

Rebuilding the House of God: A Study in Ezra 1-2

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References: **Ezra 1-2**, Jeremiah 29:10-14; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:17; 2 Timothy 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 2:15

The Call to Return

Very good, so welcome again to all. Eric, I'm not sure how we finished off last week, but often we end up leaving you half-spoken and half-unspoken. Do you want to start us off tonight, or what are your thoughts?

I'm not sure where we left off last week myself. Somewhere we left off in Ezra chapter 1. I'll read from verse 5, just to make one or two comments. "Then the heads of the fathers"—this of course is after the proclamation of Cyrus the Great of Persia, who made a proclamation for the Jews to go back and to rebuild their temple after 70 years. Seventy years had transpired, and we know, if we go back to verse 1, it says that in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be fulfilled. And we didn't look up that verse, as I recall, in Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 10.

So if you go there, just for a reference, Jeremiah chapter 29—he had prophesied that 70 years they would be taken into captivity. And part of his ministry was to warn the children of Judah that they wouldn't be carried away if they didn't repent. But God's patience finally ran out, and they sent the Babylonians down in 606 B.C., and they carried away the first group of captives. Now this is exactly 70 years later, 536 B.C., that Cyrus the Great, according to the promise made by Jeremiah, declared that they would be in captivity for that length of time. Chapter 29 and verse 10 of Jeremiah:

[Jeremiah 29:10-14 NKJV]

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the

nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

Of course, his prophecy stretches off into the future as well. It wasn't completely fulfilled at that time. As we'll read tonight, only about 50,000 came back at that time. Many of them stayed in Persia, under the Persian Empire, and only 50,000 came back. And so this prophecy, although it specifically speaks about the 70 years, that then this remnant would come back, but the prophecy stretches off into the future when Israel, in the future—and it looks like to us who read our scriptures, that it isn't very long now that the full fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy will be completed when the Jews who are now just trickling back to Israel are going to go en masse from all over the world. We said it before that there are more Jews living outside of Israel than are in Israel right now, but that will not be the case according to the prophets that prophesy that they will come back en masse.

So then we have this proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, and he, throughout all his kingdom, he made this proclamation, and we read it last time, verses 2 to 4. And then the response was, verse 5:

"Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem."

Notice this, verse 5, it says they were from the houses of Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes that formed the nation, the southern kingdom of Judah. It doesn't mention any of the other ten tribes that had been taken and scattered throughout the world before by the Assyrians that had taken them captive, although probably there were some of those as well. But it was the heads of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin that came back.

And verse 6:

"And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered."

So those that were around them—the majority decided to stay under the administration of Cyrus the Great because it was a very honorable administration. Historians tell us that he was a very wise and benevolent administrator. And so they probably found that it was more comfortable perhaps to remain in Persia rather than to face the pioneering that would be necessary to go back to a devastated land. It would take a real dedication to go to a new land and try to rebuild. And it wasn't just that it was an empty land, there were many adversaries there, as we'll discover, that were against the building of that temple.

So it was not only pioneering but pioneering under very difficult circumstances. But there were those that were willing to support them in this. And you'll see that they gave of silver and gold and goods and livestock. So it seems that the Jews prospered during that time.

Now the events in the first six chapters of Ezra take place over a period of 20 years. We'll find that out, from the time of the start of the building of the temple to the time when it was completed, which took 20 years. It was 16 years where they kind of left off building because of the difficulties that they were having with the former inhabitants of the land. And then it was after this 20 years that we have the events that take place in the Book of Esther. So that's how they fit in the time frame. And perhaps next time I'll bring up, if I have opportunity, I'll bring up a little timeline that I've been developing on these books to help us to understand where this all fits together.

So the story in Ezra and Nehemiah is a story of those that came back from captivity. The story in Esther, which is the book that follows them, is the story of those that remained in Persia during that time. So just a little placement of events from these books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Again, these first six chapters of Ezra, they speak of the return under Zerubbabel, and the last chapters, chapter 7 to 10 of Ezra, speak of the return—a smaller return of about 2,000—under the leadership of Ezra himself. But there's a number of years that take place between these two events, some 50 years or so between chapter 6 and chapter 7. About 50 years transpire between that time, so just to get a little overview perhaps of the book itself, and of the books as well.

And, I'm repeating myself, we'll be looking at the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who are prophets who prophesied during this first 20 years of the time of Zerubbabel's leadership. Now Zerubbabel again was a prince; he was of the direct line of the succession of David, from David, and we read Zerubbabel's name in our Lord's genealogy, that he was actually the king, or should have been the king at that particular time. He was the son of Shealtiel, whose father was Jehoiachin. And you remember Jehoiachin, we read it in the last chapter of 2 Chronicles, Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and he was put in

prison. Well, he was in prison for 37 years, and then he was released from prison. Well, his grandson is Zerubbabel. And so he was the prince of Judah.

Yes, verse 7:

"King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods;"

And I wonder if some of those articles were used by—you remember, what was his name, Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, who had a great feast to all his nobles, a thousand of them? And he brought out all these vessels that had been dedicated to the house of God and they were drinking and praising his gods and idols from them. And then the handwriting came on the wall, and that very night the Babylonian Empire was taken by Darius the Mede. So it fell that very night. I wonder if many of these articles were some of those which Belshazzar, in a very unholy way, used for that great drinking party that he had there.

So it says there, he brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods. And Cyrus, king of Persia, brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. That is Zerubbabel. Sheshbazzar is his Babylonian name, meaning "descendant of Babylon." So he was more than likely born in Babylon. And then he gives a number of them:

[Ezra 1:9-11 NKJV]

⁹ This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, ¹⁰ thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. ¹¹ All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The only comment I make on that is that if these were the articles, 5,400, and these are articles that were used for the worship of God in the temple, in Solomon's temple, that now had been destroyed and now were being returned—no doubt many of those articles were missing. I wouldn't doubt. What soldiers are like—I know what soldiers are like. They would probably take what they could, if they could. At any rate, the thought that struck me about

this was the intricacy and complexity of the worship of Jehovah with all those articles, and the manpower that would be needed to use them in service. You can think of the Levites and the Nethinim that were workers in the temple of God. It must have been a very complex and a very great ceremony that went on with all those precious articles being used. So that's the only thought that I have on that. Harold will probably have something on this. And so I'll just turn it over for your consideration, Harold.

High Standards for Service

All right, well, several thoughts, but let's start where Eric has just been: 5,400 articles. What kind of articles are they? Well, they're silver and gold. I don't know, you've got lots of articles in your house, in your kitchen. How many gold pots do you have?

We got one copper pot.

Okay, so.

It was stainless steel.

So this was no small deal. Eric says, "It was very elaborate." It was elaborate, but what would you do in the three feasts of Jehovah when you're in the temple and, I don't know, many hundreds of thousands of visitors come to town and they all come with their sacrifices, and you wake up in the morning—

Good morning.

—and there are twenty, thirty, forty thousand people there, all wanting to offer? And when you've got lots of people, you need lots of—I'm going to use the word **equipment**. That's not a very good word for it, but that's what these were. They were needed in the work of God. God's work in the temple was not ordinary. These vessels, the gold and silver vessels, they are not ordinary. You didn't go down to Walmart and buy some more cutlery. This was big deal stuff.

God's work demands an extremely high level of purity, perfection, and calling. What we have today is not vessels of gold and silver, but we have **people** in the work of God who are to be vessels of gold and silver. What kind of people ought we to be? We're not ordinary, run-of-the-mill cutlery. We get plastic cutlery and you throw it in the garbage when you're finished. God doesn't use plastic cutlery. God uses fine materials, and God uses people, and he expects us to be of high quality.

It's easy for us to allow our thoughts of God to come down to our understanding of what's going on in the world around us. God says, "No, my understanding is far higher than that.

And don't you come to me with an ordinary throwaway cup. I want a golden cup." What do you think those golden cups looked like? Do you think each one of them was artistically embossed? What did Bezalel and Aholiab do way back in the days of Aaron when they were making all these things? Do you think the artisans didn't spend a lot of time on each one of those gold cups? I don't know if I've ever seen a gold cup. But frankly, if I had a gold cup, I'd want one with a nice embossing on it rather than just a plain gold cup that looks like a steel cup that I might get.

So I guess what I'm saying is God's standards for service are high. And if his standards for service for the cups are high, how much higher are his standards for service for you and me? And so we sit back and we say, "Lord, frankly, if I wanted someone to serve God, I would never have chosen me. But if you did choose me, would you please make me a golden cup, beautifully embossed for your glory?" I think that's a wonderful challenge.

Well, lots of things in these chapters. I'm not really sure where to go on them in this first chapter. I've said it before, but when I say it again: were these vessels important from God's perspective? And the answer is yes. And so Hezekiah showed them off to the Babylonians, and the Babylonians remembered it. And then when the Babylonians came down, they took them, and they took them all to the temple of Nebuchadnezzar, and put them in that temple. And as Eric has reminded us, Belshazzar took them out, used them for himself instead of for the glory of God, and God said, "That's it, Belshazzar, you've been numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. Tonight, your kingdom is gone." But what if Nebuchadnezzar had not taken those vessels to Babylon?

Well, as Eric says, the soldiers would have come in and they would have taken them. And what they didn't take, the next guy would come in and they would have been dissipated all over the world. And God, in his mercy, saw fit to take those vessels and preserve them, so that when the 50,000 went back to Jerusalem to build the temple, they took the 5,400 vessels with them. They were ready to go.

I marvel at God's preserving power. If the vessels are pictorial of Christians, sometimes we go through great difficulty and we don't understand why. And sometimes the reason the Lord allows us to go through difficulty today is to preserve us for a work that is totally unrelated to what we're thinking of today, that will happen 20 years, 50 years later. Don't criticize God. Don't say, "God, you did it wrong." God preserved these vessels. And I think when they got to Jerusalem and started rebuilding the temple and the vessels were there, they probably said, "Lord, you're very good. Thank you for preserving these."

Now, so those are a few thoughts. It's interesting, verse 2:

[Ezra 1:2-3 NKJV]

² Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. ³ Who is among you of all His people? May 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 God), which is in Jerusalem.

Eric has mentioned that it's the men of Benjamin and Judah that went up. I guess that's verse 5, we get to that later. He's charging them to go back and to build the house. Would you have been enthusiastic to go? Frankly, I don't know much about immigration. Our father was born in London, but he emigrated to Canada when he was, I don't know, one or two years old, and frankly, it wasn't very hard. Some of you have immigrated from China to Canada or from elsewhere to Canada. Was it easy or was it hard? And some of you have said, "Well, it wasn't as easy as it could have been, but I was coming to a better situation."

What would you have said if you had left luxury in China to come to a broken-down, destroyed city in Vancouver? Okay, the roads have all got potholes. The parks aren't worth going into. The houses, most of them are torn down. Would you be really enthusiastic to return? And you might say, "Not really." Our mother's forebears came from Scotland. They came from not very much that was good in Scotland to Canada, which was pretty good. And I used to tease my mother saying, "Your mother, your parents weren't crazy. Your forebears weren't crazy. They were smart people. They had enough brains to leave Scotland and come to Canada." And that made a lot of sense.

How would you like to go back to something that had been all torn down? Go back and rebuild the temple. What else was there? Well, there was a city. There were all the houses. And there was nothing there other than the temple that had been torn down. You go and rebuild it. And frankly, I think a lot of people said, "That's too big a deal. We believe in God, we understand, but don't ask us to go back and start up from scratch. It was hard for Moses, but we got to go back all the way to Moses, and we got to rebuild this temple and then rebuild our lives." So I'm not surprised that a lot of people didn't go.

What about the people who didn't go? What does it say?

[Ezra 1:4 NKJV]

⁴ And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help

him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

So Cyrus recognized that this was going to be a difficult project. And so he says, "Listen, you send those who are willing to go, send them. But those who are not willing to go, you've got two obligations. Number one, give gold, silver, precious stones, beasts, food—give to the people who are going. Help the people who are going. And number two, you've got to give some offerings for the Lord yourself." So when they rebuilt the temple, who got the offerings? The Lord got the offerings from whom? Well, from those 50,000 who came, but also from those who supported them.

So, a picture for the assemblies today: What is our responsibility? Our responsibility is to go to do the work of God, and our responsibility is to support those who go to do the work of God. And what do we give them? Well, we give them silver, gold, goods, whatever they are, beasts, animals, a car. And we give freewill offerings so that when they get there, they've got something that they can give to God as well.

We often—I often was critical of those who didn't go. And we'll talk about that when we get to Esther, which might be a long time from now. But anyway, we'll talk about that. But I'm saying to myself, "Harold, those who didn't go, they contributed greatly." By the instruction of Cyrus, they contributed to the work of God.

No, the whole thing is absolutely wonderful. Have you ever heard of such a similar project? Imagine Donald Trump giving instruction to go and rebuild a city that was destroyed by somebody else in the American government. The whole thing is crazy. But God said, "I want you to go and rebuild my temple."

Now, we live in difficult days. But your job and my job is to go and rebuild his temple. And that's what Burt Mass did. That's what Trevor Kempster did. That's what a lot of us did in one way or another. And what did the others do? They said, "We'll help you. You do this, we'll help you." We're having a daily vacation Bible school. By the grace of God, it's going to be a good program. David and Faith Dunlop are going to do much. What are we going to do? We're going to help them. That's the way God's work goes. This was a particularly hard situation. They left to go back to what had been destroyed and to rebuild from nothing. And they went, praise the Lord.

All right. So verse 5 says that they rose up, the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin. Eric mentioned that the other ten tribes were not mentioned, and they could have gone—probably some did—but this was a work that was undertaken by just the two tribes. And

praise the Lord for them, and they stood up at the right time. They stood up to serve the Lord at the right time.

The priests and the Levites went with them. We'll talk more about that later. But why would the priests and the Levites go? Answer: because the priests and the Levites were by occupation and by the declaration of the Lord—the calling of the Lord—they were servants of the Lord. And they could have said, "We're going to stay in Babylon and we'll become carpenters or government officials or whatever." They said, "No, God called our fathers. And because God called our fathers, he expects us to follow the lead that our fathers gave us. We were trained from the days of Aaron. We've been trained in the work of priests and Levites. We are going to do what God has called our forebears to do and ordained us to follow." Good for those priests and Levites. Not at all surprising that they were the ones convicted by the Lord to live up to the calling that he had given for them.

And verse 6 says, "And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, gold, goods, and precious things." I think there were a lot of people in Babylon who said, "The Lord bless you," and sent off these 50,000. And I suppose those are the main thoughts that I had on this first chapter of Ezra.

Go ahead.

I'm just thinking, if you're finished on the first chapter, just a verse from the New Testament that seems to fit the idea of the articles, of the holy articles that were brought back. Let us look to 2 Timothy chapter 2. In some of the remarks that Harold has been making, he's been referring to this truth. Verse 20:

[2 Timothy 2:20-21 NKJV]

²⁰ But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. Likening the gold and silver vessels that were to be used in the holy place and in the service of God, they had to be vessels of honor to be able to be useful for the Lord's service. The vessels of wood and clay were expendable, in the sense they were probably used for refuse and garbage and whatever else that might be used where they could be thrown out, broken, discarded as being of no further use in the house of God. Whereas the gold and silver were used for special occasions. And those special occasions, of

course, picture the believer who is used in places of honor by the Lord. And that's the metaphor that he's using here.

We have two men that are mentioned earlier in verse 17:

[2 Timothy 2:17 NKJV]

And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,

They were called Phileus and Phileus. They were discouraging the people, saying the resurrection had been passed already. There was no hope then for those who were still living. Their message was a message of heresy and to the destruction of the faith of the children of God. Whereas Timothy now—Paul and Timothy—they were vessels of honor in preaching the message, the pure message of the gospel of the grace of God and the soon return of the Lord Jesus. They were vessels of honor to be used. And that great house, "in a great house," I take it as a reference to the temple. Amen. And we too are.

The temple of God. Amen. That's another picture, is that the church is the temple of the living God. And we are living stones:

[1 Peter 2:5 NKJV]

you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

We are priests in that temple. We are also here, as a metaphor, we are vessels of honor to bear the sacrifices. And, for example, the bread that would be offered to God, the frankincense, the oil, and so on, that was to be used—the salt. All those things that would be used in the sacrifices here would be where these vessels would be used. And we, too, as he says now, therefore, if anyone—verse 21—if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, in other words, there's a human responsibility here now to flee youthful lusts, to flee anything that would pollute the work of God, to hinder the work of God, to be anything that would be vessels of dishonor we should avoid entirely. So there's just a parallel, I think, that we might draw, because I believe Harold was implying something out there in some of his remarks.

Detail in God's Work

Amen, he was. So let's go back again to chapter 1 and verse 9. Ezra 1:9 says, "And this is the number of them: 30 chargers or dishes of gold, 1,000 chargers or dishes of silver, 9 and 20 knives, 30 basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort, 410"—so the first silver vessels were one level, and then there was a second level, as Eric is saying, those vessels of honor, some of lesser honor. And then, yeah, 410, and then at the end of verse 10, "And other vessels, a thousand."

What do we know about those thousand? Well, they probably weren't silver or gold. They had some value—they wouldn't have no value—but they were, as Eric says, maybe expendable. They were there. And so the challenge in Timothy is we are to be vessels of honor. It's one thing to say, "God save me." It's another thing to say, "God can use me." And we want to make sure that we're the kind of person that God, in fact, can use.

And then the next line is amazing. "All the vessels of gold and silver were 5,400." 5,400 of gold and silver, plus this thousand others, and how many other vessels were taken back? So if somebody said to you, "Well, we want you to go to Bongo Bongo and rebuild the work of God there. And here are 5,400 gold and silver vessels we want you to take with us and all the others, maybe 10,000 items." What would you say? You'd probably say, "I'm going to have to hire Lester to get a bigger truck to carry it all." I mean, the thing's just going to... it's amazing. This is a big deal.

What did they do with the beasts? The donkeys and the oxen. And I think they loaded the donkeys and the oxen up with all this incredible treasure to take back to a temple that had been destroyed, and then to start to rebuild the temple, and at that point, unpack all these vessels and start to use them. Do you think maybe there were more vessels that needed to be used when the temple was rebuilt? Do you think that they brought all the vessels back because they said, "It might be 200 years before the population is such that we're going to need all these vessels, but we're going to bring them anyway"? I marvel at them.

The servant of the Lord is a servant who basically says, "Lord, if that's what you want, I will do it. And if it looks great today, wonderful. And if it doesn't look great today, what difference does that make? The Lord said, 'Do it.' I am going to do it. And he will make it great in his own time." These were good men, they were good women, they were zealous for the Lord.

Well, chapter 2. Go ahead.

Yeah, keep going.

There was, in the next chapter, in verse 68 and verse 69, there were—I'll just make mention of it here now because we've been talking about the gifts that were given. And there's another mention of some other gifts that were given. It says in verse 68 of chapter 2, "sweet garments." Now, that's a considerable—I don't know what a drachma is, you know, I'm not sure. Now that we pay with credit cards and debit cards, we don't even know what a dollar is worth anymore. But I'm not sure what a drachma is. Is there any indication there in your book?

No, not in my Bible, no.

But anyway, it would appear that they had prospered greatly in Persia during that time, in order to expend what would seem to be quite a bit of wealth, because they would have to—there would be a lot of expenses in building that temple. We know how many millions of dollars it takes just to put up a few apartment buildings, for example, here. What would it be like there where they had to transport stone and timber for many miles? Their timber came from... from Lebanon, logged in the mountains there, transported down to the sea and rafted down to Joppa and then carted all the way up to Jerusalem. I imagine they do some, they mill it probably in one of those places after they rafted it down. But it was very expensive. And all the stone that had to be cut out, sawn by hand—that soft limestone was fairly easy to cut. But it was very expensive, the whole thing. So they'd need a lot of money. And so this is where they got a lot of it as well. No doubt these people, when they gave, they gave—some of them, it might have impoverished some of them.

Amen.

But it was money well invested. Any money that is invested in God's work is money that is invested not for a return next year or the year after, never counted in percentages, but it's an eternal reward that we will get that will never, ever fade away.

All right. Well, seeing we've got our Bibles open to the end of Chapter 2, go back to verse 64. It tells us how many there were, 64 and 65, how many there were. We'll get into detail later, but basically 50,000. But it's 66 that I'm interested in. It says, "Their horses were 736." Okay, what did they do? They counted the horses, 736. Was that a big deal? Yeah, they had to carry a lot of stuff. "Their horses, 736. Their mules, 245." That's a big deal. "Their camels, 435. Their donkeys, 6,720."

Can you imagine that? Why would God go out of his way to tell us how many donkeys there were who carried the stuff when they went back to Jerusalem? It's amazing. And among other things, it proves the character of our God. Our God cares about detail. Our God will reward based on detail. How many things that you've done for God will he forget on

Judgment Day? None. He knows. Roy often sends me a note. He said, "These are the people who were at the chapel on Tuesday night." Does that really matter? Well, yeah, God counts. He knows. I just marveled. How many donkeys can move all that stuff? Again, I can't remember the number. I've got to look it up again.

6,720.

Would it have mattered if it were only 6,713? God says, "No, this wasn't 7,613." It was... what is the number again?

6,713.

6,720.

He's got it right. I can't remember it when I read it. He's got it all written down. Among other things, as you read this, you say to yourself, our God is a faithful God. Our God is in the business of continuing to build his church and, if necessary, to rebuild his church. What is God doing at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? I'm not sure. One thing I know: he wants us to carry on. He's going to help us carry on. God's plan is to continue his work and to build his work. And even if Babylon comes in and Cyrus, king of Persia, comes in, he's going to do it. He'll use the governments of the world, he's going to use whatever he uses. Our God is in charge.

Imagine! In the first year—we didn't focus on that word, but go back with me to chapter 1 and verse 1. "Now, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia..." What do you do in the very first year of your business? You lay all the foundations, you do the things that are important. The incidentals you get to five, ten years later. What did Cyrus do in the first year? He said, "God told me to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem." And he did it in the first year. Absolutely marvelous! God is overruling in all of these things.

Okay, so back to chapter 1 and chapter 2. We keep on finding things in chapter 1, but into chapter 2. "Now, these are the children of the province that went out of the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away to Babylon and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, everyone unto his city." So when they went back, they didn't all just go to Jerusalem to build the temple. They went back to their hometowns. They went back. They began to rebuild the country. The focus was to rebuild the temple—that was their priority, that's why they went back—but they didn't all stay there. They went back to where they had come from. The theme is they went up out of their captivity, and that's the thrilling thing. You trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you begin to move up out of your captivity. Yeah.

I think it's in the book of Hebrews we read about the devil and the fact that the Lord delivers them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage:

[Hebrews 2:15 NKJV]

and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The Lord has delivered us from the captivity of sin. I'm here. That's what happened. Okay? And you say, "I don't know what happened, but it happened. I have been delivered from the captivity." If you had stayed where you were, you would be in captivity now. You would understand a little bit more about captivity, but you were delivered from the captivity of sin. And these people, delivered from their captivity, captive in prosperous Babylon. Jeremiah kept on prophesying, saying, "Go to Babylon. The Lord will prosper you there." They went. They did prosper there. And the Lord delivered them from the captivity that was there. Would it be better to stay in Babylon with all its affluence and your promotions, or to come back to Israel, to Judah, with the 6,720 donkeys and all the rest, and to rebuild the temple that was torn down? And the answer is yes. Don't stay in captivity. Get out! Marvelous! Absolutely marvelous!

Yeah. "They came unto Jerusalem, to Judea, everyone unto his own city." And then, following this, we get a list of all manner of unpronounceable names and all manner of numbers associated with those unpronounceable names. And again, I sit back and say, "Why does God care so much about detail?" And the answer is, God is a God of detail. And he cares about the essential private things in your life as well as everything else.

The scientists of the world are absolutely overwhelmed at the amazing detail that God has built into each of the multitudinous species of creatures that he created. The people used to believe in evolution. Well, there's not much proof for evolution anymore because what they're finding out is that life is far more intricate and detailed than evolution could ever reproduce. The simple story that I like to remember is that evolution says that one day—no, not one day, part of evolution was that the legged animals evolved into flying animals. And somehow the legs transform themselves into wings. And so the preacher that I heard explaining this the other day simply said this. He said, "I think between the time that they went from a leg to a wing, I think what happened was that there was a bad leg before there was a good wing." Somehow in the middle, the bad leg was and the good wing came, but in the middle, it didn't work.

So if you really believed in evolution, you'd go out one day and you'd look at a little Cessna aircraft, and then you'd look at a 747, and you'd say, "Where did that 747 come from?" and the answer is, "Well, it evolved. It used to be a Cessna, but it evolved into a 747." And you say, "What?" Yeah, you say, "But I'll tell you something else: the fact is that in the evolution from the Cessna to the 747, that plane was able to fly every single day." You sit back and you say, "What? I'm supposed to believe that nonsense?"

What do we know? Our God is a God of incredible detail, and he builds things. He builds a baby smaller than a Cessna, and he builds him into a great big man. And that man is able to do all kinds of things as he grows. What a marvelous God! So as I read through all this, I look at the details and I say, "These are important to God." Where are we?

"They came with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Sariah, Reliah, Mordecai, Bilsham, Mizpah, Bigvi, Rehom, Banna, the number of the men of the people of Israel, the children of Paris, 2,172." Got it all detailed. All detailed. If you were hired as an accountant by the Lord, would you have an important job? Yeah. If you were traveling with Zerubbabel, going back to Jerusalem, would you have an important job if you're an accountant? Yeah. How many going to Paris? And again, the number 2,172. So, again, I just... I marvel at all these details. I say, this is wonderful.

Our God cares about the details in my life. Our God cares about the details in our assembly. Our God cares about the details in our family and in our neighborhood. Our God cares about the work that we're doing. Why do we have prayer meeting? Because God cares about the details. And we've got to be humble enough to care about the details, too. We've got to pray. He's doing wonderful things, amazing things. We've got to pray. So anyway, that's the introduction to chapter 2. Eric, you may have some thoughts. Others may have some thoughts.

In verse 2, we have two names that are familiar to us: Nehemiah and Mordecai. Mordecai, of course, in the book of Esther, and Nehemiah, who is the principal of the book of Nehemiah, but of course these are not the same men. These are same names, but not the same people. Nehemiah didn't come for another 70 or 80 years after Zerubbabel to build the wall after the temple was built, and it was 50 years between the building of the temple and the coming of Nehemiah. So it wouldn't be Nehemiah, very unlikely Mordecai, although Mordecai was an older man in the book of Esther, but there's no record of him being in Jerusalem, unless he came as a very young man and went back, but it would not seem to be the character of a Mordecai to do so. So most scholars think that Mordecai and Nehemiah, the names here, are different men than we find, than we read later.

I think if you keep reading as you go through these, you'll find the name Daniel as well, and you say, "I didn't know Daniel was there." And I think it's a different Daniel. There are a lot of people. How many people do you know whose name is Joshua? Well, there are a lot of them around 16th. And here you get to verse 2 again, "Which came again unto Jerusalem and Judah"—sorry—"which came with Zerubbabel, and the name is Jeshua." Was it really Jeshua and Joshua? Answer: not very much. So there were a lot of people.

Interesting, we will read later on that some people came from Elam. And Amir will say, "I know Elam." Elam is one of the communities today that came out of the old Persian Empire. And as you read through here, you read a little line that goes, "And they came from the other Elam," because there were two Elams mentioned, probably neither of them related to the Elam that Amir knows in his country. So I think it's true: lots of different names. God's got it all sorted out. You and I will have trouble, we'll get confused. God's got it all sorted out.

So there are a large number of names, and apparently in these first 35 verses, there are two categories of names: the first one is names of places, and the second one, I believe, is the names of people. And so, verse 20, the children of Gebar, namely 95. Verse 21, the children of Bethlehem—well, that would be a city—123. But sometimes we get names of individuals, and so apparently there's a distinction there, the names of the places, the names of the people, but they're all recorded for us. Verse 31 says, "The children of the other Elam." All right, so again, just all kinds of detail. Our God loves detail.

Is there anybody that you wish to punish to have them read these names? You go ahead.

Well, I think we should just read them anyway.

Amen.

And for the few minutes that are remaining, we can all... I'll do my best. Some of these names have different pronunciations than we normally use in English. I don't know the Chaldean pronunciation of those, or the Hebrew, so I'll just do my best. Verse 2:

The Registration of the Remnant

[Ezra 2:2-70 NKJV]

² Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: ³ the people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; ⁴ the people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; ⁵ the

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

³⁶ The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; ³⁷ the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; ³⁸ the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; ³⁹ the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.

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

⁴¹ The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight.

⁴² The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine in all.

⁴³ The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴ the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon, ⁴⁵ the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, ⁴⁶ the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmi, the

sons of Hanan, ⁴⁷ the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, ⁴⁸ the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, ⁴⁹ the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, ⁵⁰ the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim, ⁵¹ the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, ⁵² the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, ⁵³ the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah, ⁵⁴ the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha.

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

⁵⁹ And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel: ⁶⁰ the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two; ⁶¹ and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. ⁶² These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. ⁶³ And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁴ The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, ⁶⁵ besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. ⁶⁶ Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, ⁶⁷ their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

⁶⁸ Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: ⁶⁹ According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments. ⁷⁰ So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

And we all say congratulations! Well, you know, I was at one of my... my granddaughter just graduated recently, high school graduation, and the auditorium was filled with them, row after row after row, and they all went up. And of course, they read all the names out and everything else. And I was only looking for the one—not the one that I knew, it was my granddaughter. But all these names, they were important to someone in that auditorium; it was really important to see her walk across the stage. And although we read those now, and they are separated from us by distance, time, and also culture and everything else, yet those names are recorded there. They're real people.

And the places that are mentioned—I'm thinking of each of those places: 95 people come back, or 123, they come back, and they begin again to till the land, to erect houses. First of all, they live in tents and so on, until they kind of get something more established and more permanent. But those were all pioneers going to different places to rebuild the nation again.

So, just thinking of those, and then the influx of immigrants. When Canada was just opening up to immigration, especially at the beginning of the 1900s when my parents came over... well, my mother was actually born here, but her parents, they pioneered it. In 1904, they came to what was the end of the railway at that time, Saskatoon, and they dumped them off there. And basically, each was given a quarter section—all the men were given a quarter section—and there it was. They had to get off the train, they had to bring their clothes and their tools and their whatever resources they might have, and to begin to build a life. That's what it was like for these people. Every one of them was faced with the same problems. So I count it an honor actually to have read them, and I trust that they will forgive me for mispronouncing about 95% of their names.

Well, I probably told you about the fact that our grandfather's grandfather came out of Scotland. He probably came in 1829, maybe 1841—I'm not sure. But anyway, he was a stonemason and he came to the province of Prince Edward Island, and there's absolutely no stone in Prince Edward Island, so he had to go back or starve. So he went back and we have no record that he ever returned to Canada. He didn't try potato farming; he could have done that.

But he didn't.

Yeah.

It's not always as easy as it looks. All right, well, our time is gone for this evening, and we end up with a great respect for our God, and we end up with a great respect for the men of God who went before us. We have much blessing in Canada, but there were many who came in the early days, and they fought hard and long to lay a foundation that we can build on,

both spiritually and physically. And we rejoice in the spiritual fathers who invested in us. Praise the Lord. Someone will close in prayer, and we say thank you.

Closing Prayer

A loving Heavenly Father who art in heaven, we hallow your name when we realize a God who created a whole world is a God in heaven who is eternal in his life, and he would create the world so he could show his love and share it with human beings. What a loving God you are! And realize that, yes, we're not perfect, and many have nothing to do with you. We would thank you for the body of believers that our brother mentioned, who are those who've gone before us to lay the groundwork for what we are today. And for the way that we could understand how God shows great detail. We read those chapters, and I thank you for Brother Eric who would do that for us to show just how detailed our God is in creating a church and what he does for us.

Thank you now for our brothers Eric and Harold and for the work that goes on here at 16th Avenue. We thank you for each one that's here, and for those that come here and support and provide all the detail that is so necessary for the work of God to go forth. Now would you bless us as we separate to go into the week. Thank you for bringing us together tonight for this Bible study, and thank you for the care that you show to each one that's here. And now, Lord, would you just separate us with your blessing. Thank you for the message that went out this morning and the way that you have guided and directed in the baptism—how beautiful that was. And now would you just guide us in the week, and may we enjoy the presence of God with us in what we do. In Jesus' name I pray, amen. Amen. Amen.