

Good Evening! It is such a blessing to be here with you this evening as we open the Word of God and once again just see the beauty and the power of what God has given to us in his Word. We are starting a new book tonight. We are going to study through the book of Ezra. So, please turn to Ezra and we will be studying through Chapters 1 and Chapters 2 tonight. We actually aren't going to be in Ezra as much as we are in other parts of the Old Testament.

I really want to set this stage so we can understand what is going on during this time and why the book of Ezra is so important to the time it was written and for us. To do this we must look at quite a bit back history to see the fullness of this book. Let's get started. Ezra Chapter 1 and I am going to read all 11 verses of Chapter 1.

***Ezra 1:1-11***

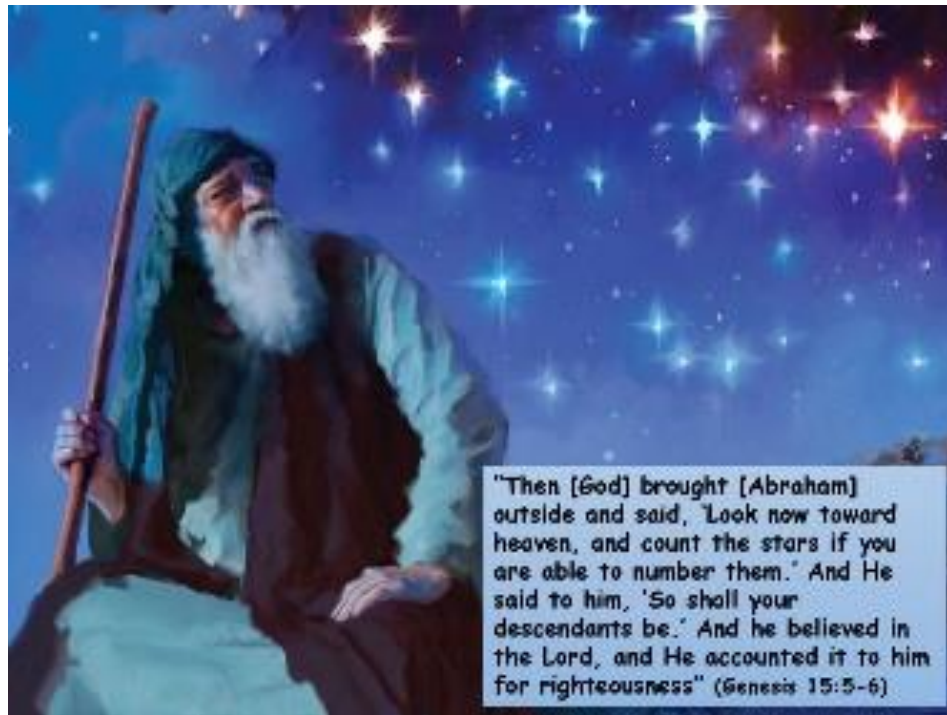
***1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: <sup>2</sup> "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever 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 rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." <sup>5</sup> Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. <sup>7</sup> Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. <sup>8</sup> Cyrus King of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. <sup>9</sup> And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, <sup>10</sup> 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; <sup>11</sup> all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.***

Sometimes in life as you look at your circumstances, whether Good or Bad, we may ask these questions.

How did we get here? How did we get to this point in our lives? Unfortunately, what we are looking at is the terrible situation that the nation of Israel had gotten themselves in with the Lord. This may sound strange to some of you, but I want you to hear this.

God is as faithful in his mercy, as he is faithful in his judgment! Let me repeat that! God is as faithful in his mercy, as he is faithful in his judgment! **Explain!!!**

Remember it is with Abraham that God made a covenant that through Abraham a great nation would begin from his offspring.



"Then [God] brought [Abraham] outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:5-6)

Why did God choose Abraham? Was there something special about Abraham? No! He was a pagan! But he listened and he obeyed God in his commands, not perfectly, but he obeyed! We would say that Abraham got saved! He put his complete faith in God Jehovah as stated in Hebrews Chapter 11.

We see this reminder about God's faithfulness to Moses and the nation of Israel. 610 years have passed since Abraham headed to Canaan and now the Exodus out of Egypt has started

Look at the screens and let's read Deuteronomy 7:6-11

### ***Deuteronomy 7:6-11***

***<sup>6</sup> "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, <sup>10</sup> and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. <sup>11</sup> You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.***

What is God seeking here? It's one word! Obedience!!! God is going to be faithful not matter what. That is his character, that is who he is. God is going to be faithful in his love, his mercy, and his justice because of his Holiness. As the law was given to Moses and the Israelite nation, he has set them apart to be a Holy nation before all the other nations to show God's greatness and his holiness.

Much was given to Israel. As we know, Jesus said, "To much who is given, much is required!"

This command of obedience is rendered again right before the Israelite nation, led by Joshua, are to go into the land of Canaan, which is also called the Promised Land. This is shown to us in Deuteronomy Chapter 30 verses 15 to 20.

***Deuteronomy 30:15-20***

***<sup>15</sup> “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”***

Disobedience to God’s Word is sin! There are consequences to sin! Those consequences can come upon us individually or as we will see now to a whole nation or country. Because did Israel stay faithful, obey God’s commands? No! That is why we see where they are as we begin Ezra.

We see this disobedience through the books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles and we pick up at this time in the history of Israel where 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles ends and where Ezra begins. If we were to look at each King that reigned through the history of Israel, on whether they served the Lord or not. Man, it would be like a roller coaster!

This King would serve the Lord with us whole heart! His son would not! This King would serve the Lord but not with his whole heart. His son would not! The King would serve the Lord but then somewhere would go off the rails and he would end up serving the gods of the other nations and put up idols for the people to offer sacrifices to them.

We see towards the end of what is written in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles is that King Josiah, when he became King served the Lord with all his heart.

It is during his reign that they find the book of the law in the temple. It is read to him and he is so convicted that he tore his clothes in a sign of repentance and he brings the Nation back to serving the Lord. Josiah tore down the Asherim poles and the altars to Baal.

But his sons did not. It is during the reign of Josiah’s son, Jehoiakim, that Jeremiah prophecies of the coming judgment on Israel as a nation. We see the prophecy that God gave Jeremiah the exact reason that Israel was about to go into captivity.

***Jeremiah 25:1-7***

***<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), <sup>2</sup> which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: <sup>3</sup> “For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. <sup>4</sup> You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, <sup>5</sup> saying, ‘Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the Lord has***

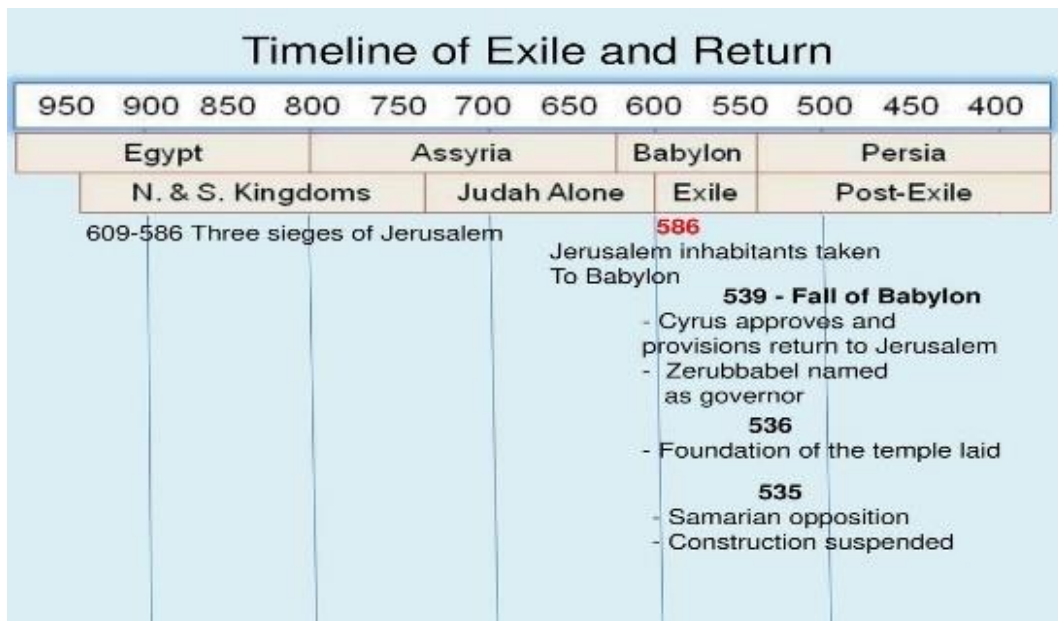
*given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. <sup>6</sup> Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.’ <sup>7</sup> Yet you have not listened to me, declares the Lord, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.*

Maybe many of them were asking! How did we get to this point? The fall of a nation begins with leadership that will not lead according to the truths of God’s Word. The fall of a nation can come when a people quit listening to the truth of God’s Word.

How did they get to this point? Jeremiah was very clear how! For 23 years I have been telling you, “Thus says the Lord!” You have not listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although, although the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, “Turn Now!” The Hebrew word for Turn is Shuwb(SHUV). This is how it is spelled but it is pronounced. SHUV

**Shuwb – to turn back, to return, to repent, to go back.**

Go back! Go back to the Lord! Repent! But they would not! This brought them into 70 years of exile out of the land that God had promised them. Look at this timeline:



This may be a bit busy. In 609 Nebuchadnezzar began the siege upon Jerusalem that would lead to a lot of the Jews being taken to Babylon. If you remember when the prophet Daniel was taken to Babylon it was those that were considered the strongest, the smartest that were taken to Babylon. Those that they felt were less desirable were left in Jerusalem.

So, the 70-year exile has begun. You know a thought came to my mind as I thought about this. Whose reputation was at stake here as the nation of Israel, God’s people, were taken into captivity? Think about that for a second! In Exodus 32 while Moses was up on Mt. Sinai with God receiving the Ten Commandments from God, “What were the people doing at the foot of the mountain?” Party!! Worshiping the golden calf, they had Aaron make for them out of some of the gold that the Egyptians gave them to get out of Egypt!

As Moses was on the mountain, God told Moses what the people were doing and God told Moses, let me alone, I am going to consume them. But Moses interceded for the people and the Bible says that Moses implored God not to destroy them. Why? Moses said then the nations will say that you were able to bring them out of Egypt

with a mighty hand but you were not able to keep them and you just brought them out to kill them at this mountain.

Think about that! How do our lives reflect the reputation of God, Jesus? We say we are followers of Jesus but are our lives revealing a life that has been regenerated? Does our speech reflect one of grace and compassion? I'm not talking about speaking up for truth! But are we gossipy, do we constantly berate or degrade people!

Does our walk match our talk? If we lived during this time could we be part of the reason our nation was sent into captivity? Have we bowed down to the gods of pleasure, greed, and just complete disregard for the truth of God's Word.

But even in all that is going on God is going to show his faithfulness, his mercy, not just for our sake! But for his sake and his name and his reputation! Think about ourselves again for a moment.

***Romans 5:8-9***

***But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.***

Wow!!!! Praise the Lord!!

This is what God is showing us in the book of Ezra and this time that leads up to this proclamation, this edict, by this pagan king, King Cyrus.

In Ezekiel Chapter 36, we see the prophet Ezekiel start prophesying of the end of the 70 years and that God is going to keep his promise. God is going to bring the exiles back to the land that he promised them! Turn to Ezekiel Chapter 36 and we will read beginning at verse 22.

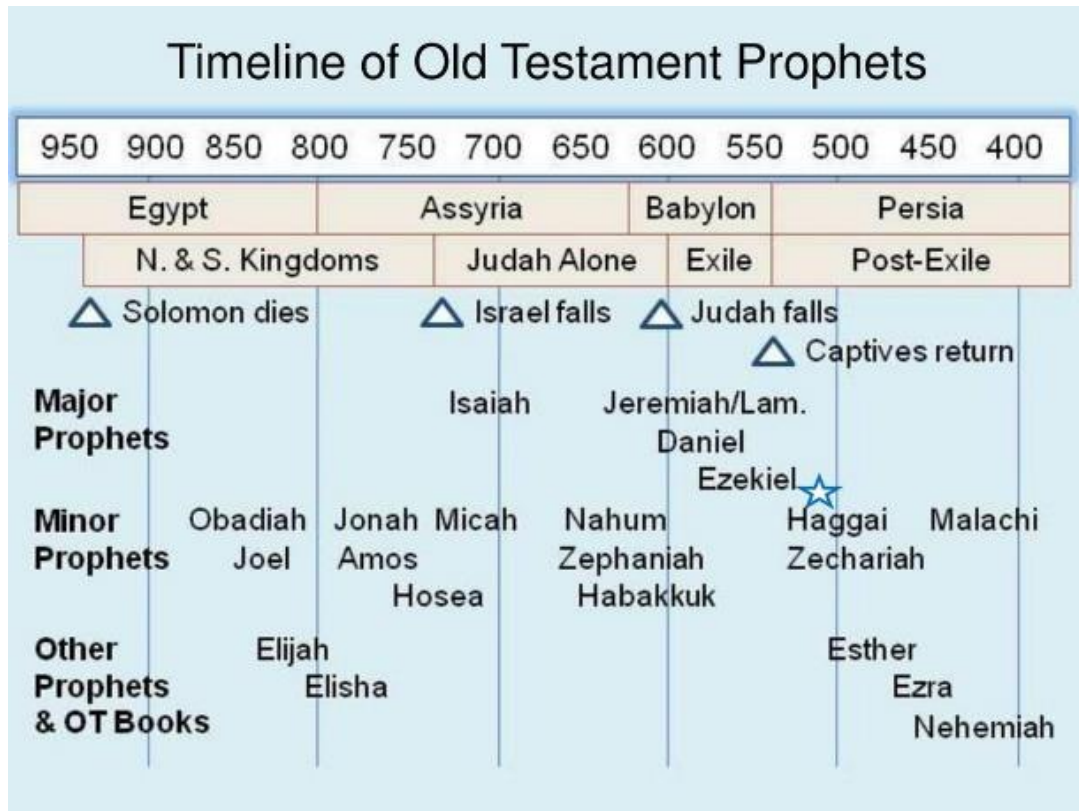
***Ezekiel 36:22-32***

***<sup>22</sup> "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. <sup>23</sup> And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. <sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. <sup>28</sup> You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. <sup>32</sup> It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.***

Yes. When God fulfills his promises, we benefit greatly! Through Jesus, the salvation that God provides for us benefits us immensely. But all of it is to show the holiness and greatness of God Jehovah!

Salvation is, By God, Through God and For God!!!

As I mentioned this is Ezekiel prophesying during this 70-year exile. So, what is going on through this time. Well there was a lot going on. Look at another timeline:



Look at the numbers towards the top of this slide. Find the number 600 and 550 and then go down until you see the name Jeremiah. What other names do you see there? Daniel and Ezekiel!

What is going on? God is still working! God is moving! We just read from Ezekiel. Ezekiel is in Babylon and he is proclaiming, “Thus says the Lord!” Jeremiah is in Jerusalem and proclaiming God’s Word to those that were not taken out of Jerusalem. Daniel is in Babylon and God is using him to show how powerful God is by giving him the ability to interpret dreams.

But, while in Babylon, Daniel is praying to God and for the people of Israel. Just look at the screens as we look at Daniel Chapter 9 as we look at one of his prayers.

**Daniel 9:1-5**

*<sup>1</sup> In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—<sup>2</sup> in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. <sup>3</sup> Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. <sup>4</sup> I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.*

But do you see what brought Daniel to his knees in prayer! God’s word! He had read in Jeremiah the prophecy of 70 years of exile! What did he confess? His sin, the people’s sins, the nations sins. Now we can’t repent for

everyone else, but we can repent for our sins. We can confess that the people have sinned! We can confess our nation has sinned and pray that everyone will repent and turn!

God moves upon our prayers and I believe that not only because God is faithful to his promise, I believe that God also acted upon the fact that the people began repenting and that is why we see in Ezra this edict by the Cyrus the King of Persia. So, let's go back to the book of Ezra.

We've already read these verses. What we see here is that God can and will use whoever he wants. Here God is using a pagan King to fulfill his will. 150 years earlier the Prophet Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus.

#### ***Isaiah 45:1***

***Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed.***

So here we are in Verse 1 in Ezra that says God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to make this proclamation. Persia had just conquered Babylon a year earlier and now here is Cyrus' edict for the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. God's plan and will come to fruition even through a pagan King and we will see that God actually uses several pagan Kings to bring the nation of Israel back to their homeland.

We've already read the edict. We begin here with the 1<sup>st</sup> wave of 3 where the exiles return to Jerusalem. You see God's faithfulness that not only do they get to go back. Cyrus has the people in the areas these exiles are living to send them back with material to help with the rebuilding of the Temple. Look at verse 6 and 7 again.

#### ***Ezra 1:6-7***

***<sup>6</sup>And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. <sup>7</sup>Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.***

We are not going to read all of Chapter 2 because it just lays out all the people that are returning and you can go read that for yourself. I'm not saying that it is unimportant but once again it tells us who is going. I will make comment though that in verse 2 of Chapter 2 that we see the name of Zerubbabel. He is assigned governor of Jerusalem and will be leading the rebuilding of the temple and that is particularly important for later teachings.

But, in Chapter 2 verses 64-70 we see how many of the exiles return during this wave and what they are returning with.

#### ***Ezra 2:64-70***

***<sup>4</sup>The whole assembly together was 42,360, <sup>65</sup>besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. <sup>66</sup>Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, <sup>67</sup>their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720. <sup>68</sup>Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. <sup>69</sup>According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments. <sup>70</sup>Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.***

Now, if I did my research correctly, they were blessed over and beyond what they could probably imagine. A daric is ¼ ounce of gold and a mina is 11/4 ounce of silver. If you do the math in today's values. They had \$28,975,000 dollars' worth of gold and \$156,250 dollars in silver.

You know what in a few months, years! They may say again! How did we get to this place in our life? But this time it would be a good thing!

It was because of God's faithfulness to them but even more for his sake and his reputation, to show his Glory! But remember I asked the same question at the beginning pertaining to how they got into the place they were in by being brought into captivity.

It was completely because of their disobedience to God. Remember this! As faithful as God is with his mercy, he is as faithful in his judgment!

There are two sides. God is always calling out but if we continually reject him in our pride and our arrogance, we leave him no choice but for judgment. I urge you! Repent!