

The Book of Ezra

Part 2

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[00:00:00] You may have remembered that we spoke on Saturday about the book of Ezra and we looked at the early chapters and we noted in the end of chapter 3, the foundation of the temple was laid and that the young people particularly shouted with joy, but the older ones wept when they compared it with the original temple, Solomon's temple. I don't know if everybody has a little paper with the secret on, sometimes helpful to see the way in which it's been divided into two sections and we would like to read together today from chapter 4, verse 1, particularly the subject of the adversaries, so it's Ezra 4, verse 1.

[00:01:03] Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel, then they came to Zerubbabel and to the chief of the fathers and said unto them, let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do, we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Asser, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel said unto them, you have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, hath commanded us. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even unto the reign of Darius, king of Persia. In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning [00:02:03] of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. And you have the letter there reported, and we look at the end of the chapter, verse 17, and the letter had reached him, then sent the king an answer unto Rehob, the chancellor, and to Shimshire, the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, peace in such a time. The letter which he sent unto us hath been plainly read before me, and I commanded, and such hath been made. It is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition are being made therein. There be mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river, and toll, tribute, and custom was paid unto them. Give ye now a commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. [00:03:01] Take heed now, that ye fail not to do this. Why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? Now in the copy of King Ataxerxes, his letter was read before Rehob, and Shimshire, the scribe, and their companions. They went up in haste to Jerusalem, and to the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of Israel. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. In chapter 5, then the prophets Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Edo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. They rose up to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Josedach, and began to build the house of God, which is

at Jerusalem. And with them were the prophets of God helping them. At the same time came to them Tetnai, governor on this side of the river, and Shethar Bosnai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to [00:04:03] build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius. Then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter. The copy of the letter that Tetnai, governor on this side of the river, and Shethar Bosnai, and his companion, the Aphaxoxites, which were on this side of the river, sent unto Darius the king, to send a letter unto him, where it was written thus, Unto Darius the king all peace. Be it known unto the king, that he went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is built with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? We ask their names also, [00:05:01] to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. Thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was built these many years ago, which a great king in Israel built and set up. But after our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto Roth, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed the house, and carried the people away into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Babylon, the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon. Those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one whose name was Shesh-bazar, whom he made governor. And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be built in his place. Then came the same Shesh-bazar, and laid the foundation of the house [00:06:03] of God which is in Jerusalem. And since that time, even until now, hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished. Therefore now, if it seem good to the king, let there be such made in the king's treasure house, which is out of Babylon, whether it be so. The decree was made of Cyrus the king to build the house of God in Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning the matter. And find the next chapter, the search was made, and you find towards the end of the chapter, verse 15 of chapter 6, and this house was finished. On the third day of the month, Adar, which was the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king, and the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, and offered it as a dedication to this house of God, and a hundred bullocks, two hundred lambs, four hundred lambs, and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. They sent the priests in their divisions, [00:07:06] and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God which is at Jerusalem, as is written in the book of Moses. And the children of Israel, the children of the captivity, kept the Passover until the fourteenth day of the first month, for the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, for they breathed in the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. We may be sure wherever God is active, the devil will also be active. We find this in our own experience, we know that [00:08:01] the devil was never more active than at the cross of our blessed Lord, and yet we know that God had the victory, the Lord had the victory there where Satan was most active. And here in this Old Testament history we find, as soon as there is a testimony for God again in Jerusalem, the chosen land, the chosen place, the place that God had chosen centuries

before, a place for his name to dwell in, as soon as there was a testimony there for the God of heaven and earth, as it says here, the God of heaven and earth, the God of Israel, he's also called here, the Lord Jehovah, the devil had his friends ready to try to break up and to stop the work by all means. We experience this of course today, wherever we are active in preaching the gospel, the devil will come in with all sorts of ways to prevent souls from listening to the word of God's grace. Where there is prosperity [00:09:07] in any way among the people of God, spiritual prosperity, the devil will seek to sow disharmony and by one means or another break up this harmony of God's people. We will stay on our watch constantly against the wiles of the devil. He comes sometimes in a very specious way as with these adversaries. They were adversaries, it says plainly, they were enemies, enemies of the faith. But they pretended to be going the same way, the same direction. They began by saying, let's build with you. We seek your God as you do. We sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, which brought us up here. We worship the same God, why don't we work together? It sounds very simple and reasonable, doesn't it? But what sort of people were these? [00:10:05] Well we find that when the children of Israel were taken out of their northern kingdom, particularly during the time of the Assyrians, the king of Assyria put there various people from his own country to look after the land. And God sent lions among them. They said, well it's because we don't know the gods of this country. And so he sent some priests back, what kind of priests, I don't know, that were willing to go back and tell these people a sort of mixed worship. It says they worship the God of Israel and the other gods. Pantheism, very prevalent today, isn't it? People like to have a veneer of religion. They like to be seen going to some place of worship, as they say. But what worship is it? It's sometimes a mixture of paganism and a sort of veneer of Christianity.

[00:11:05] What was the answer of these people? By no means, they said, you have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel.

We are the people of the God of Israel. God is our God. We're building a house to our God and no one else is going to interfere with it. Very clear cut, isn't it? We're not always so clear cut about these things. Sometimes we accept help from other people outside and invariably it leads to trouble. In the book of Amos, chapter 3, it says, can two walk together except they be agreed? Of course they can't. If I'm going north and you're going south, we can't walk together. If one is serving God and the other is serving Satan, we cannot walk together. These were [00:12:01] worshipping gods of their own imagination, pretending to worship the God of Israel. They'd lost all sense of what was due to that God who'd removed the testimony from Jerusalem. We know that we know that the worship of those northern tribes was idolatry. Oh yes, they pretended to serve God, but they were idolatrous altars, one in Dan and one in Beth-El. So it wasn't anything like the true worship of God, yet they pretended here to be going the same way. We have to be on our guard against this sort of thing. The people that want to cooperate, many of the councils of churches and various other groups, would love to have true believers on their committees to keep the balance, as they say. Yes, what balance? What sort of balance can you keep if you're having to do with [00:13:03] people who just don't believe in the inspiration of the scriptures? There's no balance to be kept there, is there? We can't cooperate with such things. These people are quite clear-cut. We are going to build it ourselves. We have the commission to build. We are going to build it. That's very plain, isn't it? And so they did. And it says here, they were so clear-cut that the people said, we'll have to try something else. And so what they did was to weaken the hands of the people of Judah and trouble them in the building. And then they hired councillors against them to frustrate their purpose. If the enemy can't get it by pleading and by seeking cooperation, then he'll try active opposition. That's what they did. They weakened their hands. I take it they withheld the supplies. They got in the way of all the convoys that were coming to them with materials. And they made it impossible to work. And they also discouraged them. They

troubled them in building. [00:14:02] And so then they found these councillors to write a letter to the king. By this time, there was another king, of course. And so this king hadn't heard what it was all about. And so that's why they sent this letter. And we get the whole copy of the letter here, be it known unto the king that the Jews which came up to us had come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city. And they set up the walls thereof and joined the foundations. Now as this goes on, you'll find trouble because they won't give tribute or toll or custom, and they'll endamage the revenue of the king. It sounds very specious, very convincing to the king. And so the king sent out this decree that it was to stop. And of course, because of the discouragement on the part of the remnant there, they were, it seems, only too lazy [00:15:02] to put down tools. And so it's very sad here we find here that the work stopped. The work stopped and it says here that they managed to get them to cease to build. Very sad, isn't it? He's done this again and again. We're talking about it today. So many of the places where there was active Christian witness, there's nothing left. Nothing left at all in so many places. The enemy managed by one means or another to discourage the workers, discourage the testimony. And I'm afraid some of us were only too easy to put our feet up on a hassack and sit back and say, well, we've done our best. We can't do any more. And yet, sadly, as in this case, God desired a testimony and there wasn't anyone ready to respond to that. Even the leaders of the people we find here, they had lost interest. It was too much for them. It's certainly very [00:16:01] discouraging to be put in prison for your faith. It's certainly very discouraging to be unpopular, very discouraging when everything you try to do is broken down. And yet, we must expect this in this world. It's Satan's world. And this country was still under the domination of Gentile kings. Mustn't forget that. It was no longer the land of the people of Israel.

They had forfeited, as they recognized later, forfeited their right to possession because of their disobedience to God's law. But God protected them still. We find here at the end of this chapter that the king's answer says, yes, these people, I know all about it. We've had trouble with them before. There have been mighty kings in Jerusalem which have ruled over all countries beyond the river and told tribute and custom was paid unto them. You see here again, it's a question [00:17:01] of money, revenue, and this is something that hits very hard. Hits the enemy hard, but I'm afraid sometimes hits Christians hard. You mustn't do anything that costs them any money, any time, or any trouble. And it's very sad that much of God's work is languishing today because of those very simple things. We can't afford to support that work of God. Yes, it's very good work, but well, we've got other things to do with our money, got other things to do with our time, other things to do with our talents that God entrusted to us to use for him, and much that could be done isn't done. And so we find here that the work ceased. Verse 24, it's a very sad verse in this Bible. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. It ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. There was a whole period [00:18:04] now that the work wasn't being carried on. It's very sad to think of this. Sad to think sometimes we go back to a place and back to the meeting where I went to Sunday school, see a little handful of people there, surrounded by hundreds of flats, children scurrying around the meeting room there all the time. Not one comes inside. And I don't know whether anybody ever goes to them. They're even more important with the gospel of God's grace. There have been those that did, have been those faithful servants. I remember when we were there, we had an elderly caretaker. She never married. She lived out on the very top floor of the building, and she got interested in all the ladies in the neighborhood. And she, it was, started the women's meeting there. And it was carried on for years and years and years. Nobody ever took any notice of [00:19:02] her. She was just the lady that cleaned the meeting room. She was just the one that put all the chairs ready. She was just the one that kept the place spic and span. But apart from that, she began a wonderful work, and many of those women that came to the women's meeting later came into fellowship in that meeting. Nobody thought twice about her. She was just part of the scenery. She

was just there. And yet, while she lived, that work carried on. She lived to be over 80, and she was still carrying on that work in that place. It's sad to see that there's no one living in that spot now, because it's just a building on its own, and a great need all around. There's nobody, unfortunately, on the spot. Everybody comes towards that meeting, and they go away again. They don't know anybody there. Yet, we think, as the people thought in those days of the former glory, we're sorry.

Very sad, indeed, to see a handful of believers coming together there on Sunday evening. [00:20:07] No, nobody from outside. Not a soul. Not all those people living in all those flats. Not one comes in. Maybe some of them hear the singing. I trust that even that may prove to blessing. We don't always know, of course, what goes on. But sometimes it's sad, like here, to see the work ceased. For a whole time, there was no more progress on that building. And then, God raised up these two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. We can read their prophecies in this chapter five. We find there that God raised these two men up, and it's good to read in that book of Haggai, oh, how he slates those people. You in your sealed houses, you with your mod cons, you with all your privileges there. What about my house? What about my house, says God? Go, bring wood, build my house.

[00:21:08] God never said the work had to stop. It was the enemy that did that. It was the people that gave in to the enemy that stopped the work. God never intended it should stop. That's why he sent these two prophets to them. Haggai and Zechariah, you read those two prophets through, you see how God used them. Yes, Zechariah gave wonderful promise of future glory. He gave a glimpse of what was going to be on this very spot where so far there was just a little foundation laid and the work had stopped. And so, we read here that they prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel. I like that. It's not the God of Judah, it's the God of Israel. It's very important this. I remember a brother saying, along with the Lord, [00:22:02] it's wrong to think in any less terms than the whole church of God. It's not this company and that company, it's the whole church of God. It's one body, the body of Christ upon earth.

We mustn't think in any less terms than that. And so here, they prophesied in the name of the God of Israel, just as Elijah, when there was such division, when there was hardly any testimony left in the northern kingdom. He appeared in the northern kingdom and he set up an altar with 12 stones according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And here again we saw, didn't we, that they recognized that although they couldn't see much of the other tribes, there was nothing to be seen of them, yet they again, when they got so far, they carried out the offerings, 12 in number, the offerings for the 12 tribes of Israel. They thought in terms of the whole company.

[00:23:06] And God sent these two men. What was the result? I think it's wonderful. Verse 2 of chapter 5, Then rose up Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Joseph, and began to build the house of God. And with them were the prophets of God helping them. The prophets didn't just talk, they helped them. It's easy enough to talk and tell other people what to do, but they helped them. The prophets of God helped in the work. They set about getting the job done. It's good to see this, isn't it? It's good to see that there were those that were ready and they prophesied and these two were ready to build. Now we get real opposition. Now we get the actual opposition on the part of the enemy because as soon as they see that they really mean business, they come and say, who commanded you to build this house, to make up this wall? Who? What are the names of the men [00:24:05] that make this building? Very important. Very important to know who commanded them to do it.

It wasn't their idea. It wasn't their idea at all. Who commanded you to build this wall, to rebuild this

place of worship? Who commanded you? What are the names of the men that are building? They wanted to know it all in full. It's good to be identified like that, isn't it? Are we identified like that? Do people know the names of those that love the Lord? It's good when you find that sometimes. I remember a brother in Plumstead who did a wonderful work through the years and somebody said one day, that's Mr. Buxton's house. One of the Sunday school children said, oh I thought he lived in heaven, he just came to us on Sundays. [00:25:02] That's the sort of man he was, a heavenly man. But he had his house right opposite the meeting room. Not a better place could he find. And all the children just loved Mr. Buxton. They used to flock to him, flocked to him as he appeared at the Sunday school gate. So they used to flock to him. He was a man that was known there and everybody knew Mr. Buxton. Yes, he was the man that loved the Lord. The man that loved the Lord. And I know another village where somebody came along, he asked the first person he met, where's the man that preaches the gospel? The man that preaches the gospel. He found the house too. He was directly right to the house, the man that preaches the gospel. Are we known like that? Are the names known of those that love the Lord in the place where we live? They wanted to know the names. What are the names of the men that do this? So we can tell the king. Tell the king who's doing this work. Go on, tell him then. So they sent a letter to him. And we see here how they told the whole story, [00:26:03] be it known unto the king, verse 8, that we went into the province of Judea to the house of the great God, notice, which is built with great stones and timbers laid in the walls. This work goes off fast on and prospers in their hands. So we asked them, who command you to build this house and make up these walls? We asked their names also. We might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. And the answer of these men is very humble, but very important.

Verse 11, they returned this answer saying, we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. We've noticed it comes in many times in this book, the God of heaven. He's the God of heaven and earth. And we build the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built it and set up. But after our fathers broke the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who destroyed the house and carried the people [00:27:04] away into Babylon. Here is confession of the cause of their weakness.

It's important, isn't it, when we're ill to get a diagnosis. It's important to find what's the cause of that illness. It's important, of course, to find a cure, but we can't find a cure until we find what's caused the state of things. And they go right back to the original cause and they confess it. That's very important. They confess these people and they took the message to the king. These people have said, we were disobedient. We provoked the God of heaven to wrath. And he gave us into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. There cannot be true blessing individually, as a company. There cannot be true blessing until we [00:28:03] acknowledge where we've gone wrong. Acknowledgement, confession, humble confession.

Some of the finest meetings we've had, the most fruitful meetings we've had, have been when brothers came together in humiliation and prayer. We came as a rule, fasting.

There was very little, there was no singing, as far as I remember. But we came together to pray and to confess our failure. And God raised up two or three times from those meetings a little revival. And I'm sure God would do the same today, if only we were genuinely ready to confess our weakness and to seek the cause of our weakness. That's what these people did. They knew why this had happened. Oh, but it wasn't us, it was our fathers, it was our grandfathers. No, no, no. They take the blame as well. We may often attribute the things today [00:29:08] on things that happened long ago, and that may be true. But we're also guilty. We're carrying on the same way as our forefathers did,

trying to smooth things over, instead of putting them right. And here again, there was humble confession. Our fathers provoked the God of heaven unto wrath.

And so they acknowledged they deserved to be carried away captive. They deserved to go into exile. But in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Babylon, the same king Cyrus made a decree to build the house of God. And the vessels too that Nebuchadnezzar had taken away were to be brought back. So they come now unto the authority, the authority of the decree of Cyrus. Now we know why Cyrus made the decree. God had purposed this. He said it already in Isaiah's time before the [00:30:03] captivity. He told them plainly that Cyrus, his servant, would be raised up. And here he is, being raised up, he's made the decree. Now he said, see if you can find this decree and then it'll be put right. So in chapter 6, Darius made a decree. Search was made in the house of the rolls and he found this record. It was all there. The record was there. And so he said, now we've got it here. Let the house be built in the place where they offered sacrifices. Let the foundations thereof be strongly laid. And so he said the whole description of how it's to go. And so the work is to continue. Also we notice that the king has said they were to have everything they needed for the purpose. And we know this is something with the Medes and Persians. If a decree was made, it couldn't be altered. So this king was bound now to carry out what had been decreed by [00:31:04] his predecessor. He was bound to carry out this. They may offer sacrifice of sweet savour unto the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and of his sons. It's a different story, isn't it?

Just now they were saying that if the temple were built in Jerusalem, the king will be robbed of his dues because toll will be paid to the ruler, whoever he might be in Jerusalem. They said the king will be damaged by allowing these people to build the temple. When he comes to examine the original decree, he discovers that Cyrus was anxious that the temple should be built. Anxious they should pray for his life and the life of his sons. And this was one of his sons now, one of his descendants. He was on the throne and prayer was to be made for him. Makes a difference, doesn't it?

[00:32:01] He had now an interest in seeing that this was carried out because there were people going to pray for him. It's good to know there are people praying for us, isn't it? It's good too to pray for those in authority. We've been commanded to do that plainly in the scripture, to pray for those that rule over us. They may not be pleasant people, may not always agree with their policies. It doesn't matter, we can still pray for them. It does much more than joining committees and councils and that sort of thing to try to interfere with the business that goes on in the countries. Much better to pray and pray that God will give them wisdom. Pray for the life of the king and his sons, it says here. There were people going to pray for him and by withholding the materials for this temple, the king was withholding prayer for himself and his sons. Isn't it often the case with us that we withhold a blessing that might be ours [00:33:04] when we too are disobedient, when we may be convicted and we are convinced that God has a task for us and we don't do it. We are losing the blessing but someone else is losing the blessing too. How important it is, isn't it, step by step as these people did, to come back to the fundamentals. They wanted the things to be carried out, it says here, according to the law of Moses. It comes again here, as it's written in the book of Moses. That's the authority for what they do. It's not just offerings as the other people do. It's not just prayer in a very casual way, but it's according to the law that God entrusted to Moses. It's to be done in God's way. That's so important, isn't it? So they realize this and as they rebuild the temple, there will be an opportunity for them there to have times of prayer for the king. [00:34:02] While in Shushan or wherever he happens to be, they can pray for the king and for his sons. How valuable it is, isn't it? So we find here, the house was finished. It was finished on the third day of the month, Eidah, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. Oh, what a date that was. A date to be remembered. The house was finished. The house was finished.

The date is plainly given, the day of the month, the month and the year. So it is to be recorded. On that day, the house of God was ready, ready to be used for the service of God, ready for the offerings to be brought day by day, the new moons, the Sabbaths and the set feast of the Lord. It was all to be done according to the words of the book of Moses, God's command to Moses and Aaron from the very beginning. It had to be done in God's order. Isn't it wonderful to think of the finished work, [00:35:05] the finished work? Yes, we are grateful, aren't we, for the finished work of our blessed Lord. And yet, the work is going on, isn't it? The results of that finished work of the Lord Jesus are going on today. We're singing about it in our hymn. View the vast building, see it rise, the work, how great, the plan, how wise. Oh, wondrous fabric, power unknown, that rears it on the living stone. All these things are types and shadows. The temple is no more. The temple's gone. When they showed the Lord the wonderful pillars of the temple and the decorations of Herod's temple, he said not one stone should be laid upon another. He has something greater, more wonderful in view. The house of God, and you and I, believers in the Lord Jesus, are members, stones in that building. Isn't it a wonderful privilege to be stones in that building, [00:36:01] living stones put into that building? And it's going on. Day by day are being added stones in that building. I don't think there's a single day that passes without stones added to that building. It's rising and rising. Oh, what a wonderful building. It couldn't be otherwise, we said the plan, how wise. It's not according to our plan. God forbid, anything should ever be to our plan. It's his plan. The great architect is God himself.

The cornerstone, the Lord Jesus Christ. That cornerstone, I take it, was still there because when Solomon filled in that valley, he put that cornerstone there, secure. That cornerstone was firm, and the whole building rested on that cornerstone. It was safe, that chief cornerstone.

And so the building of God today, the house of God, is resting upon that one cornerstone, [00:37:05] Christ himself. It cannot fail. We may fail in our testimony. We do fail miserably in so many ways.

Fail to recognize the wonder of the work the Lord has wrought. Fail to recognize what he's doing even today, and what he wants to do with us. But he doesn't fail, and we see it going up step by step, and finally it says, the house was finished. The house was finished, and the date is recorded there. Oh, what a glorious day, when we hear that shout. The house is finished. The house is finished, but our stone has been added. The Lord takes his own to be with himself. What a glorious day it will be, and we see him face to face, when not a stone will be missing. We know from the old temple of Solomon, there were certain stones still in the quarry. I've got pictures of those stones that were found in the quarry, marked already, but they weren't needed.

[00:38:07] The house was finished. The house was finished, and they were left behind. Some were begun, some were half finished. There were stones ready to put in the building, but no. The cry went up, the building's finished. They were all prepared in the quarry, and set in place. There was no sound of a saw or hammer. They were all put into place, because the plan was God's. God had given the plan to David. This is what they counted upon here again. They had that plan before them. They fitted in the plan, and so again, we may think of those that are in the quarry today. Unbelievers still in the quarry, not yet finding a place in the church of the living God, because they haven't trusted in the Lord Jesus as saviour. What a sad day, when the cry comes out, the church, the building, [00:39:01] the fabric is finished. The house of God is complete. Those souls left behind in the quarry. Those stones were rejected. They're no good anymore. They were left there behind. Sad to be left behind, certainly, when the Lord takes his own to be with himself. What a glorious thing for the living stones to be there. And so we find here, it was completed. But that's not the end of the story. That's the beginning. When the temple is completed, the worship can start. So we find they were immediately

there. It was the third day of the month, Adar. That was the time when they kept the Passover, and that's what happened. They offered up the dedication of the house of God, a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. Yes, they remembered that, just as we on the Lord's Day morning have one loaf. One loaf speaks of the whole body of Christ, [00:40:08] speaks of his body that he gave, but also in figure of the whole body of Christ, one body. We, being many members, are one body. And so here again, they reminded themselves with these twelve he goats, that they were part of that one nation. We know that the time is coming when even those other tribes will be brought back to Jerusalem, when the Lord reigns over them, and they'll each have their portion there. And so we find that the first thing they did really here, they dedicated it, they set the priests in their divisions, the Levites in their course for the service of God, and then they could keep the Passover. On the 14th day of the first month, they didn't have to postpone it. Sometimes they did, when they were unclean, when they were on a journey, then they could postpone it to the second month. But no, they were ready, it says [00:41:05] here, they had cleansed themselves, they had separated themselves from the filthiness of the heathens to seek the Lord God of Israel. They were ready. And so on the very day, the 14th day of the month, the first month, they were able to eat the Passover. They kept it up, and also the feast of unleavened bread, seven days with joy. So the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. Yes, they gave all the thanks to him, the God of Israel. It wasn't to be an empty place, it wasn't to be a place that was just a decoration, a monument. No, it was a place where there was activity, there was going to be the feast of unleavened bread, seven days. It wasn't just something for Sundays, it was something for the whole week. This is again important, isn't it? The [00:42:01] unleavened bread had to be checked day by day. They kept the feast of unleavened bread. There was nothing in the house, they make still quite a business of this, you know, among the Jews, for the Passover feast, there mustn't be any leaven in any of the drawers or the cupboards. No leaven. They go on for seven days. It reminds us again of our responsibilities, doesn't it? Leaven, the evil that corrupts, must be absent. Not only, as we come together, it's important that we come prepared, but every day, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so on, they kept it, it says here, they kept this. They kept the feast, they were ready to keep the feast of God according to his own command. So, at last we come to the end of this particular section, it's the first section, the return under Zerubbabel. You may notice he had a different name there, Sheshbaza, but it's the same man, just a different spelling, because this section is in Aramaic and the other was in Hebrew.

[00:43:08] That's why I get a different name there, the letters are different, but it's the same man, these same two men, it is Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest, who saw to it that the work of God was carried out. I suppose we have again an injunction that whatever our hands find to do, let us do it with our might. If the Lord will, we'd like perhaps further on Thursday to take up the next section, or part of it at least, to see how the work continued after about 60 years.

It's good to know that there was a foundation laid, there was a temple built, and there were sacrifices and offerings brought to the God of heaven and earth, the God of Israel.

[00:44:01] Can we sing 126? One, two, six.

Jesus our Lord, with joy we wait to see thy blessed face, though weak on earth our present strength is in thy grace. 126.