

# *“The Return”* Part 1

## A Walk Through the Old Testament - Class 21

Various Scriptures

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**Jeff:** All right. Why don't we just stop for a quick word of prayer before we get started? Our heavenly Father, we thank You for this day, for the time to be in Your word. And we pray, Father, for Your blessing upon us. We ask that You'll do this not only for our momentary good but for our eternal good. And we ask, Lord, that You'll open our eyes to the message of Your word. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** All right. Today we are going to continue our journey through the Old Testament. And today we're going to look at *the return*. I was going to try to handle the return in one sitting. But there are really two returns, two legs of the return. So I decided that we're just going to keep it at two. So this is actually part 1 of two parts.

And then what we're going to do just so you know, after we do *The Return*, I'm thinking about a recap, where we do everything that we've done in one sitting. And then after we do that what I want to do is that I would like to look at what's called *the InterTestamental period* just for one sitting. And that's what happens between Malachi and Matthew—400 years. And a lot happens in those 400 years. A lot happens that's important for our understanding of the New Testament in those years. And so I thought maybe that what we would do is to wrap up with a look at the InterTestamental period. So what I'm looking at is *The Return* today, *The Return* next week, a wrap-up, and then *the InterTestamental Period*, and then we'll be finished with our overview, and then we'll move on to something else. I'm thinking probably the New Testament. I'd like to be in the New Testament. (*Laughter*)

Anyway, two things before I get started. First of all, if you're interested in the Paideia group, I'd encourage you to check that out. You can find it if you'd just type in: [www.paideiacenter.com](http://www.paideiacenter.com)

I think it is. If you just type it into the search bar it will come up. And all the details will be listed there. We're meeting in February, March and April, the first Thursday of each month. And we're reading a text from the Reformation, Martin Bucer's "On the Truth and Error Concerning the Soul." And if you would like to be a part of that, that would be great.

Secondly, I spoke at the men's breakfast last week. And I want to tell you that it was really nice. It was really nice to look down and see that table of guys from the Friday morning study. (*Laughter*) That was good; I just wanted you to know that.

**Don Bishop:** We got a really good dose of covenant theology. (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** All right. So let's look today, and here's our purpose statement. After seven decades of exile in Babylonia the Israelites were permitted to return to the homeland. So we're going to look at two parts of the return. This is the first part today. Next week's reading will get you caught up on some of the prophecies going on during that period of time.

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Today lots of points. We’re just going to look at some introductory stuff. The return is decreed, Israel returns, the problems that follow. But we’re just going to step back and look at *the world situation* for just a minute. And then we’re going to look at *the prophets that God sent into the land during that time*, and why He sent them into the land. So that’s basically the run-down.

Just by way of introduction, this comes out of Daniel chapter 3. And in Daniel chapter 3 that was sort of the climax of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that he had in chapter 2. And you remember the dream that he had. He had a dream of all of these different various metals on the statue. And one of them represented the Babylonian Empire. That was his empire. That was the head of gold. And then there was the Medo-Persian Empire, and then the Greece Empire and then Rome.

My point is this. What we’re seeing now is the advance of this statue happening in history. So for instance, we were with the Babylonians. But at the end of our time the last time we noticed that Nabonidus was ruler in Babylon. But Belshazzar was second in command, ruling in his stead. And Nabonidus was, you remember, a little bit of an eccentric guy. He was going around refurbishing temples. And so Belshazzar was in power.

While Belshazzar is in power, what happens is that he sees the handwriting on the wall. Remember that literally the hand appears and basically writes on the wall: “You’ve been weighed and found wanting, and tonight you’re going to be judged.” And what happens is that Babylon falls that very night in 539 B.C., and Cyrus the king of the Medes and Persians takes power. And that takes you back to the statue.

And what we’re going to see in that InterTestamental period is how the Greeks come to power and then the Romans come to power. And so when I say that the InterTestamental period has importance for our understanding of the Scriptures, what I’m saying is that it takes us back to the Old Testament. We see the fulfillment of the statue in Daniel chapter 2. But it also has implications for the New Testament. The Romans were in power. And this is the authority that Jesus was dealing with and that Paul was dealing with throughout their ministries.

So for the time being Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, is in power. I showed you the last time we were together that this was God’s plan and purpose all the way back in the 700s. Isaiah had prophesied that there was going to be a man by the name of Cyrus who would come and release the captives from captivity. And so we’re talking 200 years prior to this moment. What happens is that God tells His people. “I want to comfort you. And I’m going to let you know what happens. Yes, you’re going into exile. But I want you to know that there’s going to be a man, a man named Cyrus. And when he comes to power you’re going to be free.”

You know, that’s an interesting thing to think about, isn’t it? I mean, it’s got to be a terrifying thing for you to be living in Babylon and to think that things are as bad as they are. Yet you hear a word that the man who is reigning over the Medo-Persians is named Cyrus. And you’ve got to be going, “You don’t say!” You know? (*Laughter*) Isn’t that great if you think about it like that?

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Anyway, all right. So that’s the catch-up for you. Ready for the mustard?  
*(Laughter)*

**Don Maurer:** Ahhh!

**Jeff:** Come on! C’mon, Don! *(Laughter)* You know, Don,--

**Don:** I relish every word you say. *(Laughter, applause)*

**Jeff:** You know, he was so quiet for a while. *(Laughter)* You know, I kind of wonder. He’s a real pickle. *(Laughter)*

**Don Nemit:** Boy oh boy! This is great!

**Jeff:** Okay. Coming off of what we just talked about, in Isaiah 45, with Cyrus predicted as the one who would free them from captivity, the interesting thing is that I just thought I would start with this. It’s really fascinating. The Cyrus Cylinder was discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And the Cyrus Cylinder has on it the return. Now this is the Cyrus Cylinder. Now this right in here is about Don coming. *(Laughter)* But it’s lost. There’s a hole in the scroll. *(Laughter)* It just says “Don.” And then after that it doesn’t say anything else. *(Laughter)* Anyway, I digress.

**Don Nemit:** I think you have whiteout. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** And so here’s the thing. Here’s the thing about this cylinder which is really interesting, right? So God says to His prophets, “This is the man who is going to come.” He does it 200 years before.

The interesting thing about this scroll is that one of the reasons why the Babylonians accepted his rule so readily is that one of the things that Cyrus recorded was that Marduk sent him. So Marduk was the god of the Babylonians.

You see what a political genius he is. What he believed is a matter of debate. And it’s a matter the future will tell. The interesting thing is that he’s a political genius. He says that “your god sent me.” And so there was an acceptance of him by many in the Babylonian culture.

The decree of Cyrus, however, is understood by the believers of that time a bit differently. And I want you to go with me to 2 Chronicles chapter 36. And then just turn a page over and we’ll look at Ezra. Just listen to this.

*“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.”* Now that’s 70 years prior to this. Remember, they go into Babylonian captivity. And they go into Babylonian captivity. And Jeremiah says, “You’re going in because you didn’t give the land its rest. And so while you’re in exile the land is going to rest. And it’s going to be 70 years.”

*“The LORD stirred up by the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing: ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: the LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. And He has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let it go up.’”*

Now that’s the proclamation that he issues for the return of the people of Israel to the land. Go to the next page and look at Ezra.

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*“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 by the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout the land.”* Do you see that?

So the understanding is that God is the One who did this. And Cyrus is even making this a proclamation.

Now again I say to you that whatever Cyrus actually believed is another matter. But these are the things that Cyrus happens to be saying. And yet, as understood by the people of Israel, especially those writing these texts, this is the deliverance that was prophesied about in Isaiah 45 and other texts in Isaiah that told us that we were going to receive deliverance from the land, and that 200 years beforehand.

But what they’re doing is that they’re saying, “Now here’s the reason why we went into captivity. It’s just like Jeremiah said. And now we come to the end of that 70-year period and what Isaiah said is coming to fruition. We are being freed from captivity.”

And then what you have is Cyrus’ successor Darius. Now there are some intrigues that go on. And I’ll say a little bit more about those when we get to the world situation at the time. But the interesting thing is this. Cyrus issues the decree for everyone to be able to return home.

Now think about that strategy in and of itself. It’s a pretty good one. If you’re a ruler, rather than take everyone away from their homeland, your strategy is let’s have everyone return and be vassal states under us. I mean, aren’t you going to be happier if you’re living in your homeland and you’re serving a king over you who is in another part of the world, rather than being drug from your homes and settled in a foreign land?

Well, Cyrus does that. But Darius comes along. And Darius says, “Hey, let’s rebuild some places that we tore down.” You know? “Let’s build them up again.” This was a cartoon back then, actually—“Darius the Builder.” (*Laughter*)

So Darius was a builder. Darius wants to rebuild things. And guess what? One of the things that is still considered one of the ancient wonders of the world is Persepolis. And Persepolis looks like this. And it was built by Darius. It’s not a place I’d want to live right now. But anyway, he also built a canal between the Nile River and the Red Sea. There were lots of things that this guy did that were quite astounding.

But one of the things that he wants to do is to build a network of highways. And guess what? This network of highways enables the people to have safe passage back to their homeland. And so you see how God is orchestrating this. Cyrus comes to issue the decree. Darius comes and begins to build a network of roads which enables them to return home and to what? To build some of the structures that were destroyed in the captivity.

And so it very much parallels the Pax Romana in the New Testament. With the Pax Romana there’s the Roman peace. There are Roman roadways that are better. You know, some of these old roadways were improved and even extended. And the gospel

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goes forth as a result of that. So there are lots of neat things happening in the world that God orchestrates and brings to use in terms of what He does for His people.

**Ted Wood:** Can you tell the folks what Pax Romana means?

**Jeff:** Roman peace. Okay, so that leads to *Israel’s homecoming*. Just some neat stuff in terms of background.

The principle source of our information about the return is Ezra. And we’re going to be looking just a little bit at Ezra today. But you notice in Ezra that it’s not just that Cyrus decreed their home-going and Darius decrees the rebuilding. But he also says, “Look. Anyone who is in the land”—and there are people left in the land,—“anyone who is left in the land is supposed to help in the process of rebuilding.” That’s part of the decree.

Now what you have to remember is this. You have to remember that in that middle period there was the North and the South, and then there was that middle period. And that becomes the Samaritans. And the Samaritans were people who had remained in the land. They were Jews. And they had intermarried with Assyrians and other foreigners that came into that part of the world. And when they intermarried there was obviously the diluting of Israel. But there was also a syncretism that was introduced into their religion. In other words, idols were brought together with the true faith of Israel. And so there was a syncretism, not a true Judaism.

You see this when Jesus talks with the woman at the well. She has a different understanding than do the Jews. And so it was this group of people that were remaining in the land. And Cyrus decrees that everyone remaining in the land is to help those returning to rebuild.

The leader of this first group was Shesh-Bazzar.

**Transcriber’s Note”** Jeff imitates Jimmy Stewart.

**Jeff:** That’s such a tough word to say, I’ll tell ya. (*Laughter*) My Jimmy Stewart accent. I bet ya it’ll roll off his tongue. (*Laughter*) But anyway, Shesh-Bazzar dies. You can even see how you can roll into a Jimmy Stewart accent. (*Laughter*)

Anyway, Zerubbabel his nephew succeeds him. And these are just some numbers of the people that come back. Just to give you an idea, some stats here. 42,000 people return, 7,000 slaves and 200 singers. Isn’t that interesting? This is part of 1 Chronicles, the building plans of David and Solomon. Remember, there were a lot of singers. On that cylinder they found hieroglyphics of some of the singers that returned.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Jeff shows a picture of a keyboard.

**Bill McCoy:** Oh no!

**Jeff:** Yep. (*Laughter*) Don, there’s a picture of one of these singers of Israel playing the keyboard.

**Don Maurer:** Ah, okay! I thought he’d be using a sewing machine.

**Jeff:** It looks amazingly like you. Amazingly like you.

**Don:** Wow!

**Don Nemit:** It might have been a distant relative.

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**Ted:** Jeff, did you catch that? He said it should be a sewing machine. A Singer sewing machine. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** That’s good; I like that. *(Laughter)* Did everybody get that? Does anybody want to—*(Laughter)*

**Brave Man:** No, thank you.

**Jeff:** All right. There is a positive aspect of the return. The positive aspect of the return is this. Remember that there was the northern kingdom, the ten tribes in the North, and the southern kingdom, the two tribes in the South. Well, guess what? There’s no more North and South anymore. There’s just Israel. Israel returns. That old division is gone. And so that’s a positive benefit to this return.

Now the problem is not North and South. The problem now is the Samaritans. You know, that’s the issue. And that’s going to be part of the problem that we’re going to look at. Any questions or thoughts that you have at this point before we go on to that? Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** You said that Darius succeeded Cyrus.

**Jeff:** Uh-huh.

**Don:** Okay. It’s interesting, because we know the trouble that Daniel got into in chapter 6. Darius enacted the law where Daniel couldn’t pray. So there was kind of maybe a little regression?

**Jeff:** Well, what’s happening is that I’m kind of condensing and making it sound very clean. But actually what we’re going to see here is that we’re going to see, for instance, how Esther fits in, and those kinds of things.

**Don:** Okay.

**Jeff:** So it’s one of those things where this takes place over a longer period. And people are still in the land. Because remember, Daniel is still in the land, right? He remains. He’s under the Medes and the Persians, right?

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** So there’s some discouragement that takes place with those who return. Look at Ezra chapter 3 for a minute. *“And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, and the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of David king of Israel.”*

And so what they’re doing is that they’re trying to reinstate everything that David planned in the Chronicles that we read about. So it’s according to the directions of David. *“And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD. For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout. And they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.*

*“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping. For the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.”*

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Now the interesting thing about this is this. It's obvious that they're just laying the foundation. It's going to take them twenty years to rebuild the temple. And it's going to take them twenty years because there's not a lot of eagerness. And you can imagine why there's not a lot of eagerness.

I mean, if you're trying to get excited about an event, and you have half the crowd weeping because they're like “Look what you've done! This isn't even to be compared!” You know, that sort of thing. And you have the other half of the people trying to get excited about what's happening. You can obviously see the division in Israel, and how there's going to really be a lack of eagerness in moving forward with the project. And that's really what's happening in Israel.

In addition to the internal discouragements that they're facing, the Samaritans are rejected by them. And so the Samaritans harass them. In fact, one of the ways in which we see the Samaritans harass them is that you have a guy by the name of Tattenai. And Tattenai was basically a lesser ruler nearby. And they'd go to him and they'd say, “Hey, these people are doing this in the land, and we're not even sure that they're supposed to be doing this.”

And so remember what happens to the Medes and the Persians. They have to do a little research. So this is part and parcel of what I was saying to you, Don. Not everybody remembers the decree of Cyrus at this point. Some time has transpired here. And the Medes and the Persians have to go back and they have to look. You know, this has been many years ago now.

I don't know about you, but I can't remember what happened at the last presbytery meeting I attended six or seven months prior. If you asked me to remember what happened, like some sort of formal pronouncement we made at a presbytery meeting two or three years ago, I'm probably not going to remember it, right? And so that just tells you that you need to look at it like this. For us the Jewish return is significant. But for Cyrus and for the rest of the political powers of the day, they were just one group of people returning among others. And so they were not on everybody's mind.

And so when Tattenai says, “Look. Is this people really allowed to return and to do what they're doing?”, the people in Medo-Persia have to say, “Did we say they could build?” And they have to do a little research on it and they have to find out. And they do find out. They say, “Yes, Cyrus did issue a decree and they're allowed to return home and do this,” and so on. So that's the idea that's happening here that you have to take on board when you read this.

Oftentimes we can read the Bible and think that the Jews returning home was the most popular thing in the world at that time, and it really wasn't. For the world it was an insignificant thing.

**Don Maurer:** Kind of like the birth of Christ.

**Jeff:** Yes, that's exactly right.

**Caleb Falbo:** Would you say that the motivation of Cyrus that God did not put it in him to do that? He wasn't just focusing on the Israelites; he was focusing on all the other cultures.

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**Jeff:** That’s why he tells the Babylonians that “your god sent me.” I think that really the way to read this is that Cyrus is a political genius. It’s the Biblical writers like 2 Chronicles and Ezra that give the interpretation in light of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

**Caleb:** So they worshiped Marduk, right? Were they polytheists?

**Jeff:** Yews.

**Caleb:** So in their hearts they thought they were doing a good thing, letting all the other gods do their thing.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Caleb:** That’s probably what they were thinking. That’s probably how the Romans thought polytheism. It kind of reminds me of how Paul was walking through Athens and sees the temples of the unknown God. They’re afraid that they might be defending a god that they don’t even know.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely. Okay? So they research. And incidentally, just so you know, the king, people research it and come back and tell him. He’s persuaded that Cyrus had issued the decree. The Medo-Persians are having trouble with Egypt at the time. And so he goes down to take care of the Egyptian problem, and because it would have likely been on the way, he likely visits what’s happening in the land of Israel at the time.

So those are the problems that they face. We’ll see some of those problems exacerbated when we look at Nehemiah the next time. But let’s just take a brief pause and look at *the world situation* for a minute.

As I said, after Cyrus comes Darius. And this is after some obvious political intrigues. Again I’m closing the gap on things here. And I’m just making you aware that there were a number of plots that took place in between Cyrus and Darius. Darius kills some people that take power, and so this is kind of the way it is.

Darius, though, is like his predecessor in this sense. Cyrus always had an eye to Greece. He always wanted Greece under his power and dominion. Darius is the same way. Darius has an eye to the west. He wants Greece under his power.

Now he’s never able to achieve that. After Darius comes Xerxes comes to power. Xerxes is a relative of Darius; I think it’s his son. This is Ahasuerus. And who is Ahasuerus? The king in Esther. And so Xerxes comes to power. His eye is also on Greece—like father, like son,—and what happens is that the Greeks form the Delian League.

And the Delian League was basically a group of city-states that come together. I was actually thinking that they were gyro dealers. (*Laughter*) Anyway, I digress.

**Bishop Rodgers:** You’re mixing up your cultures.

**Jeff:** No, gyros. (*Laughter*)

**Ted:** Now you’ve twisted the Word, Bishop. (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** So they form the Delian League in order to fend off external invaders. They actually conquer two Persian armies and they drive out a third. It’s kind of an amazing feat.



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Now I want you to notice. Xerxes is demoralized after this. And oftentimes this is the way that Xerxes is interpreted by historians, that he moves into this demoralized self-indulgent state because he couldn't conquer Greece.

And so who's next? Esther. So we oftentimes see this king as sort of the king that parties and invests himself in a lot of extravagant wine-drinking fests and so on. And oftentimes it's interpreted this way because of the demoralization that he experienced at the hands of the Greeks.

Esther is one of those interesting figures who remains in the land and actually preserves the lives of the people of Israel who remain in the land. Now I think this is some interesting stuff to think about. We notice that God preserves His people who remain in the land. God doesn't judge the people who don't go home. For instance Daniel remains in the land. Esther remains in the land.

Here is the most difficult thing about Esther. The most difficult thing about Esther is that she and Mordecai seem to fancy it a good thing that she's taken into the harem with the possibility of being selected as the king's wife. And depending on how you look at this book she even asks her attendant. When each of these women go into the king's bedroom, they're not going in there to play monopoly, right? She's going in there to sexually satisfy this man. And she asks her eunuch attendant. "What can I do to accomplish that task? What can I take with me? What can I do to be the best lover he's had so far?" And she wins.

I think that we have to take that on board when we look at the book of Esther. Remember, that's a perplexing thing to think about. And also I think that Mordecai has some aspirations to power. I think Esther has some back pedaling. She's not really willing to face the king. I think she basically gets a banquet set up for the king and then back pedals about it, and then has to have another banquet for the king so that she can expose the man who is trying to kill Israel in the land.

I think there are a number of what I find to be difficulties in interpreting Esther and Mordecai. I think we all want to interpret them as being sort of fearless, wonderful people of faith. I think these were sinners that God used to preserve His people in the land. And so OI know that's not the Veggie Tales version. *(Laughter)* But I'll tell you what, when I look at that book I find that it helps to see it another way. Do any of you have questions or thoughts about that? Maybe there was something I've raised.

**Ted:** Jews see Esther as a savior.

**Jeff:** Sure they do. And she was the instrument by which God acted. But here's the thing about it, right? The thing about it is that in the book of Esther, whoever wrote this book took heroism out of the hands of Esther and Mordecai and put heroism into the hands of God, because remember, it's in chapter 6, right in the middle of the book, in a book that doesn't mention God, that the king can't sleep. And he has somebody read the chronicles of the kingdom, and he realizes that he has not rewarded Mordecai. And that begins Haman's downfall and the deliverance of the Jews.

You know, God is not mentioned. But that sleepless night and the providence of asking for the chronicles to be read, and for that particular chronicle to be read, that's

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just got God’s fingerprints all over. It’s a remarkable place. But God is the One who is not hesitant. God is the One who delivers His people in this text; it’s remarkable. Esther is really not the hero, neither is Mordecai. God is the One who delivers.

**Don Nemit:** Amen.

**Jeff:** He is the One in chapter 6 who has to bring about the turning point. Go ahead, Don.

**Don Maurer:** Yes. I think your perspective on Esther is well taken, because isn’t that the way it has been throughout all of the Old Testament, that God has used sinners? For example, we think about the polygamy of so many of the heroes of the faith as it were, and other sins. And yet God has used them. And it’s the same with Esther and Mordecai.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely.

**Tom Hansz:** And he still uses them today.

**Jeff:** Yeah, right. For evidence all you have to do is just take a look in the mirror and you’ll see that God uses really sinful people to accomplish His ends. Ted?

**Ted:** To say that God uses sinners is a fairly trivial statement. I mean, who else does He use? *(Laughter)* There is no other option with God.

**Jeff:** I’m going to steal that; that’s a great quote. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** You know, I have a question that you’ve raised, which is what if Esther went to her Jewish mother and said, “Mama, I will have the chance to sleep with the king. I need to find out all the techniques to satisfy him, to be the kind of woman that all men dream about. Does a Jewish mother then say, “Esther, I know God used you. But this is a bad thing that you did.” I mean, there’s no rebuke of Esther for her behavior at all. And we don’t find it later in the New Testament. That to me is a perplexing thing.

**Jeff:** But I can’t remember Esther being mentioned in the New Testament. Can you?

**Ted:** I don’t know.

**Jeff:** But that’s kind of interesting.

**Ted:** There’s no kind of follow-up. I mean, part of the story that is lost is Esther’s conversation with her Jewish mother.

**Jeff:** Yes. I mean, Mordecai is like her adopted father.

**Ted:** Right.

**Caleb:** You were talking about this, not only the actions of Esther in the book, but we know that Xerxes was not the most noble king.

**Jeff:** Uh-huh.

**Caleb:** And he was also known to try to conquer the known world at the time. He was involved in the battle of the 300. *(Unclear)*

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely.

**Brave Man:** That’s just to say that history does not give us the norms for our behavior.

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Brave Man:** So we have ministers who sin badly. We don’t go, “Look how he’s sinned!”

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**Caleb:** But I guess you could compare Esther to Samson. He did a lot of things that were selfish. He’s commended in Hebrews. But if you read till the end of the story, if you think about it, his fame doesn’t come until his death.

**Jeff:** You know, the one thing I—

**Brave Man:** It wasn’t necessarily her will; it’s what happened afterwards. She just happened to find herself in this situation; she was forced into it.

**Jeff:** Well, she did. But you have to remember this. Think about it. She could have been like Daniel and resisted.

**Ted:** That’s what we try to do. We always say, “Well, you know, she sinned, but she couldn’t help it.” And I don’t find that to be the problem with my sin. I can help it if I want to. (*Laughter*) We always want people to be our heroes. And yet if they follow error, it’s because they didn’t have—

**Jeff:** You know what though, Ted? I know you, right? We always want our heroes to be heroes. I am okay with that, I really am. You know, Ted, I know that when I read a book about my hero that he lost his patience with his kids, and he was probably snippy with his wife when he was busy. And maybe he’s got a few more skeletons in his closet than anybody else knows about, right? But frankly I don’t want to read about those. I know our world does. As a Christian I know they’re there. And I know that if I start to think of him as sort of more sanctified than a human can be, I’m into hagiography. I’m into hero worship of the worst kind, right?

But look. This is a fascinating thing. I’m going to take the time for it. As a preacher, here’s what a preacher does. A preacher can always be tempted to preach hell fire and brimstone, right? He can be. And I was like that for a while in my life. And what happened was that a couple things sort of brought me around. I’m going to tell you one of those things.

One of them was that I read C.S. Lewis’s preface to *Paradise Lost*. And in that book Lewis talks about Lord Byron’s criticism of why it was that Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, why it was that Milton made Satan such a robust figure, such a three-dimensional figure who comes off the page who you can really relate to, who has a personality. But Adam is flat. Adam and Eve are flat figures on the page. You cannot side with them. They don’t endear themselves to you; they’re just flat.

And Byron said that Milton made Satan a hero in *Paradise Lost*. And Lewis comes along and says, “That’s not it at all.” He said that the reason why Milton makes Satan such a robust, three-dimensional figure is because it’s easy. It’s easier to talk about sin and failure and disappointment and discouragement. It’s easier to talk about those things than it is to talk about virtues. And Milton could easily talk about Satan because Satan is more like him in his fallenness than he is like Christ. And I thought to myself, you know, the reason why it’s easier for the preacher to talk about hell fire and brimstone is because he can talk about hell, he can talk about judgment, he can talk about sin, because all of those things are very close. But it’s real work for the preacher to talk about virtue, extolling the magnificence of Christ and the virtue of life in Him. That’s a harder task. It’s not just hard to talk terms. But

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it’s hard to really whet the appetite of the listener to that kind of talk, right? That’s the difficulty.

So when I’m reading a biography and somebody whets my appetite to the virtues of this person and makes me long to be more like them, I’m okay with that, because I could have written a biography that talked about the guy’s sin, you know, and made it live and sing. I could have done that. I want a biography that’s going to talk to me about the virtues and make those statements, and make me want to emulate those, a biography that makes me reach beyond myself in terms of character and conduct.

**Don Maurer:** And isn’t that what Hebrews 11 does?

**Jeff:** Yes, right; sure. Yes?

**Brave Man:** I just want to say that when you speak of heroes, even Oscar Schindler started out as a Nazi. But he became a hero because of the transition that he made.

**Bill McCoy:** There’s a warning in Jeremiah. *“Thus says the LORD: ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.’”*

**Jeff:** Is that a critique of what I just said? *(Laughter)*

**Bill:** I’d like to read the whole chapter. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** I just think that in the end you say that we focus on the evil of a man or on the virtue of a man. But in the end those are irrelevant compared to what God is doing. Those are the proper actions, not my virtues or my sins.

**Jeff:** But isn’t it true that Paul says, “Follow me as I follow Christ,” and “pour yourselves into the lives of men, that they might pour themselves into the lives of others?” There is a dimension where I live in the world with other men. I started looking to my dad for example. And over my life I’ve found other men to look to, right? And for various reasons we don’t get away from that. I don’t think that means that we trust in them for our salvation. I think it means that we find in them examples of godliness that we can emulate.

**Don Maurer:** Amen.

**Jeff:** That’s what I’m saying. So you’re right. It doesn’t matter what God does in me or you or anyone else. It’s what God does in Christ that really ultimately matters. But when Paul says, “Follow me as I follow Christ,” that says to me that I’m to look to others to find help and example and that sort of thing.

**Tom:** I think there are two levels that we work on. One is not to think of God in our own terms, but like we’re learning this morning, that He rules the world. He’s in charge. And He uses who He wants.

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Tom:** My job now is to follow Christ and to be less of what I want, and try to be more like Him.

**Jeff:** Absolutely. Let me take us through this last point. *God sends His prophets.* Haggai comes onto the scene. And he comes onto the scene about the time when

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people aren't building. Remember that I told you that the foundation was laid after the second year after they get into the land. The temple is not finished for about twenty years. And Haggai is the prophet that goes into the midst of the people and says, "Hey, when are we going to finish this temple?"

And the people say, "It's really not time yet."

And remember that in chapter 1 he says, "Oh, it's time for you to finish your house and panel it." And he starts talking to them about that "it's certainly time for your houses to get finished being built. But it's not time for the LORD's house." And he challenges them.

And then he tells them in Haggai 2:7-9.

**Transcriber's Note:** Haggai 2:6-9, NKJV. *"For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of all Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."*

**Jeff:** He says, "Look, I'm going to tell you something. This temple is to be finished not because it's the end product, but because God is going to glorify and bring glory to Himself through this temple and beyond." And actually I think He's pointing ahead to the ministry of Christ, where Christ says, "Destroy this temple and I'll build it anew," talking about Himself.

And then Zechariah comes along two months after Haggai and calls for the repentance of the people at that time. And he gives a great gospel picture in chapter 3. But maybe I'll mention that the next time we're together. That will be it. Why don't we close in prayer?

Father in heaven, we thank You and praise You for this day, for the time that we have to be together. And Lord, thank You for helping us to look at this whirlwind tour of this time in the life of Israel. Lord, help us to remember out of it that you reign as Our God, and You rule over kings and leaders, and that You bring about all that comes to pass, and You bring it about for Your glory. Father, we thank You for it, and we pray that You will bless us in Christ's name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*