

Ezra: New European Christadelphian Commentary

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Ezra Chapter 1

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished- Daniel understood from Jeremiah's prophecies that Jerusalem's fortunes would be revived after the 70 year period was ended. Yet he goes on to ask God to *immediately* forgive His people, as if Daniel even dared hope that the period might be shortened. Daniel lived into the reign of Cyrus (Dan. 6:28), and so he would have witnessed "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25; Ezra 1:1). But it seems to me that whilst the prophecy of the 70 years came true in one sense, the Jews didn't respond as they should, and so the time of Zion's true freedom in the Messianic Kingdom was delayed. Daniel had been petitioning the Father to not delay beyond the 70 year period in doing this. But in another sense, the prophecy was re-interpreted; Daniel was now told that there was to be a "seventy weeks of years" (Dan. 9:24 RSV) period involved in order to gain ultimate forgiveness for Israel as Daniel had just been praying for. The 70 years had become "seventy weeks of years". The command to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the first year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1); but Daniel must have watched in vain for any sign that Zion's glad morning had really come. And so it is recorded that in the third year of Cyrus Daniel was given a vision that confirmed to him that "the thing was true, but the time appointed was long [Heb. 'extended'; the word is also translated "greater", "more"]; and he understood the thing" (Dan. 10:1). What was "the thing" that was true, which Daniel sought to understand? Surely it was the vision of the 70 years that he had sought to "understand" in Dan. 9:2. The Hebrew *dabar*, translated "thing", is usually translated "word". He was comforted that the word of prophecy would come true; it was "noted in the scripture of truth" (Dan. 10:21). It was just that it had been extended in its fulfilment; "for yet the vision is for many days" (Dan. 10:14). And this was how he came to "understand the thing / word". The essential and ultimate fulfilment of the 70 years prophecy would only be after a long time, involving 70 "weeks of years". Thus Daniel came to "understand" the vision (Dan. 10:1); hence he was so shocked, depressed and disappointed that the fulfilment would not be in his days. But he is set up as a representative of those of us in the very last days who shall likewise "understand" (s.w. Dan. 12:10) the very same prophecies which Daniel studied. Daniel is described as both understanding, and also not understanding (Dan. 10:1; 12:8). Surely the idea is that he understood the principle of deferment and the outline meaning of the prophecy; but he didn't understand the details. And so perhaps it is with us who will, or do, likewise "understand" as Daniel did.

Ez. 4:6 revealed the variable nature of Divine time periods: "You shall lie on your right side, and shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it to you". Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years. Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variability of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation- This is the same word for "noise" in Ez. 37:7: "So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone". This meant that the "whole house of Israel" was to stand up from their graves and return as a mighty army to the land. Their attitude in Babylon was exactly as in Ez. 37:11: "behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts". These were the very sentiments of Jeremiah in Lamentations, and those who wept by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion. They were revived by the gift of the Spirit, the breath / spirit which was blown into them by God's initiative.

The stirring up [Heb. 'opening the eyes'] of Cyrus is a parade example of the ability of God to work directly on the human mind, inserting ideas and initiatives, and confirming a person in their responses to various psychological stimuli. This is the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers today, and it was and will be seen in

the revival of the dead bones of Israel. Not visible miracles, but internal mental working. And that Spirit can be resisted, as it was by many of the exiles; for we are not mere puppets in God's hand. Yet grace means that God takes the initiative; "He first loved us". That initiative is seen through His working on the human heart in calling us to action (s.w. 2 Chron. 21:16; Is. 13:17; Jer. 50:41; Joel 3:9) and Cyrus was a parade example of this (Is. 41:2,25, 45:13). The hearts of the returnees were likewise stirred up (see on :5). But this was not some irresistible manipulation of the human person; Zion was called to be stirred up ["awake"], but she refused to be stirred up (Is. 51:17; 52:1 cp. Is. 64:7). Zerubbabel had his mind or "spirit" stirred up to be the king-priest Messianic figure (Hag. 1:14); but he let the baton drop.

*Throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying-*The restoration prophecies speak of how "all nations" are to be gathered to Zion; they are those who scattered Judah amongst the nations; not every literal nation. And who "scattered" Israel? The Hebrew word is used in Jer. 50:17 to describe how Babylon scattered Judah amongst the nations. And most significantly, the same word occurs again in Est. 3:8: "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people *scattered abroad* and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom...". It is quite wrong for us to imagine Judah sitting quietly by the rivers of Babylon, all huddled together. They were scattered throughout all the many provinces / colonies of the Babylonian empire. This was why Cyrus' decree bidding the Jews return to rebuild Jerusalem had to be published "throughout all his kingdom" (Ezra 1:1), and Jews living "in any place" of that kingdom were included in the invitation. It was Babylon who had "parted my land" by dividing it up amongst the various 'Samaritan' peoples who were transported there from other conquered territories. And their being in Babylon is paralleled with being scattered to the four corners of the world as it was known to them: "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon" (Zech. 2:6-7). And consider Zech. 7:14: "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them [i.e. this concerns the Babylonian invasion], that no man passed through nor returned". Indeed, Zech. 8:7,8 speaks of the restoration as coming from both West and East of Israel, implying that the Babylonians had sold some of the Jews as slaves in Greece and north Africa.

Ezra 1:2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah- Cyrus clearly had a sense of relationship with Yahweh, and I have argued that he was one of the potential Messiah figures who could have reestablished the Kingdom at the restoration. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus. LXX "Who bids Cyrus be wise, and he shall perform all my will" suggests Cyrus had a choice; he was commanded, and it seems he partially obeyed, but not enough to the Messiah figure envisaged.

It is significant that Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the "God of Heaven" (e.g. Ezra 1:2) whilst Zechariah speaks of the "God of the earth" or 'land' of Israel, perhaps because the Angel of Israel literally went to Heaven when the glory departed from Jerusalem, and returned, in a sense, at the restoration- to depart again at the Lord's death ("Your house is left unto you desolate"; of the Angel that once dwelt in the temple).

Ezra 1:3 Whoever there 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 Yahweh, the God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem- "His God..." sounds as if Cyrus had not adopted Yahweh as his own God. And yet he does recognize that "He is God". We can know things *about* God, without grasping their personal reality. That is the lesson of Cyrus.

Amos 9:11-15 is most comfortably interpreted when read as referring to the restoration of Judah and the "remnant"

of the ten tribes to the land under Ezra: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God". "I will *raise up*" uses a Hebrew word very commonly featured in the records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to "rise up and build" (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would "close up the breaches thereof" is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was "fallen" and 'ruined' (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). "I will build it" is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God's people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn't fulfill the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in some form- they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it is with prophecies like Ezekiel 38, and the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. They will be fulfilled in spiritual essence, but probably not in strict literality, although they *could have been* had God's people been more 'fulfilling' of them.

Ezra 1:4 Whoever is left, in any place where he lives, let the men of his place help him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with animals, besides the freewill offering for God's house which is in Jerusalem - It's surely intentional that the repentance and subsequent witness of Jonah led to the King of Assyria [often paralleled with Babylon in the prophets] making a phenomenally unexpected decree and published it (Jonah 3:7)- which ought to have prepared the faithful in exile for the possibility that such a decree could be forthcoming from the King of Persia, if they like Jonah repented and witnessed their faith to the world. It did in fact happen (Ezra 1:1-4). But it happened by grace, for there seems to have been little true repentance let alone preaching by the Jews in exile.

God had told His people to flee from Babylon before she fell, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7). Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They didn't leave as asked, and so after Babylon fell, Cyrus the Persian was moved still to as it were push them to return to the land. We see here God's continual effort to get people to respond to His message even if they at first refuse. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

Ezra 1:5 Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit God had stirred to go up, rose up to build the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem- This fulfilled Joel 3:7 "I will *raise them* out of the place whither ye have sold them". The same Hebrew word is used in Ezra 1:1,5 concerning how God raised up the spirit of Judah to return to the land.

God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus (see on :1) and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through. 1

Kings 8:47-50 had predicted that God would give the exiles compassion in captivity *if* they repented. They didn't repent, as passages like Ez. 18 make clear (they blamed everything on their fathers and protested their personal innocence)- and yet still God gave them compassion in the eyes of their captors, through the amazing decrees of Cyrus enabling them to return to their land and rebuild the temple at his expense.

"Rose up / arose" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. Yahweh cut off the "master" ['the stirred up one', s.w.] because they divorced their wives and married Gentiles (Mal. 2:12). The potential work of God on men's hearts was frustrated by their hardness of heart.

Ezra 1:6 All those who were around them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with animals, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered- The book of Esther has explained how the Jews were popular in captivity. These precious gifts recall those given to Israel when they left Egypt. The whole narrative of their return from Babylon is framed by Isaiah in terms of the exodus from Egypt. As Israel were intended to use these gifts to build the tabernacle, so the exiles were to use them to rebuild the temple. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. But so much potential was wasted.

Ezra 1:7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out of Jerusalem, and had put in the house of his gods- This sounds very much like at least some element of repentance, although it has been argued that this was standard Persian practice and policy at this time. For the other captive nations were also bidden return to their homelands with their religious paraphernalia which had been taken into captivity by them.

Ezra 1:8 Even those, Cyrus king of Persia brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah- Note how "the prince" is very much the language of Ezekiel 40-48 concerning a mortal "prince", and also Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:8; there is good reason to think that Sheshbazzar was an official name for Zerubbabel- see Michael Ashton, *The Exiles Return*). And Isaiah 53 is prefaced in chapter 52 by the command to return from Babylon and to proclaim the good news of the Messianic Kingdom which Cyrus' decree could have brought in; as if it *could* have come true then. He shall "grow up" as a root from a dry land (Is. 53:2) uses the word frequently used about the 'going up' from Babylon to Jerusalem.

There could have been a fulfilment of Jer. 23:5 by Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel: "Behold, the days come says Yahweh, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land". I suggested on Jer. 22:24 that the king in view was potentially Zerubbabel, "the branch of God from Babylon". Zech. 6:12 interprets this as a reference to Zerubbabel: "the man whose name is the branch... shall build the temple of the Lord". Zerubbabel being a king-priest was in the kingly line, and thus can correctly be called a king in the line of David (Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:7; 'Sheshbazzar' of Ezra 1:8 is the Babylonian equivalent of 'Zerubbabel'; Ezra 3:8 describes his brothers as "priests and Levites"). Great prince Nehemiah humbly entered Jerusalem incognito on an ass (Neh. 2:11-15)- it is a wild speculation that Zerubbabel did the same, and thus provided a primary basis for Zech. 9:9 "Thy king cometh unto thee (also unrecognized, in the case of Jesus entering spiritually ruined Jerusalem)... lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass".

Ezra 1:9 This is the number of them: thirty platters of gold, one thousand platters of silver, twenty-nine knives- "Platters" or "chargers" is an unusual word; "Aben Ezra derived it from two words meaning 'to collect' and 'a lamb', and understood it to be applied to 'vessels intended to receive the blood of victims'".

Ezra 1:10 thirty bowls of gold, silver bowls of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels one thousand-

Of a second sort" is LXX "double".

Ezra 1:11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand four hundred- This is larger than the sum of the vessels listed in :9,10. In addition to the 1000 "other vessels" (:10), there may have been other vessels of gold and silver, perhaps belonging to the royal family rather than to the temple (see 2 Chron. 36:18); and the total sum is given here.

Sheshbazzar brought all these up, when the captives were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem- Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Is. 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' or 'bringing up' to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Neh. 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. This was the strength available to confirm them in their desire to return. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

Ezra Chapter 2

Ezra 2:1 Now these are the children of the province, who went up out of the captivity of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon- The majority of Jews preferred to stay in Persia / Babylon. Archaeological and inscription evidence (see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*), as well as Josephus, suggests there may have been 1 million of them in Persia at the time of Cyrus. Ezra 2:1 may suggest that only a relatively few Jews who lived in the province of Babylon returned (one out of 127 provinces), even though there were significant numbers of Jews in all the provinces, as the book of Esther makes clear (as also does Nehemiah 1:8, which says that the Babylonian captivity fulfilled God's prophecy to scatter Israel amongst all nations). The Persian records even suggest that some of those who obeyed the call to 'return' actually only made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and then returned to their homes in Persia. And the mighty political and linguistic changes taking place *purely for our sakes* are often ignored by us. Like the Jews in Babylon, we figure that *surely* such huge changes couldn't have occurred *only* for us. But they do, and have done. Isaiah frequently shows the folly of worshipping Babylonian idols. And yet it seems that it was Judah's worship of these idols that kept them in Babylon. See on Is. 50:10,11.

And who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each one to his city- Ezekiel's temple prophecies begin with a man / Angel with a measuring reed, measuring Jerusalem and the temple. This recurs in Zech. 2:1, where the Angel again measures the temple and then promises that Yahweh will be a protecting wall of fire around the city, meaning that the Jews should fearlessly return from Babylon (Zech. 2:5-10). There follows a description of God's Kingdom on earth, with God Himself dwelling in Zion and all nations converting to Him. Yet the Jews returned with fear from Babylon- or some of them did. And they fussed so much about building a wall to protect them, in studied disregard of God's promise here. God helped them build the wall- He was still so keen to work with them. And He later encouraged them that "I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth [s.w. used about Judah's return from captivity, Ezra 2:1; 6:21]; and no oppressor shall pass through them any more" (Zech. 9:7,8).

Ezra 2:2 who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel- The mention of 11 leaders perhaps leaves us wondering why not 12; perhaps the implication is that the intention of regathering all 12 tribes was not to be fulfilled completely.

The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7). When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10), he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then.

Ezra 2:3 The children of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two- "Children of..." can be understood literally; or the 'children of' a geographical area are the people who live in it. It seems that in :3-19 we have a list of the literal families who returned. Then in :20-35 those who returned, arranged according to geographical localities; in :36-39 the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42); then the families of the Nethinim (:43-54) and of Solomon's servants (:55-57).

Ezra 2:4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two- The Persian and Babylon practice was to replace Hebrew names with local names, as we see with Daniel and his friends. The fact some retained their Hebrew names, especially a name like "Yah has judged", may be an indication of faith; although it may also have been mere cultural loyalty.

Ezra 2:5 The children of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five- "Arah" is 'wandering', perhaps aware that the Jews had been exiled to the east just as Cain was to wander east of Eden.

Ezra 2:6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve- 2818 in Neh. 7:11. The numbers in the parallel record in Neh. 7 are often higher. I suggest that that was a list of those who began the journey, or expressed interest in it; whereas Ezra 2 is the list of those who completed it. And there was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today.

Ezra 2:7 The children of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four- Elam was the name of a neighbouring nation, so we wonder whether this was a Jew very influenced by secularism who then repented and had a spiritual revival. And he was one of the largest families to return.

Ezra 2:8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five- Neh. 7:13 says 845. 100 didn't actually make it. There was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today.

Ezra 2:9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty- "Pure", perhaps once a Nazirite (Lam. 4:7 s.w.).

Ezra 2:10 The children of Bani, six hundred and forty-two- "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem.

Ezra 2:11 The children of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three- "Bebai" isn't a Hebrew word; some of the exiles had so assimilated that they only had local Persian names. To leave all they had known was therefore a major challenge.

Ezra 2:12 The children of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two- The differing sizes of the families may not simply mean that some were larger than others, but that some families divided more than others over this question of returning to Judah. Some stayed, and others went. And of course many families didn't respond at all.

Ezra 2:13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six- 'Lord of the sunrise', a pagan, cultic name; again reflecting the extent to which the exiles had assimilated. I have noted on Esther how "Esther" and "Mordecai" were both local names associated with idolatry.

Ezra 2:14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six- A relatively large number. We are again faced with the question of why some families and geographical areas responded to the call more than others.

Ezra 2:15 The children of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four- "Adin" is s.w. "given to pleasures" (Is. 47:8). And yet the message of return to restore the Kingdom was somehow attractive even to such a person.

Ezra 2:16 The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety-eight- "Ater" is 'maimed'. Perhaps he was an invalid, which might account for the relatively small family size. The call of the Kingdom is going to be more attractive to those in such situations.

Ezra 2:17 The children of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three- Perhaps the same as Besai one of the Nethinim (:49).

Ezra 2:18 The children of Jorah, one hundred and twelve- We note the lack of the 'Yah' prefix or suffix in these names. Those who responded were apparently secular people, not known for their devotion to Yahweh. That may explain why the records of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi complain that they were not well motivated and were largely only looking for personal benefit and advantage through returning to Judah. See on :19.

Ezra 2:19 The children of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three- "Enriched" or 'seeking enrichment'; see on :18.

Ezra 2:20 The children of Gibbar, ninety-five- "Children of..." can be understood literally; or the 'children of' a geographical area are the people who live in it. It seems that in :3-19 we have a list of the literal families who returned. Then in :20-35 those who returned, arranged according to geographical localities; in :36-39 the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42); then the families of the Nethinim (:43-54) and of Solomon's servants (:55-57).

"Gibbar" is Gibeon in Benjamin (Neh. 7:25), and we note that a disproportionate number of the returnees were from Benjamin.

Ezra 2:21 The children of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three- These are pathetically small numbers, bearing in mind there were around 1 million Jews in the empire (see on :1).

Ezra 2:22 The men of Netophah, fifty-six- Counted together with Benjamin in Neh. 7. The majority of those who returned were from Benjamin and Judah. The prophetic vision of all the tribes of Israel returning didn't come about at the time.

Ezra 2:23 The men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight- The very existence of "men of Anathoth" who returned was a sign of God's grace. For because of their persecution of Jeremiah, Jer. 11:21,23 had prophesied: "There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth". Perhaps like Nineveh some repented and therefore the threatened judgment didn't come about; or Jeremiah prayed for them his enemies and was heard; or Yahweh simply pitied His people.

Ezra 2:24 The children of Azmaveth, forty-two- The small number was because this was known as literally "fields" near to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:29). And yet 42 people returned from this area. Whereas from far larger settlements, not one.

Ezra 2:25 The children of Kiriath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three- They may have been listed together because these villages were close to each other, or they travelled together as if one family. The men of Kirjathjearim (s.w. "Kiriath Arim") had looked after the ark previously (1 Sam. 7:1,2) and been blessed for it. There had been a faithful prophet there at the time of the captivity (Jer. 26:20); these considerations may account for the relatively large number who returned from that area.

Ezra 2:26 The children of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one- "Gaba" is s.w. "Gibeah of Benjamin" (Jud. 20:10). This was a priestly city, given to the Levites, although very few Levites returned (Josh. 21:17).

Ezra 2:27 The men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two- The order of the towns appears to be geographical, as "Michmas" was close to "Geba" (s.w. "Gibeah") of :26 (1 Sam. 14:5).

Ezra 2:28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three- Mentioned together because they were geographically close (Josh. 7:2; 8:9). Bethel was in the ten tribe kingdom, so it seems that some of the Israelites did return along with Judah; but not to the extent of the prophetic vision, whereby a repentant Israel and Judah would be united together in a reestablished Kingdom of God in the land.

Ezra 2:29 The children of Nebo, fifty-two- Neh. 7:33 "the other Nebo", perhaps to differentiate it from Nebo in Moab; or as LXX "Nabia".

Ezra 2:30 The children of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six- There is no other reference to this village. The impression is given that those who returned were largely from insignificant villages rather than the larger cities. Perhaps it was in those areas that there was greater faithfulness to Yahweh. Or perhaps the urban dwellers didn't want to return and rebuild their cities, whereas the rural dwellers guessed that their land would still be there for them to take.

Ezra 2:31 The children of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four- LXX Elamar. We wonder why so many, relatively speaking, should return from an unknown small village. Perhaps there was a community of faithful there.

Ezra 2:32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty- Whilst in this section we are reading of the names of towns and not people, this location is unknown, and means 'flat nosed' as if referring to a person. Perhaps the interesting case of the person Harim is being emphasized, in that people from his village also returned with him. See on :39.

Ezra 2:33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five- Neh. 7:37 gives 721. The fact is noted that even four people began the journey, or were willing to start it, but didn't make it. These details show the abiding value to God of every human person.

Ezra 2:34 The children of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five- There was a community of "sons of the prophets" there which may account for this (2 Kings 2:5).

Ezra 2:35 The children of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty- A relatively large number. We are again faced with the question of why some families and geographical areas responded to the call more than others. The larger cities such as Lachish had apparently not a single one who returned from there.

Ezra 2:36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three- As noted on :3, in :36-39 we have the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42). They were not particularly faithful for by the time Ezra came, many of them had married Gentile women.

Ezra 2:37 The children of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two- Only four courses of priests returned, when there were supposed to be 24 of them, namely Pashhur, Jedaiah, Immer, and Hardin (1 Chron. 24:7, 8,14). The priesthood had been deeply corrupt at the time of the exile, and it seems most of them preferred to remain in Babylon.

Ezra 2:38 The children of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven- Perhaps descendants of the unfaithful Pashur the priest of Jer. 20:1-3.

Ezra 2:39 The children of Harim, one thousand and seventeen- "Harim" means 'snubnosed'; the priest in whom there was a physical defect, such as to exclude him from priestly service. For this is the word used of how a 'flat nosed' man was excluded from priestly service (Lev. 21:18). Perhaps they were eager at the chance to serve in the restored temple, guessing that the regulations would be relaxed due to the relative lack of priests and Levites returning. Or the idea could simply be that the requirements of the law were not followed by the priests who returned.

Ezra 2:40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy-four- As noted on :3, in :36-39 we have the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42). These Levites of :40 are the ordinary Levites; :41 refers to the Levites who sung, and :42 to those who kept the gates. But only two families of the ordinary mass of Levites returned- a pathetic response.

Ezra 2:41 The singers: the children of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight- This was very poor response. We note that apparently the famous singing families of Heman and Jeduthin didn't return (1 Chron. 25:1).

Ezra 2:42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all one hundred and thirty-nine- This is a very small number for the families of the gate keepers. The number of ordinary Levites compared to priests is very low (4289 priests, and 341 Levites). There were far more Levites than there were priests, but it seems the Levites didn't want to return and do the dirty work; everyone wanted to be religious leaders. Hence Ezra's problem in finding

Levites to return (Ezra 8:15). We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10).

Ezra 2:43 The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth- The Nethinim were grouped beneath the Levites but above "the servants of Solomon" (Ezra 2:55). "Nethinim" is literally 'those who are given' and many presume they were originally the Gibeonites, who were 'given' by Joshua to the Levites to do their more menial work (Josh. 9:3-27). Whenever Gentiles were captured in war, some of them would have been devoted to Yahweh in that they were given to His service through joining the Nethinim (Num. 31:28). Thus in Ezra 8:20 we find mention of some "whom David and the princes had appointed (Heb. 'given') for the service of the Levites".

Ezra 2:44 the children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon- These names could well be Persian and not Hebrew. The Nethinim were Gentiles (see on :43), and had unsurprisingly adopted Persian names in the exile. But they wanted to return to rebuild Judah. It's hard to guess whether the push or pull factor was strongest. Perhaps they felt they had never been accepted in Persian society just as they hadn't been in Jewish society and therefore felt a 'push' from exile; or perhaps they were truly faithful to the God of Israel they served, and were thereby 'pulled' by that back to His service.

Ezra 2:45 the children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub- "Lebanah" is "the moon"; "Hagabah" is "the locust". These names suggest a high level of assimilation into Persian society.

Ezra 2:46 the children of Hagab, the children of Shamlai, the children of Hanan- We note the lack of the 'Yah' prefix or suffix in these names. Those who responded were apparently secular people, not known for their devotion to Yahweh. That may explain why the records of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi complain that they were not well motivated and were largely only looking for personal benefit and advantage through returning to Judah. See on Ezra 2:19.

Ezra 2:47 the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah- "Reaiah", 'Yah has seen', is one of the few names which has the 'Yah' suffix. And he was of the Nethinim, a Gentile, who had retained his devotion to Yahweh despite being made a servant of Yahweh's apostate people.

Ezra 2:48 the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam- "Nekoda" is a female name. This female head of house, a Gentile of the Nethinim, meaning literally "speckled" (s.w. Gen. 30:33,35), led her family back to Judah when many Jews wouldn't respond.

Ezra 2:49 the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai- We note that "Uzza" and not "Uzziah" is mentioned; as noted on :46, the 'Yah' suffix or prefix is notably missing in these names. "Paseah" means 'limping', suggesting as noted on :32,48,51,52 that it was those who had some physical infirmity who returned. Thus was fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy of limping Jacob returning from Babylon to Zion. And today likewise, it is those who are marginalized for whatever reason who are more likely to respond to the Gospel of the restored Kingdom.

Ezra 2:50 the children of Asnah, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephisim- "Meunim" is literally 'from Maon', a location in the desert where Nabal and Abigail were from (1 Sam. 25:2). Perhaps some of their Gentile servants became Nethinim and remained faithful- despite all the bad examples they saw from God's ethnic people.

Ezra 2:51 the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur- "Hakupha" means bent or crooked; "Harhur" means 'inflamed'- suggesting as noted on :32,48,52 that it was those who had some physical infirmity who returned.

Ezra 2:52 the children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha- "Bazluth" means 'peeled skin'; see on :32. "Harsha" is 'magician', confirming the impression that those who returned weren't the religious zealous

but generally very secular people.

Ezra 2:53 the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah- These names are all non-Hebrew; the Nethinim were originally Gentile, and these ones appear to have retained that despite returning to the land. The question is whether they were as it were pushed or pulled to return to the land; see on :44.

Ezra 2:54 the children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha- These names could arguably include the 'Yah' suffix, although most of the Nethinim and even the Jews listed here don't have 'Yah' within them. They were of the Nethinim, Gentiles, who had retained their devotion to Yahweh despite being made servants of Yahweh's apostate people.

Ezra 2:55 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Hassophereth, the children of Peruda- As noted on :43, these appear to have been reckoned beneath the Nethinim. "They have been traditionally understood to be the descendants of those inhabitants of the land 'that were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites' of whom Solomon had hired 'bondservants' for the work of building his temple (1 Kings 5:13)". It was therefore the most despised classes who responded to the call of the Kingdom. And it is the same today.

Ezra 2:56 the children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel- "Jaalah" is the word for "profit" used of the idols whom Israel believed would profit them (Is. 44:9,10; 47:12; Jer. 2:8,11; 16:19 etc.). This again rather suggests that the majority of those who returned were secular folks who were not doing so from religious, spiritual motives but for secular reasons.

Ezra 2:57 the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth Hazzebaim, the children of Ami- Shephatiah, "Yah has judged", is one of the few names in these lists which includes 'Yah'. Amongst these largely secular people who returned (judging by their names) there were some who were doing so from spiritual reasons. But they were a minority. And that impression accords with the historical information about their later behaviour in the land as found in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi.

Ezra 2:58 All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred and ninety-two- This figure is exactly the same as that given in Neh. 7:60, whereas the numbers in the parallel record in Neh. 7 are often higher when it comes to the Jews who returned. I suggest that that was a list of those who began the journey, or expressed interest in it; whereas Ezra 2 is the list of those who completed it. And there was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today. But the despised Gentile classes of the Nethinim and Solomon's servants were actually more committed.

Ezra 2:59 These were those who went up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses, and their genealogy, whether they were of Israel- These people may have included Gentiles; for it is unlikely that many Jews apart from the Levites could prove their descent, and that is why those who returned are not listed according to their tribes. Indeed it would appear that the genealogical records were destroyed when the temple was burnt. So the reference here may be to those who lived near to the original encampments of the exiles who wanted to return with them. This had been the prophetic vision- that Judah and Israel would repent, Babylon would be judged and fall, and the repentant remnant of the Gentiles would return with the repentant ones of God's people to form a new, multiethnic people of God in His restored Kingdom. But the impenitence of God's people meant that things didn't work out like that. Babylon didn't "fall" in the way that was potentially possible, the majority of God's people chose to remain in exile. And only a handful of Gentiles returned, probably the poorest of the land, perhaps captives from other nations who had been grouped along with the Jews, and likely motivated by the chance of a better life.

Ezra 2:60 the children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two- As explained on :59, these were likely Gentiles, and their names suggest that. However, "Delaiah" means 'Yah has delivered', so perhaps this was a Gentile who wished to share in Yahweh's deliverance from Babylon / Persia.

Ezra 2:61 Of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name- Barzillai was famous in Israel from the times of David. This priestly family had taken the name of this family, seeking for kudos and prestige; and thereby had lost their priestly lineage.

Ezra 2:62 These sought their place among those who were registered by genealogy- Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

But they were not found: therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood- There is a clear connection here with Is. 43:28: "Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult". They were put forth "as polluted from the priesthood" (Ezra 2:62). This is tacit proof enough that the restoration from Babylon failed to be the potential restoration prophesied. Indeed, the behaviour of the Jews at that time attracted further curses and judgment.

Ezra 2:63 The governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things, until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim- This situation precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13: "Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things". The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. And this never happened. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfill Ezekiel 42:13. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

Ezra 2:64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty- As noted on :1, this was but a tiny minority of the 1 million or so exiles in Babylon / Persia; and the prophetic intention that the ten tribes returned at the same time was not realized, because they too preferred the life of exile from God rather than returning to Him.

Ezra 2:65 besides their male servants and their female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven: and they had two hundred singing men and singing women- 7337 servants for 42360 people (:64) suggests that on average each family had a servant. We therefore get the impression that those who returned weren't the poorest of society, although as noted with regards to the meanings of their names above in this chapter, many of them were probably slightly marginalized. They returned seeking material benefit (Hag. 1:9), as lower middle class

people often do; rather than seeking to do God's work. See on :67.

Ezra 2:66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six; their mules, two hundred and forty-five- See on :67. This picture of the Jews returning on various animals is to be connected with the prophecies of the restoration, where the leaders of the nations of their exile were to also make the journey to Zion, carrying the children of the Jews (Is. 49:22,23); and using all the animals here listed in order to bring the Jews back to Zion, and then help them rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Is. 60:4-10). But this is very different to the scene we have here; of a very few Gentiles returning with a few Jews (see on :59), and those Jews not even having enough animals for each of them to ride on (see on :67). Comparison with the prophecies of what was potentially possible makes for a rather sad impression. So much Divine potential was wasted; just as it is by the millions who refuse the call to the Kingdom today. See on :69.

Ezra 2:67 their camels, four hundred and thirty-five; their donkeys, six thousand seven hundred and twenty- Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the lower classes, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon. It would be fair to infer that only the lower class Jews returned from Babylon. The record in Ezra 2:64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities.

Ezra 2:68 Some of the heads of fathers' households, when they came to the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for God's house to set it up in its place- Note the stress on "some"; see on :52. It's stressed twice that only "some" of the returned exiles supported the work of the temple (Ezra 2:68-70)- which was supposed to be the main reason for their return. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies.

Ezra 2:69 they gave after their ability into the treasury of the work sixty-one thousand darics of gold, five thousand minas of silver and one hundred priests' garments- This may sound significant, but it is nothing compared to the entire wealth of the lands of their exile which was intended to be brought to Jerusalem at the restoration (Is. 60:5-10). See on :66.

Ezra 2:70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities- The priests in the restored Kingdom were to live in one specific area near the temple (Ez. 45:4), whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44). Note the word "some"; see on :68.

Ezra Chapter 3

Ezra 3:1 When the seventh month had come and the children of Israel were in the cities- The seventh month could have been the seventh month after they arrived. But at this time they kept the feast of tabernacles (:4), which was to be kept in the seventh month of the Jewish year, so that is probably the month in view here.

The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem- This seems to imply a strong unity amongst them; the same phrase is found in Jud. 20:11.

Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak stood up with his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers, and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God- "Rose up / stood up" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. Joshua and Zerubbabel between them were intended to be the priest and king of the restored kingdom, but when that didn't work out, Zechariah's prophecies seem to have envisaged the appearance of a singular king-priest. But this too didn't happen. God was trying by all means to bring about the reestablishment of the Kingdom despite so much human dysfunction and disinterest, just as He is today.

Note that Zerubbabel was the adopted son of Shealtiel, and only on that basis was reckoned his "son".

Ezra 3:3 In spite of their fear because of the peoples of the surrounding lands- Time and again, Isaiah's restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14; 59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme. Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah's promises (Nehemiah 6:14). And Isaiah further spoke to Judah's heart in Isaiah 51:12,13: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations [s.w. re. the foundation of the temple being laid] of the earth ['heaven and earth' often refers to the temple]; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?". The fact they did fear meant that they had forgotten Yahweh who was so eager to re-establish their Kingdom.

The restoration prophecies had stated clearly that the returned exiles would not be afraid. Jer. 30:10: "Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid". Isaiah's restoration prophecies contained not only many clear commands to *not fear* at the time of the restoration (Isaiah 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4), but also a clear statement that if they were truly the re-established Kingdom, they would not fear: "Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest [s.w. Zechariah 7:14 re. how Judah was 'tossed around' by the 70 years captivity] I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires...and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for *thou shalt not fear*: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee... and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Is. 54:11-14). But the adversaries to the rebuilding *did* make the returned exiles afraid (and also Neh. 6:9). Nehemiah exhorted the people *not* to be afraid perhaps on the basis of Jeremiah's words (Neh. 4:14). Their fear and problem-oriented view of life stopped the Kingdom bursting forth into their experience. That fear was rooted in an obsessive self-interest that eclipsed a true faith in that which is greater and larger than us as individuals. And so it can be with us.

They set the altar on its base- That is, they built it on its previous site.

And they offered burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, even burnt offerings morning and evening- These were the daily offerings commanded for each day under the law of Moses.

Ezra 3:4 They kept the feast of tents, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the ordinance, as the duty of every day required- This was in the "seventh month" (:1). Even with Ezekiel's prophecies behind him concerning "the prince", Zerubbabel was easily discouraged in the rebuilding, and needed the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to encourage him again. He kept the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4) but without dwelling in booths (Neh. 8:17)- i.e., half heartedly. He *could* have been Messiah, perhaps- he may well have been 30/33 at the time of the restoration (Mt. 1:12,13). When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring "nobles [an intensive plural, meaning 'the great noble']... and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21). Zerubbabel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such as God's enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh's eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man's failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities.

Ezra 3:5 and afterwards the continual burnt offering, the offerings of the new moons, of all the set feasts of Yahweh that were consecrated, and of each one who willingly offered a freewill offering to Yahweh- Their technical obedience in offering sacrifice was commendable, but it was not being done according to the commandments for the restored temple in Ez. 40-48. They were still attempting to keep the old covenant, the law of Moses; ignoring the plain teaching of Jeremiah that they had broken this, and were being offered a new covenant which was not at all identical to the old covenant. Their motivation was therefore religious, historical and cultural, rather than spiritual and based upon God's word.

Ezra 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh; but the foundation of Yahweh's temple was not yet laid- The impression given is that they focused upon the sacrifices rather than laying the foundations of the temple, which ought to have been laid out according to the dimensions clearly given in Ez. 40-48. The prophets had often reminded God's people that He was not so interested in sacrifices as in hearts broken in repentance; but their focus upon sacrifice and ritual reflected their lack of repentance.

Ezra 3:7 They also gave money to the masons, and to the carpenters. They also gave food, drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus King of Persia- They were consciously trying to imitate how Solomon had built the first temple. But instead they should have been seeking to build according to the dimensions and details of the plans given to them in Ez. 40-48. Their attempted replication of Solomon suggests they were rebuilding *his* temple rather than building the new structure of Ez. 40-48. Their motivation was in recreating their national past, following national heroes, rather than moving in line with the Spirit.

Haggai's prophecy can be dated quite precisely- it was given August-September 520 BC. This was harvest time. And at this very labour intensive season, where all hands had to be on deck out in the fields, the prophet called for a dedication of labour to building up God's house. Yet Judah were too concerned with their own harvests than the harvest of God's glory. They were asked to do something counter-instinctive- to take time out from harvest, and spend that time on building up God's house. And they failed the challenge. But it wasn't that they were simply lazy. Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet according to Ezra 3:7, the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where had the wood gone? Is the implication not that the leadership had used it for their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But this is what we are tempted to do, time and again- build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place. And even worse- Hag. 1:9 records that the people expected "much" harvest, and were disappointed at the poor yields in Palestine. This would confirm the suggestion that many of those Jews who did return from Babylon were amongst the poor in Jewish exile society, and returned in home for personal betterment- rather than because they wished to obey the call of the prophets and establish God's glory in the land. That's a sober warning for all of us who may go through an external appearance of zeal for our God, whilst having very selfish and human motives underneath.

Ezra 3:8 Now in the second year of their coming to God's house at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all

those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work of Yahweh's house- I noted on Ezra 2 how very few Levites there were who returned. Only 341 members of Levitical families are listed in Ezra 2:40-42; and if only males over 20 were counted, that total number may have been as low as only 30- and that is assuming all the Levites who returned were obedient to this command, none were sick or handicapped etc.

Ezra 3:9 Then Jeshua stood with his sons and his brothers, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, having the oversight of the workmen in God's house: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brothers the Levites- This was all a far cry from the restoration prophecies of the Gentiles carrying the repentant Jews back to Judah and then themselves working to rebuild the temple for the Jews (Is. 60:10; Zech. 6:15). The Jews had to do so themselves, and as noted on :8, there were very few of them doing the work.

Ezra 3:10 When the builders laid the foundation of Yahweh's temple, they set the priests in their clothing with trumpets, with the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Yahweh, according to the directions of David king of Israel- They were attempting to restore what had once been, as David had established things, from nationalistic and cultural reasons, just as they tried to replicate Solomon's usage of cedars from Lebanon. Instead they should have been trying to rebuild the temple according to the commands given in Ez. 40-48. This would have been why some wept and others shouted for joy in :12. The scene would not have been that impressive, for they only had 100 sets of priestly clothing (Ezra 2:69). The system of praise instituted by David would have only been very poorly replicated. Ezra 2:41 says that only 128 people from the singing family of Asaph returned, and not all of them would have been adults. This was very poor response. We note that apparently the famous singing families of Heman and Jeduthin didn't return (1 Chron. 25:1).

Ezra 3:11 They sang to one another in praising and giving thanks to Yahweh: For He is good, for His grace endures forever toward Israel. All the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh had been laid- The "shouts" with which it was laid were the "shouts" of the foundation ceremony described in Zech. 4:7. This passage describes the Messianic kingdom of God which could have been restored in Israel at the time. But as explained on :12, the shouts were tinged with unreality, because it was clear that what had been built was not in obedience to the dimensions and system of Ez. 40-48, and was not even the size of the previous temple which the older men remembered from their youth in Jerusalem. Such great potential was precluded by Judah's limited vision. We notice that the young and old didn't rejoice together- the old men wept at how small the temple was compared even with Solomon's, whilst the younger ones rejoiced. Yet the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:13 had spoken of how "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together".

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice- The language of Israel's return from captivity as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel all has evident reference to the second coming and the final establishment of the Kingdom. It isn't just that Israel's return under Ezra and Zerubbabel was a type of that final homecoming. It could have been the Kingdom- had they obeyed the prophecies. It was all about a potential Kingdom of God. But they were too caught up with their own self-interest, with building their own houses rather than God's; and so it was all deferred. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion (Zech. 8:3)- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9); Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar). And the old men wept at the fact that

the glory of the new house was *less than* that of the earlier one.

Is. 65:17-19 describes the new creation of Zion as it was possible at the restoration, when the former heavens and earth would not come into mind. The former "heavens" of Solomon's temple *did* come to mind, and the old men mourned because of how far superior the former had been (Ezra 3:12). The voice of weeping *was* heard in the streets of Zion, as Judah mourned for their sins of marrying the surrounding nations and breaking the Sabbath.

Many also shouted aloud for joy- The returnees were to lift up their voice with joy at Zion's restoration. But at the very humble dedication of the temple, the younger people lifted up their voice with joy (Is. 40:9 same words), but the older men wept, as the temple was not even as great as Solomon's, and certainly not that commanded in Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Ezra 3:13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard far away- "The people" may refer to the people of the land. They did not get a clear message, for it could not be discerned; when instead the joy of the restored Zion was intended to be a witness to the Gentiles. Instead they heard a sound which was a mixture of weeping and rejoicing.

Ezra Chapter 4

Ezra 4:1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple to Yahweh, the God of Israel- This opposition was real and actual; LXX "And they that afflicted Juda and Benjamin...". They were opposed to the newcomers and were against the idea of a temple being built. This opposition was not at all the scenario presented in the restoration prophets. I noted on the preceding Ezra 3:8-12 that the returnees had no intention of building the city or temple structure according to the dimensions commanded them in Ez. 40-48. And they had rejected the offer of a new covenant deal, instead attempting to still keep the old covenant, however imperfectly, even though they had broken it. And so God as it were reflected His opposition to them through these local adversaries. But as the vision of Zech. 3:1 makes clear, if they had faith then even this 'satan' or adversary would have been removed.

Ezra 4:2 then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' households and said to them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as you do; and we sacrifice to Him since the days of Esar Haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here- I will discuss on :3 as to whether or not this refusal of Gentile help was correct. These people were Gentiles who had been brought to Palestine after the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes. But the desolated land meant lions running wild, and they assumed this was because they were not worshipping the "god of the land", Yahweh (2 Kings 17:26). And so they had been taught to worship Yahweh as the ten tribes had- which meant worshipping the local idols in the name of Yahweh worship. The Jews in Babylon were doing the same, as Ezekiel's criticisms of them make clear. And we note how later when Persia took over, both Esther and Mordecai had names reflective of idol worship. So indeed they did worship Yahweh "as you do". So the objection to working with them was not on religious grounds.

Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel, said to them- Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: "Judah and... Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the "David my servant" who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2). And yet he let the baton drop. The prophecies and potentials were therefore reapplied and rescheduled for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves together will build to Yahweh, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us- See on :2. It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6:15 and in Isaiah 60:10, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion. As with some of us, their refusal to allow "the adversaries of Judah" (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]... Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and them as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (Is. 60:7).

Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building- Hands becoming feeble / weakened is the phrase used of Divine judgment (Is. 13:7; Jer. 6:24; 49:24; 50:43; Ez. 7:17). The restored Zion would not have such weakened hands (Zeph. 3:16). The builders were 'terrified' (Heb.). Clearly, the rebuilding was not even beginning with God's blessing but rather His displeasure.

"The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things in the kingdom of God which could have

been restored in Israel (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not.

Ezra 4:5 And hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia- Yahweh "performs the counsel" or "purpose" of rebuilding Jerusalem (Is. 44:26). But the Samaritan opposition sought to frustrate Judah's "purpose" / counsel (Ezra 4:5 s.w.), and succeeded. Yahweh allowed Himself to be limited within how His people performed His purpose. His 'purpose' is therefore conditional upon those whom He allows to fulfill it.

Ezra 4:6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem- RVmg. "Xerxes". The well-known Xerxes, the son of Darius, who reigned 20 years (BC 485–465). He is generally identified with the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther.

Ezra 4:7 In the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his companions, to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in Syrian, and set forth in the Syrian language- This Artaxerxes could have been the son of Ahasuerus / Xerxes of :6; so this would refer to a second letter to that in :6. Or it could be the same king; for 'Arta' means 'great', 'the great Xerxes', of :6 (see note there). The reference to it being "set forth" suggests Ezra saw it and remembered it exactly as seen, as if traumatized by it.

Ezra 4:8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this way- Rehum and Shimshai were the local Persian officials, who now took the side of the Samaritan opposition of :7, probably having been bribed or manipulated by them. It could be that they wrote separately, or were giving a stamp of approval to the letter of :7.

Ezra 4:9 then Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions, the Dinaites, and the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehaites, the Elamites- This list of nine nations along with the local "people of the land" makes ten nations. This is not a literal number because there were other nations there too (:10), but we note a similar ten neighbouring nations against Israel in Ps. 83 and Ez. 38, and these are the historical basis for the ten toes of Dan. 2 and the ten horns of the beast.

Ezra 4:10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar brought over, and set in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River, and so forth, wrote- Assur-bani-pal, the great Assyrian king, is probably the king in view; for it was he had conquered and deported the peoples of :9. "He was the only Assyrian king who captured Susa and could carry off 'Susanchites'; no king so fully deserved the titles of 'great and noble'; this name ('Assur the father of the son') by a strong contraction of the middle word, is not so far removed from the sound of 'Osnappar', especially if the final 'l' of 'pal' is changed to 'r' (cf. 'Porus' for 'Pul', or 'Babiru' for 'Babilu'), and the 'r' of 'Assur' is weakened to 'n' (cf. Nebuchadrezzar and Nebuchadnezzar)".

Ezra 4:11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent to Artaxerxes the king: Your servants the men beyond the River, and so forth- Zech. 9:8-10 is a prophecy of Zerubbabel or Joshua which had to have its real fulfilment deferred until the coming of Jesus: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass [Did Zerubbabel / Joshua like Nehemiah enter Jerusalem on a donkey?]. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem [the opposing Samaritans], and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth". This latter phrase contrasts with the repeated reminder that the Persians had dominion "on this side the river" (Ezra 4:10,11,16; 5:3,6; 6:13; 8:36; Neh. 3:7). The coming King (and Joshua was prophesied as a king) was to free Judah from Persia's dominion, and establish God's Kingdom, with boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem (Zech. 8:5).

Ezra 4:12 Be it known to the king, that the Jews who came up from you have come to us to Jerusalem; they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and repaired the foundations- There had been three or four revolts against Babylon (2 Kings 24:1,9,10,20; 25:1-30) and two against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7; 2 Chron. 33:11). The walls were not finished until Nehemiah's time, so the accusation was false and exaggerated. It was designed to provoke the Persian authorities, and to give the impression that the Jews were far exceeding the instructions of Cyrus's decree, which limited them to the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ezra 4:13 Be it known now to the king that if this city is built, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and in the end it will be hurtful to the kings- "Tribute" = the contribution of provinces / districts to the central budget; "custom" = tax on goods or on agricultural produce; "toll" = travel tolls levied for maintenance of the infrastructure and roads.

Ezra 4:14 Now because we eat the salt of the palace, and it is not right for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and informed the king- Throughout the Biblical record, the kings of Babylon and Persia are presented as naive despots whose pride makes them easy prey for vain flatterers. Those writing the letter had themselves been the enemies of the empire not so long ago, and their complaints surely ought to have led to an investigation which revealed the very recent decree of Cyrus.

Ezra 4:15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers: so you shall find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces, and that they have made rebellion within the same city from old time; for which cause this city was laid waste- "From old time" was only 70 years previously; any serious investigation would have sensed major exaggeration in the complaints, and sought to investigate deeper before making a rash decision. But again the rulers are presented as always acting too hastily and being prone to flattery. For the abiding lesson from them which the Bible presents is their pride.

Ezra 4:16 We inform the king that if this city be built and the walls finished, because of this you shall have no portion beyond the River- We note the contradiction with their statement in :12 that the walls were already finished. Their exaggerations were such that they couldn't be hidden, as with all lies against God's people.

Ezra 4:17 Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River: Peace, and so forth- We notice that the opposition was based in Samaria, in the former ten tribe area; and they opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the people of Judah. Not all the ten tribes were taken into captivity. Those who remained still may have retained this sectarian spirit, believing Samaria to be the preferred dwelling of God rather than Jerusalem. The Samaritan opposition may well have been fuelled by those local Israelites. This is all so far from the prophetic vision of a repentant Judah and Israel being united together with repentant Gentiles in a new multiethnic people of God in the reestablished Kingdom. Human pride, impenitence and sectarian thinking precluded so much that was possible then, just as it does today.

Ezra 4:18 The letter which you sent to us has been plainly read before me- The Biblical record again seems to emphasize the relative simplicity of these powerful kings; for he was illiterate and needed to have the letter read before him (as in Esther 6:1).

Ezra 4:19 I decreed, and search has been made, and it is found that this city of old time has made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it- The Babylonian records would only have covered the rebellions of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:1,10,20). And these were only around 80 years previously. So the king is presented as making an exaggerated response just as the complaints had been exaggerated. And apparently they didn't search in the record house in Babylon mentioned in Ezra 5:17.

Ezra 4:20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the country beyond the River; and tribute, custom, and toll, was paid to them- Again an exaggeration, as this was only really true in Solomon's

time. But the king wishes to give a nod toward the apparent concern about loss of taxation.

Ezra 4:21 Make a decree now to cause these men to cease, and that this city not be built, until a decree shall be made by me- The king is presented as hopelessly proud, speaking of how he made a decree to research the matter (:19) and now decreed the work should stop until he were to make another decree. The decree to rebuild Zion had of course been given by God, and in this we see the word of God and the word of man compared. The very decrees the king so prided himself in making were all subject to God's decrees, finally.

Ezra 4:22 Take heed that you not be slack herein: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?- The king surely realized that the authors of the letter had their own agenda as to why they wanted the rebuilding to cease. And so this urging of speedy response is clearly tongue in cheek. He knows this is what they are wanting to hear.

Ezra 4:23 Then when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their companions, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power- LXX "with horses and force". The broken down state of the walls in Nehemiah's time may partly have been due to this use of force and power, which implies significant military strength. Zech. 4:6 is Yahweh's response to this: "Not by might (s.w. "force") nor by power, but by My Spirit". The Jews were not in step with God's Spirit; for His work cannot be hindered like this. The whole incident was to make the Jews consider their motives in this work and to perceive how they were largely doing it all for themselves and their own religious agendas rather than for God. Our work for the Lord is often likewise paused at times, so that we might consider the same question- as to whether we are doing it in the flesh or in His Spirit.

Ezra 4:24 Then ceased the work of God's house which is at Jerusalem; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia- see on Zech. 3:1. The statement in Ezra 5:16 that they had been continuously building it would suggest that some faithful ones did continue building after they were told to stop, although the majority gave up. God will confirm us in the way we chose to take. Ezra 4 says that the reason the temple was not further rebuilt was because of the decree of Artaxerxes suspending the building program; then Haggai came and told Israel that the temple wasn't built because they had preferred to build their ceiled houses (Ezra 5:1). So God had confirmed the people in the way they chose. They preferred to build their houses rather than His, so He stopped them from building His house altogether until they wholeheartedly recommitted themselves to Him. Throughout this period of their history, Israel knew what they ought to do, and they knew very well their weaknesses. They should *all* have returned from Babylon; but many remained, although they gave those who returned material support.

Ezra Chapter 5

Ezra 5:1 Now the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem; in the name of the God of Israel they prophesied to them- see on Ezra 4:24; Hag. 1:2. These prophets were critical of the returned exiles, and yet it seems they were responded to; because despite the legal problems, they arose and built.

Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah returned from Babylon and were intended to be leaders who would crown Joshua / Jesus as the Messiah-Priest-Branch who would rebuild Jerusalem. But nothing is heard of them further. Perhaps it is to them that Zech. 11:8 refers: "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them... then said I [on God's behalf], I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die". They had gone into captivity because of poor shepherds, and now at their return they again lacked men willing to be their Saviours; and God is saying that He would not do the shepherding job which He had delegated to others. It could be that Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah all died in one month as a result of Zechariah's prophecy at the time of Ezra 5:1. Or it could be that the three potential shepherds who failed were Zerubbabel, Joshua and Nehemiah.

Ezra 5:2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build God's house which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them- The fact Ezekiel gave prophecies- or what sound like prophecies- of a restored temple doesn't mean that they would come true regardless of Israel's obedience. 19th century Christians looked at the prophecies relating to Israel's return to the land and worked to enable them to happen- by financially supporting the Jews etc. It is therefore no mere coincidence that we read that the prophets who 'prophesied' of the rebuilding of the temple also helped physically to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:2). They worked for the fulfilment of their prophecies.

Ezra 5:3 At the same time came to them Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai, and their companions, and said thus to them, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall?- Tattenai was in charge of the entire area west of the Euphrates and was based in Damascus. He came specially to Jerusalem to find out first hand what the situation was.

We know that finally, the work of rebuilding wasn't done in obedience to the commands in Ez. 40-48 and the envisioned rebuilt temple and reestablished Kingdom didn't come about. The essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days, but they were also reapplied and reinterpreted with reference to the building of a spiritual house for God to indwell. We therefore perceive a similarity here with the attempts of local authorities to close down the preaching of the early apostles of the Lord Jesus. They too were asked in whose name they were operating (Acts 4:7) and they likewise continued in God's work despite being told not to. We conclude that the work of building God's house was now being understood in terms of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and baptizing people into the Lord Jesus. See on Ezra 6:6,7.

Ezra 5:4 Then we told them in this way, what the names of the men were who were making this building- It seems from :5 that the names of the "elders of the Jews" were given (see too :9,10).

Ezra 5:5 But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not make them cease, until the matter should come to Darius, and then answer should be returned by letter concerning it- "The eye of their God" may refer to the Angel giving them power to continue the work. Again we note the similarities with the preaching of the apostles, who refused to cease the work of the new temple when ordered to (see on :3).

Ezra 5:6 This is the copy of the letter that Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai, and his companions the Apharsachites, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king- As noted on :3, Tattenai was in charge of the entire area west of the Euphrates and was based in Damascus. He came specially to Jerusalem to find out first hand what the situation was. It seems from Ezra 4:9 that the Apharsachites were a favoured group of exiles who collaborated with the Persians in maintaining order west of the Euphrates.

Ezra 5:7 They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus: To Darius the king, all peace- The inspired author of Ezra apparently had access to this correspondence; it likely was in the public domain, as it were, and not confidential.

Ezra 5:8 Be it known to the king, that we went into the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is built with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls; and this work goes on with diligence and prospers in their hands- These impartial observers couldn't but note that despite the command to cease the work, the work was 'prospering'. This prospering was from God (s.w. Neh. 1:11; 2:20). No device formed against the program of rebuilding the Kingdom would prosper (Is. 54:17 s.w.), and the Divine word of restoration would prosper (Is. 55:11 s.w.). Any attempt to bring about the intended reestablishment of the Kingdom would be prospered by God; the fact that ultimately didn't happen was because the exiles ceased to make use of His potential assistance.

Ezra 5:9 Then we asked those elders, and said to them thus, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall?- Again we note the similarities with the preaching of the apostles, who were demanded to provide human authority for their work of building the spiritual temple, and refused to cease the work of that new temple when ordered to (see on :3).

Ezra 5:10 We asked them their names also, to inform you that we might write the names of the men who were at their head- This demand for names was answered, apparently, by the statement that "We are the servants of... God" (:11). It recalls John the Baptist being asked for his name, and responding that he was merely "a voice" in obedience to God's voice.

Ezra 5:11 Thus they returned us answer saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and are building the house that was built these many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished- See on :10. They were unashamed of their connection with the previous Israel, which had been researched as rebellious and the land of "great kings" (Ezra 4:20). It's almost as if they allude to that. They were unashamedly about reestablishing the Kingdom of God in Israel, and they were not pretending otherwise.

Ezra 5:12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon- This confession of sin and just punishment was not easily forthcoming. For Ezekiel had argued with the exiles against their view that the whole exile had been due to Yahweh being too heavy handed with His people. But it seems there was at least a minority who recognized the guilt of their fathers, or at least did in words. But it appears there was not the personal repentance required to activate the huge potential plans God had to reestablish His Kingdom at the time.

Ezra 5:13 But in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree to build this house of God- Cyrus was king of Persia, but they call him "king of Babylon" because he took over Babylon and therefore governance of the Jews.

Ezra 5:14 The gold and silver vessels also of God's house, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought into the temple of Babylon, those 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- This "Sheshbazzar" may be a title, and could refer to Nehemiah or Zerubbabel; for in Ezra 1:8 he is defined as "prince of Judah". The "governor" was Zerubbabel in Hag. 1:1 (s.w. "governor"); see on :16.

Ezra 5:15 and he said to him, 'Take these vessels, go, put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let God's house be built in its place' - The problem with this command is that it involved building the temple according to the dimensions of Cyrus (see on Ezra 6:3) which were far smaller than those given in Ezekiel 40-48. Building it "in its place", as if restoring what once was, precluded fulfilling the Kingdom vision of Ezekiel. And so the preference of the word of man (Cyrus) over that of God through Ezekiel precluded the fulfilment of the Kingdom then.

Ezra 5:16 Then the same Sheshbazzar came, and laid the foundations of God's house which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now has it been in building, and yet it is not completed- It was Zerubbabel who laid the foundations in Ezra 3, so it seems he was the Sheshbazzar; see on :14. Their statement that they had been continuously building it would suggest that some faithful ones did continue building after they were told to stop, although the majority gave up (Ezra 4:24).

Ezra 5:17 Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter- The records quickly searched in Ezra 4:19 would have been kept in a different location. We suspect that Tattenai was in fact aware of the decree of Cyrus. See on Ezra 6:2.

Ezra Chapter 6

Ezra 6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the archives, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon- Apparently nothing was found and if Darius was the least bit against the Jews, he would have said so. But he continued the search until the document was found at Achmetha (:2). Darius had married two of the daughters of Cyrus, so he was likely eager to continue the wishes of Cyrus. The internal correspondences within the record (see on :2) are significant, and give the ring of truth to the claim that this is indeed the inspired word of God and not something written by secular men long after the events.

Ezra 6:2 There was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media- It had apparently been moved from the record house in Babylon where it had previously been (Ezra 5:17).

A scroll, and therein was thus written for a record- The reference to a scroll fits with what is known from archaeology: that the Persians used parchment or vellum for their records, not baked clay, like the Assyrians and Babylonians, or paper, like the Egyptians.

Ezra 6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree: Concerning God's house at Jerusalem, let the house be built, the place where they offer sacrifices, and let its foundations be strongly laid; its height sixty cubits, and its breadth sixty cubits- Ezekiel's temple was 500 cubits by 500 cubits. The problem with this command is that it involved building the temple according to the dimensions of Cyrus which were far smaller than those given in Ezekiel 40-48. Building it "in its place" (Ezra 5:15), as if restoring what once was, precluded fulfilling the Kingdom vision of Ezekiel. And so the preference of the word of man (Cyrus) over that of God through Ezekiel precluded the fulfilment of the Kingdom then.

The temple which Cyrus commanded the Jews to build in Jerusalem was of different (smaller) dimensions to that of Ezekiel (Ezra 6:3,4). Two possibilities arise here. Either Israel chose to listen to the words of man rather than those of God through Ezekiel; or (more likely) God reduced the dimensions, knowing that this was within the capability of Israel to achieve. In any case, Israel were encouraged by Divine prophesy in the work of building according to the pattern which Cyrus had given (Ezra 6:14). God is so eager to work with men that He will work with us on our lower level, even if it is a level lower than what we are capable of. And so we should treat our weaker brethren. See on :9.

We could also note that Cyrus only defined the height and breadth, but not the length. This may have been purposeful; to allow the Jews to themselves decide upon this.

Ezra 6:4 with three courses of great stones, and a course of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house- Great stones are literally rolled stones, stones of greater size than could be carried. The LXX interprets this as meaning four storeys high, three storeys being built of stone, and one of timber. Not all the expenses were in fact met from the king (Ezra 2:69; 3:7). At every moment in the whole story we find potential promises not realized, for whatever reason.

Ezra 6:5 Also let the gold and silver vessels of God's house, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored, and brought again to the temple which is at Jerusalem, each one to its place; and you shall put them in God's house- The Medo-Persians would have recalled that they captured Babylon at the very moment when the Babylonian king was blasphemously using these vessels in a drunken feast (Dan. 5:2,3). Their superstitious thinking would therefore have actually wanted to return these vessels to their appropriate deity. And again, in all these things God's hand was at work; there is an internal credibility within the entire account, as noted on :2.

Ezra 6:6 Now therefore, Tattenai, governor beyond the River, Shetharbozenai, and your companions the Apharsachites, who are beyond the River, you must not hinder this matter- This continues the points of similarity with the attempts to stop the apostles building the spiritual house of God. For this is in essence the same advice as Gamaliel gives in Acts 5:39, warning not to hinder God's work. See on Ezra 5:3.

Ezra 6:7 Leave 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 in its place- The LXX is pretty much quoted by Gamaliel in Acts 5:38: "Refrain from these men

and *let them alone*; if *this work* be of men, it will come to nothing". As explained on Ezra 5:3, the work of building God's house is reinterpreted with reference to the people of God building His spiritual house through preaching in the Christian dispensation. And the apostles who were being persecuted by the elders of the Jews and the leader of the Jewish council in the first century- are thereby presented, in the analogy, to the true elders of the new Israel that the Lord Jesus had founded.

Ezra 6:8 Moreover I make a decree what you shall do to these elders of the Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the River, expenses be given with all diligence to these men, that they be not hindered- Isaiah makes many allusions to Israel's leaving Egypt. The Jews in Babylon were intended to live out the type by leaving Babylon and making the wilderness journey to the land- and God helped them in it. For example, Ezra records how God moved the local authorities to pronounce that the residents around the returning exiles should give them silver, gold and goods. This was an exact re-living of how Israel left Egypt with Egypt's gold and silver (Ex. 12:35). Yet most of the Jews didn't want to return, they didn't want to live out the type.

Ezra 6:9 That which they have need of, both young bulls, and rams, and lambs, for burnt offerings to the God of heaven; also wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the word of the priests who are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail- Absolutely everything physical which was required for obedience to the law was to be provided. The lesson is that if we wish to live the kingdom life and build that kingdom, lack of resources can never ultimately be cited as a reason for disobedience. We must note however that the Jews had broken the old covenant, and had been offered a new covenant deal with God in Jer. 33 and Ez. 20. They apparently rejected that and still tried to keep the old covenant. And yet clearly God worked with them through that immaturity. He comes over as ever eager to work with His people at whatever level they are at. See on :3.

Ezra 6:10 that they may offer sacrifices of pleasant aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and of his sons- Let's remember that the exiles were symbols of us. We in this life are passing through "the time of our exile" (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV). Paul exhorts us to pray for kings and governors, in the very language of the LXX in Ezra 6:10 about the returnees praying in the new temple for the kings of Babylon. Again, as noted on Ezra 5:3, the whole narrative of the rebuilding of the temple and Kingdom is applied to the work of the Christian church in this age.

Ezra 6:11 Also I have made a decree, that whoever shall alter this word, let a beam be pulled out from his house, and let him be lifted up and fastened thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this- The condemnation upon those who tried to change the decree was severe, and clearly had in view the local Samaritan opposition to the Jews. However the idea of cursing those who changed the word of a king was still alluding to the pagan idea that kings were divine, and therefore to try to change their word was an act of blasphemy. This pagan concept reveals how far the Persian kings were from Yahweh; and yet He worked their arrogance in order to enable His people to get on with His work- if they wished to.

Ezra 6:12 and the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow all kings and peoples who shall put forth their hand to alter the same, to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with all diligence- The kings and peoples likely to want to overthrow Jerusalem at that point were those who were going to be opposed to Persia; and so this decree was in its own way a restatement of Persian dominance in the area. To alter the word of Persian command (:11) is seen here (in the AV) as seeking to alter the house of God. They wished to perceive the rebuilding of Yahweh's temple as a function of their word of command concerning it. The rebuilding of the temple was to be the result of Yahweh's prophetic word; but He allowed others to perceive that it was their word which was causing the fulfilment.

Ezra 6:13 Then Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, Shetharbozenai, and their companions, because Darius the king had sent a decree, did accordingly with all diligence- See on :3. Their diligent ('speedy') obedience to the decree of Darius was meant to be an example to the Jews to respond speedily and diligently to the Divine decree to rebuild Jerusalem. For that was what was behind the decrees of Cyrus and Darius. The two decrees, of God and man, are paralleled in :14.

Ezra 6:14 The elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia- As noted on :13, the two decrees, of God and man, are paralleled. As Gentile men like Tattenai diligently responded to the human decree, so God's people should have done moreso to the Divine decree. The real reason for prospering in fulfilling the decree was through the Divine word through Haggai and Zechariah- which was in fact highly critical of the Jews, with Haggai accusing them of not continuing to rebuild the temple because of their desire to build their own homes, with elegant ceilings, whilst God's house remained waste. They were only using the command to stop the work as an excuse for their own laziness and lack of commitment. That hard hitting message apparently was responded to. For here we read that the work prospered because of it.

Ezra 6:15 This house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king- Hag. 1:15 says that the work began on the 24th of Elul in the second year of Darius. From Zerubbabel's laying of the foundation (Ezra 3:10), 21 years had passed. Since the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had challenged the people to repent and get to work, it took exactly four years, five months and ten days to complete it. This shows a commendable speed of response.

Ezra 6:16 The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy- Clearly seeking to emulate Solomon's grandiose dedication of his temple; but they were missing the point that Isaiah had made, that God doesn't delight in huge numbers of sacrifices as Solomon made, but rather seeks humble hearts. The reference to "Israel" rather than Judah connects with the offering of 12 goats for the 12 tribes in :17. The prophetic vision was that both Israel and Judah would be reunited in this restored Kingdom. But the majority of the ten tribes didn't return, and relatively few of the 1 million of Judah in Babylon. This feast of dedication is that of Jn. 10:22, and the LXX calls Psalms 145-148 the Psalm of Haggai and Zechariah- so they may have been used at this time.

Ezra 6:17 They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel- As when the tabernacle was dedicated (Num. 7:87; 8:17). Again they were missing the point- the old covenant was over. And any attempt at emulating Solomon's ridiculously grandiose offering of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep to dedicate his temple was also being made in the wrong spirit; see on :16.

“The Jews” is used synonymously with “Israelite” (Nehemiah 2:10; 4:1; 5:1,8; 7:73; 12:47). 12 he-goats and 12 bulls were offered for “all Israel” in Ezra 6:17; 8:35. But still Judah and Israel remained divided; and no “prince” arose to fulfill the prophecies. Israel and Judah were to become one nation in the land, “and my servant David shall be a prince in the midst of them” (Ez. 37:16-24). This is clearly the same “prince” as referred to in Ezekiel 45-48. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 30:9 speaks of a returned Judah serving “David their king, whom I shall raise up unto them”- implying that David would have been resurrected at the restoration, if all had gone according to what was possible. Some of the ten tribes did return with Judah but the scale of prophesied reunion was simply not achieved, and the offering of the 12 goats was therefore but external symbolism.

Ezra 6:18 They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses- But as noted on Ezra 2, only four of the 24 courses returned. And hardly any Levites. Their attempts to keep the old covenant were compromised; and yet they had been told in Ezekiel and Jeremiah that they had hopelessly broken that covenant, and needed to accept the new covenant, which they stubbornly refused to do.

Ezra 6:19 The children of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month- It seems they were proud of their technical obedience to the old covenant; see on :18. At this point, the book of Esther reverts to Hebrew from Chaldee (which began to be used in Ezra 4:18).

Ezra 6:20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure- Ez. 36:24-29 had prophesied: “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into

your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh". The captives were taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:20; Neh. 12:30). But they became un-cleansed through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Neh. 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be "cleansed" again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will. And so some have misunderstood the operation of God's Spirit in our own days. But although not directly stated, the promise of entry into the new covenant, whereby God would encourage obedience through the work of His Spirit, was conditional. Judah could have entered the new covenant there and then, with all its requirements for a Messiah figure to abrogate the Mosaic law. But they turned back to their uncleannesses, they would not keep God's statutes, and their potential Messiah figures failed to appear. Yet again, the promise of entry into a new covenant was deferred, to be fulfilled in a new Israel who are sprinkled through the waters of baptism. The promise was fulfilled, but in a far different context to that intended.

And they killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brothers the priests, and for themselves- The Mosaic legislation was that each head of house should kill the Passover. But they now considered that only the clean could kill the Passover, and the Levites were supposed to be super clean- even though we are soon to read that some of them were so uncommitted to Yahweh that they had married Gentiles. So their zeal for technical, casuistic purity meant they ended up breaking the law, as has so often been seen amongst God's people.

Ezra 6:21 The children of Israel who had come again out of the captivity- Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 28:3,4,6; 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfilment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). The very same word used by Joel [translated "bring again"] is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). Joel 3, however, speaks from the perspective that Judah would be 'brought again' from Babylon under Ezra; and then Joel 3:2 "I will also gather all nations...and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land".

And all such as had separated themselves to them from the filthiness of the nations of the land, to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel, ate- They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Neh. 10:28).

But the reference is probably to Gentiles keeping the Passover along with Israel. We notice that there is no mention of their being circumcised to do so. I have suggested elsewhere that the command for only the circumcised to partake of it was relevant only to the first Passover, as later in the Mosaic law and Jewish practice, all of one mind with Israel were welcome to partake of it. And this has relevance to the openness of the breaking of bread service.

However it is the Jews who are described as needing to separate themselves from the filthiness of the nations of the land (Ezra 9:1; 10:11). Perhaps the category here referred to those Jews who had remained in the land throughout the exile, and now separated themselves from the idolatry of the land.

Ezra 6:22 and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for Yahweh had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of God's house, the God of Israel- This verse emphasizes the direct work of God on human hearts (as in 1 Kings 18:37; Mal. 4:6): making them joyful, turning the heart of the king, and strengthening their work for Him. Despite their many weaknesses as discussed in the previous commentary, God was eager to work with them. Although they had not accepted the new

covenant, with its promise of the Spirit in their hearts, He still worked directly upon their hearts in confirming them in the way they had apparently chosen.

Ezra Chapter 7

Ezra 7:1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah- We appear to have a gap of 58 years covered by "after these things". Artaxerxes was the son of Xerxes, the king at the time of Esther. The book of Esther closes with the Jews popular and wealthy. This was surely the real reason why so few wanted to return. Ezra is to be commended for perceiving the need to leave that comfortable society and return to Zion.

Seraiah was High-priest in the days of king Zedekiah and was slain at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21). So immediately we see that generations are omitted here, as often in the Biblical genealogies.

Ezra 7:2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub- There is reason to think that it could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and the temple prophecies would fit perfectly into this context. Thus Ezekiel emphasized that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (Ez. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); and it was surely not incidental that Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok (Ezra 7:2). He was in a position to fulfill those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. See on :27.

Ezra 7:3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth- 15 names are listed between Ezra and Aaron- covering about 1000 years. Clearly many generations were omitted. We note there are 26 names listed between Zerubbabel (a generation or two before Ezra) and Nashon a contemporary of Aaron, in 1 Chron. 2:10-15; 3:1-19). Some details of the omitted generations are found in 1 Chron. 9:10,11; Neh. 11:11. Why was that information not included here? Perhaps because the intention was to focus upon various individuals who were historically known as involved in temple and priestly work, as if to really emphasize how Ezra was qualified for his work through being part of a long line of such workers. Thus Azariah is mentioned in 1 Chron. 6:10 as 'having executed the priest's office in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem'.

Ezra 7:4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki- Ezra's genealogy is carefully traced back to Aaron, because there were some who could not prove their genealogy at the time. If indeed the genealogical records were destroyed when the temple was sacked, we wonder how he actually managed to prove such a long genealogy.

Ezra 7:5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest- Ezra's great grandfather had been High Priest (:1), and he could trace his descent right back to Aaron. He was really well qualified to be the next high priest. The fact he wasn't could imply there was some degree of internal politics going on, or he failed to rise up to the call; and so the prophecies of a Messianic high priest in the restored Kingdom were left unfulfilled.

Ezra 7:6 this Ezra went up from Babylon: and he was a willing scribe in the law of Moses, which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given- The Hebrew word for "scribe" doesn't simply mean one who writes down or copies. It carries the idea of publishing, teaching, openly declaring- and is the word used in passages like Is. 43:21 "shew forth My praise". Ezra was an enthusiastic teacher of the law of Moses, and he wanted the returned exiles to be obedient to the old covenant and thereby be blessed. We might note however that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had made clear that the old covenant had been broken with Judah; and they had been offered a new covenant with those who repented, involving the gift of the Spirit and inclusion of any Gentiles who wished to accept it. So Ezra's passion for the old covenant was to some degree zeal not according to knowledge. He was missing the point of the wonderful offer of the new covenant, and not giving due weight to God's statements in the prophets that the old covenant was effectively over. And yet despite this wrong focus upon law and traditional positions, God clearly worked with Ezra.

And the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of Yahweh his God on him- The hand of God operating on human hearts is a great theme of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was the outworking of grace and the gift / work of the Spirit. For the human spirit is primarily where God's Spirit works.

Ezra 7:7 There went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters and the Nethinim, to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king- These are the same six categories who had returned with Zerubbabel initially (Ezra 2:70). But the order is different. Here, the first category is the ordinary

people; whereas before it was the priests and Levites who were listed first. This may be read as positive, in that the ordinary people were now responding; or negative, in that the priests were less responsive than they had been.

Ezra 7:8 He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king- This was according to Yahweh's "hand" (:6). When Nehemiah speaks of Judah having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10), he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7).

Ezra 7:9 For on the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon; and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God on him- The continual reference to the hand of God in Ezra is another way of saying that God was acting through His Spirit. There was (and is) a power higher than that of human endeavour, a hidden hand, which alone makes our way to the Kingdom ultimately prosperous; and our salvation therefore by grace rather than our own device.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances- The compelling hand of God (:9) was in response to Ezra's desire in his heart to do God's law and teach it to others. I discussed on :6 how his zeal for the law of Moses was in fact misplaced, and he ought to have given more attention to the new covenant. But still God worked with him in respect for his misplaced idealism. And his setting of his heart to seek God is clearly wonderfully positive (s.w. 2 Chron. 19:3). His "set" or 'prepared' heart could be seen as a fulfilment of Solomon's prayer in 1 Chron. 29:18, where He asks God to keep the hearts of His people focused upon the temple, keeping it "in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and prepare their heart unto You". Ezra's set or prepared heart (s.w.) was therefore a result of his willingly allowing God to work directly upon his heart. Again we see the direct working of God upon the human heart or spirit, all performed by His Spirit.

Ezra 7:11 Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, even the scribe of the words of the commandments of Yahweh, and of His statutes to Israel- It could be that Ezra was a "scribe" in the court, but more importantly he was a scribe or proclaimer of the words and commandments of Yahweh, and His statutes- as well as those of the king.

Ezra 7:12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace and so forth- Ezra 1:2 records Cyrus originally defining Yahweh, Israel's God, as "the God of heaven". This was in allusion to the Persian belief in Ormuzd as the mightiest god, in contradistinction to Ahriman, who was lord of the lower regions. The proclamation of Cyrus was effectively a denial of the Persian view of the gods and Ormuzd, although it seems Cyrus didn't maintain that; but Artaxerxes is more vague, leaving it open to interpretation as to whether the "God of heaven" is Yahweh or Ormuzd.

Ezra 7:13 I make a decree, that all those of the people of Israel, and their priests and the Levites, in my realm, who are minded of their own free will to go to Jerusalem, go with you- Those who left Babylon did so of their own freewill, and yet providential events stirred up their spirits to do this (Ezra 1:5); and the way was prepared in miraculous ways. The new covenant offered to the exiles a new heart and spirit from God. His Spirit was eager to work upon their spirit, but still there was required their own freewill desire to return both to their land and to their God. Otherwise they would have been reduced to mere puppets in the Divine hand.

Ezra 7:14 Because you are sent of the king and his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your hand- The book of Esther (Esther 1:14) likewise mentions these seven counsellors. "To inquire" doesn't necessarily mean here 'to find out information'. The idea could be that he was sent there to pray for Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of God. For this is how prayer must be- according to God's word.

Ezra 7:15 and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel whose habitation is in Jerusalem- The king clearly sees "the God of Israel" as the local god of Jerusalem, who as it were lives there. He doesn't use the term Yahweh, as Cyrus did.

Ezra 7:16 and all the silver and gold that you shall find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem- "That you shall find" doesn't mean he was to just grab whatever silver and gold he could; rather the idea is that he should take with him whatever silver and gold people were willing to give him. This is the king's way of repeating the essence of the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:4,6).

Ezra 7:17 therefore you shall with all diligence buy with this money bulls, rams, lambs, with their meal offerings and their drink offerings, and shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem- The king appears to have some detailed knowledge of the law of Moses; as an eager scribe or proclaimer, Ezra apparently had shared the details of Yahweh with the king. And he is to be commended for this; for religion is always a difficult subject with powerful employers who have their own religious views.

Ezra 7:18 Whatever shall seem good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do that after the will of your God- We note the parallel between the will of God, and what Ezra willed or thought good. The king thus accepts that the will of Ezra is that of his God. He perceives congruity between what he preached and what he really stood for himself.

Ezra 7:19 The vessels that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver before the God of Jerusalem- Although the king appears to have seen Israel's God as merely a local entity, he also seems to recognize He had some real presence there in Jerusalem. The original temple vessels taken away from Jerusalem had been restored there already, but there was apparently the need for many more, which were offered voluntarily (:15; Ezra 8:25-28). Perhaps some had been stolen before they were taken into captivity; or some which had been returned had been stolen. Or again, perhaps Ezra wished to operate worship on a far grander scale than previously.

Ezra 7:20 Whatever more shall be needful for the house of your God, which you shall have occasion to grant, grant it out of the king's treasure house- The treasure house was presumably that in Jerusalem, into which the local taxes were paid.

Ezra 7:21 I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers who are beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done with all diligence- The king seems to have foreseen that the God of Ezra was alive and real enough to give Ezra more commandments which would require material to fulfill them. The inspired writer of Psalm 45 says that his tongue is like the pen of a scribe or writer (Ps. 45:1). The writer is God. God was using the inspired person's words as His pen, with which to communicate to men. Ezra likewise was a "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:21). The God who is in Heaven wrote through a scribe here on earth. That's the idea of inspiration.

Ezra 7:22 to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred measures of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much- The taxes paid to the local treasure house in Jerusalem (:20) would have been paid partly in kind, and wheat, wine and oil were all local products of Judah (2 Kings 18:32). The king had clearly been told about the exact nature of the Jewish sacrifices, including the command to always offer with salt (Lev. 2:13).

Ezra 7:23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?- It would appear that about this time, the Persians had been driven out of Egypt, and their records describe it in these terms, as "wrath against the realm of the king". But after Ezra returned, Persia recovered Memphis.

Ezra 7:24 Also we inform you, that concerning any of the priests and Levites, the singers, porters, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on them- The Persians didn't exclude their own priests from taxation, so this was all the more a wonderful kindness. But the lesson from it all is that God was providing absolutely everything for His work to go ahead. And to this day, lack of resources has never been a barrier for the progress of any project which God wills to happen. He will always provide, most generously.

Ezra 7:25 You, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach him who doesn't know them- This was giving a huge amount of power to Ezra. We get the impression that there were Jews still scattered through the whole area west of the Euphrates. They had not returned to the land. Ezra was empowered to preach to them, and also to those who didn't know Yahweh. This was a huge commission; but there is no evidence Ezra fulfilled it.

Let's remember that the exiles were representative of us. They failed, and so these things in essence are reapplied to ourselves. We in this life are passing through "the time of our exile" (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV). They were commanded to spread the knowledge of Israel's God to all in the dominion of Babylon (Ezra 7:25 LXX), and thus they would have fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies about the spreading of the Gospel to all peoples. Yet we have a similar commission, and God will provide for us likewise, as He did for Ezra. But we have to learn the lesson of the exiles; for the exiles who returned became so caught up with their own lives that they again failed to be a light to the nations.

Ezra 7:26 Whoever will not do the law of your God, and the law of the king, let judgement be executed on him with all diligence, whether it be to death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment- The law of God and that of the king are paralleled, just as the decree of the king was effectively the fulfilment of God's decree and commandment.

Ezra 7:27 Blessed be Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem- See on :2. Ezra was enabled to "beautify" the temple (Ezra 7:27), the very same word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would "glorify" [s.w.] His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would "*glorify the house of my glory*". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "*glorify*"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cield houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for "cield" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Ezra 7:28 and has extended grace to me before the king, his counsellors and before all the king's mighty princes. I was strengthened according to the hand of Yahweh my God upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me- The extension of grace, or 'gift', was in terms of God working directly upon the king's heart (:27- see too Neh. 2:12; 7:5; 1 Kings 10:24). And this too is how God's grace can work today- the insertion of ideas into the human heart, intended to bring us to obedience to Him and the advancement of His glory.

Ezra Chapter 8

Ezra 8:1 Now these are the heads of their fathers' households, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king- Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' ["went up with me"] to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Nehemiah 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

Ezra 8:2 Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush- We wonder of course why these priests hadn't returned with Zerubbabel. We noted on Ezra 2 that there were so few priests who returned then. It would appear that Ezra had been a good scribe or teacher / proclaimer of the law, and now more priests were willing to return. We also note that the names used here have more reference in them to the name of Yahweh, either as suffix or prefix. It's amazing what one man can do in reviving a community, and Ezra seems to have been an example. But whilst this return of the Aaronic priests may seem commendable, it was a tacit act of disobedience to the commandment that only the Zadokites should serve in the new temple (Ez. 43:19; 45:15). And thereby the possibility of the Kingdom being reestablished as planned was precluded. It seems Ezra had not paid attention to the prophecies of the restoration and was fixated upon obedience to the letter of the old covenant, which was now intended to be obsolete.

Ezra 8:3 Of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males one hundred and fifty- According to 1 Chron. 3:22, we should read this as meaning "Hattush the son of Shecaniah". This would make him the great-great-grandson of Zerubbabel.

Ezra 8:4 Of the sons of Pahathmoab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah; and with him two hundred males- The family of Pahathmoab also features in those who returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:6) and were later noted for their work in rebuilding the walls (Neh. 3:11). And yet the founder of this family apparently had Gentile connections- "the pit of Moab". It is tempting to see a connection with the incident in 1 Chron. 11:22, when one of David's mighty men slew two lionlike men of Moab along with a lion- in a pit. Perhaps this was name arose from a desire to imitate that great act of faith.

Ezra 8:5 Of the sons of Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel; and with him three hundred males- LXX "Of the sons of Zattu, Shechaniah, the son of Jahaziel"; this may be the Zattu of Ezra 2:8.

Ezra 8:6 Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan; and with him fifty males- The numbers are embarrassingly small, given the presence of around 1 million Jews in the empire (see on Ezra 1:1); and therefore the uninspired, apocryphal record tends to always exaggerate the numbers. In this case, 50 is exaggerated to 250 in 1 Esdras.

Ezra 8:7 Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah; and with him seventy males- Athaliah may be a female name. This unusual mention of a woman in the genealogies could be because she had a particular spiritual influence upon her family.

Ezra 8:8 Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael; and with him eighty males- Shephatiah was also a family who had partially returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:4). Out of the 1 million or so Jews in Babylon (see on Ezra 1:1), it seems that the interest in the things of the restored Kingdom was confined to only a few families; for instead of as it were fresh blood being converted to the cause by Ezra, those he persuaded to accompany him were largely from families who had already partially returned to the land.

Ezra 8:9 Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel; and with him two hundred and eighteen males- This is the

Joab of Ezra 2:6, some of whose family members had already returned under Zerubbabel. As noted on :8, those who returned with Ezra were generally not 'fresh blood' but relatives of those already in Judah; their motives may therefore have been mixed, between a desire for family reunification and yet also a wish to serve God in response to His word.

Ezra 8:10 Of the sons of Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah; and with him one hundred and sixty male- LXX "Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah." Bani appears as the head of a family in Ezra 2:10. See on :8.

Ezra 8:11 Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai; and with him twenty-eight males- Again, this was a family which had already partially emigrated to Judah (Ezra 2:11); see on :8,9.

Ezra 8:12 Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan; and with him one hundred and ten males- Again, this was a family which had already partially emigrated to Judah (Ezra 2:12); see on :8,9.

Ezra 8:13 Of the sons of Adonikam, who were the last; and these are their names: Eliphelet, Jewel, and Shemaiah; and with them sixty males- "The last" may refer to how the other family members had returned with Zerubbabel at the 'first' return.

Ezra 8:14 Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud; and with them seventy males- The total comes to 1496 males; even if we multiply this several times over to get the total number of Jews who returned with Ezra, the number still isn't that great. The response to the call to flee Babylon and reestablish God's Kingdom in Israel was still pathetically small, considering there were around 1 million Jews in the Babylonian empire (see on Ezra 1:1).

Ezra 8:15 I gathered them together to the river that runs to Ahava; and there we encamped three days: and I viewed the people and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi- Ezra 2:42 records a very small number for the families of the gate keepers. The number of ordinary Levites compared to priests is very low in Ezra 2 (4289 priests, and 341 priestly workers and 74 Levites). There were far more Levites than there were priests, but it seems the Levites didn't want to return and do the dirty work; everyone wanted to be religious leaders. Hence Ezra's problem in finding Levites to return (Ezra 8:15). We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10). See on :24.

Ezra 8:16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, who were teachers- The Hebrew confusion of understanding and teaching is brought out by comparing the AV and RV of Ezra 8:16: "Men of understanding" (AV), "which were teachers" (RV). To have true understanding is axiomatically to teach it. We can't hold it passively within ourselves.

Ezra 8:17 I sent them forth to Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia; and I told them what they should tell Iddo, and his brothers the Nethinim, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring to us ministers for the house of our God- The LXX implies Ezra was so desperate that he used a financial incentive to get some Levites to respond: "And I forwarded them to the rulers with the money of the place, and I put words in their mouth to speak to their brethren the Athinim with the money of the place". But for all that, only 38 Levite men responded (:18,19).

Ezra 8:18 According to the good hand of our God on us they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brothers, eighteen- Those who returned did so because of God's hand upon them; even if only 18 Levites and then 20 (:19) responded, this was the result of God's hand working as it were at the very last minute. And yet according to the LXX of :17 (see note there), their motives must have been very mixed; they had not intended to return, and were only persuaded by a last minute offer of money.

Ezra 8:19 and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty- The

numbers of Levites are again pathetically small. Far more priests than Levites wanted to return. The idea of doing humble service wasn't attractive; see on :15,24. And so it has always been; to find real 'workers' for the Kingdom has always been difficult. And yet no matter how small the numbers, God works through them.

Ezra 8:20 and of the Nethinim, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim: all of them were mentioned by name- The Nethinim were grouped beneath the Levites but above "the servants of Solomon" (Ezra 2:43,55). "Nethinim" is literally 'those who are given' and many presume they were originally the Gibeonites, who were 'given' by Joshua to the Levites to do their more menial work (Josh. 9:3-27). Whenever Gentiles were captured in war, some of them would have been devoted to Yahweh in that they were given to His service through joining the Nethinim (Num. 31:28). Thus here in Ezra 8:20 we find mention of some "whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites".

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance- Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a *straight way*, wherein they shall *not stumble*". A straight way back to Zion had been prepared potentially for them to walk in (Is. 40:3). Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. But both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit"... They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a "straight way" to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the "straight way".

The return of the exiles led by Ezra made the journey by a "right way" from Babylon to Zion (Ezra 8:21). Yet this is the very word used about the "straight" feet of the Cherubim Angels in Ez. 1:7,23. The return from Babylon involved following in the path of the Angels, walking in step with them. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true- they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness. I feel this is especially true in the matter of latter day witnessing. See on Is. 52:8.

Ezra 8:22 For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken to the king saying, The hand of our God is on all those who seek Him for good; but His power and His wrath is against all those who forsake Him- Josephus claims that the treasure annually remitted to Jerusalem from Babylon in Roman times was escorted by an army of 20,000 men. So to travel without any soldiers for defence was a truly brave and faithful undertaking. Indeed, Ezra seems to reason that to accept such human strength would be to "forsake Him". To not trust in God, to hedge our bets, as it were, is portrayed here as forsaking Him.

Ezra was ashamed to ask for *help* against Judah's enemies, the implication being that he wanted that human help but was ashamed to ask for it from the King. He had initially believed those words of Isaiah, but found it hard to maintain that level of faith. But they should have had faith in the restoration prophecy's promise: "Fear not ... I will *help* you" (Is. 41:10). Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him

trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God". Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah's prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

Ezra 8:23 So we fasted and begged our God for this: and He was entreated of us- This is Ezra writing up the incident after having reached Judah safely.

Ezra 8:24 Then I set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests, even Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers with them- LXX "And I assigned of the chiefs of the priests twelve unto Sherebiah". This would place the priests in a subordinate position to the Levites. Perhaps this was intentional, because Ezra had been disturbed at the lack of Levites amongst them, as likewise was the case in Ezra 2. There were many who wanted the glory of priesthood, but very few prepared to do the humble work of service. And he therefore exalts those humble workers. See on :15.

Ezra 8:25 and weighed to them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering for the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his princes, and all Israel there present, had offered- "There present" is literally "that were found", as if out of the huge Jewish population in Babylon, these were the only ones found present. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. But Ezra didn't take this potential forward, for he neglected the commands in Ezekiel to only use Zadokite priests, and he was obsessed with keeping the law of Moses, the old covenant, rather than accepting the new covenant and the new, non-Mosaic worship system of Ez. 40-48.

Ezra 8:26 I weighed into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels one hundred talents; of gold one hundred talents- The total value of all this is huge. I don't believe the figures are exaggerated; it is simply so psychologically credible and true to experience that when a majority refuse to respond to God's call as required, they are eager to donate wealth, as if to as it were buy themselves out of their personal responsibilities.

Ezra 8:27 and twenty bowls of gold, of one thousand darics; and two vessels of fine bright brass, precious as gold- The total value of all this would probably have worked out at something like 130 million British pounds as of 2018. To carry all this in cash without military escort, and to arrive with it all safely after a four month journey through Bedouin and robber infested territory, was an amazing miracle.

Ezra 8:28 I said to them, You are holy to Yahweh, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to Yahweh, the God of your fathers- Ezra perceived a parallel between the vessels and those who carried them. Paul uses this same idea, describing all believers as a vessel made holy to the Lord (1 Thess. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:21). Perhaps his allusion recognizes that the situation at the restoration didn't come about as was prophetically possible, and has now been reinterpreted with reference to God's new people and their spiritual work in the spiritual house of God today.

Ezra 8:29 Guard and keep them, until you weigh them before the chiefs of the priests and the Levites, and the princes of the fathers' households of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the rooms of the house of Yahweh- "Guard" is Heb. 'keep awake'. To remain awake and keep that committed unto us is very much New Testament language (e.g. 1 Tim. 6:20; Rev. 16:15) for our keeping of that which is committed to our trust until we arrive at Zion, the future Kingdom of God, when there will be the day of judgment, cp. the weighing of the vessels to ensure those carrying them had preserved them. Again, these allusions recognize that the situation at the restoration didn't come about as was prophetically possible, and has now been reinterpreted with reference to God's new people and their spiritual work in the spiritual house of God today.

Ezra 8:30 So the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them

to Jerusalem to the house of our God- We note how the priests and Levites were given equal responsibility in transporting this vast wealth. Ezra had been disturbed at the lack of Levites amongst them, as likewise was the case in Ezra 2. There were many who wanted the glory of priesthood, but very few prepared to do the humble work of service. And he therefore exalts those humble workers. See on :15,24,33.

Ezra 8:31 Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was on us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the bandit by the way- This was no small miracle, carrying such a huge amount of wealth in cash with no military escort. See on :32. The text implies there were indeed enemies and bandits by the way, but the hand of God was greater than "the hand of the enemy". This was to encourage them upon settling in Judah that the hand of their enemies would never be greater than God's hand- if they allowed Him to act and humbled themselves beneath that hand.

Ezra 8:32 We came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days- This was the result of God's "hand" upon them (:31). When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10), he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7).

Perhaps they remained stationary for three days to praise and thank God; for they had likewise begun their journey with three days of fasting and prayer (:15). So often we forget to thank God with the same intensity with which we asked Him for help. It was this three days of praise which may have inspired Nehemiah to do likewise on arrival in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11). The Godly examples and prayer patterns of others really should affect us, and our examples likewise influence others.

Ezra 8:33 On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, the Levite- Transparency is clearly the order of the day- for I have suggested that there was over 130 million British pounds worth of gold and silver being dealt with. We note that the money was counted by two priests and two Levites. Again we see the Levites paralleled with the priests. This was a particular theme with Ezra; see on :15,24,31.

Ezra 8:34 Everything was counted and weighed: and all the weight was written at that time- I suggested above that the total value of all this would probably have worked out at something like 130 million British pounds as of 2018. To carry all this in cash without military escort, and to arrive with it all safely after a four month journey through Bedouin and robber infested territory, was an amazing miracle. It would have made the temple storerooms a place of great value.

Ezra 8:35 The children of the captivity, who had come out of exile, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs and twelve male goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering to Yahweh- The twelve goats implied that Israel and Judah were to be united as one at this time. This was the potential implicit in the restoration prophecies. See on Ezra 6:17. Despite all the great offering of such huge wealth, they offered sin offerings, ever aware that donation of wealth alone cannot reconcile us to God. And Ezra clearly had in mind that the community had not repented as they had been intended to. Many had returned to their land but not to their God. The way these sacrifices match those offered by Zerubbabel's group (Ezra 6:17) may have hinted that they had not devoted themselves to the work as they ought to have done.

Ezra 8:36 They delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps, and to the governors beyond the River: and they furthered the people and God's house- This support of the temple and kingdom work by leaders of the Gentiles was a small fulfilment of the restoration prophecies about this. But those prophecies featured the full reestablishment of God's Kingdom, with these leaders themselves becoming proselytes and carrying the Jews back to their land. They were to lift up the people (s.w. "furthered") and bring them back (Is. 49:22). This just didn't happen, because the Jews and Gentiles were not repentant, and Ezra in any case was seeking to only reestablish the old covenant and

had little interest in accepting the new covenant, or obeying the laws of the temple system as given in Ez. 40-48.

Ezra Chapter 9

Ezra 9:1 Now when these things were done- There is an intended anticlimax here, a juxtaposition of God's amazing grace to the exiles in Ezra 8 now contrasted with their fall into sin. The same thing happens at Acts 5:1, and often in the Biblical record.

The princes drew near to me saying, The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands and are following their abominations, even those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites- See on :14; Ezra 6:21. Ez. 42:20 commands for the restored Kingdom: "He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a *separation* between the sanctuary and the profane place". This reflected the difference between God's people, His "sanctuary" (Ps. 114:2), and the surrounding world. But Judah did not 'separate' themselves from the surrounding tribes but instead married them and worshipped their idols (s.w. Ezra 9:1 "The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their *abominations*...for they have taken of their daughters for themselves"). The same word for "abominations" occurs in the same context in Mal. 2:11: "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god". Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the "abominations" [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ezekiel 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

Ezra 9:2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mixed themselves with the peoples of the lands. Yes, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass- These relationships and children are defined as being part of mixing with the abominations of the peoples (:1). And "abominations" always refers to idol worship. So it could be that the relationships with "their daughters" were a result of sleeping with cult prostitutes and having children thereby. There was therefore far more to what happened than simply marrying out of the faith. To 'take daughters for themselves' may not mean marriage itself, but could refer to the kind of cultic relationships which went along with idol worship at the shrines. This is why the separation from these women with whom they had children (Ezra 10:3) would not then be quite the same as breaking up marriage and full blown family life. Israel are only specifically called "the holy seed" in Is. 6:13, where the idea was that after their experience of judgment, those who survived would be a "holy seed" who would shoot forth the Messianic "Branch" from the decaying stump of the house of David. But now the "holy seed" had corrupted themselves; for they were the minority preserved from judgment, and now they had corrupted their holiness. So the possibilities of the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God in Israel which the prophets were full of... was now precluded. They failed to see themselves and their offspring as anything so "holy" to Yahweh. This is the root of all sin- a failure to appreciate our holy standing in His eyes, our sanctification in Christ.

Ezra 9:3 When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down confounded- The temple still lay "waste" (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain "desolate" [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The 'restoration' was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God's eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [s.w. "confounded"] at the news of Judah's apostasy in having children by the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the 'desolate' / 'confounded' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel's prophecies about those priestly garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

The Lord would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:3 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26).

Ezra 9:4 Then were assembled to me all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the

transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat confounded until the evening offering- See on :7. The double reference in Is. 66:1-5 to trembling at Yahweh's word is a definite prediction of the situation in Ezra 9:4; 10:3, where the same rare Hebrew word is used regarding how those of the exiles who repented for their marriage out of the Faith trembled before the word in repentance. Then, at that point, the Kingdom blessings could have been brought about, as described in the rest of Is. 66. But again, there was no staying power in their repentance. By Nehemiah's time, and by Malachi's time even after his, marriage out of the Faith was still their weakness.

Ezra 9:5 At the evening offering I arose up from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn; and I fell on my knees, and spread out my hands to Yahweh my God- "Rose up / arose" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). Perhaps Ezra was motivated by these prophecies to now "arise", hoping that somehow his people would still be raised up. But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. Ezra was driven to appeal to God directly and solely from himself with his priestly garments now in ruins. I have noted earlier that his focus upon teaching the law of Moses was rather missing the point- that the old covenant had been broken by Judah, and they could only throw themselves upon the grace of the new covenant.

Ezra 9:6 and I said, My God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have increased over our head, and our guiltiness has grown up to the heavens- The description of Ezekiel's Temple was to be given to the captives in Babylon by Ezekiel, to lead them to repentance and to assure them of what could be if they repented. Then when the invitation to leave Babylon and return came in the time of Ezra, they ought to have been motivated to return to the land and build the temple which Ezekiel had explained to them. But sadly most of them weren't very deeply motivated at all; they wanted to build a temple, but not to the extent Ezekiel had outlined. Consider in this light Ez. 43:10-11: "Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them". Then, when the temple was built, they were to be obedient in all the ways in which they hadn't been obedient in the past, with the result that they were now sitting in captivity (E. 44:24). This was the tragedy felt by Ezra, when he realized the exiles were not living as they should be: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased" (Ezra 9:6). Israel would only be able to build the temple properly if they were "ashamed of their iniquities" (Ez. 43:10). And Ezra knew they weren't. And thus he sought to take upon himself that shame, believing that God would accept *his* shame on behalf of the people. Note in passing how he speaks of blushing before God. You only blush in someone's presence. And this was how close and real Ezra felt his God to be. Perhaps this repentance of a remnant explains why in fact the record of Ezekiel's temple was written down at all- for Ez. 43:11 seems to say that it would be written down *if* Judah were ashamed of their sins. Ezekiel's opening chapters record him being forewarned by God that they would not generally be responsive to his ministry; and yet some were, like Ezra, and maybe this was eagerly seized upon by God as the basis for allowing the writing down and preservation of the specifications we have in Ez. 40-48.

Isaiah 45 is as clear a prophecy as any could wish. God categorically stated that Cyrus would be raised up by Him in order to release the captives in Babylon, and to enable the building of Jerusalem (Is. 45:12); all because God had formed the land [AV "earth"] of Israel to be inhabited and not to be left without His people dwelling upon it. And this happened; the captives were released (although most preferred to stay put in Babylon), and the building of Jerusalem was enabled (although the work was not done very enthusiastically by Judah, and they preferred to build their own houses rather than Yahweh's). But the prophecy goes on in Is. 45:13-17: "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God...They shall be *ashamed*, and also *confounded*, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting

salvation: ye shall not be *ashamed* nor *confounded* world without end". But the Egyptians and Ethiopians didn't come and fall down before Judah, as the Queen of Sheba had before Solomon. Nor did they accept Yahweh as the only God, and ditch their idols. Instead, the returned Jews worshipped the idols of Egypt, and married their women (Ezra 9:1). And thus Israel *were* ashamed and confounded in the future. The same Hebrew words for "ashamed [and] confounded" occur in Ezra 9:6, where as a result of Ezra realizing that Judah had married the local women and broken covenant with Yahweh, he admits: "I am *ashamed* and *blush* [s.w. 'confounded'] to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased....". The words of Is. 45 could have had their fulfilment in the time of Cyrus; the surrounding nations could have come and worshipped before Judah, and the whole earth quit their idols and look unto Yahweh as a just God and a saviour. But Judah would not. Judah in the new temple would not "defile" Yahweh's Name any more (Ez. 43:7,8); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodies and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

Ezra 9:7 Since the days of our fathers we have been exceeding guilty to this day; and for our iniquities we, our kings and our priests, have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder and to confusion of face, as it is this day- The sins of those who returned are styled "the transgression of those that had been carried away" (Ezra 9:4). Yet those who returned to the land weren't mainly the generation who had been carried away. The intended confusion is surely to suggest that those who returned committed the same sins as had led Judah into captivity a generation earlier. And Ezra comments on this fact here in his subsequent prayer. He feels shame of face just as his people did.

Ezra 9:8 Now for a little moment grace has been shown from Yahweh our God, to leave us a remnant to escape- See on :13. Ezra saw that "little moment" or "space" as a time when they received *grace*; he understood the prophecy of the figs in Jer. 24, that it was only through the captivity and the fact God had graciously not destroyed them but rather preserved them there, that there was the opportunity for a remnant to re-establish the Kingdom. What may appear to some as forsaking is in fact God's grace to us, when spiritually discerned- whether it be deep within our own lives, or in the state of affairs upon this planet. Yet it should be noted that the prophecy of Jer. 24:6,7 about the good figs seems not to have come true at the restoration- although it could potentially have done so.

And to give us a nail in His holy place- I submit that the Messianic prophecies of the restoration prophets *could* have had their fulfilment in Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel, or some other Messianic figure at that time. Everything was made possible to enable this- Joshua, who couldn't prove his Levitical genealogy, was given "a place of access" amongst the priesthood, those who "stood" before the Lord (Zech. 3:7 RV). Ezra thanked God that they had returned and that they had "a nail in his holy place" (Ezra 9:8), a reference surely to a Messiah figure whom he felt to be among them, the "nail in a sure place" of Is. 22:23. According to Mt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27, Zerubbabel was the Prince of Judah, and the rightful heir to David's throne. But due to his weakness, the fulfilment was deferred to Jesus.

That our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage- Blindness had been their punishment for not wanting to see; and despite little evidence that they did want to see, God was trying to open their eyes all the same, and to give them revival, new life, in bondage. For they were still in bondage to the Persians and were not independent of them. But they had spurned all that huge grace.

Ezra 9:9 For we are bondservants; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage- Although the Apocryphal book of Baruch isn't inspired, it gives a significant window into the mindset of the exiles in Babylon. Baruch 1:10 mentions how the attitude was that the majority wanted to send funds to support the 'good work' going on in Judah- but didn't want to return there themselves. Like the book of Esther, this indicates that the exiles had soon quit languishing by the rivers of Babylon, and had quickly acquired wealth and some degree of prosperity. Inspired prophecies had warned them of the fall of Babylon, and their need to flee out of it and return to Judah. And yet Baruch 1:12 records the exiles praying "that we may live long under the protective shadow of [the] king of Babylon". This is in sad contrast to Daniel's prophecies that the sheltering tree of Babylon was to be cut down! There ought to have been an urgency about the need to flee from Babylon. Zech. 2:10 speaks of the need to "flee" and "escape"- the language of crisis. And the call "Ho!" means quite literally "Hey!!". The urgency to flee was

spiritual rather than physical- for there's no evidence that when Babylon fell to the Persians, the Jews were punished. Indeed they appear [from Esther] to have prospered even more. Hence the urgent appeal was to flee from the spiritual crisis which they faced in Babylon. And yet they didn't perceive the danger, just as so many today don't. For the call to leave Babylon is applied in New Testament passages like 2 Cor. 6 to our call to leave the world in which we live. The urgency of 'fleeing' from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah, when he referred to those who had returned to the land as those who has "escaped" from Babylon (Neh. 1:2)- even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the vital danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. Ezra likewise had referred to the Jews in Babylon as those "in bondage... bondmen" (Ezra 9:9)- when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king's cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society.

But has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins- "To give us a reviving" uses the same word for "put" when we read of God putting a new heart and spirit in His revived people if they entered the new covenant at the restoration: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you" (Ez. 36:27-29). They revived the stones out of the heaps (Neh. 4:2). A new spirit was potentially given to them, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Neh. 2:12 s.w.). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be.

Ezekiel 37 had its primary fulfilment in the return under Ezra. Then, Israel was given "a quickening" (Ezra 9:9 LXX), in fulfilment of how the dry bones in captivity were revived. At that time, Judah *could* have fully revived. But most of them chose to stay in Babylon. If there had been a full revival, then the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 would have taken place. It has been suggested that there was a primary fulfilment of Ezekiel 38/9 in an unrecorded invasion of the land at the time of the restoration. However, historical evidence for this is severely lacking. And yet the Scythian tribes such as Magog, Gomer, Meshech, Tubal etc. are all recorded as being the scourge of the Middle East at that time. They were marauding into more prosperous areas "to take a spoil", especially "cattle and goods", at around Ezekiel's time. They could so easily have turned their attentions toward Israel. That invasion *could* have happened; but it didn't. But because Israel were not faithful the temple was not built properly, and therefore the Ezekiel 38 invasion didn't happen, and therefore Yahweh's intervention and establishment of His Kingdom as described in Ezekiel 39 didn't occur.

And to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem- Zech. 2:4 had foretold that "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein", seeing that Yahweh Himself would be as a wall of fire around her to protect her from her adversaries (Ezra had recognized this promise, that God would be a wall to them- Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ezekiel 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ezekiel 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh's house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time.

Ezra 9:10 Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments- Again we note Ezra's total identity with his sinful people. This is proof enough that there is no "guilt by association" as believed by so many groups. Rather there is to be the very opposite- freewill association of ourselves with the guilt of sinners, that we might thereby appeal to them and intercede for them. And this was in fact the very basis of our redemption through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Ezra 9:11 which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets saying, 'The land, to which you go to possess it, is an unclean land through the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, through their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their filthiness- The people were warned that the temple had been destroyed because of their previous "abominations", and that the rebuilt temple was not to feature any such abominations (Ez.

43:8; 44:6,7,13). "let it suffice you of your abominations" they were told- and were then told not to allow the uncircumcised into the temple, as they had been doing (Ez. 44:6,9). This sounds as if the prophecy of Ezekiel was more command than prediction- to those of his own day. But they returned, and committed the abominations [s.w.] of the Gentiles (Ezra 9:1,11,14) and married their daughters; to the extent that Malachi commented upon this: "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination [s.w.] is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Mal. 2:11).

Ezra 9:12 Now therefore don't give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters to your sons, nor seek their peace or their prosperity forever; that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever' - This command directly addressed the human tendency to think that 'it won't happen to me / my family'. The "abominations" of the land (:11) were idolatry. Intermarriage was seen as inevitably involving the people in idolatry, as we saw in :2,3. The implication is that marriage is the most intimate of human relationships, and the spiritually weaker party will almost inevitably bring down the spiritually stronger party to their level. Solomon is the parade example. But it seems the lesson is never learnt- because there is an inbuilt

Ezra 9:13 After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You, our God, has punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and has given us such a remnant- Ezra said that God had punished them less than their iniquities deserved, somehow alluding to the prophecy of Is. 40:2, which said that at the time of Zion's restoration, God would admit to having punished her "double for all her sins". Yahweh in His love and pity felt that He had punished them twice as much as they deserved; but Ezra realized that in reality it was less than what they deserved. See on :8.

There are evident similarities between the vocabulary and style of Zechariah, Job and the prophets of the restoration. Thus both Job and Zechariah refer to the ideas of the court of Heaven, "the satan" etc. My suggestion is that Job was rewritten during the exile, hence the many points of contact between Job and Isaiah's prophecies about the restoration. When we read that Job has suffered less than his iniquities deserve (Job 11:6), this is the very term used to describe Israel's sufferings in Babylon (Ezra 9:13). Job, "the servant of the Lord", is being set up as Israel, just as that same term is used about Israel in Babylon throughout the latter part of Isaiah. Job's mockery by the Arabian friends perhaps parallels the Samaritan and Babylonian mockery of Judah; his loss of children is very much the tragedy of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians which Lamentations focuses upon. And Job's final revival and restoration after repentance would therefore speak of the blessed situation which Judah could have had at their return to the land. Job's response to the words of God and Elihu would then speak of Judah's intended repentance as a result of God's word spoken to them by prophets like Haggai and Zechariah. There are many connections between Job and the latter parts of Isaiah which speak about the restoration.

Ezra 9:14 shall we again break Your commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? Wouldn't You be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape?- The covenant was not to be broken; the temple had been destroyed before because of breaking covenant with Yahweh (Ez. 44:7). But Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra 9:1,14). They were themselves the remnant, and Ezra recognizes that now they too deserved to be destroyed, leaving God as it were with no Israel (:15). His spiritual mind however might have been driven to reason further, and perceive that indeed Israel would no longer be Yahweh's people- and therefore He would seek another people, on a different covenant basis. And that in fact was what the restoration prophets had been saying, although Ezra's obsession with the old covenant and teaching it had rather blinded him to that.

Ezra 9:15 Yahweh, the God of Israel, You are righteous- True confession of sin always involves this recognition that God is right.

For we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is this day. Behold, we are before You in our guiltiness- We must soberly 'think of ourselves' as someone who has something to contribute to the rest of the body, even if first of all we are not sure what it is (Rom. 15:3-8). We feel their weaknesses as if they are our own. Self interest must die; their wellbeing becomes all consuming. This is why men like Daniel and Nehemiah could feel that "we have sinned..."- not 'they have sinned'. Ezra said that because *we* have sinned, *we* cannot lift up ourselves before

Yahweh. And he cast himself down before Yahweh in demonstration of how much he was with his people in this (Ezra 9:15; 10:1)!

For we cannot remain before You because of this- Is. 66:22 and Ez. 44:15 use the same word: “But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall *stand before me* [s.w. “remain before You”] to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD”. But Ezra had to confess, using these very words of Isaiah and Ezekiel which he would have been familiar with, that they could not remain before Yahweh. They hadn’t lived the Kingdom life, and therefore the Kingdom prophecies could not come true in them. It makes a profitable exercise to consider all the times that Ezra and Nehemiah allude to the words of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It must have been heartbreaking for them to see the possibility of fulfilment within their grasp, and yet to know that their people didn’t see the wonder of it all.

"Remain before You" effectively means 'we cannot any longer be your people'. As discussed on :14, Ezra recognizes that now they too deserved to be destroyed, leaving God as it were with no Israel. His spiritual mind however might have been driven to reason further, and perceive that indeed Israel would no longer be Yahweh's people- and therefore He would seek another people, on a different covenant basis. And that in fact was what the restoration prophets had been saying, although Ezra's obsession with the old covenant and teaching it had rather blinded him to that.

Ezra Chapter 10

Ezra 10:1 Now while Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before God's house, there was gathered together to him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children; for the people wept very bitterly- The bleeding hearts of Jeremiah and Moses were actually for the ecclesia. David's eyes wept "streams of tears" because Israel didn't keep the Law (Ps. 119:136); the faithful in Ezekiel's time sighed and groaned over all the abominations committed in Jerusalem (Ez. 9:4); Paul spoke "even with tears" about those in the ecclesia who lived as enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), exhorting the Corinthians to mourn for those they had to disfellowship (1 Cor. 5:2; 2 Cor. 12:21); Ezra wept for the sins of his people (Ezra 10:1). Is this attitude seen amongst us? We lament in a gossipy way the weaknesses of the brotherhood; but is there this bleeding heart for the cases we mention? Perhaps we should never think of separating from anybody unless the decision has been come to through a process of such prayerful mourning for them first.

'Casting... down' is the common Hebrew word for "fall", often used of the condemned 'falling'. Ezra felt condemned on account of his total identity with his sinful people, and yet begs for mercy and makes intercession for them. This looked forward to how the Lord Jesus felt our condemnation, even feeling forsaken by the Father (Mt. 27:46), when in fact He Himself was personally sinless. It was this extreme identification with his sinful people which resulted in Ezra eliciting repentance in his people; for they too came forth and wept as he wept, in repentance. The result of the Lord's identification with us should be likewise.

Ezra 10:2 Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land- In Ezra 9, Ezra showed a fine example of feeling that the failures of the community are our personal failures- so identified was he with his brethren. But then in Ezra 10:2 we read of Shecaniah saying that "we" have married unbelievers, even though Ezra 10:26 makes it clear that he himself wasn't guilty [even though his brothers, five uncles and father had been, :26]. Ezra's selfless example of solidarity with his weak brethren inspired this man, as it should us.

Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing- This could equally be translated to the effect that the hope of Israel of the restored Kingdom was still possible, despite "this thing" of failure. If they repented. "Shecaniah" means 'Yah's shekinah'; he had been named in hope of the *shekinah* glory returning visibly to Zion. And he felt that was still possible, although as it happened, it didn't happen.

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. Let it be done according to the law- I suggested on :2 that the "therefore" suggests that repentance would have led to the prophetically promised hope of Israel still coming true in his time.

These relationships and children are defined as being part of mixing with the abominations of the peoples (Ezra 9:1,2). And "abominations" always refers to idol worship. So it could be that the relationships with "their daughters" were a result of sleeping with cult prostitutes and having children thereby. There was therefore far more to what happened than simply marrying out of the faith. To 'take daughters for themselves' (Ezra 9:2) may not mean marriage itself, but could refer to the kind of cultic relationships which went along with idol worship at the shrines. This is why the separation from these women with whom they had had children would not then be quite the same as breaking up marriage and full blown family life.

The double reference in Is. 66:1-5 to trembling at Yahweh's word is a definite prediction of the situation in Ezra 9:4; 10:3, where the same rare Hebrew word is used regarding how those of the exiles who repented for their marriage out of the Faith trembled before the word in repentance. Then, at that point, the Kingdom blessings could have been brought about, as described in the rest of Is. 66. But again, there was no staying power in their repentance. By Nehemiah's time, and by Malachi's time even after his, marriage out of the Faith was still their weakness.

Ezra 10:4 Arise; for the matter belongs to you, and we are with you. Be courageous, and do it- Shecaniah is seen as encouraging Ezra to do that which he was perhaps nervous to do- making the people swear to end their illicit relationships, and not to begin new ones. Being courageous and doing it is the language of encouragement given to Joshua, so that he might enter the land and establish God's Kingdom there. This was the same situation the exiles were in.

Ezra 10:5 Then Ezra arose, and made the chiefs of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they would do according to this word. So they swore- The "word" was that of the proposed covenant of :3. The way Ezra had to 'make' them swear could imply that he forced this direction upon them. Which would explain why in Nehemiah and later in Malachi we find them committing the same failure; because their repentance was more likely a bought position which was enforced upon them by Ezra and Shechaniah. And repentance cannot be a group thing nor a bought position; it has to be from the heart, on an individual level. The fact the leading priests and Levites failed in this matter is a reflection of how unspiritual were the spiritual leadership of the people. We recall that Ezra had offered money for the Levites to come back to Judah at the last minute. They clearly were not spiritually committed to the whole project in spiritual terms.

Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra rose up from before God's house, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came there, he ate no bread, nor drank water; for he mourned because of the trespass of the captives- Jehohanan had come up with Zerubbabel in the previous return of the exiles (Neh. 12:13). He was presumably a faithful one amongst the largely apostate priesthood.

Ezra 10:7 They made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together to Jerusalem- There was and is a value in group repentance; the repentance of one person provokes that of another. This is why it is helpful to confess sins to each other as James asks.

Ezra 10:8 and that whoever didn't come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the assembly of the captives- "Captives" is as AV "those that had been carried away". Although that had happened some generations previously, Ezra encouraged the exiles to perceive themselves as those who had first gone into captivity and who were now returning. We too are to see ourselves as of "no continuing city" even if for generations we lived in the same area. The exclusion from the community was like all Divine judgments- it was only really a confirmation of the position these people had themselves chosen by marrying those outside of the community of faith. The logic reflects how serious is marriage out of the faith.

Ezra 10:9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together to Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month: and all the people sat in the broad place before God's house, trembling because of this matter, and because of the great rain- Apparently "all" of them came, nobody refused to repent. This however raises the possibility of group repentance, when repentance is essentially a personal matter. The restoration prophecy of Is. 66:2 is relevant: "But to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word". The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding. But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term.

Ezra 10:10 Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have trespassed, and have married foreign women, to increase the guilt of Israel- The implication may be that by repentance and a devoted life, they were to decrease that guilt. But Ezra still comes over as a legalist, considering sin built and diminished by degrees. Israel had broken the old covenant. All they could do was throw themselves upon God's grace and accept the new covenant, as the restoration prophets had taught. But he is still far from perceiving that.

Ezra 10:11 Now therefore make confession to Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and do His will- See on :16. "Confession" is the same word translated "thanksgiving" (s.w. Neh. 12:27,31,38). Praise of Yahweh is in confession of sin. But this is the word used about the "praise" or "confession" which was to characterize the restored Kingdom (s.w. Is. 51:3; Jer. 30:19; 33:11). So even through this sin, the repentance from it led to the "confession" which produced a potential fulfilment of the restored Kingdom.

And separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women- We notice that relationships with "foreign women" is paralleled with union with "the peoples of the land". Marriage is not just with a woman as an individual, but with the society she is part of it; we marry a family and not just a person. But "The people of the

land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not.

Ezra 10:12 Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, As you have said concerning us, so must we do- This was repeated by the penitent people later shouting likewise their confession of sin "with a loud voice" (Neh. 9:4). But yet again in Malachi's time, they sinned again by marrying unbelievers. The point is that repentance is not necessarily related to the loudness of our confession that 'we're all sinners', especially when pronounced in unison with others. For repentance has to be personal. The LXX however brings out their obedience to God's word, practically doing what they had been told: "This thy word is powerful upon us to do it".

Ezra 10:13 But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand outside; neither is this a work of one day or two; for we have greatly transgressed in this matter- The idea seems to be that they felt they had to wait in line outside in order to each come before Ezra and have absolution from sin or their marriages dissolved. Perhaps I am being too critical, but I do get the sense that they were still in a 'religious' mindset, rather than seeking to God personally on their knees. For repentance and receipt of forgiveness doesn't need to be formalized by men, nor are those things mediated through men. Perhaps this is why by the time of Nehemiah, they sinned again in this manner; and again in Malachi's time.

Ezra 10:14 Let now our princes be appointed for all the assembly- "Appointed" is AV "stand"; the idea may be as in GNB: "Let our officials stay in Jerusalem and take charge of the matter".

And let all those who are in our cities who have married foreign women come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and its judges, until the fierce wrath of our God be turned from us, until this matter is resolved- They seemed to think that the legal resolution of the marriage issue was required to turn away the wrath of God, and it took three months to do so (see on :17). But getting paperwork right in a legal sense is not going to turn away the wrath of God; He doesn't cherish being angry and His wrath can be turned away in a moment by repentance. Yet they seemed to think that the three months of legal process was required to turn away His wrath.

Ezra 10:15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah stood up against this; and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them- This could mean that they "opposed the plan" (GNB), or that they alone assisted Ezra in it, "were with me concerning this" (LXX).

Ezra 10:16 The children of the captivity did so. Ezra the priest, with certain heads of fathers' households, after their fathers' houses, and all of them by their names, were set apart; and they sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter-

The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Nehemiah 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other.

Ezra 10:17 They made an end with all the men who had married foreign women by the first day of the first month- This seems a long period of time to resolve the issue; three months. Presumably this was because there was some local law to the effect that divorce could not be effected immediately but required a period of time. And yet as explained on :14, they were mistaken to think that such legalism would turn away God's wrath of itself. It was from the heart repentance that was required. Because of this legalistic approach, it is unsurprising that by Nehemiah's time they were committing the same sin.

Ezra 10:18 Among the sons of the priests there were found who had married foreign women: of the sons of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and his brothers, Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah- This would indicate that Joshua of Zech. 3 was not so spiritually strong, and therefore failed to fulfill the potential of there being a Messianic high priest in the reestablished Kingdom of God whose name was Jesus. This public listing of the sinners, beginning with the family of the High Priest, was itself a form of discipline; and may be the basis of "them [elders] that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

Ezra 10:19 They gave their hand that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their guilt- The implication could be that all who were guilty also offered the guilt offering. But a ram was offered for a guilt offering when people had sinned in ignorance (Lev. 5:14-19). It is hard to believe that they really had acted in ignorance; so their repentance was rather compromised by claiming they had in fact sinned in ignorance. If indeed they had sinned in ignorance, then this is a tacit reflection of the extent to which they were totally adrift from the word and spirit of their God.

Ezra 10:20 Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah- Only four courses of priests returned, when there were supposed to be 24 of them, namely Pashhur, Jedaiah, Immer, and Hardin (Ezra 2:37; 1 Chron. 24:7, 8,14). The priesthood had been deeply corrupt at the time of the exile, and it seems most of them preferred to remain in Babylon. And even of those who did return, they married unbelievers, despite having the 'Yah' suffix in their names.

Ezra 10:21 Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah- "Harim" means 'snubnosed'; the priest in whom there was a physical defect, such as to exclude him from priestly service. For this is the word used of how a 'flat nosed' man was excluded from priestly service (Lev. 21:18). Perhaps they were eager at the chance to serve in the restored temple, guessing that the regulations would be relaxed due to the relative lack of priests and Levites returning. Or the idea could simply be that the requirements of the law were not followed by the priests who returned. Perhaps this was why Harim's sons married out of the faith; or perhaps their physical defect made them prone to any possibility of marriage.

Ezra 10:22 Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasad- Perhaps descendants of the unfaithful Pashur the priest of Jer. 20:1-3. We note that a relatively large number of this family returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:38). They would have been perceived as relatively faithful; but relatively many of them married unbelievers. So having a 'good name' amongst the community of believers is no guarantee of abiding spirituality.

Ezra 10:23 Of the Levites: Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer- "Shimei" = 'famous' and "Kelaiah" = 'insignificant'. The impression is that the well known and prominent as well as the insignificant were alike caught up in this weakness of relationships with Gentile women.

Ezra 10:24 Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the porters: Shallum, and Telem, and Uri- Again the impression is given that weakness in terms of illicit relationships is a weakness which is found in all sectors of society; from the high priest to the priests to the singers and even the porters.

Ezra 10:25 Of Israel: Of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, and Izziah, and Malchijah, and Mijamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah- "Of Israel" appears to refer to the ordinary Israelites, apart from the priesthood. 85 offenders are now listed, compared to 28 amongst the Levites in the previous verses. A fair case could be made that the Levites / priests, those who were intended to be the spiritual leaders and teachers of the community, had sinned proportionately far more than the rest of the general population. And we noted on Ezra 2 that there were relatively few from the tribe of Levi who returned. This was truly a sad state of affairs, especially as I suggested on Ezra 9:2,3 that the relationships with these women were associated with an acceptance of their gods.

Ezra 10:26 Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Elijah- It was their brother Shecaniah who realized that there really had to be action taken about the situation (:2). This is the more

commendable because it involved a recognition that his own family had done wrong; and as in many churches today, to accept wrong behaviour amongst family members isn't something which comes easy, and involves a willingness to see things from a far wider and Godly perspective.

Ezra 10:27 Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza- Zattu was one of the elders who later was to sign to the covenant that they would separate themselves from the peoples of the land (Neh. 9:2 cp. Neh. 10:14). So this separation at this time was quickly undone, so quickly that we can assume it was somewhat fictive and insincere.

Ezra 10:28 Of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, Athlai- "Bebai" isn't a Hebrew word; some of the exiles had so assimilated that they only had local Persian names. And so the attraction to Gentile women in Judah was in turn hard to resist. They failed to appreciate their high calling in one context and so failed in later contexts.

Ezra 10:29 Of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, Jeremoth- Bani = "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem; it was a popular name because there are three separate men in this chapter called that name (:29,34,38). But, as we all can, he focused so much on the physical aspects of God's work that he failed to appreciate the spiritual implications.

Ezra 10:30 Of the sons of Pahathmoab: Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, and Binnui, and Manasseh- The family of Pahathmoab also features in those who returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:6) and were later noted for their work in rebuilding the walls (Neh. 3:11). And yet the founder of this family apparently had Gentile connections- "the pit of Moab". This might explain their tendency towards marriage out of the faith. But see on Ezra 8:4.

Ezra 10:31 Of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon- All these names are very 'spiritual'; but we can have a name we live and yet be spiritually dead and worldly.

Ezra 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, Shemariah- Shemariah is LXX Samaria. This is incidental evidence that some of the ten tribes returned with the people of Judah. But the grand reunion of Israel and Judah on the basis of repentance, to form a new people of God, simply didn't happen; for most of the ten tribes as well as Judah chose to remain in captivity.

Ezra 10:33 Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, Shimei- Admittedly "sons of..." may mean relatives. But if they were all the sons of Hashum, this is a sad spiritual statement about the family- that the seven sons all married out of the faith. We see here how spiritual attitudes spread so easily within families, and negative attitudes spread easier than positive ones.

Ezra 10:34 Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, and Uel- Bani = "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem; it was a popular name because there are three separate men in this chapter called that name (:29,34,38). But, as we all can, he focused so much on the physical aspects of God's work that he failed to appreciate the spiritual implications.

Ezra 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi- Benaiah was a popular name, taken in memory of the chiefest and most loyal of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:22); there are four men in this chapter of this name (:25,30,35,43). The tendency to name children after spiritual heroes is understandable, but spirituality isn't inherited; it has to be personal. And these four men of this name are named and shamed here for their marriage out of the faith.

Ezra 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib- In all, 12 "sons of Bani" married out of the faith. The family of "the builder" were shamed by their apostasy. To physically work for the Lord isn't the same as true personal spirituality.

Ezra 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu- Again we note the Yah suffix or prefix in the names. But this was all

external spirituality only.

Ezra 10:38 and Bani, and Binnui, Shimei- This seems to mark a new clan or "sons of...". LXX "And so did the children of Banui, and the children of Semei"; GNB "Clan of Binnui: Shimei, Shelemiah...". See on :34.

Ezra 10:39 and Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiiah- Shelemiah's son Hananiah worked on repairing the walls (Neh. 3:30). So perhaps Shelemiah's repentance was genuine and his son learnt the lesson from seeing his half-siblings being separated from.

Ezra 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai- "Machnadebai" is a form of the word translated 'willingly offered' (Ezra 1:6; 2:68; 3:5; Neh. 11:2). And yet he married an unbeliever. No amount of freewill offering to God or voluntary work for Him can compensate for a heart given to Him. And he clearly lacked that, otherwise he wouldn't have married an unbeliever and been named and shamed for it.

Ezra 10:41 Azarel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah- Many of these names reflect thankfulness to God- meaning things like "God has helped" or "Yah has guarded". But it's as if the receipt of grace and recognition of grace had resulted in a continuance in sin that that grace might abound (as in Rom. 6:1), rather than a dedication of themselves solely to Him.

Ezra 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, Joseph- A name like Joseph is incidental evidence that some of the ten tribes returned with the people of Judah. But the grand reunion of Israel and Judah on the basis of repentance, to form a new people of God, simply didn't happen; for most of the ten tribes as well as Judah chose to remain in captivity.

Ezra 10:43 Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Iddo, and Joel, Benaiah- Benaiah was a popular name, taken in memory of the chiefest and most loyal of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:22); there are four men in this chapter of this name (:25,30,35,43). The tendency to name children after spiritual heroes is understandable, but spirituality isn't inherited; it has to be personal. And these four men of this name are named and shamed here for their marriage out of the faith.

Ezra 10:44 All these had taken foreign wives; and some of them had wives by whom they had children- These relationships and children are defined as being part of mixing with the abominations of the peoples (Ezra 9:1,2). And "abominations" always refers to idol worship. So it could be that the relationships with these women were a result of sleeping with cult prostitutes and having children thereby. There was therefore far more to what happened than simply marrying out of the faith. To 'take daughters for themselves' (Ezra 9:2) may not mean marriage itself, but could refer to the kind of cultic relationships which went along with idol worship at the shrines. This is why the separation from these women with whom they had had children would not then be quite the same as breaking up marriage and full blown family life.