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**C1323 – July 10, 2013 – Ezra 7:1-10**

**Ezra: Scholar, Practitioner, Expositor**

We are studying the book of Ezra and last week we completed the first half of Ezra, chapters 1-6, the First Return in 538BC and the Rebuilding of the Temple in 515BC. At this point there is a 58 year gap between chapters 6 and 7 that includes the events of the Book of Esther. Starting the second half of Ezra, chapters 7-10, the Second Return and Reformation of the People in 458BC. The theme of the entire era is satanically-inspired opposition to God's covenant program and how God providentially overcame the opposition through human instruments.

	<b>Ezra 1-6</b>	<b>Esther</b>	<b>Ezra 7-10</b>	<b>Nehemiah</b>
<b>Gentile King(s)</b>	Cyrus, Darius	Ahasuerus (Xerxes)	Artaxerxes	Artaxerxes
<b>Goal</b>	Rebuilding of Temple		Reformation of People	Reconstruction of Jerusalem
<b>Leader</b>	Zerubbabel and Jeshua		Ezra	Nehemiah
<b>Time Frame</b>	538-515BC	482-473BC	458BC	444-425BC
<b>Satanic Strategy</b>	Deter Rebuilding	Genocide	Intermarriage	
<b>Jewish Prophets</b>	Haggai, Zechariah		Malachi	
<b>Return</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Return (~50,000)		2 <sup>nd</sup> Return (~2,000)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Return

Let's look at the theme in these three time periods, Ezra 1-6, Esther and Ezra 7-10. In Ezra 1-6, 538-515BC, God providentially worked on Judah's behalf

through Gentile kings and Jewish prophets to thwart satanically-inspired attempts to deter the Jews from returning to the land, rebuilding of the Temple and re-instating the Mosaic worship system. If Satan had been successful in deterring them God would have been forced to discipline them and eventually kick them out of the land. This would have effectively derailed His covenant program and rendered the Messiah's coming impossible. However, God is greater than Satan and His providential work through Gentile kings and Jewish prophets was successful in encouraging the Jews to complete the Temple and re-instate proper worship.

Satanic opposition, however, did not cease at this time. A brief note in Ezra 4, 486BC, mentions legal opposition during the early years of the reign of King Ahasuerus that may have set the stage for the anti-Semitism involved in the book of Esther. The Book of Esther, 482-473BC, records the well-known opposition led by Haman, a descendant of Israel's ancient enemy Amalek, who established a policy of kingdom-wide Jewish genocide. However, God had already providentially moved Esther and Mordecai into position years in advance and at appropriate times God turned the heart of the king in their favor, effectively reversing the policy by allowing the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies and giving them positive status in the Persian Empire.

Tonight we find a new strategy of opposition had begun in the land when the genocide in the time of Esther had failed. With the worship system in place in Jerusalem Satan began tempting Jewish men to marry pagan wives. These intermarriages were illegal according to the Mosaic Law. God's reasoning was that if Jewish men married pagan wives the wives would introduce pagan idolatry and the men would subsequently accommodate to pagan idolatry and eventual wholesale capitulation to paganism. This would result in divine discipline and Israel's eventual exile from the land thwarting God's Messianic purposes. The intermarriages would also threaten the identification of the Messianic line through David by distorting it beyond recognition so that when the Messiah did come His credentials could not be proven. The second half of the Book of Ezra shows how God providentially overcame these strategies by working through Gentile rulers and the raising up of a Jewish Bible teacher named Ezra.

We meet Ezra for the first time in Ezra 7:1 and we meet him before we learn of the intermarriage problem because the intermarriages had already taken place and so Ezra is going to walk into an existing problem. And so chapter 7 is designed to show us the kind of man God providentially raised up to walk into an existing problem and deal with it. Before we get into his biography it's important to ask "Why Ezra wrote the first six chapters of the book if he doesn't come into the story until the seventh chapter of the book?" "Why doesn't he just chronicle his time period?" "Why does he reach back 80 years?" I think the answer to this question is two-fold. First, Ezra was a priest and therefore had an intense interest in things regarding the Temple such as the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifices. Since the Temple was rebuilt and sacrifices re-instated during the prior time period Ezra writes to record that great work. Second, Ezra was a bible teacher and therefore had an intense interest in the work of God on behalf of Israel. To encourage his generation of returnees who faced opposition he recorded the opposition the prior returnees faced when they tried to follow God's will for their lives and how God overcame that opposition by turning the hearts of Gentile kings and raising up Jewish prophets to encourage them. The work God had done then He was now doing again through the Gentile king Artaxerxes and the bible teacher Ezra. Recalling God's work in the past would assure them that God still loved them and had a plan for them. It reminds us of the great passage in Jeremiah, "I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." The promise of a future and hope is for the nation Israel to be fulfilled ultimately in the millennium.<sup>i</sup> To reach that destiny God works through Gentile political rulers as well as Jewish religious leaders. So Ezra writes the first six chapters to show how God's past work in this manner connected and paved the way for His present work.

Alright, let's take a look at Ezra 7 starting in verse 1. **Now after these things**, that is, the things Ezra recorded in chapters 1-6 regarding God's work for them during the first return and rebuilding of the Temple. **After these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, there went up Ezra.** Ezra was a citizen of the kingdom of **Persia** during the reign of **Artaxerxes**. **Persia** was the largest empire in the world up to that time in history; it was the second of the four Gentile kingdoms that were revealed to Daniel as composing the times of the Gentiles. Babylon had been the first but Babylon had fallen under Cyrus in 538BC and thus Persia had risen and established world dominance. Ezra lived 80 years later during **the reign of**

**Artaxerxes** who ruled from 464-424BC. It was at that time that **there went up Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, 2son of Shallum, son of Zadok**, and so forth, a big long list of names giving his priestly credentials. If you notice in verse 5 he traces his priestly credentials back to whom? Back ultimately to **Aaron, the chief priest**. Why does he trace his credentials back to Aaron? Aaron was the first high priest of Israel. There's another priest in here who is very important, who is he? Zadok. Why is Zadok important? He was the only priestly family that was faithful to David. So what this means is that in the future Millennial Temple the only priests that will qualify to serve will be the priests of Zadok. I refer you to Ezek 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11, all passages that describe the priests of Zadok as performing the services in the future Millennial Temple. Ezra was in that line. He was of the house of **Zadok**.

Having revealed his priestly credentials - why is that necessary? What significance would these credentials have to a Jew? It would mean Ezra has authority. The priests had authority to teach. It was **This Ezra**, verse 6, who **went up from Babylon**. Up to where? Up to Jerusalem vv 7, 8 and 9. **Babylon** is low elevation, it's down by the Euphrates River, Jerusalem is high elevation so **Ezra went up from Babylon**. Let's say a few things about Ezra right here that relate to his background and accomplishments that are not all ascribed here but interesting and firmly held by Jewish tradition. First, he came from Babylon, a major population center of the Jews and a center of Torah study. Very few Jews returned comparatively in the earlier return. Most of them remained in Babylon. It's where oral law began to develop and eventually where the Mishnah and Gemara formed which make up the Babylonian Talmud. So Ezra lived when the oral tradition was getting started. Second, Jewish tradition holds that Ezra was the one who eventually put together a group of men known as the Great Synagogue. It was these men who collected the OT books into their final canonical form of 22 books according to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Third, traditional also says that Ezra was the one who changed the Hebrew alphabet to the Ashuri alphabet which is the script all Hebrew from that time forward is based on. The prior ancient Hebrew alphabet was more pictorial in form and that's why archaeologists can identify a discovery as pre-Ezra or post-Ezra quite easily since he is the dividing line on what alphabet was used. Fourth, tradition also says that Ezra was the one who started the synagogue form of worship that we find prevalent and widespread in the NT.

It was **This Ezra** who had priestly credentials who **went up from Babylon**. He is also described in verse 6 as **a scribe skilled in the law of Moses**. The Hebrew for **scribe** means one who “counts” or “recounts.” One who counts is a meticulous person concerned with mathematical precision. The scribes were very meticulous in their copying of the books of the Bible. Evidence exists that some scribes counted the number of letters in the original so that they could produce exact duplicates. It was in the time of Ezra that the specialized function of a scribe as an expert in the law developed. By the time of Christ in the Gospels we find the scribes as the primary students and teachers of the law (Matt 2:4ff). Ezra was one of these meticulous students of **the law of Moses**, the **law** here is the Torah, the first five books of the OT. So Ezra was an expert in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This section of books teaches the legal relationship of God to man and man to nature. Basically it’s all legal, highly technical material and Ezra we are told in verse 6 was **skilled** in this material. **Skilled** is an adjective meaning “quick,” that is, he knew where everything was in those five books and thus, “well-versed.” We’d say it means he knew the Torah from cover to cover, backwards and forwards, he could quickly recite or find any passage from memory. This is the kind of man who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Now when he entered Jerusalem he would have been an outsider, an Auslander if you will, someone foreign to the residents of Jerusalem. The problem in that situation is that he’s a man who knows the **law** and the natives were violating the **law** by intermarriage and so it’s going to be interesting to see how an Auslander handles a sin issue among the local natives. Let’s face it, how would you like it if some outsider came in here confronting you with your sin and calling for repentance? I think it’s similar to a new pastor coming in to a church and I think some wisdom needs to be exercised in these kinds of situations. First, on the side of the local natives you have to discipline yourself to get back to the most important thing, “Does this man have the word of God or not?” “Is he handling the text carefully and accurately?” “Does he know the word?” You’re not asking, “Do I like the man?” “Does he wear the right clothes?” “Does he talk with the right accent?” But “Does this man have the word of God or not?” That is the issue and that only is the issue. Second, on the other side, the Auslander needs to present his credentials, who he is, where he comes from, what he’s doing there and he needs to make some cultural concessions to respect local sensitivities, he’s not

compromising the word of God here but he's respecting local traditions, etc...he should not just march into town like he owns the place. He needs to be cautious and he needs to stick to the word of God. Teach the word of God, be faithful. We're going to see how this all plays out in the next few chapters and it's a case study on this type of situation.

So we have Ezra with his priestly credentials, highly skilled in the first five books of the OT and in the middle of verse 6 we find that he has the favor of the Persian king. **and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.** The king we said was **Artaxerxes**. We don't know the relationship Ezra had with Artaxerxes but it was probably not an official relationship like Nehemiah had with this king several years later. But we do know that Ezra was well-known by this king and favored by this king. The king would have known that he was a highly skilled physician of the legal literature of the OT and the king was in favor of sending Ezra to Jerusalem as we will see, sort of as a Secretary of State for Jewish Affairs. I take it that the king had good reasons for sending Ezra at this time that would benefit his own empire due to known military movements of the Greek army in the Mediterranean at the time. But ultimately the reason the king granted his return and all that he requested is stated to be **because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.** Ultimately it was the sovereign will of God for this king to send Ezra the skilled scribe back to Jerusalem. This expression **the hand of the LORD his God was upon him** is used repeatedly, here in verse 6, again in verse 9 and 28, then again in 8:18 and 22 and 31. It's an expression that refers to a providential, behind-the-scenes work of God that accomplishes something in history. In this case it's making the king favorable toward Ezra and his return to Jerusalem.

Now, when we reflect on God's power to do this it teaches us a couple of important lessons. First, it cuts Gentile powers down to size. Presidents, kings and rulers can seem to be all-powerful but they are not; God is far more powerful and He can even work on behalf of one believer in the midst of a country or kingdom through the president or king of that country. God did that for Daniel, God did that for Esther and God did that for Ezra. So never get so fixated on the powers that be that you forget that God is the one who gave them their power and God can work through them on your behalf. It's our God that ultimately reigns, not Gentile kings and presidents. The second

lesson out of this is simply to be impressed with God. Just to marvel at the way that He orchestrates and pulls off history such that these kings and presidents always do exactly what they want to do and yet what they do always fulfills God's plan for history. It's just a marvel watch and once you observe this over and over in Scripture you're able to look at the current geopolitical stage and relax even though the situation appears to be spinning out of control. So two things here, Gentile powers are not all-powerful, God is all-powerful, and you have to marvel at how God pulls off His plan for history through Gentile powers.

So here we have Ezra going up as the Auslander Bible teacher to the land of Israel and He's going up by decree of the king but ultimately because the Lord providentially worked on Ezra's behalf through the king. The lesson is to be impressed with the God of history and learn to interpret history in this manner. The OT is teaching us how to interpret history.

Now verse 7 and here are some of the people who went up with him to Jerusalem. **Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.** This is the first time we are told what year of Artaxerxes' reign this return occurred in. It was **in the seventh year** of his reign. Since his accession year was 465 then his first regal year was 464 making his seventh regal year 458BC. So Ezra and these categories of people went up in 458BC. We met these same categories of people in Ezra 2 when Zerubbabel led the first return in 537BC. We said the Jews divided the Levitical priests into three ranks; there was the high priest, the priests and the Levites, they all served in the Temple but in the time of David they were divided up and appointed for various offices of service. The high priest was the highest rank; he was the spiritual leader of all Israel. He had the very important function of entering the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement each year. After him came the priests. They looked after the Temple vessels and performed daily sacrifices while wearing the special, symbolic vestments and they also carried the responsibility of teaching the nation the word of God. After them came the Levites who were divided into singers, musicians, gatekeepers, etc...they helped the priests by taking care of other necessary tasks. Ezra apparently went around and stirred up some of these priests to return with him. Why? Because, as we'll find out the priests that came back with Zerubbabel had all gone apostate,

they had all intermarried with these pagan wives and so they're not going to correct the problem, they were part of the problem. That's one of the problems with defective leadership; they just re-interpret the word of God to support their defect. That's one of the tendencies of the sin nature. It always wants to re-interpret the word of God to support its pet sins. That's what's happening with the homosexual issue in the Christian church; because certain Christians are homosexual they re-interpret the texts that are contrary to homosexuality to support homosexuality. God's solution is to send in new leadership that is not defective because they're the only people who will point out sin in light of the word of God and say something about it. These other people that endlessly re-interpret the Bible are apostate, they've departed from the word of God. The leadership was defective here and God is sending Ezra and new leadership to solve a problem the defective leadership will never do anything about because they are part of the problem.

Verse 8, **He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.** So the journey from **Babylon** to **Jerusalem** was four months. The journey we'll learn more about in chapter 8 but it was a 900 mile trek through dangerous territory and they covered that distance in 120 days which works out mathematically to 8 1/3 miles/day which is an entirely reasonable number, an army can cover 20-30 miles/day and perhaps more if the roads were good and they were under forced march, so 8 1/3 miles/day is not unreasonable at all.

We're reminded in verse 9 that this all occurred **because** of the sovereign work of God. **Because the good hand of his God was upon him.** That means providence. God's providence was behind the journey. It was God who had raised Ezra up to return and correct the sin problem by teaching the word.

Verse 10 and here we have one of the greatest verses in the Bible. Why did Ezra go up to Jerusalem? Of course God wanted him to go up and the king wanted him to go up but why did Ezra want to go up? Because **Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.** He could have done all three of these things in Babylon and he probably was doing them. Babylon



was a center of Jewish study after the exile and Ezra was already a student of the law so why go to the land of Israel? Because that's what he wanted to do and I take it that ultimately it was God who gave him the desire. The word of God through Jeremiah and Isaiah said they should return to the land and I take it that as Ezra studied the word he saw it was God's will for him to return to the land so he wanted to go.

Now what makes this verse great is that it sketches the three things that are at the heart of being a bible teacher and the order is not insignificant, the order is entirely significant, the order is everything. First you **study**, second you **practice**, third you **teach**; you do not qualify to teach if you haven't studied and learned to practice what you studied. Let's talk about these one by one. First, **study**. What's study? The Hebrew word here for **study** means "to seek with care, to inquire." It's a careful, investigative inquiry into the word of God. A bible teacher isn't worth his salt if he doesn't carefully investigate the word of God. Study is the first requirement of the teacher. This presupposes, of course, that he's a believer and he has the right attitude when he comes to the Scripture, etc...But study is his first objective. If he doesn't like to study he shouldn't be a bible teacher because that's what a bible teacher does 90% of the time. If you don't like reading don't be a bible teacher, you're just keeping people from the word of God and setting yourself up for stricter judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. So if you want to be a bible teacher you better enjoy the rigorous, analytical discipline of studying foreign languages, learning grammar and reading history because there is an unlimited supply of material in these areas addressed by the Scriptures. Study is central to the entire undertaking of content bible teaching. Paul told Timothy, "Study to show yourself approved unto God." God cares how much and how hard you study, it is a means of being approved by Him. Paul also told Timothy, and "when you come bring...the books, especially the parchments." Paul needed books, Paul studied books, he didn't just stand up there and start wagging his tongue, he studied and he encouraged other bible teachers to study. L. S. Chafer, founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary said in his introduction to Systematic Theology, "the study of Bible doctrine is a life undertaking and ever makes its claims upon time and strength...thrice blessed is he who with unrelenting purpose pursues his study to the end of his days on earth...Nothing need be said here of the tragedy which is enacted by a student who...continues to preach only on the lower plane of human

conduct and never, for lack of requisite understanding, expounds a soul-transforming doctrine of the Scripture.” You see the problem he was addressing 75 years ago when he wrote this? People teaching the Bible simply on the level of morality and application and not teaching doctrine. What’s the very problem we’re facing today in the American church? Rebellion against doctrine. Why? Because they say it’s not relevant. What does the hypostatic union have to do with how I live my daily life? What do the details of the substitutionary blood atonement have to do with my life? I can get on without that. According to the word of God you cannot. Preaching morality and making life application is not fundamentally what you need, what you fundamentally need is “soul-transforming doctrine.” And what we have coming out of pulpits across America is the lowest level of chum in the entire history of America and the people are loving it. Loving relishing in not having to think, not having to learn, just going and feeling good and doing a few things for the community. NONSENSE. The men in those pulpits are in for a rude awakening at the judgment seat. Ezra is the real model not Rick Warren, not Joel Osteen. Ezra **set his heart to study**, he knew the Torah inside and out. It was the word of God that mattered.

But study alone is not sufficient. Study is only the first step. One studies in order to move to the second step, **practice**. Ezra set his heart to practice the word of God. The Hebrew word for **practice** means “to do, to accomplish.” It is the implementation of what we have learned. What good is it if we have learned something but we don’t put it to work? It’s like in any area of life. Don’t get religious on me. What good does it do if I know how to paint but I don’t paint or I know how to speak a foreign language but I don’t speak it or if I can fix cars but I don’t fix them? So in the area of Bible doctrine, what good does it do to study and know Bible doctrine if you don’t use it? That is James whole point in the most misinterpreted passage of the NT, James 2! He asks the same question, “What use it is my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?” Obviously it’s no use at all. Then he says, “If a brother or a sister is naked and in need of food and you don’t give them what is needed for the body but merely say, go and be warmed and be filled, what use is that?” It doesn’t do anyone any good to have knowledge but not put that knowledge to use. So then the second necessity for a bible teacher is to practice what he studies. What good would it be if I told you what to do but I didn’t do it myself? No good and after a while you’d leave and I wouldn’t blame you. Ezra set his heart both to study and practice what he studied.

But again, it is not enough to merely study and practice, while some teaching occurs by life example, left to itself that's not sufficient. One studies and practices in order to move to the third step and that is actually **teach**. Ezra set his heart **to teach** what he had studied and put into practice in his own life. The Hebrew has twelve words for teaching which should show you the importance and the nuances. This Hebrew word has the idea of "training as well as educating." Ezra was to set up a school of sorts where he would train and educate people in the word of God, something like a seminary. Putting all three together I would say what we have in Ezra is a scholar, a practitioner and an expositor extraordinaire.

I would say these three are the keys to impacting people with God's truth and every teacher of God's word should be all three, a scholar who studies, a practitioner who exemplifies and an expositor who explains. Note, the key to impacting people with God's truth is not a new program, it's not a new marketing campaign, it's not a hyped up music program, it's not dumbing down the message, it's not a new building with all the updated modern technology. The key is to purpose in your heart to be a scholar of the word of God, to be a practitioner of the word of God and to exposit the word of God with excellence. That is what Ezra did and that is what will make a real impact in God's sight. Man looks at the outside, big building, big music program, big lights, big numbers, boy, God must be here. God doesn't look at that, God could care less about that; God looks at the heart. Does the teacher love to study, does he put it into practice in his own life, does he teach it *as is* to the people so they can know the will of God for their lives? That is the will of God for the teacher and for the people and far too many men are filling pulpits that shouldn't be there because they are not doing that and far too many Christians are supporting men who should not be in the pulpit.

How important is the pulpit? The pulpit is the most important position on earth. James says "Let not many of you become teachers...knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." Becoming a teacher is a serious decision because with it comes subjection to stricter judgment. Why? Because of the nature of the material he is handling from the pulpit; the very word of God. The teacher better not mar it. He better not say God says x when God really says y because that's false teaching and it leads men to conclude something is true and authoritative when it is false and leading them down a

path of destruction. And yet most men in the pulpits of America are doing just that. Sometimes I listen to a man teach and within a single minute I can tell you if the guy really knows the word of God or not. It's that easy. Just like if you were an expert craftsmen you could look the work over in a blink of an eye and tell me the quality. It should be obvious to all but Bible teaching is so rare most Christians have never heard it. Isn't that sad, to be a Christian in America in 2013 and to have never heard the Bible taught? And people wonder what's wrong with America. Oh the problem is abortion, oh the problem is LBGT, oh the problem is the president. Baloney. I'll tell you the source of the problem, the pulpit. Very few real bible teachers in the pulpit and thus very little truth going out into society. Israel had been without any real bible teachers for 80 years and the very families of the original bible teachers had gone apostate themselves. So God was sending them a Bible teacher, an Auslander named Ezra, a real, hard as nails, scholar of the law and practitioner of it who knew how to accurately exposit it. That's what they needed and that's what this country needs. Are we going to get it? NO. Oh, there will be a few here and there but the numbers of real bible teachers are shrinking dramatically. When I came here I was told by Tommy Ice that in the late 70's bible teachers were a dime a dozen but in 2004 they were virtually extinct. Not only have very few people heard it but even in our own bible teaching circles the phenomenon of division of obscurantism is taking place. Take for example the group in Corpus Christi who has been looking for a pastor for something like 8 years. They'll never find one. They've divided into three groups; one group is watching videos of their late pastor and the wife of that pastor can't go, she can't go watch her dead husband preach week after week. Another group says we have to find a pastor. They've looked and looked, they've even had several good guys candidate, David Roseland, Cliff Beveridge, they rejected David Roseland over the gap theory. Really? That's nonsense. You can agree with him on 168 out of 169 doctrinal questions and you're going to reject him because he doesn't hold to the gap theory? If you divide and split over the gap theory you have no idea the impoverished state of Christianity in America. We have this unique problem in bible churches because we've become so obscurantist with some of our doctrines and consequently when that pastor dies and God says, "Oh, you want a good pastor-teacher, I'll send you one" and they reject him so God sends them another one and they reject him and God sends them another one and they reject him. Finally what do you think God says? God says, "That's it, you reject My men who are clearly trained in the word of God so I reject you."

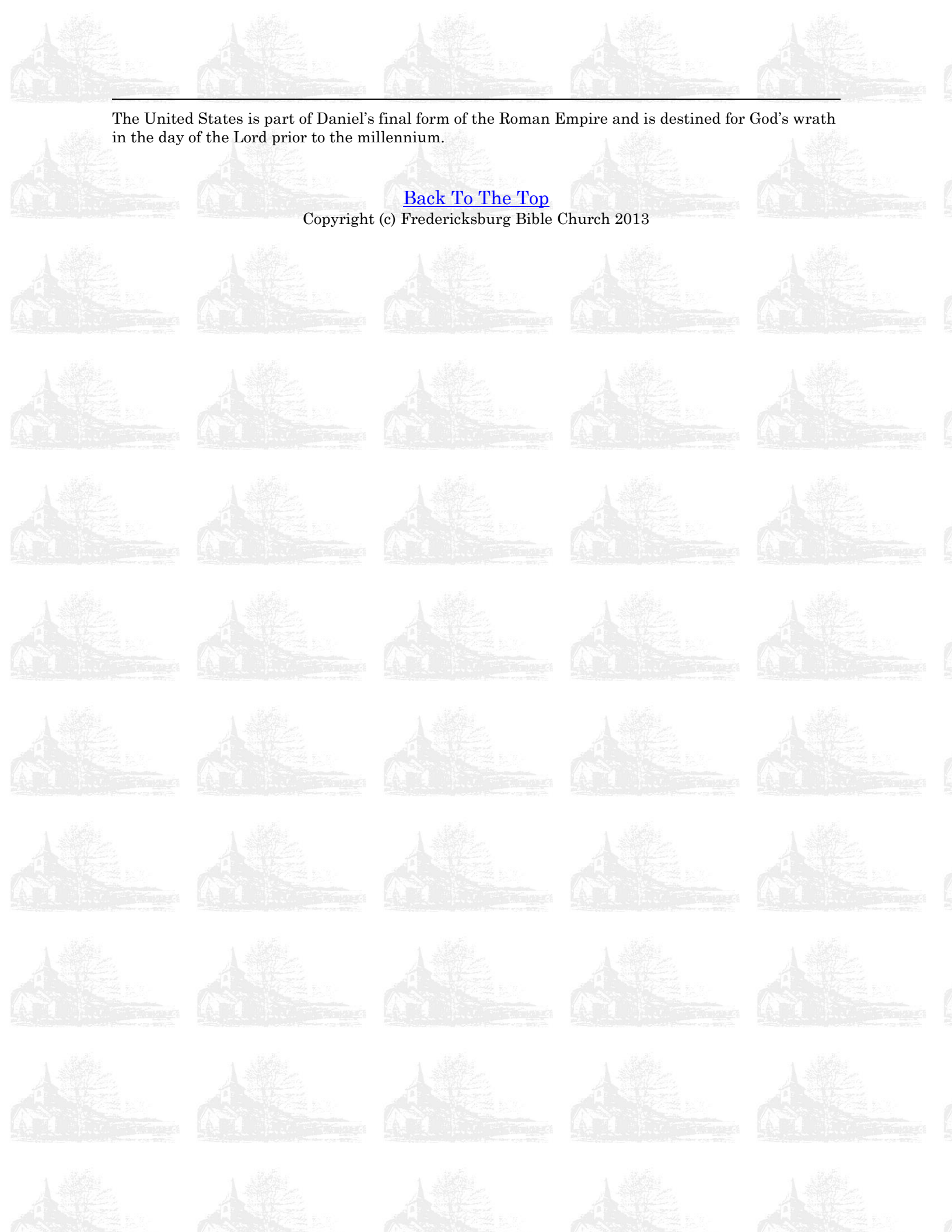
Consequently bible church after bible church is folding and closing their doors. It's just nonsense. Then you've got this church up around Marble Falls that Fred is teaching at. I'm really concerned about that church. They had numerous good candidates and they rejected every one of them and when Fred's gone that church is going to be gone. I don't know how to solve this problem but I'm not going to be silent about it, the handwriting is on the wall.

In summary, after the first return, rebuilding of the Temple and reinstatement of the sacrificial system time passed and as with most organizations, after about 75 years they go apostate. God raised up Ezra, a man with priestly credentials who was highly skilled with the text of the law of Moses to go back to the land of Israel and bring the people to repentance. To accomplish the return God directed the heart of the king to grant him all that he requested. With him came a new group of priests that would actually uphold the word of God. They came to Jerusalem in 458BC under the good hand of God. From the human standpoint the reason was because Ezra had set his heart to study the law, to practice the law and to teach the law in Israel.

In conclusion what lessons can we learn from these verses? Several things. First, God sovereignly worked through the Gentile king to encourage Ezra to return. This ought to impress us with God. God works in and through human instruments to accomplish His plan for history. Second, defective leadership needs to be replaced. Defective leadership just reinterprets the word of God to justify their sinful lifestyle. The solution to that problem is a die-hard Bible teacher. Third, God loves his people so much that he sends Bible teachers to them so they will repent and return to the word of God and come out of divine discipline. Fourth, the Bible teacher God sent was a scholar, a practitioner and an expositor of the word of God. These three elements are indispensable to a powerful bible teacher and necessary to produce soul-transformation. There is no substitute for the power of the word of God. Nothing else is a living and active instrument that can produce lasting change.

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<sup>i</sup> The Jeremiah 29 passage has no application to the United States no matter how many well-meaning people apply it to the United States. The context is the nation Israel calling upon the Lord and the Lord gathering them from the four corners of the earth to establish them in the land forever. The United States is not going to be exiled to all nations and then re-established in its land forever.



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The United States is part of Daniel's final form of the Roman Empire and is destined for God's wrath in the day of the Lord prior to the millennium.

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