

The Book of Ezra

Part 1

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[00:00:00] As you've probably gathered, I felt led to look at the book of Ezra this evening, in some part at least.

And so I'd be grateful if you turn to the first chapter of Ezra.

Ezra chapter 1 verse 1 [00:01:12] Let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel. He is the God, which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he is sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem. And all that was about them strengthened their hands, with vessels of silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. Now chapter 3 verse 1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

[00:02:11] They stood up Joshua, the son of Josedach, and his brethren, the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and built up the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases, for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries. And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required. And afterward offered the continual burnt offerings, both of the new moons, and all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord. On the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.

[00:03:07] They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters, and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Sidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the Sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus, king of Persia. Verse 10, And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord after the ordinance of David, king of Israel. And they sang together by court, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord, because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests, and Levites, and chiefs of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first

house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice. [00:04:03] And many shouted loud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people. For the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Because I travel by train, I didn't bring my large charts. I've got some miniature charts this evening, which may be a help to us to see something of the plan of this book of Ezra.

We know that Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, and historically they are well placed here, because the books of Kings and Chronicles end up in almost the same words that we began to read.

And it's interesting to see that this is after the Babylonian captivity, which again was after the Assyrian dispersal of the ten tribes, and I put these two headings to the book here.

[00:05:12] There were two periods of return, as there were two periods of going into exile.

There was quite a period of seven years between the various stages of the taking away of the children of Judah.

We read this in the various historical accounts.

And the time of coming back spreads over quite a long period, as you may see if you've got dates in your Bible.

But the two are distinct. There was a return under Zerubbabel, and the second return was under Ezra, the priest, and these are separated by almost 60 years.

[00:06:09] It's interesting to see that there's a period between those two chapters, the sixth and chapter seven. And I made a little note that between those two chapters there were battles that come in the history books, if you know ancient history, battles of Thalamus and Thermopylae, a marathon in Greek history. And during the same period two eastern wise men, Confucius and Buddha, died.

There's no mention of any of these facts, historical facts, in here, because the historian is concerned with God's center and God's purpose for his people.

And if we just think of the purpose of God, going back to the time when he called Abraham to go from that wonderful place of the Chaldees to a place that God would tell him, where he never really owned anything except the one field of Machpelah.

[00:07:15] And then the choice of Abraham's descendants through Isaac, the promises were made, then the triumph of Israel, and finally when they were brought into the land, God would give it to them for inheritance. But we read at least 21 times in the book of Deuteronomy that when they came into the land, which God would give them to possess it, there was one place where they should worship. Not their choice, but God's choice, the place that God would choose to make his name to dwell there.

That place we know is distinctly mentioned in the historical books when David had the people numbered and the plague stopped by the threshing floor of Ornan, and that was the very place

chosen for the building of the temple.

[00:08:11] And significantly it seems to have been the very place of which God had spoken all those centuries before to Abraham, offer thy son upon the place that I will tell thee.

Mount Moriah was apparently the very place chosen. God had chosen it already, the place where he would put his name. That was to be the center of worship for his people. They were not to worship as the others did, and as they did. In fact, in disobedience to God's law, under every green tree and on every hill, worshipping idols, God was going to make his name to dwell in one place, Jerusalem. We know that he came and dwelt in the tabernacle when that was built in the wilderness. He came and took possession of it. We read in the last chapter of Exodus. [00:09:07] Similarly, when Solomon built the temple, God came and took possession of it. So the priest could not even stand to minister because the Lord took possession of it, and the glory of God filled that temple. Some of us were looking the other evening at the sad story in Ezekiel, when the nation got to such a terrible low condition that the glory hovered over the threshold. No one took any notice. It was raised above the city and finally went to the mountain and up away. The glory had departed. Then we read that the temple was destroyed. Gates were burned with fire.

All the utensils, all the precious things that had been prepared by Solomon and his successors were taken away to Babylon. We know what happened in Babylon, how the idolatrous king, Belshazzar, brought in these vessels.

[00:10:10] He said, bring those vessels from the temple of God at Jerusalem, so we may praise the gods of wood and stone, silver and gold. We know how that very night, Belshazzar was slain. Then the people were, after the 70 years that God had purposed, able to come back. We read how in Daniel's book in chapter 9, he'd been reading the prophecy of Jeremiah, and he realized the time was near, the time of deliverance. He set himself to fast and to pray and to confess his sins and the sins of his people, and plead with God that he would regard his holy place, his holy temple, the mountain of Jerusalem. We know how that prayer was heard. Daniel was greatly beloved. From the moment he began to pray, his prayer was heard. God brought the people back. Daniel lived to see that wonderful day when, as we see here, Cyrus gave decree. He made a proclamation throughout all his kingdoms and put it all in writing. Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven has given me the kingdoms of the earth. [00:11:20] He's charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. The king, of course, took all the pride to himself, but God had raised him up, as we find in the book of Isaiah, already long before he existed. God said, I've chosen my servant Cyrus, my servant. Well, they didn't know God. God had chosen him to do this wonderful thing and bring the people back to Jerusalem, to bring the vessels back to Jerusalem, that at last God could be in that place he'd chosen to put his name.

This is the remnant that we find here in Israel. First of all, the return under Zerubbabel, and we find this first chapter concerned with the decree, and then we find how they went up. They went up, the chiefs of the people went up. How important it is to know, first of all, what the mind of God is. These people needed to know what was the mind of God. [00:12:24] God had made it plain, he chose a heathen ruler, an idolater, to carry out his purpose. Just as he'd raised up Nebuchadnezzar to take someone into Babylon, so he raised up Cyrus to enable them to go back. He speaks of both, of his servant.

God can use all sorts of people, even if they don't recognize him, and he is here described as the

God of heaven. It's interesting to see this title. I notice some of the interesting names God has given here, and it's interesting to see that in the book of Daniel this name is used, the God of heaven. [00:13:06] The God of heaven. Yet the God of heaven, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, says Solomon. He's still concerned with this one place on earth, the place he's chosen to make his name to dwell there. In spite of the idolatry of his people, in spite of their unfaithfulness, God remained faithful. Here a little remnant is coming back, coming back to carry out his purpose, that God at last shall have his name honoured in that place he's chosen. We know that Jerusalem has a more important role to play, and has still an important role to play in the history of this world, in the future history of this world. We read in prophecy, Jerusalem is going to be the centre of the earth. No wonder God had his eye upon that place. We read that the eye of the Lord was upon the whole land. The eye of the Lord is upon this land from the beginning of the year to the end of it. There's no land like it. But this one spot, Jerusalem, is the one place where we know our blessed Lord is going to stand on the Mount of Olives and dwell in Jerusalem as the one Lord. One Lord, his people see him. [00:14:24] But there's a little fortation away in this restoration that we find in these two books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah, we know, is concerned with the city, building of the city, that's quite important. But this one, this book, is concerned with the building of the house of God. I notice that the house of God is mentioned 38 times. The house of God. House of the Lord, 8 times. Temple of the Lord, 3 times. So it goes all together. You find that there are over 40 references to this one place, the house where God was going to dwell again.

[00:15:08] It's a wonderful grace, isn't it? God could deign to dwell in a place like this, with people like this, unfaithful as they'd been, and God was going to deign to dwell among them again. That's why he used this man, Cyrus, raised him up. He said, I've raised you up for this one purpose, to bring my people back and to bring back to Jerusalem, that which belongs there, the temple of the God of Heaven.

God of Heaven. We know that Nebuchadnezzar had to recognize that the Most High ruled. The Most High, there. Also, later, the following king, Darius, recognized that Daniel's God was the Living God. The Living God.

He said there was no other God who could deliver like this Living God. These are wonderful titles, important titles, because we read again in the New Testament with the Thessalonian saints, turned to God from idols to serve the Living and the True God. [00:16:14] The expression is used again in Hebrews, the Living God. The Living God. Isn't it wonderful to be brought into relationship with the Living God? These gods of gold and silver, wood and stone, they can't see, they can't hear, they can't do anything.

They have to be put. They have to have a nail in the water to hold them up. They have to be carried. God said, I carry you. The Living God. That's the one whose place was there in Jerusalem. We see how it began here with the decree of Cyrus, the decree that God had purposed, according to God's purpose. That's very important. It says here that it was according to God's purpose that he made this decree. And then we find here that he gave them all this instruction and the vessels. It's interesting to see as we read through this book how carefully these people brought up all the things that were delivered to them.

[00:17:22] We know that it failed. We know that it was a mere handful of people. It was something that was despicable in the eyes of the enemy. But it was at least a willingness to return to basic principles. I think this is perhaps something that we need to have before us again. These people in exile had

learnt a lesson. They couldn't learn why they could go freely three times in the year to the place that God had chosen. They didn't learn the lesson then. They became slack. They allowed, as we find, all sorts of things to go on. So God's house was polluted. We read of the bones that were burnt and put right near God's sanctuary. Men's bones were there defiling the house of God. And the sacrifices that were brought were worthless, God has to say. It's like an empty hut left behind after the harvest. There's nothing in it. [00:18:22] God found there worship, idol worship. It wasn't a real thing at all. It was empty. So that's why he had to take them away to learn the lesson. Sometimes God has to deal drastically with us because we're his children, because he loves us. Sometimes he has to deal very drastically with us because we don't learn the lessons in the place where we ought to learn them. There's no better place to learn the lesson than in company with God's people. Yet we've seen it again and again, haven't we, how God has to use discipline over his people because although they come regularly under the sound of God's word, although they perhaps know much of the scripture by heart, although they know what God requires from them, they don't do it. They don't carry it out. [00:19:15] God has to bring us sometimes to our knees and lower us still to be flat on our faces and acknowledge that we've been unfaithful. Unfaithful as individuals, but unfaithful also as companies of believers. Unfaithful to the sacred charge delivered to us. We see in the New Testament epistles of Paul particularly, the sacred charge is entrusted to the saints of God to hold the truth in love. Sometimes we love at the expense of truth. Sometimes we hold the truth at the expense of love.

There's a wonderful expression that's used there in Timothy's epistle to Timothy, holding the truth in love. It's a lesson perhaps that we can only learn when God beats us down and brings us to our knees to recognize sometimes in a far country, in some cases, away from the contact with his people, he brings them back to the fundamental principles. [00:20:18] That's what happened to these people. God wanted to bring them back to himself, not only to the principles, to himself, because the principles abound on this relationship of God's people with himself. Moses said to them, didn't he, in the early chapters of Deuteronomy, there's no other nation like this nation, having God dwelling in their midst. The living God dwelling in your midst. No other nation has such laws as yours, perfect laws, righteous laws. No other nation has the wonderful privilege of being able to be directed by the living God. Yet they didn't appreciate, as we see in the book of Judges, later in the time of the kings, they didn't appreciate God's love for his people.

[00:21:08] I'm afraid we fail to appreciate very often how loving God is to us, how gracious he is, how patient he is with us, as he was with these people. And so we find here that these things were ready and he gives us a list, once or twice a month, of all the vessels that were brought and the value of them. It's interesting to see how everything was weighed out and brought in. And in the second chapter, I didn't read the second chapter because it's just a list of names. These lists of names are important. I remember Eric once, reading through the Bible every evening when he went to bed, he said, I've got to Chronicles now, Dad, and I don't know what to make of all these lists of names. I said, well, it does seem a bit tiresome to go through all these names, but even if you don't see the little notes now and again, I think it's wonderful that God has put all these names in these books. He knew them, not as a list of names, but as people. When I pray for Mrs. Smith, God knows who I mean. I know Dad was a Mrs. Smith, but God knows who I mean when I pray for Mrs. Smith. I was praying for Mrs. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Smith this morning. Well, God knew which Mr. and Mrs. Smith I was praying for. [00:22:19] And with these other people, you find Jahiel, three times in one chapter, Jahiel. We say Jahiel 1, 2, and 3, but God knew which was which of them. They're names, were names of people that God knew. And God took account in the second chapter of the children of the province that went up out of the captivity of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, carried away into Babylon. And came again unto Jerusalem

and Judah, every one unto his city. They came with their upper bill, and God noted who they all were. He took account of those that wanted to go back, because they wanted to go back to the place that God had chosen, because they wanted to get back to this land that was the land of promise. [00:23:12] God has noted all their names and put them in the Bible. We may not be able to read them through, or we'd quickly brush through the list, but to God they were people. They were people that were intent on getting back to a place that God intended them to dwell in. Isn't that important? God notes today all those that are faithful, those faithful old sisters that keep coming to the prayer meeting. It costs them a great deal. God notes that. He knows their names. We read in the last book of the Old Testament, those that feared the Lord's sake often one to another. The Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was kept for those that fought on his name. Those that spoke about him. Don't you think it touched the Lord's heart when he called those two people up going to Emmaus? What things? The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Oh, how precious when he listens to us. [00:24:14] What do we talk about? The fashions, or the business, or the radio programs, or all the other things that come in. Well, we do talk about those things, perhaps much too much. But isn't it wonderful to catch up people that are talking about Christ? Doesn't that warm the Lord's heart to hear them talking about him? These two people are talking about him. We don't even know their names, but he knew their names. And these names are in the book here. With their genius and the number of each of these families and where they went, God noted it all. These are people that wanted to get back, back to him, back to the land, back to the first principles that he'd given them. [00:25:02] And it's interesting to see how these people are also mentioned separately as companies in verse 36. The priests, the children of Jediah, the house of Joshua, and the children of Emmaus, and the children of Pascha, and the children of Harim. The priests are noted. There were priests that went back. Good thing they went back. Of course, they couldn't start the worship of God without priests, could they? And there were priests that went back. Not all of them. That's why the names of these families are mentioned. Families were the priests that went back. Now today, we know every one of us, every believer in the Lord Jesus is a priest. And how important it is that we as priests carry out our priestly office. The priest represented the people before God, and also instructed the people about God. There's intercession on behalf of the people, and there was the expression of God's nature to the people.

[00:26:06] This is something that we, each one of us, as believers, have entrusted to us. Then, too, the Levites, in verse 40. The Levites, the children of Joshua and Cadmeo, all those, 74 of them, Levites, those that worked in the service of God.

So far, they hadn't got any work to do, because the temple wasn't built yet. But they were there, ready to do it. They were ready there, with their sleeves rolled up and their loins girded, ready to do the work of God. How important it is, isn't it, to be ready when God calls us to a task? The Levites were ready. Then there were the singers, 41. The singers, the children of Asaph, 128. The singers, people that were ready to sing God's praise. I was always ready to sing God's praise. It was lovely sometimes to come to visit some of these old saints.

[00:27:03] One I went to the other week, just quite near the harbour, there's a brother and sister, and we usually drop in there. I had to get there early, and we spent an hour with them. He said, come down and see Mother. Mother was downstairs in her little room, all to herself. Mother was, she used to be the headmaster's wife, actually, years ago. He's with the Lord, and there she is in her nineties. He said, often in the middle of the night, she's singing Silent Night. Happily, there aren't any neighbours very close to them. He said, it only wakes us up. But Mother sings. She sings sometimes all night. Mother sings. She doesn't even realise it's night, but she sings. But God gives songs in the

night, even to old people like that. And it's wonderful to sing. She's so charmed to see us. I bet she forgot and immediately asked us if we'd been there. But just to see us. You will stop for coffee, won't you, she said. And it's lovely to see these people singing. The singers, the singers. I think we sing that too little. We sing together when we're here, and perhaps drone on with each other and make some kind of noise. [00:28:10] But these are people that enjoy singing. I'm sure otherwise they wouldn't be called the singers. They were the singers. People that were ready to praise God in the proper way. Children of Asaph. Now Asaph, we know, has psalms, and his children were ready. In another place we read earlier on, those sons of Asaph were ready to sing and praise God day and night. So that's something, isn't it, that these people were ready to sing, ready to sing God's praises. Then we find the porters. People had to carry things about. Children of the porters, the children of Shalom, 139 of those, they were porters, only porters, only people who had carried their things along. Very important. I was there with a porter the other week, and I was confronted with a staircase that high and couldn't carry my case all up those steps. I said, what shall I do? And they said, I'll fetch a porter. Yes, he fetched a porter and happily he brought my luggage over. [00:29:13] Porters, useful people, aren't they? It seems a mean sort of task. It's a jolly useful task. Porters, those that are willing to do the mean jobs, to sweep the floor and to dust the chairs and to get everything ready, even providing the preacher's glass of water, they're porters' jobs. God takes note of those little things. Inasmuch he did it to the least of these my brethren, he did it unto me. Out of its context it's true, but the principle is there. The porters are named here. And the Nethinim, remember the Nethinim? Those are the children of these people who didn't really belong there, but they were there to do all sorts of jobs. Chores of wood, chores of water, the odd job men. Yes, God notes even those odd job men. Those that come in to patch up the meeting room, or patch up our homes for that matter. It's very good. But there are those too who patch up the differences between Christians. That's a very important task. [00:30:17] Those that can sweep up the mess when brethren have had a quarrel. There are those that can come and pour oil on the troubled waters and clear it up. Porters, Nethinim, chores of wood, chores of water, whatever the task may be, God values it all and he puts their names here. It's interesting, verse 55, the children of Solomon's servants. They'd been in kingly service. They'd been entrusted with the wonderful task in the palace of serving Solomon. But these are their descendants now who are coming back to Jerusalem, well, nothing to see of Solomon's palace, nothing to see of the temple anymore, all lying in ruins. But they're there. [00:31:05] These are the people, no doubt, that remembered the former things. Then we find, in verse 59, there were they which went up from Telmila, Telhassa, Cherub, Adam, and Inmuh, but they could not show their father's house and their seed, whether they were of Israel.

Later on we find, in verse 62, those that sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found. These were priests and they were put away from the priesthood because they couldn't prove that they belonged. It's a very solemn thing here, isn't it? Some people did creep in unawares. People do creep in today unawares, and they can't even show their genealogy. And how careful we have to be, don't we? I know we can't read the heart, but there should be godly discernment if there are people that come in unawares, people that don't really belong to the Lord at all. [00:32:14] Sometimes, I'm afraid, we know it happened in the Church of God, and I'm afraid it even happened in meetings of brethren, people take positions of responsibility and we wonder if they really belong at all to the Lord. They're not showing, whereas we cannot look at the heart, I say, but we need discernment, and they should be able to prove their genealogy. These couldn't. They sought their register, but they couldn't find it. They were doubtful people, and we have to watch out sometimes with doubtful people. We need to be on our guard against anything that would dishonor the Lord. If these people had been allowed to act as priests, and they didn't even belong to the family of Aaron, it would have been a disgrace. They would pollute the very priesthood,

so they were put away. They couldn't serve. [00:33:05] How important it is, isn't it, for each one of us to search our hearts and see if we are truly sure of our genealogy, that we belong to him. Tushartha, the governor, said, well, there's nothing to be done. We have to wait until there's stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim. That day hasn't come yet. They're still waiting. The priest hasn't yet arrived. Then we find the whole congregation is numbered. It tells us just how many there were. In verse 64, how many there were. The whole company there, 2,360. Quite a good number that came up. God knew just how many there were. That's again a wonderful comfort to me. The Lord knows all that are his. We can't always tell whether people are his or not, but the Lord knows them all. The whole number of the redeemed are known to him. Those that came here, he knew them all. Even the servants and the maids are numbered here, 7,337. And the 200 singing men and singing women. [00:34:07] Yes, it wasn't only the men that sang, the women sang as well. They had their task. Oh, how grateful we are for the sisters that sing. There's something they can do in the meeting. They can sing, can't they, and help us sometimes keep to the pitch. These were singing men and singing women, 200 of them, to keep the people on their pitch, to keep them in tune with the things of God. It's again important, isn't it? Then we find, they came to the house of the Lord. The house of the Lord, they offered freely, verse 68, they offered freely for the house of God set up in his place. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work, three score and one thousand grams of gold, five thousand pounds of silver, and a hundred priest's garments. These are people that could afford it, and they gave what they could afford. Sometimes, in our experience, we find it's the people who haven't got very much that give the most. And we know this is so, that the widow, she gave all that she had. The rich men making a big show of taking their banknotes out of their pocket and showing everybody what they were putting in. This widow didn't have very much, that was all she had, and the Lord knew that. He said, she's given all that she had, and he appreciated that. [00:35:21] But these were rich people, and they gave according to their ability. That's a very good thing, isn't it? Because sometimes we hold back. I'm not talking only about money, I'm talking about our time, I'm talking about our gifts. Sometimes we hold back that which we can do. Perhaps there's a task which God's expecting us to carry out, and we haven't done it according to our ability. We hang back. These people didn't. It says here, they gave themselves, they offered after their ability, they offered freely for the house of God to set it up in its place. They were determined that God's honour should be vindicated and that this house should be built. So they made sure of it, they gave freely. [00:36:09] Then we find when the seventh month has come, in chapter 3 verse 1, they were there. The seventh month, very significant, we know the seventh month is very important in the Jewish calendar, in God's calendar for his people. First the Feast of Trumpets, then the Day of Atonement, then the Feast of Tabernacles. There they were, and there wasn't even really a temple yet. How could they carry these things out?

They gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem and said, whatever we haven't got, we can come together in the place, the place, this is the place that God has chosen. The temple isn't there yet, but we can come together in this place at the time when he wants us to be there. [00:37:03] Sometimes we see this, that the testimony is removed, and it's very sad when the testimony is removed, as we've often remarked about many places where there used to be a testimony for the Lord, and now there's nothing left. Just think of the seven churches in the Revelation, what is there left in Turkey today? All those churches, and God had warned them, if they were not faithful, the testimony would cease, and it has ceased. It's very solemn, isn't it, to see this? But it's good to know that our Christians are coming from those spots and praise the Lord, even in the memory of the place. But it's important here, these people, they gathered themselves together as one man. It makes us think again of the day of Pentecost. They gathered of one accord in one place. I know we can't expect to go back to that.

We've made such a terrible mess of things as believers, as stewards of the truth of God, we've made a terrible mess of things. But we can at least seek, as they sought, to go back to the fundamental principles, and that's what we have in this chapter particularly. [00:38:13] And we find here they were offering burnt offerings on the altar. They built the altar, and the offerings were according to the writing in the law of Moses, the man of God. It wasn't their idea, it wasn't just after their passion.

They said, well, things are different now, we are different people, let's have a modern sort of worship. No, not a bit of it. They went back to the words of Moses, the man of God. If you look at the last chapter in the Old Testament, you'll find that Malachi reminds them again. They were to remember that word had been given to Moses, the man of God. It's very important that they had to go back to the fundamental principles. Some of it's later than what we read here, but they were getting away from the purity of the faithfulness and the worship there, and so he warned them to go back to the fundamental things, the law of Moses, the man of God. [00:39:17] God had given Moses the instruction as to how they were to worship. God had given all the instruction as to how the tabernacle was to be built and how the offerings were to be brought, and they went back to that. It was according to the burnt offerings as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. And they set the order upon its bases, for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries, and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, morning and evening. They were faithful in going right back and doing it just as God had instructed. So often, if you want to bring in innovations, let's do it differently. Don't let's be old-fashioned. Let's have something new. But no, it's important to go back to the fundamental principle. What does the scripture say as to how we gather, as to how we worship? We should always be able to substantiate it with scripture. Whatever we do, it's important to go back to the fundamentals. [00:40:19] So here they set it on its base, and they offered their burnt offerings, and then they come round to the 14th day, and they kept the Feast of Tabernacles as it is written. They kept it as it is written. Yes, they said, well, we can't really do it properly now because we haven't got all the things. We haven't even got a temple yet. We haven't got the altar. But they kept it as it was written. So I take it they did actually dwell in booths as it is written. And they brought the offerings day by day. Seven days, and then the eighth day, the special day, they carried it out as it was written. Meeting recently when they were having some problems, and brother said, well, there's one thing about these problems. It made us search the scriptures to see how to deal with these very problems. [00:41:12] It's a good thing, isn't it? Come back, see what the Bible says about it, not what we think, not what men have written, what the scripture says about it. These people came back to keep it as it was written. Then it says they carried out the burnt offerings according to the custom, as the duty of every day required. Good. Plainly taught them. Here it was carried out just according to the custom as God required it. So they had these sacrifices, and it does note in the end of the sixth verse, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. They hadn't got a temple yet, not even a foundation, and how important it was to get on with that. They then started paying the people, the masons, the carpenters, and all the others that were bringing the wood there, to begin to build up, to rebuild the temple of God. Wonderful opportunity, wasn't it now? Opportunity to do things, perhaps not on the same scale, but in the same manner as Solomon built the temple.

[00:42:24] Obviously they couldn't do it so lavishly as Solomon had done, but at least it was in the right place. They had all the plans, no doubt, that God had given to David. They had the instructions that God had given in the law, so they laid the foundation. We find here it was in the second year of their coming onto the house of God, it took them two years, the second month, when they began finally to build, and they set forward the work of the house of the Lord. They set forward the work of the house of the Lord. [00:43:03] It wasn't their house. We know how Haggai later on had to speak to them, the remnant there. Later time he had to remind them that their houses were sealed. They were looking

after their own houses very well. God's house was still lying waste. How easy it is, isn't it, to furnish our own houses beautifully, yet not attend to the things of God. Sometimes you just occupy with the things of this world. That's what happened with these people, but here at last after two years, the second year, the second month, they got together to set it forward. They set forward the work in the house of God, and here's a list of those that did it. And then when they laid the foundation, it says here, it was after the ordinance of David, the king of Israel, they got the plan there, and the praise was carried out by the sons of Asaph and the Levites. [00:44:04] They were able to sing together, verse 11, they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord because he is good. His mercy endures forever toward Israel. They could sing, they could sing because they'd been obedient. If we're disobedient, we can't sing. We can't sing the songs of Zion if we're disobedient. We can't praise the Lord if we're being disobedient to his word and denying his name. So it's important these people, first of all they carried it out, began at least to carry out this work. Then it says they could sing. They sang together, and then when they saw it, all the people shouted. They shouted because the foundations of the house of the Lord were laid. What a joy there was.

Then there was another group. The old people remembered. We still have a few of them among us, haven't we? I can remember the time when there were capable brothers, brothers that were faithful, and they were always telling us what happened. [00:45:15] Here they are moaning their heads off and weeping, and the others are shouting for joy because at least the temple of God, the foundation at least is made. And it's one shout really. You can't distinguish between the two. There are those moaning about the comparison, not to be compared with the, I can remember the original temple, I can remember the glory there, I can remember all the wonderful spectacle of the gold and everything there. The others say yes, but we've got at least a beginning of the temple. And as one shout goes up, a shout that couldn't be distinguished, it says here, they couldn't distinguish between the noise of the shout of joy and the noise of the weeping of the people.

[00:46:13] The people shouted with a great shout, a loud shout. Noise was heard afar off. I wonder what sort of noise is heard afar off. Is it grumbling, the things not what they used to be? Is it the noise of moaning because we can't get our own way? Or is it the shout of joy that God is getting his portion? Shout of joy to know that at least there's a company of people who want to do it according to the will of the Lord, want to be obedient to his name. There should be one shout, there should be one voice, and may we indeed be those that are ready to give the Lord his portion. The Lord would like to carry on in another portion if we spare him until Tuesday evening, but we'll leave it there with this challenge again to each one of us. What do we shout? Do we shout what used to be, or do we seek now to be faithful to our Lord?