

## Roots

*Ezra-Nehemiah*

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Ezra 2  
**Preached on:** Sunday, June 23, 2019

**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

Will you turn with me in your Bibles to Ezra 2. We continue our exposition of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah together, Ezra/Nehemiah, and the title of the message this morning is "Roots." Roots, r-o-o-t-s. Roots. This passage from which that message will come is one of the more difficult passages in all of Scripture. It is a long chapter, 70 verses. It's basically kind of a modified genealogy. It's 124 names, to my count, listed out for us. Most of those names are names of families. We're gonna see some of the names are names of places. All of the names are attempts to connect or validate the connection of the returning exiles with the pre-exile people of God.

So it's about roots. It's about establishing the roots of the people of God. In fact, that's something that's very important in Scripture. You know, roots has gotten to be a lot more important to people, you know, nowadays with computer technology, ancestry.com, all the different websites you can go to and find out your connectedness to your past, and there is a lot of value in that, isn't there, when you find something out? Of course, there can also be some disturbing things from your past, you know, but that's just the reality of what it is to live in a fallen world. We all have checkered pasts, don't we, and ultimately our past leads back to Adam and makes us all sinners condemned, in need of a Savior. But the Scripture spends a lot of time doing what it does in this book, that is genealogies, much more important to God than it is for us to be rooted in history.

The book of Genesis itself, the English word for the first book of the Bible, it comes from the Greek word genesis which means essentially genealogies or the generations of. In the book of Genesis, you read over and over again, "Now these are the generations of... These are the generations of Seth. These are the generations of Noah. These are the generations of Shem." These are the generations of you know, even down to the folks that aren't a part of God's plan. We get the generations of Ishmael, the generations of Esau. God wants his people to see their connectedness to what he's been doing in the past in the lives of his people and also to understand the people around them. And you have genealogies, the first 10 chapters of the book of Chronicles are all about genealogies. It's just one long genealogy helping them be rooted in their history.

You know, one of the things that's really fascinating to me too is when you understand how precious, it's hard for us to remember this because we live in a culture where, you

know, paper is plentiful. You know, I print things out to study with and I print out, you know, pages and I try often to do two-sided but I'm not always that faithful. I'm not trying to save the planet as much as some people are. I'm really confident God can do that on his own, but I do respect the fact that we should be good stewards and all that so I'm not really saying to just go crazy using paper or whatever. No, I'm not saying that but it's amazing how, you know, you buy a ream of paper and you stow it in the printer and then, bam. In the days the Scriptures were written, paper was a premium. I mean, to write a scroll initially they wrote on animal skins, then later they developed papyrus and scrolls made out of papyrus, and then used technology to make that papyrus into codexes, books, but paper was extremely expensive and one of the things, a testimony of this is that the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament for instance, when you look at the ancient manuscripts, they wrote all of the letters consecutively with no breaks between words. "We can't afford the space between the word." So imagine reading, you know, something in English and there's no breaks to tell you this word ends here and this word starts here. You just had to learn to deal with that because paper is so precious.

Now I say that to say if paper is so precious, why spend 60 verses listing names? Isn't that amazing? What is even more amazing is that this same chapter, Ezra 2, is almost produced verbatim in Nehemiah 7. This semi-genealogy occurs twice in the book of Ezra/Nehemiah like brackets around the three great works that are done by God in these books that are recorded. Remember we talked about three great returns that happened. The first return under Zerubbabel where the people come back from the Babylonian captivity in 538-536 BC and they began to build the temple, the first great return. The second great return is in 458 under Ezra which begins to be recorded in Ezra 7, and in 458, some other people come back and they seek to further the work that God's already been doing by establishing the law and teaching the law. Then the third great return is 13 years later under Nehemiah in 445 BC when Nehemiah comes back and they rebuild the walls. Well, after the walls are completed, all three things have happened, in chapter 7 of Nehemiah, he goes back and he says, "I went back and I got the genealogy out." So 100 years later than the text we're talking about right now, 100 years later he brings out the genealogy and he records it and the author of the books records it both places when paper is that precious. You know, he's like, "See previous chapter." But God wanted them to hear it again. We'll see that. We'll get there again and we're gonna read it again, the good news it will probably be about at least a couple of months before we get there, maybe your guess is better than mine, maybe it will be six months, I don't know, but I'm not going to make a commitment.

But Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 is essentially telling the same story and the question that we have to ask ourselves is why. We understand that the Bible says 2 Timothy 3:16 that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be equipped, thoroughly furnished for every good work." Every word, every jot and tittle is there by the inspiration of God, the breathing out of God onto the paper and so the question is what does this add to the canon of Scripture that God wants to show us in our lives. Why these names? Why all this detail?

In a simple just kind of overview to give you a little bit of something to hold onto, essentially I think what he's doing here is he is, the author is pulling this together, likely Ezra, but we're not exactly sure, but anyway the person who finally pulls all of this work together and presents it is trying to help the people of God to continue to be faithful to God in the midst of difficult trying circumstances. It's exactly what the people in each return needed. They were up against daunting tasks and at each place they are facing opposition. It's not easy to do what God's called them to do and if they're going to do what God has called them to do, they must be rooted in what God has already been doing and be confident that what God has been doing he will continue to do. That's why the urgency of connecting them to the past because if they look at their circumstances, they look at their lives, they look at, I mean, essentially think about the people that are first going back when they have to go through this basically sort of like a genealogy test, we'll see in a moment, they're going back to a land of Judah that is desolate. Jerusalem is in ruins. The temple has been razed to the ground. Their lives, their former lives, those who are old enough to remember, they're going back to see the desolation. Those who just only heard about the glory of Israel, they're going back to see something very different than their expectations from all of the stories they've heard of the glorious past. They're going to see, and none of them fully knows what they are about to experience. God does and the Lord knows that he's at work through them even in this. This apparently horrible circumstance, God is going to do something glorious in and that has real encouragement for us.

There's a sense in which this passage tells you and tells me as believers that when we find ourselves in some kind of desolate circumstance and all kinds of desolation comes in our lives as we live in a fallen world, I mean, it can be sudden, it can be something we're not responsible for, things that happen to us can bring desolation, it can even be self-inflicted; this passage is here to communicate to us when we are looking out at the desolation wondering is there any hope, this passage is there to say, yes, there is, that the God who has been with you in the past is with you in the present and is still carrying out his plan, and if you can see that and you can hold onto that and you can root yourself in that, you can have the strength to endure and to then bear fruit, and you will see the glory of God. It's not going to be easy and that's why it's so urgent for us to understand how we root ourselves in that.

So what this passage is about, I call it roots because it's really about connecting them to their roots. It's connecting the people of God in their present circumstance to the history of Israel and all of the glorious things God has done in the past. And genealogies, I mentioned there are so many genealogies in the Bible. Let me say one other word about that before we read the text. One of the wonderful things about the genealogies in Scripture is that it tells us the Bible – this is very important – the Bible is rooted in real history. The Bible is telling us about real people in real places, real historical events. The acts of God in history, not mythological ideas. No, God acting in history with real people, in real places, doing real things. The cross of Jesus Christ is the greatest act of God in history but it happened at a place, it happened through the people that we're even reading about, and part of the reason this is here is to keep the connectedness with what God has

been doing since the creation really, and especially since the call of Abraham, keeping it alive until Jesus has come. So it's continuity, connecting us to our roots.

Derek Kidner in speaking about this chapter says that what you have, he uses a metaphor, he says what you have is the replanting of Israel, roots and all. It's a good image. Think about when you plant, you try to move a bush or you move a tree, a small tree, you don't move too many trees but I'm talking about a tree is still kind of small. If you decide you want to move it to a different place, you have to get the root ball, don't you? You have to dig way around it if you want it to live because if it's not got its roots, it's not going to live. That's true even of flowers, right? You just can't just pull the flower out and leave the roots in the package. It's got to have the roots. So this is what God is doing, he's planting, replanting the people of Israel, roots and all in the land.

Now we're going to read the entire passage and as we do, I want you to listen for some things. Now all the names here are gonna be, I mean, you can pray for me for pronunciation as I go through it, but none of these names are likely familiar to us at all, right? But I want you to remember that the people who first received this, these names were familiar. Imagine you're hearing the names, I mean, this is to maybe help us understand this a little bit, if we were talking about, if you're part of a church plant and you say these families were involved in a church plant and you're having the fiftieth anniversary celebration and the families involved in the church plant are families, you know, like in our church, Guthrie, Walker, Rouse, Friel, Blackburn, you know, all of us, Reilman, and the names of people that were part of the plant. Now 50 years removed, 50 years removed for us, we're probably with the Lord, most of us, right? But our descendants in hearing our names as part of maybe a large group of people, they hear that differently, they hear the name and there's connection.

So the Israelites are hearing the names like that but I want you to see there are also some place names and the promise of God, some of the descendants are numbered not by their family name but by their place name, and so listen for that as you we read as well. Ezra 2.

1 Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city. 2 These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3 the sons of Parosh, 2,172; 4 the sons of Shephatiah, 372; 5 the sons of Arah, 775; 6 the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,812; 7 the sons of Elam, 1,254; 8 the sons of Zattu, 945; 9 the sons of Zaccai, 760; 10 the sons of Bani, 642; 11 the sons of Bebai, 623; 12 the sons of Azgad, 1,222; 13 the sons of Adonikam, 666; 14 the sons of Bigvai, 2,056; 15 the sons of Adin, 454; 16 the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, 98; 17 the sons of Bezai, 323; 18 the sons of Jorah, 112; 19 the sons of Hashum, 223; 20 the sons of Gibbar, 95; 21 the men of Bethlehem, 123; 22 the men of Netophah, 56; 23 the men of Anathoth, 128; 24 the sons of Azmaveth, 42; 25 the sons of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah

and Beeroth, 743; 26 the sons of Ramah and Geba, 621; 27 the men of Michmas, 122; 28 the men of Bethel and Ai, 223; 29 the sons of Nebo, 52; 30 the sons of Magbish, 156; 31 the sons of the other Elam, 1,254; 32 the sons of Harim, 320; 33 the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 725; 34 the men of Jericho, 345; 35 the sons of Senaah, 3,630. 36 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973; 37 the sons of Immer, 1,052; 38 the sons of Pashhur, 1,247; 39 the sons of Harim, 1,017. 40 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74. 41 The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128. 42 The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, in all 139. 43 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, 44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon, 45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, 46 the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmi, the sons of Hanan, 47 the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, 48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, 49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, 50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephisim, 51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, 52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, 53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah, 54 the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha. 55 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Hassophereth, the sons of Peruda, 56 the sons of Jaalah, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, 57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Ami. 58 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392. 59 Now these are those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, but they were not able to give evidence of their fathers' households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel: 60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 652. 61 Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name. 62 These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood. 63 The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim. 64 The whole assembly numbered 42,360, 65 besides their male and female servants who numbered 7,337; and they had 200 singing men and women. 66 Their horses were 736; their mules, 245; 67 their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720. 68 Some of the heads of fathers' households, when they arrived at the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of God to restore it on its foundation. 69 According to their ability they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas and 5,000 silver minas and 100 priestly garments. 70 Now the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Let's pray to the Lord.

*Father, we ask that You would help us now to attend our hearts to Your word. We thank You for it. We praise You that You are a God who speaks, You are not silent. You have spoken with clarity in the pages of Scripture and You have spoken supremely in the gift of Your Son who reveals to us Your glory. We pray now that You would help us to see and behold wonderful things from Your law and to love You more faithfully. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Connecting to our roots. Roots. Though the work seems impossible that God has called us to do, when things really have been desolated in our lives, it seems how can we recover some sense of what God wants us to do. We find ourselves in places where it seems everything is lost and in those moments we need to remember who God is, and what we're going to look at this morning, this is actually, you know, a good rule of thumb in interpreting the Bible is always to ask the question: what does this tell me about God? And the second question is when we interpret it correctly: what does this tell me about myself? And I think that's a good, we're going to look at two points that kind of coalesce around those two ideas because what I think the Lord gives this passage for in connecting us to our roots is to say we need, first of all, this is the first point this morning, we need to be rooted in the faithfulness of God. We need to be rooted in the faithfulness of God. If we are going to build his kingdom in difficult times, if we are going to pick up the pieces of our broken lives and rebuild them for the glory of God, we need to be rooted in the faithfulness of God and that's what this text is calling us to, and the people who heard it, especially in the beginning, the Israelites would have heard it that way.

This first point, I want you to look with me; there are three subpoints here under being rooted in the faithfulness of God. The way the passage unfolds and I'm gonna go a little bit out of order with it, but see if we can work through this together. There are three, I think, testimonies to the faithfulness of God that I want us to look at, this being rooted in the faithfulness of God. The first is when you look at the wealth of the returnees. This is actually near the end of the passage in verses 64 to 69. We are told in great detail about how much they had. Though there are 42,360 people, they have 7,337 servants, male and female servants, slaves. So they have one for every six people. That's a very healthy and wealthy kind of group of people. Very interesting that though they've been taken into Babylonian captivity, they have acquired wealth. Then you go on down and he says, he numbers, enumerates every horse. Not 725 horses, you know, could have rounded it off. He says 736, 245 mules, 435 camels, 6,720 donkeys. He wants us to know every single thing and the value of that, and the people who heard that, it's like, I mean, it doesn't make sense to us. I don't know what a donkey costs. I don't know how valuable a donkey is. In fact, I don't think a donkey has much value in my life at all, but for these people, they knew what that meant. It was like saying the cars that someone had in their possession, these group of people and, man, they had some really nice cars, and they had plenty of pickup trucks so they could get all kind of work done. This is kind of what this is saying and so the people hearing that are like, "Wow, isn't it amazing that after the Babylonian captivity they come back and they are well supplied."

It's not that many people, 50,000 is a really small amount compared to what went into captivity. It's fulfillment of what Isaiah said in chapter 11 would be true, that God would bring back a stump. The root of Jesse, I mean, the root of Jesse would come from the stump or the stump of Jesse, a root will grow from the stump of Jesse, Isaiah 11:1. So the tree has been chopped down, there's only a stump left but this stump, man, it's glorious and God's going to do great things with it just like Isaiah prophesied. Messiah is going to come from this stump.

But even as they look at it, wow, we have some serious wealth here. I mean, the gold and silver that's taken there, I did some calculations online about what gold and silver's worth, it was well over 1.3 million dollars in gold and silver. Now that sounds like not so much to us but I think it was more back then. You know, it's like nowadays, you know what it was like to have... well, anyway, let's move on from that. I don't want to talk about the money anymore.

Okay, but then, so, so they have wealth. Now this is fulfillment of what God had told them in Jeremiah 29 when he told them he was sending them into captivity, he basically says there, "When you get there, you know, dig gardens, build houses and pray for the welfare of the city in which you are, for in the welfare of the city, you will have welfare. You will be blessed in the blessing of the land, so pray for the land when you go there." And they did and they were blessed, and so God's promise is fulfilled. They go away captives, brokenhearted, and yet they come back well supplied. It's a little bit, again, like what we saw in the Exodus; they have left with a lot of wealth just like the people left Egypt with a lot of wealth.

So that's one testimony to God's faithfulness. He's providing for them. He has not abandoned them. Secondly, we see this, the faithfulness of God rooted in the faithfulness of God is seen not just in the wealth but in the groups. So this is 1B, the groups. The way that the author presents this enormous number of people and these names, he groups them, and the first group is in verse 2 where you have leaders, "These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah." Now it's interesting there is there are 11 names and I think when you add one that we also know is there from chapter 1, verse 11, "Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem," there's 12. Sheshbazzar the governor, Zerubbabel who will later be named the governor, and these other men. There are 12 leaders and a thinking Israelite would note that. Isn't that interesting, 12, just like the 12 tribes of Israel, the faithfulness of God.

The second group, though, this is, now we're under 1B, like 1 was leaders, 2 is the people. In verses 2 to 35, he deals with just the people in general and you have this long list of people, names and places.

But then thirdly you have a group who we note are the priests. He separates out in verse 36, "Listen, these are the priests that came back." And look at the number of the priests, 4,000 priests, over 4,000 priests. Basically a tenth of the people that came back were

priests. That's an inordinate number of priests. What does that say? God was taking care of the people who could restore worship to its rightful place. The priests have kept their line pure and they're able to come back. And it's not just the priests, if you're gonna run the temple, if you're gonna rebuild it and run it, you need priests, you need Levites, you need singers, you need gatekeepers, you need temple servants, and all of those lists are given in order. Do you see? He's telling them, this is telling them, "Listen, the Lord sent you back," and we talked about this last week, why did he set them free? It wasn't to go rebuild their lives for their own enjoyment, it was to go back and build God's house and this chapter just carries it forward.

The reason that you and I have been set free from the slavery to sin if you have placed your faith in Christ, the reason you've been set free is to build God's house and the wonderful thing is no matter where you find yourself and whatever circumstance, you can build God's house if you're in Christ. You have the resources. He will put, they will be around you. It may not appear to be that way at first. We often look around us and think there's nothing here but when we have the eyes of faith we see that God has put exactly what we need everywhere around us. He makes no mistakes.

The sons of Solomon's servants are mentioned in verses 55 to 58. Solomon's servants. This, I think, is an allusion to 1 Kings 9 when Solomon built the temple, it talks about, and built his palace, that he had indentured servants that these are foreign names actually, Solomon's servants are not Hebrew names, but these are people that were probably skilled craftsmen that worked for Solomon in his day building the temple and these are their descendants who apparently now have come back with the people of Israel back to the land, though they were formally aliens, not Israelites, they've come back. They had united themselves with the people of God and they stayed united and here they are and they are master builders probably. So what this says is we have everything we need. The Lord has, and this is what the people would have been thinking, "We have everything we need. Look at how God has preserved everything we need. We have all of the different workers that we need to run the temple." How could this have happened? Well, knowing the promises of God, how could it not have happened?

So we said we looked at the wealth, we looked at the groups, we're talking about the faithfulness of God rooted in the faithfulness of God, our first point. We looked at the wealth, we looked at the groups, and now I just want us to look at the names. We're not going to look at all the names. There are 124 names and isn't it significant that these family names are used? It would've been much easier to write the chapter to go from verse 2 to verse 64 and skip verses 3 to 63. I think it's testimony to all the scribes that have copied these things through the years that they just did it. It would've been easy just to go, look at verse 2, "The number of the men of the people of Israel," that's the last word and then jump down to verse 64, "The whole assembly numbered 42,360." That's fine with me. That's all I need. That's all the information I need, Lord. I'm happy to know about the servants, about their wealth, but why do I have to know all these different names?



One of the things it says is God, the God of the Bible is a God though he fills the heavens, he fills the universe and beyond, he's higher than our minds can conceive, he's transcendent far above our ability to even begin to think about, he is a God who stoops down and knows the names of his people. He humbles himself. I was reading a verse in the Psalms that says the Lord humbles himself to look down upon the earth at all. I mean, to look down at this puny planet is him humbling himself, but he doesn't stop humbling himself there, he humbles himself all the way down to look and to see you and to know you by name and to care about the details of your life and the Scripture says he knows your thoughts before you think them. So he's taking note of that. I mean, that's a rightfully awe-inspiring thing that should cause us to be appropriately reverent before the Lord and fearful, right? He knows what we're thinking. You can't hide from him. But it's also wonderful. He takes an interest in us. He knows the number of hairs on your head. For some that's not as hard to figure out as others but think of the knowledge that says.

And beyond that, did you hear in the place names, for some reason some of these families are not given their family name but apparently the people from the particular area, and I think it's not insignificant that some of those names that happen, I mean, there could have been all the different villages in Judah that could have been there but one of the first ones you hear is Bethlehem, the men of Bethlehem. Well, that's one that we all recognize. As Americans we recognize that because of Christmas, right? "O Little town of Bethlehem." Everybody knows Jesus was born in Bethlehem and if you know the Bible much, you know that David was born in Bethlehem. It's the city of David. Well, the people in the exile knew it was the city of David too, and so hearing Bethlehem to them brought that to mind. These are just allusions that the Lord is putting out there for his care for them.

The very next town actually, the men of Netophah, that's actually near Bethlehem and that's a town mentioned in Samuel where David, several of his mighty men were from. And if you read through Samuel and you read through Kings and you know your Bible as a Jew, some of these things resonate like, "Oh yeah, Netophah."

Michmas in verse 27, that's the place of a great victory where Jonathan and his armor bearer won a great victory over the Philistines. The Philistines had the high ground at Michmas and Jonathan in a bold move went up there and the Lord caused him and his armor bearer to defeat the whole Philistine army.

And of course Jericho, the men of Jericho. I mean, if I would have been a Jew and I would think, "Thank You, Lord, for letting Jericho be a place that You told us about and reminded us about. We're going back into the land, it looks like a desolation, we're gonna have enemies all over us but we are serving the God and rooted in the faith and the covenant with the God who delivered us from Jericho in the first place."

Another one is Anathoth, that's actually back in verse 23, the men of Anathoth. This might have been one that would have jumped out at them because Jeremiah, his hometown was from Anathoth. Jeremiah was the prophet that they were all aware of what he had said because he's the one who said the captivity is 70 years. He's the one that's been vindicated. He's only, his ministry only ended 40 or 50 years before this. They know

he's from Anathoth and they also know if they read his prophecy, Jeremiah 32, one of the interesting things the Lord does, I mean, it's the Babylonians are basically, it's almost like they're right outside the gate, they're gonna destroy everything, Jeremiah is telling Zedekiah, "Listen, it's over." The false prophets are saying, "Trust in the Lord, He's gonna deliver us." Jeremiah is saying, "No, God's not gonna deliver you. You haven't repented. It's over. You're going into Babylonian captivity." That's his message. Well, the Lord tells him in Jeremiah 32, "Your cousin is going to come today and I want you to buy a field from him." His cousin comes to visit him. Like I said, they're not really at the gate, it's just like, you know, they're in the vicinity, and his cousin says, "Hey, you need to buy a piece of property from our family because somebody needs the right of redemption and you have the right of redemption, will you buy it?" And the Lord told him to and he bought it, and he buys the land even though they are about to be plucked out of the land. That's not the time to buy. You remember buy low, sell high? This is not the time to buy but God says buy the land. Why? Because people will once again buy and sell in Judah. So right before they go out the door, he buys a plot of land in Anathoth as testimony that, yes, God will again bring back his people. So they hear that.

Bethel and Ai. I think that's one that might ring, especially because there is a very familiar passage of Scripture we're going to look at in a moment in our next point where Abraham when he first went into the land, when he's still Abram, before he's Abraham he goes into the land of Canaan and it says one of the first things he did was he camped between Bethel and Ai, two different towns. Why are these towns mentioned together, Bethel and Ai? Abraham camped between them and built an altar to the Lord in Genesis 12.

So God is faithful. These things are just little tastes of remembrances of the faithfulness of God. The faithfulness of God is what we must be rooted in. The God who has done these things in the past will continue them. His plan is not, has not faltered though it appears in our own estimation to have faltered. It has not. It's really something to think about, meditate on, God never has to make a Plan B. He's not like us. I mean, he's accounting for everything that's happening all along, the free choices of free agents, and he is sovereign over all those, reigning and ruling over it all all the time, and yet he knows everything and he's planned everything and he's accomplishing exactly what he wants to have happen. He decrees everything that comes to pass. There's great comfort in that.

Now when you look at things and you don't understand why it happened at first, no, it can be troubling, but keep looking into the word of God and you will see that the God who holds every detail of your life in his hand is a God who is good and a God who is perfectly good, perfectly wise, and perfectly sovereign. He only wants to do what is the very best thing. That's what his goodness means. Wisdom means he has perfect knowledge of how to do it the very best way. He never misses a little bit. There's never collateral damage in what God does. If there appears to be collateral damage, it's there exactly as he intended it. It's not collateral, it was intentional. He's perfectly good, he's perfectly wise, and he's perfectly sovereign. He reigns over everything. So if you know that the God who reigns over everything has your best interest at heart, truly your best

interest, not necessarily what you want but what's best for you, think about the difference between those two things. What's truly best for you, he always wants to do and he's able to do and he knows how to do. If we really believed that, there's no place for fear and anxiety. If we really believed that, that would be banished from our lives. We would in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

So the faithfulness of God, we must be rooted in the faithfulness of God. The second point is that we must be, we must ourselves, God's requirement is that his people have a faith that is truly rooted in his covenant. A faith that is rooted in his covenant. This is about God's requirement for his people. There's an interesting development that happens, it's one of the more interesting parts of the passage actually, when you're not just reading about names, names, names, names. That was actually exhausting. I thought to myself, y'all should have clapped when I finished that list. I'm sure I mispronounced some things but, you know. But 61 to 63 picks up the actual narrative and what we see there is, I mean, I'm sorry, verse 59 actually, verse 59 to 63. We've been getting all these names of people and in verse 59 something sort of jarring happens. There were some who came up who were not able to give evidence of their father's households and their descendants whether they were of Israel. In this group of people who want to come, there are some people who want to go and want to rebuild the kingdom and want to rebuild the temple, but they don't have the pedigree. Now that's interesting. That's something that we should stop and ask, "What's going on here?" And I want to focus on verses 59 and 60 where the priests is another issue related to that in verses 61 to 63. The priest don't have the pedigree. What's going on with that? I mean, is it really about being a racial ethnic Jew? Is that what it's all about in the Scriptures? At first glance it might appear so. These people can't show that they are of Israel, that they are of the seed of Israel, the descendants, the seed of Israel. They can't prove the genealogy and not to say that they're not allowed to go but they're in a sense, they're not gonna be able to take part in the full way the others are and the priests are told, that don't measure up either, are told they can't serve.

So what does this mean? I mean, the Bible makes clear that there is no, we have Scripture verses that there is neither slave nor free, there is neither Gentile nor Jew, all are one in Christ, neither male nor female. So what does this mean? Now the actual, at this point in time, what it meant was you had to be a physical descendant of Abraham who was in the covenant with Abraham. That meant that you had to be at this point and time in history, you had to be of Jewish birth and had to even if you were a male be circumcised, and if you were not circumcised, you were not part of the covenant, and if you were not Jewish, you were not a part of the covenant. And they are checking the evidence to see if they are and these people, a number of them can't prove that they were, 652 people can't prove that they were.

What does this mean? Well, I want you to remember, this is why, the Lord has a way of shaking up our views a little bit, unsettling us, the Scripture has a way of doing that. We are supposed to let Scripture interpret Scripture, though. Let the Bible speak to us in light of the whole context of Scripture. I think what we see is the Lord lets us know and this is a continuation of what we see in the beginning of the covenant with Abraham. In fact,

turn with me to Genesis 12. I mentioned we are gonna look at a passage where Bethel and Ai are, it's in Genesis 12. Now I'm going to try to do this really quickly. Bear with me. What's happening in Genesis, I mentioned this before, I just want to review it with you again. The Lord is showing he created everything good in Genesis 1 and 2. Man sinned and has destroyed and ruined everything in Genesis 3. Man rebelled against God and has fallen and is hopelessly lost and you see the magnitude of that because right in Genesis 4 God records the very first thing that happens as you're reading the text after the fall is Cain kills his brother Abel. Wow, that's pretty bad, killing your own brother. Genesis 6, things get so bad that God has to send a flood, as Ted was talking about, the ark, Noah's Ark. Isn't it amazing that Noah's Ark is actually like a children's toy or like we had, I don't know if we have, we looked at I know when we were getting ready to have Jonathan, like a different kind of Noah's Ark things. You know, you look at different, all kinds of options, you know, something spiritual. So think about putting a Noah's Ark thing in your children's room, what does the ark really mean? The ark is the judgment of God. It's not just about the animals, right? So God has to judge the whole world because the wickedness is so great that a God of kindness that we see in the Bible that would send Jesus Christ, things are so bad he has to wash the whole world. Then after that you think surely now everything is going to be fine, well, Genesis 11, he has to come down and send people out from the Tower of Babel and spread them out because they're exalting themselves against God and they're trying to build their way to heaven, build a tower to reach to the heavens, make a name for themselves. They, in a sense, wanting to ascend into heaven. God comes down, destroys the tower, separates the people. That's Genesis 11. Genesis 12, the very next chapter, we read that God comes to Abram, a man named Abram, and he, God initiates a relationship with Abram. The whole beginning of salvation begins to be unpacked and explained in God's dealings with a man named Abram who becomes Abraham, and the first thing is to be right with God as sinners, God has to do something. He has to come down. We can't make ourselves right. We can't go up. He comes down.

In the promise that he makes to Abraham in Genesis 12, he says, I mean Genesis 12:1-3, "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.'" There are three promises here, the Abrahamic covenant. God makes a covenant. How can you be right with God? You must be in a covenant relationship with God. This is the Lord teaching us about salvation and he's doing like Calvin said, he's prattling with us, he's baby-talking, he's giving us little by little a picture of what salvation is and the first thing is to be saved you have to enter into a covenant relationship with God, a bonding blood relationship with God, and if you do that, you get three blessings. The three blessings are: a land, a nation, and the presence of God, the presence blessing of God. Land, nation, presence.

So he's showing us through his dealings with Abraham what that means, what that looks like and this covenant with Abraham, "I'm going to give you a land," and of course, he gives him the land of Canaan and we find out later in Hebrews 11, Hebrews 3 and 4 as

well, that the land of Canaan was given as a type of heaven. It's a type. Heaven was the real thing. God's saying, "Listen, this whole thing about Canaan, I'm telling you to get into the land of Canaan is like when I'm teaching you how to get into heaven, and when you get into heaven, you become a part of My people, My nation, and you dwell in My presence." So the covenant with Abraham brings you all those things, it gives you a ticket to heaven, it makes you dwell in God's presence, it makes you one of his people, and the nation part is also you share in the Messiah, the seed. It's kind of a double meaning to seed, the nation and the Christ that comes from the nation. So you get to dwell in heaven, you get to dwell in God's presence, and you are one with Christ and a part of his people. This is what he's teaching that if you are in a covenant relationship with Abraham, like Abraham is with God. But he's just teaching us. It's going to become clear when Jesus comes what this all really means.

So what he does then he says, "Listen, Abraham, the line of blessing, the covenant goes through Abraham to Isaac, not Ishmael. It goes from Isaac to Jacob, not Esau. It goes from Jacob to the 12 tribes of Israel. It goes from all the 12 tribes, that's where the covenant is." God's covenant people is the Jewish people. As he's explaining salvation to us, it's like a picture he's drawing for us in real history, real events, but he's teaching us. This teaches you about salvation. Like a little child, he's teaching us what salvation is and to be saved, you have to be of the line of Israel. Physically you have to be a descendant of Abraham. You have to be a son or daughter of Abraham and have embraced the faith of Abraham by receiving circumcision in the old covenant, and if you haven't, you're lost. Now that was giving a picture of what salvation really is and that picture was valid until Jesus comes and that picture is valid when we are reading Ezra 2. What's happening there is that to be in covenant relationship with God, you have to be a Jew, you have to be in covenant with God, but this was always telling something bigger beyond that and I want you to see this in a moment how this is true even back then.

Romans 4:13-16. What you have is Paul tells us that the promises of God, the covenant promises of God were to Abraham and his descendants. Listen, listen very carefully. Paul makes clear that the true descendants of Abraham are not the physical descendants of Abraham, they are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, people who have the same faith as Abraham. The reason God was making it so emphatically clear that, "Hey, if you don't have the credentials, if you don't have the credentials, you can't build My house. If you don't have the credentials of being a covenant member, a child of Abraham, you have no part in building My house," was to tell us today the only way you have a part in building God's house is if you have the credentials of being a child of Abraham. Not a Jew, that was not it at all. God makes it so clear in the New Testament. "Will you come to God not trusting in your own righteousness but completely by faith, trusting in Jesus? Will you make a covenant with God the same way Abraham did in Genesis 15:6, he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness? Will you be like Abraham and believe the promise of God and cast yourself upon it in faith? If you will do that, you are a member of the covenant family, you have the credentials, you can build My house and no matter how desolate things look in your life, if you look to Me in faith I will build My house in your life." That's what he's saying. That is the glory of salvation.

Let me tell you something else now. Even though the Lord was teaching through that object lesson, you had to be a descendant of Abraham, you read your Old Testament carefully and what you will see is that all along the way, non-Jews were being saved. Do you hear that? All along the way non-Jews were being saved. I mean, it is glorious when you look back at it. I mean, example, when they leave the Exodus, there are Egyptians that are coming with them, leaving Egypt. There are Egyptians in the train with the people saying, "Your God is the true God." We are, now what did they have to do? They had to be circumcised if they were men and circumcision doesn't matter anymore because circumcision was also teaching us something, you need a heart change, circumcise your heart. But there were Egyptians in the train and then they became Jews. Once they joined, they were Jews. There was no more credentialing, "Yeah, you came from Egypt but you are a part of the people of God."

We preached through Ruth, the last Old Testament book we went through was Ruth. Ruth, the Moabitess, taken from the dark land of Moab, brought into the very heart of God, loved by God and in the line of Jesus Christ, the great-grandmother of David, Ruth, the Moabitess. And her mother-in-law or grandmother-in-law, we don't know exactly how many generations are there, Rahab the harlot from Jericho in the line of Christ.

And you see it in Ezra 6. Let me show you this, Ezra 6:21. After they finish building the temple about 20 years later after they returned, verse 21 of Ezra 6, "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." So what he's saying is these people that can't prove their credentials, they're just temporarily on hold. If you guys will be circumcised and will show yourselves to be members of the covenant, you will be welcome. But right now we don't have, you're gonna have to do like a proselyte entry because we don't see that you're actually Jewish.

So what this does is tell us that we need to make sure of our faith. We need to be trusting in God and if we are, then we are the true circumcision. So test yourselves to see if you're in the household of faith, Paul says, and if you are, if you are trusting and resting in Jesus alone, then know that you have the promises of God. All of them are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Every single one of them. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will keep building his kingdom every day of your life. It's only getting better. Even if you think things are getting worse, if you're in Christ, they're not getting worse. The problem is with us, we just don't see. So the God who brought back the people, when you're rooted in his faithfulness and rooted in the faith, then you can have the blessings.