

Ezra

Teaching Notes

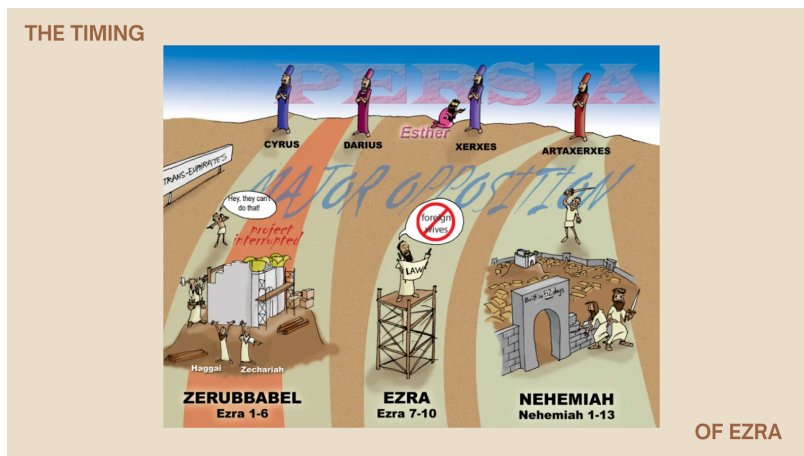
Chapter 1 - God's Plan

Verse 1: Introduction

(Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,)

When is this happening?

(Graphic 1)



Here, you can see that during the first few chapters of Ezra, both Haggai's prophecy and Zechariah's prophecies are given (To add to that, Zechariah's ministry extends longer than Zechariah's which we will study in the near future).

And you see that before Ezra and his ministry enters the picture, the account of Esther takes place. So, from what we will read here in chapter 1 is several decades prior to the introduction of Nehemiah and Malachi.

With that said, the **plan**, for the next several months, our book by book study through the Old Testament, is to go through the rest of the scriptures chronologically. So interestingly, you and I will not be going through the whole

book of Ezra in the next few weeks. My objective is to teach you chronologically.

(Graphic 2)



Verse 1b: Prophecy Fulfilled

There are two noteworthy moments in verse 1:

(1). THIS WAS PROPHECY FULFILLED. Decades prior, God revealed to Jeremiah (ch.25-29) that there would be the 70-year captivity of the Jews until their restoration. Ezra does not point out that over a century before Jeremiah’s prophecy, God revealed to Isaiah (cc.44-45) that a man named Cyrus will be God’s chosen tool to bring the Jews back to Israel.

(2). THE LORD STIRS THE HEART. Yes, it was a prophecy destined to be fulfilled. And in real-time, at a particular day, hour, minute, second, that God deemed perfect, God roused the spirit of the most powerful man on earth, Cyrus to fulfill this prophecy. It reminds me of,

ESV (*Proverbs 21:1 The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.*)

Contemporary Application: God’s Plan

That word, “destiny,” captures the minds of many people.

In my time as a believer, I haven’t heard destiny used too much. In Christian circles, we usually call this, God’s plan for your life, or God’s will for your life. Whether you call it destiny, God’s plan, God’s will, that is our topic tonight:

Today, we are going to look at what holds people back from their destiny, God's plan for their lives. And we are going to look at what it requires to fulfill God's plan for your life.

Cyrus's destiny was prophesied; and Cyrus fulfilled God's plan for his life. One may ask, "what is my destiny?" On the subject of destiny, let me first ask this question:

Did the individuals in scripture always know God's plan for their lives?

The Answer is NO.

- Some might have known the big picture plan, such as the subject of faith. (Rahab).
- Some had no idea what God planned for them until they took steps of faith (Abraham).
- Some knew God's plan for their life and rejected it (Saul).
- Some knew God's plan, made mistakes along the way, and God in His grace still got them to the finish line (Samson).
- Some walked right into God's plan unexpectedly (Gideon).
- Some fulfilled prophecy, probably unknown to them at the moment (Cyrus).
- As you look at many characters in scripture, whether they knew God's plan for the lives or not, there are two things that must be highlighted:

Fulfilling God's plan for your life includes:

(1). Faith

(2). Obedience

- Obedience to God's word;
- Obedience to God's Spirit moving upon your heart to take steps of faith.

When you study the Old Testament, you see many times:

(1). God verbally speak (Abraham),

(2). Place desires into a person's heart (Moses),

(3). Put obstacles in a person's way to redirect the person into God's will.

(4). Put opportunities in someone's path to redirect the person into God's will.

While God makes His plan and purposes crystal clear in scripture, it must be understood that each individual journey is still unique in how God's Spirit leads each person.

One of my favorite verses on the subject is,
CSB (**Psalm 139:16** *Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.*)

(2). What is Biblical Destiny?

I want to also remind you or help broaden your understanding of God's plan for your life:

(Graphic 3)

BIBLICAL DESTINY

BIBLICAL DESTINY SUPERSEDES STATUS
Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.
Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people,
Colossians 3:24 knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.)

BIBLICAL DESTINY SUPERSEDES CIRCUMSTANCES
Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

BIBLICAL DESTINY FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN (THE CHURCH)
Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Coming back to Cyrus, I am **ENCOURAGED** to read that he allowed God's Spirit to move upon his heart. At a moment in time that God knew and predestined, Cyrus simply opened up his heart to God's Spirit, and from that moment, he started to be led by God's Spirit, he started to fulfill God's plan for his life. We'll meditate more on this as we continue...

Verses 2-6: Cyrus's Decree

(**Ezra 1:2** *Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.*
Ezra 1:3 *Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.*

Ezra 1:4 *And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.*

Ezra 1:5 *Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.*

Ezra 1:6 *And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.)*

Cyrus establishes this edict to rebuild Jerusalem, particularly the temple. This edict liberates the Jews, provides protection to the Jews, and uniquely offers support and encourages others to support this. That is a **powerful** statement. It's verse 5 that catches my attention:

Verse 5: God Moved

Recall, Jeremiah had prophesied to the Jews to establish themselves and succeed in the Babylonian empire. By this time, there were several generations of Jewish families who were established and successful in the Babylonian empire. Just because there was an edict, this did not necessitate a response.

So then, what ultimately motivated these Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord? Again, going back to fulfilling God's plan for one's life, look at verse 5 again and see that phrase: "all whose spirits God had moved (CSB - roused; stirred)."

God did a work in their hearts to go. And what about verse 6?

Verse 6: Encouragement

The Jews who stayed encouraged them. Others financially blessed and supported them. We will come back to this in just a moment.

The question that any of us can have is, "For those who stayed back, did they not fulfill God's plan for their lives?" It's a great question. I will answer that soon.

Verses 7-11: Temple Items Returned

(Ezra 1:7 King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods;

Ezra 1:8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

Ezra 1:9 This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives,

Ezra 1:10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles.

Ezra 1:11 All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.)

It is meticulously recorded that the items for God's temple were returned, including each by the number. After I read this portion, I simply thought:

People may have stolen these holy items because of the failures of God's people; but the failures of God's people did not change God's faithfulness towards His people.

He did not only give them a second chance, He also put it into the heart of King Cyrus that the Jews receive back those stolen items that were for God's temple. It's another example of **God's grace and faithfulness**.

Chapter 2 - God's Plan (2)

Verses 1-70: The Returnees

(Ezra 2:1 Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city.

Ezra 2:2 Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:

Ezra 2:3 the people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two;

Ezra 2:4 the people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two;

Ezra 2:5 the people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five;

Ezra 2:6 the people of Pahath-Moab, of the people of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve;

Ezra 2:7 *the people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;*
Ezra 2:8 *the people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five;*
Ezra 2:9 *the people of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty;*
Ezra 2:10 *the people of Bani, six hundred and forty-two;*
Ezra 2:11 *the people of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three;*
Ezra 2:12 *the people of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two;*
Ezra 2:13 *the people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six;*
Ezra 2:14 *the people of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six;*
Ezra 2:15 *the people of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four;*
Ezra 2:16 *the people of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight;*
Ezra 2:17 *the people of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three;*
Ezra 2:18 *the people of Jorah, one hundred and twelve;*
Ezra 2:19 *the people of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three;*
Ezra 2:20 *the people of Gibbar, ninety-five;*
Ezra 2:21 *the people of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three;*
Ezra 2:22 *the men of Netophah, fifty-six;*
Ezra 2:23 *the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;*
Ezra 2:24 *the people of Azmaveth, forty-two;*
Ezra 2:25 *the people of Kirjath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three;*
Ezra 2:26 *the people of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one;*
Ezra 2:27 *the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two;*
Ezra 2:28 *the men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three;*
Ezra 2:29 *the people of Nebo, fifty-two;*
Ezra 2:30 *the people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six;*
Ezra 2:31 *the people of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;*
Ezra 2:32 *the people of Harim, three hundred and twenty;*
Ezra 2:33 *the people of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five;*
Ezra 2:34 *the people of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five;*
Ezra 2:35 *the people of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty.*
Ezra 2:36 *The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three;*
Ezra 2:37 *the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two;*
Ezra 2:38 *the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven;*
Ezra 2:39 *the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.*
Ezra 2:40 *The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four.*
Ezra 2:41 *The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight.*
Ezra 2:42 *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, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine in all.*
Ezra 2:43 *The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,*
Ezra 2:44 *the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,*
Ezra 2:45 *the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,*
Ezra 2:46 *the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmal, the sons of Hanan,*
Ezra 2:47 *the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah,*
Ezra 2:48 *the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam,*

Ezra 2:49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai,
Ezra 2:50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim,
Ezra 2:51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,
Ezra 2:52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,
Ezra 2:53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah,
Ezra 2:54 the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha.
Ezra 2:55 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda,
Ezra 2:56 the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,
Ezra 2:57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Ami.
Ezra 2:58 All the Nethinim and the children of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two.
Ezra 2:59 And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel:
Ezra 2:60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two;
Ezra 2:61 and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name.
Ezra 2:62 These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled.
Ezra 2:63 And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim. [Some of you might be a little confused with verses 62-63. What happened here? The answer is: only Levites were allowed to be priests in God's temple. Because these "Levites" were unable to prove that they were Levites because they lost their genealogy, they were unable to serve God's people as Levites in the Temple.]
Ezra 2:64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,
Ezra 2:65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers.
Ezra 2:66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five,
Ezra 2:67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.
Ezra 2:68 Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place:
Ezra 2:69 According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments. [After they make this momentous journey, we read that those who returned volunteered to rebuild the Temple and donate financially towards the rebuilding.]
Ezra 2:70 So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.)

It's worth noting again the meticulous nature of the Jews' records: in writing down the names, the families, the representatives of the families, and the possessions in this journey.

- On a side note, just think of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, proof that Christ came from King David, David to Judah, Judah to Abraham, Abraham to Shem, and Shem to Seth, Seth to Adam, and Adam to God. The genealogy was one proof that Christ was the Messiah.
- Or think about the careful, meticulous preservation of scripture. The Jews preserved the Holy Scriptures throughout the centuries. And there's MUCH to say on that.

So with this detailed record of those who went back with Zerubbabel, we can thank the Lord for the meticulous recordings of the Jews, which we praise for the proven genealogy that proved the Messiah; and the preserved, accurate scriptures through the centuries.

Regarding the population in the text, how many people in total went back? Nearly 50,000 Jews went back, led by Zerubbabel... along with 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,270 donkeys.

Within these chapters we have much application. First, I want to look at the Levites:

Concerning the Levites and Priests:

Introduction: For those who don't know the distinction, only the families from the lineage of Aaron were allowed to be priests; and all the other Levites in the Tribe of Levi (not sons of Aaron), worked other responsibilities at the Temple.

For the Priests: In verses 36-39, it reveals that only 4 out of the 24 priestly families (the sons of Aaron) came on the journey. In percentage, it was about 8.6% of the returnee population: 4,289 in total.

For the Levites: In verses 40-42, only 341 Levites came back. Compare 4,289 priests and 341 Levites. So, according to the numbers, it appears that for every 12 priests there was 1 Levite.

- If only the sons of Aaron were to be priests while the whole tribe of Levites served the temple and served the priests, by default it should have been the opposite.

The Distinction of Priests and Levites before the Exile:

- (1) At one point, in 2 Chronicles 30, when Hezekiah was king of Judah, there were not enough priests to do the priestly duties for the Sacrifice. So the children of Israel made an exception with God's blessing to ask the Levites to temporarily do priestly duties.
- (2) And even dating back to the "early days," with King David, there were always tens and hundreds of thousands of Levites and only hundreds and thousands of priests.

So considering the strange reality that there were 4,289 priests and 341 Levites, we should rightfully ask ourselves concerning the Levites, "What in the world happened to the Levites? Where were ALL the Levites at?"

The Destiny of the Levites:

For the past 70 years, the Temple was destroyed. 70 years prior, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple. Now, the 70-year prophecy is complete. King Cyrus issues the decree to rebuild the Temple. Now, the first wave of Jews are returning. So why in the world did the thousands of priests and tens of thousands of Levites reject their true destiny back in Jerusalem?

Remember that God called the sons of Aaron to exclusively be His priests. And He called the Levites for different responsibilities for the Temple. The destiny (which I call calling) of every Levite and every Priest was to serve Jehovah in the Temple.

Because there was no temple for decades at this point, the Levites had to find skills, trades, and new jobs in the Babylonian empire and now the Persian empire.

- **Historical Side Note:** There is a massive amount of historical data that reveals that the Jews in the Persian empire were very wealthy and brought much of their wealth to the Persian kingdom. And Persia benefited greatly from the success and wealth of the Jews. When we jump to the book of Esther, we'll see the Jews rise to greater prominence and power in the Persian empire.

Back to the Levites: When the temple was destroyed, the priests and Levites were exiled. Remember Daniel was one of those exiles. Ezekiel was an exile, among many others. Those exiled priests and Levites needed to find new jobs in those new countries.

For those of you who are second-generation Americans; or 3rd or 4th, Do you still

- (1). Speak the language of your ancestral homeland?
- (2). Have family over there you are still in contact with?
- (3). Visit the country?
- (4). Make tasty dishes from that country?

After one, two, or three generations, it's very common for the next generations to lose and forget that heritage. They speak the language of the now-country, adopt the ways of the now-country, possibly adopt the religion of the now-country, etc.

How many generations can span 70 years? A few, right? Those initial exiled Levites had children; those children had children; and just possibly, those exiled Levites had some great-grandchildren as well.

- We are told in the next chapter that there were older men who had seen the temple 70 years before. And it tells us that there were many priests and Levites who were the old men who had seen the temple previously:
- (*Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,*)

Let me share my point through an imagined depiction:

- **Story:** A Levite father, grandfather, and great-grandfather who calls for a family meeting.

Imagine Levi, a Levite, was taken in Exile 70 years before. A little boy, he remembers living right by the temple since his father, Levi Sr. was a Levite who served in the Temple. He was destined to serve God's temple one day like his father. But everything changed because of the rejection and wickedness of the people. As little Levi grows up in the Babylonian kingdom, he's required to learn a new language. He's required to go to school with people who talk differently, who look different, who have different religious ideas, perspectives, and cultural customs. Around this time, his father has a true conversion of faith. Levi Sr. then teaches his wife and 7 children, including Levi Jr., the scriptures. He teaches them concerning God's promises: that if the Jews repent and turn again to the Lord, the Lord will be gracious to restore them to Israel. And on top of that, Jeremiah prophesied that this exile will only last 70 years. Levi Sr. dies in Babylon a man full of faith, joy, and success. Levi Sr. chose the trade of refurbishing weapons. He did very well in this business due to the never-ending wars of both the Babylonians and the Persians. As a result, Levi Sr. leaves a massive inheritance to Levi Jr. and his 6 siblings. Levi and his brothers inherit their father's business. And so for the following decades, Levi and his siblings have children. In total, between all 7 siblings, there are 45 children, 30 of whom are boys. At the point of being a grandfather, Levi lost count of the grandchildren of his

siblings. But for Levi, from his 8 children, he had 40 grandchildren. And from his grandchildren, he had so far about 50 great-grandchildren, knowing very well there were still some on the way.

All this time, he never forgot who he was. He taught his children and grandchildren Hebrew, as well as Aramaic. He taught his children and grandchildren the scriptures. He did his very best to teach his family that they were only pilgrims in Babylon. He tried to prepare his family that the prophecies were almost here - that they could return to the Promised Land with God's blessing!

So when King Cyrus sent the decree that the Jews should return to rebuild the temple, a fulfillment of Jeremiah's and Isaiah's prophecy, he called for a family meeting:

He tells all his children, all his grandchildren, and all his great-grandchildren: By the mercy of God and the strength of God, we will be returning back to the Promised Land. As Levites, our destiny is to serve the Lord in His Temple. He starts to call the names of his sons, his grandsons, and his great grandsons, and he reminds them that weaponry business was only a temporary career until they can go back to Jerusalem to fulfill their true calling as priests. [Not enough time to finish the story!] And imagine the saddest news when Levi discovers that at this family meeting of 100 persons, only 7 decide to go: Levi, Levi's wife, 1 son and his wife, 1 grandson and his wife, and four great grandchildren. Imagine what kind of faith it took to leave immediate family to go back to the promised land?

They were thriving in their new lives outside of Jerusalem. They were comfortable in their new lives in Babylon and Persia. They were thriving socially, financially, culture, etc.

So when King Cyrus decreed that which was a fulfilled prophecy: Go back and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem: What did those people do, those who were destined to rebuild the Temple, those destined to lead and serve at the Temple?

For the Levites, they knew their calling. And 341 responded to the Spirit's stirring in their hearts. They said yes to the call of God; yet, imagine the tens upon tens of thousands who rejected the call.

They rejected the invitation. They rejected the stirring of God's Spirit upon their hearts. They rejected God's plan and God's best for their lives. They could not let go of their new lives, their comforts, their possessions, their homes, etc. They held tight to the things of this world rather than obeying the call of God in their lives.

Contemporary Application:

How many of us look at those who confess Christ, those who have so much potential, and instead waste their gifts, talents, and lives on financial pursuits and personal pursuits, rejecting God's best for their lives?

How many of us look at people who confess Christ, but who still don't let go of the things of this world?

How many of us see those who confess Christ disobey the Lord by rejecting the call to fulfill His plan and purposes.

For us, we aren't living in the Old Covenant or with a physical temple. For Christ became the final sacrifice for our sins in the sacrifice in the heavenly temple. The Levites aren't the mediators anymore, for Christ, the priest according to the order of Melchizedek is the true mediator between God and man. But did you know that we are "spiritual priests" as children of God? Check out this verse:

(1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1 Peter 2:10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.)

There is no doubt that God has a plan for each of our lives. And if you think you have no purpose on this earth, you are believing the lies of Satan, you are believing your own fantasy, or you simply want people to feel sorry for you so you can receive attention.

I am so thankful that when I open up God's word, I know the person I am to become, I know the way of life I am supposed to live, and I know the basic foundations of God's purpose. And by sensitivity to God's Spirit and open doors, I can walk into God's plan for my life.

For my life, I do not want to be that Christian who God begins to move upon my Spirit. He opens doors for me and I completely reject God's plan for my life.

This is one of the **saddest texts** in which God records His call to the Levites, and the vast rejection of the Levites. Only 341 out of the tens of thousands responded!

If you want to make a personal visualization from this, think of Saul. After he horrifically disobeyed the Lord by offering a sacrifice when he was not allowed to, remember what Samuel said to him:

CSB (1 Samuel 13:13 Samuel said to Saul, “You have been foolish. You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. It was at this time that the Lord would have permanently established your reign over Israel,

1 Samuel 13:14 but now your reign will not endure. The Lord has found a man after his own heart [a young shepherd boy named David], and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not done what the Lord commanded.”)

Saul rejected God’s plan for his life. As a result, he ultimately missed out on God’s plan for his life. He realized that disobedience has consequences.

All of us are walking on this journey of faith. We live by and walk on the same foundations. But each of us are called to different things on this journey. When God’s Spirit is moving in your life; when He is opening doors for you, the simple question I have for you is this:

Are you going to reject the invitation; are you going to be disobedient, **because you are comfortable?** Never be the person that leaves the legacy of choosing comfort over faith; choosing world pursuits rather than God’s will.

On a positive note, God records and we admire the meager 341 individuals who decide to walk by faith; who decided to make the great journey back to Israel. We can look at all the other Jews (non-Levites who went back - the 50,000)

(Ezra 1:5 Then the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.)

Look, the personal legacy I want to leave to you all at this church; the personal legacy I want to leave my family and loved ones; the personal legacy I want before the Judgment Seat of Christ is,

I confessed the faith and I lived a life of faith. The only legacy that matters in the end is that I confessed the faith and I lived a life of faith.

If this study is impacting you, please read Hebrews 11. To quote one verse, here’s,

(Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.)

Before we close, I said I will answer this question:

“For the non-Levites who stayed back, did they not fulfill God’s plan for their lives?”

I will say that I cannot speak for everyone who stayed back. I’m sure there were some who should have gone but decided to reject God’s plan for their lives, just like the Levites. But I will say this. It was God’s will for some to stay back.

- (1). If you paid attention a few studies ago, what Bible character knew about this but didn’t join? It was Daniel. Why did Daniel not go? Based on what we read in Daniel, God still acknowledged Daniel to be a faithful and obedient follower of Jehovah years after the return under Zerubbabel.
- (2). If you know the book of Esther, whether Mordecai was in God’s will or not, whether Esther’s birth parents were in God’s will or not, it was God’s plan that Esther grow up in Susa and ultimately become the queen of the Persian empire, save the extinction of the Jews under Haman’s decree, and change the course of history for the better.

So to answer the question: All the levites and sons of Aaron were called by God to come back to Jerusalem. Many of them rejected that call. But for the non-Levites, some were called to come back to Jerusalem but they rejected the call. But we also know that some were called to stay in areas like Persia because God had a plan there as well.

Why is that really worth mentioning? **For this application:**

When you read a text like this, it’s easy to think of missionaries who go to foreign lands in obedience to Christ. I wish there were more missionaries. People who would be willing to take steps of faith by going to a new country and spreading the gospel.

For the missionary, it’s amazing when God begins to move upon your spirit; He begins to rouse you and stir you to go and preach His gospel to the ends of the earth. If God has stirred some of your hearts to be a missionary, but you are

not obeying the Spirit's prompting, it's time to obey and walk by faith. If God has not stirred some of your hearts to be a missionary, because it's true, not everyone is called to be a missionary, I think there is an absolutely valuable application in this text concerning this:

Before the 50,000 Jews left with Zerubbabel, what did their fellow Jews who stayed back do?

(Ezra 1:6 And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.)

When you know a missionary. And now let me expand this. When you know someone is walking in obedience to God's word. When you know someone is taking steps of faith and doing what God's Spirit is leading them to do, a wonderful thing to do is:

Encourage them and support them.

And on that note, let me say this: The more you encourage and support people into fulfilling God's plan for their lives. When people take steps of faith in a particular direction and you pray with them, give them a financial gift, God will reward that. And check this out too: When you become that encourager and supporter to people, that will come back to you: when you take risks; when you take steps of faith, you will see people rally around you and support you with prayer, encouragement, and finances. In the positive way, "you will reap what you sow."

(Proverbs 11:25 A generous person will be enriched, and the one who gives a drink of water will receive water.)