

# Bible Study - April 29, 2020

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good evening everybody. Welcome to our Wednesday night Bible study. We've been looking over the past few weeks at passages from different periods of exile in the Bible. We've studied Isaiah and Jeremiah. We've looked at Daniel. We even went in the New Testament and looked at the exiles with John and the exiles with Paul. Now we're going back to the Old Testament again.
- If you'd like to start looking up the book, it's the book of Ezra. Ezra is sort of middle of the Old Testament. You'll find it. Look it up in the table of contents if you need to.
- Ezra and the sister book to Ezra, Nehemiah, are the two books that talk about when the people of Israel came back from the Babylonian exile.
- And since we're right at that point where we're looking at when do we come back, when do we come out of this exile, I thought it would be a good place to start. Now tonight's is going to be a little different than in the past.
- [ 1 : 0 1 ]     In the past few weeks I've been taking a section of the Bible and finishing it. Tonight, for those of you who have attended my Wednesday night Bible study in the past, it would be more like that.
- We're going to go through a period of time together. And when we're done with about an hour or so of Bible study, we're going to have a prayer, put a conclusion on it, and say stay tuned for next week.
- That's probably what will happen. Let's see where we get to. So we're going to start in the book of Ezra in chapter 1, verse 1. It says, So let's take a quick step back.
- Cyrus was the king of Persia. The children of Israel, first in the exile when the northern kingdom of Israel fell, and then later in 586 when the southern kingdom Judah fell, were taken by the Babylonians into exile.
- They were taken to Babylon, and the people taken were the people that were considered at the time the most valuable, the most sophisticated, the best educated, the people with the sharpest minds, the people that looked the best, that seemed the best, the top of the society, the cream of the crop, were pulled out of what was then called Israel, Judah, Palestine, and taken to the capital city of Babylon.
- [ 2 : 3 7 ]     This is what's referred to in the modern age as a brain drain, to take the people that would best help the empire and bring them to the capital.
- The United States does a similar thing. We brought in people after World War II from Germany, but what we've been doing in recent years is drawing people, particularly with our university system, but also with our corporations and our wealth and our prosperous culture.
- We draw the wisest, the smartest, the best people in the world to leave their countries and come here, because here they can be utilized to fulfill the greatest dreams for both themselves and for all of the world, but particularly for the American empire.
- So the Babylonians thought the same way. Persians thought differently. The Persians thought, let's just make everybody happy. Let's let them be who they want to be.

And so long as they're loyal to the king, so long as they support the empire of Persia, we don't really care what they believe, where they live, or how they do things.

[ 3 : 49 ] Because the whole empire is our concern, not simply the capital city. So Persia had a more dispersed view of things because the Persian king saw himself as essentially the king of the world.

So he was concerned about all the regions and all the people prospering as compared to the Babylonians who thought, let's make the center city the primary capital as the most prosperous region.

So when Cyrus became king of Persia, and Persia was different, by the way, the Babylonians were centered in a region we now call Iraq. And the Persians were centered in a region we now call Iran.

We've heard of both of these in the news. They've been fighting for centuries, and they're still fighting. And we're in the midst of it now. But the Iranians, the Persians, if you will, have now taken conquest of the entire Middle Eastern region.

They've conquered everything, Turkey. They've conquered Syria. They've conquered Israel. They've conquered Iraq. They've conquered all the Gulf regions. They've conquered all the way past Afghanistan and even into parts of India.

[ 5 : 03 ] And they've even conquered parts of northern Egypt, the biggest empire in the world. And so Cyrus, who is now the new king over Persia, has made a proclamation that is going to shift the conversation of how they're going to live as the people taken into exile.

This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says. The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

Any of his people among you may go to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.

And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of the God in Jerusalem.

Now, does that mean Cyrus followed the God of Jerusalem, the God of the Bible, the God of the Hebrews?

[ 6 : 19 ] Maybe. We don't have any other historical records suggesting such a thing. In fact, what we have is we have several decrees where Cyrus made the same comment about other gods that were regionally located.

Because his idea, it appears to be, was that I'll let people worship their own local gods. And first of all, that means all these gods will support me as the high king.

But also, the people will be happy. And if the people are happy worshiping their gods, doing what they want in their own daily lives, making their own temples, every way you look at it, I come out as the winner.

So he told the people, go ahead and go home. And he told the people around there, if you want to support this, I would encourage you, build a temple for your God. Do what you think would make your God happy.

Because Cyrus saw himself as being in power because all the various deities supported his empire, including the God of the Hebrews, who he would say helped put him into power.

[ 7 : 33 ] You see, in that day and age, they believed that the God, if you will, was the one who established the power of the king. The kings were just vessels or messengers or instruments of the gods.

You know, in some ways, that's the way it was for centuries in our culture. We've been talking in my sermons about kingdom living. And in kingdom living, a king rises up from among the people to lead the people for God.

God actually establishes the king. So in the Middle Ages, in Europe, for instance, if you watch, you'll see that the church is the one who puts the crown on the king's head.

Kings don't crown themselves. Dictators do that. A king is crowned by God, chosen and established by God.

It's a different philosophy than democracy where the people choose their king. Maybe God can work through the will of the people. That's something we have to discern.

[ 8 : 40 ] And we should all express our ideas as Christians so that the political opinions of Christians are expressed in the election.

But it's not quite the same as God specifically taking one person, raising them up to be king, and then anointing them and crowning them as king.

So the coronation is always done by the religious people or in our case, the church, in their case, the priests. So Cyrus understands this concept that he's not a king because of his power.

He's a king because God has given him power. And he believes in God. He believes in a great God. He may believe in a lot of gods.

That's for a different discussion. But in this case, this means that the Israelites can go back and establish their temple and to some degree their region. Now, they couldn't establish an independent government.

[ 9 : 44 ] That would get them in trouble with Cyrus. But they could establish their own peoples, their own region, and their own temple. In verse 5, it says, The family heads of Judah and Benjamin, those were the ones from the southern tribe, and the priests and Levites, everyone whose heart God had moved, prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

Okay, now, you'll note, some people were moved to go. Some were not. Last week, we were studying about Queen Esther. Queen Esther actually was alive during this time, and she and her uncle Mordecai chose not to go back to Israel.

They felt it was better to stay in Persia. We have that now, don't we? Some people feel motivated and interested and believe that the best thing we could do would be to break out of this exile we're in and start living.

Others say, no, we need to stay in exile. It would be better for us. I'm not an epistemologist. Is that the right word? I'm not a doctor, and I don't play one on TV.

But I've heard the different arguments, and one would say, yes, we need to stay in and stay safe and make sure that we protect our small environment in our homes as best we can to keep the disease out.

[ 11 : 13 ] Others would say, for the most part, healthy people aren't harmed that much by this disease. They get sick, they get over it, and then they're immune, and they can go on to live.

So what we need to do is we need to take unhealthy people and keep them in isolation, and we need to take particularly those people who are sick and set them aside, much like they did in the ancient days when they'd take people with leprosy or other kinds of communicable diseases, and they would place them in separate living situations so the rest of the people could go about their lives in a healthy way.

We don't know, do we? We're kind of caught in between. We're trying to listen to hear what's the right way. Should we go out? When and how? We aren't going to stay like this forever.

So how do we manage this situation? Now, interestingly, of course, most of the people who are arguing that they want to stay in are the ones who seem to have a job or an ability to keep their lives going while they stay in.

So they could do something like I'm doing. Instead of doing Bible study in person, I can do it on a camera. Okay. But what if you cannot make a living unless you go out?

[ 12 : 30 ] What if you're finding your finances squeezing and little by little, your life is contracting and what you do depends on you going out? I'm not even sure that the church can remain like this.

It's working now, but how long will it work? And when will there be a need for the people to come back together as a people of God? Now, I won't be making these decisions by myself.

We have lots of experts trying to figure this out. I'm simply the one who will have to make decisions for this community. So pray for me. Pray for the wisdom of God to be in my heart so that I make the right decision.

Should we stay more like Princess Esther did, right? Queen Esther, excuse me, and stay more into the exile or should we be more like the people in Ezra here who are called to go out?

We will have to see. I know some of you have had to be going out. You can't stay in the exile. You've been working in the grocery stores and the hospitals and transportation and security and all these things to make things happen.

[ 13 : 37 ] I know that. I've had to go out. I've had to go into the midst of things that are in some ways a little frightening because it's what we have to do for our ability to function as a culture, as a society.

So these people were called by God. They didn't actually even make the decisions themselves. It says, everyone whose heart God had moved, right?

We need to really seek in our hearts and in our souls, what does God want from us? Not just with this COVID, but with everything. I became a pastor because I honestly felt the calling of God.

He spoke to me and told me to be a pastor. I didn't choose to be a pastor. I didn't even, I know some of you won't like hearing this, I didn't even want to be a pastor. But God wanted me to do this, so I set aside what I wanted to do what God wanted.

We need to look at our whole lives sometimes and say, what is it that God wants us to do with our lives? Now I'm going to give you, I know this seems a little off, but it's not. It's related to this.

[ 14 : 49 ] I'm going to give you a little word of advice. In the Bible, there's a parable called the parable of the talents, where some were given five talents, some three, and one was given one. And they were told to go out and do something with it.

The one with five came back with five more. The one with three came back with three more. The one with one hid his talent in the ground. When the owner of the vineyard came back, the one with five showed him he had ten.

He said, well done, good and faithful servant. The one with three came back with three, he said, well done, good and faithful servant. The one with one came back and said, I know you're a tough master. You harvest where you didn't plant, and you take what you want.

So here's your talent back. The master wasn't happy. He said, he should have at least put it in the bank and got an interest, .000053%, right?

You know, the truth of the matter is, is that if God has given us talent, if God has given us ability, if God has given us a calling, there's no guy with two talents who went out and tried and lost them.

[ 15 : 58 ] You can't lose if you lived what God calls you to. You have to succeed because God never fails. Now you can fail because you decided to go and do what you wanted to do, and it wasn't what God wanted to do.

We want God to bless our stuff when God has said he will bless his work. I didn't want to be a pastor, but God made my ministry into an incredibly wonderful experience, both for me and for other people.

I can't imagine that it would have been a better life if I would have chosen not to do what God wanted. But because I followed what God wanted, it changed my life and the lives of people around me.

What a great blessing. What a wonderful thing. And God can do that for you too. Now note, he called these people to go back. He called Esther to stay.

Do you follow? Well, not everybody's called to the same thing. And not everybody's going to be called to the same thing as we look at how we're going to end this exile of ours.

[ 17 : 03 ] So now it says in verse 6, all their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts in addition to all the freewill offerings.

So if you're hearing that, what's happening is, is they're going, they're willing to do the work. And now they're looking to their neighbors to help support them.

So if you have somebody who's willing to go out and do the work, who's willing to go out and make the effort, shouldn't we be the ones who help make that happen? If we're not going to go and we have the resources, we should be helping them because they're willing to take that effort, to take that risk, to do that work.

You know, years ago when I'd go and get a takeout meal in a restaurant, I might give a dollar, maybe two dollars to the person who's put my meal together. I mean, after all, they didn't do much.

They didn't wait on the table. They didn't clean off the dishes. They didn't bring me beverages. They didn't do any of that stuff, right? But now, when I go get a takeout meal, I give a larger tip.

[ 18 : 10 ] I'm not saying I necessarily give as much as I, as probably I should. But it doesn't bother me to give them five dollars or ten dollars or maybe more, depending on what they've done.

They've done the work. I didn't have to. You look in your life. Where are other people doing things for you? And you have the ability to be generous.

Now, maybe you don't. I understand. But if you do, we need to help those who are doing so much for us, right? In verse 7, it says, Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the temple of his God.

Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought by Miradeth, the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazar, the prince of Judah. The prince of Judah.

Now, they're going to give a big inventory here. We'll go through that. But here's the point. When Nebuchadnezzar had taken these items, these holy items, he took them from Jerusalem, from the God of Israel, and he put them in the temple of his God.

[ 19 : 32 ] This did two things. First of all, it stated to the world, My God's bigger than your God. Now, we know that that God was the God of the universe, right? The God of Israel. But in that day, they saw each of these little regional gods as being someone that could be conquered by their bigger God.

So it stated to the world, My God's bigger than your God. We have that today, too, don't we? People who are trying to say that God is impotent, because they could take this or take that.

But there's another thing that it did. It said that all that was holy, all that was powerful, would be taken to the capital, and therefore, all the blessings that come with it.

But you see, Cyrus sees things differently. He says, No. By bringing those items into my God's temple, I'm actually bringing a curse on my land.

If I free them to go to the temple where they were originally to be, it brings me blessings. Remember, that's what Cyrus is seeing. He's looking for blessings for his nation.

[ 20 : 43 ] Now, these things were wealthy, were symbols of wealth. This was the inventory. 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 silver pans, 30 gold bowls, 410 matching silver bowls, and 1,000 other articles.

In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and silver. Chespazar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Now, they could have just melted it down. It's silver. It's gold. You know? You could take them over to the kiosk in Sheiktawaga, and you could get money for those things, right?

But instead of melting them down, Cyrus saw that they had more value by putting them back in the temple where they honored God.

Now, think about it. A pagan king believes so much in the blessing of our God that he was willing to honor that God.

[ 21 : 56 ] Do we do that? Do we honor God as much as people who don't even have a strong belief in Him honor God? I see that sometimes.

Sometimes, we will receive a gift, or we will receive something from people who aren't even a part of our church because they see the value in pleasing God more than people who actually come to church all the time.

It's a fascinating thing that some people seek out the blessing of God more than the very people that should be seeking God's blessing. And by the way, I believe they receive it.

We're in chapter 2. It says, Now these are the people of the province who came up from captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken captive to Babylon.

They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to their own town, in the company with Zebabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Sarariah, Reliah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvi, Ruham, and Bana.

[ 23 : 11 ] Now we don't know if that Mordecai is the same Mordecai as the uncle of Esther. Maybe he did end up going or maybe this is a different man named Mordecai.

There's lots of people named the same thing. Just like Joshua is not the Joshua who fit the battle of Jericho, right? That was hundreds of years earlier. So these are just some of the names.

The list of the men of the people of Israel, the descendants, and then they go through and they list a whole lot of people. Hundreds and hundreds of people. In fact, that add up to thousands of people from various different towns and villages and places and it will describe them as the descendants of Solomon or the gatekeepers of the temple or the descendants of Shula, Atmar, and Talman or the temple servants and descendants of the servants of Solomon in page, or verse 58.

All right? The descendants of Delilah, Tobiah, and Nakoda in verse 60 and from among the priest. In verse 61, it describes some different people to the descendants of Hobiah, Hasgaz, Bezerzila, a man who had married a daughter of Bezerzila, the Giladite, and was called by that name.

All right? These are a lot of people. A lot of people. Different people. Why do we need all these names? Why does it matter? Because these names are connected. They're connected to the people who went down into exile and they're connected to the people who come down the line from them.

[ 24 : 54 ] Sometimes, I don't think we look at our heritage as well as we should. We build our lives on the backs of those who went before us.

They lifted us up and then we lift others up. We're not just one little moment in time. We're a continuum of a history that's been going on for thousands of years.

And what we do now is going to matter tremendously to the people who come after us and it matters to the people who came before us. Even in this return from exile.

we need to consider how are we caring for the people who are most vulnerable who are largely the people who came before us. And how are we going to make sure that what we leave is a healthy and a good and viable situation for the ones who are too young or too vulnerable to protect themselves.

How do we do it? Well, the main way we do it is by not seeing ourselves as disconnected from all of this. but seeing ourselves as part of a continuum.

[ 26 : 09 ] Yes, we need to get to here but not at the cost of destroying what's here or what's here because in doing that we write off our past and we destroy our future.

We're a part of the whole connection together. Each and every one of us and even people who may not be able to come out because of health reasons have a way of giving to those who are coming out so that there will be a place for all of us in the future.

How do we do this? What's the way? Stay connected to the whole, the continuum and they did that and they were very good about putting this down. In verse 6, I'm not going to read all of it and mostly because these guys aren't named Bill and Sally and George.

These names are hard to read and I'm going to get them all wrong and you're going to go, he doesn't even know how to pronounce them and you'd be right. I don't know how to pronounce all the names in the Bible and you don't have to either. Just say it with authority and people will believe you that that's the way you say gibar.

That's the way you say heshem. That's the way you say darkon. Maybe it is, maybe it's not. In verse 62, it says, these search, oh by the way, just a little side note since we're in a Bible study.

[ 27 : 26 ] In Hebrew, there weren't any vowels. So when we read a name like darkon, you have to take out the A and the O. So it's we don't know what it was.

Somebody put some vowels in there so we could understand it. These searched for their family records but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.

Isn't that interesting? They were excluded because they didn't have a family record. They weren't connected. Their priesthood back then was inherited.

I have an ongoing conversation with a friend of mine about whether or not there should be a priesthood today, whether there should be clergy. Clergy today are primarily a function.

We protect certain things that are sacred for the church and we commit our lives, our living, if you will, for this purpose. And so therefore, we don't work other jobs so that we can have our full commitment and devotion and you can know somebody's keeping track of this and doing this.

[ 28 : 41 ] We're not more sacred than other people. In the ancient days, a priesthood was set aside as particularly and particularly sacred.

sacred. They were actually a tribe of people that kept things holy for God. That was their life from the time they were born to the time they die.

They were considered part of the priesthood. Their entire lives was committed to that sacred effort. Now, I was ordained to a sacred commitment.

I made a sacred commitment that I would be in my 30s committed, set aside for this sacred work. But it doesn't mean it's all I do and it doesn't mean I was born a priest and even though I will likely die as a clergy person, it doesn't mean that that's all I will ever do with my life.

I'm set aside to this work and the way I sometimes put it, therefore, I don't have to work because the church has given me the financial resources to commit my entire life to this work.

[ 29 : 46 ] Now, some people, and we have some in our own ministry here, they work a different job and then they do this work more or less on the side.

That's valid too. Paul did that as a tent maker in the Bible. But some people put their entire life aside, like Peter, for instance, the great apostle who put his life aside, committed his entire life to leadership in the church and so the people took care of his needs.

We don't have a hereditary priesthood today. We have a called upon priesthood. So we're more like the prophets in the Old Testament who were called to a different type of work for sometimes a time period, maybe for the rest of their lives.

Depending on the needs of God, just like we talked about in chapter 1, people called out to do what it is that God has called them to do. So in this case, they could be a part of a priesthood if they could show that they had the right lineage, the right genealogy.

In verse 63, the governor ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there was a priest ministering with the Urim and the Thunim, which are part of the holy breads of the ancient world.

[ 31 : 17 ] So there was a question mark about whether they had proper priests, whether they had the right lineage. Sometimes there's a question about whether or not Methodists have what's called apostolic succession.

There were some people that acted in those leadership roles, and Jesus laid his hands on them called apostles. The apostles, then, they laid their hands on others that came after them, like Timothy or Titus or some of the other ones that were in the early church.

And then there were others that came after that who they laid hands on, and they were laid hands on right on through to this day. Now, some people would say that the only way that that apostolic succession could be administered is through the hands of bishops.

Others would say, no, those hands were laid in by someone who gave it to them from the people who led the church beforehand. And so, in that case, yes, I have apostolic succession.

The people who ordained me were ordained by people going back, back, back to the hands of Jesus. Maybe that matters to you.

[ 32 : 42 ] Maybe it doesn't matter to you. But I carry that lineage back to those days. So it was important to them that they had the right people and leadership in the priestly realm.

Now, remember, this is both a political and a religious effort. They are going back to reestablish the city of Jerusalem, a political entity, under a governor who is under the command of the emperor Cyrus.

You follow? They're not independent. They're under the auspices of the emperor Cyrus. But they're also a religious group who are going back as a priestly function to establish the temple in Jerusalem.

We need to get back as a community of people. We need to get back to be doing the things we do. We need to have restaurants. We need to have places we can gather together again.



We need to have people back to work and manufacturing plants. We need to have some of the entertainment things we've had and venues where you can gather. But we need to gather as the people of God.

[ 33 : 51 ] Some people say, well, you don't need a church to be a Christian. But it's really hard to live out the Christian faith without the community of faith. The Bible doesn't talk about any individual Christians, any solo Christians.

Christianity is not a solo enterprise. It's something we do together. Can we do it this way? Sure we can for a time while we're in exile. Maybe we should.

all right? But it's not the same as what happens when we gather together with the people we love and we celebrate worshiping God. Psalm 42 says, I long for the day I can go back, go back to the procession of the people of God and celebrate, celebrate, worship God.

this is sort of worship. Worship is intended to be a community and the church is meant to be a community.

So anyways, the whole company numbered 42,360 people and 7,337 male and female slaves.

[ 35 : 03 ] Hmm. And they also had 200 male and female singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, 6,720 donkeys.

So they had a whole lot of people and they had animals going. Now this thing about slavery. Slavery in the ancient days was basically an economic condition. When people were no, either that or a military thing, once in a while people were conquered and the people who had to be conquered, the conquering nation would take them as slaves and the reason was because the military of the victorious people had to pay quite an expense to have that army in the field and so they took people as slaves to pay back the cost of that military expedition.

war reparations. So oftentimes their term of slavery was for a period of years that was taken as what we would call war reparations. We put war reparations on Germany after World War I.

You might not know that. We made them pay for the war. The North put war reparations on the South after the Civil War. This has been a part of the way people have done war.

All right? In that day they did it sometimes through slavery. The other way slaves came about, and this was much more common, is people just got desperate. I think that there are people out there that if you said, I will provide you with a place to live, food to eat, and clothes to wear, a basic education, I will take care of your basic needs if you will take care of me.

[ 36 : 50 ] that's all. You work for me. And let's say we'll do that for 20 years. There's a lot of people that would say, sure. In fact, a lot of people say that's what they do in their job.

They don't have to worry about bills anymore. They don't have to worry about where they live. They don't have to worry about getting meals. They don't have to worry about any of that stuff. Just go do whatever the boss tells you. That's what slavery was.

They weren't, like, typically, in chains. They weren't beaten. They weren't mistreated. They were allowed to come and go and go down to the town and do different things and be involved in the life of the world.

They were simply people who had their job defined as working for one person, meaning they couldn't quit their job. But otherwise, they were not much different than you and I.

They had a home. They had a family. They had meals. And they had freedom to come and go in their local region. They couldn't just go anywhere they wanted to. Now, I'm not trying to say slavery was good.

[ 37 : 56 ] I'm saying it was an economic condition that some people would understand. That's not what we did in this country. What we did in this country, back 150 years ago, is we said that certain people, because of their racial background, were not truly fully human.

And so, therefore, we could treat them like the donkeys and the horses and the camels and the mules. We could treat them like we would animals, because they weren't truly human.

Now, that's a whole different thing. And by the way, the strongest argument against slavery and why slavery had such a struggle was because the churches realized that the people we were calling slaves were literally giving their lives to Jesus and becoming Christians.

And if they could become Christians, if they could believe in God, if they had souls, then they were our brothers and sisters, and we couldn't say that we could enslave them. We couldn't say that they were less than us.

We couldn't say that they were less than fully human, and they needed to be liberated. And that's why the church got behind the idea of abolishing slavery any way we could, because it was wrong.

[ 39 : 12 ] It was immoral. How can we enslave people that are like us? Can we mistreat animals and be right? That's a whole different story. God gave us dominion in the book of Genesis.

He didn't give us the right to abuse the culture, the world, the animals around us just because he gave us dominion. Remember the kingdom living? That means we also have responsibility, not simply we have authority or we have privilege.

So slavery back then was different than slavery in this country's history. And I'm not arguing in favor of slavery either. I'm simply saying it's a whole different thing that if I make an agreement that I will work for you for the next 20 years, if you will pay for all my bills, that's a little different than I'm going to treat you like you're less than human and therefore treat you like an animal.

That's evil. That's wrong. Okay? And that's why there's a difference between these two systems of slavery. Nowadays we have things that in some ways are not a whole lot different.

And by the way, that's also what's going on to some degree with some of these people that are being trafficked in this human trafficking thing. That's evil.

[ 40 : 33 ] Because even though it's based on economics and maybe people made a decision to do this, it's abusive. And it's taking advantage of people that are so desperate, so desperate, that they will allow themselves to be treated as less than human.

Everyone should be treated with some human dignity. And that's why we have labor laws in our country. That's why people can't be mistreated if they have legal rights in our country.

And this is where we've got a whole different... I don't have the time to go into the whole idea of legal and illegal residents of this country. But people shouldn't be treated as less than human ever.

And we need to have at least enough respect for each other that we don't have some people living really great and other people's living really rotten based on our...

even our economic ability. Because I know people that work very, very hard, long hours, and have meager wages. And I know people who don't work all that hard and make a whole lot more money.

[ 41 : 42 ] Well, I'm off. I'm sorry. I do that. If you've been with me on Wednesday nights in the past, you know that this is... I've been off. So we'll get back to the scripture. It says, in verse 68, when they arrived at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem...

Did you note that? When they arrived at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem... So there was a worship center in Jerusalem still existing after all these years.

Some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site. Some of the people that were there helped support the effort to rebuild the temple.

According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for this work. 61,000 derricks of gold, 5,000 minnas of silver, and 100 priestly garments.

Okay. So I have a little note here. It says, this is about 1,100 pounds or 2.8 metric tons. metric tons of silver.

[ 42 : 51 ] Okay. And 3 tons of gold. So we've got, we've got, you know, 3 tons of silver and 3 tons of gold.

That's a lot of money. I didn't calculate this beforehand. You know, about how much is an ounce of gold? How much is a pound of gold?

How much is a ton of gold and a ton of silver? These people gave a great amount of wealth for the rebuilding of the temple. What are we willing to give, particularly from our abundance, for the work of God?

Think about it. You know, the church's income has decreased. I can tell you that right now. I won't go into details. I'm not trying to make this a money play.

But it's fascinating that the amount of people who are going to participate in this Bible study is far larger than any amount I ever had on Wednesday nights. And the amount of people that come to worship on Sunday morning is far larger than the amount that actually came in person at this church.

[ 44 : 09 ] But the income's less. Maybe your income's less. I understand that. That would make sense. Maybe that's the reason. And people just don't have the money. I can understand that.

These people seem to have the money so they gave it. And that's great. That's great. All right? And they gave a hundred priestly garments. They actually had those. It says in verse 70, the priests, the Levites, the musicians, the gatekeepers, the temple servants settled in their own towns along with some of the other people and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns.

Okay, so they all just went and settled in towns. Now, this is where it gets a little dicey because we need to remember that there's people living there. One of the things that occurred when the Babylonians conquered this region is not only did they take the best people and move them to Babylon, they took other people from around their empire and moved them into Israel.

Their idea was if they could mix the people up, there wouldn't be so much of an easy ability for people to have an uprising. They wouldn't have that close connections with each other.

Years later, we're going to read about a group of people called the Samaritans. The Samaritans were some of these people that were in the region when these good people from the exile came back.

[ 45 : 32 ] So there's some people that considered their bloodlines pure and others that considered them mixed up and they had different ideas and they lived in that region.

So when these people came back to live, they went back to their hometowns where they hadn't been for like 70 years and now they're saying, okay, that's my house. But there's somebody living in the house. What do you do with that?

What do you do with that? That happened, by the way, when Israel went back to what they called the Promised Land in 1948, but there were people called the Palestinians living there.

They've been living there for hundreds of years. No, now that's my house. Well, is it? So the question is, can we make room for new people? One of the ways in which the United States has become a great nation is because we kept making room for new people.

The population of the United States when we went to war during World War II was 100 million people. Do you know how much it is now, today, 70 years later?

[ 46 : 34 ] Over 330 million people. Our country has tripled in size. Now, partly it's because of births, but not so much anymore lately. The number of births in this country are not enough to keep our population the same.

We would actually be decreasing. We'd be like Japan where the number of people is actually shrinking. The only way that our country continues to grow is because we keep welcoming in people from other countries.

People we call immigrants. All right? Now, the argument, and I'm not going to get into that a lot right today, is whether or not those people come in legally or they come in illegally.

But, you know, there's all kinds of discussions around that, too. Why do we let this many from this country but we only allow that many from that country? We've got all kinds of weird rules. This needs to be totally re-looked at.

It's messed up. Most of us can trace our descendants, and we know when our people immigrated into this country.

[ 47 : 38 ] I know. You know, on my mother's side, I go back to Governor Winthrop in the 1600s. And then I go back to some people that came over in the 1800s and some people that came over 200 years ago.

But on my father's side, my grandfather was an immigrant. In fact, he was an illegal immigrant. Jumped ship in New York Harbor, swam to shore, came here, became a legal citizen, though, because he had a way to become a legal citizen and became a part of this country, and now I'm a part of this country.

So I don't know. Curious thing. Anyways, so there's people there, and they helped to start. They contributed a lot to make this work.

They welcomed the people back, and they gave money and wealth to help it happen. When the seventh month came, and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem.

Then Joshua, son of Josedach, and his fellow priest, and Zerubbabel, son of Shelotiel, and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it in accordance with what was written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

[ 48 : 52 ] Now understand, they hadn't sacrificed in decades. So they're going to reestablish the altar of God and have sacrifices according to the book of Moses. And you know, a lot of that stuff that was written about Moses was only kind of loosely written down or collected.

When they went in exile, they had to really write it down. They had to codify it. They had to truly create what we call the Old Testament because if they didn't, they would have lost their whole faith. When the religion was dependent upon a location, the temple of God, the nation of Israel, they didn't need the book so much because they had, they could go right to the temple and hear about God.

They could go to the synagogue, the local synagogue. But when they were carried off into exile to a strange place, then the writings of God became more important because they couldn't get together in person.

Think about it. This book is more important to us now that we're not meeting together than when you can come every week to hear a sermon to get together and learn from each other. It's important.

It's important that you actually read this book, not just me reading it to you because now it's what we have to hold on to. Let's go on a little bit, okay?

[ 50 : 14 ] In verse 3 of chapter 3, it says, Despite their fear of the people around them. Do you know that? They're afraid of the people around them, even though those people welcomed them. Despite their fear of the people around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

Then, in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the festival of the tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the new moon sacrifices, the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the Lord, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the Lord.

So they're doing a whole bunch of offerings, kind of to make up for what they've missed in a way, right? On the first day of the seven months, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord through the foundation of the Lord's temple, though the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.

So what they did was they made an altar without a building. They did the sacrifices, they had the worship without a building. I've thought about one of the ways we might get back to worship is we just might not go in the building.

of we'll set up a stage and we'll just meet outside. You can be in your lawn chairs all over the yard. You can social distance all you want. I don't know. Just an idea.

[ 51 : 39 ] Maybe that's what we need to do. That's what they did. They just worshipped outside. The location mattered to them because they needed to have a place where they came. A sanctuary causes us to walk in and go, God, it's not that God is more present there.

It's that we're more present with God there. And maybe we need to come to this physical site. We've had a few people show up in the parking lot here and there. You know, it matters.

It feels right to be here. But if we can't go in the building, maybe we can go outside the building. We'll see. The rules are starting to change. So be thinking about it. If you have ideas, send them to me.

I'd like to know what you think. So anyways, they did this and they worshipped God. In verse 7, then they gave money to the masons and the carpenters and they gave food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Jopas as authorized by Cyrus, king of Persia.

So they started working on the temple and they paid the people working on the temple. Now some people will say, well, why didn't they do it all as volunteers? Well, because they were doing it full time. Now if they were doing it part time, it'd be different because we do that.

[ 52 : 44 ] We help out. Somebody mowed the lawn, I noticed. Thank you. The lawn needed mowing. I'd been doing around the building a little bit, but I appreciate that. We have a lot of people that volunteer and help us out at church. And we appreciate all those of you that are volunteering and helping out.

But if people are making this their commitment and full time, these people work in full time, they needed to be supported, right? The second month of the second year after their arrival, now they've been there over a year now.

They're working on it. At the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, son of Shelateel, Joshua, son of Josettech, and the rest of the people, the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from captivity to Jerusalem, began work.

So they were there for a whole year before they really even started the job because it takes time. You can't just do big things quickly. I know I feel like I just keep talking about this thing, but you can't just necessarily go, one day we're off and the next day we're on.

It's going to take some planning and some thinking. So it doesn't happen again, right? Makes sense to me. But we need to start figuring out how.

[ 54 : 05 ] All right? They appointed Levites 20 years old and older to supervise the building of the house of the Lord. That's the end of verse 8.

So they had some people that were watching it and it wasn't that they needed priests to bless it because the priests knew how it was supposed to be built. You know, when we built the sanctuary and the building next door, I had a lot to do with planning it and I had a lot of good ideas because I know how worship is done.

But I didn't understand some things about worship and that's why we had to put soundproofing all on the back of the wall because we build it like an echo chamber. When you're building a place for people to speak, you don't build it with parallel walls.

You need to build it with, if you ever go into a proper auditorium, it has walls that are built kind of like this so that the sound bounces around and not back and forth. I didn't know that. These Levites have read what God said to build and so they're building it that way and they're supervising.

In verse 9, Joshua and his sons and the brothers and Cadmiel and his sons, descendants of Hodvia, and the sons of Hanedadad, boy, these names kill you, and their sons and brothers, all Levites joined together in supervising those working on the house of God.

[ 55 : 19 ] When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets and the Levites and the sons of Apath with symbols took their place to praise the Lord as prescribed by David, king of Israel, with praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord, He is good, His love toward Israel endures forever.

And so, they've got some foundation worked on. They haven't built the building yet. It takes a long time to build a temple. You know, the cathedrals in Europe took hundreds of years to build. But when they built the foundation, when the foundation was built, they had a big celebration the way David used to celebrate.

And it says in the middle of verse 11, And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Bills make me want to shout! Does Jesus make you want to shout? Does He make you want to celebrate? We need to learn how to celebrate and praise God.

Because God is amazing. He should make us want to shout. Verse 12, But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads who had seen the former temple wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.

[ 56 : 45 ] You know, it was interesting because the new temple was really crummy compared to Solomon's temple. Solomon's temple was magnificent. This is a crummy, ruddy, junky version.

I don't mean to sound wrong, but the truth is they did the best they could. But Solomon had the resources of an empire. They have what they get handed to them.

I've gotten into some massive, amazing, incredible churches. They have the resources. Somebody has given wealth, wealth, or maybe it was created by a nation like the National Cathedral in Washington, or maybe it was created by hundreds of years of work like the cathedrals in Rome, Notre Dame, and such.

They say Notre Dame is going to be rebuilt, but it's going to cost billions of dollars. Billions of dollars. Heck, our own whole facility was about three million dollars, which is great.

I'm happy. Thank you for your generosity. And the generosity you're still giving us as we pay off a mortgage. I mean, it's wonderful. Thank you.

[ 58 : 03 ] And we have a magnificent and beautiful church. But the reason sometimes why some are so much more than others is because they have the resources. These people remember the Temple of Solomon.

It was fabulous. And so they're sad because they know it's never going to measure up to that. And that's hard. But you know, church is what we make of it.

And we don't have to have a glorious temple. We don't have to have a fabulous building. We need to have people who are committed to God. And so you have people in this story that are weeping over what was.

While you have people who are shouting in celebration of what is and what can be. It says in verse 13, no one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sounds of weeping because the people made so much noise and the sound was heard far away.

We have people who are stuck in yesterday. Stuck in the glories of the past while others are trying to do something special with tomorrow. We can never be the people who are stuck weeping over what was while we're holding other people back from rebuilding what can be.

[ 59 : 30 ] That's part of the question we're going to have as a church. I think that this situation we've gone through will change us all somehow. Maybe in small ways, maybe in large ways.

I don't know yet. And when it's changed, we as a congregation of people, as Christians, need to be looking forward into what God is building.

No matter what it is, no matter who it is, no matter how it will be, no matter who the pastor will be, no matter who the leaders will be, no matter what the building is, no matter how we'll come together for worship, we need to be the part, we need to be the people who are celebrating what will be, not mourning what was.

Because there's no real gain in living stuck in the past. Nothing wrong with celebrating the past. We don't want to be stuck there. We want to be people who live into the future.

God is not a future of the past. He's a God of the future. And if you want to know that, think about Jesus. He doesn't remember our sins from the past. He lives for our promise for the future.

[ 60 : 35 ] Remember that. He won't remember your sins of the past. When you give your life to God, God forgets the past and gives you a promise for the future. Something that He will lay in your heart.

We talked about that in chapter one. He'll lay in your heart and make an amazing blessing happen from and through you. I'd like to look at chapter four.

And we're getting towards the end of our study, but let's try to get chapter four because there's something important here. When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, let us help you build because like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esrahaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here.

Now they describe him in this book as the enemies of Judah and Benjamin, but what have they come to do? Let us help you build because we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since back when you left.

But Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, you have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.

[ 62 : 10 ] This is very sad. In verse 4 it says, Then the people around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They bribed officials to work against them and to frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, and down to the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

And it will go on. I mean, you know, I might read through all of this, but I just want to speak to this right now.

Just this piece alone, they offered to help. And the people said, No. This is our church.

This is our temple. You can't have any part in it. Any church that turns in that way and sees the people outside the church as outsiders or as the others will eventually die.

The way in which we grow strong, in which our faith becomes amazing, is by hoping up our hearts for other people to hear the word of God.

[ 63 : 19 ] This is the fatal flaw. This is when it began. This is when the people of Israel started turning in to themselves instead of turning out to the people around them.

This is when the Israelites saw their relatives, the Samaritans, as bad. This is when the people of Israel stopped seeing the people that sojourned with them or came to live with them as welcome and said they didn't belong.

This is when things started turning bad to the point to which Jesus had to come to open their hearts up to the world again. All because they didn't want to let somebody else help.

You know, people have roles in church and I understand that. This one sings. This one does the cleaning. This one helps out with building projects. This one mows the lawn. This one takes care of Sunday school.

This one helps with the youth. This one has this job. This one has that job. But there always has to be room for someone new. Whatever it is that you do, there has to be a place for someone else to come in and work and live and do the calling God has put on their heart to come alongside you.

[ 64 : 35 ] That's what makes a church great. That's what makes a church and ministry prosper. Not by saying, no, we have everybody we need. We don't need you. We don't want you. But by saying, yes, we will make a space for you.

God has laid something on your heart. We want you to be a part of the blessing God has given to us. And so God gave them this blessing and God gave them this opportunity and they said, no.

So the people, instead of being a part of making this ministry great, started working against it. Because once you start doing this to the world around you, you know, fish fries.

Why do we have fish fries? Do you think we do it because we need the money? It does generate about 4 or 5 percent of our income. But think about that, 4 or 5 percent. That's not a huge amount. We do it because it reminds the church that the community is why we're here.

And it reminds the community that we are open to them to come in and be a part of us. We do a lot of things for the community around here. We do meals in Niagara Falls for the community around here.

[ 65 : 46 ] We do rummage sales so people can buy things and come into our building. We do activities for the community. My gosh, and we didn't have it, but we're still hoping to do it again.



We have an Easter celebration where we have Easter egg hunts and hundreds of people come. Why? Because we need to remember that we're here for the community and the community is part of us.

It's not us and them. It's us and them. In verse 6, at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged in an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

See, they've gone already up to the emperor. And in the days of Adaraxas, king of Persia, Bishlem, Mittha, Tabeel, and the rest of his associates wrote a letter to Adaraxas.

The letter was written in Aramaic script and in the Aramaic language. Rahum, the commanding officer, and Shemshah, the secretary, wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Adaraxas, the king, as follows.

[ 66 : 48 ] Rahum, the commanding officer, and Shemshah, the secretary, together with the rest of their associates, the judges, officials, administrators over the people from Babylon, Uruk, and Babylon, from Persia, Uruk, and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, and the other people whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal, it's killing me, deported and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates.

In other words, all these people who have gathered together and become this new people, part Israelite, part people from elsewhere, and where did they settle?

Samaria, right? Because they were part, they were half Israelite. This is what they say. To King Adaraxas, from your servants and Trans-Euphrates, the king should know that the people who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city.

They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations. Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute, or duty will be paid, and eventually the royal revenues will suffer.

So what they're saying is these people are starting a rebellion, and if they build the walls, you're not going to get any money. There'll be no more tax revenue, right? Got to hit them in the pocketbook. They're making the argument that these are bad people.

[ 68 : 24 ] Why? Because they turned them away, right? In verse 14, now since we are under obligation to the palace, and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored, we are sending this message to inform the king, so that a search may be made in the archives of your predecessors.

In these records you will find that this city is a rebellious city, troublesome to kings and provinces, a place with a long history of sedition. That is why this city was destroyed.

We inform the king that if this city is built and its walls are restored, you will be left with nothing and trans-Euphrates. Wow. Wow.

All because they told him, no, you can't help with the building of the temple. So the king sent this reply to Rahum, the commanding officer, Shemshah, the secretary, the rest of their associates living in Samaria and elsewhere in trans-Euphrates.

Greetings. The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence. I issued an order and a search was made and it has found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition.

[ 69 : 34 ] They're right. It's true. Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of trans-Euphrates and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them.

Okay. That is a problem. Now issue an order to these men to stop work so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order. Be careful not to neglect this matter.

Why let this threat grow to the detriment of the royal interests? Wow. They got to the king. As soon as a copy of the letter of King Ecterxes was read to Rahum and Shemshah, the secretary and the associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop.

Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Tarius, king of Persia. So now they have to stop building the temple.

Why? Because they wouldn't make room for these people to help them. Wow. Do we want friends or do we want enemies outside our church walls?

[ 70 : 43 ] Do we want people to help us rebuild the kingdom as we come out of this exile or do we want enemies? I think we want to bring in everyone. All the people listening to this, all the people involved in our ministries online, you are now part of our church.

You're not people out there. You're not people we don't know. You're not the other people. You are a part of this ministry with us and we welcome you to be part of this church, to be part of building this church, to be part of expanding and spreading the word of God to the whole world and all the people around us.

You can share this on your friend space. We welcome you. We welcome your friends. We welcome everyone to come and join us. You don't have to think exactly like we do.

If you believe in God, if you want Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if you're willing to commit to the ministry that God has called you to, if you want to be a part of making God's grace work in this world, we welcome you.

Come join us. Be a part of this ministry in the walls and outside the walls because we're building a community for God and we want you to be part of that.

[ 72 : 00 ] Welcome back from the exile. We're reading the stories to see how do we get back. We'll be picking up where we left off in the book of Ezra next week, chapter 5, and we'll be studying to see how the people of Israel got back from their exile.

We have many concerns, many issues. We've had people who have passed away and people who have lost loved ones, some from the coronavirus. I only know of one in this congregation. But there are relatives and friends who have died both from the virus and from other things.

We've had more people die of other things in our congregation. Excuse me. We have people who are sick. We have people who are struggling. We have people who are having financial concerns.

We have people who are just in need of a blessing. You can be a part of that. We'd like you to be a part of it. We'd like you to join our ministry and help us with what we're doing. Contact Pastor Sherry Mehar or contact Gidget Meeland if you want to help with the helping ministries.

Pastor Sherry Mehar will help you with the connecting ministries. We want you to be a part of what we're doing. And we invite you now to join us as we turn all of what we do over to God in prayer.

[ 73 : 14 ] Dear God in heaven, bless us in this place. Fill us with your power and your presence, whether we are gathered in the house of the Lord or whether we're gathered as the house of the Lord wherever we might be.

Pour out your Holy Spirit into us. Break the power of sin in our lives and forgive our sins and free us with your grace and peace. Bless us, Lord, as we come together like this, that we might rebuild the kingdom of God, that we might rebuild the church, that we might gather again together in person to celebrate and shout.

We thank you, Lord, for all you do, for all you are for us. And we pray your special blessing upon us as we offer the prayer that Jesus said to pray, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

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. This is Pastor Tom.

[ 74 : 29 ] Glad to have you with us. In case you didn't recognize me or didn't know me, because I'm getting to be more of a 1970s Moppet. God bless you. Go in peace. Amen. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. Heard love you. You're all right. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you.