



Ezra 1-3

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Tape #7145
By Chuck Smith

The book of Ezra is the first of what is known as the post captivity book. It deals with an extremely important part of history of the Nation of Israel. Their release from their captivity. The Nation of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was taken captive by the Assyrians. It was the practice of the Assyrians to move the people out of their native surroundings and to repopulate them in other areas to totally break down their morale and their sense of national identity and the feeling of their ethnicity. Then later, Judah, the Southern Kingdom was taken captive and carried off to Babylon. So the land that God had promised his people was lying desolate or had been repopulated by other ethnic groups.

When the Assyrians attempted to repopulate the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they had difficulty. The wild animals began to attack the people and the villages. They complained to the Assyrian king. The people said, "we don't know the customs of these peoples God. So send some of the people to teach us the customs of their gods in order that we might worship him and stave off these attacks of these wild animals". Some of the Israelites were brought back to teach these people who have been repopulated in the Northern Kingdom the worship of Jehovah.

These people married and intermarried became mixed and were known as the Samaritans. They inhabited the area that was generally the area that belonged to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Whereas the area of Judah remained pretty much desolate after the Babylonian captivity. The time has come for the word of God to be fulfilled.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, (1:1).

Which would have been the year 536 or 538 BC, there's differences of opinions from the commentators. The first year of Cyrus's reign after the conquering of Babylon. Cyrus actually began his reign in about 552 BC, so this would be the first year of the reign of Cyrus after the conquering of Babylon.

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, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, (1:1).

Jeremiah had predicted, in Jeremiah twenty-five eleven and in twenty-nine ten, that they were going to be taken captive by Babylon. He predicted that the period of captivity would be seventy years. As you read the book of Daniel, chapter nine, which took place just before this in about 538 BC, Daniel began to fast and pray and seek the Lord having read the prophecy of Jeremiah, or realizing from the prophecies of Jeremiah, that the seventy years of captivity were almost over.

Daniel, who was high in the court of the Persian king, began to fast and pray and seek the Lord, making himself available to God should God have in mind using Daniel in some way for the repatriation of the people. He was just making himself available. It was during this time of his fasting and prayer that the angel Gabriel came to him. Interestingly enough, did not give him any instructions at all as far as the place or the role that he might play in the repatriation but did give him fantastic prophecies concerning the times that God appointed for the Nation of Israel, the city of Jerusalem and the coming of their Messiah, giving to Daniel the very year that the Messiah would be appearing.

It is interesting to me that Daniel was a prophecy buff. He had been reading the prophecies of Jeremiah; he was interested in them. He was sort of governing his life according to the prophecy. I think that that is an important thing that we have enough sense to let our lives be guided by the prophecy.

In this light, now I don't mean to be a financial counselor, but for you who have invested in gold and silver as a hedge against inflation and all, you should read James who said, "go to know ye rich, weep and howl for the wolves that have come upon you". For you have bought up the gold and silver as a hedge in the last days but you know, it's going to be worthless, it's going to be cankered and you're going to lose your investment. On the other hand, if you read the book of Revelation, you'll find that a quart of wheat is going to be selling for fifty bucks. You might take some commodities in wheat and corn. If you want to be the richest man in the tribulation just...

Notice what is happening in the Midwest right now. Corn belt, the wheat, the tremendous drought, the Mississippi and Ohio rivers don't have enough water that they can get the barges down right now. They felt that they were conquering this vast surplus of grains, we've been trying to get rid of the grain and balance things out. This was the year they felt they were going to bring it in balance. Unless something dramatic happens, it's going to be the other way around. We're going to have a shortage. Something to watch because the Bible does speak about the shortage of the grains in the last days.

Daniel, a prophecy buff, had been reading Jeremiah and no doubt had been reading Isaiah also. According to Josephus of Judea, he writes that Daniel brought to Cyrus the prophecies of Isaiah and showed to him where he had been named in the prophecies of Isaiah. Back in Leviticus chapter twenty-four, God gave the law of the sabbaths of the land.

"When you come in the land that the Lord thy God shall give to thee then you are to plant the land for six years. In the seventh year you are not to plow it, you're not to plant it. You're to give the land rest that the land might have its sabbath".

Every seventh year is sabbath for the land. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, there is a prophecy concerning that they would not obey that commandment. "Therefore, the Lord will drive you out of the land in order that he might give the land its sabbath".

The kingdom of Israel, under Saul, to the time of Zedekiah and the taking of Judah into captivity was four hundred and ninety years. According to the prophecy of Leviticus, God will leave them into captivity until the land has had her sabbaths and thus the four hundred and ninety years of the kingdom would come out to seventy years of sabbaths that the land had coming. It is interesting that that's just how long they were in captivity.

Realizing the seventy years were over, Cyrus the king of Persia, in order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and he made this proclamation" (1:1).

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem (1:2-3).

Hear the grammatical text they tried to indicate in the parenthesis. He is the LORD God of Israel which is in Jerusalem. He is the God, is the idea. It isn't that he is a localized God, it isn't the sense of his being a local deity which was a popular concept in those days.

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he 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 (1:4).

The proclamation by Cyrus to release the people from Israel from their captivity. Turn to Isaiah chapter forty-four beginning with verse twenty-four,

“Thus said the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that makes all things; that stretched forth the heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by myself; That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid, (Isaiah 44:24, 28).

You say, “Well, so what?” This happens to be a hundred and eighty years before the decree went forth. It happened to be a hundred and fifty years or so before Cyrus was born that the prophet Isaiah, through the word of the Lord, calls the guy by name. Now explain that one.

One of the greatest apologetics that the Bible is indeed the word of God is the internal evidences of inspiration and this is one of them where the Lord, through the prophet, spoke of the events of the future with interesting details. In this case, even naming individuals, naming Cyrus and then bragging about the fact that, “I have named you and you don’t even know me”. “For Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me” (Isaiah 44:4). God is talking about the guy before he is even born saying, look I’ve named you, I’m the one that gave you your name.

God knows a lot more about you than you imagine that he does. You are of interest to God. Jesus spoke about how that “there is not a sparrow that falls to the ground but what your Father is not aware of it”. If your Father is aware of sparrows, how much more is he aware of you his child?

Here in chapter forty-five, “Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,” (Isaiah 45:1). First he calls him his shepherd, now he calls him his anointed. “whose right hand I have held, to subdue the nations before him;” (Isaiah 45:1). I have been his strength, I am the one that helped him to subdue the nation. “I will loose the loins of kings,” (Isaiah 45:1).

As you read the book of Daniel, at the time of the fall of Babylon, the night that Babylon fell and Belshazzar was having that great party and drunken brawl in the palace. He ordered the vessels that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple of Jerusalem to be brought into this banqueting house that they might drink their wine out of these sanctified vessels of the temple. As they were drinking the wine and praising the gods of gold and silver, suddenly there came over, on the wall, a hand that was writing on the plaster words that he did not understand but he was terrified. The Bible says that, “the joints of his loins were loosed and his knee smote one against another”. His knees began to shake because he was so terrified. Notice the joints of his loins were loosed. God said concerning Cyrus, “I will loose the loins of kings,” fulfilled a hundred and seventy years later. The Lord also said, “I will open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; (Isaiah 45:1).

Within the city of Babylon, the river Euphrates divided the city of Babylon. The Persian troops diverted the flow of the Euphrates so that those who were beseeching the city when the water of the river receded, they were able to come in on the river bank inside the city’s huge walls of three hundred feet high and eighty seven feet across the top. They were able to come in under these walls on the banks of the river Euphrates. However, within the city of Babylon, there were also walls lining the river Euphrates who had these large gates that would be shut at night and locked. According to the historian Herodotus, this particular night when Cyrus made his invasion, those gates were left open. As the Lord said a hundred and seventy years earlier, “I will open to you the two leaved gates”. Those were the gates in the center of the city that led directly into the palace. “The gates shall not be shut.” (Isaiah 45:1). Isaiah could not know that except by divine inspiration.

God goes on to say, “I will go on before you, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places,” (Isaiah 45:2-3).

When Persia conquered Babylon they conquered the treasure store, the wealth of the world. “With the purpose that you may know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God Israel (Isaiah 45:3). I’ll do these things that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel.

Coming back now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, Babylon has been conquered in order that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled, these prophecies, He has made this decree to allow the people of Israel to return that they might build the house. He realizes that he’s been commissioned by God. He has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. God’s given me this commandment, this charge.

There is a lot of talk today about the ten lost tribes of Israel. You’ve heard that term I’m sure. The Northern Kingdom comprised of the ten northern tribes taken captive by the Assyrians. There are those that would try to trace their wanderings or their being repopulated on into Europe, on into England. They seek to identify the Anglo-Saxons as actually the ten, what they call, lost tribes of Israel. They use such logic as the Danes who are known as Dan-ish or the Danish people. Dan-ish, the word –ish in Hebrew is man, so Dan-ish, they are Dan’s men or they are from the tribe of Dan. Thus they try to identify some of the various Anglo-Saxon peoples as to their tribes. Of course you have Swed-ish and I don’t know of what tribe Swed would have been from. Engl-ish but they say, “you see it has the –ish on the end” well so does fool and that’s what it is, fool-ish.

This decree made by Cyrus extended to all of Israel, not just the Southern Kingdom of Judah. If you will turn to chapter two, verse seventy, it says, “So the priests. And the Levites and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities” (2:70). This repatriation was not just of Judah.

When Persia conquered the Babylonian Empire, the Babylonian Empire had already conquered the Assyrian Empire. So Persia, as Cyrus said, “I rule all the kingdoms of the world,” so his decree was not limited to Judah, the decree extended to all of Israel so that those who returned from the captivity were people from all of the tribes of Israel. I started to say the twelve tribes but you know better than that, you know that there are thirteen. Levi was usually not counted as a tribe and the tribe of Joseph was divided into two, Ephraim and Manasseh.

So there were twelve sons of Jacob but the one son Joseph became two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, the double portion to Joseph. Thus made thirteen tribes. Whenever they are listed, they are never listed as thirteen tribes, they’re always listed as the twelve tribes and you always find that there’s one missing whenever you read the list. Or the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are combined together in tribe of Joseph. In the listing, there is always a listing of twelve. Twelve is the number of human government, governmental perfection and so the twelve apostles and the twelve apostles, the twelve tribes. It is particularly a significant number of human government.

The tribes are all included at this point of history, so there are not ten lost tribes that migrated to England. They have fanciful stories of Jeremiah taking one of the descendents of David and taking him to Egypt then on to England where he became the monarch in England. England is the only nation that still has a monarchy that goes way back and God” promise to David, “there should never cease one of the seed to be sitting upon the throne” and thus the king of England is part of the seed of David, etceteras, etceteras, oh nausea.

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 they that were about them strengthened their hands (1:5-6).

Those that were about them, the people, their friends, their relatives, strengthened their hands.

And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which

Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods: [Merodach] Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasure, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred, All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem (1:6-11).

This group now begins to gather together the treasures, the wealth, to go back and to begin to rebuild the temple that is in Jerusalem.

Now these are 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 had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; (2:1).

First of all, in verse two, we have a listing of the leaders. Notice the first two leaders Zerubbabel, one of the headmen, and Jeshua, was the high priest or the chief priest. You will read again of Zerubbabel in Nehemiah and then, if you would for your own benefit or for extra credit, read Zechariah this week. You'll find that Jeshua and Zerubbabel have a very important place in the prophecy of Zechariah and the prophet Zechariah was writing at the time. Also read Haggai, that's easy, only a couple of chapters in Haggai. Read Haggai and read Zechariah and reading what is going on here will give you a better understanding of these prophets if you would read them in conjunction with Ezra and Nehemiah.

In verses three to verse nineteen, you have the naming of the various family heads; these are the various families that came back and the numbers from that particular family. Beginning with verse twenty to verse thirty-five, you have the listings of the cities, the people from these various cities that returned. The numbers of people and the cities where they lived, the families came from these various cities. Verse thirty-six to thirty-nine, you have a listing of the priests. Then beginning with verse forty you have the listing of the Levites and that goes to verse fifty-four. Beginning with verse fifty-five, you have the servants of Solomon, the children of Solomon's servants and the names of the servants of Solomon and their children. Then again in verse sixty-one, you have the children of the priests and the various families of the priests that came back.

Now in verse sixty-two, you have something interesting, this last grouping in verse sixty-one sought through the genealogies to find their pedigree of sorts. They could not and they did not have sufficient proof. The family Bible had been lost and they didn't have the names of their parents, they didn't have a good genealogy. Their search was made and their names were not found, they could not prove that they were of the priesthood. Therefore, they were considered as unclean, not able to serve in the priesthood.

The Tirshatha [Zerubbabel] said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim (2:63).

Back when God first established the priesthood under the law of Moses, a part of the priest's vestment was the Urim and the Thummim of which we know very little. The words in Hebrew mean light and perfection. All we know is that somehow they used the Urim and the Thummim to determine the will of God. The Urim and the Thummim were worn by the priest as a part of his vestments and through these, they will inquire the will of the Lord. There have been various suggestions offered as to what the Urim and the Thummim were but we really don't know. All they are is suggestions and conjecture. The Bible doesn't really tell us.

Leave it to Joe Smith to tell you what the Bible doesn't tell you. For he tells us that the Urim and the Thummim were a pair of glasses that he discovered with the golden tablets. They were magic glasses because when he put these glasses on that he found with the golden tablets, the glasses, which were the Urim and the Thummim, he could then read the hieroglyphics of these golden tablets. That's Joe's interpretation. I don't put much stock in it.

They were divining instruments by which they would determine the will of the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament period up until this period, through the years, they would go to the priests to inquire of the Lord, up until the about the period of the prophets and then they would go to the prophets to inquire the will of the Lord. Through and until the period of the prophets, David went off into the priests to inquire from the Urim and the Thummim concerning what they should do, whether or not they should go into battle, when they should go into battle, what would be results be and so forth and God spoke to them, it was a divining instrument of some kind.

Zerubbabel, when these fellows say they are of the priesthood, because they could not produce genealogies that proved it they were not allowed to enter into the priesthood until he said we've established the whole thing, we have a high priest with the Urim and the Thummim in which we might inquire from the Lord if these men are true or not. There is no record or indication that the priesthood ever again did use the Urim and the Thummim for the discerning of the will of the God. It seems to be, from the silence, that it never did develop again as a method or means of discerning God's will.

I think it's quite interesting that in the New Testament, when the disciples sought to discern God's will concerning the choice of one to take the place of Judas Iscariot to bring their number back up to twelve, they chose Matthias and Barsabas and then in order to discern God's will between these two fellows, they cast lots or sort of drew straws. That's an interesting way of finding God's will is drawing straws. I think though that they made a real mistake.

I think that often we do make a mistake when we limit God to just two choices, "God which of the two shall it be?" It turned out it wasn't either of the two. We often make a mistake when we say, "Well God should I do this or that"? Come on, let's be fair, let's leave it totally open, "God what do you want me to do"? It is often, we limited it to two but God has alternatives that we haven't even thought about. It's important that we leave it totally open to the Lord, "Lord, just guide me". Of course the Lord later chose Paul as an apostle by the will of God.

These fellows were not allowed actively in the priesthood because of their inability to produce their genealogies.

The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore [forty-two thousand six hundred and sixty] Beside their servants (2:64-65).

According to a part of the book of Ezra, they did not number the children under the age of twelve. There was possibly as many as sixty thousand or so that returned.

Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women [the choirs] (2:65).

He even gives you the number of their horses, if you're interested.

Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, tow hundred forty and five; (2:66).

If you divide that into the number of people, that means they really didn't have that many horses, that many mules.

Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty (2:67).

That means about every hundredth man had a camel. Donkeys were the main beast of burden.

Some of the chief fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: (2:68).

Here is this small group of people, relatively speaking, from those that went into captivity. The Jews basically, prior to captivity, were Agrarian, they were farmers. Each man had his plot of land and grew his own food. When they were taken as captives to Babylon, Babylon was the commercial center, so the Jews became business men and they were such excellent business men that many of them did not want to go back to the farm. Thus they had become so prosperous and so successful in their business ventures that they really weren't concerned to going back to the hardship of trying to rebuild the land. Many of them just remained in Babylon, in Persia, rather than to go back to the hardships of rebuilding.

Those that came back, as they made their final way up to Jerusalem, as they came over the top of the Mount of Olives and they looked down upon that rubble of that once glorious city, can you imagine the mixed emotions that they must have felt? Excitement, we're back, but yet, O what desolation, what rubble. There was that mixed emotion in the people in this returning.

They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand [sixty-one thousand] drams of gold and five thousand pound of silver, (2:69).

It isn't equal to our pound.

and one hundred priests' garments. So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all in Israel in their cities (2:69-70).

They didn't all come back to Jerusalem, a segment did. Notice in verses three to nineteen, there are many cities and the people went back to their own cities.

And when the seventh month was come, (3:1).

This is the month of religious celebration. This is the month in which they had Yom Kippur, the month in which they celebrated the Feasts of the Tabernacles.

and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together [according to the law] as one man to Jerusalem (3:1).

Keeping the law, gathering to worship.

Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, (3:2).

These two guys mark their names in your book or card file because you will come across them again.

and his brethren, and builded 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; (3:2-3).

The original foundation stones were still there so on these foundation stones, they built a new altar in order that they might offer sacrifices thereon.

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 (3:3).

They began the morning and the evening sacrifices. The people that had moved into the land during the seventy-year period were hostile to them when they returned and they were actually outnumbered by these people. These people began to seek to hinder their work, as we will find out as we move along in Ezra.

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 offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feast of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD (3:4-5).

The various offerings, the daily sacrifices, the special sacrifices on the new moon, as was required in the law of Moses, plus daily, the freewill offerings as people brought in their sacrifices on a freewill offering basis to the Lord.

From 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 (3:6).

They just set up the altar so they could offer the sacrifices there in the court of the temple and they had not yet begun the rebuilding of the temple.

They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, (3:7).

Zidon and Tyre are coastal areas. There isn't much area for growing food, they were more merchants, they were the Phoenicians and they were navy men and they were commercial men, but you have to have food. Most of their food came from the land of Israel, so it was a barter kind of a thing, we'll give you oil and grain and food and in turn we want cedars to be sent down from Lebanon.

to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, (3:7).

They would make these cedar rafts and float them down the Mediterranean to Joppa and from Joppa they would carry them over land thirty-five miles to Jerusalem. No small task.

according to the grant that they had of Cyrus the king of Persia (3:7).

This decree that he had in ordering the people to help them.

Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD (3:8).

The second year and second month.

Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, (3:9-10).

This big ground breaking ceremony. We are going to start the building now.

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 course [antiphonal] in praising and in giving of thanks unto the LORD; (3:10-11).

So many of the psalms are called antiphonal psalms in that the ladies would sing one part like, "O give thanks unto the Lord," the men would respond "for he is good for his mercy endureth forever". So many of them have that response, the ladies singing out, "The fear of the Lord is clean," the men responding, "enduring forever" or "The judgements of the Lord are true," and the men would respond, "and righteous all together". It was a back and forth kind of a thing, no doubt very beautiful, as they would worship the Lord.

because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, (3:11).

It was an exciting time. Finally we are beginning the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord.

when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (3:11).

Exciting times. A time of praising God and shouting.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, (3:12).

They could still remember the temple of Solomon when they were children and taken from Jerusalem. They remember the glory and all of the temple of Solomon.

when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: (3:12).

There was this mixed emotion. The old men were weeping; it's such a pitiful thing in comparison to the glory and the splendor of Solomon's temple. The young guys say this is great, all right we are doing it; a shout of joy with the old men weeping.

So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: (3:13).

They would wail when they would weep. They would really wail, in fact you have heard of the wailing wall in Jerusalem. You go today and you watch the Bar Mitzvahs and you hear the interesting type of wailing that sometimes goes on, which is not a weeping. But in those days, they had professional wailers, people who had extremely good lungs. They would be hired for funerals. It was a cultural thing to indicate how sorrowful you were at the death of a loved one. You really love them and you are very sorry that they are dead, you want to show how sorry you are by hiring these professional wailers. They come in and really wail so the whole city would know that something horrible had happened, as they would hear all these wailers. If you could really wail, you could get a pretty good price for your services.

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 (3:13).

They were all shouting. It's interesting, the acoustics in that land, you can hear for miles and from afar off. It did create some problems. The people heard all of the noise and they came to see what it was all about. In the next chapter we will find some of the problems that arose because of this.

Next week we will continue the book of Ezra as we look at chapters four and five.

May the Lord give you a great week watching over you, filling you with His love, guiding you according to His plan. May you experience the work of the spirit within your heart, deepening your commitment unto Jesus Christ, causing you to have a true perspective of life, helping you to discern between that which is temporal and that which is eternal in order that you might give yourself over to the things that really count. Thus may God's hand be upon you to guide and to keep and to make it a blessed week for you as you commit yourself to follow Jesus Christ.