

CELEBRATING WHAT IS MEANINGFUL Sunday, June 30, 2013

Unifying Topic: JOYFUL WORSHIP RESTORED

Lesson Text

I. Building The Altar (Ezra 3:1-3)

II. Return Of The Feast (Ezra 3:4)

III. Preparing To Build The Temple (Ezra 3:5-7)

The Main Thought: 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; (Ezra 3:4, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People gratefully celebrate the happy turns of events in their lives. What are the marks of celebration for joyous change of circumstances? The writer of Ezra tells of the time when God's scattered and exiled people celebrated their return with sacred festivals and worship.

Lesson Aim: To review Ezra's writing of the exiled Israelites' festive celebration of their return to Jerusalem.

Life aim: To remember ancient celebratory events of the faith community and to integrate similar gatherings into present-day corporate worship celebrations.

3:1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

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

3:3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

3:4 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;

3:5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord.

3:6 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.

3:7 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, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

HISTORY:

The Book of Ezra was written by Ezra. ¹Ezra was a scribe who revived the Law of Moses as the basis for Jewish religious and social life during the period of restoration following the Babylonian exile. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra-Nehemiah is one book. The setting of the book of Ezra is the postexilic era (after Babylonian captivity) when the faithful Israelites were returning from Babylon to Judah, so they could rebuild God's temple and re-establish their temple worship. There were three successive returns from Babylon to the land of Israel (538, 458, and 444 B.C.), just as there had been three deportations to Babylon (605, 597, and 586 B.C.). The first return was led by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. The second return was under Ezra in 458 B.C. The people needed reforming; they needed to return to their covenant worship. The third return was led by Nehemiah in 444 B.C. God used pagan kings and godly leaders to restore His people by reinstating temple worship and reviving the Law of Moses. Ezra begins by seeing Cyrus's decree releasing the exiles as the fulfillment of God's promise in Jeremiah 29:10 (**Ezra 1**). **Ezra 2** we see the exiles return to Jerusalem and Judah led by Zerubbabel. A total of 42,360 people returned. The heads of families gave offerings for the temple.

LESSON:

Ezra 3:1-3 Building The Altar

3:1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Now it is the "seventh month" of their arrival— September-October. Although the year is not mentioned, it is implied that this was the seventh month of their first year in Jerusalem. This is substantiated by the opening statement of verse 8 (the second year). Scripture says the people were in the cities and they gathered themselves "as one man" to Jerusalem. The idea was that they gathered in unity for the same purpose; having a spirit of unity among them or a fresh resolve suggests it was all for the purpose of God. It was important for them to get back to their sacrificial worship and regular calendar feasts unto God as one. Unity is one of the basic foundations for accomplishing a work for God. But they had a lingering sense of fear and intimidation troubling them because of the

¹ <http://www.getanewlife.org/clientimages/39165/14ezra.pdf>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

peoples of the lands (v.3). Lack of unity is one of the hindrances to revival in the twentieth-century church.

However, when the children of Israel returned to their homeland in the seventh month, it was supposed to be one of the most sacred and worshipful times. This was a time of the blowing of the trumpets (The Feast of the Trumpets; Day of Atonement, and The Feast of Tabernacles), yet their entire temple lay demolished (v.6).

Trumpets	Atonement	Tabernacles
1st day 7th Month (Tishri) (Lev. 23:23-25)	10th Day 7th Month (Tishri) (Lev. 23:26-32)	An Eight Day Festival 15th to 22nd Day 7th Month (Tishri) (Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43)

²*The Feast of Trumpets marked the beginning of ten days of consecration and repentance before God. Its name comes from the command to blow trumpets. No kind of work was to be performed, but burnt offerings and a sin offering were to be brought before the Lord. It commemorated the end of the agricultural and festival year. The blowing of the trumpets on the first day of the month heralded a solemn time of preparation for the*

Day of Atonement; this preparation time was called "Ten Days of Repentance" or the "Days of Awe." *The prophets linked the blowing of trumpets to the future Day of Judgment: "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill..."*

³*The Day of Atonement, also known as Yom Kippur, was the most solemn holy day of all the Israelite feasts and festivals, occurring once a year on the tenth day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. The solemnity of the day was underscored by God telling Moses to warn Aaron not to come into the Most Holy Place whenever he felt like it, only on this special day once a year, lest he die (Lev.16: 2). This was not a ceremony to be taken lightly, and the people were to understand that atonement for sin was to be done God's way. There is much more associated to this day.*

⁴*The Feast of Tabernacles or The Festival of Booths began on the fifteenth day; begins and ends with a special Sabbath day of rest. During the days of the feast all native Israelites were "to dwell in booths" to remind them that God delivered them out of the "land of Egypt" and to look forward to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would deliver His people from the bondage of sin.*

3:2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, 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. ⁵The men who headed up the constructing of the altar were Jeshua, the priest (a descendant of Aaron), and Zerubbabel, the main leader (a descendant of David), along with fellow priests (other descendants of Aaron) and associates (other descendants of David). These recognized spiritual and civil leaders stood up or came forth and built the altar of the God of Israel.

⁶An "altar" is a table (usually stone or metal) where the priests burned animals and gave other gifts as a sacrifice to God. This was the altar of burnt offerings. This was the first agenda that was meaningful before they could worship God. Apparently the work on the altar had been done prior to the seventh month, for the sacrifices actually began on the first day of the seventh month (v.6). ⁷Jeshua was acting high priest. His grandfather, Seraiah, was high priest at the time of the destruction of the temple before the Babylonian captivity. Zerubbabel had led this group of captives back from Babylon. God had instructed them in the Law of Moses on how to go about offering. God had shown David that this was the only acceptable place for burnt offerings to be made.

3:3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening. The idea is that they built the altar on its former base, utilizing the foundation of the original altar. The people were fearful of the surrounding heathen nations because of their worshiping of their false gods and they saw the Jews as a threat and quickly wanted to undermine their allegiance to God. However, the Israelites offered sacrifices to God even though they feared attack from the surrounding people of the land. Resetting the altar on its bases was all that was needed to reestablish temple worship, so that it occupied its sacred site. Burnt offerings were the most common offerings for sin and it was done morning and evening. These were the first sacrifices made there in 50 years.

Ezra 3:4 Return Of The Feast

3:4 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;— This was a time of year that was required by the Levitical law for all males

² <http://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Trumpets.html>

³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Day-Atonement-Yom-Kippur.html>

⁴ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Tabernacles.html>

⁵ <http://ldolphin.org/daniel/ezra02.html>

⁶ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>

⁷ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/03.html>

to worship.⁸The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days. During this time, the people lived in temporary dwellings (tents, booths, and lean-tos-a slope-roofed shelter) just as their ancestors had done many years before as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. The feast would remind the people of God's past protection and guidance in the wilderness and of His continued love for them. The sacrifices showed that the people wanted to be responsive to the Law of God. "*By number*" meant for on all the eight days of the feast there was a certain number of sacrifices fixed for every day; and exactly according to the law concerning them. According to *Kiel*: on the first day thirteen oxen, on the second, twelve, etc. They were careful to do all that the Law ordered.

Ezra 3:5-7 Preparing To Build The Temple

3:5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord. After the Feast of Tabernacles the priests observed continual burnt offering, the new moons and all the set feasts of the Lord.⁹The "*continual burnt offering*" is speaking of the regular morning and evening sacrifices. They would, from this time on, keep all of the appointed festivals that were consecrated (holy and sacred). A "*freewill offering*" might be made at any time. It was not of obligation, but of their free will.

3:6 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. The sacrificial worship had been established on the first day of the seventh month, now it was time for the people to begin the task of rebuilding the Temple. The people had great zeal and enthusiasm for the worship of God, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not yet been laid. They began to be anxious to complete this task.

3:7 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, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. Just as the people assembled as one man to go to Jerusalem for their sacrificial worship and feasts, they are assembling together for the building project of the Temple. The work could not proceed immediately, preparation had to be made. Money was given to the masons and "*the stone workers*" and carpenters. The preparation for the wood (cedar trees of Lebanon) had to come from Sidon and Tyre, where they were paid with meat, drink, and oil instead of money.¹⁰Many years earlier, King Solomon built the first Temple for God. He too had paid the people from Tyre to send him good wood. The people from Tyre also sent that wood by sea to the port called Joppa. Joppa is a convenient port for Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 2:1-16). And so, this is how the cedar trees of Lebanon had to come; by sea to the port of Joppa. King Cyrus had allowed them to do this. The king of Persia had helped to finance the rebuilding of the temple out of his own funds, for the Jews had not been back long enough to produce their own wood.

SUMMARY:

The people of Israel are coming back home and they have gathered as one man to go to Jerusalem. There were certain ones who re-built the altar on its bases where they could offer their burnt offerings unto the Lord.

Following this, the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles and began their regular observance of the various sacrifices.

After the building of the altar, offering burnt offerings, and celebrating all the feasts, preparation of gathering supplies for the rebuilding of the Temple began.

APPLICATION:

What would you share with others from the Book of Ezra? Would it be worship, coming together as one man, giving of your time, celebrating what God has done in your life, or building God's temple. All sound good to me. For the Israelites, putting Him first was the most meaningful part of their coming back home. Their worship was restored in the right way. There is no place like home. The return of the Israelites to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple are repeated in the lives of every Christian who has come out of the captivity of sin and returns to God to rebuild their lives.

⁸ <http://children.ccm.com/OTTeacherGuidePDF/CUROT120.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/03.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>