

Ezra 6

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Preacher: Billy Joe Calvert

[0 : 00] We ask that Christ be honored in all that we do. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Take your Bibles, go into the book of Ezra, Ezra chapter 6. Ezra chapter 6. Making our way through Scripture, we have made our way up to this point, the book of Ezra.

The book of Ezra is a really unique book in its setting. It is unique in that it gives us a clear definition of how God is reestablishing his people after the Babylonian captivity.

And he is really sovereignly working not just on the spiritual front, but also on the political front. He's working in every realm of mankind. We have just finished the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles.

In our study of 1 and 2 Chronicles, we know there are a number of things that are important to the chronicler. 1 Chronicles is also post-Babylonian captivity. It is probably, well not probably, we do know that in Jewish Scripture it is at the very end of what we refer to as the Old Testament.

And the chronicler focuses on three things. That is, the temple, the Levites, and the throne. So it's looking at the role of the temple among the people of God, the Levites serving in the temple, Levites and priests combined, and the lineage according to King David.

[1 : 23] Ezra is so unique in that it's not really focused on the society, but really focused on how God was bringing everyone back. God was leading the people to reestablish themselves.

It is the matters that the chronicler is addressing later on in history that are taking place in the book of Ezra. That is the reconstruction of the temple, the reintroduction. By the time we get to the 7th chapter, we'll find Ezra eventually, finally making his way back.

And Ezra brings with him priests and Levites, and the reintroduction of the priests and Levites into the region of Jerusalem. And we're looking at them as people who have come out of this disciplinary action of God, that God has refined them, if you will.

It is always worth repeating that they went into the Babylonian captivity, one of the most polytheistic people, and they come out of the Babylonian captivity, one of the most, if not the most, monotheistic people.

That is, their problem of worshipping a multiplicity of gods has been refined within the confines of the Babylonian captivity. Now they come out seeking, at least on the outside, to worship the true God.

[2 : 32] Now, we know they're doing it in an imperfect way. They respond to the decree of King Cyrus, that whosoever will let him return to the regions of Jerusalem to rebuild the temple again.

We find that in the last verse of 2 Chronicles. We find that same refrain, refrain, if not verse by verse. I repeat it in the first chapter of the book of Ezra. And they respond, the ones whose hearts were stirred to come back.

And we've been looking at that over and over again, that it is just a small minority of the people who return, 42,000 plus. And we're still in that first wave, if you will. Some 12 to 15 years have transpired since then.

And a number of political fronts have happened in the Persian Empire. Cyrus is no longer king. Artaxerxes is no longer king. Darius is now up on the throne. There's also the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah coinciding.

There's a lot that's going on. If you want to kind of really fully understand what's going on in Ezra, you have to read Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah. Read the book of Esther. And also read a little bit of the book of Daniel.

[3 : 39] Because there's a lot happening. There's a lot of the Old Testament, if you think about it, that focuses on this time historically. That God is bringing his people back. He's doing some amazing things.

He's fulfilling his word. Whereas up until we get to the book of 1 Chronicles in our Old Testament, everything is looking towards the captivity.

And now we're looking back after the captivity. We're pushing forward historically until the coming of Christ. We know that it will still be centuries before he comes.

But that is what we're pushing forward to. And God is preparing a way for the Messiah to show up. But I want you to see this evening a visible testimony of favor. A visible testimony of favor.

In the fifth chapter, after the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the people of the Lord begin to reconstruct, begin the reconstruction process again of the temple.

[4 : 36] If you remember, they came, they laid the foundation stones, they built the altar. The enemies of the people of the land came and began to challenge them. So they stopped for about 12 years. The prophets show up within two months of one another and begin to issue the word of the Lord to them.

And as they are empowered by the word of God, they restart the reconstruction process, the very thing God had called them to. And in the fifth chapter, Tatnaia and Sheshbazar, the region leaders of that part of the Persian Empire, because they're not an independent people.

They're people within the Persian Empire. By the way, we get that in the book of Daniel. We start looking at the image of the gold, the silver, the bronze, all those things.

And we get down to the clay and bronze. It's all part of that imagery that you find. And if you're reading in your daily reading and you read Daniel 11 today and you scratch your head because you read Daniel 11, there's just all these wars and battles going on.

That all fits in bits and pieces here as well. It is an interpretation of what is to come with all these changing of empires. And so they're between the Persians. And so there have been the Medes and the Medo-Persian, now the Persian.

[5 : 43] And we're getting ready to go into the Greeks historically. Alexander the Great will show up eventually and change everything. in the landscape of history. But what we find now is they're part of the Persian Empire.

And so in the fifth chapter, the governors of that land say, What are you doing? You're rebuilding this huge structure. And why are you doing that? Do you have permission to do it? And they give them their names. Yeah, these are the people that are working on it.

We're here. We're doing it because the decree was issued by King Cyrus. So they continue to build. But the region leaders send a letter to Darius and say, Find out if that decree actually exists.

Or are these people just pulling straws and making something up to do what they want to do? So that kind of gets us where we're at. I told you in the first chapter, pay attention where it says, And King Cyrus issued a decree and put it in writing.

That refrain, that word, and put it in writing is important. And we'll see why here in the sixth chapter. So Ezra chapter six says this. Then King Darius issued a decree.

[6 : 42] And a search was made in the archives where the treasures were stored in Babylon. In Ecbatana, in the fortress, which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found and there was written in it as follows.

Memorandum. In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus the king issued a decree. Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered, be rebuilt.

And let its foundations be retained. Its height being 60 cubits, and its width 60 cubits. With three layers of huge stones and one layer of timbers. Let the cost be paid from the royal treasury.

Also, let the gold and the silver utensils of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be returned and brought to their places in the temple in Jerusalem, and you shall put them in the house of God.

Now, therefore, Tatnaia, the governor of the province beyond the river, Shethar, Baznai, and your colleagues, the officials of the province beyond the river, keep away from there.

[7 : 42] Leave this work on the house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God.

The full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the river, that and that without delay. Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs, for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine, and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, it is to be given to them daily without fail, that they may offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

And I issue a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this.

May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change it, so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued this decree.

Let it be carried out with all diligence. Then Tetaniah, the governor of the province beyond the river, Shethar of Osni, and their colleagues carried out the decree with all diligence, just as King Darius had sent.

[9 : 02] And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Ido. And they finished building according to the command of God, the God of Israel, and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia.

This temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar. It was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.

They offered for the dedication of this temple of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Then they appointed the priests to their divisions, and the Levites, and their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. The exiles observed the Passover on the 14th of the first month, for the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together.

All of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers, the priests, and for themselves, the sons of Israel who returned from exile, and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the Lord God of Israel, ate the Passover.

[10:18] And they observed the feast of unleavened bread, seven days, with joy, for the Lord had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

I want you to see a visible testimony of favor. This temple was completed in the year 516. It tells us in the sixth year of King Darius' reign, it would have been in the month of Adar, that is the last month of the Jewish calendar in the year 516.

The temple in Jerusalem, if you're counting it up, fell in the year 585. So we're almost 70 years, which should not surprise you, because Jeremiah said it is appointed for 70 years.

Almost 70 years to the day. And we find this completion here as a testimony to the favor of the Lord that rests upon his people. And I want you to see that that favor is being displayed, not just in the completed temple that stands before them, but in a number of ways throughout this passage.

First, we see here the favor of the Lord is displayed through his sovereign leading. We see the sovereign leading hand of the Lord God Almighty as he shows his favor towards his people.

[11:32] It says King Darius issued a decree, and the search was made in the archives. And as we have been holding on to this reality that it tells us in the end of 2 Chronicles, and it repeats it in the very first chapter of the book of Ezra, it tells us that King Cyrus issued a decree and put it in writing.

God uses the laws of the land multiple times throughout this chapter to fulfill his purposes, for it was a law in the land of the Medo-Persians that once a decree was issued and put in writing that it was an everlasting, eternal law, that it could not be changed, that no decree could be taken against it, or that could make it null.

It had to be fulfilled completely and absolutely. We see that in the book of Daniel. The reason Daniel was thrown into the lion's den is because the decree was written by the king that if anyone prayed towards anyone else but the king for three days, they would be thrown in the lion's pit.

And Daniel was thrown in the pit because he violated that decree. But another law was put into writing as soon as Daniel came out of that, and that was that one could worship the Lord God Almighty. And that if any said that they couldn't, then they would be thrown in.

We see it over and over again. But it is that law of the land that has such an impact because it is used by the great lawgiver himself, that is the Lord God Almighty.

[12:47] God in his sovereignty is truly turning the hearts of the kings in the palm of his hands, but he is doing it for the glory of his people. And if we look at this chapter in connection with the chapters that precede it, we see that God uses the kings to not only begin the work in the temple, but he also uses the kings of the land to confirm and to complete the work on the temple.

That God uses it to spur his people, that the time has come to rebuild, and it is by a decree of King Cyrus and the issuing of that decree that some hearts are stirred and they go back.

And it is confirmed not through, it is kind of restarted through the word of God, through the prophets, but it is confirmed and it is completed because of the decree of King Cyrus. I mean King Darius.

But the reality we find is that when Darius issues this decree to search the archives in Babylon, we even see the sovereignty of God extending even further for the scroll is not found in Babylon.

It is found some 200 miles away in the summer residence of the kings of the Persian Empire in Ecbatana. It is there some 200 miles from Babylon that they find a scroll.

[14 : 02] They happen to find a scroll. Now think about that, really just how difficult the possibilities of that reality may be. They are searching in the archives of Babylon, but they do not find it there.

They find it some 200 miles away inside the summer residence of a king. There happens to be a scroll that contains a memorandum that a scribe wrote down. Now when Cyrus had issued a decree, more than likely that decree would have been carved on a tablet of clay, but later on a scribe would have transcribed that memorandum and put it on a scroll of paper, rolled it up, and deposited it somewhere that the king had asked them to, and it happens to be not in Babylon, but in Ecbatana, and there the scroll is found.

And God's hand is completely upon this reality. And if we really see how God is moving, in the fifth chapter we have the tendency to be discouraged because they are responding in obedience to the word of God.

It says in the book of Haggai, is it time for you to live in your paneled houses, in the house of the Lord to be in shambles? And so they begin to rebuild. And the moment they begin to rebuild, the opposition starts.

The governor of that land, Tetaniah, shows up and begins to question them. Now while he doesn't stop them, we would think we get discouraged. Well, why can't people just leave them alone? Well, if Tetaniah had left them alone and never asked a question, never wrote the paper to Darius, never asked Darius to make a search, and if the scroll had never been found, then everything that follows the finding of the scroll would have never taken place.

[15 : 37] So even then, we could say that the opposition that came to his people was sovereignly under the hand of God, for God is, as the book of Romans tells us, working all things out together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

And his purpose at that moment was to rebuild the temple. And he is sovereignly orchestrating where they will have not only the opportunity, but the ability.

What does it tell us in the book of Zechariah? That Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple and that Zerubbabel would complete the foundation of the temple. And we've repeated this over and over again, but it tells us in Zechariah, not by might nor by will, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

That Zerubbabel wouldn't do it because he had the ability or he even had the capability to do it, but through the spirit of the Lord God Almighty, he would bring it to completion. And now we see that God is sovereignly working this out.

He uses the heart and hand of King Cyrus to issue a decree. He uses the search that is called for by Tetaniah that leads to a decree by King Darius so that the people will complete the task that he's called them to do.

[16 : 55] One of the greatest displays of favor is that God is sovereignly working things out for the purposes he has intended to take place. The temple is of utmost importance because of everything that is connected to it.

For in the mount of the Lord, it will be provided. And we know that when Christ stands in that place, if God had not sovereignly worked according to the political matters of that time, then there's a possibility these things would not have come about, but yet we see this sovereignty of God.

We not only see the sovereign leading of God in all of these events, we see the supplied needs. Because one thing that takes us by surprise when we read of the decree of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issues a decree and he encourages the people of the land, that is the people of Babylon, that are not returning, and it seems to be in Ezra chapter one, that those Jews whose hearts were stirred could go back and those Jews whose hearts were not stirred to leave should support those brothers of theirs that are going back and fund their return.

And they should also, and we know that Cyrus does this, take the silver and gold that were taken out of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and gives them back to them. But what we do not have is kind of the rest of the story, and we don't find it until here.

And that is that within that decree, there is also the reality that the funding for the project should come out of the royal treasury. Now, it is really astounding because Tetniah is questioning why they are rebuilding, and in the end, Tetniah will be told that the taxes he collects should fund the work they are doing.

[18 : 36] His question is, well, you shouldn't be doing that, and if you were to go back just a couple more chapters, and when the people of the land rose up in the first opposition, which caused the people to stop the work on the temple, the implication was for the kings of Persia to look and to see that the people of that region had caused great disturbances and done much harm to the Persian Empire, and that if that temple was to be rebuilt, that it would be harmful and detrimental to the king himself and to everyone around it, that it was a work to be stopped.

But when the decree is issued and the search is made and the findings come out, what has been written, again, as God has so ordained, was not only that it would be permissive for the people to rebuild the temple, but that it would be funded by the royal treasury of the Persian Empire.

Now, before you get carried away and think, oh, look how holy the kings of the Persian Empire are. No, this was a common practice. Again, God uses the ordinary practice of man to bring about extraordinary means.

It was the common practice, much like the Roman Empire of the Persian Empire and even the Medo-Persian Empire to really encourage local worship of the regions that they overtook because it kind of befriended.

In Rome, it ended up being called the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome, that you can keep practicing your faith and you can keep doing this and we'll just all be one big happy people, right? And even we find it here, Darius says that it should be done so that they can pray.

[20 : 04] They said, we will fund it, but you be sure to pray for the king and his sons, okay? We're going to pay for it, but you pray for us as well, which for the people of God is never a contradictory term because we are called in Scripture to pray for those who rule over us, right?

So there's no contradiction in terms there. Now, to Darius, it seemed to be kind of self-serving. If I can make them happy and give them what they want and they pray for me, then maybe that's the true God that would answer their prayers and as long as I have everybody praying to all the gods, at least one of them will be the right God.

And if we're looking at it from a very paganistic term, but when we look at it from the sovereignty of God, God is using that practice to bring about his work. And this is not the only time in history he does that.

It is the practice of Pax Romana that the early church gets to exist within the realm of the Jewish people and to spread throughout the Roman Empire. God uses that realm and that acceptance.

It is not until they have this full break from the Jewish faith and Judaism that the church comes into really opposition. And we begin to see even Paul utilizes these things for the glory of the king.

[21 : 13] And what we find here is that God is using this because Tatania gets this letter back from Darius and says, leave them alone. That's wonderful. God supplies for them protection.

He says, as for this work, don't bother them. And if you were to look at the rest of Ezra, no longer do they face opposition when they build the temple. Opposition comes later on when Nehemiah shows up and they're rebuilding the walls.

But the protection is given them because they are told by the king, don't interrupt the work. But then he goes a little further and says, also the taxes you collect in that region fund the work.

Now notice, they're within the realms. They're, it's a good way of saying, the people weren't going beyond what they ought to be doing. If you remember the letter that came from Tetanai, it said that there are three layers of large stones and timbers in the walls.

What does the decree from Cyrus say? There should be three layers of large stones and timbers in the walls, right? They are obeying the law of the land and God is using the law of the land to bring about the work and will of God.

[22 : 21] So he says, you should fund it. And then he says, not only fund the construction, he says, you should give them whatever the priest needs. All the sacrificial system, the wheat, the barley, the oil, the animals, whatever they need on a daily basis.

God is providing and supplying here what they need to worship him. And it's a wonderful testimony of the favor of God being shown upon such a small minority of people.

God supplies their needs. Third thing that we notice is not only is there a sovereign leading, there's a supply of needs, there's also a successful completion.

That is, they do what God has called them to do. One of the greatest displays or testimonies of the favor of the Lord upon his people are when his people actually do that which he's called them to do.

It tells us in verse 14, and the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah. Again, the success is not because, and we have to keep this balance, they were not successful because Darius funded the opportunity.

[23 : 38] They were successful because of the word of God leading them through the prophesying. And they finished building, notice this wording again, and they finished building according to the command of, now as far as Tetaniah and all the people of that land are concerned.

The command for this building to be rebuilt began with Cyrus and was further along by Darius. So the king has issued a command and a decree.

But when the people of the Lord look back upon it and they pin this, Ezra pins it this way, they finished completing according to the command of the God of Israel.

They know ultimately that the building that has been erected, the work that has been accomplished is not a response to the command of the court of the king, but rather it is founded in the courtroom of heaven.

And the work they have accomplished may have been carried along, at least outwardly looking, from the king's ethics and decrees, but it was the Lord God Almighty who had commanded them to do the work.

[24 : 55] It is a proper perspective. Now it is, and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, the decrees helped to carry along the command. But the ultimate authority and the ultimate one who issued this rebuild call was not a king of the land, but the Lord God himself.

We won't ever want to lose sight of that, that God moved in time through the people of that day to bring about his eternal purposes and plans.

God had brought them about for his glory. and for his honor. It is only when we begin to think that it is a result of what the king had commanded. Church history tells us that the church itself got in trouble when they began to think that it was the command of the king of the land that brought favor instead of the command of the king of heaven.

And they began more concerned about the kings before them than the Lord God who reigned over them. But here favor is shown because they have completed it according to the command of God.

And it is a testimony and how big of a testimony it is will be seen in the next thing it is a testimony to everyone around them. And they testify it says and they gathered together and they dedicated the they celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.

[26 : 15] I love how Warren Wiersbe declares this Warren Wiersbe says compared to Solomon's temple this dedication service is really nothing. In the dedication of Solomon's temple they offered sacrifices that could not be counted like almost 2,000 sin offerings I think it was like 1,900 and something sin offerings I mean it's astounding how many people brought in animals to be sacrificed and they had to do it on a larger altar just because there were so many people gathered around in comparison with Solomon's temple this dedication service is nothing.

But what we notice are those that are taking part in it have joy because they're able to worship and to celebrate and to walk in obedience coming out of the Babylonian captivity and God receives that worship they had no problem counting the sacrifices given here it says that they celebrated the dedication of the temple of God with 100 bulls 200 rams 400 lambs very small but God accepts those sacrifices because it's not the number of the animals but rather the heart of the individuals that testifies to the work being completed and probably the most amazing number that we find is the smallest one and they offer for all Israel 12 male goats 12 representative of the entire people of Israel one for each tribe now that's amazing because we know going into the captivity they were a divided nation as a matter of fact the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen so many years prior to the fall some 200 years prior to the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah and they have been a divided people since the reign of Rehoboam the son of Solomon but yet now coming out of that captivity they are again declaring their unity as the single singular people of the

Lord God and this is again if we look at the prophecy of Jeremiah and even Ezekiel they declare that God does not see them as a divided nation but as a united nation it is Ezekiel that I believe is supposed to take two sticks and join them into one and say that God is joining the nation together and God is bringing that about Ezekiel is prophesying about the time they go into Babylonian captivity and now we see the display of that coming out of the Babylonian captivity that they are seeing themselves as a singular people that God has brought this heart change within them and it's a completed work fourth and finally and probably the greatest testimony of the Lord's favor is that we see here a separated people and it's kind of hidden from us it says in verse 19 the exiles observed the Passover on the 14th of the first month so the very next month that the celebration of the dedication of the temple is on the last month of the Jewish calendar is the very next month that they celebrate the

Passover and it is a celebration of the Passover with a new temple they get to do it in the temple for the first time since going into Babylonian captivity as the people of God but we don't want everyone to lose sight of why God is doing this okay and we have to go back in all the scripture and we find this in the early pages of scripture in the book of Genesis why did God call Abram out of the land of the earth of the Chaldeans which is the same reason why God called Israel out of the land of Babylon in the Persian Empire God called Abram out of the land of the earth of the Chaldeans not because Abram was something special not because Abram was walking faithfully he was living really in what most people think was the seat of idolatry in all of the world he would have been an idolatrous individual walking among an idolatrous people until the Lord God Almighty interrupted his life and God called him to separate himself from his father's household and he and his wife

Sarah to leave and to go to land he would show them he gets held up in Haran for a number of years we don't know why he gets held up in Haran until we read the book of Acts he said why we need the new testament along with the old testament right and Stephen tells us in his defense before the council of freedmen why Abram got held up in Haran is because Abram had to wait until his dad died because what happened is Abram was told to leave the land of the area of the Chaldeans and Abram took a little bit of the land with him he took his daddy along and when he took his daddy along he got halfway to Israel and he stopped but after his dad died the Lord appeared to him again and told him where to go until he got to a point of complete obedience so we ask ourselves why did God call Abram out of the land of the earth of Chaldeans in order to make Abraham out of him so that he may rise up a nation is it because Abraham was something special and the answer to that is no it's because God is about to do something God is going to raise a nation from the most unlikely of sources and in raising this nation he's going to do it for an intended purpose to be a display to a watching world so that the nations of the world would understand what holy

[31 : 22] God almighty looks like in relation and connection with a particular peculiar people he's going to call them to live different and he does it for a purpose I know we go through this before and it gets kind of lengthy but he does it that the nations would know and so throughout the history of the nation of Israel what we find are people being drawn the reason for all those weird laws they have in the book of Leviticus and why they can only eat kosher meat is not just so that they could be they could look at everybody and go see we're different than you know it's so that these things would set them apart and being set apart people would take notice of them and when they take notice of them they would say wow their animals do not feel to give birth give birth wow it's always raining over there wow look at the bumper crop of harvest they're bringing in what is different about that people than about us and they would get looking a little bit further and they say they worship one god that god must be an amazing god it's like

Naaman wanting to take loads of dirt back with him after he went seven times down into the river right that river is not special but the god of that land is special so god is raising up these people so that other people will know who he is after the Babylonian captivity he's doing the same thing when he takes the nation of Israel out of Babylon and he puts them back in Jerusalem he's putting them among a very diverse people group right the peoples of the land but when they celebrate this Passover look at what so we see this testimony of God's favor are they doing what God called them to do verse 23 it's kind of subtle so I want you to pay attention to it these!

are the sons of Israel who returned from exile that would be the 42 thousand plus that's who they sacrificed for the sons of Israel who returned from exile and there and there's another people group there as well the sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them that is those people who were living there and saw how God worked to bring about the completion of the temple and had seen the display of God's favor and the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah seen the decrees of Cyrus and even the further decree of

Darius those people who knew their tax money was going and returning and funding this and so they purified themselves notice what they had to do they separated themselves from their culture the impurity of the nations of the land and they joined them it is a display of God's favor when people say I want what they have and they join them to seek the Lord God of Israel why did God put them there so that the people of the land would separate themselves and purify themselves to join them and say I want to seek the God of Israel it's why God put us here right one of the greatest displays of God's favor upon our lives is that when we realize God puts us in a place to live differently so that he can sovereignly work to supply all of our needs and he can work in such a manner that makes people scratch their heads so that when people look at our lives they could say

I want to seek what they have I want to celebrate with them because what they're doing looks different than what I'm doing and it is the call of God's people to show that favor to a watching world so that others would separate themselves to join with them and they did it says they ate the Passover and they observed the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy for the Lord had caused them to rejoice and had turned the heart it's kind of a play on words here by the way I don't know if you catch it unless you are really paying attention had turned the heart of the king of Assyria wait a minute the Assyrian empire fell in the 600s this is 516 there is no king of Assyria anymore that's the king of Persia right but the Persians had taken the place of the Assyrians and what we're being told here is that judgment originally came when the king of Assyria came in

[36 : 15] Sennacherib and he took away the northern kingdom now all of that has been reconciled all of that has been brought back God's favor is poured upon him those who rule over them now are no longer being used as judgmental tools but rather as tools of God's favor towards them to encourage them in the work of the house of God the God of Israel it is a visible testimony of his favor and multitudes of people we are told respond to that testimony we want to celebrate and may we as the people of the Lord be a visible testimony of his favor as we display to a watching world to those around us this is what it looks like when God works in an individual's life for his glory and his honor we find it recorded for us in Ezra 6 let's pray we'll be dismissed father we thank you so much for this day we are so thankful for the opportunity we have of gathering together we thank you for your word and we pray

Lord as we get ready to leave here tonight that you be glorified and honored through our lives that the favor of the Lord would rest upon us as a testimony to those around us not just for our own comfort not for our own ease but that it would be a testimonial tool that others would see and others would come to know the Lord God Almighty Lord Jesus we thank you for your love we thank you for your kindness and your mercy that's displayed towards us we thank you for grace we thank you for the salvation that we find in your work we pray that we would live as your people for your glory and yours alone in the days ahead and we ask it all in Christ's name amen thank you guys really appreciate your time