

Ezra 03 - Altar is Set Up and Sacrifices Restored; Foundations of Temple Laid

I. Restoration of the Temple (Ezra 1:1–6:22)

- (2) Rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:1–6:22)
 - (A) Altar rebuilt, sacrifices re-instituted, foundation laid accompanied by the nation's mixed reaction (3:1-12)
 - (a) Erection of the altar (3:1-2)
 - (b) Sacrifices reestablished at the Feast of Booths (3:3-6)
 - (c) Temple foundation laid (3:7-9)
 - (i) Materials (3:7)
 - (ii) Workers (3:8)
 - (iii) Supervisors (3:9)
 - (d) Mixed reactions (3:10-13)
 - (i) Singing (3:10-11a)
 - (ii) Shouting (3:11b, 12b-13)
 - (iii) Sadness (3:12a)

Ezra 3

- (2) Rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:1–6:22)
 - (A) Altar rebuilt, sacrifices re-instituted, foundation laid accompanied by the nation's mixed reaction (3:1-12)
 - (a) Erection of the altar (3:1-2) (Cf. Neh 7:72)

1 Now when the **seventh month** came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, **the people gathered together as one person** to Jerusalem.

1 Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

1 Seven months after the Israelis had settled in their cities, they all gathered together in Jerusalem as a united body.

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.

- Construction of the temple began soon after the exiles returned to Jerusalem. It was the basis for the post-exilic community's fellowship with God. A finished temple symbolized God's covenant with His people, which is why it was so important.

- "...seventh month" - may refer to the seventh month after the people left Babylon or to the seventh month after they arrived in Jerusalem. This would've been in September-October. This was probably in 537 BC, since Cyrus issued the decree in 538 BC.
- In years past, the seventh month had been a great month religiously for Israel. Three religious festivals were held in the seventh month: the Feast of Trumpets on the 1st day (Lev 23:23-25), the Day of Atonement on the 10th day (Lev 23:26-32), and the Feast of Tabernacles on days 15-21 (Lev 23:33-36,39-43; Num 29:12-39; Cf. Ezra 3:4).
- "...the people gathered together as one person" - suggest they all agreed that the temple re-building project must begin quickly
- The men who headed up the constructing of the altar were Jeshua, the religious leader (a descendant of Aaron), and Zerubbabel, the civil leader (a descendant of David), along with fellow priests (other descendants of Aaron) and associates (other descendants of David).
- They built the altar so that they could offer sacrifices in accordance with what was written in the Law of Moses. It was imperative that the returnees would come back to the Mosaic Covenant. Because their forefathers had left the covenant, the nation had been driven into Captivity. The former exiles did not want to make that same mistake.

2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the **son of Shealtiel** and his brothers, rose up and 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.

2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and 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.

2 Then Jozadak's son Jeshua and his brothers got up, along with Shealtiel's son Zerubbabel and his brothers. They built an altar of the God of Israel in order to offer burnt offerings, as prescribed by the Law of Moses, the man of God.

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.

- The fact that the returnees built an altar and offered burnt offerings on it demonstrated their earnest desire to be living sacrifices for God, which is what those sacrifices symbolized.

— They built the altar first because it could be completed quickly and easily. We begin a great work by first doing what we can. There was also spiritual significance to the altar. It was where sin was dealt with and where the common man met God. It was a wise spiritual priority showing that they understood their need for atonement from sin.

- As they re-established their worship of God, they were careful to follow the Mosaic Law (Cf. Ex 27:1-8; 38:1-7; Deut 12:4-14)
- The fact that Sheshbazzar (Cf. 1:8,11) is not mentioned here, or from hereafter in Ezra, indicates that he may have died
- "...son of Shealtiel" - in this verse Zerubbabel is called the son of Shealtiel, but in 1 Chr 3:19, Zerubbabel is called the son of Pedaiah, who was a brother of Shealtiel (1 Chr 3:17-18). Possibly Shealtiel died childless, and his brother Pedaiah married Shealtiel's widow, following the custom of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10). Or Pedaiah may have adopted Zerubbabel. Or Shealtiel may have reared Zerubbabel.

(b) Sacrifices reestablished at the Feast of Booths (3:3-6)

3 So they set up the altar **on its foundation**, because they were **terrified of the peoples of the lands**; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

3 So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

3 Even though they feared the people in neighboring regions, they rebuilt the altar where it had stood before. They offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD—burnt offerings both in the morning and in the evening.

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.

- "...on its foundation" - they built the altar on the same ground where it had once stood. They could have reasoned that the altar and the temple could be built anywhere, because Yahweh was God of the entire earth. Yet in the Jewish mind, there was only one place where the altar and the temple could stand: on God's holy hill (Ps 2:6; 99:9), in His holy land (Zech 2:12).

- "...terrified of the peoples of the lands" - when they built the altar on the temple mount in Jerusalem, they probably destroyed a crude altar that had been built in the previous 70 years, and scattered people who had inhabited the area

— Because they had become corrupted by idolatry in the past at the hands of surrounding nations, they set up a true altar to prevent a repetition of the past

4 They also celebrated **the Feast of Booths**, as it is written, and *offered* the prescribed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required;

4 They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and *offered* the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required;

4 They also observed the Festival of Tents as has been prescribed, offering a specific number of daily burnt offerings in accordance with the ordinance of each day.

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;

- "...the Feast of Booths" - a great, joyful feast that celebrated God's faithfulness to Israel during the wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land
- To celebrate this feast, the Israelites would camp out in tents (booths) to remind them of how their forefathers lived during the Exodus
- As the returnees came back to destroyed cities, they were forced to also live this way until they could properly rebuild, so this feast likely had a special meaning for them

5 and afterward *there was* a continual burnt offering, also for the **new moons** and for all the appointed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a voluntary offering to the LORD.

5 and afterward *there was* a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

5 After that, they offered all of the continual burnt offerings and the New Moon sacrifices for all of the designated festivals of the LORD that were being consecrated, along with all the voluntary offerings that were dedicated to the LORD.

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.

- During their long stay in Babylon, the exiles were not able to offer any sacrifices, as this could only be done in Jerusalem. Instead, they were surrounded by pagan temples (at least 50, along with about 180 open-air shrines to false gods).

- "...new moons" - marked the first day of the month, which was a holy day (Cf. Num 28:11-15)

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 had not been laid.

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6 They began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD from the first day of the seventh month, even though the foundation of the Temple of the LORD had not yet been laid.

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.

- These were the first sacrifices made there in 50 years—since 586 BC when the temple was destroyed. Other sacrifices were offered in connection with all the appointed feasts. The sacrifices showed that the people wanted to be responsive to the Law of God.
- All of this was done before even the foundation of the temple was laid

(c) Temple foundation laid (3:7-9)

(i) Materials (3:7)

7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring **cedar wood from Lebanon** to the sea at Joppa, according to the **permission they had from Cyrus** king of Persia.

7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

7 They paid masons and carpenters in cash. They paid the residents of Sidon and Tyre with food, drink, and oil, for them to bring cedar trees by sea from Lebanon to Joppa in accordance with the order they had obtained from Cyrus, king of Persia.

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.

- Temple construction began by obtaining construction materials from Lebanon and hiring construction workers

- "...cedar wood from Lebanon" - legendary for their excellent timber. This shows that the returnees wanted to only use the best materials they could find in construction, and the same materials used by Solomon to build the first temple (Cf. 1 Kings 5:6)

- "...permission they had from Cyrus" - legal allowance to rebuild the temple and the financial support from the royal treasury

- Since Tyre and Sidon were under the Persian Empire, Cyrus had to authorize this transaction (Cf. 6:3-4), in which the logs, as in Solomon's time, were paid for by money, food, drink, and oil.

- It's interesting that this temple was authorized by a Gentile, used materials from a Gentile nation, and was financed by a Gentile king

(ii) Workers (3:8)

8 Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, **in the second month**, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began *the work* and **appointed the Levites who were twenty years old and upward** to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

8 Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began *the work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

8 Two years and two months after arriving at the site of the Temple of God in Jerusalem, Shealtiel's son Zerubbabel, Jozadak's son Jeshua, the relatives of the priests and descendants of Levi, and everyone else who had left the Babylonian captivity for Jerusalem appointed descendants of Levi who were 20 years old and older to oversee the work of the LORD's Temple.

8 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.

- The returnees needed several months of preparation before actual construction could begin. First, they had to secure building materials from Lebanon, which were shipped along the coast to Joppa then carried over land to Jerusalem. This was not a quick process.

- Extensive foundation repair work was also necessary because the temple stood on a hilltop, and because the Babylonian destruction was extensive

- "...in the second month" - Solomon began his temple building project in the second month (May-June; 1 Kings 6:1), the same month this rebuilding began under Zerubbabel.

- "...appointed the Levites who were twenty years old and upward" - whereas 25 was the minimum age for tabernacle service for Levites (Num 8:24; 4:3), the age was only 20 for temple service (1 Chr 23:24; 2 Chr 31:17)

- There were 24,000 Levites appointed to oversee the work of Solomon's Temple (1 Chr 23:4), whereas now there were only 341 total (Cf. 2:40-42).

(iii) Supervisors (3:9)

9 Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers stood united *with* Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah *and* the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

9 Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers stood united *with* Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah *and* the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

9 At this time Jeshua, along with his children and relatives, and Kadmiel, with his children and the descendants of Judah, joined the family of Henadad with his children and relatives, and the descendants of Levi in overseeing the work on the Temple of God.

9 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.

- Centuries earlier Levites were involved in the tabernacle construction (Ex 38:21) and in caring for and transporting it (Num 1:50-51; 3:21-37). Now they were involved in the temple construction.

— Three Levite groups of supervisors were mentioned—Jeshua and his family, Kadmiel (Cf. 2:40) and his family, and the family of Henadad.

(d) Mixed reactions (3:10-13)

(i) Singing (3:10-11a)

10 Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel.

10 Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel.

10 After the builders laid the foundation for the LORD's Temple, the priests stood in their ministerial robes with trumpets and the descendants of Levi (who were also descendants of Asaph) with cymbals to praise the LORD, according to instructions prepared by David, king of Israel.

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

- When the builders laid the foundation for the temple, it was a memorable scene. The people celebrated God's faithfulness, the priests were dressed in their ceremonial apparel, the musicians were ready to praise the Lord with instruments and song, and they sang responsively (v11) to God's faithfulness and provision.

(ii) Shouting (3:11b,12b-13)

11 And they sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, *saying*, "For He is good, for His **favor** is upon Israel forever." And all the people shouted with a great shout of joy when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

11 They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, *saying*, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." 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.

11 And they sang in unison to one another, giving thanks to the LORD: "He is good, and his gracious love to Israel endures forever." And all the people shouted out loudly in praise to

the LORD when the foundation of the LORD's Temple was laid.

11 And they **sang together** by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever 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.

- As the priests and the Levites led the dedication service for the temple's foundations, they did the things that were prescribed by David. The order followed was the same as when David brought the ark to Jerusalem (Cf. 2 Chr 5:13).

— At that time priests blew trumpets and Asaph sounded cymbals (1 Chr 16:5-6). Here the priests blew trumpets and sons (descendants) of Asaph played the cymbals.

— The order was also similar to the time when the ark was brought to the temple in Solomon's day (2 Chr 5:12-13), when Asaph and others played cymbals, harps, and lyres; and the priests blew trumpets.

— However, there were some differences: there was no ark, no visible glory of God, and no temple yet. Only some beginnings, and small beginnings at that. But God is enthroned on the praises of His people, so these praises could indeed be as glorious as Solomon's.

- "...sang together" [KJV] - one to another, antiphonally. The very psalm sung on this occasion (Cf. Ps 136:1) suggests that they were thinking in terms of Jeremiah's great prophecy (Jer 33:11).

— This song of praise is highly significant for by it the religious leaders were acknowledging that YHWH had again established His loving protection over the nation

- "...favor" - *hesed*, God's covenantal loyal love which exists forever with His people Israel. Now that the temple worship was being re-established, the people again recognized the commitment of God's unending covenantal love.

(iii) Sadness (3:12a)

12 Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' *households*, the old men who had seen the first temple, **wept with a loud voice** when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy,

12 Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' *households*, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy,

12 Now a number of the priests, the Levites, and the leading officials of the elders—who were very elderly—had seen the former Temple with their own eyes. When they observed the foundation of the Temple being laid, they wept with a loud voice, while the rest of them shouted for joy.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes,

wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

— "...wept with a loud voice" - the old Jews, who had seen Solomon's temple, wept because they could already see, with only the foundation having been laid, that the second temple was far less glorious.

— While the above is the common interpretation, we're not told exactly why the elders wept. It could have been weeping in joy that they lived long enough to see the temple of God rebuilt, or at least construction begun on its rebuilding, in their lifetime. These may well have been tears of joy, whereas later after the temple is completed, they wept tears of sadness.

— We do know from Haggai 2:1-9 and Zech 4:10 that the elderly Jews who saw the completed second temple and Solomon's temple wept because the second temple was far less glorious

— Those who wept may have been Jews taken in the third deportation (586 BC, and now returned, in 536 BC. For them, the Babylonian exile was only 50 years long.

13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, because the people were shouting with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

13 As a result, the people couldn't distinguish between the noise coming from the shouts of joy and the noise coming from the weeping people, because everyone was shouting loudly and could be heard a long way off.

13 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.

- The two sounds, the joy and the weeping mingled together and were so loud that they were heard far away