

## The Rebuilding of Jerusalem, Pt. 2

Ronald Weinland

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This sermon is being given from Dublin, Ireland. I was hoping to be able to have a corner of this room that I could be able to pan out on the little river or canal here, whatever it's called. There's a ship out here that they have. I think they give tours of it, I'm not sure. But that didn't work out so well. So anyway, the background I have is going to be a little difficult probably for Jeremy for editing, especially because one side has the sun coming in and it's going to be changing constantly. So, that will probably present some challenges. But it is what it is. At least it's being recorded.

I'm going to try to look at the camera mostly today, but people are sitting over here. So anyway, this is the first recorded sermon, I guess, that I've given in Ireland. I did give one many, many years back when we first came here.

So, we went on a tour yesterday and cut it a little short because we were soaking wet. The day we got here was nice. Today is nice. But that day when we got out there it was pouring rain, the wind was blowing, and pretty much got soaked in the first part of the tour around this great dome that I'll maybe mention later on, that is the oldest constructed of its type in the world, right at 5,000 years old.

It was interesting on the tour, but we had a half an hour tour, but the tour is outside because this thing is outside. And so, we got colder and colder and colder and colder. Anyway, I was soaked through. But interesting information. I'll maybe mention it another time.

We're going to continue on today. This will be *Part 2* of the sermon series, *The Rebuilding of Jerusalem*. Some will have only heard *Part 1*. By the time they hear this one here, obviously, it will be nice to hear *Part 2*. But today some will have missed *Part 1*, those here primarily, and they will have to pick another time to catch up on it. So, shouldn't be too hard in this particular series here.

We're continuing on from the flow of what we had in the previous series entitled *God's Glory and Greatness*, and basically, it's some of the same history we're going through but covering different matters.

So anyway, this is *Part 2* of that new series, *The Rebuilding of Jerusalem*, and it should be evident as we continue to go through this series it still is a spinoff of *God's Glory and Greatness*, that particular series. We're just going through the timing here now of the time when Babylon fell. It was in power for about seventy years, right almost exactly seventy years.

Then we come to the time that Cyrus conquered the area there of Babylon, took it, and we start then with the reign of the Medes and the Persians, which is the silver part of the statue with the arms and the chest part being that. The head was gold. That was primarily Nebuchadnezzar and those who followed him up to the fall there.

But anyway, after the Jewish people who desired to return from captivity had done so, they experienced a lot of opposition.

Now, what we brought out in *Part 1* here is that this is a physical thing that's taking place but it's a type of something that would happen spiritually later on. That's why we should all be more moved, in that respect, to understand that there are a lot of things in scripture that are indeed about the end-times, but even this Body, the remnant is very much a focus of a lot of prophecies. That really becomes a little more mind-boggling when you continue to go through some of these things and realize this is what so much of this is about. There are lessons to be learned from those things that happened physically that we are to learn spiritually, but they are still a type.

I think of especially this here with this title here, *The Rebuilding of the Temple*, because that's why they had been sent back. That command two hundred years previous to that written by Isaiah was given to Cyrus. He saw his name. He knew it was about him, and he was very moved that God had named him and charged him to send the Jewish people back from captivity. Because even the prophecies about the captivity of Judah and how Babylon was going to conquer them were all there.

So again, God plans these things, has planned these things so far in advance before (it's hard for us to grasp that), before time began, before things were created, and has a plan for molding and fashioning, for creating His Family. The more we grasp and comprehend that kind of power, that kind of mind and being, the more in awe we should be and the more we should be in awe of the fact that God's working with us.

That's why I marvel at what David said. David marveled, "What is man that You're mindful of him?" This is what we should think in that respect, "Who are we, what are we that You're mindful of us?" Of nearly 8 billion, or I think it's over now 8 billion people on this earth and we have an opportunity to be a part of something so incredible that was prophesied so long ago. Yet we are, and we just have to hold onto it with all of our being, to recognize that we have choices to make, and then to fight for it.

Here they had started the migration back out of the areas of Babylon now controlled by the Medes and Persians. We talked about that in *Part 1*.

They had a lot of opposition when they got there, to rebuilding the temple, because the people had been living there in that area for over seventy years. So, this was their home. Some, many were born there, they grew up there, and this was their land, this was their home. And so, to see people being sent back, it wasn't well received. They felt it was theirs and they fought, they went up against them at different times, created a lot of havoc for those Jewish people who were returning.

A lot of comparison then of things that we've had to go through, battle after battle after battle. Because it was long for them in the process of returning and trying to rebuild the temple. Then as we talked about last Sabbath, the period of time there was around ten to fourteen years where they had been told, commanded to stop building because some had sent a bad report from the region about what they were doing.

To understand now that there are leaders there that are already established under Babylon in the beginning, and then a lot of those just rolled over and gave their allegiance then to the Persians, and so some of the same people. In some cases, they would send different ones in to govern the region, but

again, they were opposed to what the Jewish people were doing and so they continually battled against them as well or tried to make it difficult for them.

So, this has been some of the story in the flow here, that then they were told by God to start rebuilding. They hadn't received permission from the king to start rebuilding after the previous one who had told them to cease. It never started again, so during those ten to fourteen years they became rather lethargic in the sense of why they had returned and rebuilding the temple. They became more focused on building their own homes and so forth in the towns they'd returned to around the areas of Jerusalem and in Jerusalem. And so, this became a problem.

Again, things we have learned too as we have gone through various stages of rebuilding of the temple after the Apostasy.

So again, continuing on here. So they, again, had received a lot of opposition from those who lived in the region as they were trying to rebuild the temple, and we're not even to the period of time now where they started rebuilding the wall totally.

We then came to the count where, again, there were others once again who had come there, leaders or rulers under the Persians who were in that region of Judea, and it sounds like it was all the way up to the area of the river Euphrates. They had authority as governors of that area and they had come to Jerusalem, seen the rebuilding of it, and they demanded to know who they were, what they were doing, why they were rebuilding it, and so forth, and so they sent word then to Darius. Basically, their intent was, as the ones before, was to shut it down.

But kind of a unique situation here of what was taking place and how Darius responded to all this. But not what they were expecting. But again, to note that the individuals who wrote these things were very shrewd, very smart, very wise in how they presented this to the king. Which was good on their part, otherwise they probably would have ended up dead.

Anyway, let's pick it up in Ezra 6 and read this part once again, and then we'll continue on in the few verses down from there, I guess it is. **Ezra 6:1** says, **Then king Darius issued a decree, and a search was made of the archives.** So, if you remember, those governors or the governor of that area and those who were with him, governing with him, sent this information then to Darius and made the statement in there asking him if he would make a search or if he would find if it was so what Nebuchadnezzar had done and then later on what Cyrus had done, if this was true that Cyrus had given them the command to go back and rebuild. Because, again, that's how they presented it to Darius.

So, it says here **Darius did issue his decree and a search was made of the archives where the treasures were stored in Babylon. Then Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll (at this particular location) was found, and in it a record where the following was written...**

So, this is what they found there. **In the first year of king Cyrus, king Cyrus issued a decree in the house of God at Jerusalem, and here is what it said, Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered**

**sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, which is about 100' x 100' (30 m x 30 m), with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber.**

So, all this was very explicit in how it was to be done because these things were already in the record, and his task, in that sense, was to do it exactly as God had given them before in the building in what was there to rebuild it in like manner.

He went on to say, as what Cyrus had done or said, **Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple, which is in Jerusalem, and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, to its place; and deposit them in the house of God.**

Now, we look at something like this and we see things that are very physical and things that were taken away, but we need to understand what this means spiritually, "the treasure" and so forth, what those were or what they are for us and what had happened as things began to be taken away.

Because that's what happened with the Apostasy. The Apostasy was an attempt to take everything away that had been given to the Church as far as every basic truth you can think of. The Sabbath, the Holy Days, all the way through, it doesn't matter what it is you look at, tithing and so forth, some of the most basic things, and even the desire, eventually, to take away the name.

So, we can go through and look at those kinds of things and realize that's our treasure. That's our gold and silver, what God gives to us, the truth. That's what we should value. That should be our treasure. God began to reestablish those things and the foundation of those things.

That's why I mentioned last Sabbath one of the first things God had us do, had me do, in that respect, was to focus in on the Passover because it was being taken away. And not only that, but within the scattered Body it was being taken away because now different ministers came to the forefront who had been taught improperly in Ambassador College about 14/15 concept of Passover.

And so, they came out of the woodwork, in that respect, after the Apostasy, because now was their chance to really put forward what they already believed. They'd been ministers for so long in the Church – in the environs of the Church, I should say, because some even cut themselves off. Because if you do those kinds of things, you cut yourself off from God's spirit. But God allowed that to continue on. They could teach those things they had learned.

I think of one minister that was in an area we moved to. I grew up in Kansas so went back to Kansas. When we first got married we went to Kansas for about a year. That minister there, it became evident in time, he didn't really understand anything spiritually. Any conversation with him, there wasn't anything of God's spirit in it. But he was a smart individual. He'd gone to college before he ever went to Ambassador. I believe it was chemistry he was really good in, had a degree, if my memory served me correctly.

Just like people who had seminaries and they're taught doctrine. If someone receives that and takes it back out and teaches the same thing, they can talk about it just as it's presented to them. This is what

some ministers did. They were able to go out and teach various things they had been taught, as long as they taught them faithfully, as to what was given and not putting in their ideas. But in time that began to change, and people began to put in their own ideas. Hence, the Apostasy.

But this happened with this matter of Passover as well, that individual who had been taught by Dr. Hoeh about a 14/15<sup>th</sup> Passover, a lot of ministers under him who had been taught by him in these classes, went out and they believed that stuff. And so, now after the Apostasy and the scattered Body, they began to come forward with some of these ideas, teaching them in their areas. Some got in trouble in some of that, but they never really addressed it in the largest of the groups and didn't take a stand on it like they should.

But that's one of the things God blessed us in doing. And not only that, blessed us in being able to dig into it deeper. So, not only was the foundation re-laid, if you will, or established once again but more was built upon that for us in the end-time, more understanding, more proof, in that sense, on a spiritual plane.

Like I mentioned (I believe I mentioned this last Sabbath), things like the Hebrew words "*erebyim*," "*bane ha erebyim*," where it talks about "between the two evenings," "*ba erev*," "*ma erev*," "*erev*," all the meanings of those things. God gave us clear insight into that.

I was talking to someone last Sabbath and talking about there was a period of time where we had one Jewish rabbi who was contacting us, contacting me in the Church, I guess, and he'd gone through some of these materials and had read them and he was communicating back and forth about some of it because by what seemed to be indicated, he could grasp and comprehend that they had some things wrong about the meaning of "*erev*" and "*bane ha erebyim*."

Anyway, it was kind of an interesting dialogue back and forth, but he couldn't take an extra step beyond that to go any farther than that. After a while kind of dropped out of there totally. But I had mentioned this as well, he wasn't just any individual as far as a teacher of the Jews was concerned because he said his father had been buried in the one main burial site there in Jerusalem, and you don't get buried there unless you're way up there in the Jewish religion in the sense of rabbis. So, he was an important individual and he was able to see some of these things, but he couldn't take it any further because God wasn't drawing him.

But it gave me encouragement to realize even more so what it was that God had given, because we had people in the Church who felt that the Jews, surely, understood all these things because they had Hebrew, and surely they understand some of this or all of it, and they lean toward that. The reality is we should lean toward always, obviously, toward God and the inspiration He gives us to reveal things to us.

So, that was revealed by God. To me, very exciting to understand that God was re-establishing things of the temple that we had to have for the end-time. So, it was doctrine after doctrine, things about Pentecost and so forth, that God continued to reestablish in the Church.

That's our treasure! That's our strength even! Talked about so often all the truths that God has given us in this end-time is our strength. There is power on that, of the knowledge, of ability to see and know those things. And indeed, it should be our treasure.

So, these things shouldn't escape us, what's being said here.

**Also, let the gold and the silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple, which is in Jerusalem, and brought to Babylon be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, to its place, and deposit them in the house of God.** Well, where is the house of God today? It's in those with whom God is living and dwelling. Those things had to be restored in us because they were being watered down, and an attempt then to destroy them completely.

Again, to be reminding everyone here, Ezra is going through telling the story, bringing us up to the present, but he's still not a part of those returning. He's just going through an account of history. That's why some people become so confused when they read some of the different prophets here, minor prophets, because they think Cyrus and Darius lived at the same or reigned at the same time. That's not the case. One followed the other.

Here is Darius now, later on, and the things he's going through, and Ezra is learning from this process and recording. So, continue on here, pick it up in verse 6.

**Verse 6—Now, therefore, Tattenai, the governor of the region beyond the river,** he's the one that sent this then to Darius, and so this is what's being done, **and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions, the Persians who are beyond the river, keep yourselves far from them.** This is what Darius is telling them. So, kind of backfired. He gives them a command, "Keep away from these people, leave them alone." Pretty strong coming from the king.

So again, he says, **all these your companions, the Persians who are beyond the river, keep yourselves from them. Let the work of the house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build the house of God on its site.** So, Darius was very moved by this and he's going through and finding these things out himself and now he's very moved by what Cyrus had done and by what he learned concerning this history about why Cyrus did what he did. That he's moved by this to, in essence, take a strong stance in favor of the Jews who had returned.

So, he said, **Let the work on the house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build the house of God on its site. Moreover, I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews; for the building of the house of God let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the river.** In other words, "In your region, let this cost be taken from you."

I find that amazing, how God works with things, orchestrates things. The house is going to be rebuilt and He sees to it that things that others were trying to work at backfires on them. Not only that, but now they have to support it out of their taxes that would have been out of that region.

So, he says, "Let the cost be paid at the king's expense." So, he's reminding them this is the king's, "You serve me, the money comes to me, but send that to them." So anyway.

**This is to be given immediately to these men so that they are not hindered. So, whatever they need— young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven...** So, he hadn't known about

these things, but Darius now knew all of this stuff. He had looked into it, obviously, more deeply than what is recorded right here. But he knew about these things, of what they were doing, how they did it, and so that interest was moved along here. But he said, “This is what you’re to do so that they can offer these burnt offerings to the God of heaven.”

**...wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem—let it be given to them day by day without fail.** Now, that’s a pretty strong directive, command from the king to these leaders in that particular region.

**...so that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.** He wanted favor. A lot of different ones like this were superstitious in many things they did, and yet there were various things of various gods that they saw that some people had favor from the gods they worshipped. They wanted to be associated with that.

That’s basically what was taking place here, and if there was any kind of favor that he could receive from this God who had done all these things, that he’s now more aware of, then he wants favor for him and his sons. So again, very knowledgeable here about what they were doing, that they had the customs of sacrifices and so forth, of offerings to the God of heaven.

**Verse 11—Also I issue a decree, and whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it.** So, this gets stronger and stronger with the teeth he’s putting into it as to how they were supposed to give favor and help to the Jewish people that are rebuilding the temple.

So again, **Then let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it.** How much stronger can you make something like this, to put a fear into the people serving, who are supposed to be serving the Persian king, Darius, and bringing them into line that they better do exactly what he says, or these things are going to happen to them?

So again here, **may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I, Darius, issue the decree; let this be done with diligence.** So, yeah, incredibly strong, powerful.

Then it goes on to say, **Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the river, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what king Darius had sent.** So, they didn’t just do it, they diligently put their hand to making sure this was done the way that Darius had told them.

**So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo.** Again, as I mentioned last Sabbath, it’s incredible to me all the prophets that were raised up, worked with at different times, talking about Jeremiah in Babylon, back in Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar, different ones that at different times that were taken into captivity, like Ezekiel and so forth, Daniel that we talked about. They came during different captivities and here they are being raised up and used by God and wrote so many things about the end-time.

That's why I marvel about Ezekiel. I get a charge out of that because his prophecies, the prophecies in the book of Ezekiel are very much about Israel and Israel going into captivity. Well, this is why so many people have pooh-pawed Ezekiel, because here he is writing about the captivity of Israel long, long, long after they've already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

What's this all about? Well, again, God revealed to Herbert Armstrong this is about the end-time. This is about Israel, a physical people, in that respect, but it's even more than that. God is even showing more about that right now, that even things that are written there are about us and about this time and things that are taking place. So again, all these things are awesome here when it talks about Haggai and then Zechariah, some of the things we've read and will be reading. They're prophesied. So, they're in this period of time. Ezra is still just writing about it. He is not coming on the scene yet in the sense of what he's going to do.

So, it's talking about these two prophets. **Then they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia.**

It says, **Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar**, That is Nisan. So again, that first month where Passover is, Nisan. So, it says it's **finished on the third day, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius**. So, that's in 515 BC. So, we've come quite a way down here now from the area of 539 from the time that we come to the period of the end of Babylon, the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire and up to this point in time now. So, we're moving forward. Ezra is taking this forward more and more in what has happened and so it shows when the temple was finished, in the sense of the structure itself.

So again, "in the sixth year of Darius." Now, Artaxerxes is mentioned here amongst these. He was mentioned in Ezra 4 as being the one who had put a stop to the construction of the temple. Now again, some of this stuff you go through history and read some of the things written about some of these kings, they are so messed up in the timing of some of these things and where they put the different kings. Again, the primary reason is because they don't use the Bible as any kind of authority whatsoever. If they would that would help them to place things in their proper place. But they refuse to do that.

So, this Artaxerxes is mentioned here among these others. It didn't mean he did good, but it's according to what he said, too. In other words – I'm pointing this out – it says here that they built and finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. That doesn't mean they were all good. Because they commanded certain things. Artaxerxes put a stop to it. Well, it still happened according to that, but it stopped for that ten to fourteen years, and that brought out other things that they needed to learn and be moved then by God after He charged them by Haggai and Zechariah, that they were to start again in the construction of the temple when they had laid off for that long.

We learn from that as well. That's covered in *Part 1*.

Then it goes on in **verse 16—Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the descendants of the captivity celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.** Now, I read something like this, and I think of different times when we have gone through different trials in the Church.

But I think of the first time that finally we were able to get started in the sense of what happened during the Apostasy and at our first period of time of a Sabbath, first Passover, first Unleavened Bread, and those things were very moving. Because when something is taken from you, treasure, those things, everything in your life is stripped from you, and now you're able to start receiving it back – have a long way to go but what those things meant can only be experienced, in that respect.

This is kind of a part of what they were doing on a physical plane after being gone for so long, seventy years, and different period of seventy as I've talked about. Here is another seventy now, the completion of the temple and their dedication and what was taking place. Celebration, indeed, as it says, "with joy." I think of what we're commanded to do at the Feast of Tabernacles, to rejoice before God. We're to see the things that God has done in our lives and we're to look forward with that same kind of anticipation and excitement and joy for what God is bringing.

**...celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. So, they offered sacrifices at the dedication of the house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.**

So, it is during this period of time that they have been in captivity, that because they were no longer able to worship in Jerusalem they began to build structures of places that they could worship. Not in the same way because they couldn't offer up sacrifices and the like. They understood that by some of the things that were given, but they still kept up the system of knowing who were Levites, who had the various jobs according to their service. That's what this is referring to, what had been established back in the time of Solomon.

All these things recorded in scripture of what they were to do and how they were to do it, this is what they were following, as it says, "as it's written in the book of Moses." So, all this was commanded. This is what Solomon followed and refined even more so, and they followed the same process.

**Verse 19—Then the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.** So again, this is in that same month, in the same month of the year. This is Adar. This is Nisan (Nissan, if you will), and this is now Passover on the fourteenth. The temple, I think it said it was completed on the third day. My eye doesn't see it, but I think that's what was said.

This is, again, Passover on the fourteenth day and it says, **For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves.** So, they had gone through all the things that are given in the book of Leviticus about

purification, about being able to do their jobs, their functions in the service of the temple. And this is exactly what they were doing.

**...they had purified themselves; all of them**, it says, **“were ritually clean”** but they were clean before God in the sense of being able to do the service before God. To be clean for us we understand it’s a matter of being forgiven of sin, which is another matter.

**So they slaughtered**, in other words, **They killed the Passover for all the descendants of the captivity**. I marvel at this verse here because this is one that is so messed up. It has been in the Church for ages and ages. This is why the 14/15 got so messed up because people didn’t separate.

There is a sacrifice of the Passover when you’re referring to God’s sacrifice, the sacrifice of Joshua as our Passover. We understand that distinction. But there are also sacrifices of the Passover. Doesn’t mean they sacrificed them on the Passover day, but it refers to them in this regard because this is when they were slaughtered.

That’s what it says here, **“So, they slaughtered, killed the Passover.”** In other words, killed the animals at that time in the afternoon of the Passover day because this is the time... This is the time we understand that Christ died. But there’s a lot of meaning throughout the Passover day, as we’ve gone through in times past. So, here is a period of time where all the animals were being butchered, killed, and prepared. They wouldn’t have had time if they waited until sundown. They’d have been up all night and not able to start some of the feasting until the next morning.

So, here, this is what they did. They had it all ready so that they could start offering it immediately at sunset. Still going to be late by the time they could start partaking of it, which they did, of the sacrifices, but they weren’t actually offered as sacrifices until the first day of Unleavened Bread, but they were killed on the Passover afternoon. It’s a clear distinction. But again, God had to reveal that. We didn’t know it. We didn’t understand it until He gave it.

**...they slaughtered (killed) the Passover for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren and priests, and for themselves.**

**Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Eternal God of Israel.** We’ll talk about some of those things later on in this series as we go through it. But they had gone through various things. This is a fairly long period of time we’re talking about. Here we are down to 515. Cyrus had given the command back in 539, and that length of time, with time, time tests people, it tries people.

Time has tried us within the scattering, and we go through various things, go through various trials and how we’re going to respond. Well, this happened to them as well and some of them began to mix with some of the people of the region roundabout, and God had forbidden that because of their religious beliefs. Because whenever they did this the record is, as a whole, they began to follow – especially if the men took wives of different people – they began to give into some of their beliefs and slowly but surely watered-down things that they’d been given by God, or they were totally taken away from them.

Even Solomon did this toward the latter part of his life — Incredible! —because all the wives he had were from different areas he began to let down and do things he should never have done. So again, that's why God commanded these things. It wasn't because of race; it was because of the truth in the sense of what they'd been given at that time on a physical plane. Theirs wasn't spiritual but on a physical plane.

And so, these individuals (again, it'll come up later), some of them had done these things and they had to make things right before God to be able to serve God especially. Well, same for us. We have to cleanse ourselves in our lives through this process we go through. We're ever working on self. We're ever working to get rid of the things of this world. We're ever seeing things inside of us.

God will show us. After we've conquered one thing or come to see something in our life that has to be addressed, we begin to address it, we begin to fight it. We may have to fight it for a while because it may try to raise its ugly head again. You've got to keep fighting until it's conquered. Then after all that's done God shows us more. Because there's so much inside of us that has to be conquered. It's about the mind, and it's about things that are deeply embedded in the mind.

It's kind of like building a foundation but in reverse. You know, when you build a temple you build these different rows of rock that have to go up. You can't get on to the sixth row until you've done the fifth row. In like manner this is like the tearing down, if you will, of things that are deep inside of us. You have to take it row by row breaking it down. There are some things you can't get down to the fifth row until you've gotten rid of the sixth. I hope that makes sense. In the sense of what we're doing in reverse of conquering and destroying the things that need to be destroyed inside of our thinking so that we become more at one with God.

So again, **Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all those who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Eternal God of Israel.** That's just about repentance on our part and a continuing process we have to do to repent, to learn things that are inside of us that have to be changed, to be refined. As we conquer one thing then we'll see something more deeply inside of us. That's an awesome and a beautiful process in order to become transformed. That's what growth is all about, spiritual growth.

**So they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Eternal made them joyful, and turned the heart** it says, **"of the king of Assyria toward them," to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of the God of Israel.** Now, I don't know why that is in here in this regard. Anyway, "So they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Eternal made them joyful and turned the heart..."

So, there is something missing here in the translation, and it seems to have more to do on a spiritual plane with like some words for Egypt, as an example. There are different words that have different meaning that can actually be translated. Just like "king" in this respect, "things that rule; or rulers; or governors" so it's very broad, some of these are very broad terms.

But so often what's happened is that translators have put in the only thing that they can grasp and understand because they're not being led, as a whole, by God's spirit. Sometimes they have been. But as a whole, they haven't been when they're copying various things and so you'll get individuals who record various things at times on a physical plane of something they don't grasp.

Because by this time Assyria had nothing to do with anything here. This is way down the line because Assyria – the Babylonians came in and conquered Assyria. The Babylonians got rid of the Egyptians in the region, pushed them back down to Egypt and they had power then over, in essence, so much of the world at that time. Then Medes and Persians came along, and Assyria is long lost in the past. So, this has something to do with the hearts of individuals being turned from their past and so forth.

But again, God hasn't given that.

Anyway, **to strengthen their hands in the work in the house of the God of Israel.** So, perhaps something that started all the way back in the time of Assyria there when they started conquering? Don't know what it means. Hasn't been given.

So anyway, so the temple was rebuilt and dedicated again here in 515 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel. So again here, a fascinating story about Zerubbabel, that he was the first to be sent out and sent down into that region to begin building up and building the temple. Called by a different name, as we read last week, by the Persians, the name he'd received evidently then from the Babylonians or perhaps the Persians. They renamed individuals oftentimes here, but this sounds like this came from Babylon.

Like Daniel's name, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and all those, there were all these different names that they had in those regions than the Hebrew names that they really had.

Zerubbabel was his Hebrew name. So, it talks about "under his leadership with the encouragement and guidance of two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah." These are the two, especially at that time when they had let up and quit rebuilding, that God sent word from these two prophets to them and sent them to strengthen Zerubbabel and help keep him focused on the rebuilding of the temple. They responded accordingly, and according to God's spirit, as we read earlier last week.

Now, it needs to be noted here that Ezra still hasn't even come on the scene yet. He's just giving a history of things from the beginning that led up to this.

So again here, it needs to be stated that Ezra still hasn't come on the scene yet. He's giving a history coming up to this point in time and started with those events concerning king Cyrus who gave permission and even command, if you will, to the Jews to return to rebuild the temple.

So again here, Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 and then gave permission to return to rebuild the temple, and the temple was finally completed then in 515 BC, twenty-four years later. So, that's incredible it even took that long from the time they were commanded to go back and the time they actually finished the temple, the rebuilding of it with all the thousands that had returned (that we covered last Sabbath), and

here it took them this long. Especially when you think there was ten to fourteen years that they weren't even rebuilding. So, whatever that period of time is, isn't absolutely sure, but somewhere in that area.

What's written about next concerns the Jewish people who would stay behind, of which many had moved farther east. So again, we've covered that. Many returned, thousands returned, but a lot of people stayed there because this was their home now. This was where a lot of them had grown up. You're talking about a long period of time here that they'd been in Babylon, seventy years, you're talking about another twenty-four years added to that, long period of time here.

So, I think of Daniel, his age, how long he had lived. He lived through so much of this coming up to the time of the Persians then when Cyrus was there and Daniel. Incredible.

So again here, so moving forward from when Persia defeated Babylon in 539, it's nearly sixty years later in Persia. We're jumping ahead sixty years to 479 BC, and we come to a king named Xerxes, also referred to as Ahasuerus. "Ahasuerus" is a term like "Pharaoh" or "Caesar," so that's how he's referred to in scripture. But Xerxes was reigning in Persia. We covered that story recently in the book of Esther.

So, here we are, this is where Esther comes on the scene. So, got to understand here that a lot of people had moved out of the region of Babylon deeper into the east into Persia. This is where they grew up. You're talking about a long period of time now by the time you get down to 479 and even after the rebuilding. But if you talk about when they had, Babylonians had first gone in and taken captive everything you start with 605, here we are this much later now, 479, we've gone through a lot of history here up to this point.

So, now sixty years after the Medes and Persians had conquered Babylon we come to this king, Xerxes, Ahasuerus. He's the one in the book of Esther, and when we talk about Esther and what had taken place concerning queen Vashti. We know the story, we've gone through it.

We will pick up a little of this in the book of Esther to be reminded of a part of it. In Esther 2, let's read this.

**Esther 2:5—In Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai.** So, got to realize there are a lot of Jews, there are a lot of people now who have grown up in Babylon, born at different times in Babylon, different ones here who were born during the time of the Persians then, of their being in power and having conquered. So, we went from Cyrus, and Artaxerxes was in there for a little while, and then we had Darius, and now we're all the way down to Ahasuerus or Xerxes himself in the time of Esther.

So, a lot of the individuals, God had given the Jews incredible favor. They served in the palaces; they served in government even. If you look at what happened in Babylon, God had given special favor and help to the Jewish people, different ones, different leaders, and so forth. Look at the different ones that served, going all the way back to even Daniel, and seeing the ones that were given favor of rulership and service within the temple. Then all the way through in every king here, basically, there are different ones who served in the government or served in the areas of the kings, places of service. It was with the Persians as well. They were given favor from God.

This is something we should never lose sight of. We may have different trials and hardships we go through sometimes in the Church, in the sense of growing and experiencing the things that we need to experience in the sense of trials, but to understand that so often we don't even know the times, as a whole, because we don't tend to think that way, that God gives us favor, gives us abilities, gives us strength, gives us favor from others around us within the midst of those who don't give us favor. Because we receive plenty of flak from others too.

But so often we have those accounts where God has given incredible favor to individuals. That's always exciting seeing that process take place in our lives. So, we have a mixed bag.

So do they. They have different ones who fought against them and others who gave them favor. Just the story of Esther alone is an incredible story of that when you see what took place there with Haman. So, you have the adversaries in one part, others on the other part who give favor. So, constantly an ongoing process even within the Church.

**Esther 2:5—In Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity, who had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah.** Now, it doesn't, in this portion here, doesn't specifically from what's being said here, it can be referring to some of the individuals who, as it's going through a lineage here and showing some of those who were taken captive. It doesn't specifically mean that this had to be Mordecai who was taken, in that respect, but he's descended now from these individuals who have been.

So, it goes back in the lineage here, who had been taken. It doesn't get real specific about the different ones that might have been a part of that because it could have been a father and a son and then he continued on. I hope you're understanding what I'm saying, in that respect. Because you're talking about a lot of years all the way down the line here. These are descendants because this is what happened. Some of the scriptures talk about this later on, of all these. They have these descendants, and the original ones are the ones taken captive and then the others either were born in Babylon or born in Persia and that's where they grew up.

**...who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity, who had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah.** So, his lineage, whoever going back here in this, Jeconiah, so there were several captivities. Jeconiah, again, or Jehoiachin was the one taken down into Babylon.

It says, **whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away.** So, this was also when Ezekiel was also taken to Babylon. This was in 597 BC. So that was in that particular captivity, 597 BC's captivity that this lineage of Mordecai was taken into captivity.

**And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter.** So again, they were cousins. **...for she had neither father nor mother. And the young woman was good and beautiful.** So again, we've gone through that story, but I find it incredibly interesting that here is the process we've gone through. All this time and you see the different prophets that God raised up at different times, and then the story of Esther

in the midst of all this, as a story flow of time that Jerusalem was being rebuilt in the sense of the temple. But the walls haven't been rebuilt. This is something to be addressed in time here.

This is a long period of time of rebuilding and some things may seem really long to us, and they do, but they're really not that long. When you think of something that physical to them, this is long. So, from this it appears that Mordecai's great-grandfather was Kish who had been taken captive in 597. This is the lineage, Kish, and this is nearly 120 years now. So, we have different process here of time of lineage, and it's at this point of the story, it's thirty-six years after the temple had been rebuilt, dedicated in Jerusalem.

So again, thirty-six years later after the temple had been rebuilt, dedicated in Jerusalem you come up to the time then of Xerxes, up to the time of Mordecai, the story of Esther, the book of Esther.

There's a lot that happened during this period of time, which is to me is fascinating. Everyone has a different take on history and things that are plugged in there. I've talked to so many people at times, and I didn't like history when I was growing up, but once you come into the Church so often that changes because things begin to fit into place in a way that are intriguing and exciting. Whereas before it didn't mean a thing, now it does.

Anyway, so next in timing of these events we come to the next king of Persia who followed the reign of Xerxes at the time of Esther, and there's another king. There are different kings here that sometimes carry the same names. Sometimes they call them the first or the second or whatever. This is Artaxerxes, not the same as before. So, it's not the Artaxerxes who had halted the building of the temple all the way back in Ezra 4.

The reign of the next Artaxerxes was from 465 to 425. Many of these are things that are actually very much recorded in history. A lot of these dates are right down the line with when these kings reigned. So, the reign of the next king began in 465 to 425 BC which follows the time of Esther.

So, just before refreshing our minds concerning the story of Mordecai and Esther, we'd been covering the book of Ezra, and we'd come to the point where he was giving history then, bringing us through a long period of time, from the captivity on up, and the time of the building of the temple that had then been rebuilt in 515.

Then that following month, we read then in **Ezra 6:19—Then the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.** So, this is where we pick it up in the story here in Ezra's story flow. So, he's brought us up to this point.

**Then the children of Israel that had returned from the captivity ate together with all who separated themselves from the filth of the nations,** as we read there, and it talks about how they observed the Feast then during that period.

Now, Ezra 7. It's the next book of Ezra. It finally comes to the timing of his story, of not just giving a history but now his involvement of what it's talking about here in this thing about the rebuilding of the temple and restoring the things in the temple and beyond.

It says here, **Ezra 7:1—Now after these things...** So, this is how Ezra is addressing it. So, everything else has been bringing it up to the present. This is why so many people become so screwed up when they look at the different kings and the things that took place and get all these times jumbled up sometimes by over 150 years of messing them up.

He's now saying, basically, here we're starting with the rest of the story that he can tell from his personal point of view and not as a matter of something now that's just history bringing everything up to date.

**Now, after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra,** so it's speaking of himself, **the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah...** So again, a genealogy flowing, mentioning that it goes back to **...Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the high priest.** So, he's giving his lineage, basically here, and it goes all the way back to Aaron the high priest. So, they never lost sight of these things in their history. These things were always important to Jewish people, and they kept good record of everything in that regard.

I think it's interesting to note here too that he goes back to Phinehas. Now, Phinehas is the one that took the javelin and ran it through the two in the camp. Wasn't hesitant about it at all because they were flaunting the adultery and things that they were doing and mixing with other nations in the time of Moses. Phinehas is the one who took that javelin, the spear, if you will, and ran it through the two (enough said), while they were both in the act. So, anyway, he's well noted for him taking a stance like that.

Could there have been another way of handling it? Possibly. But he handled it that way and God blessed that lineage as a result of that event. Now, all by coincidence, by chance? There are some things that God just inspires and moves people to do in working with them because there is a purpose of why the line of Phinehas and that someone was going to fulfill this particular lineage in some of the things they were going to do.

Sometimes we don't recognize in a calling we're fitting into a place that God has already planned and prepared. That's why we ought to grasp that God is still doing that. He's building His Family. To me, it's an incredible thing, seeing some of these things, and to realize if we can we fit into, God calls us to fit into some place, something He's going to mold. It's a part of a temple! God's going to be building on the temple for a long time. We have 1,100 years to go of building. It's about His Family. It's about Elohim. God continues to build and construct and fit within that Family.

There are a lot of things we don't grasp and comprehend about it but there are places, especially at the beginning when you talk about some of the things concerning the foundation and the things being constructed and built, and you think of 144,000. That's very foundational, but it's not all the temple. It's the beginning of it. It's the support of everything else that's going to be raised up during the Millennium and the Great White Throne. It's the educational part of it, it's the teaching of it, it's the governing of it. God's prepared that.

All that have been called to that, there's some place that they have to be molded and fashioned because it's a specific part of the temple. That's why when it talks about in Revelation, when it talks about the

different eras of the Church and when it gets down to Philadelphia and we read about different things and it says, "Let no man take your crown," well, that means a lot because people from Philadelphia on up there were those who were going to live to the end.

I was called during Philadelphia, 1969, and so you have different ones who are called at different stages to fit into a certain place. We don't know what those places are but if it's God's purpose that we be in the temple in a particular place, He calls people to fit into those and starts molding them for it. He has called different ones and given them opportunity, and if we just yield to the process we're going to fit. But you've got to fight, you've got to be a part of the construction. You've got to engage in the fight and the battle that's there.

I think of all the people who have gone by the wayside since the beginning. When it says, "Many are called, and few are chosen," to recognize that within the Church itself the majority of people have left, have been separated from God, have given up, have cast away that opportunity. To me, in so many ways that's absolutely mind-boggling. It's ongoing. It continues to happen. Every year it happens in God's Church.

So, we know that; we understand the process. It's not one I like, that we like to see happen, but it happens because everyone has choices to make. If someone gives up a crown or a place in the temple God is going to put someone else there. There are individuals who are to live on into a new age. There are individuals who are to fulfill that portion. I don't know what that is, God does. God's the one who has it all planned, has it planned before man was ever created, before the earth was ever created.

There are those positions and those places of individuals. God had determined that there would be an apostasy in His Church before anything was ever created! Because it would be one of the greatest lessons, one of the greatest teaching tools of all time, of all 7,100 years. It would be one of the greatest lessons of all time, in that respect.

I think of Herbert Armstrong's sermons about government, and he would go through different periods of time and showing the rebellions of people and what happened. The greatest rebellion of all after Lucifer was the Apostasy. Lucifer was a spirit composed being. He didn't have the holy spirit. They didn't have access to it. But they had all the truth because God gave it to them, and it was their choice to believe. But if they chose to do something else, their minds, because they were spirit, composed of spirit, they're forever gone. They can't change that. They don't want to because it's their choice.

Human beings though can change. That's what's an awesome thing about God's creation. He made us this way so we could be physical so that something could be changed in this mind before that spirit essence in us is destroyed. So, we sin, but it's not destroyed yet in that respect. You can go to the point where the mind can become so seared, so set.

Like before the flood and like we are now, we are at a point in time where some have gone so far; I can't put it any other way but to say there is no purpose in being resurrected again because they are set. They

have done what Lucifer did. They have done what the angelic realm has. They have gone so far in the searing of their mind they can't be worked with. They don't want this.

God knows who can be worked with and who can't. So, you think of all the minds. It's like, "Well, what about all those people then?" Because we used to have some of those concepts which are kind of Protestant. "Well, what about all these people that have made choices and surely then they can be resurrected in the Great White Throne." And think, there are a lot of people whose minds are gone, they can't be worked with. But there are many others who can be in a resurrection.

So, I think of us in the Church and how so many then have given up and what was offered them. But the more we grasp what God is doing in our lives, that there is a calling, we should understand. I think of how that was lost during Laodicea. The ministry, candidly, lost the concept that we are called. We're called. This was being lost up to the Apostasy. You weren't hearing, we weren't hearing sermons about being called, that this is a calling. We got to the point where that was leaving.

The concept and the ideas of Philadelphia and Laodicea, that was gone. If you lose concept of your history and where you are and where you fit and that we're called into a particular era of time, a particular period of time, and to understand what the battles are, and you don't know those things, well, that's how messed up we are, we were. The more we can grasp we are called.

Some have been called to be a part of 144,000. In 2008 up to 2013 there were people who came out of Philadelphia, who were in Philadelphia, who gave up their crown. Astounding!

That's why some of the greatest lessons of all time, in the sense of an apostasy, to understand that with God's spirit people can turn against God. Lucifer did as an angelic being, became Satan. We can as human beings impregnated with God's spirit. Sons, children, begotten children of God can still turn against God.

The majority of the Church has over the past 2,000 years, and it still goes on. People let down. People let up. People become lukewarm, as the example of the last era. God can't accept that. We have to stir up the fire. We have to want God to stir up His spirit in us. We've got to fight for this way of life, and you can't let up. We've got to be renewed in that constantly.

So, if we could just grasp, we are called to fit into God's Family. Some are called to fit into, and there even may be a specific number, I do not know, but it appears to be because we have been kept at a certain size, basically, since the beginning of PKG. All the people who have gone by the wayside, incredible, and yet God has called others to fill in, to fill it in. What an awesome calling! We're to learn lessons from that.

There are those who are called to live on into the Millennium as the foundation of God's Church that continues on, of those who are physical in the Body continuing into the Millennium. Others are intended to be in the 144,000. Whatever you're called to it is awesome! Whatever we're to fit into, it's awesome. The greatest things ever offered to human beings, especially at the beginning of the building of the temple. Some of the most awesome things ever.

So, lessons to be learned all the way through here. So, here it is, the book of Ezra, he's now starting to tell his story, who he is, that he is an individual, as I was talking about Phinehas and there was to be someone to fulfill that. It was Phinehas. There was to be that lineage as well. A lot more said on that in time throughout scripture.

They kept track of those things. Again, Ezra had an incredible lineage. Sometimes we don't even know and understand some who we may be here because of a lineage, some of us.

**Verse 6—This Ezra went up from Babylon.** I love the way different individuals in scripture wrote because they didn't say, "I went up." "This Ezra." He's writing a story here and it's about himself. Who was it, John who wrote him and Peter were racing, running, and "This other disciple." So, sometimes they didn't identify themselves. It's like you don't want the focus to be on yourself unless it's supposed to be. Other times they wrote and said, "An apostle of Joshua the Christ." So, there were times in writing when they were to identify that. There were other times when they didn't.

We should understand that. There is that portion of our lives where we should be on guard to not lift up self, to not promote self, to be wise and balanced about it, whatever it is.

**This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he is a scribe ready or skilled in the law of Moses.** So, smart thing to do in that sense about yourself. You're writing about yourself in something, but you've got to write the facts. So, this is a good way of doing it. "Skilled in the law," because it's supposed to be written he skilled in the law of Moses, because that needs to be known.

**...which the Eternal God had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Eternal his God upon him. So, there went up some of the children of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim,** which just means "temple servants" **unto Jerusalem.** So, this is the second great return. There was the one under Zerubbabel. This is the next one under Ezra. This is something he's saying the king has given charge in, from Artaxerxes, and now this is the second great return of Jewish people out of the areas of Persia.

So, he says, **and the porters, and the Nethinim unto Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.** So, this is right at 458 BC. This is 57 years after the temple was rebuilt. So, Ezra up to this point in time has been giving the history leading us up to this point when he is now going to return in the second great return of people out of captivity who are now in Persia, been under Persian reign for a long time now. Yet they're going to return as well and join all those who are in the areas of Judea and Jerusalem. That's what it's addressing here.

**Then he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which is the seventh year of the king.** So, just setting the time period very straight here, very much as a matter of fact. Ezra is telling the story about his going back and those, in essence, who were with him.

**For upon the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month...** So again, it's this is the area where he is at and getting ready to go on down to that area. It's this

whole region that's under the control of the Medes and the Persians, but it's that particular area of Babylon where he is at at this point.

**On the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.** So, he's showing this is coming from God and God's hand is upon him to do this, to move forward, to accomplish this.

**For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Eternal.** So, incredible story here. He's telling about the process of what he was going through, God's hand was on him, basically, another way of expressing God's spirit was working with him to help him in this process of researching, going through, studying as he was the law of the Eternal, **and to do it, and to teach it in Israel, statutes and judgments.**

**Now, this is a copy of the letter that the king, Artaxerxes, gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Eternal, and of His statutes to Israel: Artaxerxes, king of kings, Unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of God of heaven to complete and at such a time.** So again, showing where the authority came from in the sense of a physical ruler, Artaxerxes, who had given Ezra the right and the power to do this.

It says, **I make a decree that all they of the people of Israel and of His priests and Levites in my realm, who are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem** – very much like what Cyrus wrote, "If you want to go, if you're moved to go then go." Artaxerxes is basically saying some of the very same thing here.

**So, if you're minded, as it says, is their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with you.** So, it's speaking to Ezra. **For as much as you are sent of the king and of his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your hand...** So, it's incredible here the kings that were all through here starting with Cyrus, that God placed it in their being, in their mind to be moved to do certain things, to give the Jewish people favor, to very powerfully have authority and finances and everything that was needed to rebuild and to return.

**...and to carry...** All of it hadn't gone yet. So, just as there were different captivities, in essence, and different things brought back at different times, so there is in returning and taking everything back. He's given more here now. It says, **and to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered unto the God of Israel,** so this is what they're giving of their treasuries, of things that they have, as it says here, **whose habitation is in Jerusalem.**

And so, again here, **even all the silver and gold that you may find in the province of Babylon, for the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offer willingly for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.** So again here, I'm sorry, this didn't specifically mention those things that were taken, so this is freewill offerings of different ones, starting with the king.

So, he's telling them of all this that they had given, of those who are rulers. So, even they were moved to give of their wealth and send it with them because God had given to them in their minds things to see about Him, about history, of what had happened, about His power. These things didn't escape various

rulers at different times, of history that had taken place, and so they wanted to receive favor as they would from any of the other gods that they had, which is why they did these things.

**All this you may use to quickly buy with this money, bullocks, rams, lambs, with the meat offerings and the drink offerings.** Incredible! He knew of all these things. He had been told by some who were by him, probably Ezra and others who were there who had influence, and they gave him this history of these things. He's writing this exactly as to what they would need.

**...and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. So whatever seems good to you and to your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.**

Then **verse 19—The vessels also that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, for you to complete from the God of Jerusalem.** So, whatever they need for any of these items. **Then whatever more that is needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to give, give it out of the king's treasure house.** So, incredible authority, incredible amounts of money and so forth that were being sent.

**Now, for this reason I, Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven shall require of you, let it be done quickly.** So, incredible authority here and it's given to him, telling these other rulers that he has this authority to take from you whatever he needs to accomplish whatever is needed in the service of the Levites, the service of the priests, and so forth.

It goes on to say how much: **unto a hundred talents of silver.** So, this is how much that they had authority in access to funds. **...unto a hundred talents of silver,** that's two million dollars in today's money, **and to a hundred measures of wheat, and to a hundred baths of wine,** whatever a "bath" is, I'm not sure. That's not the same as we look at a bath. But anyway, it's a large quantity here. **...and to a hundred baths of oil, and salt without measure. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?** In other words, he's doing these things because he doesn't want the wrath of God, because he has seen enough history to see what happened to Babylon, to see the story of Cyrus.

He has all this history and he believes on a physical plane that it's God that has given them this power to reign and to rule, and he doesn't want disfavor from this God because he knows enough history now to see what happened to the Assyrians, to see what happened to the Babylonians, and so forth, and so he's telling these things and he's saying, "Why should I do anything that would bring disfavor from God upon myself and upon my sons," and basically upon his reign and their reign.

**Also we instruct you,** so he's giving more instruction, **about the priests and the Levites, singers, porters, Nethinim's, or ministers of the house of God, of this God, this house of God, that it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom upon them.** So, "You're in this region, governing this region, but you are not to tax them. You are not to take anything from them. On the contrary, you're to give all this to them."

**Then you, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, set magistrates and judges.** I wish it would tell more of the story here because Ezra must have been given incredible favor in telling the king, teaching the king about these things, because he is the one who is there that has received the favor. He's the one that has the ear of the king, and it's just incredible. How can you describe such a thing?

**...set magistrates and judges.** So, this is what you're to do, **that is in your hand, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of your God; and instruct those who don't know. Then whoever will not do the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon...** So, he's saying, "Whatever that law is of your God, basically, I give you authority as the law from the king to follow through then." **...let judgment executed quickly upon him, whether it be to death, to banishment, to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.**

I mean, some of these things are just... Well, it's because God did it. God gave that favor to do such a thing.

Now we come to what Ezra's words are: **Blessed be the Eternal God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart.** He knew He did. He knew that this was placed in the king's mind, in the king's heard to do this, **to glorify the house of the Eternal, which is in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy upon me before the king, his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes.** This had to give him incredible encouragement in what he was now to set out to do. Because God has to do that with individuals, to give them the encouragement that they be able to see that God is indeed in this.

**So I was strengthened, as the hand of the Eternal my God was upon me; and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.** God has done this through time with those that He raises up to work with, to lead, to guide, and direct because it's needed. I think of Gideon. He had to give to Gideon. That's an excellent story, to see what he went through and to see the process there. He's done it with the prophets through time, with the apostles and so forth.

**I was strengthened as the hand of the Eternal my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.** Incredible story.

**Ezra 8:1—These are now the chief of their fathers, and the genealogy and those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes, the king.** So, incredible migration, again, of individuals. Not nearly as large as the first one. But then there is the genealogy that follows.

We're going to pick it up now in **verse 15—So I gathered them together to the river.** Some translation has this as saying it's a canal or a stream **that runs to Ahava.** Again, sometimes people read certain things into some of this and locations and so forth. This is the location where Ezra was gathering everyone for their journey to leave from Babylon, to proceed to Jerusalem, and it seems that the focus of most of it is about a river by this name that doesn't seem to exist when you read it through scripture.

Instead, some try to find this river and try to place where it is on a map, but when it speaks of a river, the river Euphrates is always spoken of, "beyond the river," and it's a dividing line between the areas that go down into Judea, the areas of Babylon, the areas that the Medes and the Persians conquered, and it's

always used as a significant place, and it appears to be far more a location like a town or a place where they could gather together. So, they all knew where this was along this particular river.

So, meeting by the river Euphrates, a town is far more direct in telling everyone to meet than a particular canal or stream. Because if it's a stream where along are you going to meet? Where along a canal if they're long and so forth where are you going to meet? So, it's undoubtedly a very specific location.

**So I gathered them together to the river that**, it says, **"runs"** but really the Hebrew here is **goes by Ahava**. **And there we camped three days. As I learned of the people and the priests, there were none found of the sons of Levi. Then I sent for...** In other words, he sent several men who were listed as **chief men, men of understanding. Then I sent them with instruction to Iddo, the chief at the place Casiphia**. So, they knew the location. This had to be a location fairly close by that had this particular name because it wasn't, couldn't have been a location in Jerusalem, Judea, or anything else. It's in another location. So, Iddo knew where it was.

It says here, **and I told them what they should say unto Iddo and to his brethren, the Nethinim's**, again, **temple servants at the palace at Casiphia—that they should bring unto us servants for the house of God**. So, in other words, they needed more people to serve in this particular capacity as Levites and so forth, so they went there to get them. Again, they had already started the process of building different places even of study or of worship for the Jewish people and this is an example of one of those locations that had to be of importance for the Levites as well.

So, **verse 18** it says, **So, by the good hand of God upon us, they brought us those of understanding**. So, then it lists specific individuals and the number of those who came with them being right at 260 people that they were able to gather to go with them.

So, it continues then in the story in **verse 21—Then I proclaimed a fast there by the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God**. So again, now everyone is gathered together, and they want to continue now on this journey, they want to draw closer to God. That's how you do this, it's a matter of humbling oneself to know that this is of great importance. They want to humble themselves to be able to serve God and so this is how they start the process, they fast before they begin the journey.

**...before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because he had spoken to the king, saying...** So, he's telling this story, "We have gathered together here and we're humbling ourselves, we're beseeching God, we're asking for God's help, for protection and so forth on this journey down there," and so he's reminding everyone here now by what he's saying, because he is saying, "I was afraid or embarrassed to ask the king for protection." That's what he's saying here.

So, "Because I stated to the king that God's going to take care of us." So, his desire then to make sure God takes care of them, we better set things right, we better make sure that we're all right before God and

we're humbling ourselves before we're beginning this journey, because indeed, we're looking to God for protection and for help. And so, this is the thrust of this.

It goes on to say, **The hand of our God upon all those who for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath**, again, a matter of judgment, **are against all those who forsake Him. So we fasted to seek our God for this, and** it says, **He answered our prayer**. So again, an incredible story here, a process here of where they were at this point in time.

Next Sabbath we'll continue on in the story here now of Ezra and them going on down into that area. But it's an incredible thing here. They were given this favor by Artaxerxes, they gathered there together, he recognizes they don't have the right number of people to fulfill certain positions and places that need to be fulfilled in Jerusalem, in the temple, and so they needed more Levites. And so, they gathered more Levites together and then they gather there together, and they have a fast because they are seeking the help and the favor of God.

We understand that's a process there, too. We understand it more deeply because it's a matter of humbling ourselves, of seeking to be forgiven of our sins, of seeing what it is we need to conquer and overcome. It's a physical thing we go through to accomplish something on a spiritual plane to draw closer to God, to seek forgiveness, to see things in ourselves, and indeed because we desire God's favor, we desire to be at one with God.

We're coming up to Atonement very quickly now. That's next, a Holy Day, and those things need to be in our mind, a desire to seek God, a desire to draw closer to God, a desire to be more fully at one with God, to enter into the Feast of Tabernacles, the Millennium, for us, that's right before us.