

Ezra Chapter 3

Verses 1-13: The worship and regular calendar resumed. The altar was probably rebuilt (in 537 B.C.).

Ezra 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."

The previous chapter describes the return of the people. Chapter 3 now introduces the commencement of legitimate worship. The people being "in the cities" simple means that having arrived in the land, they were already settled.

"Gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem" illustrates unity and a return to the form of worship detailed in the law.

After their arrival, they were occupied with their own dwellings in and around Jerusalem. After that work was done, they turned to building the altar of burnt offering in time for the feasts, resolved to celebrate as if the temple had been completed. The month (ca. Sept. – Oct. 537 B.C.), of the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Booths, or Tabernacles (compare verse 4), was the seventh month. Such an assembly had not convened for 70 years. They obeyed according to (Lev. 23:24-44). Over 90 years later, Nehemiah and Ezra would lead a similar celebration (compare Neh. 8:13-18).

"The seventh Month": This was the first day of the month (verse 6), which was the Feast of Trumpets (Num. 29:1-6), which foreshadowed Israel's final gathering. The seventh month was Tishri (September – October), and most likely was (September 25, 536 B.C.), if there was a two-year delay in the beginning of the journey from Babylon after Cyrus's decree. The laying of the temple foundation in the next year would have brought to a close the 70 year captivity Jeremiah had predicted (in Jeremiah 25:1-12, 605 B.C.). The journey was approximately nine hundred miles from Babylon to Palestine and would have taken at least four months (compare 7:8-9).

It appears from this, that the people first went and reclaimed their inheritance. The seventh month was Tisri on their calendar. On our calendar, it is approximately October. This was speaking of them coming to Jerusalem right after their harvest time. This month had always been special to the Hebrews. This was a time of the blowing of the trumpets. Day of Atonement occurred on the tenth day of this month. This would be a time they would have their minds on their LORD. The Feast of Tabernacles occurred in this month as well. This was a special month for all Hebrews.

Verses 2-6: When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, their first act was to rebuild "the altar" where it was before ("upon his bases"). Their first priority was worship.

Ezra 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."

“Jeshua ... and Zerubbabel”: The recognized spiritual and civil leaders, respectively (see notes on 2:2).

“As it is written in the law of Moses”: The burnt offerings were in accord with (Lev. 1:3-17).

“Zerubbabel” was the political and spiritual head of the tribe of Judah, when the Israelites were released from the Babylonian captivity (536 B.C.). As the prime builder of the second temple, Zerubbabel led the first group of captives back to Jerusalem, and set about reconstructing the temple on the old site. For some 20 years he worked closely with prophets, priests, and kings, until the new temple was finally dedicated and the Jewish sacrificial system was reestablished. Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoiachin, the king of Judah who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in about 598 B.C. (1 Chron. 3:17). Zerubbabel was thus his grandfather’s legal successor and heir, in the direct line of the ancestry of Jesus (Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27). Some scholars suggest that he was probably in the king’s service and had been given an Aramaic name, Sheshbazzar (compare 1:8). Certainly, he was appointed by Cyrus as governor of Judea (Hag. 1:1). Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest were encouraged and exhorted by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1-2). Haggai promised Zerubbabel a special blessing which had messianic implications (Hag. 2:21-23; Ezra 2:2; Ezra Chapters 3 and 4; Hag. Chapters 1 and 2).

Jeshua 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. Those priests and people in high authority had built the altar where they could offer burnt offerings. God had instructed them in the Law of Moses how to go about offering. God had shown David that this was the only acceptable place for burnt offerings to be made.

Ezra 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."

“Set the altar”: This was all that was needed to reestablish temple worship (compare verse 6). They reset it on its old foundation, so it occupied its sacred site.

“The people of those countries”: The settlers who had come to occupy the Land during the 70 years of Israel’s absence were deportees brought in from other countries by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. These inhabitants saw the Jews as a threat and quickly wanted to undermine their allegiance to God (compare 4:1-2).

The people the Israelites feared were those who chose to stay in the land, Jews and Samaritans, not the people of neighboring countries. There were Jews who remained in the land of Judah (2 Kings 25:22), many of them by choice (Jer. 40:1-6).

“Burnt offerings”: These were the most common offerings for sin (compare verse 2).

This action is a tribute to their determination to succeed despite tremendous obstacles. All of chapter 4 is devoted to the long series of hostilities that covered the time period of Ezra and Nehemiah some 80 to 90 years later.

We see from this, that perhaps the bases had not been destroyed. The new altar was made to the size of the base. The altar sat upon this base. These nations, they seemed to be afraid of, were the nations around them that worshipped false gods. They would not have feared the Persians, because Cyrus had sent them to construct the temple. The following are the instructions they were keeping.

Exodus 29:38-39 "Now this [is that] which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually." "The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even:"

Ezra 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;"

“Number according to the custom” (according to Num. 29:12-38).

This was a time of year that was required by the Levitical law for all males to worship. This would not be a true Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Ingathering, but would be recognizing the days as such. The temple was not re-built at this time. This is the beginning of re-establishing worship in Jerusalem.

Ezra 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."

Not after the feast of tabernacles, as if they then began to offer the daily sacrifice. For that they did as soon as the altar was set up, and on the first day of the month (Ezra 3:3). Rather the sense is, that after the daily burnt offering of the morning, they offered the other sacrifices peculiar to the several days of the Feast of Tabernacles. They never neglected that, yea, always began with it; all the rest were after it, and so on other festivals.

"Both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated": To the service of the Lord, and the honor of his name. As every first day of the month, and every other appointed festival, they offered the sacrifices appropriate to each. But not to the neglect of that sacrifice, and always after it.

"And of everyone that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord": These they were careful also to offer in their proper time.

The "continual burnt offering" is speaking of the regular morning and evening sacrifices. We see that the returned Hebrews kept the morning and evening sacrifices, and kept the new moons

which was the beginning of a new month. They would, from this time on, keep all of the Feasts including Passover and Pentecost. A freewill offering might be made at any time. It was not of obligation, but of their free will.

Ezra 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."

And which day was not only a new moon, but a grand festival, the feast of blowing of trumpets (Lev. 23:24). And no doubt but they observed the tenth day of this month, with all the rites of it, which was the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27).

"But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid": They began first with sacrifices, that having thereby given thanks to God for their return to their own land, and for all the benefits they enjoyed. And made atonement for their sins in a typical way, they might be the more prepared and fit for the work of building the temple. Or, "though the foundation" of it was not laid, yet they offered the above sacrifices.

It appears the worship began in earnest on this first day of the seventh month, and continued as if the temple was there. They had not even begun the work on the temple at this time. They had taken care of their own affairs first. They re-established their homes, and then thought of sacrificing.

Ezra 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."

"Masons ... carpenters ... cedar trees": The process of re-building the temple sounds similar to the original construction under Solomon (1 Kings Chapters 5 and 6; 1 Chron. Chapter 22; and 2 Chron. Chapter 2).

"Of Zidon ... Joppa": The materials were shipped from the Phoenician ports of Sidon and Tyre south to Joppa, the main seaport, about 35 miles from Jerusalem.

"Grant that they had of Cyrus" (compare 1:2-4).

We can assume from this that the masons, carpenters, and workers received money to live on in coins while they were working on the temple. Tyre and Zidon did not have enough foodstuff, so they were paid for the cedar trees, they brought for building, in grain and other foodstuff that was plentiful in Judah. The king of Persia had helped to finance the rebuilding of the temple out of his own funds.

Ezra 3:8 "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."

“Second year ... second month” (ca. April/May 536 B.C.). This officially ended the 70 year captivity that began (in 605 B.C.).

This seems to be saying that about May of the second year since they had returned, they set forward the work on the house of the LORD. Zif was their second month, which is comparable to our May. This is the same month that Solomon had laid the foundation for the temple he built. Zerubbabel seemed to be in charge of this whole operation. All young men 20 years or older, were to come to work on the temple.

Ezra 3:9 "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."

“Judah”: Some suggest a change due to dittography (writing a letter twice when it should have been written once). It may read Hodaviah. As a result, the first three names here (are the same as in 2:40), and represent special Levitical families placed in charge of the temple workmen.

We see from this, that the High Priest would make sure that all was done according to the building of the first temple. Jeshua was that High Priest. Kadmiel was of the tribe of Judah, but he was not priest. He was descended from Hodaviah. Henadad was a Levite, but not a priest.

Verses 10-11: Once the temple’s “foundation” was laid, the people’s gratitude for a permanent place of worship prompted a worship service. Praise was conducted in the manner prescribed by the “ordinance of David”, meaning that worship in Israel’s present, reflected worship in Israel’s past, particularly the celebration associated with the building of the first temple (1 Chron. 6:31; 16:4-6; 25:1; 2 Chron. 5:13; Psalm 136:1).

Ezra 3:10 "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."

A comparison (of 5:1-6 and the Book of Haggi), shows that little was achieved (until 520 B.C.), apart from the actual laying of the foundations. The same order was observed when the Ark was brought to Jerusalem in David’s time (1 Chron. 16:5-6; compare Num. 10:8).

The trumpets blown by the priests in their priestly robes, proclaimed the victory of the building of the foundation of the temple. The cymbals were struck to show that the building had begun. We remember, the family of Asaph was in charge of the praise and worship through singing and music.

Ezra 3:11 "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."

“They sang”: Their song of praise is similar (to Psalm 136:1).

This was a time of great celebration because the re-establishing of the temple in Jerusalem had begun. God was and is good. His mercy does endure forever. This was especially so for these Hebrews. God kept a remnant for them to begin again. The praising and shouting was a way of saying thank you to God. We need to do a little shouting and praising today for the goodness God has bestowed upon us all.

Verses 12-13: It had been about 50 years since the first temple had been destroyed, and many of the older men (“ancient men”) who had seen the earlier buildings wept now because of the sorrowful contrast in size and splendor. When the temple was completed (late in 520 B.C.), there were still some of these old men who wept again. (Haggai 2:3 and Zech. 4:10), relate Zechariah’s challenge to those who “despised the day of small things.”

The returned exiles had mixed emotions that day: many of the people “shouted aloud for joy” while the “weeping of the people” who remembered the original temple from the days of their childhood, “shouted with a loud voice” because this newly built house of worship did not compare to the glory of the original.

Ezra 3:12 "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:"

“The first house”: The temple built by Solomon (compare 1 Kings Chapters 5-7).

“Wept with a loud voice”: The first temple had been destroyed 50 years earlier. The old men, who would have been about 60 years or older, knew that this second temple did not begin to match the splendor of Solomon’s temple nor did the presence of God reside within it (compare Hag. 2:1-4; Zech. 4:9-10). The nation was small and weak, the temple smaller and less beautiful by far. There were no riches as in David and Solomon’s days. The Ark was gone. But most disappointing was the absence of God’s Shekinah glory. Thus, the weeping.

“Shouted for joy”: For those who did not have a point of comparison, this was a great moment. Possibly (Psalm 126), was written and sung for this occasion.

The weeping from those whom remembered the greatness of the temple before it was destroyed, was in joy. They were overwhelmed in their hearts with the prospect of it being built again.

Ezra 3:13 "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."

That is, not clearly and distinctly, they were so mixed and confounded together, and made such a jarring and discord.

"For the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off": The shouting being of young people, whose voice was strongest, and they the most numerous, the noise of shouting prevailed over the noise of weeping. And it was heard further, and at a distance appeared more distinctly to be the noise of shouting, as that of weeping not reaching so far.

The crying and shouting with it, was just as loud as the shouting and praising. This had to be a spectacular sound with the cymbals clanging, the trumpets blowing, the weeping loudly, and the shouts of praise. Everyone had to know what was happening by the loud sounds. Wouldn't it be interesting to see a church in our day rejoicing so loudly that it would stir up the entire neighborhood? Where has our enthusiasm in the LORD gone?

Ezra Chapter 3 Questions

1. When did the children of Israel come to gather in Jerusalem?
2. What was the 7th month on their calendar?
3. What month is that on our calendar?
4. What special event had gone on during this month in times past?
5. _____ was acting High Priest.
6. Who was High Priest, when the temple had been destroyed?
7. Who had led the people home from Babylon?
8. Who built the altar?
9. It was built for what?
10. What was the altar set upon?
11. The nations around them worshipped _____ _____.
12. What Feast did they keep?
13. What is this re-establishing?
14. The "continual burnt offering" is speaking of what?
15. What other thing did they observe, mentioned in verse 5?
16. How did the freewill offering differ from the other offerings?
17. When did the worship begin in earnest?

18. Who did they give money to for their work?
19. What did they give for the cedar trees?
20. When did they begin work on the temple?
21. Who was overseeing this whole thing?
22. What did the priests do?
23. Who was called into service to work on the temple?
24. Zif on their calendar is compared to our _____.
25. Who was Kadmiel?
26. Who blew the trumpets in celebration of the foundation being laid?
27. Who struck the cymbals?
28. Asaph's family was in charge of what?
29. Who cried over the foundation being laid?