

Good evening! Please turn in our Bibles to Ezra Chapter 5. We will look at the whole Chapter this evening. Since we have had a few weeks off I want to do a short review of where we are in this wonderful book of the Bible.

We know that the Israelite nation was taken into Babylonian captivity because of their sin and disobedience towards God and his commands or his Word. Disobedience to God’s Word is complete and utter disregard for the Creator and Savior of the world. So much so when that happens you have put yourself in opposition to God Almighty!

Because of the sin of the people God had prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel to prophecy that they would be taken into captivity for 70 years.

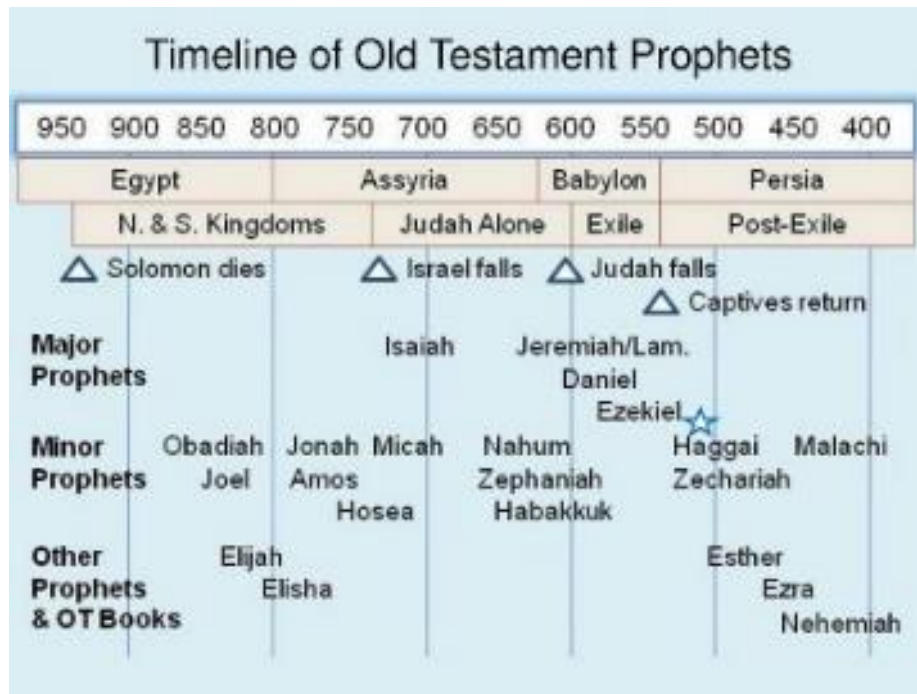
1. Isaiah prophesied 150 years before it happened that though they were taken into captivity there would be a pagan king named Cyrus that would allow them to begin a migration back into their land.
2. Jeremiah preached for 23 years for them to repent and turn to the Lord. And he used those famous words! But you would not listen!! Then he prophesied that the captivity would last exactly 70 years.
3. Ezekiel wrote and prophesied of the wrath that was to come but also the mercy that God was going to show as there was a remnant crying out to God in repentance.
4. Babylon was conquered by Persia and this is where we see that King Cyrus makes his decree that the Jews can go back to Jerusalem and their country and begin to rebuild the temple.
5. A portion of the Jews return and begin to rebuild the temple beginning at the foundation.
6. Everything was going to go smooth now, Right? Nope! When you are being obedient to the Lord there is always going to be opposition. Even from some that say they believe like you! The Israelites stop working on the Temple.

This is where we pick up in Ezra Chapter 5. We are going to read the whole chapter, but we are going to begin with verses 1 to 5. What we are going to see tonight is God’s Word at Work!

Ezra 5:1-5

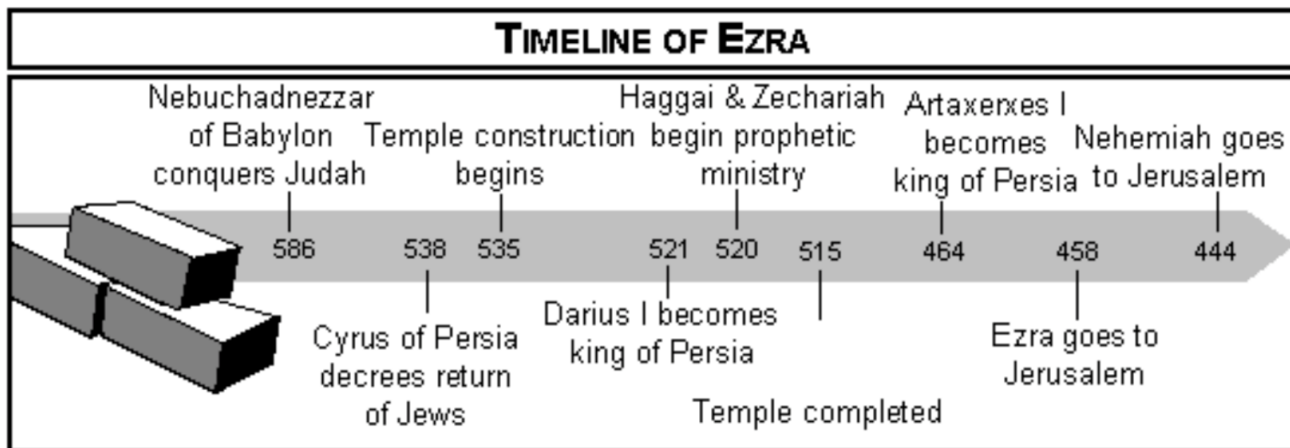
¹Now the prophets, Haggai, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. ²Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them. ³At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus: “Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?” ⁴They also asked them this: “What are the names of the men who are building this building?” ⁵But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

Before we move on, I want to show you two timelines that we have used. First to show you where the different prophets fall into the prophecy of the captivity and those that were living though this time also.



If you will locate the star outlined in blue you will see where Haggai and Zechariah fall in this timeline of the captivity and now the return of the exiles back to Jerusalem. Look toward the middle of the slide and find Isaiah and may I remind you Isaiah prophesied 150 years earlier, giving name of the very king, King Cyrus, of who God was going to use to help the Israelites come out of captivity and go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and eventually the city walls.

Now look at this timeline.



Remember one of the main reasons the Israelites were allowed to go back was for them to rebuild the temple and begin worship in the temple once again. Persia conquers Babylon and in 538 King Cyrus makes his decree for them to go back and in 535 the construction of the temple begins.

But what happens? Persecution! Discouragement! Bribery of counselors in the area to force them to stop building. And that is exactly what happened! Zerubbabel and the Israelites crumbled under the pressure and stopped working on the Temple. For about 15 years they stopped building the temple, but it goes beyond them just stopping. We will see through the warning that God gives Haggai that they turned inward towards themselves!

Sometimes we just need a little encouragement don't we to move ahead. Let's face it! Sometimes we just need a good kick in the pants! Right! In steps Haggai and Zechariah! We get a bit more detail of what God told Haggai and Zechariah to tell Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Turn to Haggai Chapter 1.

As you are turning just a few comments. You see the word prophesied in Ezra and we will read, the word of the Lord "came by" or "came to" Haggai and Zechariah. The word for prophesied here is that they were preaching. It is not that they were speaking of a future event as prophecy or prophesy can mean. They are saying, "Thus says the Lord!" They are exhorting by preaching, or by teaching what God's Word says. Let's read from Haggai

Haggai 1:1-6

I In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ² "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord."³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Now let's read from Zechariah. It is the next book over and as we saw that Haggai spoke in the sixth month, we now see Zechariah speaking two months later as we will read in verse one that his speaking came in the eighth month. Let's read from Zechariah Chapter 1 and again the first six verses.

Zechariah 1:1-6

I In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, ² "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. ⁴ Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. ⁵ Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, 'As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.'"

What we see in Zechariah is a reminder to the people that it is because of their sins that they are in this situation to begin with. When sin is pointed out in our lives or the Holy Spirit convicts us of them, "What is our first response to be?" Repent!! Look at verse 2 and 3 again.

Zechariah 1:2-3

² "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

May I remind us all tonight that there are consequences to our sin! Because of God's holiness and his desire for us to be Holy, there is a separation from God that occurs while we are in our sin and a judgment that comes if we do not repent! But did you catch the beauty of repentance? Return, Turn, Repent to me! And I will return to you!

That is exactly what the people of Israel finally did as verse 6 says.

Zechariah 1:6

⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, 'As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.'

Several things here. The people recognized that even in their repentance there is a consequence for their sin. Also, that God is just in his judgments. Once we get back in Ezra in a few moments we are going to detail some of the sins of the people and let's see if God is just in his judgment upon the people of Israel.

Another point here is that what we see in Haggai and Zechariah is the power of God's Word. May I remind us that it is the power of the preached Word that changes lives. It is the truth of the Bible that has in it what is described in Romans 1 as the Gospel that has the power that leads to salvation to the Jew first and the Greek. In other words, for all people so they can be saved if they will repent and believe.

Let's look back at Haggai just for a moment. Just in these six verses we see two admonitions to the leaders and to the people. We know they had quit working on the temple because of the persecution. But, remember when Cyrus sent that first wave of exiles back to begin the building, he sent them back with plenty of resources to build the temple. What do we see they were doing?

Look at verse 4!

Haggai 1:4

⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"

They had quit working on the Temple and started working on their own homes. Remember from Chapter 1. King Cyrus commanded that as the exiles were leaving the areas they were living in that those around them were to supply them with resources to build the Temple. They were using those resources to build their own houses.

That begs a question we should all ask ourselves. Are we building our houses, our kingdom with the resources God has given us? Or are we using, the resources we have, no matter how small or how large, to build up the Kingdom of God. ***Matthew 6:33 – Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you!***

So, one, they had used God's resources for their own gain. They were living in a life of luxury. The other is that they had forgotten God's Word. The prophets had been prophesying and they have seen prophecy after prophecy fulfilled and they let the persecution cause them to forget that God will fulfill his plan. God will never leave us nor forsake us. Even in times of persecution, in times of hardship we can trust God's Word.

Now, let's go back to Ezra. We read in the first 5 verses of Chapter 5 the response of the leaders to Haggai's and Zechariah's preaching. In verse 2 it says Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the priest, arose to go and rebuild the temple. They repented and they were obedient to God's word! It says all the prophets, but that also can include the people, that they were with them and the rebuilding began again.

Were they left alone? No. Again we read that the governor, Tattenai, and other Persian leaders came and asked them why they had started building again. Who gave you permission? What is the name of all these people who are helping you build? We are going to have to tell the King about this!

Once again, they could have cowered under these questions. They could have said, “Oh no, not again!” But they were now standing in boldness upon the strength of God’s Word and his favor once again restored. Look at verse 5.

Ezra 1:5

But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

God’s eye! God’s sovereign nature, God’s provision and God’s protection was over their work. When we are being obedient to God’s Word then we go in God’s power with his anointing and his presence in our lives that nothing he has called us to do can be thwarted because of persecution by way of slander, lies being told about us, an attempt of undermining the very truths of God’s Word. If we are obedient, we are under his care and nothing can happen to us unless he allows it!

It reminds me of that great song, His Eye Is on the Sparrow! Look at the lyrics.

***Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav’n and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.***

Well, Tattenai sends his letter to Darius. Let’s read it. Ezra 5:6-17

Ezra 5:6-17

⁶ This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and his associates, the governors who were in the province Beyond the River, sent to Darius the king. ⁷ They sent him a report, in which was written as follows: “To Darius the king, all peace. ⁸ Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built with huge stones, and timber is laid in the walls. This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. ⁹ Then we asked those elders and spoke to them thus: ‘Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?’ ¹⁰ We also asked them their names, for your information, that we might write down the names of their leaders. ¹¹ And this was their reply to us: ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. ¹² But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia.

Let’s stop right there for a moment. Again, what have we established thus far.

1. The Israelites were brought into captivity because of what? Sin! Disobedience to God’s Word!
2. God warned them and warned them through the word of the prophets!
3. God told them they were going into captivity and for how long!
4. God showed them he was going to have mercy upon them and gave them Time, Place and Names of who God was going to use to bring them back out of the captivity!
5. To me this was the most scathing rebuke by several of the prophets! But you would not listen!

You know we have talked a lot about the sins that Israelite committed that brought them into captivity, but we have never really named them. In verse 11 in their answer to Tattenai they mentioned a great king of Israel had

first built this house, temple. Of course, they are speaking of Solomon. But it is with Solomon that a lot of these sins began.

We are going to get to it later in Ezra but one command that God gave the Israelites is that they were not to intermarry with the other nations because they followed these false pagan God's and worshiped these false gods in very perverted ways. But Solomon disobeyed and he started marrying women from these nations. Look at the screens as I read from 1 Kings Chapter 11.

1 Kings 11:4-8

⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. ⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. ⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. ⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

What was God's first commandment that he gave Moses? You shall have no other God's before me. So, who were these false gods that were brought into Israel?

1. **Ashtoreth** – A false female deity. She was linked with Baal worship. If you read much in Kings and Chronicles you would have read the term Ashtoreth pole. This was a limbless tree that was cut in a shape to reflect the female deity. She was also considered the Goddess of love and was worshiped through prostitution and sexual acts outside of God's commands.
2. **Chemosh** - A false worshiped deity that was worshiped as a conquering deity! Also worshiped by orgy's and child sacrifice.
3. **Moloch/Molech** – A false deity that linked with child sacrifice. As you look at this picture.



It was believed that if a couple would sacrifice their 1st born, they would prosper financially. You see the guys beating the drums and blowing the trumpets? They would do that so they couldn't hear the screams of the child as the child was burned alive.

Worship for each of these "gods" were accompanied by sexual perversion and the slaughter of innocent children. Though several Kings such as Hezekiah, Josiah tried to get the people to return to God in repentance they would not. They left God no other choice but to judge their sins.

Did any of that sound familiar to you? Is that not the way of America? Really the whole world? Sexual perversion, the norms of gender continually attacked, over 60 million abortions just in America since 1973. You do realize that the WHO, World Health Organization, The United Nations is going to push this agenda more and more and with the possibility of this incoming administration, America is going to be blowing the trumpet at the front of the line.

But may I remind us of what we see in this response also. Look at verse 11 again.

Ezra 5:11

¹¹ And this was their reply to us: We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.

What brought them back to rebuilding the temple? Repentance! They returned and through the preached word by Haggai and Zechariah they once again were brought to the realization of who God is and that they are to obey him. They are as a nation, God's nation, that he chose to set apart to be a witness of God's power, faithfulness, love, and justice.

They were to be, "The Servants", of "The God of Heaven and Earth!" The one true God who created all the universe and established all truth when it comes to Creation, Life, Sin, Salvation and Judgment upon sin. Whether you will spend eternity in Heaven or Hell depends on your repentance. They were turning back to what was commanded in Deuteronomy Chapter 6:

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

⁴Hear, O Israel, The Lord your God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words I command you today shall be on your heart.

Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church may I remind us that we are to serve God and God alone. Jesus said that we cannot serve two masters. We will love the one and hate the other! In context what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6 was not to go after the pleasures and the treasures of the world but with what resources you do have serve the Lord with it. Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

The response that Zerubbabel and Jeshua gave Tattenai continues in this letter. Look at verse 13.

¹³ However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. ¹⁴ And the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem and brought into the temple of Babylon, these Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; ¹⁵ and he said to him, "Take these vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site." ¹⁶ Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been in building,

and it is not yet finished.’¹⁷ Therefore, if it seems good to the king, let search be made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus the king for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. And let the king send us his pleasure in this matter.”

Well, do you want to know how the King responded? Do you want to know King Darius’ answer? You have ever been watching a show and you are really into it and then pops up these words.



You have to come back next week to see God’s providential hand once again at work.

What we have once again seen is that there are consequences to sin. God has given us his Word so that you may know him intimately and if we are living in what his Word calls sin, there is a call to return, turn, repent, and come back to him.

When God wants to move his people to obedience and to action it is through a proclamation of his Word and a return to the truth of his Word. Any work under the premise of God will never truly prosper unless it is built upon the Word of God. It may be flashy, and it may be high spirited and emotionally driven but without the Word at the Center that is exactly what it is. A flash in the pan!

Let’s be obedient to God’s Word and follow the Lord Jesus!!