

“The Book of Ezra” (Route 66)

All right, let’s turn in our Bibles, this morning, to Ezra Chapter 1... we are picking things up RIGHT WHERE we left off LAST Sunday... at the end of 2nd Chronicles...

There is a LOT of evidence that Ezra—as a “**skilled Scribe in the Law of Moses**”—was the COMPILER of 1st and 2nd Chronicles... It’s BEEN SUGGESTED that THOSE Books —along with Ezra—originally existed as **ONE**, consecutive work...

And, we SEE the “overlap” between in the closing Verses of 2nd Chronicles... and the OPENING Verses of Ezra Chapter 1...

Now, WHERE WE ARE... in the OVERALL NARRATIVE... it’s 538 B.C... in the kingdom of Persia... And Israel’s 70 years of Babylonian Captivity have been completed... And a **REMARKABLE FULFILLMENT** of prophecy takes place, when Ezra writes:

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus... so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom... saying, ‘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... Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem... and build the house of the LORD God of Israel... whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God...”

The Book of Ezra covers about EIGHTY YEARS, and tells of the FIRST TWO WAVES of returning exiles to Jerusalem... The FIRST WAVE...

Happens under the leadership of Jeshua, the High Priest, and Zerubbabel—who was a GOVERNOR, “*a descendent of the last king of Judah,*” and “*heir to the throne of David.*”

Their return takes place in the FIRST 6 CHAPTERS of Ezra, and focuses on the **REBUILDING of the TEMPLE**...

Then—60 YEARS LATER—a SECOND WAVE returns under the leadership of EZRA—in Chapters 7—10—and focuses on the **RESTORATION OF WORSHIP**...

What I’m going to do this morning... is SUMMARIZE CERTAIN SECTIONS of the Book of Ezra... And then—we’ll PAUSE along the way—and draw-out certain applications...

Chapter 1, Verse 5, says—after the decree of Cyrus—that: **“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.”**

We EVEN read that CYRUS—in Verse 7—“**brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his**

gods...” – “Cyrus... counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.” – Verse 11 says: “All these [were taken] with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.”

Now, Chapter 2 LISTS all “the people... who RETURNED... with Zerubbabel [and] Jeshua...” – It’s a LONG LIST of NAMES... Verse 64 says...

“The whole assembly... was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides... male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers.” – David Guzik writes:

*“This was only the first wave of [returning exiles]... The approximate **TOTAL**... [would be] somewhere between 100—150,000... [A vast] majority [will] stay behind in Babylon.”* – Now...

We could read this list, and think: “What’s the big deal? It’s just a bunch of names.” – But what is almost ALWAYS the first question people ask about ANY FUNCTION we attend nowadays?

- * “Hey, we went to Riley’s football game on Friday night.” – “Oh yeah? Who all was there?”
- * “We went to Faith Christian Girl’s Volleyball game on Tuesday.” – “Who all went?”
- * “Did you go to church this morning? – How many people were there?”

See, PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD... One author writes: “*THESE people did what... few of their fellow Jews did – they took the time to return to the land... [They] had a pioneer spirit; they were willing to endure hardship because they had a call from God that was more important than their comfort. It would be wonderful to have [our] name written in the Bible... And, though we are too late for that... God does have a book of remembrance [according to Malachi 3:16]... surely, the names of God’s faithful pioneers will be in it. – Will you be one of them?*”

Now, in Chapter 3, we see the people BUILD an “altar [to] the God of Israel...” – Even though, Verse 6 says: “the foundation of the temple... had not [yet] been laid.”

BUT... Verse 8 says: “In the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God... Zerubbabel... [and]... Jeshua... the... priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of... captivity... began work... [on] the house of the LORD.”

There is a LESSON here... Don’t **WAIT** to start WORSHIPPING or SERVING or GIVING or PRAYING or LOVING... START WHERE YOU ARE—Start with WHAT YOU’VE GOT...

These people BUILD an “altar [to] God...” – Even **THOUGH** “the temple... was not [yet] been” built... They **DIDN’T WAIT** for the temple... They **DID WHAT THEY COULD**...

And, Verses 10—13 record something interesting... It says: “**When the builders laid the foundation of the temple... the priests... and the Levites... [began] to praise the LORD... [and] all the people shouted with a great shout... because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.**” – “**BUT,**” Verse TWELVE says:

“Many of the priests and Levites... old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid...” – SO that, Verse 13 says: **“the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy... from the noise of the weeping...”**

See, SOME OF THE PEOPLE were **DISAPPOINTED**... They were **NOT IMPRESSED** with this new temple... And through the prophet HAGGAI—who comes ON THE SCENE at this point—God CALLS them on it... He says:

“Who is... among you who saw this temple in its former glory? – And how do you see it now? In comparison with [the former temple], is this not in your eyes as nothing?” – But then, God says: **“The glory of this latter temple [will] be greater than the former...”**

Almost ALL of us... have a TENDENCY to THINK, and ACT, and SPEAK like... the so-called **“Good Old Days”** are ALWAYS BEHIND us... The Bible says this is EXACTLY **WRONG**...

Ecclesiastes 7:10 says: **“Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ – For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.”** – This is God’s POLITE way of saying: *“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”*

God says to the people HERE: *“You’re looking BACKWARDS!”* – *“You’re looking the WRONG DIRECTION!”* – *“You think Solomon’s Temple was greater than THIS one? The glory of THIS temple will be GREATER than the first.”* – *“And—if you’re NOT looking in the right direction, you’re gonna MISS it.”* – We’ll talk more about that next week...

Now—in Chapter 4, **OPPOSITION ARISES** [because it always WILL when there is a WORK of God]... We read: **“When the adversaries of [the people] heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple... they came to Zerubbabel and... said... ‘Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do...’ – ‘But Zerubbabel and Jeshua...’ - WISELY - ‘say, ‘You may do nothing with us... we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel...’”**

And **“Then”** these same people **“tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose...”**

They even **“wrote an accusation against [them]... to Artaxerxes king of Persia...”** – And say: **“Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you... are building [a] rebellious & evil city...”** – **“If this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king’s treasury will be diminished.”** – Just BOLD-FACED LIES!

However, King Artaxerxes **“give[s] the command to make the [Israelites] cease, that [the] city may not be built until”** HE gave a command... And so, Chapter 4 concludes by saying: **“When [a] copy of... Artaxerxes’ letter was read... the work of the house of God... ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year... of Darius king of Persia.”**

Guys, we have an enemy—an **“adversary”**—who will stop at **NOTHING** to disrupt, distract, or DERAIL God’s work... in our lives, our marriages, our families, our church...

And—one of the ways he DOES this—is INFILTRATION... We’ve heard the expression “*If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.*” – Here, the enemy of the Israelites LITERALLY try to DO that...

And, Satan attempts to DO the same thing with us... This is what’s at the **HEART** of “false teaching.” – It **WEAKENS** the CHURCH... Ephesians 4 says “**give no place to the devil.**”

That word “**place**” is sometimes translated “*foothold*”... It refers to just the tiniest outcropping of rock that one can use to HOIST their entire WEIGHT upon...

Another tactic of the enemy is **SLANDER and GOSSIP**. — The word “**devil**” **MEANS** “**slanderer.**” – Revelation 12:10 calls him “**the accuser of [the] brethren...**”

That’s what we see the enemy of God’s people doing here! – They fabricate charges against them in an attempt to STOP the work of God—to “**frustrate their purpose.**”

And God overcomes the attacks of the enemy in **OUR** lives the SAME WAY HE DID for the people here... We just read that “**the work of the house of God... ceased...**”

Ezra Chapter 5 says: “**Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah... prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem...**”

THIS IS WHERE the Books of Haggai and Zechariah should be inserted... If you’re a note-taker—OFF TO THE SIDE—write “**Haggai & Zechariah**”...

If we HAD TIME—we would STUDY THOSE BOOKS this morning... Because when you EXAMINE THEIR MESSAGES IN CONTEXT of the Book of Ezra... they’re POWERFUL...

Haggai will say: “**Be strong, Zerubbabel... and be strong, all you people of the land... and WORK; [for] I am with you,’ says the LORD... My Spirit remains among you...**”

Zechariah will—**FAMOUSLY**—say: “**This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.” – “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; [and] His hands shall... finish it.”**

Now, we will study those Books in detail NEXT week, but—with MESSAGE LIKE THAT—no WONDER we read—here in Ezra Chapter 5—that: “**Zerubbabel... and Jeshua... rose up and began to build the house of God... [with] the prophets of God... helping them.**”

Okay... (“*True Confessions of a Pastor*” time)... After almost 30 years of full-time ministry... I **STILL** NEVER cease to be amazed at how...

I will have conversations with people who are going through some kind of trial... in their marriage, or... struggling with depression, or a sense of loss, or fear, or dread, or anxiety, or “dryness” in their spiritual life... And I’ll ask:

“What’s your relationship like... with the word of God?” – I never cease to be amazed when they say: “Well... I don’t really HAVE one.” – Or, you know, “I do my 5 minutes of reading every morning.” – And THAT is the PROBLEM right THERE!

God uses his WORD to BUILD US UP, and STRENGTHEN us, and FORTIFY us, and NOURISH us, and EQUIP us, and GUIDE us, and PROTECT... Listen to Psalm 107:

It says: “They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them... Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons... They fell down, and there was none to help... Their soul abhorred all manner of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.”

THAT IS WHAT GOD DID for the people in Ezra’s day... [And it’s what He WANTS to do for US!...] He SENDS HIS WORD through Haggai & Zechariah... and the work resumes...

Now, because we have an enemy who does NOT give up easily... Their enemies ASK them: **“Who has commanded you to build this temple and... finish this wall?”** – *“Who said you could DO this?”* – So, Zerubbabel and Jeshua explain the whole thing... They say:

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon... Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God.” – They say: *“He even gave us the GOLD ‘which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple... [and] said... ‘Take these... [and] let the house of God be rebuilt...’”*

So, their ENEMIES send a letter to DARIUS King of Persia, and say: **“Let a search be made in the king’s treasure house... whether... a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem...”** – They’re trying to TRAP them!

But—in Chapter 6—I know it’s a lot, but I have to read this because it’s SO GOOD! – We read: **“A search was made in the archives... And... a scroll was found, and in it... was written... ‘In the first year of... Cyrus king of Persia... [he] issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem [saying]: ‘Let the house of God be rebuilt... Also let the gold and silver... of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem... be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem...’”**

He writes: **“Now therefore... Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site. Moreover, I issue a decree... for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king’s expense...”** – From the TAXES on the people who were trying to STOP THE WORK! – He writes:

“This is to be given immediately to these men... Whatever they need—bulls, rams, lambs... wheat, salt, wine, oil... let it be given [to them daily] without fail... Also... whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and... let him be hanged on it... May the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to

alter it, or to destroy the house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.” – And then, we read their enemies:

“Diligently did... what King Darius had sent.” – And so, “the elders of the Jews built... they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai... and Zechariah... they built and finished [the temple], according to the commandment of... God... and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.” – Absolutely amazing!

Now, BETWEEN Chapters 6 and 7 there is a 60 YEAR GAP... Once again—if you’re a NOTE-TAKER (which I hope you are)—take a PEN and write “ESTHER” between Chapters 6 & 7...

THIS is where the Book of Esther takes place... And, THAT Book concerns the JEWS who had REMAINED in PERSIA during this time...

But, Chapter 7 [of this Book] is where Ezra ‘officially’ comes on the scene... He leads a SECOND WAVE of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem... Verse 1 begins:

“After these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia... Ezra,” Verse 7 says: “came up from Babylon...” – He is described as “a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses...”

We said LAST week: “[This] sounds like a glorified secretary... But... [a] scribe was an expert in the Law of Moses... a... trained lawyer in the Word of God.”

G. Campbell Morgan said: “[The Scribes] took the place of the prophets...” – Derek Kidner said: “[Ezra]... [was] regarded as a second Moses... More than any other, [it was he] who stamped Israel with its lasting character as a people of [the] book.”

Listen to THIS description of Ezra, from Verse 10... It says: “Ezra... prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD... to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

We could do a MINI-BIBLE-STUDY on this ONE VERSE ALONE... Notice SEVERAL THINGS... First of all: EZRA PREPARED HIS HEART...

A lot of times, we will—MISTAKENLY—ask for the Lord to PREPARE OUR HEARTS... But, Proverbs 16:1 says: “The preparations of the heart belong to man...”

WE are the ones who are supposed to PREPARE our hearts—NOT THE LORD... And, notice what Ezra PREPARED HIS HEART to do: It was to SEEK the Law of the Lord... to DO it... and to TEACH OTHERS...

* Scripture tells us to “Be diligent”—to STUDY—“to present [ourselves] approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

* James 1:22 says: “Be doers of the word... not hearers only, deceiving yourselves...”

* 2nd Timothy 2:2 says: “The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

We're to **SEEK** the Word of God... to **DO** it... and to **TEACH** others... EZRA is a FANTASTIC EXAMPLE of DISCIPLESHIP...

Verse 7 says that: **"The king granted [Ezra] all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him."** – This IDEA—of the "hand of the Lord" being on Ezra could be considered one of the THEMES to this Book... AND into the Book of Nehemiah...

* In Ezra 7:28, he says: **"I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD... was upon me..."**

* In Chapter 8:22: **"The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him..."**

* Chapter 8:31: **"The hand of... God was upon us, and... delivered us from the hand of the enemy..."**

* Nehemiah says: **"the king granted [supplies to me] according to the good hand of my God..."**

* He says: **"I told [the people] of the hand of my God which had been good upon me..."**

And, just LISTEN to the letter that Artaxerxes sends WITH Ezra on his journey... I won't read the whole thing, but—in Ezra Chapter 7, Verse 11, we read: **"This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest... I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm... may go with you."** – "Whereas," Verse 15...

"You are to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel..." – "Be careful," Verse 17... **"To buy with this money bulls, rams, lambs, with their grain offerings and... drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God."** – Verse 20:

"Whatever more may be needed for the house of your God... pay for it from the king's treasury... I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest... may require of you, let it be done diligently..." – "We [also] inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom... And you, Ezra... set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment." – No WONDER Ezra just ERUPTS in Verse 27...

"Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart!" – He writes: **"So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me."**

Now, this DOESN'T MEAN Ezra doesn't encounter HARDSHIP along the way... In Chapter 8, Verses 15—20, Ezra discovers they have no LEVITES with them... David Guzik writes: *"These were... essential workers for... temple worship that Ezra was to promote [in Jerusalem]."*

Chapter 8 ALSO sees Ezra proclaiming a FAST... **"that we might humble ourselves before... God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions."** –

One author writes: *“There was a constant threat of robbers and bandits [on the road], especially [since] they were transporting so many valuables.”* – But—in BOTH INSTANCES—we read:

“By the good hand of our God... they brought [Ezra] a man of understanding, of the sons of... Levi... EIGHTEEN men...” – AND, Ezra writes when we **“fasted and entreated... God... He answered [our] prayer.”**

Chapter 8 **ALSO** LISTS all those **“who went up with [Ezra] from Babylon...”** – David Guzik writes: *“We... [can] surmise that the total number of [people] coming with Ezra... was [somewhere] between 6,000—7,000 people.”*

But—BY FAR—Ezra’s BIGGEST CHALLENGE was **IN** JERUSALEM when he arrived...

In Chapter 9, Verse 1, Ezra writes: **“The leaders came to me, saying, ‘The people of Israel AND the priests and... Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands... the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites... They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons... so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed... the leaders and rulers [have] been foremost in this trespass.’”**

Now, this is why CONTEXT IS IMPORTANT when studying the Bible... ALL THE WAY BACK in Deuteronomy Chapter 7... God TOLD the Children of Israel:

“You shall make no... marriages with... the Hittites... the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites...” – **“You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.”**

And, here’s WHY: **“They will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods...”** – Guy, this is EXACTLY what Solomon did in 1st Kings Chapter 11...

Which LED to the DIVISION of—and the eventual DESTRUCTION of—their homeland to begin with! – These people **TRULY** KNOW BETTER! – By the way...

Take note AGAIN of what the people tell Ezra, in Verse 2... They say: **“They have taken some of their daughters as wives... so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands.”**

REMEMBER what God is DOING all through the Old Testament... A promise is INITIALLY made to Abraham that—**“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...”**

THAT promise passes to Isaac... Which **THEN** passes to Jacob... which **THEN** passes to JUDAH, and—eventually—DAVID...

God is “PRESERVING” for Himself a people group FROM WHOM He will bring forth the Messiah... The Old Testament is **“salvation history.”** – But here we see ANOTHER ATTEMPT of SATAN to “water down” the **“seed”** of God’s people so that God’s PROMISES cannot be kept... and the Messiah cannot be born...

And—REMEMBER what’s happening back in PERSIA at this point! – Haman has enacted a plan to **ANNIHILATE THE JEWS!**

But no wonder Ezra says: **“When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished...”** – He says: **“I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.”**

Just LISTEN to Ezra’s Prayer... He says: **“O God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift... my face to You... our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been... guilty, and for our iniquities we... have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands...”**

“And now—for a little while—grace has been shown... to leave us a remnant to escape, and... give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may... give us a measure of revival in our bondage.” – **“We were slaves. [But] God did not forsake us in our bondage; [He]... extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins...”**

“And now, O... God, what shall we say? We have forsaken Your commandments... And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and... guilt, since You... have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and... given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? – Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? O LORD... You are righteous... [and] here we are before You, in our guilt... no one can stand before You because of this!”

This is a man who is **DEEPLY AFFECTED** by the sin of His people... In a lot of ways, I think we have reached a time when—a lot of people who CALL themselves “Christians”—have a tendency to be MORE SYMPATHETIC to the SINNER... than the HOLINESS of God...

And, to LOOK upon a response like this, and say: *“Don’t you think you’re overreacting, Pastor?”* – *“Is it REALLY that big of a deal?”* – *“Hey man, there’s GRACE!”* – But GRACE was NEVER GIVEN to be a **REPLACEMENT** for HOLINESS...

In fact, SCRIPTURE says that when we REALLY **GET** the GRACE OF GOD, it will LEAD to **GREATER** HOLINESS! – Titus Chapter 2 says:

“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men... TEACHING us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...” – 2nd Corinthians 6 says that—as New Testament believers—we are to:

“Not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. [Because] what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? What communion has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? What part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. [And] God has said... ‘Come out from among them and be separate... Do not touch what is unclean, and I

will receive you.” – “Therefore, having these promises... let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Ezra 9 & 10 are ALL ABOUT the **“PRINCIPLES of SEPARATION.”** – One author writes: *“[Ezra] calls [the people] to repentance and... a renewed submission to the law, even to the point of divorcing their pagan wives.”* – It is a VERY DRAMATIC SCENE...

We read: **“a... large assembly of men, women, and children gathered”** together, and **“the people wept... bitterly.”** – It’s POURING RAIN... And Ezra stands before the people, and says:

“You have transgressed and... taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD... and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.”

And the WHOLE LAST HALF of Chapter 10 is a LIST of NAMES who were GUILTY of this transgression... One author writes: *“Not a... good way to get [your] name... in the best-selling book of all time.”* – The LAST VERSE of the Book says:

“All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.” – Just a BUMMER OF A NOTE for the Book to END on...

And, I would LOVE to say that this occasion brought about LASTING REPENTANCE for the Children of Israel... But—by Nehemiah Chapter 13—the people will have done **THE EXACT SAME THING... AGAIN!** – [Not that WE would EVER do that, right???

And so—one author writes—*“Ezra [will] disappear from the Biblical record [until] he [again] appears... in the Book of Nehemiah. His passion then [is] the same as it [is here]... to transform the people of God by bringing them the word of God.”*

THAT... is a GOOD MISSION STATEMENT for the CHURCH... Ephesians 4 says the PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH is: **“...the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...”**

The church is called to MAKE DISCIPLES... to EQUIP THE SAINTS... not ENTERTAIN THE SHEEP... We are: *“To transform the people of God by bringing them the word of God.”*

But—BEFORE we get to the Book of Nehemiah—we’re gonna set-aside NEXT Sunday to focus MORE FULLY on the Books of Haggai and Zechariah...

Who God raises-up—and USES—to keep these people focused on their mission... Their messages are fantastic... I encourage you to MAKE some time this week—in the midst of your THANKSGIVING CELEBRATIONS...

Read BOTH THOSE books—they’re VERY short... but VERY good... And then, come back next Sunday... That is where we are headed next, when Route 66 continues!