

We are observing another Feast of Tabernacles, a time that pictures the removal of Satan from this earth and the ushering in of God's Kingdom that will rule for a thousand years. This monumental change is about to come about in the not so distant future, and up until this point in time, is one of the most important and exciting parts of God's plan for mankind. So many in times past have wanted to live in *this* period of time that we are in now - to be able to see, witness, and experience what will shortly come to pass.

We are actually quite far along now in God's plan, and we are really close to being able to see the results from all the work that God has been doing over the past 6,000 years, and even much longer; we don't even know for sure. There has been so much pain and suffering, as well as destruction that man has caused since the beginning until now. So why did God not only allow for this to happen, but even built a nature in us that is contrary to Him? It is all so that we can learn, and that later on down the road we can have the possibility to live up to our real potential. Man hasn't enjoyed the sufferings that he has caused himself over this time, and God has not enjoyed watching it, but all of this was done with a purpose in mind - for the building of Elohim.

Elohim was, and always has been, God's main focus since the beginning. Since the beginning, His plan has been forward looking. Not necessarily looking forward to all the suffering and destruction that I was just mentioning, but rather to the outcome and the result. Because just like anything we learn in life, the first part of the process is not the part that we look forward to. We don't try to learn a foreign language, for example, because we are interested in spending hours and hours studying and doing the boring stuff like learning how to conjugate verbs and other nonsense like that. No, we do it because we want to have a new skill and want to be able to use it. That's where the pleasure comes from. But you must go through that part of the process before you get to the good stuff. The same is with God's plan. He has designed it to be this way, because it's the only way. It is the only way we can have holy righteous character developed in us.

Let's start off here by going back to Genesis. That's as far back as we are really able to go in this whole process that is God's plan for mankind. Let's go to **Genesis 1:26**.

Now, the first 15 verses of Genesis are all about God setting up the earth, putting everything back in order, and setting up the laws which govern our physical world. He created animal life, and then, finally, we get to **verse 26**. It says, **And God (Elohim) said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.** Here we see, just as in all the previous verses, that the word for God that is used is "Elohim." Moses

could have easily inserted "Yahweh," for the name of God instead of Elohim, but God inspired him to put "Elohim" for a purpose. It goes to show that from the beginning of the creation that God has been focused on the final goal - Elohim - a place where He can finally have rest.

God also waited to create man until the 6<sup>th</sup> day. Everything was prepared for Adam and Eve and it was given to them on a golden platter. He fixed the earth and created everything. All of this work that God did prior to creating man was just a preparation for His main focus.

Let's jump on down to **verse 28—And God blessed them, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.** God said, "Be fruitful and multiply." Why? Because that is how more potential members of the family of God can be created. God could have just keep making humans from the dirt, but He wants to share in the process of creation. It's about a family, and that's what God desires.

Let's go to chapter 2 in Genesis here, and we'll go to verse 5. That's **2:5**. And here it's talking about the creation of man again. And it says, **And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there was not a man to till the ground.*** Here again, everything was prepared for man. But mankind was the last and most important final touch that had to be created. God made it so that man *could* till the ground. That was the purpose, to have man take care of the earth. We are suppose to learn these physical things first, and then once we are a part of Elohim then we have potential to be more than just caretakers. But we've seen how well that has worked out for mankind. Something as simple as taking care of the planet - *big* failure there. But often times we must learn from our failures. And God knows that.

**Verse 15—And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.** So we have gone over this quite a bit this past year in this "Year of Dedication," and we know what this is about. God put mankind on this earth "to dress and keep it." But we know that that is not just about the physical things that we have dominion and control over but also our minds and the spiritual aspects which we are to dress and keep.

Let's go to Genesis 2:1. **Genesis 2:1—Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.** All the rest of the creation was also finished.

**Verse 2—And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.**

So from the beginning, God sanctified the seventh-day. He set it apart for special use and purpose. While on the seventh-day no work was done, something still happened, something very important to God. A day was set aside and made special. How is it that man thinks he can just come along and

change that? Not even Jesus Christ changed it. As Jesus stated, He did not come to destroy the law. No, He enriched it and He gave more understanding. It blows the mind to think that some (so called) "men of God" can come along and sit around and debate about whether they can change the day that God sanctified to another day. They argued about it and they took votes. Now, if it were any of the other things from the creation, man obviously can't try to change it. You can't change time. Can't say, "Oh well, let's make night time a little bit shorter, because, you know, I don't get enough done in the day, and that night time just bothers me. Let's just redefine how we refer to day and night." That sounds ridiculous, right? But just because it's easy for man to say, "We are changing the day of rest to another day," just because they say that and it's something more abstract, then it seems more acceptable to change. So the Catholic church can say it changed the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday because they voted, but the reality is that Sunday is not, and never was, sanctified. Because only God has the power to sanctify something. Just like you can tell me that night doesn't exist anymore because we don't like the idea of going to bed then. Well, it's still going to be dark at those hours. The reality is the same. We cannot change what God has done. We can only fake it and make it look like it's changed.

It's just stupidity to think that God, who made this amazing plan, would just be cool with someone changing it so that they could serve their own selfish desires and incorporate pagan religion in with the Great God's true religion, just so they could solidify their own stupid kingdoms of the time. Last time I checked, I'm pretty sure that God doesn't have such a high opinion of those other false idols and god's. Don't think He would be okay with combining His awesome plan with some other ill conceived nonsense. Sometimes it's just hard to believe the stupidity of man. But we know that they are deceived and they can't even see something as basic as the seventh-day Sabbath. It's sad. But again, we're getting close to finally getting rid of Satan's influence. So that's definitely something to rejoice about.

But do we also rejoice in the fact that we understand this simple and basic truth about the Sabbath? It's one of the most basic things to get, yet, for just about the entire world of self professing Christians, the seventh-day Sabbath is seen as weird! It's weird because no one observes it. Just a few from those who were a part of the Worldwide Church of God, and some other smaller groups like the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Adventist's. But they are all so small still. It's easy to take something like that for granted, but sometimes we need to be reminded of just how blessed we are to have it. Because we never want to become "lifted up and increased with goods" like what happened in the Apostasy before.

But the other importance of the seventh-day is in direct reference to the 7,000-year plan for mankind. We are almost in the seventh-day right now. The day of rest is sanctified and very important, of course, but how incredible is that last thousand years for God's plan? So, since the beginning this has been God's intention, His goal - to finally have an end to man's pathetic rule of this earth with the help of Satan. Although the point we're about to arrive at is not the completed final goal, it is one of the first main goals. It is when the firstfruits will be harvested. After such a long time, how joyous is this occasion? This plan is the best plan that has ever been designed, by a long-shot. It should give us hope,

allow us to be incredibly thankful for such a plan - a plan that focuses on us - and lastly, should make us incredibly happy and joyous. And these attitudes are exactly what God commands us to have here during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The title of today's sermon is *Give Thanks and Rejoice*.

We see that we play a role in God's plan. It's not only God working and us sitting around... or at least it shouldn't be that way. So the fact that we are able to play *any* role in the best plan ever designed and to be a part of it, should really help bring this Feast more alive for us.

If you see a beautiful house for example, you can admire it and think "Wow!" But if you look at that same house and you know that you did something to make it so beautiful, then it's a "double wow." It would have so much more meaning to us. And it's the same with the House of God, and we have a part in its building.

Let's take a look now at this command to rejoice at the Feast. Turn over with me, if you will to Leviticus 23. That's Leviticus 23 and we're going to go down to verse 39. **Leviticus 23:39—Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a Feast unto the LORD seven days: and on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth-day shall be a Sabbath.** The Feast is a festival of a harvest. And for the Israelites back then, it was primarily physical. But for us, we know that the Feast also pictures a time when a spiritual harvest will take place. And it is not too long now until the first fruits, the 144,000 will be here to reign on this earth.

Next verse, **verse 40—And you shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice (be glad) before the LORD your God seven days.** It's talking about the building of booths for the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Booths. And it says that we are to rejoice before God for seven days. Part of the reason that those in the Old Testament were rejoicing is because it was the end of their harvest. They had physical food that God had provided for them and they were thankful and glad. Today, you know, we take food for granted. It's just something that's in the supermarket and we go there whenever we need it. But for those of old, and for many people around the world still, they are dependent on rains and the right weather conditions to have a good crop. And sometimes you don't have a good crop. So when the season goes well and you have something to harvest, you, too, would be very grateful. The connection that most of us have with the supermarket is not the same connection a farmer has to the land and to the weather. But getting back to the harvest... The thankfulness that they had for it also has to do with the purpose of the booths themselves, which we're going to get into a little bit later.

So we're here at the Feast and we don't have a physical harvest to partake in. But we have set aside our tithes to be able to partake more in some special physical things that we might not normally be able to do throughout the year. Maybe we go out to restaurants more or to a particular nicer

restaurant, or we treat ourselves to something else at the Feast that we don't normally have access to. It is a special time of the year and God wants us to understand that. These small things help put us in a happy and content frame of mind.

At the Feast, though, we normally don't need to be told to rejoice and be glad. That is usually a given for most since it's a time when, you know, we get to see many people we haven't seen for a long time (sometimes it's been many years), and then on top of that we are fed with sermons every day. But we need to make sure that we realize where this joy is coming from and make sure that it's in-line with what the Feast is suppose to be all about.

I will give a small example here, and that would be for those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to visit a Feast site in a far off destination. Maybe we're going to Australia, or maybe those from Australia are coming to Europe or to the U.S. While that can make our Feast much more exciting and joy-filled, we also need to be careful that we don't turn that into our primary reason for being so excited about the Feast. It shouldn't be a time of just pure vacation and that we can go off and serve our own selfish wants and desires.

Or another example that is really simple, is when we put too much emphasis in our after-service activities. Now, I know as a whole, for both of these examples, that we have balance in them. But I have also seen in years past those that have been unbalanced in these areas. Our primary goals at the Feast should not be about going shopping every possible minute or be off doing our own excursions. If we are more excited about the after service activities than the service itself, then there is something wrong. Of course we should partake in various activities, don't get me wrong, but that shouldn't be our main focus. Everything needs to be done in moderation. And I hope you understand what I am saying. I think you do.

So, the Bible talks an awful lot about rejoicing and being glad. And I thought it might be good to just go and take a look at a few examples of them, and that way we can get a better idea of what we are to rejoice about and why we are to rejoice.

Let's first turn over to Psalms 5:11. That's **Psalms 5:11—But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them: let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee.** We can rejoice and be glad if we put our trust in God. Why? Because God's word is true! You can trust everything that He says. His plan *will* come to pass. You can put your hope in Him and not have to worry about whether what He says is true or false, because everything from God is true, period (exclamation point)!

We don't put our trust in governments of this world or in some human leaders. They are not capable of delivering on their promises. We don't put our faith in man's systems. They too will fail. Every one of them has. If you know they have failed, how can you trust in one? Money? Are you going to trust in some currency? Just because in the U.S. the money says, "In God We Trust" doesn't help it. It too will

fail. So is money going to safeguard you? No. Those have all come and gone. But as humans we are incredibly foolish and we often put our trust in the wrong places.

The next part of this verse says, "Let them shout for joy because you defend them." The word "defend" is usually translated in other places in the Bible as "to cover." In other words, God's got you covered. You can rely on Him. It's like another scripture says, "If God is for us, who can be against us." It's true. He's got your back.

So this scripture here in Psalms also says, "Let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee." What's that mean, to love His name? It is not some superficial, syrupy, sweet garbage that the Protestant world would like you to believe. "If you just say His name and say you believe..." No. It's not talking about just saying His name or talking about names. That's not what it's talking about here. If you love His name, you love what God represents and His way of life. You love what He is offering mankind. You love His plan, etcetera, etcetera. If we truly "love His name," as it is stated here, then we will be thankful to Him. And that thankfulness and the looking up to God for what He has done for us should, no doubt, make us very joyful.

So if we look at just this one verse alone we should have reason to rejoice and be glad. All of what's being said here is good news. And if we think about what's being said here then we should have a variety of reactions and emotions. We should be thankful, awe-inspired, at-peace, and probably much more. All of those reactions and emotions lead to us being able to rejoice.

Let's look at another verse; it's also in Psalms. And we'll go to chapter 48 and verse 11. **Psalms 48:11.** It says, **Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Thy judgments.** "Rejoice and be glad," because of God's judgments? Why? Because His are true and just! Man's judgments, on the other side, are not because they are from man, and when man looks inward for the judgments they aren't coming from God, they're coming from himself. How amazing will it be in the Millennium when we can finally have real justice? I look forward to that and I am sure all of you do too.

Let's go over to another verse here, Isaiah 25:9. **Isaiah 25:9—And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.** Yes, of course we're going to be glad and rejoice, because without God's amazing plan, what would we have? I would say, well, we would just live and die and that would be it. But really, you think about it, without God's plan, we wouldn't even be able to have lived once, if you get what I'm saying. None of us nor this physical world around us, would even exist if God hadn't planned it out so long ago.

So, from these verses we just looked at, hopefully now we understand just a little bit more about why God wants us to rejoice and why it's commanded for us to do so at the Feast of Tabernacles. So if we know the reasons why we are to rejoice, there is no need to try and fake it or muster up some kind of

"Yea! Hurrah!" kind of fake attitude. That's not what God wants. And He wants it to be a genuine kind of rejoicing and gladness.

Let's go a little bit deeper into the state of mind that we need to be in in order to more fully and easily be able to rejoice at this Feast. I would like to read a small paragraph introduction from a Feast sermon that my dad gave back in 2007. It was entitled, *The Feast and Our Name*.

He said, "Our history is important. It's important to understand what God had been doing throughout time. We are going to go back into a lot of history in the Feast at points, so we can always be reminded of what God has been doing and what His plan and purpose is. And even short time history, toward the end-time here, of what we have gone through is important to remember and to keep in your mind... deeply embedded in your mind. And to understand how awesomely blessed we are. Because the more you see it, the more you know it, the more thankful you are and the more you truly do what God says to do for this Feast - is to rejoice before Him. To be ever so thankful. Thankful, excited about the plan that God has given us to share in."

That statement is very true and it can be applied not just to the Feast but also to all facets of our lives. If we are truly thankful for what we have then we will be happy and content in our lives. That goes for both physical and spiritual things. I was thinking about that the other day, and it really struck me of how often we, as humans, sit around and think about things we want and the things that we don't have. Now, it isn't intrinsically bad if we think about something we want to obtain. But if we aren't careful, we can get stuck in a frame of mind where that is what we concentrate on the most. And then it's so easy to forget and not think about the things which we already do have! That is the mentality of a spoiled little child. They can be given all of the physical things that any other child would only dream of, but in the end, they aren't even happy with it all. And as adults we have a tendency to do the exact same thing, although maybe we can hide it a little bit better than kids do. But if we think about what God has given us in the Church and think that we aren't even truly thankful for it, well, how do you think God sees us then? There isn't much difference there.

So, contentment, joy, being able to rejoice, where do those things come from? Do they come from always wanting more? You know, we live in such a commercial society that our brains are just bombarded every day with messages telling us, "Buy this and your whole life will change!" All these empty promises. And it's pretty easy for us to get into that frame of mind of always wanting more and never being satisfied. This is Satan's world and he still is the prince of it. It's the same mentality that Satan had. He kept wanting more and more even though God had given him so much, more than almost all of the other angels! And he likes to have influence on us still and to try and spread this rotten, spoiled brat attitude.

But just imagine how much difference there would be, if we just concentrated on the things that we *do have*, that we were really thankful for them. That's something that we have to force ourselves to do though, to actually stop and remember those things. Because it's not natural for us as humans to do

that. We need a little bit of discipline to make it happen. Again, if we can remember what God has done through time and in our lives, than we should be very thankful to Him.

Let's go ahead and take a look at a few examples. Exodus 13:3. **Exodus 13:3—And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you from this *place*: no leavened bread shall be eaten.** You know, if you went through those things that those in Egypt went through and their coming out of slavery, and seeing all the miracles that God performed, you might think, "Oh yeah, I will remember that." But as we can read, it's quite apparent that the people did not remember. It didn't take them but a short period of time before they were murmuring and complaining and already disobeying God. Pretty crazy to think that we can do that as humans - that we can witness something so incredible and know that it comes from the Great God, and then get back into this, "Woe is me," kind of attitude, and then completely forget what God did. They were not truly thankful for God freeing them. Because if they were, they *would* have obeyed God.

Most in the Church have gone through similar things though, where God has done something amazing in our lives. Whether it was the process of being called, living through the Apostasy, or just whatever other kinds of trials that we have gone through in the Church and we can see that we survived it, that we were able to continue on living God's way of life. We should remember those things and be thankful that we are even able to be at the Feast this year. Because as is said year after year, when the Feast rolls around next year there will be someone who is among us now that will no longer be with us. Let's not take that for granted. Because we know that in the end, it's only by the grace of God that we are here. None of us deserve to be here. And just think of how many in the world that have never even been called. How grateful are we for our calling?

Another scripture, Deuteronomy 16:3. **Deuteronomy 16:3 - You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shall you eat unleavened bread therewith, *even* the bread of affliction; for you came forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that you may remember the day when you came forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.** In the Church we have this long held tradition called, "A Night To Be Much Remembered," and it's also sometimes referred to as, "A Night To Be Much Observed." And for this tradition, as I'm sure you all know, we have a meal in the evening when the First Day of Unleavened Bread begins. And that night is for us to stop and remember what God did. In fact, the unleavened bread itself is a direct object that should make us stop and think about what God performed. When we eat that unleavened bread we are reminded of the historical events that took place and why the bread wasn't able to be leavened in the first place.

Let's turn over to 1 Chronicles 16, and we're going to look at verse 12. That's **1 Chronicles 16:12—Remember His marvelous works that He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.** We take for granted what we have. Whatever becomes the status quo in our lives becomes mundane, normal, expected. Travel to a place with great natural beauty, and often no one even cares. They don't stop to think about littering and just trashing it. People have wealth and don't care. They have health,



and don't even care. God has given us so much. All of His creation was put here for us. We were made with a special plan and purpose in mind.

Something as simple as our health is, again, really important. Most of these things, though, are things that become just normal for us and we don't realize how amazing it is just to be alive. When do you think about your health for example? Chances are, if you are healthy, you probably don't take too much time to even consider it. It's often times only when people get really sick or have a near death experience they can start to see how precious life really is. You know, today your heart is going to beat between 80 thousand to 100 thousand times. It is going to push around 2,000 gallons or 7,600 liters of blood through tiny dime-sized openings. That, in turn, allows us to animate our bodies, allows all these billions of neurons in our brains to fire off. How crazy is that?! No technology involved there. That is way more impressive than any feat that man has ever accomplished, by a long stretch! It's really amazing what God has designed our bodies to do every day, and we don't even think about it, it just happens. Be thankful for it! Don't take it for granted!

So, kind of going along with these lines of how God sustains us, you know, we've been fasting a lot this year. And when we're fasting we're afflicting our bodies. And when we do that, that gives us time to really see what we are without food - to look at how something so simple is needed every day to sustain ourselves. We can thank God for allowing us to have physical food. But with fasting it is also about being thankful for the spiritual food that He gives us. Both of them are needed to live. So next time we fast, we should also consider that - how God truly is the sustainer of everything living and to look to Him because we need Him. If you want to be sustained now, and in the future, than you had better look to God.

The point I am trying to make in all this is that we have so much to be thankful for, but a lot of times we need to stop and take a bit of an inventory so that we don't forget. We have a tendency as humans to get all bent out of shape over stupid little nonsensical issues, that in the end, are really not important in the scheme of things. It's easy to get into a spoiled frame of mind. And I am not just talking about physical things, but also about the spiritual things that have been given to us. We also want more - and that's good - but only to a certain extent. It's good to want more from God and to always want more to learn about His way of life. But sometimes we need to go back and look at what has already been given to us. It comes alive much more. And the more often we do it, the more it comes alive. Because often times we don't understand everything that's been said the first go-around. It takes many times and thinking about it and going over it and praying to God before it slowly starts to become more clear and more clear. Just like I stated a minute ago about our physical bodies and all the amazing things that goes on with our heart and blood, it is amazing, but it depends on how we look at it. If you know that your heart beats, well, that's really nothing new. Everyone that's alive, their hearts beat too. But if you see how many times it beats and how the whole system works, then it puts it into a whole different perspective. It's much more impressive to know that our hearts will beat between 80 thousand to 100 thousand times per day. There is a lot of work going on just to sustain us on a daily basis.

And that's exactly what we need to do with God's word and with the truths that He has given His Church. If we do that, and concentrate on the things which we have *already* been given, we can find inspiration and excitement in them. And then we're set. We don't need to go off and speculate about things. That can lead us down a wrong path. And anyway, what good can come from speculating? If it's not coming from God, than what good is it? It's just our own ideas then, not God's. Just about the only thing that speculating can do is set us up for problems in the future when things don't play out how we thought they might, and some man-made idea that we have come up with can become a stumbling block for us.

I would like to go take a look at the accounts of the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem. And we're going to take a look at what God performed. He caused some pretty amazing things to take place. And we're going to take a look at the responses from the Jews. And there are a lot of similarities and parallels with how God worked with them and how He's working with us today. The main difference, though, is when God was dealing with the Jews most everything was done on a physical level, however, with us it is much more of a spiritual level.

Let's turn over to Ezra 1, and we're going to start off in verse 1. **Ezra 1:1.** (I'll give you a second to turn over there.) It says, **Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.** So this account already starts off with a bang. Cyrus, the king, has taken over Babylon where the Jews have been in captivity for seventy-years. And not only that, he makes a decree that says that a house is to be built for God in Jerusalem. That's pretty interesting right? Why on earth would a new king, who just conquered Babylon, be making a decree in favor of the God of Israel and say that the LORD God has given him all the kingdoms of the earth? Well, the answer is pretty amazing. In this verse that we just read, we can take notice that it says, "The word of the LORD by mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled." And this is referring to an earlier prophecy that Jeremiah made. Let's go take a look at it, because it's pretty remarkable. You can hold your place here in Ezra and we'll be coming back here in just a bit. But right now let's turn over to Jeremiah 25.

So we'll go over to **Jeremiah 25:12.** It says, **And it shall come to pass, when seventy-years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and the nation, says the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.**

**Verse 13—And I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves and them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.** So Cyrus must have been made fully aware of this prophecy when he entered into Babylon! Exactly seventy-years after the Jews

were taken into captivity, he comes along, takes over Babylon, and in addition, he creates one of the largest empires that the earth has ever known. So you better believe that the Jews that were there were letting him know that his actions were part of prophecy. And not only that, there is another scripture that refers to Cyrus *by name*. Let's take a look at that one as well.

It's over in Isaiah 45. **Isaiah 45:1**—Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two levied gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou might know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. So, here we see that it was foretold that a king by the name of Cyrus would come along and that God had big plans for him. It is even stated that he was "anointed." Those are extremely strong words that are attributed to Cyrus. And there is one other scripture actually where he is also mentioned.

Let's turn over there. It's just back in chapter 44 of Isaiah. Let's turn back a page or two. **Isaiah 44:28**—That said of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.* So here we see that Cyrus was charged to build a temple. Amazing! Amazing how God was able to make these things come to pass! So when Cyrus entered into Babylon, he sure got an earful. He was told that his conquering of Babylon was a prophesy that had just come true, and that he was mentioned by name, and that he was to build a temple. And not only that, but he was going to be successful king, and as it states in the scripture there, that, "the crooked places would be made straight." Can you imagine that? That's one way to get somebody's attention, even the most powerful man in the world's attention. And he believed it. And I'm sure he wanted to believe it too, since it was prophesied that he would be a great ruler. That must have just been music to his ears.

It makes me think about the prophesies that we are looking at to come to pass now. What about Daniel's vision of the ten toes that are formed by the iron and the clay, symbolizing the ten nations of Europe that will soon come together? It describes their relationship. They are together, but they're barely held together since they are of different material. And we can see this prophesy is almost completed, and it won't be much longer until it's fulfilled. How amazing will that be to show people in the future something that we have always known and we'll finally be able to prove it 100%. I bet some world leaders would be interested in that as well. Who knows how it will all turn out though? But I am sure we are going to see some pretty impressive things take place. That can definitely make some people take note, just like Cyrus did. Think about the rest of the knowledge that we have of other things that will also come to pass. That's going to give credit and authority to what has been planned out so long ago.

So we see now why Cyrus gave homage to God. It doesn't seem like he ever really even converted or anything like that, but this worldly king was given a commission from God. And God knows exactly how to move people into action and to make sure that His will is done.

Alright, let's go back to Ezra now and we'll pick back up in chapter 1. So we'll go to Ezra 1:3. **Ezra 1:3—Who is there among you of all His people? His God will be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (He is the God), which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remains in the place where he sojourned, let the men of his place help him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. Also, Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods.** This is a scene a little bit reminiscent of what happened in Egypt when the Israelites left Egypt. The Egyptians were giving them riches and wealth, but for a different reason. There, they mostly just wanted these people to disappear and they were willing to do whatever they could to get rid of them. They didn't want any more plagues, and the Israelites were just *bad* news for them. Well, this time something similar happened, but the king ordered that they be helped along the way in order to get back to Jerusalem. And this was help in the form of financial means and with good and whatever help in addition that they needed. Also, everything that had been stripped away from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar was also to be returned. So this was a pretty good deal for the Israelites, right? They were being brought out of captivity again even though they weren't deserving of it.

So it looks like they left Babylon sometime in the spring. And if you were to look on a map, you'll see that it's a pretty long trek from Babylon all the way up to Jerusalem. But they eventually arrive. And we will pick back up in chapter 3 and verse 1. That's **Ezra 3:1—And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; And afterward offered the continual burnt offerings, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.** Here we see that the Levitical system was back up and running. They weren't wasting any time in setting up the temple.

They must have been pretty grateful for being released from slavery and given all this help to get back to Jerusalem, and we can see proof in the next verse. **Verse 5—And afterward offered the continual burnt offerings, both of the new moons, and of all the Feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.** This was a *big deal* for them. The priesthood had not been in operation in Babylon. They were slaves. But now, with their new found

freedom and coming back to their homeland, they were given the opportunity to rebuild and keep God's Holy Days. And they were thankful and they offered up continual offerings to God.

Let's skip to verse 7—says, **They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus, king of Persia.**

**Verse 8—Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.** Two year later, after they returned, the work to rebuild the temple began. You have to remember that the city was a ruin when they arrived. Think about the destruction that occurs after wars. I think of images from Germany after WWII and the huge piles of rubble that were left as a result. I imagine that it was a little bit of a similar situation in Jerusalem. There weren't any places for the Jews to live. They had to completely rebuild. It must have been a *huge mess* to clean up. It probably would have been easier to have just started anew at a completely different place. So that must have had a huge physiological effect on each and every one of them. They were, after all, the cause for this destruction, for their disobedience to God. It's quite a powerful lesson. So we see that Zerubbabel lead the reconstruction process and it didn't even start until two years after they returned because of all the preparation that had to be made first. They first had to have a roof over their heads and a place to stay before any work on the temple could even begin.

**Verse 10—And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David, king of Israel.** They made music just as David had started. Pretty appropriate to have this kind of celebration when you consider that it was David who had first desired to build a house for God.

**Verse 11—And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *He is good, for His mercy endures forever* toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, and they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.** Finally, after all that time in captivity and after returning to a ruined city, the foundation was laid. This was an incredible time. It was pretty easy for them to see God's mercy, and they were filled with emotion. And again, we see that they praised God and rejoiced. Why? Because it came from this deep-seated feeling of gratitude that they had. These were some of the most momentous times in the lives of these returning Jews. But as we see in the next verse, it was also a little bit bittersweet.

**Verse 12—But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and they shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise**

**of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.**

We're going to experience this in the future too. We're really looking forward to God's Kingdom reigning on this earth, and it is going to be the most joyous occasion that has ever occurred on this earth. But it too is going to be bitter sweet. Because that's just the history of man. We hurt ourselves. We cause all of our own problems. And it's just sad to see that and experience it - just like these returning Jews experienced. They saw the ruin and the destruction. We too are going to see that, but it's going to be on such a massive scale that it's really hard to even comprehend. But there is the good news within all of this destruction, and that's something that we can rejoice about. As time goes on we're going to be able to better relate to the people spoken of here that returned to Jerusalem and the heartache and the joy of seeing everything being rebuilt. It's true, we're going to see so much more ruin and destruction, but we also have the opportunity to see God's Kingdom finally reigning on this earth.

That's a big part of what the Feast of Tabernacles is all about. And we're going to get to see that with our own eyes. How thankful are we for that opportunity? And when we realize how amazing this opportunity is, how much more should we be able to rejoice?

Let's go to Ezra 6. **Ezra 6:15—And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius, the king. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of the house of God with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.** So, eventually the temple was rebuilt and it was dedicated. But if you notice, it wasn't finished during the time of Cyrus. In fact, it was many years later. There were a lot of problems with the reconstruction since there were many that didn't want to see its completion, many of the people that were living around Jerusalem. But even when Darius came to power and the rebuilding continued, it wasn't until his sixth year of reign that it was finally finished. There was a lot of work that had to be done. Like I mentioned earlier, the state of Jerusalem as a city was very, very bad.

Again, if we look at what we are going to go through in the world tomorrow. We are going to have a lot of work to do as well. Who knows how long it's going to take to rebuild things and how much damage we will cause to this earth before it's all said and done. We know that God says that if He didn't intervene that we would destroy the entire planet. So how far will God allow it go? We don't know. But what we do know is that we are going to have our work cut out for us afterwards. And it could very well go on many, many generations into the future. Many of those that will be born in the Millennium will be able to see the results of man's stupidity, of man's rule and what it led to. It's going to serve as a very strong witness! It's just more proof that man's way leads to destruction, the complete opposite of God's way. That's one of the main lessons that we *must* learn, and we must be *fully* convinced of it.

Let's now fast forward a little bit in time and look into the accounts of the rebuilding of the city wall in Jerusalem. When the Babylonians conquered the city they destroyed it all, including the walls. And the returning children of Israel had a lot of groups of people around them that didn't like them, and the city wall was of utmost importance for their protection and survival.

So let's turn over to Nehemiah 1:1. That's **Nehemiah 1:1—The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. So Nehemiah is in the Palace of Shushan which was one of the main residences for the kings of the Persians empire. This is on the eastern border of what is today Iran, for those of you who are interested. That's quite a distance from Jerusalem and Babylon, but you have to remember that this Persian Empire was one of the largest empires that the world has ever seen. So, Nehemiah, he didn't really know what was going on in these other places that were far off. But when he found out that the people were having such difficulties and that the walls of the city were broken, he was overcome with emotion. And then he goes before God.**

We'll continue in **verse 5—And I said: I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy and those who love You and observe Your Commandments; please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel, Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the Commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. So Nehemiah's prayer to God, he is stating that they have sinned and they haven't listened to Him. Essentially saying that they're not deserving of any of God's mercy. This is an attitude we should all have. Did you happen to live through the Apostasy and actually come through it? Well, you were probably pretty lukewarm and also not deserving of God's mercy. Or for everyone else that's has been called? Well, we've all sinned, but God has allowed us to have a relationship with Him even though none of us are deserving of it. How many in the world have been called to know what we know? That right there is something very important that we should never forget; but it's true, we are so very blessed.**

**Verse 8—Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My Commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out from the farthest parts of heaven, yet I will gather them from there, and I will bring them to the places which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name. Here Nehemiah is referencing older scriptures from the law. He understands**

that even though they sinned, that if they repent and turn to God, that God will work with them. He is placing his hope solely on God, and that's a good place to put it, but as we all know and understand, God requires obedience.

**Verse 11—O Lord, I beseech Thee, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and the prayer of your servants, who desire to fear Your name: and prosper, I pray Thee, Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.** The final part of this prayer here is addressing the fact that Nehemiah is going to go before the king and ask something. So he's petitioning God to help him in gaining some favor with the king. And it states that he is the king's cupbearer. So that right there is a *huge* advantage for Nehemiah. He is in a position of power and of trust. The cupbearer's job was mainly to safeguard the king. He was the one that was responsible for making sure the king would not be poisoned, as so often happened back then. You know, he would often drink out of the cup first and make sure that it was safe before giving it to the king. Often times, the threat to a king was posed by immediate family members that wanted to have power and to be the king themselves, so it was common to have someone in your own family try and kill you. So if you were the cupbearer you were trusted above all else. And as a king, you were entrusting your life to this person. So, indeed, a very important position that Nehemiah had here.

Let's go to chapter 2:1—**And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before, therefore, the king said to me, Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? There is nothing but sorrow of heart. So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and the gates are burned with fire? Then the king said to me, What do you request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask you to send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.**

**Verse 7—Furthermore, I said to the king, If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy. And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.**

It worked! Nehemiah was allowed to go to Jerusalem, again, with the support of the king. And he returned and got to work. But there were groups around Jerusalem that would have liked to have seen the Jews disappear. They saw them as a threat and tried to stop the building of the wall. Similar things happened, if you remember, when the temple was being rebuilt. And even though this was still the Persian Empire, you have to remember that there were all kinds of little micro-states within the larger empire. And just because it was all a part of the Persian Empire did not mean that all of those little



states on the inside were all united. No, they all had different languages, different cultures, different religions, etcetera, etcetera.

Let's go to Nehemiah 4:1—But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that they were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—*stones* that are burned? Now Tobiah, the Ammonite, was beside him, and he said, Whatever they build, even if a fox goes up *on it*, he will break it down, their stone wall. So these two guys were all worked up and just want to mock and ridicule Nehemiah's wall project. They are just going to be there to help build character apparently. Because God could have easily made it easier for all these people who returned from captivity, but that wasn't the point. There are things they can learn from the mocking and the ridicule. It's the same for us. There is no escaping it. They went through it and we go through it too.

Let's drop on down to verse 6—So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work. Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come *and* attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless, we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. The wall is going to be finished. These other groups were just a big annoyance, but it wasn't going to stop them.

Verse 13—Therefore, I positioned *men* behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. Each family was responsible here for different sections of the walls, and they were often times separated by quite a long distance. So Nehemiah set watches and armed the families so that they could continue their work.

Verse 14—And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

Verse 16—So it was, from that time on, *that* half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and *wore* armor; and the leaders *were* behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Everyone here had a particular role to play, and everyone was on guard. In the last verse there it states they were even working with one hand and that the other hand had a weapon in it. These guys were determined, and they were going to get the job done, regardless.

Let's go to verse 19—Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, **The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.** So Nehemiah had devised a clever plan that had everyone on watch, and then the trumpet was used to sound an alarm if something was going on. They were all spread out here, really far apart from each other, and they were each working on their own sections of the wall, and that increased the threat of an ambush. So it was quite an amazing plan and strategy that was employed so that they would still succeed even though they had a massive undertaking and they were very few in number.

There are a lot of parallels with us and what God has done with his Church in this end-time. Look at what was done through the Worldwide Church of God and how the gospel was able to go out to all the nations of the world as a witness. And then how through PKG that that, too, has continued and how the books have gone out to such a large audience and how that we have been able to accomplish this with the use of technology. And we know that there is still much more ahead for us; the work isn't done yet. Or look at the simple fact that the sermons are able to be given in any part of the world and how God's Church is able to be fed Sabbath after Sabbath. All of this has been accomplished through a very small group.

Moving on here. I'm not going to go into chapter 5, but I will fill you in a little bit for the story flow. Basically, some of the poorer Jews start complaining about usury and having to sell their vineyards and land; even some of their children were having to be sold into slavery. So Nehemiah reprimands the ones with money and power and says, basically, that they're not to do what was done to them in Babylon. He asks them, you know, how could they sell their own into slavery? And we see that there were problems that still existed, as is almost always the case, but it gets corrected and the work continues.

And then we have, you know, Sanballat and Tobiah who kept trying to kill Nehemiah and stop the wall process. This is another story in and of itself, but I'll spoil the ending for you: They don't succeed. You can look into it more and into detail on your own time if you like.

But let's continue on in Nehemiah here and we'll go to chapter 6:15—says, **So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.** Sanballat, Tobiah, and all the others that had tried to stop the construction of the walls, they were all disappointed because they couldn't stop the work. They really threw everything at it and tried every trick to make sure that the building stopped. In their eyes, it should have stopped, too. And because of that, in their eyes it was accomplished through the God of the Israelites. They must have figured that the God of the Israelites was somehow more powerful than their god; that was the only explanation for their success. And they were right, because Yahweh is the only true God and He helped deliver them. They just didn't grasp the whole picture.

Let's go further here to **Nehemiah 8:1**—And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the Great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

**Verse 9**—And Nehemiah, which is at Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For the people wept when they heard the words of the law. They were being told here that this day unto God should not be a sad occasion. But it was difficult for these people that had been through so much, especially considering the sins that they had committed or that their fathers had committed, and it also seems like they were really seeing how they truly were. And when you get a glimpse of that, it can make you sad, because we all sin and that sin causes destruction and pain in our lives. But it's kind of like looking through the glass half-empty or half-full. And they are being told to focus on this Holy Day of God and be glad about it. Don't dwell on past mistakes, but get back up, deal with it, and be happy and rejoice in the plan that God has given. It's good to see ourselves and it's good that we are repulsed by it, but we are to be glad and happy that there is a way out, there is a solution, and God is giving it to us. Why shouldn't we rejoice about that? This is a big part of the good news.

**Verse 10**—Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD. Neither be you sorry (and that's grieved or pained) for the joy of the LORD is your strength. Again, "the joy of the LORD" *is* our strength. His plan *is* our strength. If we didn't have that, it would be difficult to keep going, if this life were all there is, if this sick system of man's was all that there is. But, thankfully we know that it isn't. How thankful are we, though, that we have this kind of knowledge, that God has made this plan for us? That is some good news right there, and that should give us some real peace in our lives.

The word "strength" that's used here as well is also translated sometimes as "fortress" or "refuge." What does that really mean? Well a fortress or a refuge, those are places of protection and are places that should have peace. But this is like a protection and peace of the mind. That's is really what God and His plan gives us.

**Verse 11**—So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be you grieved.

**Verse 13**—Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' house of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the Feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written. So, as it's been mentioned in past sermons, this word "dwell" can also be translated as "to sit in," since it's really more of what they were actually doing. They weren't living in these booths during the Feast. They didn't have kitchens or bedrooms. It was a simple box that they were entering into at times during the Feast so that they could do some reflecting, to pray, to study, etcetera.

**Verse 16**—Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in the courtyards of the courts of the house of God, or in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So these booths were constructed in open spaces outside of the houses, in the streets, some of them were on top of their houses, others were in their courtyards, and some even within the courts of the temple itself.

**Verse 17**—So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Here we see that in the same word that was translated in verse 14 as "dwell," that here in verse 17 is translated as "to sit under." Because that's what they did, they sat in them. The Feast we are now in is called the "Feast of Tabernacles" or the "Feast of booths." It's based around this idea of these structures. And there is a lot that we can learn from them. For the Jews here, they were thinking about their past, thinking about all that they and their forefathers had gone through with God. When they were thinking about these things, they were also counting their blessings, and I am sure they were feeling incredibly grateful, because at this point, it seems like they realized how much God had done for them, even though they disobeyed Him so many times. How could you not be thankful for the grace that God had shown? Probably there weren't even that many of them that had ever celebrated the Feast before. They were, after all, slaves in Babylon. There wasn't a Levitical system in place at that time. And, the Babylonians were quite oppressive.

Usually when groups of peoples are conquered they are dealt with heavy-handedly, and all their culture, the things they identify with, their religion, all those things are discouraged. The conquerors want the others to become like them, because "*they are right*." Remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Nebuchadnezzar tried to force them to even bow down before his idol. So that was not just, "You can't practice your religion," but rather, "You must practice mine." So these Jews had suffered through that kind of thing. That thankfulness and gratitude that they had translated into joy and gladness, then, as it says, "there was great gladness."

So for us, too, we need to have that gratitude and thankfulness so that we can do as we are commanded and to rejoice at this Feast. But we should be way, way, way more thankful and grateful than any of these children of Israel were. They were looking back at what had happened to them. We can also look back on our past and how we have just as much, and even more to be thankful about. But we can also look forward, which is something that they really couldn't do. They had very little actual knowledge about God and His plan. Just look at everything that has been revealed since then! Just a few books were even written back then at that time. How would it be if we only had the first few books of the law? Not even the entire Bible? Not even all the extra stuff that's been revealed through time here, but just the first few books? Most of that stuff was just purely physical in nature for a physical people! Jesus hadn't even come along yet and revealed that the temple is spiritual. What more meaning is there for us knowing that these temporary dwellings are just that, temporary, and that in the future that we have the potential to become a spirit being in the spiritual family of Elohim, in a spiritual temple, no longer in a temporary body but as a permanent being.

Let's go back in time a little bit here and take a closer look at Solomon's Temple. This was, of course, the first temple, and I think it would be a good idea to take a look at the dedication of it. So we'll start off in 1 Kings 8:1.

So that's 1 Kings 8. **1 Kings 8:1** says, **Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.** So the building of the temple is now finished and they are starting the celebration and the dedication of it. And now they are moving the ark of the covenant into place.

**Verse 2—And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the Feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.** So this dedication is happening during the Feast. And later on it states that they actually started seven days previous, before the actual Feast of Tabernacles.

**Verse 3—Then all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. And they brought the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude.** So there's a lot of sacrificing going on here during these many points throughout this dedication.

Hold your place here in 1 Kings 8. We'll be coming right back. And let's jump over to 2 Chronicles 5:11. And this is another account of the same event but it just has a little bit of extra information not found in 1 Kings 8. So it's 2 Chronicles 5:11. **2 Chronicles 5:11—And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait of course: All the Levites, which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, and their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and**

psalteries and harps, stood at the east of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets). And it came to pass, as the trumpeters and singers *were as one*, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD. That's exactly as it should be. And that's what we do at services. We come together as one. We make one sound. We shouldn't be divided. And God's spirit is what brings us all together as one. And if we look at the last part there it says, "They came together as one to *praise* and to *thank* God." So we praise God through our admiration and looking up to Him. We should really be put in awe by the Great God and what He has done, and is doing, and then be so very thankful for it. If we have those two things then we can really rejoice.

Continuing on in the verse... and when they lifted *their* voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, *saying, For He is good; for His mercy endures forever: then* the house was filled with a cloud, *even* the house of the LORD.

Alright, so let's go back here now to 1 Kings 8, and this time we're going to pick back up in verse 54. **1 Kings 8:54—And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.** So Solomon made a really long prayer at the dedication, basically just asking that the people not stray from God, and if they do, they be quickly corrected so that they could continue to obey Him. And at the same time he gives lots of praise and thanks to God. So he just finished that.

And then in verse 55—**And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the LORD, that has given rest unto His people, according to all that He promised: there has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses His servant.** Just like what was mentioned earlier, God keeps His promises. We can truly trust in God and He has us covered. And it must have been really amazing at this moment to see the temple that was promised to David, that it was finally complete, to see how God had delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians, brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey. And it was pretty easy for the people to see how God had kept His promises. They were living it and able to partake in it. That definitely made it easier for them to be in a more thankful frame of mind. And I am sure they rejoiced more because of it.

Let's go down to verse 62—**And the king, and all of Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD. And at the time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days. On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David His servant, and for Israel His people.**

You don't have to turn there, I will just read it to you, but in **2 Chronicles 7:8** the same thing is stated, but just a little bit differently. **Also, at the same time, Solomon kept the Feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. And on the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the Feast seven days. And on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shown unto David, and unto Solomon, and to Israel, His people.** So you see, the people went back to their tents and they were glad and merry. Why? Because they were grateful for everything that had been done to them. They weren't like spoiled children. And if we truly are able to "see" what God has given us, than we, too, should be so very thankful and we should be able to rejoice more at this Feast.

You know, for the Israelites, most things were pretty physical for them. That was the primary way in which God was teaching them. For us, it's a little bit different. We don't have a physical temple. God isn't performing physical miracles like He did with the Israelites today. And that can make it a little more challenging for us as humans sometimes, because we need to have that physical proof all the time. They say, you know, "Seeing is believing," and that's pretty true for us. Humans would much rather go out and carve an idol out of some rocks and look to that as "god" as opposed to looking to the real God. It is somehow just easier for us to do that.

But just because we don't see all these physical things like they did back then, doesn't mean that we don't have things to look to, to be thankful about. On the contrary. We have so much more than what any of these of the Old Testament had. And God gives us proofs and signs. He has given us so much more truth as well. So, I ask, "How thankful are we for that? And what is our response to God for that which He's given?"

Let's look at 2 Chronicles 6, and we're going to go to verse 41. This is after the dedication of the temple, and here we are able to see, get a little bit of insight to the understanding of the people at this time. So that's **2 Chronicles 6:41—Now, therefore, arise, O LORD God, into Your resting place, You, and the ark of Your strength: let Your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let Your saints rejoice in goodness.** Solomon thought that this temple was going to be the resting place of God on earth. He had no idea that Jesus was going to come along and make the way to God's true resting place. Everything was physical for them. He had no idea that God's resting place was to be Elohim, and that a way was going to be made so that God could live within us. So if these people that were talked about here in the Old Testament, they had this amount of understanding and they were able to be so thankful and joyous at *this* occasion, how much more thankful and joyous should we be in the times that we're living in now and for all the truth that we've been given now? We have so much more.

So, this year we have been going through our own dedication as well, a final part of the measuring of the temple. We are doing something similar to what happened back then, however, it's even more important. Let's look at a section from the posts from after last year's Feast, entitled, "A Year of

Dedication." I just want to read the first paragraph here in this post that is under the heading of "Two Events Holding Back Destruction (continued)."

"In reviewing what God has revealed, the last year for the measuring of the temple is to be a 'Year of Dedication' for God's Church. It will be a year of finalizing our preparation (PKG) for the great work that yet lies ahead and the actual coming of Jesus Christ in his Kingdom. We will be working to more fully dedicate God's house - the temple of God - our lives with God and Christ dwelling in us - through prayer as we actively seek and apply ourselves (in work) to fully offer up sacrifices (of self) on the altar before God. Much of what this will actually involve in the lives of God's people will be covered more thoroughly in the series that follows."

So, we should ask ourselves: How thankful are we for being in this Year? Of being blessed to participate in it? And for the fruit it has produced in our lives? We have been offering up sacrifices of self for the entire year. We have been working on the details of the temple, preparing the temple. That is what we should be doing all the time, actually. It's in our name, "Preparing for the Kingdom of God." We've been preparing more this year than in times before and we can see the fruit in our lives and in the Church. That's much better than a physical harvest of fruit that those of old had.

So I want to ask again: How thankful are we for being able to take part in this year of dedicating the temple? The degree to which we are thankful will determine in large part how much more rejoicing there can be in this year's Feast, as we near the end of this prophesied Year of Dedication.

In closing here, I'd like to turn to one final scripture, and that's Isaiah 65:18. We'll be reading verse 18 and verse 19. That's **Isaiah 65:18—But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create. For behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people. The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.**

That's what it's really all about, and that's what we look forward to with such anticipation. The next phase of God's plan is drawing nearer to us, and it is going to be a time of even more rejoicing. We will be saved from our own destructive nature. And that's pretty awesome.

So let's be thankful for all that God has given us - both physically and spiritually. Be thankful for this plan from God that really is "the best design ever." And let's put some time aside this Feast to meditate and reflect on *all* of our blessings - take an inventory of them, if you will, a little bit similar to what was done in the Old Testament with the function of the booths. And let's look at what we really have and be thankful for it all. And in doing this, we should be able to "see" how truly blessed we are, and that, in turn, will allow us to be more joy-filled and to be able to more truly rejoice at this Feast.