Ezra

Introduction

The book of Ezra gets its name from Ezra the priest who leads the second group of Jews out of Babylon back to the land of Israel.

Zerubbabel leads the first group which we read about in the first six chapters, and Nehemiah leads the third and final group which we read about in the book of Nehemiah.

The Babylonians conquered the kingdom of Judah for their rebellion against God, and they carried them away for 70 years, then the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians. See 2nd Chronicles 36:5-21.

Chapter One

The proclamation of Cyrus

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

The first year of Cyrus: In 559 BC.

The word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah: The LORD moving in the heart of a king to accomplish his will.

*Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

LORD: Is from the four consonants in Hebrew alphabet, YHVH. Pronounced as Yahweh in Hebrew. There is no letter J in Hebrew. Joshua is really pronounced Yoshua.

Jews did not pronounce the name because it doesn’t have vowels in it and they didn’t want to blaspheme the name of God by pronouncing it incorrectly, so they wrote his name as LORD. There are many Lords, but there is only one LORD.

The proclamation

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia,

The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

The LORD God of heaven: Cyrus learned from Daniel about these prophecies. See Daniel chapters 2, 7 and 8.

All the kingdoms of the earth: Cyrus knew that God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth, because he had read the prophecy that God had made 150 years before his time.

Daniel is the one who told Cyrus of this prophecy. A prophecy concerning Cyrus is also found in the book of Isaiah:

*Isaiah 44:28 That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*

*Isaiah 45:1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; 2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: 3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. 7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. 8 Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. 9 Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? 10 Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? 11 Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. 12 I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. 13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Cyrus let God’s people go, unlike Pharaoh, and he was blessed for it. Perhaps he read the book of Exodus. He was a king over many kings, and he had perfect knowledge of the demise of Egypt.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

His God be with him: Those who were believers in the LORD God of heaven could go home! Their 70 years of captivity was over! They were to rebuild their temple.

*Jeremiah 29:10 For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.*

God did not destroy Cyrus and his kingdom as he did with Pharaoh, all he did was he moved in the heart of the king by means of a prophecy that was written 150 years earlier that named the king before he was born.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Whosever remaineth: Cyrus told the Jews that wanted to stay that they must help those that went back to rebuild.

The Jews were not living like they were in Egypt as slaves, notice they had riches that Cyrus said they needed to donate to the work.

5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

Judah, Benjamin, and the Levites: They primarily made up the southern kingdom of Judah. The Levites didn’t have any land for their tribe, and they were employed in the temple in Jerusalem. The other tribes went into Assyrian captivity.

All them whose spirit God had raised to go: Not all the Jews went back, just those that were stirred up by God’s word and wanted to go back and serve God as they were supposed to.

They could not serve God in captivity the way they were supposed to because God had ordained that they worship him in Jerusalem and in his temple.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

The vessels are returned

7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; 8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah: This is the Babylonian name given to Zerubbabel the Governor as seen in Haggai 1:1.

The number of them

9 And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, 10 Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

This is a fulfillment of the prophet Jeremiah

*Jeremiah 27:21 Yea, thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house of the LORD, and in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem; 22 They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the LORD; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.*

Chapter Two

The second exodus

This is the second time that God delivers the Jews out of captivity. The first time was in Egypt, and now it is from Babylon.

1 Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city;

Every one unto his city: The people didn’t just go anywhere they wanted, they returned to their own cities, and to the properties that were given to their parents as an inheritance.

2 Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel

3 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12 The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. 14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15 The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16 The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17 The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18 The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. 19 The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20 The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. 21 The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three. 22 The men of Netophah, fifty and six. 23 The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 24 The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25 The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. 26 The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27 The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. 28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29 The children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30 The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. 31 The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34 The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35 The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

The priests

36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.

Pashur: He was well known to the prophet Jeremiah. He didn’t like what Jeremiah had said concerning Israel, and he struck him, and had him arrested, and put in the stocks in the gate of Benjamin (Jeremiah 20).

39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

The Levites

40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four.

The singers

41 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight.

The children of the porters

42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all an hundred thirty and nine.

The Nethinims

43 The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 44 The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon, 45 The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, 46 The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmai, the children of Hanan, 47 The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, 48 The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, 49 The children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai, 50 The children of Asnah, the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim, 51 The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 52 The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 53 The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah, 54 The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

The Nethinims: The word means gifts. They were temple servants.

The children of Solomon’s servants

55 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, 56 The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 57 The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. 58 All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.

The Nethinims: The word means gifts. They were temple servants. See 1st Chronicles 9:2.

These list were kept to help establish lineages of the tribes and what belonged to which tribe and family.

They could not shew their father’s house

59 And these were they which went up from Telmelah, Telharsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel: 60 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two.

The children of the priest

61 And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name: 62 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.

Therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priest hood: They took their wife’s names while they were in captivity, and they were not allowed to operate in the priests' office until their genealogies could be verified.

63 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

The Tirshatha: The governor Nehemiah.

They had to wait until they had a priest that had a Urim and Thummim to determine if these men were actually priests.

Urim and with Thummim: These were instruments that God gave the priests to determine his will in grey areas.

The whole congregation

64 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, 65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women. 66 Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; 67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

The freewill offering

68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: 69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. 70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

The Nethinims: The word means gifts. They were temple servants. See 1st Chronicles 9:2.

Chapter Three

An altar of sacrifice

1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

*Leviticus 23:24 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. 25 Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.*

The seventh month was come: The Feast of Trumpets is a yearly reminder of Israel’s future gathering back into the land in her kingdom.

This gathering in the seventh month coincides with the kingdom parable that Jesus taught his disciples about in Matthew 13:

*Matthew 13:24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. 26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? 28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

This parable of the kingdom was to inform the people of Israel that when God returns to set up his kingdom, he is going to separate the wheat (believers) from the chaff (unbelievers) and the believers will inherit the kingdom.

It will be a time of great joy and rejoicing for them, but for those unbelieving people it shall begin an eternity of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth in Hell.

The altar of God is built

2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

*Exodus 20:24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. 25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if* thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. 26 *Neither shalt thou go up by steps* *unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.*

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

They able work on the feast days because they were holy convocations according to Leviticus 23 The holy convocations were additional sabbath days given to Israel by God.

They kept also the feast of tabernacles

4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

The feast of tabernacles: It is the last of the feasts of the LORD, and was a picture of the coming kingdom. They also began offering the daily sacrifices that the law required, which included morning and evening sacrifices.

5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

Israel did not have their temple built yet, but they were already offering sacrifices, the foundation had not even been laid and yet God allowed them to offer sacrifices unto him. Was there any precedent for this in Scripture?

Abraham offered unto God without a temple, or a tabernacle, but what was always said of Abraham when he offered a sacrifice unto the LORD? Abraham builded him an altar. And that is exactly what Israel, and her leaders did.

The continual burnt offering: See Exodus 29:39-43.

The set feasts of the LORD: Passover, unleavened bread, firstfruits, pentecost, trumpets, atonement, and tabernacles.

A freewill offerings: See Leviticus 22.

7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. 8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

The grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia: See Ezra 6:3-5.

9 Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

These are the descendants of the very same people who initially worked in the temple. Israel kept records of who they were so that when they got back into the land, they could resume their duties.

*Romans 11:29. For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance.*

This verse speaks of Israel’s gifts and callings, not the body of Christ’s, how do we know that? It is found in Paul’s explanation to the Gentiles about God’s future dealings with the nation of Israel.

The builders laid the foundation of the temple

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

*2nd Chronicles 35:15 And the singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them.*

The sons of Asaph: He was a seer (prophet) who had descendants that led in singing praises to God.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

Their captors wanted the children of Israel to sing one of the songs of Zion while in captivity and they refused because their songs were meant to be sung in Jerusalem where the presence of God was.

*Psalms 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. 2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. 3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. 4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?*

The ancient men wept

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: 13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Ancient men: They would have been in their late eighties and nineties since the captivity lasted seventy years.

The prophet Haggai tells Israel and her leaders that God is with them in this endeavor, and they are to see it through.

*Haggai 2:1 In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, 2 Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, 3 Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? 4 Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:*

Chapter Four

The adversaries of Judah

1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; 2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them,

Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin: The southern kingdom that had just returned from Babylonian captivity.

The LORD God of Israel: This is speaking of the God of the united nation of Israel before the kingdom was broken in two.

Assur: This was another way of saying Assyria. The northern ten tribes of Israel were conquered by the king of Assyria and carried away into Assyria as slaves.

Then the king of Assyria sent men not of the children of Israel, back into the land to work the land and eventually he sent back a priest from among the captives to teach these non-Jews how to worship the God of Israel.

This was a mistake because they went into captivity because it was the priests led them into idolatry in the first place. This story is found in the second book of Kings:

*2nd Kings 17:23 Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. 24 And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. 25 And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. 26 Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. 28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. 29 Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. 30 And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. 33 They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. 34 Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; 35 With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: 36 But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. 37 And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. 38 And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. 39 But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. 40 Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. 41 So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.*

While these Samaritans worshipped the God of Israel, they also worshipped all the other gods listed above.

God is exclusive, he is a jealous God and will not share his glory with another. You cannot serve Jehovah and Baal at the same time.

This story should help you understand the story of the woman at the well better, and the things that Jesus said unto her and vice versa.

Remember when Jesus said, we know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews? He was reminding her that the Samaritans were Jews who intermarried with Assyrians and were put there by the king of Assyria.

While they worshipped Jehovah to some extent, they also still worshipped the gods around them and blended the religions together which was totally unacceptable to God.

3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them,

Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

God didn’t call their adversaries to help in the work, he called the captives from Babylon, and king Cyrus sent them to do the work themselves. They could not compromise either.

4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, 5 And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

And hired counsellors against them: The people of the land hired counsellors to frustrate them, and it lasted through other kings, getting progressively worse with each, especially with Ahasuerus:

These were lawyers that would try to get laws passed against the Jews. They are listed in verse seven below.

An accusation

6 And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Ahasuerus: The king before Artaxerxes. See the book of Esther. She marries king Ahasuerus.

7 And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

Artaxerxes: The king after Ahasuerus. He is called the king of Persia in the book of Ezra (6:14), and the king of Babylon in Nehemiah 13:6.

8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: 9 Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, 10 And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnappar brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time.

The great and noble Asnappar: A previous Assyrian king that brought numerous people groups into the land to mingle with the Israelites in the north. They became known as the Samaritans.

On this side of the river: The Jordan river.

The letter

11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king;

Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time. 12 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.

Notice they said here that these people who came from Babylon were Jews, and they were saying by this that they did not consider themselves Jews.

13 Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings. 14 Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

The inhabitants of Samaria could not tell king Ahasuerus that they really hated the Jews, so they devised a plan to get the king on their side, by telling them it was in their best interest to stop their building project.

Because we have maintenance from the king: They told the king that the Jews would not pay tribute or toll or custom and that it would harm the king’s revenue from which they received maintenance (assistance).

15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. 16 We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

They have moved sedition: They broke from their previous submissions to other nations, and they would do so again to Artaxerxes.

The kings answer

17 Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river,

Peace, and at such a time. 18 The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. 19 And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. 20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. 21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. 22 Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

They made them to cease the work

23 Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. 24 Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Many years went by (15 possibly) that the work of the building of the house of God was halted and the children of Israel began to get idle.

Chapter Five

Consider your ways

1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.

The prophets: What did Haggai and Zechariah prophesy unto the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem?

*Haggai 1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah,* and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

The word of the people

*Haggai 1:2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying,*

*This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.*

The word of the LORD

*3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying*

*4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?*

The children of Judah and Benjamin while starting out strong stumbled when it looked like everyone was against them.

They were pretty bold with their adversaries when they knew the LORD and the king Cyrus was on their side but when king Cyrus was gone some thought God was gone as well.

*5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*

Why are these things happening to the children of Israel? Why are they not blessed in the land of promise?

Because they have forsaken the work of the LORD when they forsook the word of the LORD. Answer me this: Did the LORD tell them to stop building? No! Man did.

The very same God who told Israel to return and build, who supplied all their needs to do just that would continue to sustain and protect them regardless of what this new king had decreed.

They just needed a preacher or two to remind them and that’s what the LORD did with Haggai and Zechariah.

Consider your ways

*7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts;*

*Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*

The LORD said to Judah and Benjamin, just do what I originally told you to do, and I will take pleasure in it and bless you as I said I would.

*9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. 10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. 11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.*

There is nothing like a good sermon preached by the man of God that can take a person or church or in this case a nation and turn them back on the right path serving the LORD.

*12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.*

I am with you

*13 Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying,*

*I am with you, saith the LORD.*

*14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, 15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

Zechariah’s Prophecy

*Zechariah 4:1 And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, 2 And said unto me,*

*What seest thou?*

*And I said,*

*I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: 3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.*

*4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying,*

*What are these, my lord?*

*5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me,*

*Knowest thou not what these be*

*And I said,*

*No, my lord.*

*6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying,*

*This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying,*

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. 7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.*

*8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,*

*9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the* *foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. 10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.*

God prophesies and mentions Zerubbabel by name and says that he started this job, and he is going to finish it in his lifetime, and nobody should despise the day of small things.

He was referring to the smaller temple, because that temple would be greater than that of Solomon’s because of who it is one day that is going to enter this temple, Jesus Christ.

Back to Ezra

2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them. 3 At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them,

Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

Notice Tatnai, Shetharboznai and their companions have been put in power by the current king, and they become worried about Zerubbabel’s actions.

Notice also the next thing that they say as well which will let you know a lot about their motives:

4 Then said we unto them after this manner,

What are the names of the men that make this building?

They wanted the names of the people in charge, so they could tell the king. To defy the king’s decrees meant certain death but these men were only obeying the orders of the first king (king Cyrus) who commanded them to build the city in the first place.

More importantly they were obeying their God who had commanded both the king and the children of Judah and Benjamin to build his house.

5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.

The letter

6 The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: 7 They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus;

Unto Darius the king, all peace. 8 Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

9 Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus,

Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

10 We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. 11 And thus they returned us answer, saying,

We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. 12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. 13 But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. 14 And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; 15 And said unto him,

Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.

16 Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.

The letter’s conclusion

17 Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

I don’t believe Tatnai had any ill will against the children of Judah and Benjamin because they give a very honest report of what they saw and heard.

They requested an inquiry be made back in Babylon to see if their claims were so, because if they were, they were binding on the current king because their number one law was that the decrees could not be altered, even by the next king.

Chapter Six

The decree

1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

The decree is found

2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem,

Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; 4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: 5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

Leave them alone

6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: 7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. 8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. 9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: 10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

King Artaxerxes reads this decree from Cyrus, and it moves him to action because it is the word of the LORD, and it produced strong faith in the king, so much so that he added to it to further help the children of Israel. God will do abundantly above what we ask or think.

11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. 12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

If I were the children of Judah and Benjamin, I would have made several copies of that letter and carried one with me at all times to stick in the face of any future adversaries that may arise.

And they builded

13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily. 14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

This house was finished

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. 16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, 17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

The dedication of the house of the LORD was not the same as the story in John 10:22 which talks about the feast of the dedication because that feast as it says was in the winter and this dedication was in the month of Adar which in the Jewish calendar is in the Spring.

18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

The children of the captivity kept the passover

19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

The passover: A memorial feast for Israel commemorating the night passover lamb was slain.

The fourteenth day of the first month: The fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year.

20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat, 22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

The feast of unleavened bread: A feast of Israel that occurred right after passover on the Jewish calendar.

*Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

God can operate in the heart of the king from his throne in the heavens to accomplish his will.

Chapter Seven

Ezra the priest

Word had spread throughout the realm of king Artaxerxes and especially among the Jews of his realm that the temple was rebuilt, and a new wave of Jews would now be prepared to go to the promised land, this time led by a priest named Ezra.

1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia,

Ezra’s lineage

Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 The son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest: 6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. 7 And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

Nethinims: The word means gifts. They were temple servants. See 1st Chronicles 9:2.

8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. 11 Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.

The letter

12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. 13 I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. 14 Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; 15 And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, 16 And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: 17 That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. 18 And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. 19 The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. 20 And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. 21 And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, 22 Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. 23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? 24 Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

Toll, or tribute, or custom: This is where we get the idea of tax exemption for ministers and churches.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. 26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

Let judgment be executed speedily: The right to a speedy trial.

Ezra’s praise unto the LORD

27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: 28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

There will be a temple in the kingdom, and it will also be financed by the Gentiles just as this one was:

Israel’s kingdom and future temple

*Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. 2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. 4 Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they* *come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. 5 Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. 6 The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. 7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.*

Chapter Eight

The genealogy of them that went up with me

1 These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.

The sons

2 Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush. 3 Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty. 4 Of the sons of Pahathmoab; Elihoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males. 5 Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. 6 Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. 7 And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. 8 And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males. 9 Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. 10 And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males. 11 And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. 12 And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males. 13 And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males. 14 Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

Shall we gather at the river?

15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. 16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. 18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty;

The Nethinims

20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

Nethinims: The word means gifts. They were temple servants. See 1st Chronicles 9:2.

I proclaimed a fast there

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. 24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: 26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; 27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. 28 And I said unto them,

Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. 29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. 30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; 34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. 35 Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD. 36 And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

Chapter Nine

The princes came to me saying

1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying,

The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

The holy seed: They were forbidden to mingle with the people of the land because they would lead the people away from the serving the LORD.

3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonied. 4 Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonied until the evening sacrifice. 5 And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, 6 And said,

The evening sacrifice: Israel had both morning and evening sacrifices, prayers, and incenses that were to be burnt each day.

Notice the response of Ezra the priest, He rent his garment and his mantle, and if that wasn’t enough, he then began to pluck off the hairs of his head and his beard all because of the sins of his brethren.

The group that went back with Zerubbabel slowly began to compromise with the neighbors that remained in the land.

I’m sure that the first few days after Zerubbabel and the Jews returned, they saw the sinful ways of their neighbors for what they were but after 20 years they became desensitized to their differences.

Ezra’s prayer

O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.

Why does Ezra the priest, who just showed up in Jerusalem say that the sins that the first group of returning Jews committed were our (the nations) sins?

Because God held the nation responsible for the sins of its members, especially when it was the sins of its princes and priests as we see in this story.

When David sinned many people in Israel died because of it. When Achan sinned, even though he was nobody in the nation, Israel was punished, and thirty-six men died because of the sin of one of their fellow countrymen.

8 And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. 9 For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. 10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, 11 Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. 12 Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

A remnant: A little group of believers.

To give us a nail in his holy place: A small place. See Isaiah 22:23.

13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; 14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? 15 O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

Because God is a holy God, and he would not allow the Jews sins to go unanswered he would have to step in at some point and judge the nation unless the nation as a whole would first acknowledge their sin and turn from it.

That is what we see happen in the next chapter, but it all began when Ezra, who just showed up, saw for the first time what was going on in the land and he openly repented for his brethren even though he had done nothing wrong.

Chapter Ten

The Putting Away

This is one of the most confusing passages of scriptures in the Bible if you do not understand Israel’s program as the future nation that would rule over all others in the kingdom, led by the Messiah who will come from their loins.

Israel’s program was different from ours today in the body of Christ. We are not Israel.

1 Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. 2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra,

We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. 3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

Let it be done according to the law: They couldn’t just rid themself of their responsibility to their spouse, they would have to make provision for them.

You are not Israel under the Law program; you are not the holy seed that makes up the nation that God is going to use to establish his kingdom one day. The Messiah is not going to come out of your lineage because he has already come.

You are the body of Christ, and he is your head, and he told us Gentiles today in the dispensation of grace that if we are married to an unbelieving spouse and they are pleased to dwell with us that we are not to put them away. See 1st Corinthians 7:11-12.

5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. 7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; 8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

All of his substance shall be forfeited: Ezra was saying you would lose your inheritance in Israel forever! The land that had been passed down to you would be given to your next of kin and if you held any office in the service of the LORD you lost that as well.

Remember, this has nothing to do with our doctrine today, because we are not God’s holy nation that is to inherit that land for the kingdom one day.

God was not going to make all these promises to Jacob’s descendants to give them this land to have them turn around and give it right back to their Gentile neighbors by their marrying them.

9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. 10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them,

Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. 11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice,

As thou hast said, so must we do. 13 But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. 14 Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

Taken strange wives: Some married Gentile women.

15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. 16 And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.

The priests that were found

18 And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass. 20 And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. 21 And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uzziah. 22 And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasah. 23 Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24 Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. 25 Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. 26 And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. 27 And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. 28 Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. 29 And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth. 30 And of the sons of Pahathmoab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. 31 And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. 33 Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. 34 Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh, 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau, 38 And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei, 39 And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. 43 Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah. 44 All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

Why this kind of ending? It’s not really the end, the story picks up in its third and final record which is the book of Nehemiah who brings the third and final group of Jews back into the promised land.

The End

   To submit a test for grading simply copy the test below and paste it along with your answers written in bold font in the body of an email and send it to:

tests@dofgbi.org

Ezra Tests 2.5 Credit Hours

Introduction Test

1. Who was the king when Judah and Benjamin were taken away in the Babylonian captivity?

2. Who was the king of Babylon at that time?

3. How many years did God's people stay in Babylon?

4. What did Nebuchadnezzar put in his temple at Babylon?

5. What did scripture say the land would do while God's people were in captivity?

Chapter One Test

1. What did God charge Cyrus to do?

2. Who did God want to build his house?

3. What two major prophets prophesied about Cyrus?

4. When was the prophesy about Cyrus given?

5. What were the people who remained behind supposed to do to help those that went to Jerusalem?

6. What did Cyrus return unto Israel?

Chapter Two Test

1. Where did each of the Jews return to specifically?

2. Who were the two main leaders of the Jewish people that led them back?

3. Why did God keep records of the people’s genealogy?

4. What happened to those who could not find their name in the register?

5. What was the names of the two instruments that the priest would use to determine God's will with?

Chapter Three Test

1. What feast were they celebrating in Jerusalem?

2. What kingdom parable did Jesus teach that related to this feast?

3. What chapter in Leviticus list the seven feasts of the LORD?

4. What is the first thing that Jeshua and Zerubbabel built?

5. What did the Babylonians ask the Jews to sing at the first?

6. What was the response of the people who had seen the original temple when they saw this one?

Chapter Four Test

1. What did the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin ask to do?

2. Who were the Samaritan according to this chapter?

3 What did Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, say unto them?

4. How did the people of the land weaken the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building?

5. What was in the accusation letter sent to Ahashueras?

6. What was the initial result of the accusation against the Jews?

Chapter Five Test

1. Which two prophets prophesied unto the Jews to get back to work?

2. What did the first prophet say comparing houses?

3. Why were the people not prospering according to the prophet?

4. What was Zerubbabel's response to the prophet's words?

5. What did the Governor ask Zerubbabel?

6. What did the Governor ask the king to do?

Chapter Six Test

1. What was Darius searching for in the house of the rolls?

2. How did the decree state that the building would be financed?

3. What is to happen to anyone who tries to alter the decree?

4. At what time of the year was the dedication for the temple?

5. What proverb talks about the king's heart?

Chapter Seven Test

1. What two religious offices did Ezra hold?

2. Who was king when Ezra left Babylon?

3. How many months did it take Ezra to get to Jerusalem?

4. What did Ezra prepare his heart to do and teach in Israel?

5. Who freely offered their own money to Ezra?

6. What was Ezra told to do with any extra gold or silver?

7. What was Artaxerxes' decree to all the treasurers beyond the river?

8. What else did Artaxerxes tell them to do touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God?

9. What did the king tell Ezra to do with all the people who know the laws of his God?

10. Who will finance Israel's future temple in the kingdom?

Chapter Eight Test

1. When Ezra gathered everyone at the river who was missing?

2. What did Ezra proclaim at the river?

3. What did they seek the LORD for before departing?

Chapter Nine Test

1. What sin were the people committing that Ezra saw?

2. Who did the princes tell Ezra also committed the same sin?

3. Who were leading the nation in this sin?

4. What does Ezra call the people in verse two?

5. What did Ezra do when he heard of their sins?

6. Why did Ezra say the sins of others were his?

Chapter Ten Test

1. What was the response of the people when they saw Ezra praying in v:1?

2. What did the people covenant with God concerning this sin?

3. Should a saved person do the same thing today with their unbelieving spouses? Why or why not? Give a scripture to support your answer:

4. What did Ezra make the people doing concerning this sin?

5. What did the proclamation that Ezra made declare as punishment to all who would not obey it?

6. What did the people who had sinned offer to God in v:19?