

Ezra 1-3 - The Exiles Return

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Open your Bibles to the Book of Ezra. We begin a new study tonight. I don't know how much you enjoy history, but I love it. Isn't it funny how many things you learn that you love after you're done with school? In school, I thought I hated everything. Actually, I did. Well, art was okay.

When I was a little kid, recess was the bomb, but other than that, pretty much everything else stunk. And I made sure my teachers knew just how bored I was in school, and I thought, oh history, what a drag. Math, all this other science stuff. Boy, I tell you, I got out of school, and history's great! I love hearing about history. I wish I would have known that when I was a kid. Kids are dumb, right? Well, I was anyway.

But anyway, history, This is Ezra and Nehemiah are pure history, and when we left off in our study of 1st and 2nd Kings, we saw the fall of the kingdom of Judah. First, we saw the fall of the kingdom of Israel. Later on, the kingdom of Judah fell when the Babylonian army came and destroyed the city and took all the people captive.

You might be interested to find out that that was the third time that Nebuchadnezzar had actually conquered the Jews of Judah. That was the third time. He came the first time and he basically just said, okay, you're mine. And he allowed a king to reign there in Jerusalem, and then they rebelled against him, and he came again and conquered them. Allowed another king to reign.

Finally, the third time when they rebelled against him, Nebuchadnezzar conquered the city and then sent his General back and he said, just decimate that city. I don't want anything at all living there anymore. These people are a rebellious people and we're going to do away with this city once and for all, and they did. They demolished the entire city of Jerusalem and they demolished the beautiful temple.

The temple which the Jews believed could not be demolished. The reason they hung out so long against the army is that they believed God wouldn't allow the temple to be destroyed. Even though God had spoken to them repeatedly through several prophets, including Jeremiah, and said, this temple will be

destroyed. They didn't believe it, and they hung out to the last second and you know what? Just as Jeremiah prophesied, the temple was, in fact, destroyed.

So, the whole place is basically in ruins and the people were taken off to the Babylonian kingdom. Now, just in case you're taking notes, this is the period of Israel's history that we refer to as, The Exile. It's also called the Babylonian Captivity. But we call it the Exilic Period, meaning the time of the exile when the nation of Israel went into exile in the Babylonian empire, and even while they were there, the Babylonian empire changed hands, but we'll get into that later.

But it was during the Babylonian exile or the Babylonian captivity that the ministries of Ezekiel and Daniel took place there in the Persian kingdom. They both were relocated, and their ministries went on there. When you, if you were to ask me, if you'd never read the Book of Ezra before, and you simply said, pastor Paul, what is the Book of Ezra about? It's about the rebuilding of the temple. That's it. That's it.

It's a very simple book. It's about God giving the Jews another opportunity to rebuild the temple, even though they're still under Babylonian rule, okay? That's what the book is about. It is called Ezra, because we believe that Ezra probably wrote down these events, but what's interesting to note is that Ezra wasn't there when the temple was rebuilt. He didn't get there till many years after. In fact, somewhere close to 60 years after the temple was rebuilt, Ezra arrived on the scene and began his ministry.

He was a priest, or in the line of the priesthood, and he was also a scribe, meaning that he wrote down the Scriptures. Copied the Scriptures. A copyist, if you will. The scribes were considered to be learned individuals. who are also teachers of the Word. When we get to the Book of Nehemiah, which, by the way, in some of the original Hebrew scrolls, it is one with the Book of Ezra. They're just together.

When we get to that book, you might ask, what's the Book of Nehemiah about? Well, it's about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. It's basically, what it's about, and Nehemiah, by the way, was there when the walls of Jerusalem were built and we will get to that. By the way, the temple that is rebuilt. Remember who built the temple the first time? It was Solomon, the son of David, and it was incredible.

I mean, the whole temple was practically pure gold. I mean, it was just amazing. One of the wonders of the world to be sure, and then it was completely

destroyed. This second temple is actually referred to as Zerubbabel's temple because he was the man who oversaw the building project. This temple will also be destroyed, eventually, and another temple will be rebuilt and refashioned which will be referred to as Herod's temple not because Herod was a godly man, but simply because he approved the rebuilding project.

Let me give you, I don't know if you're interested in this but I'm just going to, I'm going to put up a timeline of events and you're going to see how these things overlap with other books of the Bible and events and things like that, like such as even the book of Esther, which goes on in the Persian kingdom. Right around 538 B.C., we have a decree by Cyrus to rebuild the temple.

Chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

- 538 b.c. The decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple.**
- 538/7 b.c. Zerubbabel's expedition to Jerusalem.**
- 536 b.c. Foundation of the temple laid.**
- 535 b.c. Work on the temple halted.**
- 520 b.c. Ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.**
- 520 b.c. Decree of Darius to resume work on the temple.**
- 516 b.c. Temple completed.**
- 486 b.c. Reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) begins.**
- 479/8 b.c. Esther crowned queen.**
- 464 b.c. Reign of Artaxerxes begins.**
- 458 b.c. Ezra's expedition to Jerusalem.**
- 444 b.c. Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem.**
- 444 b.c. Walls of Jerusalem completed.**
- 420 b.c. Nehemiah's second journey to Jerusalem.**

He was the king of the Persian kingdom at that time. We'll read about it in just a moment, but it happened in 538 B.C. That year, or a year, or the next year we have Zerubbabel's expedition heading to Jerusalem. In 536 we have the foundation of the temple being laid. You're noticing, aren't you, that these numbers are going backwards because obviously this is before Christ, and so all the numbers go up to zero and then start over again, and that's, of course why.

But in 535 the work on the temple is halted because of opposition. In 520, mid the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, take place there in Jerusalem to encourage the Jews in the rebuilding project. In 520 that very same year a decree by Darius resumes the work on the temple, and then it was finally

completed in 516 B.C. In 486, you'll notice, the reign of Ahasuerus, or also known as Xerxes, begins, and In 479, roughly to 478, Esther is crowned queen during that time.

In 464, the reign of Artaxerxes begins. In 458 Ezra begins his expedition to Jerusalem, which we'll cover in this book that we're studying, and in 444 BC, then Nehemiah eventually gets to Jerusalem to begin the process of rebuilding the walls of the city. That same year they completed them. They got, they worked hard and they got them done, and in 420 BC Nehemiah made a second journey to Jerusalem.

He had gone back to the Persian kingdom after the walls were completed. So, that gives you a little sense of the timeline. You can see where some of these characters that are elsewhere in the Bible come into play and that sort of thing. Let's begin in Ezra chapter one. Verse 1, it says,

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

Stop there for just a moment. Before we look at Cyrus’ proclamation, first we want to look at the prophecy that is being referenced here by Ezra, which tells of the fact that this is all going to take place, including the length of the exile. Let me show you from Jeremiah, chapter 25, and then also in chapter 29, I've put them both together here. He writes,

Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10 (ESV)

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. “For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.”

“This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste (now remember, Jeremiah wrote these things before the fall of Jerusalem, okay? Before it fell, he says this whole land, meaning Israel or Judah, if you will, the kingdom of Judah. will become a ruin and a waste) and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.”

All right? So, Jeremiah prophesied even before the city walls fell, even before the Babylonian army came into the city and decimated the place. He prophesied that it would fall and that they would return, and he gave the specific amount of time that they would be in captivity. 70 years. Now, fast forward to a man by the name of Daniel. You have the Book of Daniel in your Bible. Daniel has the writings of Jeremiah in the Persian kingdom.

He's reading through them, and he notices something very interesting.

Daniel 9:1-2 (ESV)

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

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So, Daniel is reading through the prophecies of Jeremiah, years down the road, and he realizes this is close. He starts computing when the nation fell and he's thinking about this and Daniel lived to a very old age. He lived pretty much, well, the majority of his life, he was a very young man when he was taken captive to Babylon.

He was an old man when these things all took place, but he's reading through the prophecies of Jeremiah and he realizes, this is close, and I didn't put it in here, but if you go through and read Daniel, it's really interesting to find out how he responded to reading that prophecy. How would you have responded?

If you were living in the Persian kingdom, and you're reading through the prophecies of Daniel or Jeremiah, and you're like, 70 years, 70 years, and you start computing the years, and you're thinking, this is close, this is, we're almost at the end. What would you do? If you read in Daniel, you'll find out he began to pray. He just got down on his knees and he started to pray.

He started praying for the nation. He started praying that all those things would take place and come to pass exactly as the Lord said that they would. So, what

we're reading here in Ezra is the fulfillment. of these prophecies. So, look at verse 2 here in Ezra chapter 1.

“Thus (and this is the proclamation now made by king Cyrus) 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 at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³“Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the God who is in Jerusalem.”

Stop there for a moment. This is amazing, isn't it? This is, because this is a pagan king. This is a pagan king and yet, he says, God has charged me. God has charged me to build a house, a temple for him in Jerusalem, right? Now, this is, what's not only incredible that he did that, but he's writing this proclamation to the Jews to say, whoever wants to go, go.

He's not releasing them from the standpoint that he's no longer going to rule over them. He understands that he's still king of the hill. But he's telling the people, you're free to go home. You're free to go back to your homeland. You're free to go back. Now, we're going to find out that a lot of people do go, but a lot of people are going to actually stay in the Persian kingdom.

It's been 70 years. That's a long time, and for the majority of the people who are there, who are Jews, they've lived there all their lives. They know nothing else. They were born there. Okay? It's been 70 years. So, can you imagine if you came from another country and now you were living here in the United States and you've been living here as long as you've been living and suddenly this king gave a proclamation and said, you guys can go home.

Well most of you, you've lived here all your life. This is where your family, your friends, everything your businesses are here. This is where it's like, yeah, I'm going to stay here. I mean, life was pretty good for the Jews for the most part. They're not autonomous. They don't have the freedom to worship their God in the way that He told them to worship because there isn't even a temple. They can't do, they can't, the sacrificial system stopped. It hasn't gone on for 70 years, and even then it wasn't going on very faithfully, but they haven't done it for a long, long time but, now they're free.

They're free to go home if they want to. You know what's interesting about this? This Cyrus guy... yeah, he's a pagan king, but he's a king that God talked about, by name, before he was born. One of the very few individuals in the Bible who

is spoken of by name before the time of his birth. Let me show you where this is. It's in Isaiah chapter 44. Listen to this.

Isaiah 44:24, 28; 45:1,4 (ESV)

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, "...for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by name. I name you, though you do not know me."

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: (He's talking to Israel) "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" (And then in Isaiah 45) Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, "...for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by name. I name you, though you do not know me."

The fact of the matter is, this is before he was even born. So, God speaks of him by name and says, this is what He will do. He will rebuild the temple. It's just really amazing passage.

Cyrus continues on here now in verse 4 in your text. Read along with me. He says, *"and let each survivor in whatever place he sojourns be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts besides free will offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."*

Not only does Cyrus tell them that they are free to go home and rebuild the temple, he financially provides for them and says he puts a decree out saying the people are to help. They're to give them what they need to do this.

Verse 5 tells us. *"then rose up the heads of the fathers houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem."*

Did you notice that language? Everyone, it says, whose spirit God stirred. Did you notice earlier, just in those verses, it says that God stirred the spirit of Cyrus to make the proclamation to send the Jews back to build a temple. Now he's

stirring the spirits of the individuals, of the Jews who are to go back, God works to stir people's hearts, and this is an interesting insight that we have from the Word of God.

How does God get people's attention? How does God move upon people's hearts to do things? He stirs them up. There's a stirring. Now, the enemy can stir things too. Believe me, he can stir you up. But when the Lord is moving upon the heart of an individual, there is a passion, there's a desire, there's a longing that He places within that person and these people, even though many of them, most of them, had been born in the Persian kingdom, their hearts were stirred to go to Jerusalem.

And it says in verse 6, ⁶ *“And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered.”*

Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. Isn't this crazy? 70 years before. I always hate reading it when I read through, when it says that they came into the temple and Nebuchadnezzar basically took everything of value out of the temple.

I always hated reading that because I thought, oh those precious articles, they were lost. Well, they weren't lost. God was just putting them in safe keeping. He knew that the best way to keep them safe was to have them taken away from His people, stored literally in the temple of the gods of the Persians until the time that He decreed that the temple would be rebuilt, and then He would so move upon the heart of the king, he'd give it all back! This is crazy stuff!

In fact, you know what? This is longer than 70 years, because Nebuchadnezzar actually took the articles out of the temple years before he actually destroyed it. They've been there longer than 70 years. What you and I see sometimes, as a terrible thing, is God moving sovereignly and protecting things for His own safekeeping. You know, like I said, I read that in Second Kings how Nebuchadnezzar comes in and he just basically pillages the temple and we're oh man, that's terrible.

It's not terrible, but it looks terrible because you and I can only see the present. When we're looking at life and what's happening around us, we make a judgment call based on what we see, and what we see is the temple is being pillaged. That's terrible. But little do we know that 70 plus years later, it all

comes back. It all comes, God brings it all back and we're, and suddenly we have this new perspective, don't we?

We take a step back and we go, oh well it wasn't so bad. Have you ever had that happen? Like when you go to the doctor, you go to the dentist and you get done with it, and you go, that wasn't so bad. I took my kids all in for their regular shots and stuff, and of course they're always scared to death and then they come out going, that wasn't so bad. Anticipation and thinking about it, and when it's happening, it's the worst.

And then later on, you're like, wasn't so bad. God has a plan. We say that, but how many of us really believe it? It just rolls off our tongue. God has a plan, as if we're just passing along some trite sort of a saying, God has a plan. Do you really believe God has a plan? Do you believe it's a good plan? And if you do, why don't you see something happening when it's, when it looks very tragic or difficult and go, wow that's rotten, but God has a plan.

God promised that He's going to work these things together for good for those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. I believe that, and I'm going to put my hope in that rather than what I see right here.

Verse 8, *“Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.”*

We don't actually know who the “*Sheshbazzar*” guy is. Some people believe that it's actually the Persian name given to Zerubbabel. The Persians really liked to do that. They gave names to, they changed the names of the Hebrews and so forth.

Verse 9, *“And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, ¹⁰ 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; (Wow!) ¹¹ all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.”*

Isn't it interesting? You would expect Ezra to make a very detailed list, wouldn't you? I mean, the guy, you got to know these scribes. These scribes are amazing. They're very detailed. You know, they would write down the Hebrew Scriptures, and we're told that if they made a mistake, they would burn the scroll where they'd start it and just start over again. Obviously painstakingly detailed. He's listing all the things even to the last vessel that are brought back.

Okay, chapter 2 is largely just a list of people. We're going to move pretty quickly through this and the belongings that made the journey. This is more of Ezra's lists. Apparently, the guy was a little OCD. Anyway, we'll go through here. It says,

² *“Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. ² They came with (and these are the leaders) Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, (and that's not the same Nehemiah that's going to appear in the book named after him) Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:”*

And then it's going to list the family names and the numbers. That's really just an exercise in pronunciation. I'll spare you that so, skip all the way down to verse 59. Boy, are we moving or what? It says,

“The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: ⁶⁰ the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, (there were) 652 (of them).”

⁶¹ *Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name) ⁶² These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ⁶³ The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.”*

Stop there for a moment. Let me just explain what's going on. 70 years. 70 years in a foreign country. 70 years in exile. Guess what happened? Some people lost their family line, their genealogy, and they couldn't prove, some of them couldn't prove they were Jews. Others couldn't prove that they were of a specific tribe. They knew they were Jews, but they claimed to be of the priesthood.

Meaning that they were in the family line of Levi and were therefore Levitical priests, but they couldn't prove it. They had no paperwork. They had nothing to show that they were of that line.

And so it says that the governor basically told them, listen, since you can't prove your lineage I don't want you eating of the food that is set aside only for the priest to eat until we can get a priest here and we can consult, notice it says the Urim and the Thummim.

We don't know very much at all about the Urim and the Thummim except that it was a means of consulting God on a matter and determining His will. That's really all we know. We don't exactly know what it was. There's a lot of guesswork, but we just aren't sure.

Verse 64, *“The whole assembly together was 42,360, (and that was) ⁶⁵ besides their male and female servants (some of the people were financially secure enough to actually own servants) of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. (Oh, look at this, they even list how many horses) ⁶⁶ Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, (it was a big deal back then to own a horse. Mules were mostly for transportation) ⁶⁷ their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720.”*

Can you imagine this progression of people making their way from the Persian kingdom to Jerusalem? Wouldn't that have been crazy? All those thousands and thousands of people. I mean, we're talking about roughly, we're talking about four times the size of Ontario making a progression, mostly on foot, with all their animals and belongings back to Jerusalem.

Wow, crazy. And they're carrying a lot of goods, too. Verse 68 tells us that, *“Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, (they) made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site.”* (Well, where'd they get those freewill offerings? They had to bring them with them from the Babylonian kingdom)

⁶⁹ *“According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments. ⁷⁰ Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.”*

Obviously, you've got to remember guys, Jerusalem is, for the most part, rubble. It's rubble. There's no wall. The wall's broken down. The temple is a heap, been cast down, and most of the houses that were of any value at all were completely burned and destroyed. They only left the most meager of buildings. The place is just, and it's been a ruins for 70 years.

Can you imagine what a place looks like after 70 years? Can you imagine what your lawn would look like after 70 years? Can you imagine what it would look like after 70 days of not being taken care of? Boy, around this part of the country, 70 hours can spell the difference between your neighbors liking you and hating you. 70 years, I mean, this is pretty crazy.

The people, many of them, went to go live in the surrounding towns, and they where they might have, their family might have lived in the first place. They went and just lived there.

Chapter 3 says,

¹ *“When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem (now they're all coming back to the rubble of Jerusalem) ² Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.”*

This is sort of interesting, isn't it? Wouldn't you think the sense the temple was the place where they offered all these sacrifices that they would want to build the temple first? Well, they decided, no, we need to offer sacrifices first, and we'll see why here in a moment. But they start by building the temple, or excuse me, by building the altar.

It's just outdoors right there, which the altar was anyway outdoors, but the point is, everything else around them is rubble. And they decide they're going to build the altar first, and you'll notice in verse three that we are told that,

³ *“They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, (presumably meaning they felt they needed to get the offering, the sacrificial system underway so that the Lord would bless them. There was already opposition from the people of the land. And it says here in verse 3 that) and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening. ⁴ And they kept the Feast of Booths..”*

Your Bible may say the Feast of tabernacles or the Festival Of Tabernacles. Do you guys remember that was the festival or feast that was a commemoration of the fact that the nation of Israel lived in tents during their 40 year sojourn between Egypt and Syria, and coming to the land of promise during the time of Moses. And once each year, God would have the people keep the Festival or the

Feast of Booths or tabernacles to commemorate or to remember that they came into the land, living in tents

⁴“...as it is written and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the rule as each day required. ⁵ and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the Lord. ⁶ From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.

⁷ So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians (and basically that means people from Tyre and Sidon, where the trees of Lebanon grew, and they would contract with these people to sell them wood for the rebuilding of the temple. And that's what it says) to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

⁸ Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to supervise the work of the house of the Lord.

⁹ And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers, and Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Henadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers. (the work on the foundation begins in earnest, but keep in mind, this is just the foundation. It tells us in verse 10)

¹⁰ 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, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David king of Israel. ¹¹ And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, (saying) “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever 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. ¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men (notice that, old men) who had seen the first house, (meaning the temple that Solomon had built) wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³ 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.”

What's going on here? Well, these people would have had to have been old, because remember, they'd been in the kingdom of Persia for 70 years, but some of those who were very old and remembered seeing the temple that Solomon had built, recognized and remembered its grandeur, its beauty, its magnificence and even at the view of the foundation, the temple hasn't been built yet, but even the foundation alone caused them to recollect how much smaller and how much less wonderful this rebuilt temple is.

And even though a good number of the people shouted for joy and were rejoicing, the foundation is being laid! Several of the people who were very old wept aloud and with great sorrow because this temple wouldn't even be a shadow of what the original temple looked like, and they mourned that this time in Israel, the glory of Israel, was not what it used to be.

Now, there's some good things and there's some bad things about Israel's time in Babylon, or the Persian kingdom. The bad news is what we've just looked at, and that is that sin has a way of stealing from us that which would otherwise be our birthright, and these older Jews, and they had to have been probably all of them around 80 or above. I mean, they must have been at least 10 years old when they were taken into captivity, to remember the temple.

These older individuals who are recollecting and expressing sorrow over this smaller, more humble temple are a picture of what happens many times in our own lives when we fritter away the blessings of the Lord. They're gone. God had so much more in mind than what we allowed to really come into our lives and we walked in some of that beauty but sometimes the consequences of our actions are that we just, as I said, we fritter those things away.

I can't think of a better way to say it, and it's sad. It's sad. I mean, I've talked many times with married couples and other individuals who, in their life of sin, before they really gave their heart to the Lord, they now there's things missing in their life. I had a guy write me just a few weeks ago, through Facebook just to tell me, he said, man, he says, I just, I practically destroyed my family just with my sin and rebellion.

And as it is, even this day he doesn't get to live with them because his wife has gone on married somebody else. He doesn't even get to live with his kids. It's all too common today. But those things they're just, sin, the point is sin has consequences and sometimes we look at those consequences and we mourn but

that's okay. It's okay. It's okay to mourn those things that have been lost and to come before the Lord and to say Father, this is me.

You told me the depth of sin. You told me that there were consequences to sin and I ignored it. I ignored You and now I'm dealing with these consequences and they're painful. They're hard to look at, just like it must have been for these individuals who saw this smaller, more humble temple going up and they're realizing, oh what we have lost, what we've lost as a people. But there's something else that good came out of this.

We went through 1 and 2 Kings. Did you get tired? In fact, we went through Judges before that and then we went through 1 and 2 Kings. Did you get tired of all the talk about idolatry because I did.

In fact, you go through Judges, and the nation of Israel, they're doing great with the Lord. And then they fall into idolatry. And then the peoples around them start to oppress them, and then they cry out to God, and then He brings up. He raises up a judge, a deliverer, and that deliverer helps deliver them from their oppressors. And they're all happy, and they love the Lord for a while, and then they fall back into idolatry again. And the cycle happens over, and over and over again. And then eventually they say, we want a king, just like all the other nations.

God gives them a king, and what happens? They're just involved in idolatry. Idolatry, and God brings all of His prophets to them and says, what are you doing worshipping hunks of wood, who can't they can't see and they can't hear and they can't even move and yet you worship them. And all this oh this idolatry it just it goes on and on and when we went through 1 and 2 Kings.

You learned about all the things that Hezekiah had to clean out, and all the things Josiah, when he came to the Lord had to clean out of - there were prostitutes living in the temple of God!

That's how bad Idolatry had become in the land. Guess what? The nation of Israel goes into Babylon, into captivity for 70 years. We don't hear of idolatry ever again. It's gone. That wasn't the problem when Jesus came along. Legalism was rampant, along with some pretty wild stupidity, but idolatry was gone. God cured them.

It's interesting, there's a passage in the New Testament that talks about, he who has suffered in the flesh is done with sin. (1 Peter 4:1) We're looking at two consequences, if you will. One negative and one positive, for the suffering that

many times that we go through that is brought upon our lives many times ourselves. One of them is that we lose things because we fritter them away.

We literally lose things that we can't get back because of our sin, but if we are able to learn from the suffering that we endure, God can do a work of cleansing, and a work of such gracious restoration in our hearts that those things that we literally prostituted ourselves to before, become a thing of the past, and we do not bow down to those things again.

If we learn the lessons that we need to learn, so, there are always two sides of every situation and we see that here with the nation of Israel.