

Survey of the Bible part 59 **Ezra 2 - 4:1-5**

The last time we were together King Cyrus had given the decree to allow the captives of Judah to return to their land and he also gave them the means to rebuild the temple. All of this was done as God and God alone had moved the spirit of Cyrus to accomplish God's will to return His people.

This of course happened after 70 years of captivity of the Jews in Babylon. And, it is not a coincidence that the captives were in Babylon 70 years as God had promised to those who rebelled against Him.

^{NAU} **Jeremiah 25:11** 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years

They wouldn't serve the King of kings and so the Lord gave them a taste of what it's like to serve a king of this world. And it's like anything else in life, when something is taken away from you it's then that you can begin to appreciate what you've lost.

But these captives were given a mandate from God, and essentially He told them to carry on with their lives under the rule of Babylon and get used to serving God there because you're going to be there for the duration.

Jeremiah 29:4-7 ⁴ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, ⁵ 'Build houses and live *in them*; and plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ 'Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. ⁷ 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.'

70 years could contain 3 generations of people and many of those who went into captivity died in Babylon, but now the offspring, most of whom have known nothing but being ruled by a foreign power, are given the opportunity to go back to the land.

But what is interesting is that even though they knew the specific number of years God determined for them in Babylon, when year 70 comes to pass it doesn't appear that anyone is making plans to leave Babylon. Instead what are we told about those who are going to leave?

Ezra 1:5 ⁵ Then the heads of fathers' *households* of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

Why do you suppose God Himself has to move the spirits of these people to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord?

This exodus back to Jerusalem in Judah may not have seemed as wonderful to some of those Jews as we might think. When you grow up in a place that has been your home for many years and you have become adapted to that place, the prospect of leaving to go to a land, that in their case, would now be foreign, might not seem as attractive.

Imagine an immigrant family coming to this country from, let's say, Poland. And this family, brings with them 3 small children ages, 1, 3 and 5. They arrive here and are able to find work with the help of other relatives who came a few years earlier.

When they arrived they wanted their 5 year old to attend a local kindergarten.

Well, what would be an immediate problem for that 5 year old?

A language barrier.

How motivated would the parents be to help that child, and for that matter, the other 2 children, to learn English?

Why would they be motivated to do this?

Because when the predominant language is different from your own language and all of commerce and the education system and the ability to work in that new country is in a different language, to survive you need to adapt.

Those children grow up and in a matter of just a few years they are speaking English fluently. Twenty years later that five year old is now 25 and marries a local girl. They begin to have children of their own, and guess what language they speak?

So in one generation, in the span of 20 years the household language of that family is English. Twenty years later the children of this family begin to have children and guess what language they speak? In just 40 years this family, whose roots go back to Poland

where their relatives didn't speak English, and whose culture was anything but American, are now fully Americanized and would not be recognizable as having Polish roots.

They've blended in with the American culture. But we're still not done. 20 years later these third generation Polish Americans have children and now they're 60 years departed from their roots in Poland. Are you beginning to see where we're going with this?

Now let's take this last group of Polish-Americans. One of their relatives in Poland asks them to come back to their native land. Of course, there's not much to go back to since the town in which their relatives grew up is now a wasteland. There are no jobs, no opportunity, and if they go back they will have to start from scratch. Well, they don't know the language, they all have good jobs here and chances are the skills they've learned here won't help them much there.

How excited would these people be to go back to Poland, now close to 70 years out from when their relatives originally came here from Poland, who have died a number of years back?

The only way that this might be conceivable, is if your Polish ancestors who came here almost 70 years ago, stayed in a Polish community, sustained Polish customs and language, and encouraged their children to marry Polish people in that community.

But even in those cases this never happens that way. Even when the Jews were dispersed throughout the world and they promoted their Jewish customs they invariably intermingled with the locals of that country and spoke the language of that country.

By the way, that's been tried in this country but it never seems to stay that way without some of the influence from this country being brought to bear on that closed group.

I know Jewish people from different parts of the world and in one case I know a Jew from Russia. He has lived in this country for a number of years. Guess what his first language is. It's Russian.

He doesn't Hebrew. In fact, his grandchildren, only two generations separated from Russia all speak English. Guess what language they don't speak. Russian.

The point is that many of the Jews who would be coming out of Babylon may not have desired to do that precisely because they

were now going back to a wasteland where they had to labor day and night to first build houses they could live in and then begin construction on the house of the Lord. And so we see that even when the 70 years were up God had to move their spirits to come out of Babylon.

As we come to chapter 2 of Ezra we essentially have a list of the people who are heading back to Jerusalem.

Ezra 2:1 ^{NAU} Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city.

And then we are given a specific list. And this list gives us particular numbers of certain households. And when they are all numbered according to household you arrive at 34,004 of the sons of these particular men, which is the way the tribes were usually numbered.

But if you look at **Ezra 2:64** ⁶⁴ The whole assembly numbered 42,360,

How does that square with number 34,004?

If you subtract the two numbers you end up with 8,356 additional people. Who do you suppose these additional people are?

Probably the wives and female children.

But there are a few more people to be counted.

Ezra 2:65 ⁶⁵ besides their male and female servants who numbered 7,337; and they had 200 singing men and women.

Why are these people not counted among the assembly?

Because they are servants of those in the assembly, by percentage they make up about 20% of the entire population.

By the way, what people might these servants be made up of?

Babylon conquered many more peoples than just the Jews and they brought many of those people to Babylon as well. And so, other captured peoples, other than the Jews, may have been included as pilgrims back to Jerusalem as they went as servants, a Hebrew word that could also be translated slave.

But on arriving in Jerusalem and other parts of Judah the first order of business would be to get established and build homes where you could live and prepare for the larger work of rebuilding the house of the Lord.

And so, as we come to chapter 3 we see that the work begins after about 7 months in the land.

Ezra 3:1-3 ^{NAU} Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. ² Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. ³ So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

Now in the second year of being back in the land they were finally able to lay the foundation of the house of the Lord and there were mixed emotions about it.

Ezra 3:10-13 ¹⁰ Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel. ¹¹ They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, *saying*, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." 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. ¹² Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' *households*, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

This was bitter sweet for the old men. And by old we're probably talking about men who were in their mid to late 80's or 90's. Some would have been teen agers 70 years prior to this and would have remembered the house of the Lord as it stood in majesty and now they were having to make what would turn out to be a shadow of its former glory.

But again, this is precisely why when we talk about the house of the Lord and what it pointed to in the fulfillment of Jesus the Messiah, it is always in light of being a shadow of what is to come. In a sense the Lord was showing the old men that the old covenant was on its way out to be replaced by a glorious house.

Hebrews 10:1-10 ^{NAU} For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? ³ But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; ⁶ IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. ⁷ "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" ⁸ After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*" (which are offered according to the Law), ⁹ then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

For these Jews to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord at God's moving was to show them that what the Lord desires is for a people to gather with Him to worship and share in His glory forever.

And this rebuild is just a taste of what was, what is, and what is to come because there is no place on this present world that we could call home, because our home is not of this world, but of the world to come. And this is essentially what the prophet Jeremiah told the Jews as God gave him utterance.

Jeremiah 7:1-7 ^{NAU} The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ² "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house and proclaim there this word and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!'" ³

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. ⁴ "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.' ⁵ "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, ⁷ then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

The land that God is talking about here is not the present middle-east and it will never be the present middle east because the temple of the Lord is not made with hands, but made by the Spirit. This is the temple of the Lord that lasts forever and ever and it will be this temple that will be built up by God.

Zechariah 6:12-15 ¹² "Then say to him, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD. ¹³ "Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.'" ¹⁴ "Now the crown will become a reminder in the temple of the LORD to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen the son of Zephaniah. ¹⁵ "Those who are far off will come and build the temple of the LORD." Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And it will take place if you completely obey the LORD your God.

Who is this branch that will build the temple of the Lord?

^{NAU} **Isaiah 4:2** In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth *will be* the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel.

^{NAU} **Isaiah 11:1** Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

^{NAU} **Jeremiah 23:5** "Behold, *the* days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land.

^{NAU} **Jeremiah 33:15** 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth.

^{NAU} **Revelation 22:16** "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

But what temple is He building?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ¹⁶ "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?" ¹⁷ "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

Ephesians 2:19-22 ¹⁹ "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

By the way, it's worth noting that the one who builds His temple is King over this temple. But he is also priest.

Zechariah 6:13 ¹³ "Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, *He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.*"

But, if this prophecy is addressing the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, how can He be priest since the priesthood of Israel came from the line of Aaron and Jesus is from the line of Judah?

Psalms 110:1-4 ^{NAU} A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." ² The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." ³ Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You *as* the dew. ⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "*You are a priest forever [after] the order of Melchizedek.*"

David understood all of the nuances of the Levitical priesthood in Israel and yet under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it is made clear that the new King and the new Priest over the New Israel and Jerusalem would be a Priest whose priesthood is everlasting after the order of Melchizedek.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 5:10** being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

This unique priesthood, who only had one other priest after this designation, was the perfect shadow of the one and only unique High Priest of the new covenant, Jesus Christ.

Whether it was Jeremiah, Zechariah, Isaiah or the other prophets speaking to Israel it was always in the context of God calling out a people for Himself to be a dwelling for His Spirit whom He is building up for His habitation.

And so, the temple or the house of the Lord that Ezra speaks of was a picture of all of God's people in both testaments who are brought together to worship and fellowship with the Lord forever.

And like the old men who wept at the building of this temple that King Cyrus commissioned we should never think for a moment that this world or the things of this world would ever replace what God ultimately has in store for us. In comparison we should see the difference as these old men did.

But the construction went forward and the temple of the Lord would be built, but as seems to always be the case whenever God's people purpose to do what God has ordained the enemy desires to quench the Spirit of God with a spirit of fear.

Ezra 4:1-5 ^{NAU} Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, ² they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' *households*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." ³ But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' *households* of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." ⁴ Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, ⁵ and hired counselors against them to frustrate their

counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

What parallel do we have in the N.T. church to what was taking place here as the enemies of God's people try to convince the leaders of Judah and Benjamin that they too only want to worship the one true God as they desire to build with them?

Matthew 7:13-16 ¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. ¹⁵ "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?

Acts 20:29-32 ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Galatians 1:6-9 ⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

There will always be wolves, but we need to be aware of who these wolves are and not be taken in by them. The only reliable way to know a wolf is to know first and foremost the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and to know what it takes to be a sheep under the Great Shepherd. And that's the word of God that we stand on without compromise.