

(Through the Bible) Ezra

by Chuck Smith

The Book of Ezra tells the story of the repatriation of Israel after the Babylonian captivity, and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, as God's sovereignty and prophecy fulfillment are demonstrated.

Duration: 1:22:27

Scripture: Ezra 2:61, Ezra 8:21-22, Ezra 8:36, Isaiah 45:1-13

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker talks about a man who had been bragging to the king about the power and greatness of God. As a result, the king gave him a lot of gold and silver, but now he is worried about the journey through a land filled with nomadic tribes who plunder caravans. Instead of asking the king for soldiers and horsemen for protection, the man decides to fast and pray, seeking God's guidance and protection. He divides the treasure among twelve men and they embark on their journey. With God's hand upon them, they are delivered from the enemy and safely arrive in Jerusalem.

Transcript

Let's turn now to the Book of Ezra. The Book of Ezra, the first part, was probably written by Ezra, but written from the records. Actually, at the time that Cyrus gave the decree to build the temple, Ezra wasn't even alive.

Ezra doesn't come into the story into a first-hand account until you get to chapter 7. The first six chapters deal with the first of the repatriation of the nation Israel after the Babylonian captivity. Now in the first year of Cyrus, the 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 of his kingdom and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, the 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 a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Now, he mentions here in order that the word of the prophecy of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.

And as you turn to Jeremiah chapter 25, we find that the Lord had predicted that they would be in Babylonian captivity for 70 years, Jeremiah 25, 11. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. And it shall come to pass when 70 years are accomplished that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.

And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it. And then also in Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 10, For thus saith the Lord, that after 70 years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, they are thoughts of peace, not of evil, to give you an expected end.

And ye shall call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord, and I will turn away your captivity. I will gather you from all of the nations and from all of the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord, and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

All right, now turn to Daniel chapter 9. In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet that he would accomplish 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed to God and made my confession and so forth.

So that Daniel, knowing the prophecy of Jeremiah that the period of captivity would be 70 years, during this period he began to seek the Lord as to what part the Lord might have him to play in the repatriation of Israel. Now, let's turn to Isaiah chapter 44, verse 28. Now remember, now in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia, the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.

Now in Isaiah 44, 28, Thus saith, or that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and I shall perform all my, and he shall perform all my pleasure. Even saying to Jerusalem, thou shalt be built, and to the temple thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings.

You remember how, O Belshazzar, it says that his knees smote together the night that he heard that the, he saw the handwriting on the wall, and it says that his knees began to smite one against another. And so here's a prophecy of that experience that Belshazzar had. I will loose the loins of the kings to open before him the two levied gates, and the gates shall not be shut.

And I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight. I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in center the bars of iron. I will give thee the treasures of darkness, the hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name. I have surnamed thee, though you have not known me. So, here the prophecy of Isaiah was uttered two hundred years before this particular event where we read now, in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia, the fellow that even according to Isaiah, the man that God named, said, I have named you, even though you haven't known me.

God named him two hundred, hundred and fifty years before he was born, God named him, and declared that he would be the one that would allow the people to go back and to start rebuilding the temple. So, fascinating prophecies, many of the, you see how much scripture is tied together in really just the first verse here of Ezra, as we see the prophecies of Isaiah, the prophecies of Daniel, for Daniel predicted that the Medo-Persian empire would overthrow the Babylonian empire, and of course the prophecies of

Jeremiah, the seventy years of their captivity in Babylon, and then that God would release them from that captivity. So, it's exciting times in Bible history when you come down to the point where God is now fulfilling the things that he promised, when you start seeing the things fall together, when you know that the Lord said that seventy years will be your time of captivity, and you can count, and you know when seventy years are up, you start getting excited, alright, God's going to start moving, you know, because the seventy years are about up.

When Cyrus is the name of the general that takes over in Babylon, then you really get excited, because you know that God said, hey, I've called you by your name, and I've surnamed you, though you haven't even known me, and you will do my bidding, you'll do my desires, and allowing the people to go back from their captivity. So, you see things beginning to come together, and there's always a lot of anticipation and excitement, and hey, the day in which we live today is just that kind of a day, because we see things coming together, and it's exciting to see the things happening in the world, because all of a sudden we say, yeah, that's what the prophet Ezekiel said was going to be. Yeah, that's what the Lord said would happen there in Isaiah.

Yes. And you see how God is setting the whole thing together, and we're moving again to a period of history, just like it was here in the first chapter of Ezra, where God is getting ready to fulfill His promises and His Word, and He has set the stage. Things are coming to pass, and there's just an excitement in the air, because you know that God's Word is being fulfilled around you, and you know what's going to be happening as God has declared these events.

They're going to take place, so we look at the world today, and we realize that Russia will soon be making a move into the Middle East. We know that Russia is going to attack the Middle East, and for us as Christians, it's really exciting, because we know what a threat Russia is to our own security and to our own peace, and to realize that they're going to make this military mistake and blunder in trying to take Israel first before she goes against the United States. We know what's going to happen, and so we rejoice that God has given to us advance warning, advance notices, so that we will actually believe when we see these things happen.

Jesus said, I've told you these things before they come to pass, so that when they come to pass, you might believe. And so it's always exciting to live in those periods of history when God starts to put things together, and you know, hey, this is the time that the prophets were speaking about. These are the events God said were going to take place.

Wow, this is it. Look at that, you know, and you see the whole thing beginning to just sort of weld together, and it's just really exciting times. Now, Daniel had predicted that the Medo-Persian Empire was going to overthrow the Babylonian Empire, and Daniel actually became a counselor.

He was a counselor in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. However, by the time that Belshazzar, his grandson, came around, Daniel was sort of in retirement, and when the handwriting came on the wall, they brought Daniel in, and Belshazzar really didn't know him. Are you that Daniel that, you know, helped my grandfather and so forth? And Daniel then interpreted the dream for Belshazzar, telling him that that night his kingdom was going.

That was it. He had had it. His days were numbered and finished.

That was all for him, and he had a very short span on the scene. Daniel was probably at this time close to 90 years old, he probably lived to be 110, 115. He lived to the time that the temple was rebuilt, and he, because it was, as we'll get tonight, it was Darius who gave the order to start work again.

Cyrus gave the order to start, and about 50,000 of the Jews returned, as we will be reading, and started rebuilding the temple and resettling the land. Then about, oh, then actually a Cyrus was removed. Another king came in who wrote and stopped the building of the temple, and then Darius came on the throne, and he wrote and started the whole project again about 16 years later.

Now it is the same Darius that was a close friend of Daniel. It was Darius the king who was tricked into making the decree, if anyone prays to any god other than me for 30 days, you know, let him be thrown in the lion's den, and he signed this proclamation, and then they came and said, hey, there's a guy down here that broke your law, and he's got to go in the lion's den. And he said, who is it? It's Daniel.

And of course, he was grieved because he loved Daniel, and he sought all day to try and reverse things, but the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be changed once they had been sealed. And so he encouraged Daniel, and he said, Daniel, the god you serve, he's able to deliver you out of the hand of the lions. And Daniel said, don't worry, I'm an old tough customer, you know, I'll get by okay.

So they threw Daniel into the lion's den, and of course, the king didn't sleep all night long. He was really troubled over the whole thing. And in the morning, went out early, and I like it, the scripture said, and he cried in a lamentable voice.

Oh, Daniel. However the lamentable voice was. He was just, you know, sort of in a lament.

It was, is your God able to deliver you? And he says, ah, live forever, king, you know. God sent an angel down and stopped the mouths of the lions, and I'm in good shape. So they brought Daniel out, and then the guys that conspired against Daniel were tossed into the lion's den, and before they could even hit the bottom of the den, they were devoured of the lions.

Now, this is the Darius that we will get to in a little while, who gave the order to start building again, even ordered them to pay whatever money they needed to help. So we'll start putting this story together for you as we move along. So Cyrus the king made a proclamation that whatever people there were of the Israelites who wanted to return could go up to Jerusalem and build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel, for he is the God which is in Jerusalem.

And whosoever remains in any place where he sojourns, let the men of his place help him with silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, beside the free will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. So there rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites and all of them whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver and gold and goods with beasts and precious things beside all that was willingly offered.

And Cyrus the king brought forth vessels out of the house of the Lord which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem. And put in the house of his gods. Even those did Cyrus the king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithridath the treasurer and numbered them unto the prince of Judah and the number of them were thirty charges of gold, a thousand charges of silver, twenty-nine knives and so forth.

Now it was the policy of the Assyrians and of the Babylonians when they conquered people to take them out of their land and to just place them in other lands that they might lose their national identity and they might lose any fighting spirit. It was the policy of the Persians. They were far more humane than were the Assyrians or the Babylonians.

And the Persians policy was to sort of repatriate the people. Now it is mentioned here that those of Judah the Levites and Benjamin. Later on we'll find that it also mentions those of Manasseh and those of Ephraim that return.

I make mention of that because there is what is referred to as the ten lost tribes of Israel and those who try to make an identity of the Anglo-Saxon nations with Israel and say that we are a part of the ten lost tribes. The Bible never refers to ten lost tribes. In fact in the New Testament there are references to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.

Greetings. And there were people from the twelve tribes that were living and still identified with those tribes during the times of the New Testament. And so you really don't have lost tribes.

That's sort of a misnomer that people have developed saying the ten lost tribes. Even here there were those from the tribe of Benjamin which was well that was a part of Judah and Benjamin were together but then those of Manasseh those of Ephraim and the Levites. And of course you have the tribe of Judah so that even already we have many of the tribes identified and by the New Testament Paul the Apostle said he was of the tribe of Benjamin and he knew the tribe from which he came and of course there were the Levites and all during the time of Jesus Christ.

So they may not know their identity today as to which tribe they're from. It isn't necessary. It was only necessary to keep the tribal distinctions until the coming of Jesus Christ.

It had to be that he was of the tribe of Judah and once he came forth from the tribe of Judah not necessary to keep tribal distinctions any longer. It was all fulfilled but God knows where they are. In fact God is going to seal them 12,000 from each tribe in just a very short time as he gets ready to put the final touches upon the whole earth system before the return of Jesus Christ.

God is going to seal 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel 144,000 altogether. So God knows exactly who they are where they are and all even though they themselves may not know what tribe they're from yet the Lord does know. So here they are returning to Jerusalem as I said some 50,000 and in chapter 2 it gives you the names of the people and the families that came and the numbers that came with them.

Beginning in verse 36 to 39 you have the priests that returned and then beginning with verse 40 the Levites that returned and then Solomon's servants that returned. Now in verse 61 there were some of the Levites that were returning who could not find their names in the register. Among those that were reckoned by genealogy.

They just couldn't find their names that is they could not accurately trace their family history. They could not trace themselves back to the tribe of Levi. Therefore they were as polluted and they were put out of the priesthood.

They were not allowed to minister or to function as a priest or to receive the offerings, the tithes or the dues that were given to the priest in those days because they could not prove their pedigree. They couldn't trace their names in the records. And they were kept out of the priesthood until such a time as they could

find a priest with the Urim and the Thummim in order that they might inquire of the Lord and determine if these men really belong to the priesthood or not.

Now the Urim and the Thummim are this thing that the priest, the high priest wore upon his chest and the words mean light and perfections. Just what they were we really don't know. But they would use the Urim and the Thummim to inquire of the will of God.

Now the common theory is that it was a little pouch with a black stone and a white stone. And they would ask a question and the priest would say Lord give us a perfect lot and he would reach in to the little bag and pull out a stone. If it was the black stone then the answer was no.

If it was the white stone the answer was yes. And they used this method to ascertain the will of God in certain things. Keep asking questions keep pulling out the stones and if you pulled out the white stone then answer yes if you pulled out the black stone the answer no.

And so this is what some have theorized the Urim and the Thummim to be. Just what it was we don't know. It was a method by which the high priest received God's answer for the people and God's directions for the people.

It was some type of device by which divine guidance was given to the people. Now though we don't know exactly what it was I do know exactly what it wasn't. It wasn't a pair of glasses that Joseph Smith found with twelve golden tablets that when he put them on he could magically decipher the hieroglyphics by putting on these glasses which he said were the Urim and the Thummim.

That is not so. During the time of Moses they didn't even know how to make glass and it wasn't a magic pair of spectacles to read the hieroglyphics on the golden tablets. But as I say what it was I don't know.

I do know what it wasn't. So there were about 50,000 who returned at this first repatriation under Cyrus and going back to build the temple plus they had 736 horses and 245 mules and 435 camels and all. And some of the chief fathers when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem they offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place.

And they gave after their ability under the treasure of the work three score and 1,000 drams or 61,000 drams of gold, 5,000 pound of silver and 100 priest garments. So the priests, the Levites and some of the people and all the singers and the porters and the Nethemims that dwelt in their cities and all Israel in their cities. So they returned and they took up an offering.

Some of the wealthier families and all gave as was their ability for the rebuilding of the temple there in Jerusalem. And when the seventh month was come, the children of Israel were in the cities. The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem and then stood up Joshua the son of Josedach and his brothers, the priest and Zerubbabel the son of Shethiel and his brethren and they built the altar of God of Israel to offer burnt offerings thereon as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

And they set the altar upon its bases for fear was upon them because the people whose countries they offer burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord even burnt offerings morning and evening. Now Zerubbabel was more or less the political leader of the people who returned. Zerubbabel was a grandson to the one king of Israel, Jehoiachin.

And so had they followed the monarchy, he would have been the king but he didn't assume the position of a monarch but he was the leader of the people in a political sense whereas Joshua the priest was the leader of the people in a spiritual sense. Joshua was the priest leading them in spiritual things. Zerubbabel became more or less a governor over this remnant of people that returned.

However, he was of the royal line of David and could have assumed the position of the king. However, the monarchy had ended and is not to be picked up again until Jesus Christ comes and he will sit upon the throne of David and God's promise to David that there shall not cease one from his family sitting upon the throne forever will be fulfilled when Jesus comes again and establishes God's eternal kingdom upon the earth. And so if you will at this point next week read the book of Zechariah you will find where Zerubbabel and Joshua fit into the picture.

They were the instruments that God used in bringing the people back and in encouraging the people. These two men were vital instruments of God and you will find more record concerning them there in the prophecies of Zechariah and also of this particular period of the building of the temple. You will find Haggai has a lot to say about this.

So this week as extracurricular reading you might want to go to Haggai and Zechariah because it fits right into this general period. So they gathered together and they started offering sacrifices to the Lord even before the temple was rebuilt. They cleared off the area of the altar.

They began to offer the morning and evening sacrifices because actually there was a lot of hostility from the people around about them and they were living in real fear and so they were really seeking God's protection and started offering sacrifices both morning and evening. Now they kept the Feast of the Tabernacles which of course is in October. They were there it said in the 9th month they came back.

So they started keeping again the Feast of the Tabernacles the 10th month. They offered the daily burnt offerings according to the number that was required and so forth. And the special offerings of the Feast and all.

And everyone that willingly offered a free will offering unto the Lord. It is interesting how that all the time the mention of giving to God is always mentioned in a free will willingly. Pressure is never right when it comes to giving to God.

You should never give out of constraint Paul said. But as every man hath purpose in his own heart so let him give. And so it is a shame that the church has adopted pressure tactics in trying to get pledges out of people or get offerings out of people or get support for God's work.

And there are various types of pressure tactics that are used. There's a lot of weeping and wailing which is a pressure tactic to get your sympathy so that you'll send your money in. And there's a lot of exuberance and hilarity and all.

And push push push. But it should never be. Because so often if I give actually if I give in order that I might be seen of men to give.

If I'm giving in a public service because everyone who is going to give so much is going to stand up you know and then you get your public recognition then after I give it I feel bad. I think oh my I really didn't want to give that much and I can't afford that and all. And you begin to feel bad and then you begin to resent what you gave to God.

That's terrible. God doesn't want anybody griping over what they've given to Him. And thus your giving should always be willingly a free will offering unto the Lord.

And that's really the whole rule of giving to God. Freely of your own heart. Not by pressure.

Not by constraint. Not by someone begging or pushing. But you're just determining in your heart I want to give this to God.

And then doing it without any fanfare or anything else. Just hey Lord I love you and I want to just give this to you and Lord I just thank you for the opportunity of giving and give freely unto God. And always through the Old Testament it's emphasized and of course the New Testament is declared not by constraint.

Not by force but willingly let everybody lay aside that which is purposed in his own heart. So the people gave in order that they might start building the temple and they gave money to the masons, the carpenters and they hired actually men to go up to Tyre and Sidon and to bring down some of the cedar timbers in order that they might start rebuilding even as Solomon had brought the timbers from Tyre and Sidon for the building of the first temple down to Joppa. So now they are bringing more of those timbers out of the area of Lebanon to rebuild the temple.

And the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month Zerubbabel and Joshua and the remnant of the brethren and the priests and all they that were come out of captivity to Jerusalem appointed the Levites from twenty years old and upward to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. Then stood Joshua with his sons and his brothers and they set forward the workmen in the house of God and when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord they set priests in their apparel with trumpets and the Levites and the sons of Asaph with their symbols to praise the Lord after the ordinance of David the king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and in giving thanks unto the Lord because he is good for his mercy endureth forever 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. And so you can get a mental picture of this scene. They came back to Jerusalem which had been lying there desolate for seventy years.

So it just had become overgrown. Some of the men that came back actually had seen Jerusalem before its destruction. They had seen the original temple.

Some of the very old men. But most of them had never seen Jerusalem before. Only they came back to a city of rubble.

The older men no doubt directed them to the place where Solomon's temple had been built. They cleared away the rubble and they laid the foundation stones once more. And they were so thrilled that the foundation stones were laid.

That they had a big ceremony offering offerings unto God. The priest blowing on their trumpets others sounding with their symbols. And there were two hundred singers and so they had no doubt several choirs and one would sing and then another.

Praises unto the Lord as they were praising God and as the choirs were singing. The people were there worshiping God and just so thankful that a center of worship was being created once again where they could gather before God and offer their offerings unto Him. But as they were singing and praising the Lord

some of these old men who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple the beauty and the glory of that temple when they saw the foundations and they realized hey you know we're putting this thing together nickel and dime and that one of Solomon's was so glorious.

These old men began to weep. The younger fellows were all excited we're going to have a temple again but the older fellows remembering the glory that was passed the glory that was lost. They wept and so you have half of them or not half but you have a bunch of them weeping some of them yelling and you couldn't tell the difference in the noise whether or not they were weeping or praising and all as their noise mingled together but they made such a racket that it was heard afar off.

And when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity had built the started to build the temple of the Lord unto the Lord God of Israel they came to Zerubbabel and to the chief of the fathers and they said let us build with you for we seek your God as you do and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esherhaddon the king of Asher which brought us up hither but Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel said unto them you don't have anything to do with us to build a house unto our God but we ourselves will build unto the Lord God of Israel as the king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us and the people of the land weak in the hands of the people of Judah and trouble them in building now when the northern kingdom was

destroyed by Assyria the Assyrian king took the people of the northern kingdom Israel and scattered them throughout the world and they had brought other people that they had conquered and settled them in the land of the northern kingdom became known as Samaria that was the capital city and the people ultimately became known as the Samaritans now when they came into the land the wild animals began to turn against the people and many of them were devoured and they came to the king and they said hey we can't get along with the gods of the land the animals are turning against us so send us some priests that they may teach us how to worship in order that we might worship these gods of the land so that these wild animals won't be eating our kids and all so they the king of Assyria found some

priest and they brought them to these people who the priest taught them the worship of God and it said so they feared Jehovah but they worshiped their own gods in other words he was just made a part of their whole total worship program but it wasn't a true worship of Jehovah nor were they truly descendants of Abraham or Israel so they did however as a part of their total worship worship Jehovah even as they were taught they did have the sacrifices they did offer the sacrifices and all because the priest taught them the burnt offerings the peace offerings and these things so they did do that and so when these fellows came and were going to build their temple they said hey we'd like to help you because we worship your God too but they worshiped God as a mixture with a lot of other gods and

so Zerubbabel and Joshua and the chief men decided that they didn't want their help now it would be great if the church would maintain that same attitude today we don't need the help of the world in doing the work of God but not all churches see it that way and many are trying to conscript Satan to come help them in their building programs or whatever but God doesn't need any help in accomplishing his program especially from those who are not true servants of God and I feel that it is wrong to go to worldly people to try to conscript aid for the work of God they refused to accept their help now these are the same people that in the time of Christ were called the Samaritans and the Jews would not have any dealings even after they returned they would not have any dealings 400 years later

when when Christ came they still would not have any dealings with the Samaritans and you remember when Jesus met the woman of Samaria at the well and said would you give me a drink of water she said how come you're asking me for a drink you're a Jew I'm a Samaritan the Jews don't have dealings with the Samaritans it is true the Jews would usually when they were coming to the feast from Galilee go clear on down to the Jordan River and come all the way along the Jordan River and then come up from Jericho rather than take the shorter route directly through Samaria because they just didn't like to be around the Samaritans there was a lot of bad blood between the two now the Holy Spirit came upon the church and in one of the early persecutions the church was sort of scattered and Jesus had

said to his disciples when the Holy Ghost comes upon you you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and unto the other most parts of the earth so in the persecution as the church was scattered Philip went up to Samaria and began to preach Christ to the Samaritans and many believed and were baptized when they saw the miracles that were wrought through the hands of Philip now when the church in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had also received the gospel they sent unto them Peter and John for as yet the Holy Spirit had not come upon them and when they came they laid hands on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit and that's when Simon said hey I'd like to buy this power that whoever I lay my hands on they would receive too and Peter said your

money perish with you because you think that the gifts of God can be bought with money and told him to pray that God would forgive him the bitterness the gall that was in his heart so the Samaritans received the gospel a great revival now at the present time there are still about 200 Samaritans still living they're almost extinct there's only about 200 of them living today they still live in the area of Nablus which is at the in the valley at the base of Mount Ebel and Mount Gerizim and they still believe that Mount Gerizim is the place where God should be worshiped you remember the woman by the well said to Jesus when she realized that he was a prophet sir I perceive that you're a prophet our fathers say that we are to worship God in this mountain Gerizim right above them there for they

were at Shechem or which is a present day Nablus in that area our fathers tells were to worship God in this mountain Gerizim you say in Jerusalem where is God to be worshiped and so they still today have an annual Passover sacrifice and they sacrifice a lamb at the top of Mount Gerizim still to the present time they are called the Samaritans as I said there are only about 200 of them left and they are pretty much imbecilic they're pretty much imbeciles now because of the close cross breeding they won't marry outside and so their numbers continue to reduce and they have just a lot of idiocy among them because of this close cross breeding but they still exist which is interesting about 200 Samaritans left so these were the people they came to Joshua and Zerubbabel and they said hey we will

help you because we worship your God too we will help you build this temple and they consulted together and they said nope we don't want your help well their help being spurned then they turned against them and did their best to defeat their purposes of rebuilding they started really hassling them and hindering in every opportunity so they hired attorneys to frustrate their purposes to file injunctions to get the court to file injunctions make them have an EIR report and all this kind of junk to just frustrate their building efforts I'm sure that no matter what they did they couldn't foul things up as much as things can be fouled up with our present governmental systems today if you want to build anything it is just unreal what they make you go through we are just governmentalized to

death it seems to be the government's purpose to put everybody out of business and to make everybody dependent on the government that sounds good but then who is going to pay the bills if the government

makes trying to be independent so difficult more and more ordinances, OSHAs and everything else to come and harass you I'll tell you they couldn't harass them nearly as much as the government harasses building projects today some of you may be government employees the bureaucracy today is something horrible we are just going to sink under bureaucrats so they sought to frustrate the purposes all of the days of Cyrus the king of Persia even until the time that Darius took over the throne so in the reign of Ahasuerus who is the Cambyses of secular history at the beginning of his reign they

wrote to him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem and in the days of Ahasuerus Artaxerxes who is also the previous verse Cambyses of the secular history they wrote him a letter in the Syrian tongue and they said Artaxerxes the king thy servants the men on this side of the river and at such a time be it known to the king that the Jews which came up from thee to us have come to Jerusalem and they are they are building the rebellious and bad city they have set up the walls and they have joined the foundations and be it known now to the king that if this city is built and the walls are set up again then they will not pay their toll or their taxes or customs so that you will be endangered in receiving revenue now because we have maintenance from the king's palace and it

was not meet for us to see the king's dishonor therefore we have sent and certified to the king these things and we suggest that you search the book of records and you will find in the book of 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 in old times for this cause the city was destroyed and we certify the king that if this city be built again and the walls are set up by the means thou shall have no portion on this side of the river then sent the king an answer to Rehum the chancellor and to Shimshai the scribe and to the rest of the companions that dwell in Samaria and unto the rest that are beyond the river peace and at such a time the letter which you sent to us has been plainly read before

me and I have commanded and searched that and the search has been made and it is found that the city of old time has made insurrection against kings and that rebellion and sedition have been made there in there have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem which have ruled over all the countries beyond the river and toll and tribute and custom was paid to them give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease that this city not be built until another commandment shall be given from me take heed now that you fail not to do this for why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings and so the copy of the letter of Artaxerxes was read to the Reham and to his companions they went up in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and they made them to cease by force and power then cease the work of the house

of God which is that Jerusalem so it ceased under the second year of the reign of Darius the king of Persia so during the time of Cambyses the Artaxerxes the work was stopped a period of perhaps 10 years or so they had started they laid the foundation they were building and they got this order to cease and desist so they stopped the building and in stopping the building they got then involved in their own houses and fixing up their own places and they started fixing up their houses very nice and they just forgot and left desolate the house of the Lord and so if you will read Haggai chapter one he is crying out against the people for their forsaking the house of the Lord is it time for you oh Israel to dwell in your sealed houses while the house of the Lord lies desolate behold take a look

at things because you have sowed much but you're gathering little it seems like your pockets have holes in them you can't keep your money and you're always broke and you never have enough and the reason is that you've been spending everything for yourself and you've just been letting God's house go desolate and so Haggai is encouraging the people let's get back and let's start building the temple once again so it

tells us here in chapter five the prophet Haggai and the prophet Zechariah they prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of God of Israel then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Jethiel and Joshua and they began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem and with them were the prophets of God helping them now in the first effort it was it was the

priests that were doing the work and now Haggai and Zechariah the prophets have pitched in and they are helping them to rebuild the house of God and at the same time there came to them Tatnai who was the governor on that side of the river and Shetherbanznai and their companions and they said unto them who commanded you to build this house and to make this wall and they said they said to them what are the names of you men you know that are making this building so the guys came up you know like building inspectors who commanded you to build it what are your names fellows you know and started to give them a bad time 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 so they returned answer by letter concerning

this matter in the copy of the letter that Tatnai the governor sent to Darius the king they sent the letter unto him wherein was written unto Darius the king all peace now remember this is the Darius who loved Daniel Daniel sat with him many times had long conversations about God and the power of God and Daniel a man of such wisdom and such fellowship with God no doubt Darius was well he was the scripture tells us extremely impressed by Daniel loved him so Darius gets this letter God moved the hashers out of the way and put Darius on the throne now and it said be it known unto the king we went to the province of Judea to the house of the great God which is built with great stones the timber is laid in the walls and this work is going on fast and it is prospering in their hands so we ask

those elders and said unto them who commanded you to build this house and to make up these walls and we ask their names also in order that we could certify to you that we might write the names of the men that were chief among them and thus they returned us an answer saying we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and we build the house that was built these many years ago which the great king of Israel built it and set up but after that our fathers have provoked the God of heaven to wrath he gave them to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon the Chaldean who destroyed the house and carried the people away to Babylon but in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God 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 to the temple of Babylon those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon and were delivered unto one whose name was Bazar and he may have been a governor and he said unto him take these vessels go carry them to the temple that is in Jerusalem and let the house of God be built in this place it says now if it seems good to the king search and see if Cyrus Cyrus did make such an order and you know let us know quickly so that we can put a stop to what's going on or let us know the king's pleasure in this matter so Darius the king made a decree and search was made in the house of the rules where the treasures were laid up in Babylon and they found at in the palace that is in the province

of the meads a rule and there was the record written in the first year Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem let the house be built in the place where they offered sacrifices the foundations be strongly laid the height of it will be 90 feet and the breadth of it 90 feet with three rows of great stones a row of new timber so let the expenses be given out of the king's house and let the golden and silver vessels which were in the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is Jerusalem and brought to Babylon let them be restored again to the temple

that is in Jerusalem everyone to his place now therefore Tatnai the governor beyond the river now he searched he found this in the record so he writes back to Tatnai

and he said you and your companions let the work of this house of God alone let the governor of the Jews the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place moreover I make a decree that what you shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of the house of God that of the king's goods even of the taxes that you collect on that side of the river and the expenses be given to these men that they may not be hindered so these guys were trying to stop them but instead they were ordered to give part of the taxes to them to help them and that which they may need both young bullocks and rams and lambs for their burnt offerings for the God of heaven wheat and salt and wine and oil let it be given to them every day without fail that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the

God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and for his sons and 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 there on and let his house be made a dunghill for this in other words anybody tries to hinder them tear down his house and take the timbers of his house make a gallows and hang the guy on the gallows now you remember in the book of Esther how Haman sought to destroy the people of God and he was hanged on a gallows that he built in his backyard so hanging was a form of capital punishment during that period of time but rather than thwarting now the building of God Darius no doubt because of Daniel's influence ordered that they help them that they give them expense monies that they give them

animals to sacrifice and pray for Darius the king as they are praying there before God let it be done with speed and so the elders of the Jews built and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah and they built and finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel according to the commandment of Cyrus and Darius and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar which is the sixth year the reign of Darius the king and the children of Israel the priests the Levites and the rest of the children of the captivity kept the dedication of this house of God with joy and they offered at the dedication of the house of God 100 bullocks 200 rams 400 lambs for a sin offering for all of Israel 12 he goats according to the number of the tribes of Israel and

they set the priest in their divisions the Levites in their courses for the service of God which is at Jerusalem and the children of the captivity kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month 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 brother in the priest and for themselves the children of Israel which were come again out of captivity and all had separated themselves into them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel did eat and they kept the feast of unleavened bread for seven days with joy for the Lord and made them joyful and turn their heart of the king of Assyria unto them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God

the God of Israel now after these things in the reign of our exert sees who is long of the secular history 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 of his request according to the hand of the Lord is God upon him and there went up some of the children of Israel and the priest and the Levites and the singers and the porters and the nephilim unto Jerusalem in the seventh year of our exert sees the king and he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month which was in the seventh year of the king for upon the first day of the first month began he to go from Babylon to the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem according to the good hand of his God upon him for Ezra had prepared his heart to

seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach Israel statutes and judgments so Ezra was called a ready scribe he had sought his heart to seek God and our exert sees a gave had given to him permission to come on back with another contingency of men about seventeen hundred and fifty four plus their their little ones and their wives are all their substance so this is now the second return it's a small one under Ezra coming back to Jerusalem a favorite phrase and of course now we get into chapter seven we get into this is this is eighty years approximately after the first people had come so the people of course have been in the land those that first return they've been out there for about eighty years when Ezra comes on the scene and he evidently has favor with the king he is granted

permission to go back in order that he might teach and instruct the people in the ways of the law of God a popular phrase with Ezra is the good hand of God upon him now our exert sees gave Ezra the priest a a decree verse twelve art exerts king of kings unto Ezra the priest describe of the law of God of heaven perfect peace at such a time I make a decree that all they of the people of Israel and of his priest and Levites in my realm which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem go with you for as much as you are sent of the king and of his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of thy God which is in your hand and to carry the silver and the gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered unto the God of Israel whose

habitation is in Jerusalem and all the silver and the gold that you can find in all the provinces of Babylon with the free will offering of the people and all the priest offer willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem that you may buy speedily with this money the bullets and the rams lambs and their meal meal offerings their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem and whatsoever shall seem good to thee and to your brothers do with the rest of the silver and gold after the will of your God and so the vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of God those deliver before the God of Jerusalem and whatsoever more should be needful for the house of thy God which thou shall have occasion to bestow bestowed

out of the king's treasure house and I even I are exerts he's the king to make a decree to all the treasures which are beyond the river that whatsoever as with the priest described the law of God of heaven shall require of you be it done speedily unto a hundred talents of silver to a hundred measures of wheat to a hundred baths of wine to a hundred baths of oil and salt without prescribing and whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven that it be diligently done in the house of the God of heaven for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons now why would he say that because he said as really gone to the king and said now the hand of the Lord is upon all them for good who seek him but if those forsake him then you know the the punishment and the wrath of God so

he said why should you know God's wrath be upon me go ahead and do all of these things so he also made the decree that they could not tax the ministers the priest and all of those who ministered in the house of God there was not to be any taxes or tolls or customs imposed upon them and now Ezra after the wisdom of thy God that is in your hand set magistrates and judges which may judge all the people which are beyond the river all such as know the laws of God and teach them that know them not and whosoever will not do the law of thy God the law of the king let judgment be executed speedily upon him whether it be to death or banishment or to confiscation of his goods or to imprisonment and Ezra said 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 at Jerusalem and hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counselors and before the king's mighty princes and he said Ezra said I was strengthened as

the hand of the Lord my God was upon me and I gathered together out of Israel the chief men to go up with me so Ezra no doubt had a very great favor in the eyes of Artaxerxes and Artaxerxes gave this marvelous decree giving unto Ezra money and also commanding that those on the other side give money also commanding that he could collect a free will offering but it is interesting to me that so few really decided to go back with Ezra now as many as one can return and only 1,754 wanted to what had happened is that the Jews had become so prosperous they started into businesses and all up

until of course the time of captivity there were most of them just farmers but here they started getting into businesses and they started getting so prosperous and so wealthy that they just really didn't want to go back to the hardships of the land the land of Israel was still offered just a lot of hardship a lot of work it was you know everything was rebuilding here they were in Persia in this great and glorious empire and they were wealthy they were getting along so well they really didn't desire to go back and so though they all had the rights as many as want to of their own free will to return may do so at this time only 1,754 chose to do so the rest of them just settling down comfortable prosperous not wanting to go through the rigors of trying to rebuild the land that had been

desolated so in chapter 8 it gives to us a list of those who went with Ezra totaling out about 754 of the males when you add the priests that were added to later so they numbered the people and they found out that they didn't have any ministering priest among them of the Levites and so they wanted to take back some priest that could minister also and so search was made and they found these men and by the good hand of our God upon us they brought to us a man of understanding and his sons who were the sons of Levi the sons of Israel and so they returned with them to the land but as they gathered at the river and they were ready to go they had collected a lot of money the king had given them a lot of gold and silver and he said then I proclaim verse 21 if fast there at the river of Ahava

that we might afflict ourselves before our God to seek a right way for us and for our little ones and for all of our substance for he said I was ashamed to require the king of hand of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemies in the way because he had actually told the king how great God was the God that we serve you know he is the God of the universe and he's the God been bragging to the king about God been witnessing to the king about the power and the greatness of God and how God watches over his people and how God's hand is upon those for good who seek after him and we're going to seek after God and all and so the king you know gave him all this gold and everything else and now he has all this treasure and he's got this long journey through this land that is filled with

nomadic tribes who plunder all of the caravans that come along they live off of these caravans and with all of the wealth that he is carrying he's really worried about it what if they get plundered on the way you know and they're going to have to move slowly actually it took them four full months to make the journey from the area there in Persia to Jerusalem and with all this money so he really had sort of painted himself into a corner in bragging about God it would be inconsistent to go back to the king now and say would you mind sending a bunch of soldiers and horsemen so we can be protected from the enemy when they had told him that God was able to protect so they fasted and prayed and they then began their journey so he took twelve of the men and he divided the treasure among them

weighed out all of the silver and the gold to these twelve men and he instructed them to watch it and to keep it and so we departed from the river Hava on the twelfth day of the first month to go to Jerusalem and the hand of our God was upon us and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and such as lay in wait by the way and we came to Jerusalem and we were there for three days now on the fourth day the silver

and the gold and the vessels that were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest and with him was Eliezer the son of Phineas and with him was Joseph the son of Joshua and so forth and so they had these guys bring the gold in and they weighed it out and it was all there every every ounce made it safely and they delivered the king's decree

to the king's lieutenants and to the governors on this side of the river and they furthered the people and the house of God 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 the abominations even of the Canaanites the Hittites the Perizzites the Jebusites the Ammonites and the Moabites and the Egyptians and the Amorites 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 the rulers have been chief in this in this trespass now they came to Ezra and they gave to him this awesome report for God said to them when they had

come into the land that they weren't to take any of the daughters for their own sons or give their daughters to their sons to be married that they were to be a separate people a holy people unto God and they weren't to have any inter marriages with the other tribes the reason being that God was preserving the holy seed for the coming of his son also they were there was the danger that they would begin to worship the gods of the Canaanites and the Perizzites and all so God forbid interracial marriages only for the Jews and I think that it's important that we point this out God did not make a general prohibition of interracial marriages there are those who try to make out that inter racial marriages are against the scripture that is not so it was only for the Jews that God commanded them

not to marry interracially with those inhabitants of the land but even Boaz the great grandfather of David married a Moabitess and from that of course Christ was in that line but the prohibition was not to marry the people of the land unless you know you turn to their gods and turn away from the living God so they bring the report to Ezra now since they've returned these guys haven't been keeping the law of God they've been marrying these gals and actually the priest and the chief leaders are some of the worst offenders now the effect that this had on Ezra was just overwhelming you see Ezra had come back to teach them the law of God he was a teacher and a ready scribe and his whole purpose in returning was to teach the people the law of God and here they had been for 70 years in captivity

in Babylon because of their idolatry because of their disobedience to God and now they've been in the land again for just about 80 years but they're right back in their old idolatry and it's just more than Ezra can believe he's just astonished he when I heard this thing I tore my clothes and my mantle I pulled my hair out of my head and off my beard and I sat down astonished I can't believe this and so he pulls out his hair his beard, tears his clothes and just sits down there astonished and then were assembled unto me everyone that trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the transgression of those that had been carried away and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice and at the evening sacrifice I arose from my heaviness and having torn my garment and my mantle I fell

on my knees and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God and I said oh my God I'm ashamed and I blushed 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 for since the days of our fathers have we been in 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 and to captivity as a spoil to the confusion of faces as it is today and now for this little space grace has been shown 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 might lighten our eyes and give us a little reviving in our bondage for we were bondmen and 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 and to set up the house of our God and to repair the desolations and to give a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem and now oh our God what shall we say after this for we have forsaken your commandments which you have commanded by thy servants and the prophets saying the land into which you go to possess is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands and their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons neither take their daughters unto your sons nor seek their peace nor their wealth forever that ye may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children

forever and after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great trespass seeing that you are our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve and you have given us such deliverance as this should we again break your commandments and join in affinity with the people of these abominations what's not thou be angry with us till thou has consumed us so that there should be no remnant nor escaping old 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 we cannot stand before thee because of this so Ezra's tremendous prayer unto God shows that he does have a good knowledge of the law of God which he came to teach the people shows that he does have a good concept of of the will of God and of the

purpose of God for the people and offers his prayer before God acknowledging that the judgments of God really were merciful he did not judge them as much as they deserve and here they're going right back and doing the same thing God what can I say you know we're we're lucky that you haven't wiped us out completely we're fortunate that we still exist and so he he calls out unto God for the people and so they come to him the leaders and the people and they say we've they said we've done a terrible thing and so this was the remedy those who had married wives from the land were to put them away and their children it seems like a very harsh measure indeed but they were to divorce all of those wives that were not Israelites and all of the children that were born of them were to be put out they

said hey you know give us a little time to do it because there's quite a few of us that have trespassed in this thing and so they took this very stringent measure in putting them out now I did mention that interracial marriages were only forbidden to the Jews but there is for we Christians the injunction be not unequally yoked together with an unbeliever so you should never go into a marriage with an unbeliever you're just violating the law of God what fellowship hath light with darkness what communion concourse hath Christ with Belial but here a very stringent and harsh measure was taken they put away all of these wives and they said unto him with a loud voice as thou hast said so must we do they realized that it was a divine imperative we must do it it seems cruel it seems harsh but it

had to be done if they were going to survive it was a matter now of survival and so they took this cruel harsh measure put away all the wives and the children and separated themselves again unto God and since that time though Israel is guilty and the people have been guilty of many sins they have not been guilty of idolatry it seemed to be the cure finally for an idolatrous people whose major sin was that of idolatry and that seemed to be a permanent cure for Israel as far as idolatry was concerned now the names of those that were involved are listed towards the end of the book and thus we get to the end of the book of Ezra may the Lord bless you and watch over you this week may his hand be upon your life to strengthen you to guide you may he use you as his instrument to do his work may

God fill you with love and with understanding compassion of his spirit may you walk in the spirit and be led of the spirit of God this week in Jesus name

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/6/SID6366.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/chuck-smith/through-the-bible-ezra/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net