

Bible Study - May 6, 2020

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 May 2020

Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

[0 : 0 0] Good evening everybody. Welcome to our Wednesday Night Bible Study. Good to see you again. We're continuing our look at the book of Ezra. So if you want to turn to Ezra, last week we actually started with Ezra and what we found is we had King Cyrus, who was the Persian king. And Persia at the time had a huge empire. It was stretched from India to the shores of Greece, all the way down to Egypt. It was the largest empire of its day.

And Cyrus believed that it was best to have people have their own local customs, their own local religions, and to encourage that and that that would make people happy and then you wouldn't have to worry about having so much trouble in the empire. So he told the Jews that they could go back to Israel and that they could rebuild their temple. And he even helped them in the effort and in the process. So some of the Jews stayed in Persia and some of them stayed in the Babylonian area.

Some stayed in Susa, the capital of the empire at the time, like Queen Esther. Others went back to rebuild the temple. Now I had talked about this last week that the people that had actually been taken into captivity by the Babylonians were the most noble or the ones that had the highest education or the most potential. And they were the people that were taken by the Babylonians into captivity to make the capital of Babylon into a center for all the best knowledge and the best wisdom and the best understanding and the best quality people. And then they took the people that were left in the lands and they mixed them all up. And that way you didn't have quite so much local territorialism, so to speak.

That's what the Babylonians thought. Now the Persians are saying, go ahead and go back and have your own culture. So when these people came back from Babylon, what they found was they found that there was a group of people back there that had kind of mixed together with all sorts of other folks. Some people had moved in, some people had moved out, they had gone off into captivity. And in the meantime, they had changed some of their customs. They still worshiped God, but they worshiped God in a different way. They still had a lot of the same rules and customs, but not all of them, because they had kind of mixed some of the traditions and some of the ideas that other people have brought in into the population. We know what that's like in our country, where we mix different cultures from all over the world to make what we call the American culture, which is really a combination of many different ideas. So when these people came back, they saw themselves as not only the wisest, the smartest, the most noble, the best educated, the top of the list.

One was even called the prince of Judah. They saw themselves as the best of the best. They not only saw that they were in their minds a better class or ability of people, but they also felt that they had kept their bloodlines pure, because when they went off to captivity, they didn't mix with the people in Babylon. They didn't mix too much with the people in Susa.

[3 : 26] And so they had kept their heritage and their culture a little more distinct from the people around them. So what happened in the first few chapters is they started to work on trying to build the temple. And the people in the surrounding areas who also worshiped God in that area contributed to the effort, and they contributed wealth. They contributed money, which the people coming back from Babylon readily received. But then they wanted to participate. They actually wanted to do some of the work. They wanted their hands to be the hands that helped build the temple of God.

Well, the people who had come back from Babylon, the people who come back from captivity, felt that somehow, well, they really didn't belong working on God's house. They weren't quite good enough, quite pure enough, quite, well, Jewish enough. And so they told them no.

And that started a heritage of frustration and difficulty between these two cultures that went on past the day of Jesus. So the people that were living there that wanted help out were told no. And so instead, they decided they would oppose this effort to rebuild God's temple.

And they became known in the Bible as a group of people we refer to as the Samaritans. Now, we think of the Good Samaritan, but the Jewish people thought there was no such thing as a Good Samaritan.

They were all people that didn't measure up. They were all people you didn't want to associate with. They were all people that came from the wrong side of the river. So that started a whole struggle that went on for quite a while. And in fact, some people would say that one of the primary reasons Jesus needed to come was to remind the Jewish faith that the belief in God that they were given was for the whole world, that they were meant to be a kingdom of priests, to share the grace of God with everyone, and not to hold it to themselves as some sort of special privilege that they felt that they had.

[5 : 48] So even at this point in time, things changed. Because before this, there are a lot of people that called themselves Israelites, that called themselves Jews, because they had adapted what the Jewish people believed. But after this point, people would trace specific bloodlines, and it was a lot harder to convert to Judaism than it had been in previous generations. So this began more of an exclusive idea of the faith. So we're studying this because I'm looking at different passages that come to us from the period that we call the exile. Now, sometimes it's the Old Testament exile, but we've looked at New Testament exiles like the Apostle John when he was on the island of Patmos, or Paul when he was in prison in Rome. This is the exile that happened when the children of Israel carried off after being disobedient to God. And now they're returning. And we're going to look at Ezra and most likely Nehemiah as we look at our return. How did they return? What can we learn from them? So you should by that amount of time have found the book of Ezra. It's in the Old Testament, and you can look it up in the table of contents if you wish. We read the first four chapters, and we're at the place now where the children of Israel are rebuilding the temple, but the people around them have sent letters to the king. And there's a new king now. They've gone through a couple of emperors. And at this point in time, they have a new king called king, Adorexes. And Adorexes didn't follow all the ideas of Cyrus. And what he did was he looked it up in the records, as he was reminded to do, and found that the people that lived in Jerusalem had been a difficult people to the nations around them for centuries, and in fact had created their own empire. And so he said, maybe we shouldn't be so quick about giving these people back their kingdom.

So in chapter 5, it says, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Edo, prophesized to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Now, prophecy is a word that we see in the Old Testament that really means to tell forth the word of God. Some people associate it with preaching, which it can be. Some people think preaching is more teaching, but prophecy is a little something more because it's to understand things that most people don't truly see, but we see them because God has given us what's called vision, or an ability to see what he is revealing to us. Most powerful knowledge, we've talked about this before, that comes to us, comes as it's revealed from God to us. So these people are prophesying, which means that they are showing the people, but they otherwise didn't necessarily see what wasn't quite so obvious that God wanted them to hear. And they're preaching specifically to the people who are Jewish that are living in Judah and

Jerusalem. But all prophecy also carries down through the generations to us. Then Zerubbabel, son of Shittiel, and Joshua, son of Josedek, set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem.

And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them. So even though they had this struggle with the people outside of their community, within their community, they were of one mind. In the book of Acts, it says that the people were all together one day on the day of Pentecost, 50 days from Jesus' ascension. And as they were sitting there, all together in one place, the Holy Spirit came on them.

The power of God is much stronger in our community when we are of one mind, working towards what we believe God wants us to do. And even though they weren't so open to the people around them, at least they were not in a struggle with each other. At that time, Tettine, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shintar Bozene and their associates went to them and asked, who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it? Where's your work permit? That happens today, doesn't it? There's always a government official looking for a work permit. Now they have two reasons for that. One is because they want to make sure it's being built right and that it was authorized by the people in charge, but also because usually they want to collect a fee of some sort, right? They also asked, what are the names of those who are constructing this building? We want to know who's doing this, right? But the eye of their

[11 : 01] God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received. So now we have a new king. This is the king of King Darius.

We've had Cyrus and now we had King Exerxes and now we have King Darius. And so they've sent to the king to say, what should happen here? Should we stop these people or should we let them build? Now, interestingly, they didn't stop the people. They just wanted to make sure that this was authorized.

Oftentimes when time passes, we forget what we were arguing about. And sometimes we make enough peace that we can move forward.

And so the officials at this point don't know why they're stopping these people. They've forgotten and they're not even sure why they're building in the first place. So in verse six, it says, this is a copy of the letter that Tatenei, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shenthar-Bozenei and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to King Darius.

The report they sent to him read as follows. To King Darius, cordial greetings. Always good to butter up the king. The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God. Call it the great God. The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is being carried out with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction. You do know a building's going up, right? We questioned the elders and asked them, who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it? We also asked them their names so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information. And this is the answer they gave us.

[13:00] We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. And we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. So that's what they're saying. We're actually just building something that was already here. If I want to replace even the joists and the floorboards of my porch out at the lake, that's not hard. I can do that. I don't even need a permit.

But if I want to add a little shed to the side of my building, I need special permits. Replacing things that were already there is a lot easier than building something new. So they're saying it was already here. In verse 2, but because of our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon. So they're talking about the exile. However, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. He even removed from the temple of Babylon, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon. Then King Cyrus gave them to a man named Shishbazar, whom he had appointed governor. And he told him, take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God on its site. Now, that's just a recap of what actually happened in the beginning. That's exactly what he did. The king Cyrus said, go and do this, go build it on that site. And so they went and started doing what the king had authorized them to do.

The Bible often repeats a story again and again and again. And that way it gets in our mind. We hear it. We understand it. We remember it. So this Shishbazar came and laid the foundation of the house of God in Jerusalem. From that day to the present, it has been under construction, but it is not yet finished.

Building a temple takes a long time. We built our church in less than a year. Many churches will take a couple, two or three years to build. And building a cathedral in Europe took hundreds of years.

The house of God, the temple took many, many years. Now, if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter. Now, they're leaving out the whole part about King's exorcism saying, no, we don't want this group to do this. They're just kind of going past him. But like I said, when people have been away from something for a while, or they come from a different region, which these leaders seem to be doing. They're, they're, how do I describe it?

[16:08] The governor in this case that they've referred to Shishbazar was a governor of a small region, which would be more like the size of maybe Erie County or even Erie and Niagara County. Whereas this leader is ruling an entire region, which is more like the governor of New York state type of a thing.

And now they're writing to, in our context, somebody would be like sitting in the seat of the president. But we've had people changing through the years. King Darius then issued an order and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon. A scroll was found in the citadel of Ekbenah and the province of Media, and this was written on it. And the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem. Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices and let its foundations be laid. It is to be 60 cubits high and 60 cubits wide. Now that's about 90 feet, roughly. Okay. We're in chapter six, if you're just joining us of the book of Ezra. And we're in verse four.

It will have three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. King's going to pay for it. Also, the gold and silver articles of the household of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, after we returned to their places in the temple of Jerusalem, there to be deposited in the house of God. So again, this is a retelling of what we've already read in chapter one or two of the book of Ezra. So we're just reminding ourselves of what was said that King Cyrus had authorized this whole work to begin. But now they have a new king, King Darius, and this is after a king in the middle. So it's been a bit of time.

Now then, Titadani, governor of Trans-Euphrates and Shetharbozene and you, other officials of that province, stay away from there. Mind your own business. Do not interfere with the work of this temple and of God, this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site. Okay? So they're given clear orders. Stay away from these people.

They've been authorized. Even though they weren't authorized by Darius, he respects what was done by his predecessor, Cyrus. Because we build, like we talked about this last week, we build on the shoulders of the people that come before us. We're lifted up by what they've done. And usually, there's a lot to be learned and a lot to be gained by building on the past instead of trying to fight against it. Moreover, in verse 8, it says, Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews and the construction of this house of God. Not only are you not going to harass them, but, he says, their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates so that the work will not stop.

[19:37] So I don't know if you caught what he said. Don't harass them. Don't bother them. Leave them to do their work. And I want you to pay for that out of the money that I normally would collect from you.

Out of your taxes. You pay for it. In verse 9, Whatever is needed, young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem, must be given them daily without fail. Daily. That's a lot. That's a lot coming from the king. So that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven, and pray for the well-being of the king and his son. So you see what his intention is, what his purpose in supporting this effort is, is that he wants to make sure that God blesses him. Now we have nothing right now that would indicate to us that Darius necessarily believed in this God as the one and only God. Back then many people were believed in multiple gods, but he did believe that there was a God and a powerful God that was centered in this temple in Jerusalem. And he wanted the blessing of that God.

I, Darius, have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence. Oh, I'm sorry. I skipped an entire section, didn't I? Going back to verse 11. Furthermore, I thought that came up abruptly. Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. Whoa!

And for this crime, their house is to be made a pile of rubble. So not only if you don't listen to my orders, am I going to kill you, but I'm going to destroy your house too. I'm going to destroy your heritage for your family.

That's tough. That's real tough. May God, who has caused his name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. Then he says, I, Darius, have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence. So now they have the full support of the king. These officials were wise. And the reason I say that is they could have tried to stop the work, but instead they said, let's check with the king. Let's make sure we're not in trouble. Let's not just make the decision ourselves. We're going to have decisions to make as we open up our world again, as we start to go back to life and what we're going to do, as our church goes back to doing what it was called to do. We're going to have to make some decisions. In the process, we want to make sure we're asking a lot of different people so that it doesn't come down to the wisdom of one person or even a couple people. Because the wisest of people are not going to have as much wisdom as the entire group of people or the crowd might have. So we'll ask our leadership. We'll check to see what our governor is doing. We'll look at the county statistics. We'll consider what people want and what we should do. Because that's just smart. And they were smart. If they had gone the other way, they might have found themselves with a beam pulled out of their house. And they would have been impaled on it and their house would have been destroyed. Not what they want to have happen. So always check, especially with people that have power over you. In verse 13, it says,

[23 : 36] Then because of the decree King Zarius had sent to Tenei, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shithar Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, a descendant of Edo.

They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Adizaxus, kings of Persia. Now, King Adoraxus actually seems to have not been so much in favor of this temple. But he's still listed because it's a tradition. And they're trying to show that this was something that has been going on for a long time and was supported by everybody who was the king of Persia, basically.

The temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Then the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. So now the temple is built. Somebody asked me the other night, was this the temple that Jesus was in? Is this a temple that was destroyed in 70 AD?

This is the beginnings of it. It's the foundations of it. It was kind of, I hate to say it this way, but it's kind of a crummy little temple. They didn't have a lot of money. I know the king was providing money, but not of the same glory as the temple that occurred under Solomon, who had an entire empire to use those resources. Or later, this temple that was rebuilt under Herod into something much more glorious and dynamic and amazing.

And so the temple that Jesus was in was started with this temple, but it wasn't completed that way. It was an expanded and renovated and much more amazing temple. But anyways, they had a temple temple and they celebrated it, the dedication with joy, with joy. It is a great joy to celebrate the dedication of the house of God. I've had that opportunity. And we do celebrate when we know that what God is wanting to do in our lives comes to fruition. In verse 17, for the dedication of this house of God, they offered a hundred bulls, 200 rams, 400 male lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, 12 male goats, one for each of the tribe of Israel.

[26 : 39] And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the book of Moses. Now that, that last part we'll talk about first. In the book of Moses, there were certain priests assigned to certain duties.

They had certain things they did so that the temple worship would reflect the worship that happens with God in heaven. Before that, they were talking about all these sacrifices. We don't do animal sacrifices today in our religion. In fact, we believe that the sacrificial system was done away with once and for all when Jesus became our sacrifice. And so that's why sometimes when we talk about our salvation being by the blood of the lamb, Jesus being the lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world.

But first, let's, let's go back and look at the sacrificial system. This is a huge amount of animals, really is, bulls and, and goats and sheep and just all sorts of things.

The original sacrificial system was based on the idea that I would make what it sounds like a sacrifice. I would bring a gift to God. And the better, more expensive gifts back then were animals, the better animals of their flocks. Now, some people couldn't afford that and they brought what was called a grain offering and poor people brought a couple little birds or something. But if you were wealthy and you had had the capacity and the ability to, you were expected to bring a goat or a sheep or a lamb or even a bull, which would be a much bigger sacrifice. Because the very fact that you're willing to give that up because you believed that a God would forgive your sins because of it, but also be that, that God, how do I say this, that God recognizes the sacrifice you're making. So the sacrifice was the proof of their faith. It was their faith that made the sacrifice effective, but the actual gift itself was the proof of it.

If we had a faith where we just talk about God, but we don't do anything, we don't give anything of our time, of our, of our wealth, of who and what we are, then it's, it's, it's really kind of a very thin faith. A lot of people say they have some kind of belief in something, but we really put our resources behind what we believe in. So if we really believe in our family, we put, we put time and effort to make that family successful. If we believe in our work, we put time and effort and even money into trying to make that work. That's faith. That's belief. The sacrifice is the proof of it. So it proved their faith and their faith is what forgave their sins. Much the same as what it is for us today. We believe in the sacrifice of Jesus. We commit our lives to following him as Lord. We're willing to give up who and what we are to follow Jesus and he forgives our sin and it becomes effective.

[30 : 19] Now, the interesting thing that it also did was it took people who were kind of poor and it gave them some meat to eat. Now we're talking about having possible meat shortages. There's plenty of animals out there that just can't get them from there, the farm fields to, to the table. Now where we have a cottage at Silver Lake, they raise all that livestock in that area and when I went to their grocery stores, they've got tons of meat. I shouldn't tell you that. You'll be driving out there because there's plenty of food out by the farms. It's just getting it from the farm to our grocer.

So people are talking about having a vegetarian meal, having a diet that just wouldn't include as much meat. Studies have shown you really only need to eat a very small portion of meat, maybe a couple times a week for health. But we tend to feel we need to eat more than that. The people in the biblical days didn't have access to meat. It was expensive. So largely they ate bread and they ate bread and they ate bread. And sometimes they get a few vegetables thrown in or something like that. But meat was a rare commodity that most of them could not afford. And most of them ended up going without.

But when they went to the temple and all these offerings are occurring, now you need to understand a bowl. Oh my gosh, my, my parents, when I was young, they, they used to have the food delivered because my mother had polio. And so they'd have a, a, a half a cow, half a cow delivered. Half a cow would fill our freezer. This is not just a whole animal. A bull is bigger than a cow. It's a lot of meat. One person's not going to eat that.

One person is not going to eat the meat from 400 male lambs or 200 rams. It's just not going to happen. So what they're going to do is they're going to take all that meat that they've, that they've gathered.

And basically they're going to have a giant barbecue. What they would do is they would cook the meat and they distribute it out to all the people. So it was an opportunity in a way that God made for the people of God to get a healthy meal once in a while by having some meat provided.

[32 : 45] So these people are installed and now the worship experience of God has been reinstated. It had been decades, decades since they had been able to go and worship God properly.

And I think we're having a conversation around communion the other day. How do we do communion now? How could we do communion? Is there a way we could do it if we can't have church? How long are we going to go without being able to come to the table of the Lord? I don't have an answer for that. But I can tell you these people were overjoyed when they had that opportunity. And I think we'll be filled with joy.

When we have that opportunity again, it means a lot to us to be able to do it the right way. In verse 19, it says, on the 14th day of the first month, the exile celebrated the Passover.

The 14th day of the first month. Now, I don't know how this all works. It's got something to do with the moons. After the 14th day of the second moon after the first equinox. I don't know. Something like that is how we know when Passover is. And when we know when Passover is, we know when Easter is. Because Easter and Passover go together on the calendar. It says so in the scripture that happened.

All the holy drama that happened in that last week happened during the week leading up to Passover. So now they're celebrating Passover. Once again, the traditions and the customs. Imagine you can't celebrate Easter. Imagine you can't celebrate Christmas. I had somebody say that to me. They said, my daughter, she said, you missed Christmas Eve service because you're sick and now you missed Easter too. Well, I didn't miss it. We were together. But it's not the same. It's not the same.

[34 : 51] Passover, for the Jewish people, what it really meant was the passing over by the angel of death. The angel of death was sent to Egypt and when the people of Israel were living there, God told the people of Israel to take the blood of the lamb and put it on the doorstep. And then the angel of death would pass over that house. Well, this is like an ending has ended. They're back. For us, it'll be when the ending has ended and we can be back.

And so Passover is a time of salvation of God getting concluding the end of a very dark period. The priest and the Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean.

That's kind of an odd thing, but being ceremonially clean is different than just like washing your hands, which is good to do. It prevents the germs and the COVID, right? But ceremonially clean means that they have prepared themselves for that time of worship. Every week before I engage in worship, I take certain amount of time in prayer with God. It's just important. It's important to prepare ourselves.

If you prepare yourself before you come to worship, if you prepare yourself before you come to a Bible study, if you prepare yourself for God, you'll receive God in a much more powerful way. So they were clean, they were ready, they were prepared. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for the exiles, for their relatives, the priests, and for themselves.

So the Levites slaughtered the lamb and prepared it for everybody. Now they're not all going to eat very much from that little lamb, but they will from all the other sacrifices. So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel. So we're getting a little clue there, aren't we? Let's stop for a minute. Because what they're saying is, is that there were people from the surrounding community that were allowed to be part of their religious experience, but they had to be willing to put aside the pagan practices and fully embrace God. We call it sanctification, to grow more and more like God. When we give our lives to Christ, we don't stay the same person. Now in this case, they they may have separated a bit much because it left the other people behind, left them out completely. But if people are going to be part of the family of God, they have to not only expect, but be willing to change.

[38 : 03] So they did have people in the community that were willing and capable of living the way that they had expected and wanted them to. In verse 22, it says, For seven days they celebrated the joy, with joy, the festival of unloving bread. Because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria. So that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

So they're celebrating because of the Passover. They're celebrating because they get to worship again. They're celebrating because God made a way when there seemed to be no way.

God will make a way where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see. He will make a way for me and for you. Chapter seven. You ready? Let's get another one done if we can. It says, After these things, during the reign of Adarzerxes king of Persia, Azra, son of Saraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shelom, the son of Zadok, the son of Atab, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meroth, the son of Zeroyim, the son of Uzzi. And it continues. Okay.

It says, The son of Aaron, the chief priest. This came up from Babylon. These are the people who came from Babylon. Ezra was a teacher well-versed in the law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked for the hand of the Lord, his God was on him.

If God is with us, even the kings of this world, even those who aren't necessarily following God, God will turn their hearts so that there's a benefit towards what we're trying to do.

[40 : 13] Some of the Israelites, including priests, the Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Adorazaxes. This is happening over a period of time.

It's a little confusing because they don't always get the schedule in an orderly way. When we write a book, we usually, at the end of writing a book in our culture, we'll get what's called an editor. The editor will read through the book and look for things that are out of place, inconsistencies. Because sometimes as you're telling a story, you might bounce back a few years and don't even realize you did it. It just comes up because it reminds you of that and it can get confusing.

In the Jewish faith, they just wrote down what they wrote down. In verse 11, it says, This is a copy of the letter King Adorazaxes had given to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord for Israel.

Adorazaxes, King of Kings, to Ezra the priest, teacher of the law of the God of Heaven. Greetings. Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests, Levites, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. You are sent by the king and his seven advisors to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the law of your God which is in your hand.

Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisors had freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem. Together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. That's a lot of money. It even says in verse 17, with this money be sure to buy bulls, rams, male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

[42 : 28] Now, this is what the king is saying. There's a little confusion. And sometimes I get a little confused. And if I have, I apologize if you're that much of a history buff.

We have King Cyrus and we have King Eterozoxes and we have King Darius. It appears that King Darius and King Eterozoxes served at the same time in certain places at certain points in history.

Maybe one was the emperor and one was a regional king. I'm not really sure. I'd have to go back and study it. And I apologize that I didn't do that before I started this study because I have read it before. And it seems to me that one is a king in the capital of Persia and one is more of a regional king. Darius, the more regional king and Eterozoxes took over from Cyrus, the great king of Persia.

Or others have said, maybe these are the same people with two different names. Because we have that too in the Bible. Same person can have two different names.

So anyways, this is a copy of the letter King Eterozoxes had given to Ezra, the priest, a teacher of the law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees, the Lord of Israel. In verse 12, chapter 7, it says, wow.

[43 : 52] Yeah, I'm right. I'm sorry. Adorazaxi, king of kings, to Ezra, the priest, teacher of the law of God of heaven. Greetings. Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. You are sent by the king and his seven advisors to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the law of your God, which is in your hand. Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisors have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem. Together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and the priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. With this money, be sure to buy bulls, rams, and male lambs together with their grain offerings and drink offerings and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem. I'm reading through this pretty quickly because it's really a recap of what's happened, which is why it felt like we stepped back in time, but it's really a recap of what's going on. You and your fellow Israelites may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold in accordance with the will of your God. Deliver to the God of

Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. And verse 20, and anything else needed for the temple of your God that you are responsible to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury. This would be very, very generous. Now I, King Xerxes, decree that all of the treasures of trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest and the teachers of the law of God of heaven may ask of you, up to a hundred talents of silver and a hundred cores of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit, which we don't think much about salt because we think it's common. We have it all over our house, but salt in the ancient days especially was a rare commodity and we need salt to live and survive. So that's actually a very generous offer, not to mention that that this amount of silver and gold is in the tons, tons of silver and gold. This is very generous, a lot of a lot of product that he's offering. Verse 23, whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should his wrath fall on the realm of the king and of his sons? So King Xerxes is concerned that he's going to be cursed because God would be upset that his temple was destroyed. Now, as I said, he may believe in many gods, but he doesn't want any gods working against him. So he wants that God to bless him and he gives what he can to make it a blessing. I went to a church in Pittsburgh once and it's huge. It's the size of an entire city block. It's like three stories tall, a massive facility. And it's my understanding they have like three or four hundred million dollars in the bank. So actually, if nobody gave any money to that church ever again, it would go on forever. It was, um, it was endowed by the Heinz family, but even more so the Mellon family, because the story goes that when Mr. Mellon went to his pastor, he said, I want you to build a church. Here's a check, fill in the figure for whatever you need.

Whatever you need. The proverbial blank check. I can't even imagine. I can't even imagine having the wealth to do whatever it is that God would want. Now, these people are building a temple.

And they fell in Pittsburgh was building a temple or a church is what we would call it. These are the buildings of God and they're very expensive and they're very needed. And we have a building and buildings are expensive. They cost us a lot of money. It's still costing us money into the future as the people in the future help to pay for the built building that they're using. So this is expensive. But imagine if we had a blank check to do whatever we needed to, to just spread the word of God. If people were so concerned about being blessed by God that they just said, whatever it takes, it's not going to be a blank check. And they had the ability to do that. Now, I know we don't have people in our church, I don't think, that could write a blank check. I can't write a blank check.

Right? But could you imagine we have people in our culture that are multi-billionaires. What kind of check could they write for the work of God? Would they do it? In the meantime, where are we? You know, we've been talking about sacrifices and the gifts we make. And the question is, what sacrifice are we making in our lives and our actions and who are what we are in our gifts and our abilities and even in our wealth for the work of God? Because we want to be blessed. Most people want to be blessed by God, but they don't want to do what God wants. And why should God bless what you want to do? God blesses what he wants us to do. So anyways, this is just fascinating because this is a very wealthy, very powerful man using his wealth and his power that he believes was given to him by God to do the work of God. And sometimes, you know, it's hard for people to talk about what could be done with resources like this. I don't know what it would be like if I had the opportunity to share with somebody who was a multi-billionaire about the work of God and what's needed. I really don't know.

[50 : 16] If they said, Tom, what do you need? I don't know what the answer would be. It's an amazing thought. Amazing thought. It says in verse 24, you're also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute, or duty on any of the priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, temple servants, or other workers at this house of God. So we don't want you to build the temple of God by making the people who are going to work in the temple of God pay for it.

We make our contributions to God. We don't mind. And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of trans-Euphrates, all who know the laws of your God.

And you are to teach any who do not know them. So he's actually even saying that Ezra is supposed to be the one who is going to head up picking the judges and deciding what's right and wrong in this entire region. That's amazing.

Evidently, somewhere along the line, Ezra must have made a deep impression on the emperor. In verse 26, it says, Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

None of those are easy. Banishment, you're kicked out of the country. Right? Death is, well, that's plain and simple. Confiscation of your property, they take everything away.

[51 : 58] Or imprisonment. So in this case, we have what's called an established religion. It's like when Constantine converted to Christianity and told all the people in the empire they were now Christians.

An established religion is not the way of the United States. But there's a lot of countries, including even in what we call the Western world in Europe and such, where the king or queen is the head of the church.

So it can be done, but it's just not as common. So at this point in time, they're making pretty strong statements.

And this emperor seems to be promoting faith in God. Verse 27, he says, Praise be to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

In this way, and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisors and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

[53 : 12] Now again, this is a recap of what we already read. So the first few chapters, they were talking about how they went up, and now they're talking about how they went up.

It's almost like a retelling of it, and some people think it actually is a different story. But I don't think it's a different story. I just think they're telling it again from a different perspective.

And maybe the way it was written was it was written early, and then when they dedicated the temple, they decided they needed to write it down and write it again the way they understood it.

So that's what they did. I'm going to see about one more chapter. And we're going to read through the beginning of this rather quickly, okay?

Chapter 8, these are the family heads and those registered with them who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Adorazaxes.

[54 : 10] Now you notice he's saying with me. It's gone from being talking about Ezra to talking as Ezra, okay? So that's another shift that we have going on here.

And so then it talks about the descendants of Phineas, Gershom, the descendants of Ithmar, Daniel, of the descendants of David, Hattish. And it goes on to talk about all these different people who came up with Ezra to the Promised Land, back to rebuild the temple.

Now you can read them all through. They're very interesting, and you might find a good name for your new child or something. But we're going to skip right to verse 15. I assembled them at the canal that flows towards Ahava, and we camped there three days.

When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there. So I summoned Elizar, Ariel, Shmia, Elithan, Jerob, Nathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshushalem, who were leaders, and Jeorod and Elanethan, who were men of learning.

And I ordered them to go to Iddo, the leader, in Kespiah. All right. So he summoned up some people to go because they didn't have any Levites.

[55 : 37] The Levites were the priestly tribe. And when the 12 tribes of Israel were carried off into captivity, 10 were carried off early, and a lot of those people were lost in their lineage.

And two of the tribes, the ones with David and Benjamin, were Judah and Benjamin. They came later. Now, the Levites lived in all of the communities, so they would have been expected to be there.

But for one reason or another, they didn't find any Levites, any people that were essentially the workers in the religious community that wanted to go back with them.

So he sent these people. And in verse 17, he said, I ordered them to go to Iddo, the leader, in Kespiah. I told them what to say to Iddo and his fellow Levites, the temple servants in Kespiah, so that they might bring attendance to us for the house of our God.

So he sent to the Levites to ask some Levites to go. But in verse 18, Because the gracious hand of our God was on us, they brought us Shabiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mele, son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Shabiah's sons and brothers, 18 in all, and Habibiah, together with Jehara, from the descendants of Mereri, and his brothers and nephews, 20 in all.

[57 : 06] They also brought 220 of the temple servants, a body of the David, and the officials had established to assist the Levites, and all were registered by name.

So they were talking about the clans that went up, but then when they got to the Levites, they realized the Levites were missing, and they decided they couldn't do this unless they had that group of people with them, because they're supposed to be the ones that keep the holy covenant.

All right? So, anyways, in verse 22, it says, I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from the enemies on the road, because we had told the king, the gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.

So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. I trust in God, I trust in God, I trust in God, but sent a couple police cruisers to escort me.

I trust in God, but... Well, you know, one time I had a bishop say to me that we need to work as if it all depends on us and pray as if it all depends on God.

[58 : 16] Maybe that's kind of what's happening here. We sometimes feel that if we can't demonstrate a faith that may not even be rational, that somehow we don't have faith.

Because you try to make prudent and reasonable decisions in life, because you save funds for your retirement, because you don't go into dangerous areas without somebody keeping you safe, that doesn't mean you lack faith.

It might just mean that you're not foolish. Then I set apart 12 of the leading priests, namely Shabiah, Heshabiah, and 10 of their brothers, and I weighed out to them the offering of silver and gold and the articles the king, his advisors, his officials, and all Israel present there had donated for the house of our God.

I weighed out to them 650 of talents of silver, silver articles weighing 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, 20 bowls of gold valued at 1,000 direct, and two fine articles of polished bronze as precious as gold.

And you can make bronze look so nice that it's worth more than just common gold. So he's weighing this all out for the priests. I said to them in verse 28, you as well as the articles are consecrated to the Lord.

[59 : 38] Consecrated. You've been set aside for God's work. So the money and these people are. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your ancestors.

Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel. Then the priests and Levites received the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the house of our God in Jerusalem.

Now remember, this is going back. We've already had the house dedicated and now we're back before. So they're retelling what happened beforehand, before they even went off into captivity.

And what they're saying, they're just telling the story. I have a feeling that, you know, they dedicated the temple and they sat down and said, let me tell you the story about how we got here. Because that's what it seems like, okay?

And sometimes we need to tell the story. We need to share with people what our heritage and our story and what brought us to where we are is because it helps to set the stage for what our lives will be together going forward.

[60 : 47] So they've taken this money and they've entrusted it to the priest. You keep it safe. You keep it safe. In verse 31, on the 12th day of the first month, we set out for Havach Canal to go to Jerusalem.

The hand of our God was on us and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. So we arrived in Jerusalem where we rested three days. That was a long journey and they had tons of gold and silver.

And they turned out to be safe without the king's horses, without the king's soldiers because God himself looked after them. That's a good thing. On the fourth day in the house of our God, we weighed out the silver and gold in the sacred articles in the hands of Merzma, son of Uriah, the priest, Eleazar, son of Phinehas, was with him.

And so were the Levites, Shohazbed, son of Jeshu, and Adiah, son of Benu. Everything was accounted for by number and weight. The entire weight was recorded at that time.

So all the gold and all the silver that the king had given them was weighed out before they left and weighed out when they got there and it was all there. Meaning they could trust the priests and the Levites.

[62 : 02] It's a good thing. It's good that you can trust the people that are leading the church. Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the Lord of Israel, 12 bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, 77 male lambs, and as a sin offering, 12 male goats.

Those numbers are important, by the way, because we're talking about multiples of 12s and 7s and 7 is a very holy number, the completeness of God, and 12 is also a holy number.

They also delivered the king's orders to the royal satraps to the governors of Trans-Euphrates who then gave assistance to the people and to the house of God.

So we're going to end our story and our reading there tonight. Basically, they were recapping. So we had the story about going out into captivity. And then today, we saw the completion of the temple, and then they retold the story about going into, from captivity, from exile, to rebuilding the temple.

So we have this story again. Sometimes we need to tell the story again and again and again. I love to tell the story will be my theme in glory to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

[63 : 28] Because sometimes there's people who haven't even heard it. And sometimes we need to tell the story because we need to remind ourselves. So we don't get caught in the trap of becoming so much like the people around us that we lose the distinction of what makes us the people of God.

Ezra was sent by the king because the king saw God in him. And he entrusted him to build the household of God so that God would bless the king. What do we do so God will bless us and love us and live in us and change us?

Let's pray, shall we? Dear God in heaven, you have given us all things. You have given us heaven and earth. You are the king of glory. You are the king of kings. We honor you and we thank you for all the blessings you give to us.

And we ask, Lord, that you will walk beside us. You will help us always to be mindful that you are the one who shows us what we are to be, calls us to what we need to be, and then blesses us to be exactly what you want.

We thank you, Lord, for blessings. We thank you for hope. We thank you for an opportunity that we can get together in the house of the Lord, even if it's like this. Be with us and bless each of us in our needs and our concerns and our worries as we offer our prayers as Jesus did, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

[64 : 59] Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. I apologize for my occasional hesitations here and there.

You know, talking for over an hour straight without anything to drink or anything to stop, it takes a little doing. It takes sometimes a little toll on the voice. May God bless you.

May God keep you safe. May God move us out of the exile so that we can live our lives the way God intended. Go with God's blessing and go in His peace. Amen.

See you next week. Utilize and not through Joel to try.

[66 : 17] desse■■■