went one better than his predecessor [Cyrus]. He now decreed that provision be given to the builders, not according to some predetermined and limited scale but according to their need. (v. 9) – Ezra 5:16

Vs. 10 – there is the primary motivation – “Da Rye us” wanted the Jews to pray on his behalf – very superstitious

It gets better

Vs. 11

Vs. 12 – The king’s final word was this, “Let it be done with haste”

Can God help us by using an unsaved government official?

What we just read was incredible. It fails to make the impact on us.

If you had been a Jew in Jerusalem and you received this letter from “Da Rye us” – you wouldn’t believe it

Let me remind you of something – there is a God in Heaven that rules over the affairs of men and He sets up one and puts down another. The powers that be are ordained of God. What started out as a hassle ended up as a royal decree that protected and provided for the work of God.

When we encounter apparent opposition from government, how will we respond?

Ezra Sermon #14

Turn in your Bibles to Ezra 6

Ezra 6:13

So far we have covered 22 years of history

This book begins at 538 BC and in this passage today, it is 516 BC when they complete the Temple – 22 years

Think with me the history of those 22 years.

Ezra 1 – Preparation – Cyrus declared – send Israel back and rebuild Temple in Jerusalem

Then in Ezra 2 – Names – families – 50,000 – only a remnant returned – small portion of the whole

Ezra 3 – Foundations – the people of God raise up the altar and then they lay the foundation for the new Temple

Ezra 4:1 – immediately upon their building, there was opposition – 16 years – very little work

Ezra 5:1 – then the prophets began to preach – stirred them up

Chapters 5 & 6 – record the completion of the work

Chapter 3 The building commenced

Chapter 4 The building ceased

Chapter 5 The building continued

Chapter 6 The building completed

I've entitled today's message "What Prospers People" Can you say that with me?

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Ezra 6:13-22

Let us pray

You may be seated

"What Prospers People"

Notice that vs. 13-22 has three sections to it

So we have:

#1 Finishing of the House of the Lord – vs. 13-15

#2 Dedicating of the House of the Lord – vs. 16-18

#3 Services in the House of the Lord – vs. 19-22

Read 13-22

What is God trying to emphasize to us here in these verses? Is it the House of the Lord? No

I want to bring us to a more in-depth understanding of the record that is given here.

What has God emphasized in these verses?

Upon reading this, we say the building is done. The project is finished. They are celebrating. On the surface that is true.

But if that is all there is, then nothing has been accomplished.

Did you notice that as we read the Scripture today that God gave no description of the Temple? Nothing! I'd like to know what it looked like.

But nothing of the sort is recorded. Why not? The reason is this. God's emphasis is not on the building of a building but on the building of a people. What does God emphasize in this passage? It is not the Temple, not the House of the Lord, it's on the people.

The main point is not the building – even though it was a great building and for six chapters, we have been reading the ups and downs of the project.

“The house of the Lord” – that expression occurs dozens of times. Yes, God called on them to rebuild, but there is much more going on than simply just the job. There is always their work and there is the workman. In vs. 13-22 that which is important, is not just that the Temple was finished, but that something had happened to the workmen.

Their character/heart was different and God speaks of their spiritual state – finished task and renewed people

Here is the first thing that God tells us about these people.

In verse 14 – “they prospered” – In Haggai, they were not getting anywhere.

Vs. 14 – they personally prospered – very suggestive word – advancing, succeeding
It means that they have come to a satisfactory accomplishment of an end – not the building, but they personally.

This passage tells us these people were completed – mature – responsive to God

These people were moving in the right direction.

These people were moving in response to the preaching they were hearing.

They were in a fruit-bearing time.

What is God concerned with? The people or the building?

Why were the previous buildings destroyed? Was there anything wrong with the building? NO!

They were destroyed because the people were hollow – it was a farce – shallow – it was hypocritical

God said I can't bear your sacrifices; I can't stand what you're doing

Your heart is not in it – lip service, mouth service – empty

Sin in your life – lack of genuineness in your soul. God allowed one of the greatest buildings of all time to be destroyed. Why? Because of the people.

Look at vs. 14 – here is the real question.

Now, when did this – their spiritual growth – happen? How did they come to this maturity? To this place of prospering?

Vs. 14 – These people builded and they prospered. They were active in the service of the Lord and they were spiritually growing. That is the combination. The prospering

took place as they were serving the Lord. A lot of people believe they are mature because they show up at the building.

They were active in the service of the Lord and spiritually prosperous

While they were working – sweating, laboring for the Lord, they were growing spiritually, too.

Simultaneous work – work of God, Word of God – keep those two in balance.

People – both active in the service of the Lord but growing into real maturity simultaneously!

Haggai, chapter 1, God blew on it – put holes in their pockets

Let's look at the active in the service of the Lord first.

Two sides – overactive and underactive

Too busy in the service of God

On the other hand, there are people who are not active at all.

Now, I want you to notice what goes along with that.

What is it that prospered them? Look at vs. 14

They prospered through the preached Word of God!

That is God's answer. So many people are in church today and they are active but there is not sustaining food from the pulpit. That's why they quit. How many times have we ourselves been weary and the preaching of God's Word invigorated us once again to do the Lord's work?

All the way through the Bible the emphasis is put on the preached words.

The Apostle Paul had not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Acts 20:27

Psalm 1:2 – delighting in the law of the Lord

Psalm 1:3 – tree planted by the rivers of water – bringeth forth fruit – leaf will not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper

Joshua 1:8 – This book of the law – meditate, observe it – thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then shalt thou have good success

Let's look at II Timothy 3:16-4:2a – see the combination

This needs to be a major/fundamental part of our philosophy of ministry

This is the commission given. This is the emphasis throughout the Word of God.

Hearing the voice of God through a messenger of God is where the prosperity of God's people is.

What does that say for a church that nearly puts everything ahead of the pulpit?

What does that say for a preacher who gives sermon preparation the tidbits of his time?

Oftentimes, the secondary things are put before the primary things in the church.

How often have we heard people say I enjoy my church – nice people – but I am not _____? Fed.

If the pulpit is unsound in a church, it is utterly fruitless to be a part of that ministry.

The Apostles

Acts 6:3-4, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word."

We need to return to this kind of conviction as a ministry.

When we come back to this primary ministry, there will be prosperity in the work of God.

We need to get back to the great themes of the Bible

What did Haggai and Zechariah preach?

Did they preach sermons with these kinds of titles?

"The Seven Causes of Clinical Depression"

"How to Be Happy While Married"

"You and the Mid-Life Crisis"

“Your Unfulfilled Self”
 “Developing a Healthy Self Image”
 “How to Have a Great Year”
 “Fifty Days of Love”
 “Getting Healthy Again”
 “Living Like a Champion”
 “Stress Busters”

Folks, this is preaching

Preachers fill sermons with comedy, psychology, stories

We need to get back to the Bible preaching—this is what changes/energizes/invigorates lives.

Haggai and Zechariah preached on God – great themes of the Bible

1. How God loves His people
2. How God wants holiness
3. How God judges sin
4. How God restores the repentant

And they preached about Christ, His coming and His Kingdom, His rule and reign, obedience to Christ!

That’s what the people of God need to hear!

Back to the preaching of the Bible

We need to be intensely interested in that kind of preaching

What means did God use to get the temple work going again? Preaching of the Word.

Ezra 5:1

If we want to know the power of God, we must also know the Word of God.

We have got to return to God with a love for the preaching of His Word.

This is what really nourishes us/feeds us/advances us

This is the kind of ministry I will be a part of – support – provide for my family.
I will place myself under so that I may prosper for God.

We won't burn out in the service of God because internally we are growing and maturing.

Let us keep this focus.

What prospers people?

Working for the Lord and hearing from the Lord.

Ezra Sermon #15

“What Prospers People?”

I want to give you two descriptions/comparisons of these people – 70 years apart – let me take you back – when the Temple was destroyed – in 586 B.C. – 70 years earlier

Turn back 4-5 pages to II Chronicles 36:14 – let me show why God’s people don’t prosper

Vs. 15-21

Back in Ezra 6 – the work that had been destroyed is now built up
But the people are different? Right.

When we come to the end of 70 years – Ezra 6 tells us not just that the building/structure is back, but the people of God are back

What was their condition?

Vs. 14 – they prospered through the preaching that God sent

When did they advance?

As they were building

As they were active for the Lord

As they were serving the Lord

God was doing a work in them.

How? Through the preaching of God’s men.

What kind of preaching did Haggai and Zechariah give? The great themes of the Bible.

Why did they prosper under preaching? Because when they listened to those men, they listened as if their words were not the words of men, but the Word of God!

Turn to Haggai 1:12 – see this/catch this

That’s why Haggai 1:12 says, “Then Zerubbabel . . . and Joshua . . . , the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.”

The voice of the Lord came through the preachers

That’s the pattern – that’s the model

Prospering under the God-appointed preaching of His Word

Apostle Paul said of the Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 2:13, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

Folks, these are three things that go into a good preaching service

1. A God-called man
2. A message from God
3. And hearing and receiving people

No matter how great the preacher and message from God, the whole thing will be short-circuited/shut down if the lives of the people are tangled up with the weeds of the world.

So, when we gather together

Are we gathering together passively – sitting back, waiting for something to happen, filling our religious bellies, being spectators?

Or, are we gathering as prayerful participants, with our gaze fixed on God and our ears open, with our hearts ready and willing – expecting, longing, and looking for God to work in us through the preaching?

That is the difference between a healthy congregation and an unhealthy one.

When you come to church and there is an air of expectancy – God can work in that atmosphere.

Let me give you the second fact about these people – we are going to have to do a little pasting to put this together.

Vs. 14b – this records something about their work

Vs. 16-18 – that records something about their worship

Vs. 16 – they dedicated the House of God

Vs. 17 – they offered these offerings

Vs. 18 – they set up that worship according to the guidelines given by Moses

And then notice in vs. 19-22 – records something about them

Vs. 19 – kept the feast

Vs. 20 – purified themselves

Vs. 21 – separated themselves from the heathen

Vs. 22 – lived for God with joy

Now combine all of these statements and you will come up with a very clear fact
– that indicates the prosperity of these people!

in their work – in their worship – and in their own walk with God

These were people who were obediently postured toward all of God's will.

They were obediently positioned toward the will of God

#1 – for their work

#2 – for their worship

And #3 – for their own personal holiness

Now what is it beyond that for a Christian?

But his own walk, worship of God, and the work God has given him to do.

Isn't it interesting that God records something about all three of those facets

#1 – the work that God gives them to do – vs. 14 – “they finished it according to God’s commandment.”

#2 – vs. 18

The worship that God had prescribed – they did it just like God said in the books of Moses hundreds of years earlier – they did not say, “Those things are outdated and ancient.” They did not say, “This is too much.”

No, they looked into the Word of God for how God wanted things done.

And, what about their own personal lives?

#3 – they were purified from the top to the bottom.

Vs. 20 – as God prescribes throughout the Bible

The priests were purified, the Levites were purified, and the people had separated themselves from the filthiness of the land.

These are the details of their prosperity – advancing

What was the key ingredient of those three? The Word of God.

They were obediently postured toward all of God’s will! Let me sow this a little deeper.

#1 – will for their work – what was it that God called them to do? To build the Temple.

What was the nature of the work? It was a corporate calling! – a calling on the whole believing community.

Let me ask you – of the 50,000 who returned – who was responsible to see the building done? God said this is My will – rebuild the Temple – who out of the 50,000 was responsible?

Everybody was – the whole 50,000 – this was their corporate calling. Do we have a corporate calling as a church? Yes. Are you a part of that?

Now, do you remember when they got into trouble?

They got into trouble when they abandoned their corporate calling – when they turned inward and gave their primary attention and energy to themselves (Haggai 1) – when they became concerned about and consumed with themselves

The problem was they put their personal callings ahead of the corporate calling.
Great mistake!

We have personal responsibilities

#1 – self – take care

#2 – family – take care

But we better not stop there

We need to minister to ourselves – then minister to our family – but why? So that we can have a wider ministry within the church and even the world.

Sometimes we turn inward – we back off from our corporate calling – we neglect the services of the Lord's House – and we neglect the things that God has called us to do corporately!

Soul winning, discipleship, Bible study

How many churches are soul winning, discipling, preaching the Bible?

We give our time and energy only to our families and to ourselves! That is a grave mistake!

Listen and don't miss this:

When they neglected the corporate work God had given for them to do, it was disaster for their families, it was disaster for their businesses, it was disaster for them as a nation.

But when they banded together to do the work corporately – what caused this – preaching of what – Word of God

When their priorities turned around, they began to prosper. So they were obediently postured towards God's will for their work – corporate calling and #2 they were obediently postured towards God's will for their worship.

Now, notice in vs. 16-19

Vs. 16 – with joy – this is worship. What's the use if we dedicate the house but we don't dedicate ourselves?

Vs. 17 – offerings – sin offerings – getting right with God – this is worship

Vs. 18 – prescribed tasks

Let me say one thing here – Numbers 3, 4, 18 – God divides tasks between priests and Levites

All priests were descendants of Aaron who was a descendant of Levi. But Levi had three sons and Aaron was a son of one of those sons.

What about the rest of the descendants? They were called to be Levites. God gave prescribed tasks for Levites and for the priests. Essentially the priests were the ones who offered the sacrifices and who officiated within the sanctuary/temple.

The Levites' tasks – what were they? Many would say the not-so-important things of the Temple. They had the menial labors. Just think if you were a Levite – your only job was to dust the furniture in the house of God. Well, that's what God gave them to do.

Gershonites – curtains

Kohathites – carry the furniture

Merarites – sockets, pins, cords

When the remnant returned, there were 4,289 priests (Ezra 2:36-39)

Do you know how many Levites returned? Now there should have been many more Levites than priests. But there were only 341 Levites that returned.

I don't know why, but I know human nature and I'm sure it would be easy for the Levite to feel that what he was doing or what was asked of him wasn't that important.

So, in considering that long trek – start over – to resettle in a hostile land – little job – real decision

I'm just a Levite – there are other people who can sweep, dust, and polish.

Every person is important.

In Ezra 6, They set the worship back up – these people had once again adopted the viewpoint of God toward their work. No one minimized what God had called him to do. Those that were there were fitted into their appointed tasks and they all (vs. 20) were purified. Why? Because their hearts were beating as one about this personal holiness.

That's how you know the people of God have prospered – that no matter what your ministry is – among the people of God – whether it's teaching, cleaning, laboring – people are striving to be holy.

As for us, there must be concern for personal holiness no matter where we fit into the work of the church

If we look at it this way, we can't measure holiness by the kind of thing we are doing. It is measured by whom we are doing it for and if we all are laboring as unto the Lord.

Then, how can any of us have any less concern for personal holiness than any of the rest of us? This is all a commitment to God.

God's concern is not so much what we are doing. It isn't that one of our ministries is more holy than another. It's that all of it is unto the Lord. So all of it has to be holy.

We are prospered when the church works together as unto the Lord. That's why these people in Ezra 6 had the blessing of God on themselves.

Can you remember when the priests were not clean? And the Levites were not clean? And the people's heart wasn't in it? What they did was as a farce and God judged them. And they did not prosper.

What prospers people?

- #1 – serving God along with strong preaching
- #2 – All dedicated to God's corporate call for the church
- #3 – All involved in the worship of God – way of life
- #4 – All striving for personal holiness – purifying ourselves

Ezra Sermon #16

Ezra 7

So far in Ezra we have seen all kinds of people

Yet no Ezra – we haven't seen Ezra, for whom the book is titled.

Now we finally see Ezra!

I've entitled this sermon "Ezra's World"

I want to take you to Ezra's world!

Ezra 7

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy and inerrant Word

Ezra 7:1-6

Let us pray

You may be seated

"Ezra's World"

Ezra 7:1 is like starting over. How's that? It is like a sequel – Ezra 1-6. I need to set the historical context of this time because we have leaped forward 60 years.

Need to review with students? If not precede to page 106 at the star

Let me remind you of the chronology of these three books

Ezra 1-6

Then what comes next? The book of Esther – Esther records what's going on back in

Persia

Then Ezra 7-10 – then Nehemiah

So Esther needs to be inserted between the end of Ezra 6 and Ezra 7:1

What part of Jewish history?

These three books record the return of the people to Israel.

In Ezra 1-6 – they rebuilt the Temple – mentioned 40 times – house of the Lord

In Ezra 7-10 – we have the renewal/reclaiming of the Law

And in Nehemiah – they are reconstructing the wall

These are the activities – the Temple, the Law, and the wall

But there were spiritual things going on, too.

Rebuilding the Temple – restoring their worship

Coming back to the Law – renewing their covenant

Rebuilding the wall – separation from surrounding nations

And God chose three men to lead those three movements

Ezra 1-6 – Zerubbabel – Temple

Ezra 7-10 – Ezra – Law

Nehemiah – Nehemiah – walls

Let me put a blanket on top of all this

I read this to you on our first sermon in Ezra

Ezra 9:8-9

Vs. 10

Let me throw one more curve ball

Prior to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon – Israel ruled their own nation – they had their own king and own army

But after they were conquered and hauled off to Babylon and when they came back

– they were still under a foreign power

This period for the Jews began – what is called the Times of the Gentiles (Luke 21)

– meaning that Jerusalem would be trodden under the foot of Gentile nations
 From this time on, they must live faithful to God while living under pagan rule.
 There will be no encouragement from the civil authority to live holy.

**In Ezra 7 we have the coming of Ezra, for the restoration of God's people back to the Law – the Word of God

Between Ezra 6:22 and 7:1 – in that blank space
 How many years have lapsed? 58 technically (50-60)

I want to introduce you to the world of Ezra that was shaped by those 60 years – that would go in that space

I want to fill in that blank space in your Bible between these two chapters

To begin with, for 30 years under Darius – they were in a state of tranquility and peace. We hardly know anything about those years.

The Temple completed – 516 B.C. – Ezra 6:15 – Temple destroyed - 586 B.C.

Darius I dies.

In 486 – a new king came to the throne – Ahasuerus or another name, Xerxes.

This is the king of the book of Esther.

Esther 1:1 – and he reigned over Persia from (486-465) B.C. It was during his reign that certain things took place that affected the people of God.

As soon as Ahasuerus came to the throne, the enemies of Israel lodged an official accusation against the Jews in Jerusalem.

Ezra 4:6

Chapter 4 recorded for us the opposition to Israel – all of it – from Cyrus → Nehemiah

In the third year of his reign, he deposed his queen (483 B.C. – Esther 1:2) – Vashtee
 – she wouldn't come and parade herself before his drunken friends.

It took Ahasuerus four years to get a new queen – so he finally settled on a queen and her name was Esther (479 B.C. – 2:16). Married Esther in 7th year.

She was a Jew. How did she get into Persia?

By Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Captivity.

Daniel 11:2 – God showed Daniel the future of Persia

Daniel, there are three kings coming and then a fourth king which is Ahasuerus.

God said that this fourth king will be more powerful than the others and because of his wealth, he will stir everyone up against the kingdom of Greece.

That king was Ahasuerus/Xerxes

What was Ahasuerus busy doing these four years between the two queens?

In secular history, it is recorded that he had a series of running battles with the Greeks of which he never won one.

Kept losing – the most famous battle was a sea battle

The Battle of Salamis – Ahasuerus had 1,000 warships vs. 380 Greek warships and the Greeks won a stunning defeat – that was in Ahasuerus' sixth year

In his seventh year – he took 100,000 troops – invaded Greece and they were defeated again. And now he is back home in Susa the palace – moping around and thinking about his losses and he finally chooses a queen – Esther

Five years go by after their coronation.

Now in the twelfth year of his reign – 474 B.C. – Haman constructs a diabolical plan to exterminate the entire nation of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire and God uses that queen by the name of Esther and her relative Mordecai to preserve the Jews throughout the kingdom

And in Esther 10:3 – Mordecai ends up becoming second in command to Ahasuerus.

Will Esther, Mordecai, and King Ahasuerus help Ezra? We shall see.

All of those events are going on in that blank space at the end of chapter 6
 Ahasuerus was killed in his own bed by his own trusted servant and his son came to the
 throne – Artaxerxes – Ezra 7:1 – possibly son of Esther – one half Jewish

Artaxerxes comes to the throne seven years before 7:1

Ezra 7:1a

Artaxerxes was a different kind of king than his father.
 His father was a warring man – subjected people by force.
 Artaxerxes was a politician – his armies never invaded Greece!

Instead, Artaxerxes tried to buy the favor and the submission of countries around him.
 This is important as we launch into Ezra's world.
 Artaxerxes had political savvy – he was a manipulator and it is with this man that Ezra
 has to deal with.

These are the years for which we have the growth of a man of God and the decline of
 the people of God.

Somewhere a baby was born and his parents called him Ezra and he became – vs. 6 –
 “ready scribe” – skilled student of the law of Moses in Babylon
 His grandparents/folks had not traveled with 50,000 remnant. They had stayed in
 Babylon.

And, at the same time, this young man was rising early in the morning – studying the
 scrolls filling his mind and his heart with the Word of God. Then bending his knee in
 prayer to God asking God to allow him to teach and minister these truths to the people
 of God.

While Ezra was growing – back in Jerusalem, the people were waning – declining
 spiritually!

At the end of Ezra 6 – the people are doing good, but as we open chapter 7
 – 60 years later – the people were not doing so well

When Ezra arrives, he finds that the people had intermarried with the heathen – gone right back to the very sin that initially began their decline – in David and Solomon eventually the judgment of God upon them – in the form of the Babylonian Captivity.

One man rising and a whole nation declining

And God is going to bring that man into that nation at just the right time to bring the renewal and revival that they need.

This is the world of Ezra!

Now look with me at the lineage of Ezra, verses 1-5

We are going to see 16 names

If you notice, this is what we call an ascending genealogy – starts at the bottom and takes the man back – all the way back to Aaron. Aaron is a Levite – he is the strain that are the priests.

Ezra had the best of credentials and could prove his lineage all the way back to Aaron, the first high priest.

Let me point out to you the spiritualities of this ancestry

Some names are missing – this is not complete list – I Chronicles 6 – lists

The names here contain spiritual lessons and are built on the name of Jehovah Himself.

Ezra 7, vs. 1-5

These names had to be an affirmation to Ezra.

A number of these men are recorded with sobering events

Vs. 1 – Seraiah – Ezra’s great grandfather – 129 years prior – was the high priest – at the time Nebuchadnezzar overthrew Jerusalem

The Bible records that Seraiah was taken along with other officials and assassinated

– II Kings 25:18 – executed at Riblah – Jer. 52:24

Seraiah reminds Ezra of the demise of God’s people. Joshua would be a great uncle?

The second name – vs. 1 – Hilkiah – what king did this man serve with?

Hilkiah was the priest who recovered the Law of God, 5 books, after the Temple had been run down.

There was a great revival in this king's day – Hilkiah served with Josiah

The Law had been recovered by Hilkiah – II Kings 22

God called Ezra to do the same thing – take the Word of God to a people who have forgotten it.

Does Ezra know his history? He is “ready scribe”

The third name is Zadok (vs. 2) – he was a priest under King David – who supported David's choice of Solomon as the next king. Zadok was loyal.

There were two priests – Zadok and Abiathar. And Abiathar helped in the rebellion of Adonijah, (son of Bathsheba too) who was Solomon's rival. David quickly positioned Solomon – the rebellion fell apart, so Zadok became the official line of priest – he was loyal to God's appointed king! I Kings 1-2 Zadok made High Priest instead of Abiathar. Solomon removed Abiathar.

The fourth name – vs. 5 – Phinehas (Fin a has) – Numbers 25 – the people of God committed adultery with the daughters of Midian

Remember the guy named Baalim told the Moabites how to corrupt the children of the Jews – by sending your heathen daughters in to them. In broad daylight, right in front of Moses an Israelite brought a Midianite woman into the tent.

In Numbers 25 – Phinehas slew them both with a javelin – and God blessed Phinehas

In Ezekiel 44:15 – in the millennial kingdom – that Phinehas line will serve God in that future Temple

Phinehas – reminds Ezra – separating from sin – being tough on sin

Zadok – reminds Ezra – being loyal to God

Hilkiah – reminds Ezra – Word of God

Seraiah – reminded Ezra – judgment of God

The genealogy vouches for Ezra as a priest . . . and the length at which it is given prepares us to meet a man of considerable importance. . . he came to be regarded as a second Moses . . . who stamped Israel with its lasting character as the people of a book.

Could you imagine having an ancestry like this?

Of course, being blessed with Godly ancestors is no guarantee of success for their descendants, but it's a good beginning. Ezra didn't squander the rich spiritual legacy they had entrusted to him but used it to honor the Lord and serve His people.

Some of you have Godly ancestors – praise God!
Pastor, I don't have that kind of ancestry – start one!

It was then that God raised up Ezra to lead a second group of refugees (about 2,000 people) from Babylon to Judah to bring financial and spiritual support to the work and to help rebuild the city.

We will see how God blessed and used this man.

Ezra will be a real hero to us.

This was Ezra's world.

Ezra Sermon #17

Ezra 7:6-10

Now Ezra needs to get to Israel

Straight across the desert – 500 miles

The journey was going to begin at the hottest time of the year

They looped to the north. The trip then would have been extended to some eight or nine hundred miles.

It was a long, hot, dangerous trip – averaging about ten miles a day. It took four months – vs. 9ab

Now notice who gets the credit – vs. 9c

So, in vs. 1-10 – these ten verses introduce us to the whole life of Ezra

These verses end by telling us the mission that this man had – the mission to teach God's law to God's people.

“God's Man on God's Mission”

The future is a series of daily decisions, of daily choices.

On the first return to Israel – around 50,000 people returned – there was no shortage of priests to preach, teach, and instruct – remember over 4,000 priests came back to Israel in Ezra 2

Even though there was sufficient manpower, there had not been adequate instruction

So Ezra was going to Israel to meet the chief need of the people – that was to teach the Word of God

The Word of God

So, Ezra had a specific mission – to teach in Israel – God’s Word.

Now what kind of man would God call on for a work like this? Entrust with such a strategic ministry!

When there are obviously many men God could have used, why did God call on Ezra?

Look at Ezra 7:6 – there are three persons mentioned there and the dynamics are interesting – vs. 6.

In the first place – Ezra

Then it mentioned the king.

Then it mentioned the Lord.

First, we are dealing with a man who has some personal credentials that commend him for the task.

Vs. 6 - He is a scribe – one who studies

He is a “teacher” . . . The word came to mean “one who studies, interprets, and copies Scripture.”

“Well versed” . . . “skilled” . . . Ezra was “a professional.” Ezra had a PhD – doctorate degree.

Ezra was expert in explaining, expounding, and applying the scriptures to daily life.

The scribes were the official secretaries – they were the men who knew how to read and write. Limit yourself

Videos games, movies, T.V., internet

In the ancient world, not many were trained to read and write.

If you had an official capacity, if you were a son of royalty, you would have been taught to read and write.

But very few people knew how to read or write – so we have the necessity for scribes.

Ezra had some kind of chief position that brought him to the attention of Artaxerxes. He served in some kind of a secular capacity for Artaxerxes – most likely as a minister of religious affairs for the Jewish nation.

Department of religious affairs – he was to resolve religious issues for the Jewish people for, you see, the Persians allowed freedom of religion – maximum religious ability, believing that this helped them control the countries easier.

These scribes represented the religions of the kingdom in the Persian court.

Many believe that Ezra was one of the ministers of religion.

We know that Artaxerxes had a personal knowledge/respect for the skills of Ezra. We would also believe Artaxerxes believed that Ezra would not cause his fellow Jews to rebel against him.

So, Ezra was a scribe – vs. 6 – ready scribe

Ready – adjective – occurs three times in Old Testament.

It refers to someone so skillful that he is swift at the task. David – harp – brought before the King.

In other words, it speaks of someone who has the ease of movement throughout the complexities of the Old Testament Law

Pull passages – he had it in his mind – exceptional ability

He could quote and explain whole passages – Ezra had distinguished himself in this capacity!

He would have had an accurate knowledge of the Word so that he could spot an error when he saw it.

Ezra had a personal credential that supremely presented him for this mission from God.

This is the first step in any service to the Lord – personal preparation in the Word of God.

Vs. 6 – what he studied

Notice who wrote what he studied – Moses – a very important person

But please notice vs. 6 – God gave it – came directly from God.

That's the inspiration of God.

7:6 – God gave the Word! Ezra didn't revise it, make it convenient or comfortable. Who are we to circumvent it, question it, or debate it?

#1 – Ezra had an accurate view and knowledge of the Word – that is the first step in any service to the Lord.

#2 you have to have a circumstantial opportunity

You can be well trained, but you have to have opportunity

The initiative was on Ezra's part because the king granted unto him all his request! vs. 6

We don't know what Ezra said, but we do know he approached Artaxerxes for permission and Artaxerxes granted Ezra's request.

There is a circumstance that gives opportunity

There is the open door

Sometimes it only presents itself once.

Now notice - third place

And all of this was according to the hand of the Lord his God – so there is the Divine enablement.

Training is one thing

An open door is another

But God is the One who must so provide that those things work together in a cohesive unit so that the mission can be accomplished.

How to find the plan of God for your life?

These three elements are a part of that:

1. Gifts, training, education, preparation

2. Matter of circumstances and open doors
3. The leading of the Lord – empowering and enabling of God

Ezra had a mission and the reason he is able to accomplish it is

1. He was prepared – personal credentials
2. Circumstantial opportunity
3. Divine enablement that God gave

Let me go one step further

Why this man? Why Ezra?

The answer is given in vs. 10

Notice the first word of vs. 10 is “for”

For – introduces a reason and if you will look at vs. 9 – it summarizes

Why did God have His hand upon him?

For

Vs. 10

For Ezra had prepared

Do you see that?

But the interesting thing in vs. 9-10 – is that this man had done something. God’s hand was upon him - for Ezra had prepared!

This is why God used this man

This is the explanation given here

There was something about this man that had distinguished his preparation from all others.

Notice where his preparation started. Everyone must start here. You start with your heart – vs. 10.

Keep your heart with all diligence because out of it are the issues of life.

We make these decisions in our heart – somewhere Ezra decided – purposed in his heart and mind.

In his past, he formed, he fashioned, he prepared – to the point of being stable. He made a decision in his past and stayed with the decision. The decisions we are making today determines our future. They are the seed of life we will reap at a later date. These are decisions that are preparing your future – it all begins with our heart.

What was Ezra's goal?

What was it that Ezra had prepared his heart to do? Vs. 10

1. Vs. 10 – To seek the Law of the Lord
The investigation of Scripture – devoted to the study of Scripture
2. To do the Law of the Lord
To put feet to his faith – live it
Ezra did more than study – he obeyed
3. To teach – instruct
He studied, obeyed, and then taught it to others
When Ezra began to teach – he would open the Bible and the people would stand for the reverence of the Word

Three things

Notice the order of these things – this order cannot and must not be reversed.

Dig first, live it second, teach it third.

What a model for all teachers and preachers of the Bible to follow!

How could Ezra demand that others follow his instructions – if his instructions are not Biblical and second if he isn't doing it himself.

Some do the first, some get to the second, but most never make it to the third step of passing

II Timothy 2:2 – each generation needs to discover the precious treasure of the Bible

The second one is the bridge between the first and the third. Live it.

No matter how much passion – it cannot overcome the hurdle of a disobedient life.

It is absolutely necessary for whatever God has called you to do that your heart is set on exemplifying the Word of God in your own life.

Disobedience to the Word short circuits our effectiveness and influence.

This is a matter for which we prepare – heart to take advantage of opportunities to increase competency – skill – read the Bible/Bible conferences/in church

This is something that does not happen overnight – you prepare for it

And the further you go with this, the more effective you are for the Lord and the larger sphere of real opportunity opened by the hand of God comes.

So let us prepare our hearts to seek the Word and do it and then after this, be a tool for the Lord, instructing other people.

Who gave the Word?

What shall we do?

1. Learn it
2. Live it
3. Teach it to others

Let me point at least two more things

This kind of patient preparation always precedes choice opportunity for service!

God does not normally put people into positions for which they do not have competence and then somehow supernaturally compensate for their lack of training.

So we must work on the front end and then when God puts us in, we can do the job for Him

This is the way that God normally does it – can you think of any examples of it?

This kind of patient preparation preceding choice opportunity for service

How about Joseph – how many years between being sold and becoming second in command – 13 years

Moses – 40 years – desert – then brought to his life's work

David – running from Saul – seven years in Hebron reigning over one tribe before he finally is king over all tribes

Jesus – 30 years of preparation – three years of ministry

Apostle Paul – went to Arabia

Patient preparation brings permanent power

This is God's normal approach to things

Second thing – the extent of the opportunity often depends on the preparation

There will be no great opportunity without that preparation

II Timothy 2:15

Ezra Sermon #18

Ezra 7

Chapters 7-8 – record Ezra’s return

Most of chapter 7 beginning with verse 11 on through vs. 26 was a letter of recommendation given to Ezra by Artaxerxes.

Then chapter 8 gives the names of the chief men going back and the journey that they took.

So by the end of chapter 8 – Ezra and his group have arrived in Israel – vs. 32

Ezra 7-8 – Ezra’s return to Israel

Ezra 9-10 – The renewal/revival of the people

“Biblical Leadership”

Ezra

Dealing with the life of a great man of God

Ezra 7:1-5 – genealogy

6-10 – missions

Beginning with vs. 11, we come to a very interesting part of Scriptures

We think of the Declaration of Independence

What we are going to read is an official letter coming from Persian monarch Artaxerxes written for Ezra about his travel from Persian back to Israel

I believe when we read this document, you will see it is a remarkable document

Vs. 11

Vs. 12a – look at the title he uses for himself

Vs. 12b, c

Vs. 13a – first four words – this decree will run down to vs. 20

All one decree

A decree concerning the return of exiles to Israel

Vs. 13-20

Vs. 21 – we have a second decree – vs. 21

Vs. 25-26 – third part of the letter concerning Ezra

Vs. 27-28 – Insight into Ezra’s own prayer life

We have to admit that this is unusual correspondence from a pagan

Artaxerxes took several steps to assist the Jews in this important undertaking.

- I. Authorization (7:11-12, 25-26). First, Artaxerxes appointed Ezra as the leader . . . to the extent of giving him the right to inflict capital punishment on offenders (v. 26).
- II. Liberation (vv. 13-14) . . . Artaxerxes gave the Jews the privilege to leave Babylon and go to Jerusalem with Ezra
- III. Compensation (7:15-26) . . . by opening the royal treasury and providing money to buy sacrifices to be offered at the temple in Jerusalem. The king commanded his officers . . . give the Jews money out of the local royal treasury and defined the limits (Ezra 7:22). A hundred talents of silver would be nearly four tons of silver!

Then Artaxerxes gave Ezra the sacred articles from the original temple that hadn't been carried back by Zerubbabel (v. 19). Finally, he allowed Ezra to receive gifts from the Jews who remained in Babylon and from anybody else in the realm who wanted to contribute (see 1:4).

. . . (7:23) . . . his generosity had somewhat of a selfish motive behind it.

Finally, Artaxerxes exempted the priests, Levites, and temple servants from paying taxes or being conscripted for special duty to the empire (v. 24).

IV. Celebration (vv. 27-28)

Without wasting any time, he assembled the chief men of the tribes and gathered the people who felt moved to travel to Jerusalem.

What does the Bible say?

5 things provided for by pagan king – the work of God is provided for by pagan king

1. Leadership
2. People – vs. 13
3. Ministry of the Word – vs. 14; vs. 25
4. Finances
5. Freedom of choices – vs. 18, 25

Artaxerxes expresses the utmost confidence in Ezra

Vs. 12, 21

Ezra could be trusted – he would not take more than is required

Vs. 23

Vs. 28

In Chapter 7:27-28, there is something that occurs in these two verses for the first time in the book.

At the end of this lengthy letter of Artaxerxes, all of a sudden there breaks into this – a prayer from someone.

We are suddenly aware of Ezra the man, his own voice breaking into the narrative with a grateful delight which time has done nothing to diminish.

It says – vs. 27, 28

For the first time in this book, we have a different vantage point in the writing. Up to this point, it's been narration from a third party standpoint – the writer of this book has his name affixed to this book – Ezra – but it is not until this time that Ezra switches from biography to autobiography – first person, from his own view.

We have here a successful leader – a great leader – a Godly leader - Ezra
And he is just simply talking about what he did getting these people into the will of God
Ezra is telling us how he led.

Leadership is not so much a position as it is a function
People are in positions of leadership – that does not mean they are leaders
The leader is whoever the people are following
He may be someone who does not have any position of leadership in the organization
but if people are following – he's the leader.

Now Ezra was a leader because people followed him.
He was a successful leader because he led his followers to do the will of God. That is successful leadership in the Biblical sense of the term.

We are looking at leadership – what Ezra did in certain situations!
And what he said when facing certain situations

I. The first thing I want you to notice about this man's leadership is the phrase in vs. 28 – "I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord, my God, was upon me."

That is the third occurrence of this statement – there will be three more times this is mentioned in Chapter 8

Ezra recognizes that his strength and success comes from God.

7:6 – it was not Ezra's charisma or his testimony

Notice where all the credit goes – how it is explained

Vs. 6

This is the vessel that God can use

7:9 – I am able to go – because of God

Then vs. 28 – Ezra says that the key to the success of his leading was the hand of God upon him

Do we have the hand of God on our life?

If you want God's hand upon you – the answer is found in Ezra 7:10 – for Ezra had prepared

Favor of God and man

How do you have the hand of God on your life? You prepare your heart.

First, seek the will of God as expressed in the Word of God – learn the Word

Second, not only seek it – we have committed ourselves to living it

When God finds people like that, God's hand comes down on that kind of life

In Ezra 7 – twice – Artaxerxes refers to Ezra as having the law of God in his hand.

He had it in his heart.

II. The second thing is that this is a man that was able to accomplish God's will in the atmosphere and culture of the world/his surroundings!

Israel finds themselves in a whole new realm because they will be dealing with authorities.

God's people are under foreign powers and dictators – beginning at the end of II Chronicles

From this point on, function and accomplish God's will under this – accomplish God's work under the confines of heathen governments

That demands special attributes of the people who are going to lead in this kind of a situation.

There are people who have God's blessing on them but when it comes to functioning with people of the world – they find it overwhelming and impossible

Ezra understood the authority over him and to be able to work within the constraints of his society to accomplish God's work.

Can we do that?

Ezra is the example that it is possible to accomplish God's will while living in a secular, humanistic, materialistic society.

Ezra proves that!

What is the secret of accomplishing God's will in the midst of a crooked and wicked generation?

The secret to that is that we worship a God who has control over the heart of the king.

That's what Ezra says in vs. 27b – that's it!

We may never have access to the President or his heart, but God does

In the Old Testament we have example after example of God working in a pagan leader's heart – the king will have change of heart and all the credit goes to God.

Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will."

Ezra went in a made request to the king

But before he ever got to the king – look at what he had to go before first

Vs. 28 – What a formidable bureaucracy he faced!

Ezra stood and asked and God worked and his request was accepted

We can take heart in the omnipotence of God

God has the ability to bring to pass whatever He pleases

Our desires are more than our powers, but with God – His counsel shall stand and He will do all His plans/pleasure

Isaiah 46:10, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.’”

He can do – He cannot be refused, refrained, or frustrated!

God can do anything – but fail

With God all things are possible. Ezra believed this.

Ezra was a successful leader – accomplishing God’s will in the midst of a secular world.

III. Let me point out a third thing about this man’s leadership
– end of verse 28

Ezra 8:1

Vs. 2-14 – we have the names of heads of households and gives us the number of males

No numbers are given of the women and children

Only the number of males – which came to 1,496

We have to guess on how many total

Let me show you how this goes!

Vs. 2 –

David’s line listed last – the priests are first

That is a reversal of what we have in historical books

Up to this point, we have always had the civil leader listed first

Now they are switched

From this point on in Israel's history – the priests are the leaders of Israel – there is no civil king – anymore

What I want you to notice is how Ezra targeted the chief men, vs. 16.

We see an emphasis on key individuals who choose out other key individuals.

Ezra targets the key men! Ezra had a burden in his heart.

God touched the king's heart – Ezra went right to the king – he is the chief. If he moves, other things will start to move.

Okay, the king moves – what does Ezra do now?

He still has no following – he gathered these men

Maybe he went one by one – communicated his heart, his burden, and these people got moving and then each one of these leaders took other people with him

These people for all these years had been in Babylon

Ezra was the key man that God used – surveyed

Ezra targeted key men

There is one subpoint I want to give you about these chief men – this is below the surface

Every one of these families except for one – Joab in verse 9

Every one – 12 heads of families – every family name is also found in the record of Ezra 2 in the first exodus

Nearly everybody in Chapter 8 is related to somebody who went back 80 years earlier.

Is there any significance in that?

There is a magnetic influence – that runs in families – for good or bad!

Of those who went back this time, nearly all had an example in their family of a father, grandmother, great aunt – somebody who took the plunge and made the trip to set up a new household in Israel

These people did it – and no doubt – an influence on them was that there was a peg out there, a stake out there – people who had gone before!

There is a line of influence – good or bad – that runs through families
And you are somewhere in the chain of good influence or the beginning of that chain
Every person in here – what kind of influence are we establishing for our children,
grandchildren, great grandchildren
Ezra is an outstanding example – leadership – God’s hand on your life
Functioning for the Lord in the midst of a crooked and perverse world

Then gathering around you – like-minded, qualified, Godly people to accomplish the will
of God

It’s still the method the Lord uses.

Ezra Sermon #19

Before preaching, read Luke 10 – Samaritan story

Ezra 8

“Biblical Leadership, Part 2”

The standard for successful leadership is not how big the work

Or how wealthy

Or how much international influence

The standard is – does it accomplish what God has called it into being to do – church
Ezra was at the top of this organization – he was the leader God chose

Vs. 15 – that is a strange thing – because the reason they were going back was to
further the work of the Temple, the House of God, to further the faith of their nation

1,496 men, but not a single Levite

You would think that out of 1,500 men – there would be some Levites

For the Levite – the Temple was supposed to be the center of their lives

It should have been the center of their lives

For the Christian – church and the church family ought to be the center of our life

The Church is God’s organization for the Christian in New Testament times

Coming to church is not a work, it is a privilege – look forward to

No Levites had volunteered to go in this expedition – none had stepped up!

The Levites were hot and cold just like the nation.

Remember when Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 – Levite,
priest

Now, the Bible doesn't give reasons. Why? But let me give a few guesses knowing human nature

#1 – change of status if they went back.

In Israel, the Levites were forbidden to own any lands

So if they went back, they wouldn't own any properties, lands, fields

In addition to that, they were entirely dependent upon the offerings and gifts of the people for their own physical needs to be met

If they were to have food on the table, it would depend upon God's people being faithful in their worship – the material prosperity of a Levite and his ability to provide for his family was directly tied to the spirituality of the people.

Why did God set it up that way?

But in Babylon, it was every man for himself. They owned land, homes, etc.

For them to go back, it would be a whole change of status

Second guess – The Levite was a subordinate to the priest and his position involved monotonous manual tasks

Gathering wood, cleaning the altar, caring for the articles of the Temple – baking of the bread

All in subjection to the priests

This kind of work leads to thoughts

#1 – to avoid it

#2 – to minimize it

#3 – to say it's not important

Job like this – ministry like this –

We cannot look at any service to the Lord as unimportant. It is a corporate effort.

Every person is important. A good leader helps the people to see their work as a ministry not a chore. Honor to serve the Lord

So, what we have is the case of the missing Levites – so what does Ezra do about it in his leadership?

Vs. 16

Ezra went and got nine influential men and then two more men – vs. 16c

Men of keen understanding – he got eleven men – total!

9 called – chief men – influential men

2 of real understanding

Nine of them for the weight they carried in the community, and an extra two for their diplomatic skill

Vs. 17a – Casiphia – town – not much is known but it would seem that a number of Levites must have settled there

Vs. 17

Vs. 17c – so what is Ezra doing in his leadership?

Ezra was a man who challenged people to fulfill their God-given callings.

Ezra went right to the people that God had called to do this kind of work and said to them – this is your calling/responsibility – this is what you are alive to do and you're needed

Most Christian leaders do all the work – statistics – 20% do 80% of the church work
Equip the saints/people are to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12)

Ezra challenged the right people to do the right thing in the service of God

And if you will notice he was careful how he did it – vs. 16

Notice – he didn't go to them by himself – he could have done that.

He sent other men that would make it less confrontational than if he had gone.

He let men who were already hazarding everything for the journey

– to call on the Levites.

Listen, Levites, 1,500 (rounding off) of us – why aren't you joining us?

Vs. 18-19 (38 Levites)

Vs. 20 – 220

. . . 38 Levites . . . 220 temple servants came . . . even then, the laborers were few

Ezra should have been disappointed in the number, but it never records any negative attitude or feelings

Don't let a few people disappoint or dissuade you from God's work

Now, there are two things in this passage that stick out – that Ezra used in his leadership

Vs. 17 tells us – that when he sent this delegation of 11 – he did not leave them without the arguments they were to use

He says – vs. 17b – what to say and whom to approach

Vs. 17d – Now, the first line of reasoning was the need of the work of God – there is legitimate need for your service in the work of God

The second line of reasoning is in vs. 20

Vs. 20b – Appointed to do – this is your calling

There is a need and that need is to be met by you

This is two of the legitimate motivations to be used in the service of God – no arm twisting – no guilt trips

The work of God is a volunteer organization.

This is not like a secular organization where you have various pressures you can put on people. Most are monetary – pay raises, promotions, bonuses, perks – incentives, possible firing

There is a need for us and God has fitted us for service
 Those are the two best motivations for church people

What God is looking for is that His people would love Him – with all heart, soul, mind, and strength

Therefore, God says to us: This is the need and this is your calling and now will you do this work for no other motivations than these.

This is what needs to be done – and this is what I called you to do! Will you do it?

And if God's people will do that with a good spirit, God gets what He wants – He gets the demonstration of our love in our heart, soul, mind, and strength

And task after task after task – we demonstrate to the Lord that in this life we serve Him out of a heart of love. These are the right motivations

And what Ezra said is what still needs to be said to God's people today.

Motivating God's people today has turned into a secular/worldly business

Ezra was a great leader – he challenged people to fulfill God-given callings

Ephesians 4:1 – walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called

Now, here is the second situation that came up that demonstrated Ezra's leadership

Vs. 21 –Ezra was concerned for safety

1,514 men plus 258 Levites = 1,772. Plus women and children = over 4,000

Several thousand Jews, inexperienced in travel and warfare, carrying a fortune in gold and silver, led by a scholar, not a soldier, and planning to travel through dangerous territory – 800-900 miles – with desperadoes and nomadic bandits – that's a situation of risk

There was a human solution

There was a possible solution – vs. 22a – they could have gone to the king and asked for an armed escort

Would have that been right or wrong to ask?
 Before you answer, let me show you something.

Nehemiah 2:9

So Nehemiah had an armed escort
 So, would it have been right or wrong for Ezra to accept a human solution to the problem? The answer is – it depends.

Remember that Ezra also had tons of precious metals given by a heathen king for God's House.

In other words, the work of God is going to be furthered and funded by a gift from pagans.

Ezra accepted the money. What about the armed escort?

Ezra does not feel that in this case it's the right thing to do in asking for an escort!

Why not?

Here's why – explanation

Vs. 22b – because . . .

Vs. 23

Why?

Because he would have run the risk of diminishing the glory of God in the eyes of that lost man. That's Ezra's concern. God's testimony! Our testimony is God's testimony. We represent God to the world.

What a testimony it would be to that heathen king . . . if Ezra could bring this unlikely company through that treacherous desert and up to Jerusalem unharmed.

Ezra explained that the king might have misunderstood if he had asked for a military escort.

Folks, Ezra knew that God's hand was upon him

Ezra knew that this was the will of God

Yet, Ezra – vs. 23 – still fasted and prayed

There is no presumption on Ezra's part – no confidence in himself. What happens to leaders after they have had successes?

It should be noted that there was nothing casual about their approach to that journey. They first gave themselves to earnest prayer for guidance.

It takes a real leader to lead people into dependence on God

Then he leads them right out into the desert without an escort as a testimony to King Artaxerxes

That's a tremendous thing!

Vs. 23 – “He answered our prayers” has been the testimony of God's people throughout the centuries.

That's Biblical leadership

Ezra Sermon #20

Ezra 8

Ezra's leadership

Ezra had

1. God's hand on his life – how do we get that? He prepared himself – two things:
 - #1 He got into the Word – learned it
 - #2 Critical step – lived it
2. Spiritual skill – able to do the work of God within the confines of secular government
3. Targeted key men, chief men to lead others
4. Challenged people to accept the calling God has given to them

Absence of Levites
5. Ezra made decisions based upon God's testimony
6. Ezra led God's people into dependence upon God

I've entitled today's sermon "Biblical Leadership, Part 3"

Ezra 8:24

Biblical Leadership, Part 3

How many of us think of ourselves as a leader?

What's it take to be a leader?

What's a leader?

A leader is somebody who has somebody following him? It could be for good or bad.

Is anyone following you?

Would you say a father is a leader?

Would you say a mother is a leader?

Would you say a big brother/big sister is a leader?

Anyone who has someone following him is in a position of leadership!

You may not have a title or official position, but if other people look to you and listen to you, you are in a position of leadership – home, church, work, or community

Anyone whom God has given that kind of influence will be required to exercise that influence in a successful way

Successful – meaning you have led your followers in the will and way of God

Vs. 24a – Ezra said “I” – he is going over what he did as a leader

See if you can mentally extract from this what Ezra is doing as a leader

Vs. 24-30

What did Ezra just do?

If you want a picture of it, we have one man handing over stuff to other men with instruction

That’s called “delegation” – willing to entrust people with the responsibilities of their calling and character

Who is going to be responsible for all of this money?

Numbers 3 says it’s the Levites and the priests’ job

Ezra is doing the right thing!

Is it hard to delegate?

If you have been in any leadership for any period of time, there are times when it is very easy to commit to people their responsibilities and then there are other times we are tempted to hold onto those responsibilities ourselves.

And the temptation generally comes because of the combination of two factors.

When are we tempted to hold back on delegation?

First, it occurs when the responsibility becomes great, when the magnitude is huge – when there are tremendous ramifications for failure.

When it is needed, we question in our minds if they can do it.

Let me show you the magnitude of the responsibility that Ezra gave these 24 men.

Vs. 26-27 – we have detailed to us the poundage – sheer weight

Possibly Skip this info: start on page 139

Let me give you the figures.

Vs. 26a – 650 talents of silver

Do you know how much a talent weighed? It weighed 75 lbs. – calculate $650 \times 75 = 48,750$ lbs. (calculate)

That's almost 25 tons of silver

Vs. 26b

$100 \times 75 = 7,500$ (we have over 56,000 lbs. of silver)

Vs. 26c

100 talents of gold – that's 7,500 pounds of gold

56,000 pounds of silver

7,500 pounds of gold

Load on to pack animals that carry 200 pounds a piece – 300 pack animals

Would you say this was a big responsibility?

I know you can't compare modern values with ancient values

Now, that's one factor – the largeness of the responsibility.

See, that's one reason to hold back on delegation or to take back responsibilities.

Here is the other factor.

Start

In any organization, who is ultimately responsible?

Whoever is at the top is ultimately responsible

Ezra was ultimately responsible. That's who the king held responsible!

Ezra 7:12, 14, 15

Before Artaxerxes –

Ezra is responsible and Ezra is going to march around people and 300 pack animals right out into the desert without an armed escort!

Who is going to share this responsibility? The people who are responsible.

It's the priests and the Levites – no wonder Ezra wanted some Levites to go on this trip.

Ezra resisted the temptation to take to himself responsibilities that God intended to be delegated to certain people.

Notice how Ezra delegates

Vs. 24 – he gets men – the people you delegate to is very important

We have priests and Levites and he gave it to them and he made them accountable for it.

Folks, we have to do that in leadership – we have to make people accountable.

That's part of training people – there is a price to pay in training people, but if we do a good job and the long-term upside is tremendous.

Notice in Ezra 8:28 – Ezra reminds them

Separated unto God

Entrusted with God's things – adding God to the equation

We are separated unto God

We are holy unto God

Has God entrusted us?

Will there be an accounting day? Should we know this?

Does that give us a greater sense of solemnness about what we are doing the for Lord?
It ought to.

So in vs. 29 – instructions are given – you guard them, you look after them until the day comes when you can turn over your responsibility to the people in the temple
Ezra was a man who entrusted people with responsibilities.

In other words, he challenged people to accept their calling and then gave them the responsibilities that went with it and he tried not to override it

Vs. 31 – the group left on a four-month journey

Notice at the end:

Vs. 31 . . . He protected us against enemies and bandits. From the broader context of its usage here, it is clear that the term must mean that the Lord protected them from being attacked.

As those Jews headed home – trudged through the wilderness – spotted the hills of Judea in the distance – I wonder if they sang Psalm 121 to each other.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.”

They finally got to Jerusalem – vs. 32

There are many things that could have been written about the journey.

The whole trip from Babylon to Jerusalem is summed up in five words of vs. 32.

That was a 900-mile trip we just read about. Nothing is recorded at all.

Vs. 32

Ezra and his company arrived . . . and wisely decided to rest. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is to do nothing. Jesus told His busy disciples, “Come aside by

yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31) . . . “If you don’t come apart, you will come apart—you’ll go to pieces.”

Vs. 33, 34

There is the accounting of it.

Ezra made them answerable, responsible, accountable!

Ezra does this because he’s accountable to someone

For, you see, we are all accountable to someone.

Who needs to be accountable in the Lord’s work?

Everybody – everybody needs accountability.

Christians must learn from Ezra . . . in all their accounting: today’s civil law requires it, non-Christians expect it, God’s people want it, and God requires it.

One of the toughest things you’ll do as a leader is hold people accountable. It’s difficult, but it has to be done.

God’s servants must be faithful in every area of ministry, but especially in the matter of money.

Vs. 33-35 – Ezra stands back and watches his people do what was instructed in Persia. Ezra goes back to the third person.

Vs. 35 – the new arrivals were worshiping in their land, at their temple altar, for the first time in their lives! How Ezra’s heart must have been stirred as he stood at the altar and participated in the worship service! Psalm 122, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” Psalm 122:2.

The first thing the returnees did was worship God. For those who love God, the first response before, during, or after any project such as this must be worship.

Vs. 36a, b

Ezra, having taken care of the spiritual matters, presents himself and his credentials to the local Persian officials . . . Ezra left Babylon with God's law in his heart and the king's letter in his hand and the good hand of God upon him.

No wonder his mission was a success.

No wonder he was a great leader.

With Godly leadership and people who will voluntarily follow that leadership, the work of the Lord goes forward and accomplishes what God wants.

So lead where you are a leader and follow where you are a follower and do it after this kind of example.

Vs. 36c

We know that God's purpose in the earth today is to build the church . . .

May it be true of me/you that when the day is over, that we had furthered (helped) the house of God and the people of God.

It takes leadership.

Ezra Sermon #21

Turn in your Bibles to Ezra 9

The first six chapters are concerned with the first remnant returning led by Zerubbabel
– building the Temple of God

Then 60 silent years between chapters 6 and 7

Then the second leader God sends back to Israel leading a smaller remnant is the man
named Ezra

Ezra 7-8 – we saw his leadership

Ezra 8:32 – Ezra had arrived with his group in Jerusalem

Ezra 9:1-6

This chapter opens dealing with the first issue that confronted Ezra in his ministry

In fact, it is the only issue that was recorded

We only have two chapters left in the book and they are both occupied with the same
issue – it's a sin issue

I want to preach today on a Godly leader's response to sin

Now, God sent this man back to teach those people the law of the Lord and the first
thing he had to deal with was gross sin

And yet, that is, in many cases the first issue that leadership has to confront

Doing the work of the ministry is not just teaching/preaching and laying out the
principles/doctrine and yet being blind to all that goes on around you.

If our objective is to bring people to God and Godliness – then it's always going to involve the expelling of sin from our lives and other's lives.

A part of ministry is confrontation with sin.

The confrontation of sin is the single biggest challenge to any person living for God. Because when we confront sin, there are a number of things that may happen.

We may be a Godly person, go in the right spirit, and have the Word of God clearly stated, and confront sin and

#1 see it explode

We can confront sin and #2 see people fail to respond at all

Or #3 see repentance

Or #4 excuses

We don't know what is going to happen

We just know that the sin is there and it must be confronted!

It is the single greatest challenge that we will face in our Christian life.

**When sin is not confronted and dealt with – leaders quit rather than confront it
People sin – never confronted – allowed to go to other ministries and serve and it
is repeated all over again because the prior churches did not confront
This story is repeated over and over again**

If you are a Godly person and you are placed in a position of leadership and if there is sin somewhere in the ministry.

It will only be a matter of time before the Lord will ask you to deal with that for the sake of the ministry, His name, and the purity of the church.

This is Ezra's experience.

Let's look first of all at the sin Ezra had to confront

Vs. 1-2 – let me sum it up

These people – God's people had intermarried with the heathen and they had done it previous to Ezra's coming to Jerusalem.

We don't know how long this had been going on – but we know that God's people had

been back there for about 80 years.

This sin had been going on before Ezra got there and what really makes it tough – look at the end of vs. 2

The rulers had been chief, at the forefront of the trespass and that always is the most difficult of all situations when you have other people in leadership and they sin and you have to deal with the leaders. That's difficult.

This was Ezra's situation

First, let me give you God's Word on this matter of intermarriage with the heathen – mixed marriage

We are not talking about colors of the skin. Let's get that straight right up front.

Turn back with me to two passages in the Law where God has made His will expressly known on this matter?

Exodus 34

Scan them briefly – I want you to see God's language is clear, strong, and straightforward as it usually is. Amen.

Exodus 34 – this is before the Promised Land

Exodus 34:11-12 – you be careful – lest you become ensnared/trapped with these people

Vs. 13-16

You can see the rationale that the Lord is giving

God didn't have to give us a reason why – but He does

The whole point is that kind of physical union is going to lead you into a religious union and that will lead you away from Me – God said!

Now turn to Deuteronomy 7 – 40 years later – the second giving of the Law

Moses reiterates once again God's will

Deuteronomy 7:1-4

Now we can see that God's will was expressed very directly on this subject.

We are dealing with people who were polytheistic – they believed in many gods.

They had gods all the way from Baal – who was the god of fertility – with whom Elijah had a contest – all the way to a god named Molech – who was offered children in fire sacrifice.

These people were superstitious!

They were sensual!

They practiced necromancy or communication with the dead

astrology

magical rites

incantations

God knew that about these people – He knew all of these things even before His people ever entered that land.

God was safeguarding His people telling them right up front that you are to make no covenants with them.

God was very specific on one point.

Do not give your children in marriage to their children.

That will overthrow God's plan.

Throughout the Bible, God calls his people to separate themselves from the world.

You look at Solomon – I Kings 11 – he loved many strange (foreign) women – those women turned his heart away from the Lord and in the end Solomon actually constructed altars and places of worship for them for their false gods.

Remember King Ahab – he married a Phoenician princess named Jezebel!

On Jezebel's staff, she had 450 prophets of Baal

400 prophets of Ashtoreth – who was the female counterpart to Baal

And throughout their history, this is one of God's complaints about Israel – that they had

forsaken Him and followed false gods!

And, so God's wrath came unto His people for this kind of idolatry

Pastor, why would the Israelites do this?

With this knowledge, why would they intermarry with the heathen?

There are many reasons for that

1. One reason – marriage in those days were not just love affairs – they were after political alliances
2. Economic reasons – when things were bad – they would look for comfort and ease
Forsake God, Word – tough times do that to a lot of people
3. Location reasons
When those exiles went back, there was no doubt more males than females
4. No doubt these heathen young people were wild and wicked.
Folks, the world's young people are always more sensual
There is a certain attractiveness

Nineteen-year-old man who is borderline with his walk with God and he looks at the girls in the church

The world's youth have the appeal, the attraction, the excitement, unlike the girls who go to church and live for God and by His principles.

Borderline Christians get sucked right into that because of the sensual attraction of lost kids

There was that temptation and much, if not more, of this is true today!

Let's look at the New Testament passages – dealing with this issue of intermarrying with unsaved people

I Corinthians 7:39 – the qualification is that he must be believer

II Corinthians 6:14a, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"

In fact, marriage is the closest, most intimate yoke you will ever have in life.
 You have to live and harmonize together and marriage is not just a matter of people
 living under the same roof

It's not just two people in a physical relationship.

It's a matter of two people in a one flesh covenant that in the end will involve the union
 of their convictions, minds, and emotions.

This is why Malachi 2 talks about the fact that marriage is a covenant. That's why God
 says in II Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what
 fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath
 light with darkness?"

Another strong passage is Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ
 also loved the church, and gave Himself for it."

The man is supposed to love the woman as Christ loved the Church.

Try getting an unsaved man to know anything about that.

And where the woman is supposed to submit to her husband as to whom?

As to the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4, "And, ye fathers, raise your children – bring them up in the nurture and
 admonition of the Lord."

That is impossible for an unsaved man.

And for the woman, Titus 2:4-5 says, "That they may teach the young women to be
 sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste,
 keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be
 not blasphemed."

This is but a sampling of passages but the whole intent of God is expressed in the
 second chapter of Malachi.

Malachi 2 – very strong statement – Malachi 2

Now Malachi came after Ezra. He was dealing with the problem of divorce
 In this second chapter, God is angry with these people for divorcing the wives of their
 youth – (end of vs. 14)

By the way, Malachi 2:14 is real helpful in defining what marriage is

Marriage is a covenant

Marriage is not just a physical relationship

If people are involved in fornication that does not comprise a marriage!

Marriage is a covenant – vs. 15a

The point of that is

Did not God make one woman for one man – so why are you divorcing?

Did not God make two people one – so why are you divorcing?

When there is a covenant, a marriage – they are one

Genesis says these two become one flesh

Now look vs. 15b – God had power and ability to make many women for Adam, but God
 made one woman for this man and God intended for them to be one flesh

Vs. 15c – and why one?

Look at vs. 15d – children – God's intention is for those two people to be one flesh
 – one mind, one in emotion, one in dedication to the Lord

And one of the objects of their home be the raising of Godly seed unto the Lord

I don't understand why in so many Christian homes that our young people are dating
 unsaved people

It is amazing to me that parents allow this – that parents encourage it – that parents
 give their children away – that parents give their blessing to it

Parents must dig in and resist it

Never give in on

We don't aid it

We are not neutral about it

We are not passive about it

We are always actively opposed to it – we have to be!

Or we will end up with a daughter/son who marries an unsaved man or woman and then
we end up with grandchildren that are pulled both ways

And the ramifications of that kind of marriage for generations of your descendants is
tragic

Now, this is the problem that Ezra was facing and has to confront!

It's a problem I have to confront – that we need to confront

I've lost families in this church because of this issue

Christian young people marrying someone that they ought not to be marrying and

I would not do it, bless it, help with it, or allow our church to be used for it

Yet these families profess to be Christians

I don't understand that at all!

This was what Ezra had to deal with!

Imagine walking into that situation

And it's not just fringe people

It's not just carnal people

It's your leadership who are involved

How did Ezra respond to this?

Three ways – emotionally, prayerfully, practically

Ezra Sermon #22

Turn in your Bibles to Ezra 9

We looked at the last two chapters of Ezra; they really are one unit

They deal with the first issue that Ezra confronted in his ministry – sin issue

God's people had intermarried with the heathen. The Jews – how could that have happened? Between Chapter 1-9 – 80 years have passed.

A generation had passed

The people we are looking at in Chapter 9 are not the same people of Chapters 1 and 2
– the people who came back to Jerusalem

Most of the people in Chapter 9, most likely, did not know those who came back!

Dealing with a whole new generation of people

One thing we see in the entire Old Testament is that history repeats itself

It's like the book of Judges – another generation arose who did not know the Lord

Then they forsook the Lord – they intermarried, Solomon intermarried – I hate to say this but even after Ezra they do it again. It still happens today – we have believers who marry unbelievers.

These people in chapter 9 were 130 years removed from that destruction of Jerusalem and one of the major reasons God destroyed His people and they were taken captive to Babylon was because of this very sin – the intermarrying with the heathen.

God is strongly against it. It was very clear in the Bible.

Do you remember why God was against it?

Psalm 106:35 – but were mingled among the nations and learned their works – adopted their ways – became like the heathen.

“Responding to Sin”

I want you to notice a very interesting thing with me

I want you to notice the way that Ezra learned about this sin.

There were a number of ways Ezra could have found out about this

What’s interesting is the way that he did.

Vs. 1 – says – that certain leaders came and reported it

Now Ezra did not know anything about it for in vs. 3, it says that when he found out, he was astonished, which means he was shocked – he was stunned

Now, they did not come to Ezra immediately!

Ezra 7:9 records that they arrived on the first day of the fifth month!

According to Chapter 10:9, it was the ninth month before Ezra received this information.

There were about 4 ½ months that went by and I’m sure Ezra was teaching and preaching – Ezra 7:10 – that’s why God sent him back to Israel

4 ½ months have gone by and Ezra knows nothing about it – yet it was something widespread.

Let me point out several things.

#1 – God did not reveal this to Ezra; God did not tell him that this was what he was going to face

God could have, but He didn’t

We will find this when we take any work on for the Lord

God could have told or revealed all of this on the front end.

“Here are the ten things you will face in your first year so that you can get ready for it.”

God never does that.

I have heard men say – Godly men –
 If I would have known, I would have never taken this ministry.
 My response is that's why God didn't tell you

Remember that one of these days when you take on something for the Lord and you get
 into it and there is a can of worms
 Remember Ezra – remember that God has placed you into it to deal with it.

So #1 – God didn't tell Ezra upfront.

#2 – Ezra did not find it out on his own!

That means that he went about his business of ministry – he wasn't involved in
 investigating people's lives

We do not need to play detective!

If God allows us to become knowledgeable about sin – then we have to deal with it

But it's not our business to search out and spy out everybody's sin

Folks, God has timing in dealing with sin

God has a timetable when God allows us to become aware of things – that's His
 timetable and then we've got to go forth

But our primary business is to minister the Word and then when things crop up, we
 have to deal with them

Our task is not to dig up – not to be suspicious – not to be in everyone's private affairs

Ezra was ministering – So Ezra's campaign to spread the knowledge of Scripture was
 bearing the characteristic fruit of reform less than five months after his arrival.

It had thrown new light not only on a tolerated evil but on the high calling of this
 community as a *holy people* . . . And with no prompting from Ezra this had dawned on
 the group of leaders who now approached him with a report that was news to him.

These men . . . were the established leaders.

Well, how did Ezra find out?

People came and told him!

Now why do you think they came to Ezra?

Because Ezra was a man of God – he was a leader – and he was a Bible believer – they knew he would deal with it.

His ministry of the Word caused people to have conviction of sin and made them feel they could come and seek his aid and he would do the right thing.

What was Ezra's response to this sin?

First, we see his emotional response to hearing this

Vs. 3

He sat down astonished

Ezra was a Godly man

When the sin was found out – it tore Ezra up

vs. 4

Ezra became the catalyst that brought these trembling souls together, that they might publicly identify themselves on the side of truth. Quite obviously, the common bond between Ezra and this group was their common subjection to the will of God as revealed in the Word of God

Where are the men and women today who reverence the word of God? Hold it in high regard!

Who unite over the Word of God?

How many people really take the Word of God seriously?

People unite in the churches today over a host of things.

But God's people need to unite in their convictions of the Bible.

Vs. 5a

The fact that this intervention on Ezra's part began at the time of the evening sacrifice should not be overlooked.

It is a timely reminder to us that sin in all its forms required the blood shedding of God's dear Son. . . . The atoning blood of Jesus is the only ground upon which God can forgive the sins of either the unsaved or the saved.

We can rejoice that there is sufficiency in that blood to meet the need that we have.

Vs. 5b

Falling to his knees showed Ezra's attitude of humility before God, and spreading out his hands indicated his need of God's help.

Vs. 6 – Ezra tells us how he feels

I am ashamed – I blush – I am embarrassed

When was the last time we felt so deeply for other people's sin that we are embarrassed for the cause of Christ?

Ezra went to the point of tears – 10:1

Part of our problem – maybe we have lost – we have lost the ability to be shocked and to weep.

What is a Godly leader's response to sin?

First – emotional response

Second – prayerful response

Did you remember that Ezra had capital punishment authority (Ezra 7:26) – began not with execution, not with banishment, not with preaching, but with prayer

What kind of prayer is this?

It begins in verse 6 and extends all the way to verse 15

I want to point out first that this is a prayer of intercession

This is not a prayer of condemnation

This is not a prayer of judgment

It is a prayer of intercession – praying on the behalf of others

This prayer takes the direction of confession and because it does, it is parallel to two other prayers in the Bible.

There are three men who lived right after the Exile (after the Babylonian takeover) that prayed prayers of intercession and confession for God's people

An interesting thing is that all of these prayers are found in the ninth chapter of their books

Daniel prayed in Daniel 9

Nehemiah and the Levites prayed in Nehemiah 9

Ezra 9 – in the middle, we have Ezra

All prayers of confession but Ezra's prayer differs from the other two in one major respect!

There is not a single request

There are no petitions – frequent in ours, but missing in Ezra's

This prayer falls in sections

First section is vs. 6-7 – that was the past

Vs. 6-7 – the first portion of this prayer

This passage contains two occurrences of this word: trespass

Vs. 6-7 – guiltiness – this is the Hebrew term for guilt

What is Ezra doing? Immediately in this prayer Ezra is acknowledging guilt

We also find that Ezra makes no excuses for that guilt

Ezra doesn't in any way try to excuse it

It's one thing to cushion our guilt and it's another thing to feel the shame of it

In our confession of sin, we feel intensely our guiltiness and that in our confession we are not in any way trying to rationalize with God why it happened

Secondly – the guilt was not minimized

And I take that out of the words that Ezra used

Vs. 6 – very strong – the word was iniquity – to twist, to distort, to bend or to make crooked

It is a very strong word for sin

This word gives us a picture of something that is laid out in front of us and it's quite straight – it is cut and dried – and we have twisted that

Then in vs. 7

He goes back to previous generation

Vs. 7a

One of the things that gives intensity to the sin is Ezra's sense of history

This man has what many Christians do not have – keen sense of history

And when Ezra looked at where they were, he tied it in with where they had been.

So Ezra's sense of history intensifies his sense of guilt

Look at the exact wording – vs. 7d

When Ezra looked back at the history of his people

Ezra saw the seriousness of the present sin – because the severity of chastisement that the previous sinners had suffered

What heated this prayer was that Ezra understood what people had suffered before for the same kind of sins and he said – “Oh no, look at what happens to people who intermarry with the heathen. O God, we are guilty again.”

Folks, there is a great benefit in reading this Bible and seeing what happened to people who pleased themselves and not God

How strongly does God feel about if one of our sons or daughters goes out and marries an unsaved person?

Look at the severity of punishment

How does God feel about sodomy? Couples living together?

Pornography? Lying, cheating, stealing, lusting?

Murmuring and complaining and gossip?

How serious is sin?

Let us go back to where God dealt with that sin in the Bible!

The seriousness of sin is seen in the severity of God's dealing with it in the past
If there is anything that should give me the sense of guilt to my sin, it should be looking back and seeing what could happen to me if I don't mend my ways.

When we come to confess before the Lord and acknowledge our guilt

The fact that we are still spared – God has not dealt with us yet – does not mean that God has changed any in His opinion of those things or the way He feels about those things

Notice Ezra includes himself with the sinners

Vs. 6-7 – our, our, we, us, our

Ezra includes himself with the people of God – identifies with the people

Do you know why Ezra could say our and us? Let me show you!

Vs. 7d

He includes himself in the people because he is in the judgment of the people

He is an innocent man but his conditions, the life in which he lives, the day in which he lives, are because of judgment

He has been affected by the sin of others, and it causes him to say we are all in this together

We all incur the fallout from these things when God's people live unholy

It is the sin of a generation and we receive the ramification of others' sin?

So vs. 6-7 – that's the past

Here is the present – Vs. 8-10

Now we have the commandment of the prophets – Vs. 11-12.

Ezra said – we have forsaken those commandments

Vs. 13-14 – are a unit

Vs. 13a & 14a

The disastrous repetition of those sins—after all that has happened to us – should we do it again?

Vs. 13-14

And now a concluding summary – a righteous God and a guilty people – Vs. 15.

Ezra is a broken man -

He is simply confessing sin; acknowledging God's graciousness

Foreseeing what God might do to the nation

Ezra goes to prayer

Ezra Sermon #23

In Chapter 9, we find Ezra 4 ½ months into his new ministry when he finds out there is a widespread sin

Ezra responds three ways to the sin of the people

First – emotionally

Secondly – prayerfully

And then in Chapter 10 – practically, procedurally

I want us to take our time as we go through his second response – as we look at Ezra's prayer of confession

Ezra 9:5

“The Grace of God”

We are dealing with a passage of scripture that is a confessional prayer by Ezra

This is a prayer that God intends for us to identify with, a prayer that we can put into practice

This is a model prayer for confession

Prayers of confession are everyday prayers of Christians

This prayer of confession was for the entire Jewish community

In vs. 6-7 we saw the acknowledgement of guilt

He gave no defense for their sin

No rationalization, excuse, or justification given

It was expression of guilt without minimizing it

The second part of this prayer is the bright spot

It is not all gloom in confessional prayer

That is what we find in vs. 8-9

Vs. 8 – when Ezra says, “And now” – this is a transition
 From the piled-up guilt of the last 130 years
 And now for a little space, grace hath been shown from the Lord our God
 And vs. 8-9 – deal with God’s grace
 They are an acknowledgement of God’s grace
 Divine grace in spite of human guilt

Vs. 9

That word “mercy” is another word for “grace”

Vs. 8-9 – are an acknowledgement of God’s grace
 That is a true and essential part of all confessional prayer
 I want to help us understand the grace of the Lord that we are still experiencing

Let’s start with the two words Ezra used

Ezra was a ready scribe – a scholar in the Law of God – he was familiar with the
 terminology of grace and mercy and how God demonstrated grace in the lives of
 the Jews

Let me show you what Ezra would have been aware of knowing the Law of God
 There are two terms in these verses

The one in vs. 8

The one in vs. 9

Two terms for grace

They are different terms

One of them is really an expansion of the other

But they are highly significant in some of the passages in which they occur

The first term – the one in vs. 8 – grace

That is the most common way translated in the Old Testament – simply grace

It originally, in its verbal form, had reference to bowing down or stooping down
 But it did not mean that I bow down before a superior, follow me now-----
 It had the idea of the superior bowing or stooping to the needs of the inferior
 In other words, it referred to someone who was above me condescending to me with
 favor

When we look up in the Old Testament, the references to this kind of favor
 This favor from a superior to an inferior
 You find that it is a favor that is free.
 Is that good news or what?

So what we are dealing with is a kind of favor that comes freely and for nothing on the
 part of the person receiving it

This free favor (kindness) in the Old Testament is almost unique just to God
 The adjective “gracious” – is only used of God, not men in the Old Testament
 The Scripture by its cautious usage of words confining it almost entirely to God indicates
 that this is something God is capable of, but people are almost entirely incapable
 of

It is God who is able freely to give favor to people who cannot do anything at all to merit
 it

Turn to Nehemiah 9:17 – this is also a confessional prayer – Nehemiah 9:17
 That, folks, is the kind of God we have
 Who has a God like that? Full of free favor that people cannot merit

Exodus 32 while Moses is on the mountain, the people made a golden calf – utterly
 despising the Lord’s goodness
 They throw off the Lord
 They worship this other god
 Moses comes down with two tablets and breaks them
 And then he is before God interceding for these people

Exodus 32:32 – you see that long hyphen – silence

Do you know how God answered that prayer

Exodus 34:6

God shows favor to people who are totally undeserving

Ezra is ascribing to God this very grace

Ezra 9:8 – undeserved favor, merit, goodness

II. The second word for grace in this passage is the word translated “mercy” in Ezra 9:9

Many times in the Old Testament this word is translated “loving kindness”

This is an expression of God’s grace

This is a kindness God shows because of the relationship that He has with people

This word is used most of the time in context where people have relationship with one another

Family relationships

Legal relationships because of a covenant/contract

Or it’s used in context where God is in covenant with people

The first word grace is just a kind of a wide open free favor that God gives

But the second word – mercy – is an advancement on that because this is something God shows to people because He has decided He will obligate Himself

In other words, the first word – we don’t have any claim to at all

God does it – we just thank and praise Him for it

But the second word – somewhere along the line God has obligated Himself to it

God said I will do it – you can count on it – I’ll be faithful to it – He does that through covenants

Take a look at I Samuel 20:14-16 – I want to show this to you – between two people

Relationship between Jonathan and David

I Samuel 20:14-16

David, enter into a contract with me so that you will not cut off my house forever

It is kindness because of relationship

And secondly, it is kindness that must be shown in order to be faithful to that

relationship

Let me show you an outstanding passage to this – the 89th Psalm

Psalm 89

The whole Psalm is dealing with the Davidic Covenant

Psalm 89:3

:28 – just follow the train of reason here

Vs. 28-37

Do you see what that is saying?

That is saying David's descendants can be unfaithful to Me – I will deal with them, but
there is no way I will forsake them – because of God's mercy – loving kindness –
God's grace

This is what Ezra is praying about, folks

Ezra 9:9

This loving kindness, this grace, in spite of Israel's sin because He is in relationship with
them

This is the same position that every New Testament believer is in – exactly that same
situation

That's why Paul could say

Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good
work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

This is going to happen

Peter said in I Peter 1:5 that we will be kept by the power of God – it will happen

We may be chastened, but we will not be forsaken

God's New Testament covenant with us is not going to fail

His face toward us remains the same

God, has have been exceedingly gracious to us.

Let me show you the evidence that Ezra shows

Ezra 9:8-9

There are four occurrences of a verb in these two verses and this verb is the sure evidence that we are being dealt with graciously

There is no way of showing grace without doing what?

Look at vs. 8-9 – do you see it? Find the verb

The verb occurs two times in vs. 8 – occurs two times in vs. 9

We show grace by giving

To give – vs. 8 and 9

That is the sure evidence that God has been gracious

Let me ask you – Has God been gracious to us?

What is Ezra giving thanks to God for? God's giving.

#1 – gave a nail – the image here is of a nail pounded into a wall

It depicts security, stability, the foothold the Jews have in the land

We've got that – He is called the Holy Spirit – who is the earnest of our salvation – the down payment – Ephesians 1:13-14

#2 – gave a reviving – rare word used only eight times in Old Testament

It means relief

The Bible says, if we confess our sins – if we will admit that God is right – He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness

How many of us have experienced that relief?

#3 – vs. 9 – gave something to do – to revive a work

#4 – wall – refers to protection

He is not talking about the wall around Jerusalem – but a wall/fence around a garden

Ezra was talking about God's protection of the Jewish community

The grace of God was supremely revealed and given in the person and work of Jesus Christ

Titus 2:11 – for the grace (gracious love) of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men

The Bible says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith” – we can do nothing to get it and we can do nothing to keep it

God says, “My grace is sufficient for thee”

God says, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Being justified by His grace through the redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ”

The Grace of God

Ezra Sermon #24

We will pick up in Ezra 9:10

“True Confession”

What do we do with our sins – with our national sin – with the church’s sin?

We have a prayer of confession laid out in a pattern, a model for us

We actually have the language given for prayer

Now, when we pray, God does not expect us to come before Him in prayer speechless
or wordless

Words portray what is in our hearts

How can sinful man speak to God?

First of all, we have a Mediator between God and man

His name is Jesus Christ and He is the only mediator

Secondly, I’ve got more good news

There is someone helping us when we pray

Now we may not fully understand how but the fact is – the Holy Spirit helps us
(Rom. 8:26) “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not what we
should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with
groanings which cannot be uttered.”

God records Ezra’s prayer of confession for us.

The only way to deal with sin is to go straight to the one we have sinned against!

The Scripture is clear – when we sin, we have sinned against God and the only way to
get that right is to go to God in confession

Folks, the only thing that God requires is that we come humbly straight to Him and when

we come, God has given us ideas as to what is to be said
 Let us look at this pattern that God gives us – in Ezra’s prayer

It is essential that when we come to the Lord that we acknowledge

#1 – our guilt, to acknowledge our sin for what it is – not grudgingly, we willingly do that
 “God, this is what I did; I said; I thought” – 2 things –

Let me give you two extremes:

#1 – hard heart – we are not repentant; we do not have a Godly sorrow

#2 – sin was so bad the sinners feel they need to punish themselves (those
 unworthy feelings); they don’t deserve the forgiveness

Truth is – we never deserve. How many in this room deserve to go to Heaven?

We know what we deserve.

The second thing we need to know is God’s grace.

A lot of people never get past their sin – to realize that God is gracious and kind. It is
 essential when we come to God in confessional prayer to know that He has
 tremendous mercy, forgiveness and pardon and when He forgives, it’s forgiven
 and to accept that – to receive it.

Psalm 51

Psalm 32

Ezra 9

Now notice in vs. 10-12 – the third part of this prayer

Look at vs. 10 – and now – that is the transition – vs. 10

“God, You have been gracious to us and we have done it again.”

How many of us have sinned repeatedly in the same area?

Sinned, confessed, received forgiveness, only to sin again

Vs. 11a – This is what God said in the Law of God

Vs. 11b

It is possible for people to make real estate unclean – I'm not talking about dirty, but I'm talking about filthy from sin – there are certain parts of a city that are unclean because of the abominations that take place there.

It is unclean with their abominations that have filled it from one end to another

The Canaanite civilization of vs. 1 was a cancerous tumor and the Israelites decided to give their sons and daughters

Abortion mills, movie halls, bars and dance halls

Vs. 12a & b

Don't seek their peace, to make deals with them, shake hands with them.

Remember God said these people were to be eliminated. God commanded it.

In other words, Israel was to be God's hand of judgment in bringing the death penalty to these people

Don't seek their peace and also don't seek their wealth – vs. 12c – Don't be purchased, bought, bribed. People often give up their Bible convictions and principles when money gets involved.

Of vs. 10, 11, and 12?

Which verse contains the commandments that they have forsaken?

Vs. 12 contains it

So what do we have in vs. 11? What would we call vs. 11?

Vs. 11 is giving the reasons for the commandments

Don't link up with them – godless people.

Look at the end of vs. 12

What is that?

These are more reasons:

Ezra in his prayer is giving the reasons why/rationale for God's commandments
 Why should we remain pure until marriage; not steal from our employer; why should we spank our children?

It's like Ezra is taking God's role and arguing for the reasonableness of God's demands

This is an important part in confession

How can we truly confess sin if we are saying under our breath that God's standards are too high?

God is too strict; He doesn't understand

What God requires, is too difficult

Ezra is not doing that

Ezra says to God – we have broken this commandment and we remember why You said not to do it and we fully admit to the rationale that You give.

Those people are sinful and we would have been blessed if we didn't marry them.

Who was God protecting by forbidding the Jews to marry the heathen?

Ezra is taking God's side in this – we need to get on God's side

The next element we have in this confessional prayer is in vs. 13 and 14

1. Man's guilt
2. God's grace
3. God is right – His Word is true – it is better for us to obey His Word
4. Chastisement is a just reward for sin

Vs. 13a – three deportations – leveling of Jerusalem – 70 years in captivity

Vs. 14a – that's the structure

After all this, should we again go against Your Word?

After looking at the past and all that has happened – should we duplicate in the future the sinful actions of the past?

Should we continue in the cycle?

Vs. 13a & b

Ezra is noting the judgment they experienced

Vs. 13c

Ezra is summing up – we have suffered

But You, God, have been so good to us – You have not dealt with us like what we
deserve

Ezra is saying, “We did not get all that was coming to us. We deserved more
punishment for our sins than we received.” How many of us would say – True God

So Ezra asks in vs. 14 – after our sin and Your exceeding graciousness, should we
again break your commandments and continue in this pattern and the answer is
NO. No way!

So what would happen if we did – here is what we will face

There is this possibility

Vs. 14

Does that happen to God’s people?

Yes, that happens to God’s people

Sinning against God’s grace and presumptuously sinning against God when we take
advantage of God’s grace, we cannot call the consequences – we cannot control
them

We have a free will and we can choose what we want to do, but we can not choose the
consequences – that is entirely in God’s hands

And what is Ezra doing here? (God is not mocked.)

He is acknowledging a reaping of what is sown – a just and deserved judgment on sin

Both in the past and in the future if they continue this way

So how do we know if we truly have confessed our sin?

What is the condition of confession – how do we know if we really have confessed?

The test of confession is what is said in vs. 14d

Am I willing to acknowledge that any consequence I receive is just and deserved?

Lord, I get everything I deserve and really far less because I did sin – what do we expect when we sin?

There has to be in our spirit a willingness to acknowledge to God that this is just, that God is not unkind, unfair

Genesis 4

Cain murdered his own brother – He was a cold-blooded killer and Genesis 4:12-13, God says, “Cain, you will be a vagabond.”

How can Cain say that? What is he talking about?

His brother is dead by his own hands

And he has the audacity to say to God – vs. 13

You will know that you have truly confessed when in your heart there is no bitterness with God about any consequences that have come

They may be difficult to bear, but they are not unjust

These consequences are given to us to bring us back, to help us to learn, to shape, mold and form us into His Son

God does not desire to inflict hurt upon the sinner.

All of the sin has been paid for (punishment). God’s wrath has been laid on one Person.

Anything that God brings upon our lives is not to pay for the sin. That’s already been done. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Consequences come to us to teach us not to do that again!

Ezra 9 – Last Verse

Notice how Ezra ends this prayer

Vs. 15a

End of prayer

There is the confirmation of a righteous God and an unrighteous people

God, Thou art righteous

We are standing before You in our sins

A righteous God and sinful people

When we look at a prayer like this, I wonder

How much Biblical confession really goes on from among God's people?

Does my confession fit this kind of pattern?

Do I acknowledge guilt without excuse? – without blaming someone, some
circumstances

Do I recognize God's graciousness? Do I see His mercy?

Do I admit that I have broken God's Word?

Do I recognize that anything that has come into my life as a consequence of my sin is a
just and deserved consequence?

In fact, I have not received what I should have.

Psalm 103:8-12, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”

I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins,

The word “confess” means to “say the same” – to confess is to say the same as God
 There have been people who have watered confession down to nothing more than
 simply, all you got to do is state your sin, therefore activating God’s grace and
 go on your way.

Many teach that you don’t need to be sorry – just say what it is or what we did – God
 has to respond and we can go on with our living

Confessionary prayer is not a mechanical/magical formula
 Vain repetitions – Matthew 6:7

Christianity is not the repeating of words, repetition
 Christianity is a matter of relationship between people and God
 It is a relationship between beings

Real confession is serious – our offense is against God

And when we confess our sins
 Count on it, my friend
 He is faithful and just to keep on forgiving us our sins, to cleanse us from all
 unrighteousness

True confession
 Pattern of confession in prayer

How many would say – “God, I have some things in my life that are contrary to You”?

Help us to keep our lives clean – up to date with Thee

We need to keep short accounts

Thank God – we can come to the throne of grace

And receive the forgiveness

Clean hands and pure heart

Knowing that he who cometh to Thee will in no wise be cast out

Is there any unconfessed sin in our life?

This sin problem is a big problem and needed a big salvation

God sent His Son – Jesus Christ – to pay for our sins and punishment

He took our place – died on the cross – was buried – and rose again

Will you come to God this morning and say, “God, I am a sinner.

I want to receive forgiveness, mercy, and pardon.

I believe Jesus Christ died and shed His blood for my sins.

Be merciful unto me, a sinner.”

Won't you pray right now and ask God to save your soul, forgive you, cleanse you

– all because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

Ezra Sermon #25

Turn in your Bibles to the tenth chapter of Ezra – Ezra 10

The final chapter – we are in the home stretch

Ezra 9:1 opens with a mess on Ezra's hands

There was sin in the camp – intermarriage - we are not talking about the colors of skin.

The Jews had married the heathen people of the land – which was strictly forbidden by

God – Ex. 34 and Deut. 7. In the N.T. we are taught something very similar

(basically the same principle) – a believer is not to marry an unbeliever (I Cor. 7 and II Cor. 6:14a)

Ezra, when he found out about the sin, was in shock – he prayed about the situation

And now in Chapter 10 – he begins to deal with the problem

“A Sticky Situation”

How do you handle a situation where Jews have married heathen?

The church today finds itself in all kinds of sticky situations when it comes to divorce and remarriage and a host of other issues.

But ladies and gentleman – Ezra gives us a plan for dealing with tough situations.

Vs. 1

Ezra prays.

Never underestimate the power of the prayers of one dedicated believer . . . for the intercession of only one concerned person can make a difference in what God will do to and for His people. As Ezra prayed and wept . . .

James 4:9-10, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.” . . . That's God's formula for revival.

After this prayer meeting, there began a movement of revival. And revival always leads to reformation. When there is true revival, you don't need a fingerprint expert to find the results. – There will be sinners turning from sin.

An intense conviction of sin came over God's people at this particular time
 At the end of vs. 1, it says "They wept bitterly" – "wept with a great weeping"
 See the brokenness – Ezra was broken first – very few Christian people are broken up when dealing with others' sins.

Vs. 6b – Ezra was brokenhearted

For you see, God was at work in the hearts of the people and before long "there gathered unto him a great congregation." (v. 1) Note that women and children are mentioned. Entire families were involved.

Sin affects the family—a daddy's sin, a momma's sin, a brother's sin, a sister's sin, grandparent's sin—can bring heartache to the innocent – vs. 44

Do you see how sticky this situation was?

Vs. 1d

It was clear that these people were moved and were already conscious of the chastening hand of God upon them.

There is one of two things:

We will either be broken for our sins or

God will break us

There is a pay day someday – we cannot sin and win.

There is always a day of reckoning, reaping

Vs. 2a,b

The man Shecaniah apparently became the spokesman for the people—

by the way, he is not listed as one who had a heathen wife—who recognized their sin and wanted to confess. He came to Ezra and said, “We have trespassed against our God.” . . .

This fellow is outspoken – quick to speak up – I’ll show you why in just a moment—very candid acknowledgment. He said, “We have taken wives of the people of the land.”

That, my friend, is nailing it down and dealing with specifics. . . . In other words, they had departed from the Word of God.

When we do that, we have sinned against our God.

Let me show you something about this man – VS. 2a

His own relatives had sinned by marrying heathen wives; look over at Ezra 10:26.

This fellow understood the pain of his daddy most likely divorcing his Jewish mother and taking an ungodly wife

Malachi 2:16; 2:11

In my pastoral ministry, I’ve seen churches split and their witness almost destroyed because people have sided with their disobedient relatives in matters of discipline instead of with the Lord and His Word. Blood sometimes is even thicker than Scripture. (Deut. 13:6-11).

Paul taught this same principle for the local church

I Tim. 5:21, “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” – no favoritism, no prejudice

We have to side on God’s side – even if it is a relative – Amen!

That’s hard, but it’s Biblical.

Shecaniah and the other leaders recognized that in taking heathen wives and husbands into their homes they had been unfaithful to God and had broken the Word of God.

Ezra 10:2e – I like this man.

All is not lost; there is still hope for Israel. The logical outcome from the prayer of Ezra is that if the iniquity is removed, there would be forgiveness for their sin. God is righteous; he is a God of grace. Thus, there must be hope.

In Vs. 3 – Shecaniah offers a way to deal with the problem

Vs 3

The plan was simple but demanding. First, the nation would unite under God's Word.

Do you know how hard that is today? Even under clear passages of the Bible – church people.

Our churches are in disarray

But if there is anything that should rally us to unify, it should be the Word of God

It's unchangeable – immutable

Second, Ezra and a group of men who (vs. 3) “trembled (revered) at the Word” would decide how the matter would be settled.

Put a committee together of God-fearing people!

Third, let's do what the Bible prescribes – let's take God's medicine.

That's putting the Bible in proper perspective. It's the authority for all matters of living.

Shecaniah, then in vs. 4, encouraged Ezra to be strong in his resolve to fix the situation.

Vs.4

God's leaders need God's people to encourage them in the tough

decisions.

It's not easy some of the stands we have to take – we find ourselves in places of making people angry at us

Many churches and many leaders begin to cave in

Once they start – it usually leads to a succession of poor decisions

Ezra, “Rise up.” Shecaniah gave a call to action. Weeping was not enough –

Proverbs 19:18 – child crying, still give it to him

Courageous and painful decisions had to be made. The people themselves had to respond.

Shecaniah got behind Ezra

Breaking the Law of God was a very serious thing.

First, we must walk in the light of God's Word.

When we come to the Word of God – we must yield to it

It brings conviction to our hearts.

Jesus is saying to His church as He did in the book of Revelation,

“Repent. Come back to Me. Come out of your coldness and indifference.”

The thing that we need today is revival, and a revival will not come without repentance among believers.

It will not come by shortchanging the Bible

It will not come by discouraging God's leaders

Vs. 5

Two things in verse 5

#1 – He had the people commit to taking care of the situation

It is important when in situations – conviction is there – to nail it down

Because with time and distance from the sin – one loses their

1. stamina to make it right
2. conviction to fixing the problem

Secondly, Ezra (vs. 7) enlisted the aid of the leaders (not going to be a one man band).

In dealing with sticky situations, its important that the leaders be involved and
have a united front.

Decision is made – united front – not going to divide us

Ezra was wise.

Wise is the leader who involves other people in the process, especially when the issue
is so sensitive.

Could Ezra have taken care of this by himself?

Though Ezra had been vested with great authority (7:25-26), he used it sparingly and
influenced the people by his example.

The proclamation was a corporate one . . . not put out in Ezra's name alone.

What would carry more moral weight? Ezra by himself or Ezra and the order of the
local leaders?

Vs. 6

He withdrew into one of the rooms of the temple to fast and pray for God's guidance.

This had impacted Ezra

This is how God's men and God's women respond in tough times – crisis situations – in
difficult decisions.

They don't run from God. They run to God – draw even closer.

We need more than ever to have leaders who will seek the face of God.

Vs. 7-8

The chiefs and elders (local leaders) ordered all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem.

To appear in Jerusalem within three days or be in danger of expulsion from the
community

At that time, each marriage would be investigated and the committee would discover who had violated the Mosaic Law.

Let me take a moment to review.

Ezra and his people resolved to act along the following four ways:

1. Priority would be given to self-examination (Let us – vs. 3a). – It is best to just step up to the plate and take responsibility. It is always worse when we lie or try to cover up our sins.
2. Everything would be done according to the law (vs. 3) This is crucial when dealing with situations.
3. There should be no delay in beginning the process (vs. 8). The dragging of feet usually makes the situation worse.
4. Should any fail to judge themselves then they must be judged (vs. 8) – their land, homes.

The best judgment, of course, is always self judgment. But where this is absent, then those in authority must take action.

Those who fail to comply with God's Word will be removed from the community (vs. 8) They would not be allowed at the service of the temple, and it might also mean that they would forfeit their rights as citizens.

These were for Jews severe measures indeed. They were then not allowed to partake in the daily sacrifices for the removing of their sins. They were totally cut off from other members of the community and could expect no help in times of distress.

Vs. 8

. . . were to be cast out of the congregation.

Church discipline is rare today. Shunning is even rarer.

I Corinthians 5:11, 13

Hopefully, this will bring him or her to their senses.

Vs. 9

Verse 9 captures for us the shivering misery of the scene.

In December, the men of the two main tribes, Judah and Benjamin, plus exiles from the other tribes, gathered in the street before the temple to start the solemn investigation.

It was the rainy season . . . and the crowd trembled, not only because of the sin, but also because of the heavy rain – that portrayed this difficult day
The weather cooperated with the mood of the situation.

The Hebrew means – torrential rains – was a sign of judgment
It is raining “cats and dogs.” The Chinese say, pouring from the pot. Brazil – each drop is equal to 1 pot

The people had to be nervous and on edge.

Vs. 10-11

Wasting no time – he got right to the heart of the matter
Ezra opens the meeting – recapping the events and what was going to take place
Ezra made it clear that the mixed marriages would have to be dissolved, and he called upon the faithful Jews to separate themselves from those who are of the heathen lands

“pagan wives” – we do remember why God said not to marry these heathen nations
They turned the hearts of their spouses and children away from God – perfect example was Solomon – Nehemiah 13:26

Ezra 10:11

They had committed treason, not against the state, but against God.
They had violated the prescriptions of his law and with it his covenant.
With this violation they had increased the guilt of Israel. . . .

Only by separation could the people atone for their sins.

We cannot confess and still keep our sins – it does not work this way

The action may seem harsh, but the continuity of the Jewish community was at stake.

This was a sticky situation – we will see what happens next time.

Ezra Sermon #26

In the middle of a difficult situation

“A Sticky Situation”

Vs. 11

Now think about what he’s asking these people to do – You are talking about a sticky situation

This whole business had the potential for widespread dissension and explosion.

What Ezra asked these people to do was a bitter pill to swallow.

I am confident that there was a great wrenching of the heart and a great agony of the soul as these people separated themselves from their loved ones.

Those who occupy positions of leadership in the Christian church today are often perplexed and sometimes overwhelmed by the issues that confront us—disunity, building construction, staffing, church discipline, drug abuse, family problems
More and more problems of a domestic nature are presenting themselves—where most pastors are taking classes in counseling rather than pastoral studies

Leaders must always keep before them the Word of God and endeavor to maintain the integrity of His Word in God’s ministry.

Ezra did just that.

Ezra knew that marriage was instituted by God and considered a permanent and exclusive relationship (Gen. 2:24) – that has not changed.

The New Testament normally represents the marriage bond as not dissolvable and as a life-long union between a man and a woman who have been lawfully joined together.

The Bible does not advocate the divorcing of partners to whom we are legally

married; but this is the very thing that was asked of the people of Jerusalem.

For our part, we are not under Law but under Grace.

These chapters in Ezra . . .

They cannot be taken as authorization for divorcing an unbelieving spouse.

Being married to an unbeliever can be discouraging/frustrating, but Ezra 10 does not give permission to divorce the heathen man or woman

In I Corinthians 7:12-16,

In marriage unions, most Christian leaders agree that each case must be studied carefully in light of Scripture and in light of its own particular situation.

The moral dilemma Ezra faced, however, was caused by the hedonistic pagan influence these foreign women would have on the children of these mixed marriages and then on the newly reestablished community of faith.

Israel had fallen as a nation before because of this very sin.

The family and the convictions of the whole religious community were at stake.

Also, the situation in Ezra was different from that envisioned elsewhere, for in Ezra pagan wives were involved.

These marriages were wrong from the outset – Deuteronomy 7:1-4

In the New Testament, Jesus plainly teaches that divorce is not God's will:

Matthew 19:6, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Especially in our times when irresponsibility and selfishness are often renamed "individual freedom," the sanctity and permanence of marriage must be emphasized.

Yet Matthew 19:9 and I Corinthians 7:11, 15 recognize that in certain cases divorce will occur. That is reality.

Here in Ezra we have a totally different situation.

Foreign women were married contrary to the law of God.

And the key word of vs. 11 (Ezra 10:11) is “separate”

Separation shows repentance

Separation shows obedience

Separation shows loyalty to God

The people of God are to be a separated people.

It is a sin for people to live together or to have physical intimacy together before marriage. Amen.

If a Christian is involved in this and he wants to be right with God, he must confess and separate himself.

Vs. 11 – Confession means to praise God – to give thanks to God

Lets see what happens after Ezra’s decree

Vs. 12

This verse describes the reaction of the congregation.

They agreed with Ezra.

Their approval was given loudly - acknowledging their need to do something about the situation.

The crowd agreed with the decision and promised to obey.

It is true that only the sinner who confesses can truly praise God “and do His will” (pleasure, delight) vs. 11.

If we want to hold onto our sin – we cannot please God!

Genuine repentance is always related to obeying God’s commands, which indicate his will.

Now, Ezra is preaching and teaching the Word of God.

Everything must be done according to the Word of the Lord.

This means that there must be a prior acknowledgement by the people of the authority of scripture.

“What saith the scripture” should be the starting point on all decision-making.

It should settle every question.

A church cannot function successfully if the people of the church do not bind themselves under the authority of the Word of God

Then in that same congregation, leaders must be in place who are able to bring the Scriptures to bear on the particular issue that may have arisen. This is crucial.

And quite honestly, such men are few and far between—Biblical decision-makers – men and women who understand the times – know what we ought to do

There is a pressing need for leaders to arise who are giving themselves to the reading and study of the Word of God – spiritually-minded men and women!

But, we must take into consideration the circumstances

In handling sticky situations, there are always hurdles in eradicating the sin problem.

Vs. 13

First, the people gathered there were a large crowd, and it would take a long time to organize the crowd.

Remember that everyone was called to this meeting – vs. 7-8 – and given three days to get to it.

Second, it was raining cats and dogs – vs. 9 – and they were standing out in the open without any protection

Third, a great number of cases had to be decided and the work couldn't be done in a day or two.

Fourth, some of the cases might be problematical.

Here comes a solution – vs. 14

Vs. 14

Once again, Ezra was given counsel by others, and he accepted it.

Blessed is the leader who has open ears to the ideas of others!

Ezra was open to reason and the initiatives of others.

It was suggested that Ezra empower the committee of priests and Levites to work with the leaders of the tribes and leaders of the towns and let them determine who was guilty and come at an appointed time to rectify it.

Let all things be done decently and in order.

Vs. 14c

The proposals were concluded with a motivated clause, namely, the important aspect that the anger of God must be averted.

Let us not think that God does not get angry with us in our sin.

Sometimes we behave as if God doesn't exist or God doesn't care.

He does – He will drop the hammer!

Vs. 15

Four men who dissented – who didn't like it

Now our first thought would be that they had foreign wives – that is not true.

They are not listed amongst the sinners.

What they stood against was the plan, the way, the mode of operation in settling the sinful problem.

From all that I can see in the Hebrew, these four guys were for quicker action regarding the sin.

Do you know what this teaches us?

In dealing with things Biblically, sometimes the way we go about it brings the ire of believers.

Vs. 16-17

Ten days after the rainstorm and plan of action were decided, Ezra and the leaders sat down together and began to investigate the matter.

Three months later, in March 457 B.C., their work was finished.

They completed it by the first day of the new year.

It must have been a difficult job to do, but they persisted with the help of the Lord.

They discovered 110 offenders, including 27 priests, Levites, people you would have expected to be models of obedience.

Vs. 18

The family of “Jeshua” (v. 18) was an important family; Jeshua was co-leader with Zerubbabel in Ezra 2:2 during the first return under Cyrus. Eli – worthless son Samuel

When spiritual leaders begin to sin – when leadership gets soft – the rest of the body doesn’t stand a chance.

It doesn’t take long for other people to follow.

The priests are mentioned first because there was a greater trespass; greater privilege brings greater responsibility.

To whom much is given, much is required.

Eighty years before, nearly 50,000 Jews had returned, and during the ensuing years, the people surely multiplied.

The total number of offenders was probably less than 1 percent of the residents.

However, it's better to deal with these matters when the numbers are low, because the longer you wait, the more the sin will spread.

Even one offender is one too many

When the Church begins to blink at sin, it gives the green light to others.

Ecclesiastes 9:18b, “. . . but one sinner destroyeth much good.”

Vs. 24

Only one singer and three gatekeepers were involved.

You know what that means – one choir member and three ushers involved

That such delicate matters should have been so successfully unraveled, demonstrates the wisdom given to Ezra and to those who sat with him.

Vs. 19

The guilty ones promised to put away their heathen wives, and they offered sacrifices to seek God's forgiveness

“They gave their hands,” that is a handshake

Beginning in vs. 18-43, the chapter closes with a long list of persons who had been found guilty of the sin.

The Book of Ezra opens in Chapter 2 with a list of the names of the Jewish heroes who willingly returned to the land to serve the Lord.

The book ends with a list of the sinners who disobeyed God but publicly made it right with the Lord and the people.

But “making it right” didn’t automatically heal every wound or remove every pain.

There are consequences.

It’s easy to pull the nails out of the board, but it’s impossible to pull out the holes that they leave behind.

Ezra 10:44

This verse tells a sad story, does it not?

Some of the marriages produced children

We are not told what was done for these families.

Most likely they would return to their own families.

We simply lack the knowledge of what was customary.

But what we saw was a humble praying leader, a willing people to come under the

Word, and a faithful and courageous committee working together to accomplish a difficult task.

What an example for the church to follow today!

On this painful note (vs. 44), the story of Ezra’s ministry breaks off.

Ezra’s mission was to apply the law to his people (7:10), and the law brings the knowledge of sin.

And when the Word of God comes on us – confess, repent, and praise God

What we do with our sins tells us:

What kind of church we have

What kind of people we are

Ezra Sermon #27

“A Farewell to Ezra”

We are dealing with a special group of people in this book – a remnant of Jews

The people that remain after the Babylonian Exile

In this book, what is the first thing we see them doing? Returning.

The remnant is returning to their land – Israel

Folks, what do you think is the enduring challenge of this book?

After God has restored us, let us not go again to the chains that bind us.

Jesus healed a man at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus ran into the man later at the Temple and Jesus said in John 5:14, “Sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee.”

What does God want us to fasten on to coming out of this book?

Don’t repeat our sins after God has so graciously restored us, forgiven us and cleansed us.

It is not difficult to see why this book is called a book of recovery.

It begins with recovery from Babylon (first under Zerubbabel, and later under Ezra).

They recovered again after the work had stopped by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah.

And finally, it records the sin faced by Ezra and the gracious recovery that God gave through the intercession of His servant.

Before we leave Ezra, I have to tie up one loose end.

Ruth 1:4 – Moab (tell the story), 1:15, 3:11, 4:22

Ruth is King David's great grandma – she can be found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:5.

Ezra 9:1

Ezra 6:21

God is good – isn't He?

God is the whosoever God

The story of Nehemiah starts 13 years later.