

# CELEBRATING WITH JOY Sunday, July 14, 2013

## Unifying Topic: DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

### Lesson Text

#### I. The Dedication Of The Temple (Ezra 6:13-18)

#### II. The Passover Celebration (Ezra 6:19-22)

**The Main Thought:** 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. (Ezra 6:16, KJV).

**Unifying Principle:** People often assign great importance to specific locations. What makes a particular place so special? The temple was special to the Israelites because God commanded them to rebuild it and because it gave them a place to commemorate with worship their original freedom from Egyptian bondage and more recently from their Babylonian exile.

**Lesson Aim:** To introduce students to the important connections between the completion of the temple, the dedication ceremony, and the Passover.

**Life Aim:** To demonstrate the importance of worship in forming the identity of the Church in knowing her history and living into her future.

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6:13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

6:14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

6:15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

6:16 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.

6:17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

6:18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

6:19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

6:20 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, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

6:21 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,

6:22 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.

### HISTORY:

#### Chapter 6:1-12

6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. Cyrus king of Persia died and now king Darius is in office. Darius made a decree commanding that the records be searched to determine if Cyrus had made a decree permitting the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. Apparently the valuable treasures were stored in the same place as the historical documents (in the house of the rolls or public library or museum) where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

6:2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:— However, the province of Medes was not in the main city of Babylon but was found at Achmetha (the capital of the ancient Median empire), called Ecbatana (Persian capital, 300mi. NE of Babylon) in the foothills where Cyrus and other Persian kings had their summer homes. Probably all of Cyrus's documents (including the decree of Cyrus) were in Achmetha, and the words on the scroll or roll was found to be written— hence a record.

6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;—This allows us to know that in Cyrus' first year of reign a decree had been sent out concerning the house; the Temple of God at Jerusalem where the Jews offered sacrifices. Thus it spelled out exactly what was to be done: "Let the house be built... let the foundations be strongly laid; the height...threescore cubits (90ft.), and the breadth... threescore cubits (90ft)." Solomon's

Temple was only thirty cubits high and twenty cubits broad. These instructions to rebuild authorized a much larger facility. Cyrus wanted to rebuild a bigger and more impressive facility than the one which was destroyed.

**6:4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:—** The walls were to be built with three rows of big stones and a row of new timber (wood). Money from Cyrus' storehouse will pay for it. Cyrus not only permitted the rebuilding, but he was willing to underwrite the expenses of the project.

**6:5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.** The vessels were crucial to the re-establishing of the sacrifices and proper worship of Jehovah. The vessels which were stolen by Nebuchadnezzar and brought to Babylon were to be restored and brought back to the house of God (Temple) at Jerusalem. Everything was to be placed back into its proper place, placing them in the house of God as they were before.

**6:6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:—** Darius responds to the now found written decree of Cyrus. He instructs Tatnai (governor), Shetharbazai, and companions Apharsachites that are beyond the river (west of the Euphrates) to not hinder or interfere with the rebuilding of the Temple. The message in short was: *"leave them alone"*.

**6:7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.** God so favored the Jews through Darius. Darius forbade the officials from interfering with the building project. The governor and elders of the Jews were to be left alone to build the house of God in its former site.

**6:8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.** Now Darius goes on to make a decree to those described in verse 6. After finding out they were not to hinder the work, they now find out what they were to do to help with the work. They were to give money from the tribute (taxes) to the Jews in order to finance their expenses.

**6:9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:—** Also in their giving, they were to include for the priests: the animals for the sacrifice, that is, the young bullocks, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings unto God; wheat, salt, wine, and oil each day without fail.

**6:10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.** The priests were not to want for anything in their offering of sacrifices for it was to be a sweet savour unto the God of heaven. Darius also had ulterior motives in helping the Jews re-establish their worship. Darius wanted them to pray for he and his sons to the God of heaven. Cyrus had recognized the authority of the Jewish God, now Darius also recognizes this authority and seeks His blessings.

**6:11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.** Darius further decrees that anyone who disobeys and alters this word would be hanged. The idea was that a beam would be pulled out of the perpetrator's house and this person would be nailed to this piece of wood. This kind of crucifixion was customary among the Assyrians. His house would be destroyed, made a dunghill for going against these rules.

**6:12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.** Wow! Darius calls upon a greater power, God's wrath upon all kings and people to be destroyed, if they put their hands against the Temple of Jerusalem. He decreed that God should destroy them for this is where God has caused His name to dwell. Darius made the decree which cannot be changed and it was to be done will all diligence.

## **LESSON:**

### **Ezra 6:13-18 The Dedication Of The Temple**

**6:13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.** Tatnai and his fellow officials respond quickly to king Darius' decree. Other

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versions of scripture say "*beyond the river*" which seems to mean "*on this side the river*" which is still west of the Euphrates.

**6:14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.** The elders of the Jews builded and prospered. Note the close relationship between physical prosperity and spiritual prosperity. They were able to build, finish their building program, and also receive spiritual nourishment through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. This was made possible according to God's commandment. God's commandment precedes and supersedes the commandments of both Cyrus and Darius. The rebuilding of the temple was decreed first by God and then carried out by the kings. <sup>1</sup>Haggai and Zechariah preached and kept them with the desire to do this according to the will of God. Cyrus had written instructions that the Lord had given him, and Darius and Artaxerxes gave orders of how it was to be finished, too.

**6:15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.** Here, Ezra gives the exact day of the completion of the house of God. <sup>2</sup>From the time the foundation was laid, until its completion, the temple was 21 years in the building. After God sent Haggai and Zechariah to them, it took 4 years and 5 months. The month of Adar, on the third day (February/March) was the last month of the year and the dedication of the Temple brought about its finished work, just before the celebrations of the New Year that would follow. The sixth year of the reign of Darius was 515 B.C., almost 70 years after the destruction of the first temple (586), thus fulfilling the prophecy of 70 years of exile. God had spoken by His prophet Jeremiah. The punishment given to the Jews by God would only last for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10).

**6:16 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.** They had their celebration. The children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the children from captivity kept the dedication of the house of God with joy just as Solomon and the people did in their first dedication of the Temple of God. This was a very much needed and fulfilling festive occasion for all.

**6:17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.** The dedication of the house of God was followed with lavish sacrifices which did not exceed in the dedication of Solomon's Temple. They offered an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs as sacrifices. They also offered twelve he goats for a sin offering for all Israel. Although it was the southern tribes (Judah) who were taken into captivity, permitted to return, and rebuild, they were conscious of the fact that Israel was a nation of twelve tribes.

**6:18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.** <sup>3</sup>Many years earlier, God had told Moses how the priests and Levites should serve in the temple. Moses wrote these commands in his books (Numbers 3:6-9; 18:1-32). <sup>4</sup>The priests were Levites, too. However, not all Levites were priests. Some were keepers of the doors. Some were singers and musicians. All Levites were set aside for the service of the Lord. Just a few were priests.

## **Ezra 6:19-22 The Passover Celebration**

**6:19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.** The children of the captivity were the returned exiles; those in captivity. After the dedication of the temple, the next month they kept the observance of the Passover on its appointed date. They come to remember how God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt (the Passover). This was done the fourteenth day of the first month. Each year the Jewish men were required to make three trips to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

**6:20 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, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.** Great preparations were made. The priests and the Levites purified themselves together and were clean. This purification was important and qualified the priests for holy service. The temple had been dedicated, and now the people were dedicating themselves to the Lord. So for the priest and Levites, the purification was a time to put away all evil from their lives, so they could be pure as

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/06.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/06.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/ezra-lbw.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezra/06.html>

one man that they may help one another in the celebration of the Passover before the Lord. What good is a dedicated Temple if you don't have a dedicated people? The priests and Levites killed the Passover lamb for the exiles (children of captivity), their brethren priests, and themselves to be eaten.

**6:21 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,—** Not all the people were children of Israel. There were the proselytes who had embraced the Jewish religion by having mingled with the Jews in their captivity. This means that the heathens saw it and began to walk in the light of the Lord with them. A significant rule regarding the Passover was that it could not be celebrated by those who had not repented of sin. Only those who had lived separated lives could partake and eat.<sup>5</sup> They were all ready at one time to observe the proper rites and ceremonies.

**6:22 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.** Following the Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasts for seven days. During this time the Jews had to remove all yeast (leaven) from their dwellings, a picture of personal purification. To a Jew, yeast was a symbol of evil, so Passover was a time to put away all evil from their lives. This was now to be a joyous time in their lives. We have to look at all the things that had occurred in their lives at this time: the rebuilding of the Temple, its dedication, the Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were all possible because of what God had done. All was with joy, because the Lord had given them cause to be joyful. They were quick to give Him all the credit for this joyful moment. There is spontaneous joy when God's people see evidence of Him working through and turning the heart of the king of Assyria to assist them. The "title", King of Assyria was held by every king who succeeded the great Neo-Assyrian Empire regardless of what country they may have come from. This encouraged them to complete the rebuilding of the temple; to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of the God of Israel.

#### SUMMARY:

<sup>4</sup>Governor Tattenai, Shethar Bozenai, and their advisors carefully obeyed King Darius (v.13). With great success the Jewish leaders continued working on the temple, while Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them by their preaching (v.14). And so, the temple was completed at the command of the God of Israel and by the orders of kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes of Persia. The Temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (v.15). The Israelites—the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy (v. 16).

One hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs were offered as sacrifices at the dedication (v.17). Also twelve goats were sacrificed as sin offerings for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then the priests and Levites were assigned their duties in God's temple in Jerusalem, according to the earlier instructions written by Moses (v.18). The returned exiles kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month (v.19). For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean (v.20). So they killed the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their brother priests, and for themselves.

The sacrifices were eaten by the Israelites who had returned and by the neighboring people who had given up the sinful customs of other nations in order to worship the LORD God of Israel (v.21). For seven days they celebrated the Festival of Thin Bread. Everyone was happy because the LORD God of Israel had made sure that the king of Assyria would be kind to them and help them build the temple (v.22).

#### APPLICATION:

Ezra carefully pointed out that rebuilding the temple was commanded first by God then by the kings, who were His instruments. God's will is supreme over all rulers, all historical events and all hostile forces. If I trust in His power and love, dedicating all to Him, no opposition can stop me, and there would be an abundance of joy in doing it.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/12172/eVerseID/12172/RTD/Clarke>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/the-temple-is-dedicated/>

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