

Ezra 8

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Date: 09 November 2025

Preacher: Billy Joe Calvert

[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and go with me to the book of Ezra. Ezra chapter 8. Ezra chapter 8 is where we will be at this evening. We will look at the chapter in its entirety. Though I will spare you a few verses at the beginning there that are full of names.

So I don't know that we will read through those because I'd like for the sake of time for us to see the chapter in its entirety. But the first few verses there is a listing of names. We will kind of highlight those for just a moment. We won't necessarily read through each one of them.

So, but understanding I say this kind of as kind of an announcement beforehand. Those names are important. Those names are there because the Lord God wants those names there. I butcher those names every time I say them.

But the names are of utmost importance and hopefully we'll see the importance of those names by the time we're done this evening. But I don't know that we'll read over every one of them just for the sake of our time and your ears.

So, let's pray and then we'll get right into the word of God together. Father, thank you so much for the day. We praise you for the opportunity we have of gathering together. We thank you for this space. We thank you for these people. We praise you that it is a joy together, together with the people of the Lord God.

[1 : 23] To read the word of God and to study the word of God and we pray that you be with us as we open it up. And that by the presence of your spirit that you would speak to our hearts and minds. You would help us to understand it with clarity and certainty.

That you would give us a settled conviction into what it teaches us. That it would shape and mold our lives. And that we would become more and more conformed to your image. Father, we ask that you continue to strengthen your people for your glory.

Not our comfort, not our ease, not our popularity, but for your glory. So, Father, we ask that you would do a wonderful work among us even this evening. As we seek to meet with you in the word of God.

And we study to become the people of God in the community you've put us in. We ask it all in Christ's name. Amen. Ezra chapter 8. Ezra is a wonderful book.

And you know as we've made our way through it, we have focused on the reality that the first six chapters of the book of Ezra. Ezra is writing, looking back. Starting in Ezra chapter 7, Ezra is writing from a present tense reality.

[2 : 23] That is, he is living out what is taking place starting in the 7th chapter. Some 58 years pass between Ezra chapter 6 and Ezra chapter 7. The temple has been completed in the end of Ezra chapter 6.

And 58 years transpire without a word or any written word of what, at least in scripture, of what happened during that time within Jerusalem. We can read from the book of Nehemiah and read from the book of Ezra.

We can come to an understanding that the city has not been rebuilt. The walls are still in shambles. The gates are still burned. The majority of the people are living outside of what would be the walls of Jerusalem.

So they have settled back in their country land. The temple has been rebuilt, but it is just really a structure that is not necessarily manned nor operating properly. Sacrificial system has begun because we know that when they came back, the first thing they did was build the altar.

And they started the sacrificial system, but it is not necessarily carrying forward with every sacrifice and in all manners and ways. We know that the people are really kind of self-focused.

[3 : 29] They've completed their task. God raises up two leaders during that time. Leadership is an important thing. When we study scripture and when we study history, we see that when God is moving according to his plans and purposes, God always has an individual in the waiting.

It is either a man or a woman that he has set aside to lead and to move individuals' hearts and minds. Sometimes he moves in ones and twos, and sometimes he moves among the nations. We know that God is in control of the hearts of the kings and the decrees and the issues, the ethics that are passed, are according to the sovereign hand of the ruling of God. But we also know that the people he puts in place are the people that he's called to lead, even as Mordecai would tell Esther at such a time as this.

He puts his people in place for his glory, and he puts them to further the kingdom. So I want you to see in Ezra chapter 8 what it looks like in sanctified leadership. Sanctified is a good word.

It just means to be set apart for holy service. Ezra is one such sanctified leader. Set apart for holy service to lead for the purposes and plans of God as they move forward.

[4 : 39] For what we are really pushing towards, that is the coming of the Messiah. For the reestablishment and the rebuilding of Jerusalem was absolutely necessary. The resettlement of God's people.

All of these things are within the plans of God. All of these things are not things that God is responding to, but rather things that God orchestrated in advance.

They are according to the foreknowledge and even predetermined plans of God before the foundations of the world were laid. One of the things that amazes me in Scripture is that God is not caught off guard by what happens in history.

God stands outside of history, and therefore he ordains historical events. God was not caught off guard when Adam took from Eve the fruit that Eve had taken from the tree. And Adam took and ate, even though we know that Eve had eaten.

It was Adam's knowing rebellion to be like Eve and to eat of that that led to the fall of man. God was not surprised by that, for he had already determined.

[5 : 39] He had already planned how things would come about. We understand, even with the Babylonian exile, that God moves the people of God into a land outside of there, and he redistributes their land to people who are not of Jewish descent, the land that he had promised to Abraham, land that has connected to a promise, the one that would come, the seed that would come within that land that would be a blessing to the nations.

And I know I've said that this morning, but it bears repeating that the blessing to the nations is not the nation of Israel. Israel is not the blessing to the nations. It is the Savior that comes out of Israel that is the blessing to the nations.

Okay, we need to understand that, that the focus is always on the seed. Now, we should pray for the peace of Israel, sure. We know that God still has purposes and plans for the nation of Israel. We know that these matters are happening, but it is not a nation that is a blessing to other nations. It is the seed that comes from the nation that is a blessing to every other nation.

And that seed is Jesus Christ, the lion from the tribe of Judah. And those plans are carried out through instrumental leaders. One such leader is Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries of one another, leading at the same time, but leading differently.

[6 : 53] Nehemiah is sanctified to lead on the political realm. Ezra is sanctified and set apart to lead on the spiritual realm. But what does it look like to be a sanctified leader, to be one who is set apart?

You say, well, that's good. I'm not a leader. Well, the reality is that each one of us bear influence upon someone around us. So therefore, in that manner, we are a leader of individuals. We lead by our examples, we lead by our profession, and we lead by our living.

We have all been sanctified, for in Christ you are sanctified. You are set apart for holy service. And how you lead in those areas absolutely matter. We do not all lead in the same capacity, but we all lead from the same source.

We have all been called to the same reality. The word of God says in Ezra chapter 8, Now these are the heads of the fathers' households and the genealogical enrollment of those who went up with me from Babylon in the reign of King Artaxerxes.

And what follows is a listing of names. Names that are important individuals and the number of those who went with him. Names that are recorded in the genealogical enrollment. Don't miss that.

We'll see it in just a moment.

[7 : 58] Names that carry importance not only with Ezra, but with what Ezra has been called to do. These are the heads of their fathers' households and the genealogical enrollment of those who went up with me from Babylon.

But we'll pick up the bulk of our reading in verse 15. Because after this listing of names, which numbers somewhere around 1,900 individuals, if you were to count them up, I believe it is. It says, Now I assembled them at the river that runs to Ahava, where we camped for three days. And when I observed the people and the priests, I did not find any Levites there, so I sent for Eleazar, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jerob, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, Meshulam, leading men, and for Jorib and Elnathan, teachers.

Elnathan was a popular name back then. You notice that, right? He said, Now I sent them to Ito, the leading man, at the place Kasiphiah, and told them what to say to Ito and to his brothers, the temple servants, at the place Kasiphiah, that is, to bring ministers to us for the house of our God.

According to the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of insight, of the sons of Mahali, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely, Sherebiah, and his sons and brothers, 18 men, and Hashbiah, and Jeshiah, of the sons of Merari, with his brothers and their sons, 20 men, and 220 of the temple servants, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, all of them designated by name.

[9 : 27] Verse 21, Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Hava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.

For I was ashamed to request from the king, troops, and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek him, but his power and his anger are against all those who forsake him.

So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and he listened to our entreaty. Then I set apart 12 of the leading priest, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and with him ten of their brothers, and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God, which the king and his counselors and his princes and all Israel present there had offered.

Thus I weighed into their hands 650 talents of silver, and silver utensils worth 100 talents, and 100 gold talents, and 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 derricks, and two utensils of fine shiny bronze, precious as gold.

Then I said to them, You are holy to the Lord, and the utensils are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord God of our fathers. Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leading priest, the Levites, and the heads of the fathers' households of Israel at Jerusalem in the chambers of the house of the Lord.

[10 : 52] So the priests and the Levites accepted and weighed out silver and gold in the utensils to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God. Then we journeyed from the river Ahava on the twelfth of the first month to go to Jerusalem, and the hand of our God was over us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and the ambush is by the way.

Thus we came to Jerusalem and remained there three days. On the fourth day, the silver and the gold and utensils were weighed out 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 were the Levites, Jezebub, the son of Jeshua, and Nodiah, the son of Benua.

Everything was numbered and weighed, and all the weight was recorded at that time. The exiles who had come from captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, twelve male goats for a sin offering, all as a burnt offering to the Lord.

Then they delivered the king's edict to the king's satraps and to the governors in the provinces beyond the river, and they supported the people and the house of God. I want you to see what sanctified leadership looks like.

For we all want to be those who lead, being set apart for holy service, in whatever capacity we lead and have influence over. Some people have said, well, I don't want to be those who carry the responsibility of leadership.

[12 : 18] My friend, the moment we accept Christ, we are given charge of some things and some responsibilities which are ours, not for our choosing but for our calling. Number one, I want you to see that those who are sanctified leaders remain focused on the task before them.

They remain focused on the task before them. We see this in Ezra in particular. We go back to the seventh chapter and we know that Ezra had set his heart to study the word of the Lord God, to study the law of God, and to practice it, and to teach it to the people in Jerusalem.

So Ezra's focus was to study the word, to practice the word, and to teach the word. Central to that focus was the temple that had been rebuilt 58 years prior in Jerusalem, for that was the seat of religious exercise among the people of God.

We do know that when he gets there, as we have recorded for us in the book of Nehemiah, that he does exactly what he had set his heart to do. He has studied the word, he's practicing the word, we see that in the chapter before us, and then he teaches the word.

He receives the commission from King Artaxerxes that he can indeed teach those whom he encounters the law of God, those who do not know the law. He has the ability to freely teach the law.

[13:34] Again, they are not an independent people, but they are living under the reign of the Persian Empire still. And yet God has graciously given him favor with the king to do the very thing he thinks God is calling him to do.

But even in the opening pages of this chapter, we find since the temple is central to the task that Ezra believes God has called him to, that when he gathers these people around him, the people that he is influencing to bring back to Jerusalem with him, he tells us without a doubt that these are people with genealogical enrollment.

You say, well, that doesn't mean anything other than they know where their ancestors are. Well, it does mean something when we go back and we read the first couple of chapters of the book of Ezra and we find that when that first group came back, the first small minority, some 42,000 plus, came back of the few exiles out of the Babylonian captivity and the response to King Cyrus' decree, that there were a number who could not prove their genealogical enrollment.

And since they could not prove their genealogical enrollment, therefore, they were excluded from service in the house of God. That is, they could not prove that they were of the nation of Israel, therefore, they could not do any work in the temple, though they said, hey, we're priests and we're Levites.

Well, if you can't validate that, your word is simply not enough because God's service is so holy and so pure that God had said that no foreigner should be within the realms of the temple.

[15:01] And so they said, well, we have to wait until someone shows up. Well, we never have, and I know I've said this before, we don't have recorded that a priest ever showed up with Urim and Thummim. No one would cast the lots because that's what they said.

But what we do have recorded for us here is that there is a priest, Ezra, who shows up with a bunch of men with genealogical enrollment. He brings those who can validate the reality that they are of the descendants of Israel.

And if we were to read this name and we go to the first one that we mentioned is one of his close relatives for they are a descendant of Phineas. Ezra himself is a descendant of Phineas. And Phineas is more than so much, so much more than just a cool name that we find in scripture.

He is the one that God gave the covenant of an everlasting, enduring position of priests over the people of Israel as his grandfather Aaron had been given because of Phineas' zeal for the things of the Lord.

So Ezra stays focused on his task because he is ensuring that those who come back with him indeed have an opportunity to serve within the temple. But it's not just that.

[16:05] We find this listing here, but it says that when he gathers all these people around, now keep in mind what's going on. If all Ezra was doing was leading a group of people to go back to Jerusalem, then as soon as everybody got together, he'd say, okay, let's set out.

But that's not what Ezra has been called to do. That had happened during the decree of King Cyrus. That had happened some 60 plus years prior to that.

Actually, it happened about 80 years prior to this by this time because it's 58 years since the completion of the temple, but they had been there a number of years and they started the foundation. They didn't do anything. So almost 80 years ago, someone had just said, whoever wants to go, let's go.

So they all got together and they went. That's not Ezra's task. That's not his calling. His calling is to what? Study the word, live the word, teach the word. Therefore, he needed to strengthen the temple.

He needed to restore the spiritual worship of the people. So when he gathers everybody together, he gets them beside the river that leaves Ahava and they wait for three days. They camp for three days.

[17 : 06] And what he said is, if you guys want to go, the Lord's leading you to come meet me and it's okay, we're ready to go and everybody's prepared. Everybody's sold everything. Everybody's packed everything. And he says, okay, now we're going to wait for three days.

But these are not three wasted days. Because notice what he does. He says, and I observed them. These are three days of observation.

It's not judgmental days. But Ezra knows what God has called him to do. And he says, and as I observed them, I noticed there are priests and there are leading men, but there's someone that's not there.

Notice what the text says. But I observed among them there were no Levites. Levites are important. When you're trying to restore temple worship, you need Levites.

For Levites are the tribe of Levi that have been given charge to do the work within the temple, right? They're the ones who are supposed to handle the sacrifices that are brought in. And they aid the priests.

[18 : 10] They don't necessarily offer the sacrifices, but they cleanse the sacrifices. They skin the sacrifices. They do all the, we would call it the mundane tasks. They do the everyday, day-to-day operations of what takes place in the temple.

They're the gatekeepers. They're the musicians. The Levites encompass all of those. But when Ezra looked, he said, we have priests, we have leading men, but what we don't have is we don't have any Levites. But he doesn't move yet.

Why? Because the focus, the task, is not just to bring a bunch of people back to Jerusalem. The task that God has called him to is to restore the worship of the nation.

And to restore the worship of the nation, you had to have each and every part. And so, in that waiting, what Ezra does is Ezra calls some of the leading men, the three, the three Nathans, and then Nathan, and all the other men, and he sends them to a certain region where he knows there are Levites.

I like Ezra's pointedness, by the way. There are a bunch of Levites over there. So he sends them to this region and he asks, he compels the Levites to join them.

[19 : 15] And he declares, because of the gracious good hand of the Father, good hand of God upon us, God brought us a man of wisdom and discernment and leading and Levites were gathered to him and 200 plus servants in the temple.

What if Ezra had just thought, all I'm called to do is leading a bunch of people back to Jerusalem? What he had done is he had gathered these 1,900 people together and he had brought them to Jerusalem but there would have been no Levites and therefore the day-to-day operations of the temple would have been no better off.

Sanctified leadership maintains focus on what God has called them to do and the task before them. even if they have to wait three days and then reach out and say we're missing something.

It is a patient reality. It is something that we know God stirred the hearts of the Levites who went but it took a matter of time, right, and it took discernment from Ezra to say yes, we need Levites and so he stays focused on the task before them.

Secondly, sanctified leadership encourages an attitude of humility and dependence. It encourages an attitude of humility and dependence.

[20 : 39] After waiting and realizing that they have no Levites and sending these men to Kisathia and all of a sudden God brings these men of insight and the sons of Levi and all the Levites are gathered to them and say okay, now they're ready to go, right, they have priests, they have leading men, they have Levites, they have everything they need but look at what Ezra does.

Then, after he has everyone in place, then I proclaim to fast there at the river of Ahava. It's not moving yet. Everyone's ready to go but the very first thing he said we need Levites so the Levites get there and then he proclaims a fast and he commissions the people to be still.

These are leading men probably of some prominence and position within the Persian Empire. We know that Ezra was. We can see from the wealth that they bring with them that they are at least some people of means and these are people of genealogical enrollment, right?

These are people who have a land over there that they're going to go back to. These are people of some persuasion. These are people of discernment of the times. These are people who know some things but he says the first thing we're going to do is we're going to fast and pray.

Why? Lest they be tempted to trust in their own ability or lest they be feared lest they fear their inability.

[21 : 59] The two extremes there. They're about to embark on a pretty extensive journey. It takes a number of months to get there. They're going across a deserted region which is full of criminals and full of dangers and trials and tribulations and there are two extremes.

Either they would trust in their ability or they would fear their own inability and he doesn't want either extreme. He proclaims a fast and he says that we might humble ourselves before our God and seek from him a safe journey.

It is the reality that though we are gathered together and we are returning we have the commission and the decree of the king. We have the authoritative backing of the king of the Persian Empire. We have the calling of God but they humble themselves and they depend upon the Lord God Almighty. It says that as they did that in verse 23 we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter and here's the praise and he listens to our entreating.

What great leadership there, right? A leadership that says I know that we are people who have all of the support of the Persian Empire behind us. I know that we have letters to the satraps and the governors of that region to support us.

[23 : 14] I know that we have all the funds here to us but our dependence is not anybody in this world but rather our dependence rests alone in the Lord God Almighty. And he encourages this attitude among the people.

This is why we're not so surprised when we find the matters that happen later. He encourages an attitude of humility and dependence of realizing and resting upon the reality that it is God they need not their own strength or their own abilities.

So sanctified leadership is a leadership that encourages people to be humble and dependent because there's this great fear of independence and trust in our own abilities.

And we see here that Ezra is doing this with these people. Nehemiah would do very much the same thing but Ezra is calling them to live differently.

Fourth, we see not only does sanctified leadership focus on the task and encourage humility and dependence, true leadership fights to preserve the power of the testimony they had proclaimed.

[24 : 25] Ezra fought to preserve the power of the testimony they had already proclaimed. For he tells us why he proclaimed a fast.

Verse 22 says this, For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way. So what is Ezra telling us there?

Ezra said, I could have, right? I was in a royal position that I could have requested from the king. I mean, all we have to do is go back to chapter 7 and read the decree in writing that king Artaxerxes gave him.

He was at least of enough political position even though he was a spiritual leader that it was at least possible for him. Nehemiah does request the leadership and the protection of the king and Nehemiah gets it because Nehemiah and so we don't judge Nehemiah for not asking but we also understand these are two different leaders, right?

Nehemiah is a political leader from society rebuilding walls. Ezra is a spiritual leader rebuilding hearts and lives and people committed to worship in the Lord God.

[25 : 36] So Nehemiah does have the escorts of the kings leading and providing there but Ezra is ashamed to ask for that. Why? Because Ezra's calling is different.

It's much like D.L. Moody was unashamed to ask for any amount of money. D.L. Moody is considered one of the greatest fundraisers of all time in church history and D.L. Moody could commission you and ask you and respond and he had no shame whatsoever in asking anyone to give for the work of the kingdom.

He raised countless amount of funds for the YMCA and YWCA and he built churches all across the nation and he raised funds everywhere even in the state of Tennessee. He was raising funds to help with missional work overseas and he was sending some of that funds to individuals who wanted nothing to do with asking for money.

Hudson Taylor would never make anyone aware of his financial needs. They were contemporaries living at the same time. Hudson Taylor's conviction was that he would never make a need known but he would trust that the Lord God would supply the need.

But part of the way that the Lord God supplied that need was by using an individual who had no shame in making a need known and it took both. But they were both operating within the confines of their convictions.

[26 : 53] Nehemiah has no problem requesting to the king a royal escort and we praise God for it. Ezra does not but why is Ezra ashamed? Because Ezra does something that Nehemiah had never done.

Ezra had already offered a testimony before the king. Nehemiah prays to himself right? Nehemiah prays a quick prayer Nehemiah focuses so much on prayer he's praying all the time the king says why this sad face so I prayed to myself and I said to the king and he says all these things and we'll get to that when we get to the book of Nehemiah.

Ezra he evidently did more than pray to himself before the king he stood boldly and why should we be surprised for Nehemiah had set his heart to study the law to practice the law and to teach the law and he is speaking to king Artaxerxes who by the way has a little bit of spiritual influence because there's a queen named Esther up there and there's this man named Mordecai and there's this preservation of the people of Israel and the Jewish people even though Haman had revolted and Haman has hung on the gallows outside there's all this influence going on so now you have Ezra who says let me tell you something about the Lord our God and this is what he says he says I was ashamed to ask because we had said to the king he had testified to the king and what had been his testimony the hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek him but his power and his anger are against all those who forsake him so what he's saying here is I had already declared the worthiness of God to be worshipped because he is able to keep his people safe therefore

I was not going to ask for protection therefore he fought to preserve the integrity of his testimony why did he proclaim a fast and why did he go before because the testimony he had offered before the king was dependent upon it this is why scripture tells us be not quick to make a vow or to declare truth because we can rest assured the reality the enemy will give us an opportunity to go back on that truth we ought to fight to preserve the testimonies we have shared if we have testified to the worthiness of Christ to those around us and we have testified to the reality that Christ is our provider and sustainer and we have testified in all and everywhere friend listen to me fight to preserve that testimony among the people you have testified to the enemy will always give us a way to go back back on that word stay true to what you have proclaimed to the realities for God God loves to stand on his word and also be careful that what you testify is the word of God not the thought nor the opinion of man and when we make a bold proclamation and it is in alignment with the word of God then we stand on a sure foundation for God loves to be held accountable to his word he says in the book of Malachi test me and try me and see if I will not right it is not that we are testing God what God loves to do I believe from reading scripture is to validate in time and space the reality of his word through the lives of his people that when people stand on the word of God he loves to validate that to the people that are watching and waiting sanctified leaders fight to preserve the power of their testimony that they have shared with the people around them and they want to be true because we can be assured that if Ezra had went back to Artaxerxes and said and by the way we need a royal escort

[30 : 45] Artaxerxes would have remembered but didn't you say just so in our lives whenever we go back to people and we say something rest assured they will also say but didn't you say didn't you say God is able preserve that testimony history is full of those who have done so fourth and finally we see that sanctified leaders empower others to fulfill their roles they empower others to fulfill their roles it says in verse 24 now they're ready to go right they've gathered around they've been next to the river that leads to Hava and they've stayed three days Ezra's commissioned and called the Levites for he knows that he needs them that's according to the task he's asked the people to pray he's preserving that testimony now they're ready to set out verse 24 it says then I set apart twelve of the leading priests

Sherebiah Hashabiah and with them ten of their brothers so he's got these priests and these Levites here and he he sets twelve of these leading priests apart what's about to happen is not something that has to happen when Ezra knew that God was calling him back to Jerusalem King

Artaxerxes and the counselors around him in his presence offered a large sum of money for Ezra to take back with him now we have seen it does not necessarily mean that Artaxerxes and his royal counselors are holy men we do know that they are endearing themselves to the Jewish people so that the Jewish people will in turn pray for Artaxerxes and his son that God's blessings would rain upon them as they did every other region that they reigned over but yet they are giving this bountiful gift they're giving silver and gold and brass they're giving utensils to put back into the tabernacle these things were entrusted to Ezra for Ezra was the one who received the royal decree from Artaxerxes and also had received in his hand the gifts from the king and his counselors but what takes place next is pretty astounding because Ezra is accountable for these things right he is the one that is accountable for he had received them from the hand of the king and he is the one that was to bring them and put them in the temple but before they leave what Ezra does is Ezra summons twelve of the leading priests priest and places these gifts in their hands why because according to the word of God the priest were the ones who were to receive the gifts and the offerings that go into the temple that's temple work

I know Ezra is of priestly descent but he is a teacher and a scribe he entrusts it into their hands and he weighs it out into their hands for it is their job that's their calling but what's unique if we think about it you say well sure that makes sense but these are priests who have never seen the temple these are priests who have never done temple service these are priests that are only priests by genealogical lineage they have never once offered a sacrifice for they have lived their entire lives in captivity well probably within the freedom of the Persian Empire but outside of the confines of Jerusalem you say well pastor I thought there were some who had seen the former temple and they saw the new temple well sure but that was 80 years ago right that was 80 years ago so by this time those who are coming back had all been born in a foreign land none of them had seen the glory of Solomon's temple nor served in a temple but Ezra knew that they were a particular people set apart by the Lord God Almighty to do a task they were priests and what he does even before they leave the region of the Persian Empire to go to Jerusalem is he empowers them to begin doing what they're going to do when they get there think about the faith that Ezra had to have not in the men he were putting this into their hands but into the Lord God who had called these men because these are the gifts from the king given to Ezra and we only know two of the individuals names of the twelve and he weighs out this gift into their hands why because scripture tells us he studied the law that he may know the law and he may practice the law one of the practices of the law are found in scripture in the old testament in particular where he was reading in the pentateuch was that you give your gifts and offerings to the priest and so he puts it in their hands and says this is your responsibility he could have kept it himself and he could have ensured that on that four month journey that it would have stayed safe but he didn't he weighed it out gave it to them and said we'll weigh it when we get there when they get there it's also there but he gives it to them before they enter into the dangerous treacherous region because he's not because he's trusting them he's trusting the

God they just prayed to and he heard our prayers right and the hand of God rest upon him and stayed all the robbers and the people waiting in ambush and everything all the dangers along the way but part of that is that Ezra was empowering the people with him to fulfill the calling upon their life too because leadership is not a monopoly you guys watch everything that I do as Ezra would say he would say hey I'm glad you're with me this is your responsibility carry this across this region I probably wouldn't have wanted to be one of those twelve just me being honest with you I hope you didn't call my name because we're about to go into danger land but here's the king's gift make sure he gets to the temple but he does he empowers them and these are the men that when they get to Jerusalem they walk into the temple and the very first thing they do they were there three days three days is an important thing around Ezra it takes time and so they were there three days but after three days they get to walk into the temple and they bring the offering to the temple can you imagine now it would be hard you'd be hard pressed to keep these men from doing their work in the temple why because they were entrusted with a great responsibility they were given much and they fulfilled much Warren

[37 : 34] Wiersbe said there is some imagery here of the Christian life by the way it's a great side note I love Wiersbe's application of some things Wiersbe said there is some great application at least a picture here of the Christian life that in this life we are entrusted with precious gifts and we are told to keep and to guard it until the day where we go before his presence and we lay it at his feet but as Wiersbe rightly says unlike these priests we are not just told to keep what we've been

given and to weigh it back the same we've been told to take it and to invest it and to multiply it and weigh out more when we get there ours is to increase the parable of the talents it's not just to be hidden and kept and weighed back the same yet what we notice is much like Christ does with us Ezra does with them he empowers them to fulfill their role he gives them a responsibility he says you can do this fulfill it this is sanctified leadership it remains focused on the task before them it encourages an attitude of humility and dependence it fights to preserve the power of the testimony they have already declared it empowers others to fulfill their role may we be those who lead like that set apart for holy service and the glory of the father and the benefit of the kingdom let's pray father we thank you so much for this day we thank you for the opportunity we have to come together and study the word of god we thank you for the truths it contains lord may this word be an encouragement to us for the week before us lord as we seek to serve you to lead others around us to come to a greater knowledge of christ may we be sanctified vessels set apart for your service in the world you put us in we praise you for the work you're doing among us we praise you for the the way you work in our society the plans and purposes you carry out and all we ask is that we would continue to be those tools in your hand useful for the master thank you lord as we get ready to leave here that we can leave with confidence in your leading and guiding and may we draw closer to you each and every day and we ask it in jesus name amen thank you guys