

Today is *Part 3* of the series entitled *The Rebuilding of Jerusalem*.

Last week we ended *Part 2* while covering how Ezra had been given authority from the king of Persia, Artaxerxes, to gather people for a second return to Jerusalem of those who were descendants of those who'd been taken captive.

Now, this is an incredible story, and it really is a difficult one to put together because everything is so messed up. Whether it be theologians, historians, the two can't meet, the two don't agree with each other. It really becomes a nightmare because they don't really follow the flow that's given in scripture as to what's really taking place, and in some cases, some of them are over 150 years off in their timing of various things. Which doesn't mean a whole lot unless you really want to understand the story, which I did. If I'm going to give it, I want to understand the timing of it and to give it in that respect.

But I find it fascinating to think of the different times that Babylon, first of all, came in and took them at different times, took them captive, took things from the temple, took things from the king's house and so forth, took it into Babylon. Then to know that even in that they're messed up because they don't realize there are several captivities that took place. They like to put it in one neat little package in a lot of cases, and it's not there.

The same thing then with coming back. It happened at several different times over a very long period of time, longer than it took for the captivity to take place by far. This is spread out over quite a period of time.

Then to me a fascinating thing as well, we turn to books in the Bible all the time, but to understand that there are so many of the major prophets and so many of the minor prophets, this is their beginning. This is when God called them to do their jobs. And so, we've already talked about several minor prophets, several major prophets, different times they were taken captive, and now some who were in captivity, born in captivity whom God began to work with and send back. Ezra is one of them.

We went through the story of Ezra, and that's probably one of the most misconstrued books in the sense of timing and events because too many take it as though Ezra is starting the story about him, and he's not. He gives a history all the way up to I think it's Chapter seven, six or seven, seven, I believe it is, and then he begins talking about his returning and going there. But before that he gives an incredible picture here of the different things that took place and the struggle of being able to go back to rebuild Jerusalem.

Something to mentioned too, that probably should be mentioned now, might have been mentioned a little bit in *1* as well, but these things, the more you come to see what God is giving to us, this is a physical thing that took place, very physical as far as Judah and the

Levitical system that was taken into captivity at that time and then their being brought back. There are physical things as far as history is concerned but a lot of it's about now. A lot of it's about the Church. A lot of it's about a type of something that was going to happen in the end-time about something that is on a mightier, greater scale, though very small because we're very small.

But we need to understand it isn't about the size! It isn't about the number of people! It's about what God is doing and what God says about it and the importance it is to Him. Because completing the 144,000 is exceedingly important to God Almighty and He wants us to understand that in the end-time, and not only that, but of the things we went through and why we went through them. Because what happens on a spiritual plane in the Church is far, far more important than what happened to them over decade after decade after decade after decade. That was all physical. But it was to record things that benefit us, to record things, to give a type of something that was to happen at the end-time.

That's why I love the book of Ezekiel, in that sense, of understanding that here Ezekiel is taken captive in I think it was about the third wave there into Babylon, and he starts writing about, as far as his function as a prophet, starts writing about the captivity of Israel. Well, Israel nearly two hundred years before that went captive. They were taken captive into Assyria.

And so, there are a lot of theologians that had rejected him. Different ones have rejected Ezekiel at times because it's like he's talking about the captivity of Israel, and they're already gone. They're the lost tribes. They don't even know where they are, and he's talking about this.

Well, we have already known for some time that so much in Ezekiel is, again, about the end-time, and not just the end-time but it's about the Apostasy, it's what happened after the Apostasy. Because these things are far more important on a spiritual plane. Why is that? They never had God's spirit. Different ones of the prophets, different ones had God's spirit. They were being worked with by God. But as a whole, the people did not.

God's Church has been impregnated with His holy spirit and look what happened. Sometimes we don't grasp the magnitude of what took place with an apostasy. The incredible thing about it is it's one of the greatest lessons that will ever be used throughout the Millennium and the Great White Throne, to show what we're capable of with God's spirit! Because it's a far more heinous thing to be impregnated with God's holy spirit, to be given opportunity to be begotten children of God, and to throw it away and turn against God, to spit on God, to spit on His word, to spit on His way of life, to reject. Because that's what happens!

The vast majority have been called in the last 2,000 years have done that. Then you think of the magnitude of what took place in the Apostasy, it's even greater yet. One-third left because they were so disillusioned and couldn't remain around, didn't have any hope! "If this can happen to God's Church then there is nothing!"

Another third just went right back so easily into Protestantism. It's even a hard thing to describe sometimes, how incredible that was. I think of one minister who was traveling through. I think he was, when he stopped through Toledo, he was going to another destination he was being moved, transferred to. He was moving from one area; we knew him very well in Pennsylvania in the ministry. We'd been in Erie, Pennsylvania, and Franklin, Pennsylvania, and just had been assigned to Toledo that summer.

And so, we're going up through a period of time now and he's getting transferred later on to another area, and so he's passing through and asked him to come through and be with us. I think we had a meal together, whatever, and maybe even stayed there. I don't remember for sure. But had a great conversation in the respect of what it was we were experiencing and what it was we were going through.

And we didn't really know. We didn't understand that it was an apostasy. God hadn't revealed these things to us. We were too weak yet. We were trying to hold on to what God had given to us. We were wanting to continue on with the calling that God gave to us, holding on to the Sabbath and Holy Days and so forth.

I don't remember if it was the next day or within that week we got a call from him; he'd been talking to Joe Jr. I think he was on the phone for over three hours. I did not know the man! He was different. His personality was different. His talk was different. His beliefs had totally changed. He had accepted Protestantism once again.

How can such a thing happen? It's mind-boggling.

There was an old sci-fi movie one time called *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. How many have ever seen that? You kind of have to be pretty old or really watch a really old movie. But this is the way it was. It's like people change. These aliens and whatever, they'd taken over people and they had different minds and no personalities at all.

That's kind of how this was. He didn't have a personality anymore, not one that I recognized, not one that I knew. We did a lot of things together. That's why I think of that song so often, "We went to God's house side-by-side and counsel blended sweet." And we did! Then something like that happens.

That's why we need to understand the magnitude of what took place. Sometimes being drawn in or brought into the Church, called after that, you can be told about it, but it's another thing, candidly, to experience it.

Anyway, they were going through things in their return and God moved them. We're to learn lessons from all of this. Some of the greatest ones is we're to learn how important it is what we have experienced. Because at the height of 6,000 years now God is teaching some of that. He's revealing some of the most incredible things, just like He will during this Feast. (More carrots.)

It's awesome what He's given to us above and beyond what we had before, before the Apostasy, to encourage us, to strengthen us, preparing for His Son's return, that the Church be established in those things it needs to be established in to move forward quickly as far as a body is concerned that's already practicing and living the things it needs to be living into the Millennium, and finishing the completion of 144,000.

God wants us to grasp how important this is to Him. These are the greatest lessons that can ever be taught. When I say that I can't help but hear, in that respect, Herbert Armstrong. Feast of Tabernacles after Feast of Tabernacles so often he would focus upon government and rebellion and the things that have happened through time beginning with where it all began, Lucifer, Satan, and then bring it up through the things that happened with Israel and so forth into history. But he never knew about the apostasy. He didn't have to see it, thank God. So many people that were raised up, and to do what they did then later on, I'm glad he didn't have to experience that.

So, we're to learn from all this how important of a time we really live in. Ezekiel 5, Ezekiel 2, in through there, it's about us! It's about God's Church at the end-time. It's about what we've already experienced. Awesome, to know that those things were written and planned. God planned all this. He knows what human beings are going to do with what they're given. He knows what they're going to do with certain truth and how much truth they're given, choices that are going to be made.

That's an awesome thing. We have choices to make in that process, and if we're called to it we have an opportunity. But God knew. Not the individuals who would do it, but of those He would call that there would be those, the majority, who would reject Him. What a horrible thing to think, what a horrible thing to see in Your own children, Your own begotten children, that everything You have planned, everything You're prepared for is being rejected by Your own children, Your own begotten children.

That has to hurt. That has to be painful on a level we don't grasp fully. So many given that opportunity. Because everything is about... Before anything was ever created it's about His Family. It's about offering Elohim.

So, what we're going through right now is far more important than what we can really grasp and comprehend right now. You can drink a little bit in at a time. But the more you put it together and the more you see it the more in awe you're going to be of the Great God of the universe who has planned these things far in advance!

These things here, of the different kingdoms, they were planned! What was going to happen with the Medes and the Persians and the favor He was going to show through king after king after king after king to Judah is astounding. What more can you say? To know about Babylon, that it was planned. Seventy years of Babylon, it's all there was, and then it was gone. The head of gold.

Then we're down to the body parts of arms and chest of silver now, the Medes and the Persians. But as far as for Judah's sake they received incredible favor from this part of silver and going back to rebuild the temple - which is what has been taking place since the Apostasy. That's exactly what it is and it's important to God that it be done in preparation for His Son's return. The walls around it, and they had battle after battle, conflict after conflict, going back and striving to do these things and themselves having their own trials to deal with.

So much so that a prophet had to be sent to tell them, Zerubbabel, "Get to work! This isn't a time to take it easy!" They had ten to fourteen years not building because a king had told them (in Persia) not to do so. They never started it back up again, so they got busy with their own jobs, with their own houses and building things, building things up again, and left the temple and the walls. Basically, God told them enough is enough. What is more important? Building this again, rebuilding it, or what you're building. That's basically how He put it to them. "What's more important?"

We have to learn from that too. What is the most important thing in our life? It should be the Church. It should be the rebuilding that's taking place within. It should be the work we're doing on ourselves, in ourselves. There is nothing else more important!

That's what Elohim is about! And if we want to be a part of it we have to fight for it right to the end. This isn't over with until it's over. It's not over until you're there, until you're changed. As long as you're a physical human being you can screw up, you can do stupid things that you become rejected by. Is it worth it, whatever that might be? Is drifting away a little bit worth it? Is letting down a little bit worth it? We have to be on guard.

That's what Ezekiel is about, again, to be watchful, to be on guard, to be alert. This is a battle. It's not to be taken lightly. Because what I see sometimes as a minister is sometimes it's taken too lightly. For the last three years at the Feast of Tabernacles, I know that God has been giving me more strength and more power to cry out, in that respect, to His people. We're His Church, His people, and we've got to get our lives right and be right with God.

So, last week we ended with *Part 2*, well, covering how Ezra had been given authority from the king of Persia, from Artaxerxes, to gather people for a second return to Jerusalem of those who were descendants of those who had been taken captive.

A lot of time has passed here. Incredible! Seventy years of captivity, now...I'll get to the years here in a moment, but another, one generation after another one, several generations coming along, born in captivity.

I think of this period of time in between this. Talked about in number 2, so you'll hear it again, but before Artaxerxes, there was Xerxes who was Ahasuerus, who was the husband of queen Esther. So, sends chills up and down my spine just thinking of the timing and of the first king, starting with Cyrus. Darius, you talk about them, and you come on down the line here decade

after decade. Now you come down to Ahasuerus and to Xerxes (same name), and he gives his favor to the Jews again.

Anyway, we're down to **Ezra 8:15**. So, I'm going to read these verses I read at the end of *Part 2* and then we'll continue on. **So, I gathered them together to the river that runs/goes by Ahava, and there we encamped for three days.** So, this is where they had gathered together. He'd called out, he needed certain group of Levites to be brought in, they didn't have enough numbers in that particular area to fill in some of the spots of things they needed back in Jerusalem, so they waited, they encamped there for three days.

He says, **As I learned of the people and the priests**, that's of the story here, **there were none found of the sons of Levi** for specific jobs. **Then I sent for chief men...** Several then are listed, **chief men...of understanding. Then I sent them with instructions to Iddo, the chief at the place Casiphia.** So again, had to be a place fairly close to them. Again, they haven't left yet. This is an area before they go on down toward Jerusalem.

**And I told them what they should say unto Iddo and to his brethren, the Nethinim's.** Now, these are temple servants. So, there are different jobs that have to be fulfilled and that they needed there. They had communication back and forth and so he's now going, he's been given this opportunity.

He had to be really close to Artaxerxes because Artaxerxes wrote some things—I'm not going to go over again (it's in *Part 2*)—and he gave him incredible favor and wrote things that you know just by what he wrote in his decrees that Ezra had to be the one that gave it to him almost word for word. So, they had to have a very, very close relationship and great favor in the sight, in the sense Ezra had in the sight of Artaxerxes.

So, anyway, he said to gather them **at the place Casiphia—that they should bring unto us servants for the house of our God.**

Then **verse 18—So, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us those of understanding.** So, God always blessing us whenever we need it. We might go through various things of difficulty, but you keep forging forward and God gives you what you need.

Then it lists specific individuals and the number of those who came with them being right at 260 people who came together to go with them. So, another 260 were added to it.

**Verse 21—Then I proclaimed a fast there by the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God.** So, before they started this trek, this journey on down to Jerusalem that wasn't really a safe thing, safe place to go through in how they were traveling they wanted to draw closer to God and beseech him for favor and help and protection and they wanted to be close to Him and to yield to Him through that desire of what opportunity they were now being given.

...to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. So, when I read that I read it on a spiritual plane. That's what we want all the time, the right way always, always, always, seeking that out, wanting that in our life. Because it's the little things that are the wrong way, the things we're doing wrong that need to be gotten out of the way. We have to humble ourselves, as we've gone through recently in talking about fasting and prayer and drawing closer to God, that God, it's a matter of knowing we need God, and we have to constantly fight and seek Him. And you know what? He blesses that. If we'll humble ourselves He knows what we're doing on a physical plane in order to have a closer spiritual relationship.

He says here, this is why they're doing this, **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 they knew that those things existed out through there where they were going. Even though they had quite a few people there, there are still others that can come in and attack and do things.

...because we had spoken to the king, saying, so this is what he had told the king in a boldness, **The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath,** in other words a matter of judgment, **are against those who forsake Him. So we fasted.** So, in other words he's saying he didn't want to ask the king when he told him "God" (in essence, that's what he told Artaxerxes), "God will bless us. God will take care of us." He didn't want to ask him for additional help then through that journey and so they were looking to God for help.

**So, we fasted to seek our God for this, and He answered our prayer.** Here it is now continuing on from last week: **Then I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them—and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles of the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes...** So, they had given, the kings and the princes of the palace, they'd given tons of money, in essence, for them to take back, gold and silver.

...and all Israel were present, who had offered. So, the rest of Israel had done what they'd done in the first large time that they went back down there with Zerubbabel. So again, more of the Jewish people who this was their home now, Persia. They gave. They weren't going back but they gave abundantly to those who were.

**I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver.** Today, that's equivalent to \$13 million. Pretty heavy. ...**silver articles of one hundred talents** (another \$2 million), **one hundred talents of gold** (\$200 million), **twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas** (another \$4 million), **and two vessels of finely polished bronze, precious as gold.**

So, what they're doing is dividing it up so that if they were attacked that the thinking here is in part of this, that they would be able to divide it up enough that it's not going to be recognized or seen with one area that's being guarded and so it's kind of spread out amongst them. So, they went ahead and went through the routine. Nevertheless, God was blessing them.

**Then I said to them, You are holy.** What does that mean? Well, those who had it, he's telling them, "You are holy." He's saying, "This is for holy use and purpose." That's what "holy" means. In the Old Testament and the New Testament as well, in that respect, whatever is considered that by given as far as God is concerned, to God, it's for a holy use and purpose. So, he says, in essence, "You are holy. You have a job to do serving God."

**...to the Eternal. And the articles also holy; again, holy use and purpose. Then the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Eternal God of your fathers. Watch and keep this until you weigh it before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers of Israel in Jerusalem.** So, it's their different responsibilities now to see to it that this makes it through. **...in the chambers of the house of the Eternal.**

**So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.**

So, we can read that on a physical level and think it's a nice story. It's a lot of gold and silver that they were dividing up and using, and I think of the Church, how God gives to us. He sets us apart for holy use and purpose in a way that's far above what took place here and what He gives to us is far more precious than any gold and silver. What are we going to do with it? Carry it through to the end, make it stronger? All the way through this story things to see in a light for us that's on a spiritual plane, for them on a very physical plane indeed.

**Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. So, the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. "So, we didn't have any problems. God took care of us." So we came to Jerusalem.**

God does the same for us on a spiritual plane if we are on guard and watch and protect. Because so much about what God gives to us, it's about that. We are to watch what He's given to us. We're to be on guard to the truths that God has given to us.

**So we came to Jerusalem and stayed there three days. Now, on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua...** And now, some of these names are similar to things in the old Testament. They're not those people. But just like so many cases names are passed down and skip a generation and another name pops back up that's used in the past.

**...and Noadiah the son of Binnui, with the number and the weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time. The children of those who had been carried away captive...** So, that's who these are, these are the children of those who had been carried away captive into Babylon. Now, this is their home in areas of Babylon and Persia and so they're making a trek back. There is the need in Jerusalem, everything isn't completed yet. There's

more work to be done. The other generation has gotten older and passing away and there is need for reinforcements. That's what's taking place here.

So, it says, here again, **the children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the Eternal. And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors of the region beyond the river.**

So, as mentioned before there is that area talking about beyond the river, and it appears to be it's talking about beyond the Euphrates when you're going down into the other regions there. They weren't occupying in the sense of Babylon moving into it, they had governors. Then when the Persians came along, basically that's where they stopped in that area of Babylon and along the Euphrates, the wealthier parts of the region, and didn't continue on down. Because it's not a pleasant area down through there. As a whole there weren't that many living there but farther in there were and there were satraps, their officials put there by the Persians to carry out government.

So, that was read last week, what was commanded to them, and so that's what it's referring to here. It says, **All this was a burnt offering to the Eternal. And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors of the region beyond the river.** So, what was given by Artaxerxes was now passed on to the individuals in that region, of what they were supposed to do and how they were to respond.

**So they gave support to the people and the house of God.** So, it says, "the satraps and the governors" they did what Artaxerxes told them. Because if they didn't that wouldn't be healthy for them.

**Ezra 9:1—When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.**

So, what was going on? Well, they brought in abominations, things that aren't of God. Basically, things of other beliefs. They were messing around with things they shouldn't have been messing around with, and there's a reason for it, and it goes on to show some of this.

**For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy offspring is mixed with the peoples of these lands.** So, again here, especially with the Levitical Levites, that was a different issue than those of Judah even or Israel before.

The primary purpose of not mixing with the other nations around them was because of the different religions. That's why God gave it. It's not a matter as some have tried to say, that it's a matter of race or whatever. Not the case at all. It's about their beliefs and they're not of

God. To bring them in, this is what's going to happen if you start bringing them in. You start mixing them in.

Solomon is probably one of the best examples of that, of what he did. After all that he did, he built the house of God that his father had desired to do, and all the things that he had done and the things written that God had given him to write, and then at the end, toward the end because of all the wives and he started bringing in some things. Oh, they brought in all kinds of places, things of worship and so forth, and he allowed it in Judah, in Jerusalem. I mean, sick. That's the very reason why God says don't do these things.

**Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in their trespass.** Surprise, surprise.

Because if the leaders will do it, if the evangelists are doing it at headquarters, if the regional pastors are doing it, if pastors are doing it, elders are going to do it, deacons are going to do it, deaconesses... and the whole Church is going to do it! That's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened in the Church. It didn't have anything to do with foreigners. It had to do with the spiritual adultery.

Because that's what this is. Spiritual adultery in a sense, in that respect, for bringing those things out. It's against God's laws and God's ways. For us in God's Church to begin letting down, to begin teaching other things, to begin teaching their own things in certain areas... Because this was happening in the Church especially through Laodicea. People were drifting farther and farther away from the trunk of the tree, farther and farther away from Herbert Armstrong, getting to the point where they wouldn't even use his name, where ministers wouldn't even acknowledge that he was an apostle.

Where ministers would make stupid comments, "He was a great teacher. I learned a lot from him." Those are the ones I really wanted to smack. And if I had the opportunity today you'd probably have to hold me back in some cases, seriously. I'd just love to smack the you-know-what out of them, knock some sense into them. Because I walked to God's house side by side and counsel blended sweet with a lot of them. Think, what is wrong with you?!

What is wrong with us when we do things like that? They made their choices, and we have to make ours constantly, to be on guard, to be watchful. This isn't over until it's over.

**So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair on my head and beard, and sat down astonished.** Now, I don't know why this was a part of going through this at this time when you fasted and you were doing the things you did, like Job did when he got in the ashes and so forth. I'm glad we don't have to do all that. You ever plucked any hairs out in different parts? Anyway.

**Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.** Do you know what hit him? They are the children of those who have

been taken captive and now we're doing the same things again for why they were taken captive! How sick!

This is why he was hurt to the depth that he was. "How could we do such a thing? How could you who have been living here, how could you have done such a thing?" And he says, "This is what we have done! What is God going to do? It may be already in the pipeline, so to speak." (Speaking of pipelines that don't have much these days.)

**At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Eternal my God. Then I said, O my God, I am ashamed and humiliated.** He felt horrible just going before God and having to acknowledge this, "This is what we've done."

There are times we need to be a little ashamed and humiliated at what we're capable of as human beings in God's Church with His holy spirit. This is what repentance is all about. The more we can experience that, the more we can hate the sin, the easier it is to conquer, the easier it is to love what God gives us.

**I am ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day.**

So, it was already happening. They were having troubles and problems in their area and people were coming in and attacking them at different times. As we go a little bit more in the story here it talks about them trying to rebuild and strengthen the walls around what they had built there in Jerusalem that had been torn down, destroyed during the Babylonian invasions. So, they weren't even finished with those things yet.

Enemies. We have enemies all around all the time, things that especially in the spirit world, that want to get at you in some way or another. You have to fight. Incidents, things that come along that are difficult and hard. Trials are hard. Fire is hard to go through. But it's all by design because through those things we can become much, much stronger. It's an awesome thing to understand.

**Verse 8—Then now for a little while grace has been shown from the Eternal our God, to leave us a remnant to escape.** That's the way we are. How blessed at the end? God has a purpose. Thank God He has a purpose. Thank God there's an exact number because He's going to fill it. To be called to have that opportunity, to those who are able to live on into the Millennium. Perhaps an exact number? God is all powerful, has incredible design, and He brings things to pass. We have choices to make along the way.

**...to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a stake, like a pin or a nail, it's a stake you drive in to hold something firm, in His holy place.** That's what we've been given spiritually.

How awesome is our calling? How blessed are we in God's Church? If you look at physical things you're going to miss the mark. If you look at the size you'll miss the mark. It isn't about that. It's about finishing it, getting it finished, completing it, completing the construction of which we have an opportunity to be a part of.

**...that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; so they'd been taken into captivity. That's what he's saying. ...but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us.**

So he's saying, "And the kings of Persia, look what we've been given," favor after favor after favor, the amount of money, the amount of wealth they were willing to give of their own to send back to receive favor from this God themselves because they had heard enough from the different ones.

Cyrus heard from a prophet who told him what Isaiah had said, had written, that even his name had been given of what he was to do, called to a special purpose nearly two hundred years before it was read to him. He was moved so deeply he was moved to send the first wave back and to give tremendous power and authority to them.

This king here, Artaxerxes had to be very close to Ezra and moved by God. God can move kings. God can move people to give us favor, to give people favor, to get something accomplished. That's what He was doing here. These things didn't just happen. These people didn't just take a liking to them because "You're a nice guy and I just kind of like you." It wasn't that thing at all. God gave it to them to like them, to give them favor.

**He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair (raise up) the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall (hedge or wall of protection) in Judah and Jerusalem. So now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, and the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their iniquity.**

We have to remember for seventy years they weren't there. Then under Cyrus they began to return under Zerubbabel and began to rebuild. Long process. These people had already been established who were there, already had different generations coming up. They were rebuilding the land and they didn't want the Jews to come back, they didn't want Jerusalem to be rebuilt like it was before. It's a threat!

So, as so often happens these people were there, and they started mingling. So, he's telling Him what was in the land already because of these different peoples. It's their beliefs, and if you bring that in you're not going to escape it.

**Verse 12—Now, therefore, do not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; nor seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land.** So, we're talking about a very physical people in a very physical carnal situation being worked with to establish something, again, very physically because it's about a physical establishment of something but it's something that God desired for them to do in the sense of honoring Him, in the sense of maintaining Judaism, if you will, or the Jewish people and the beliefs of the Sabbath and Holy Days. God was going to preserve that though the people didn't get it.

**So after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities "deserve";** now, "deserve" is added in there but that is basically true. I hope we could all understand that. God gives us incredible mercy, He really does. We're begotten of His spirit, and we still have struggles, we still have carnality, we still have sin we have to fight, and that gets refined as you grow and you keep fighting but it never ends because we're carnal, we're human beings. The kinds of things we address as you continue on, God will show you more and more on a spiritual plane of things in your mind about the way you think. Because that's where it all starts and that's where the battles have to take place. It's great sometimes just to pray to God in that regard, "I know You've been very merciful over and over again. Thank You!"

**...and have given us such deliverance as this, should we turn back and break Your commandments?** Every Feast I give warning. Every Feast of Tabernacles. This time next year we won't all be here. It's been that way last year, the year before, ever since I've been in God's Church.

**...should we turn back, and break your commandments, and join in marriage with the people and their spiritual adultery?** Finding something else we place higher than God. **Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us so that there would be no remnant or survivor?** Thank God He has a plan. We're blessed to be a part of a remnant.

**O Eternal God of Israel, You are righteous.** See, we're not. The righteousness we receive into our lives comes from God, sustained by God by God's spirit. We're able to hold on to the truth by God's spirit. We're able to see the truth by God's spirit. On and on it goes. It comes from God. The power and the strength to do it, the choices are ours, but the power to do it comes from God.

**...for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You in our guilt for there is no one who can stand before You because of this!** Basically saying the same sort of thing on a spiritual plane. If there is sin we're not going to be able to stand. It has to be repented of. We have to get rid of it. We have to acknowledge it. We have to accept our own responsibility for what we do.

That's why I marvel how that after the Apostasy people heard about certain things and they began to have their eyes open to certain things that God is showing, that yes, there was an apostasy, and yes, we were spewed out of His mouth.

Oops! That means if we were spewed out of God's mouth we were all Laodicean and there are people who couldn't acknowledge that. They couldn't admit they were Laodicean. They still insist on "I'm a Philadelphian." You think, it's not about being a Philadelphian. That ended a long time ago when Herbert Armstrong died. But they couldn't accept that either. We want to see ourselves as better than what we are.

**Ezra 10:1—Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, mourning, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people cried aloud with great weeping. Then Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, We have trespassed against our God and have taken foreign wives from the people of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel. Now, therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born of them.**

Don't you know that had to be hard? Children. But because of this, they were giving into (and that's been the entire history), to the various things of their gods. Certain things came in no matter what. It just happened. They made peace with one another this way. They had supposedly happier homes and families because they compromised.

And how far does that get us if we ever compromise with tithing with our mate? How far does that get us if we compromise with the Holy Days? How far does that get us? It gets us farther away from God. But we all have to take a stand in our lives and that's a part of our growing process. It isn't meant to be easy. It's a battle...with our husbands, with our wives, with our children, with our parents. Hope you understand what I'm saying.

We always have to stand for what is right. We have to stand for God's way of life always, always, always.

**Now, therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them according to the counsel or the purpose of my master (lord), and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.** So, they knew there was law here concerning these things and why.

**Arise, for this matter belongs to you. We also are with you. Be of good courage and do it.** I'm amazed how many times it talks about things like this, "Be of good courage." Look to God for the courage, to be encouraged. God will give us the help if we just take the steps forward. If we just stand. You stand in a spot God will do the rest.

I think of so often we talk about Gideon's army. Look what they did. Took him a while to get there. The wool, one time wet, one time dry. Feeling a little bit better about all this. Go down in the camp with a close friend there, hears a dream, now he's encouraged, now he knows.

Goes back up, they get three hundred together, head down the hill. That's taking a stand on something that's not easy, not comfortable, but you do it and God gives the help and the blessings.

**Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel take oath that they would do according to this word. So they took oath. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib; and when he went there he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.**

**Then they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they might gather at Jerusalem, and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.**

Now, sometimes there are people in the world, they read things like this, and they think, "God was such a hard God." No, He wasn't. It was for their good. It was so He could bless them, so He could raise them up and work with them. Sometimes it's difficult to see things that come from God because they're on a spiritual plane. You have to see the plan and the purpose of God, of what He's working out. When you see those things everything fits into its place.

**So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month and on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat at the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. In other words, they were very uncomfortable, what was taking place here, besides being there.**

**Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have transgressed and have taken foreign wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now, therefore, make confession to the Eternal God of your fathers, and do His will. It's what repentance is about. Acknowledge it. That's what "making confession before God" is, it's acknowledging to God what we've done, asking God for mercy, asking God for help and help to do His will.**

**...separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, Yes! As you have said, so we must do.** So, God was really working with the people here in a very powerful way to bring them to this point. To accomplish something like this on this plane wasn't something they were able to do on their own. God gave them help at different times and different eras, and when they would seek Him and had that kind of heart and able to be moved in that fashion then God gave them more. Does us too.

**Truly, there are so many people; and it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all**

**those in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and the judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter.**

So, in other words, let's leave, it's raining, it's hard to be out here in this, it's going to take many days, not just a few, to get all this summarized, to get all this recorded of who has done what, of what needs to be addressed. Because they were going to do that, and those who wouldn't go through the process they were going to take everything they had and more. Their desire was they understood why they'd been taken into captivity, and they were moved by this. They were sobered by this. Good thing to be sobered by sin, to realize what has been done when something has taken place. Because that helps to bring about repentance then if we respond to that.

**Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah took their stand on this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support.** Now, this is kind of awkward when it comes to knowing exactly what's being spoken of because of the Hebrew words that are being used here and the matter of these has two possible meanings in the Hebrew of what took place here.

It's commonly translated as "employed" and "opposed." So, the point is here that because of what they were doing, they were going to have everyone leave, they were going to start recording and had certain ones take on the responsibility. In other words, being employed in the project of doing this, of recording all these things and helping to get everything organized and moving so they could accomplish the task before them. It can have that meaning.

It can also have the meaning that they opposed what was taking place, which doesn't seem to be the case. It seems to be in context here of the matter of taking care of the work that was in front of them. But anyway, we can still learn from both. Stupid to oppose. Wise to be a part of doing the work and getting it done.

**Verse 16—Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, and certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken foreign wives.** Took quite a while to get all this done. So, it's more about the work of what had to be done and recorded and going through all the tribes, all the people who were there. Not a small thing. And they questioned them, got names.

**And among the sons of the priests who had taken foreign wives the following were found...** So, up through verse 43 now it lists those families involved.

**Verse 44—All these had taken foreign wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.** So again, not an easy thing because in some cases many, many years now in this kind of family environment. To take this kind of stand took a lot, truly did.

We've reviewed a lot concerning the captivity of Judah and the long period of time that involved the process of Judah being allowed to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Again, that analogy, that's what's been going on for some time. God has blessed us in rebuilding, and not only that but adding more. He's given us more to build upon. That in itself is exciting and that's our strength. Truly is.

In the story then we've covered two returns concerning going back from Persia and from the area of Babylon to Jerusalem. So again, the first return was under Zerubbabel after Cyrus gave them the authority to do so and gave them incredible wealth. Going all the way back to 538. Then the second return here now under Ezra who was of the descendants, who was actually a descendant of Aaron the high priest in Moses' time. And so, he writes about some of those things that you'll hear in *Part 2* that haven't heard it.

So anyway, the second return here now under Ezra was in 458. So, we're talking right at eighty years even from the time that they started back, that now eighty years later after Zerubbabel, here comes Ezra into the region. And so, this is that story about him coming and returning and the things that they began to do and the incredible wealth that he'd been given to take back and to receive from the governors of the region in order to continue the kind of construction and building they had to do there in Jerusalem.

Then we come to one more. There is going to be one more return after this and that's in 445 BC. That's thirteen years now after Ezra, and it's Nehemiah.

So, when we read through these things we don't think of time, we don't think of what was taking place, but it really adds a lot more to the story when you see these things in the line of Jeremiah and what happened to him and he went down in Egypt and the story, some of the history of things that we had during Philadelphia that I don't believe we have all of.

But the reason I wanted to go to Hill of Tara. It was muddy that day. It was raining and the guy that took us on the tour he said, "I'll take you there." Matter of fact, we went to these huge mounds. They're supposed to be the oldest structures in the world. I've heard France is claiming one that's older. (I'm just kidding here with someone from France, has a French background. Where are you? There you are.)

Anyway, I'm going to do a little research to see. But anyway it's hard to know because of carbon dating. But these things were built before the flood. Interesting thing, during one of the parts of the tour here they talked about how that they don't know what happened to the people. It's just like all of a sudden they just disappeared. They think it was some kind of a plague or something, but they literally just all just disappeared because of the remains of things they found and don't understand it. Never a thought of the flood.

So, we took that tour, and it was raining like mad. It was cold and this guy is taking us on the tour, and this is outside. You don't have any shelter, you're walking along outside and you're getting wetter and wetter and colder and colder and it's like, "When are you going to end? This

is interesting, but I can go inside and read the same thing or listen to this thing on..." Anyway, so by the time it was to go to the next place, the Hill of Tara, because I mentioned this past I'll mention it again, this is where so many of the kings early on were coronated in Ireland.

Anyway, this is the history that goes back farther than those who were coronated on the Stone of Scone. Jacob's Pillar Stone but there's another name; it's the Stone of Destiny. They call it the Stone of Destiny as well. Which is actually going to be taken back down, maybe back down already, that King Charles will be coronated on the same stone. Amazing. Passed through time.

I remember in Ambassador College when we were there at that time, I believe it was in 1972, that that plaque was still in front of the chair, the throne that's over a thousand years old that all the kings have been coronated on, queens, and that rock was underneath it. And down below it said, "Jacob's Pillar Stone." Later on, they removed the sign. Probably because of things Herbert Armstrong was saying. But anyway, they still had the stone there for a long time but didn't have the sign there any longer. And then, of course, it went up into Scotland.

But kind of an interesting story. On top of this hill, they have another stone they call—they both have the same name—The Stone of Destiny. (Because I don't normally use that word.) It's the "Stone of Destiny." Anyway, they have in Ireland their own "Stone of Destiny" on top of that hill.

I always thought from what I'd heard that this other stone, that was "Jacob's Pillar Stone," had gone through Ireland first and then up through there, which fits the story more likely. Then Great Britain had it, and of course, Scotland and Great Britain fought about, over it.

But I'm really kind of confused about it now because there is this other stone out there now. I didn't know there was a second one they called the "Stone of Destiny." It stands upright. He says, "I'll take you up there," he said, "but most people when it's raining out there and it's this wet they slip, they slide up there. It's muddy and I've seen people fall." I think he said, I'm pretty sure he said he fell too one time walking up there. He said, "There is a rock up there," but he could basically tell us all about it.

So, he told us about it and, anyway, to make a long story short, we never got to see that stone. But I've come to the conclusion, there is a lot we don't know.

Nevertheless, history is interesting. But one thing that stood out all the time there, of all the things when you go on tour and they talk about history, no matter where you are in the world, of things that are ancient, one thing is for certain, can you imagine as soon as Christ returns there are going to be those who know everything about that particular period and what happened. Jeremiah? Won't be any questions anymore.

You think of all the different periods of time and those with whom God worked, and they'll be able to fill in the pieces in ways that we don't have. Looking forward to that.

Anyway, the next period of time, third return, is going to be under Nehemiah in 445.

We'll stop there and have a pause through the Feast of Tabernacles before we continue the series again.