

JOYFUL WORSHIP RESTORED

Bible Background • Ezra 1:1-3:7Printed Text • Ezra 3:1-7 | Devotional Reading • Matthew 23:29-39**Aim for Change**

By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW that we should celebrate and express thanks to God for His goodness; DESIRE to praise God for His goodness; and PRAISE God for His goodness.

In Focus

Adam was a faithful church member who led the praise and worship portion of services. He met a woman that he liked and began to spend a lot of time with her. He sought God's approval of the relationship, though, he felt in his heart that God was not pleased.

Adam entered his place after work one evening to find his belongings gone with just a search warrant left behind. Adam had been under surveillance because of the woman he'd been dating. She'd been identified as a co-conspirator in intricately planned robberies. The warnings of the Lord came back to Adam's mind. Ashamed, Adam stopped going to church and shied away from praising and worshiping God.

Weeks later, while remembering the praise and worship services, Adam began to sing to the Lord. In tears, he called his pastor and the praise and worship leader, both who readily accepted him back. Adam gladly worshiped the Lord to prepare for the next Sunday's services. There, Adam experienced an anointing in worship like none he'd ever seen before.

Today's lesson is about how we as believers should ask God to help us maintain joyful worship of God, who is worthy to be praised.

Keep in Mind

"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).

Focal Verses

^{KJV} 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. 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 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. 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; 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. 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. 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.

^{NLT} Ezra 3:1 In early autumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled in Jerusalem with a unified purpose. 2 Then Jeshua son of Jehozadak joined his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his family in rebuilding the altar of the God of Israel. They wanted to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed in the Law of Moses, the man of God. 3 Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its old site. Then they began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to the LORD each morning and evening. 4 They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed in the Law, sacrificing the number of burnt offerings specified for each day of the festival. 5 They also offered the regular burnt offerings and the offerings required for the new moon celebrations and the annual festivals as prescribed by the LORD. The people also gave voluntary offerings to the LORD. 6 Fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began, the priests had begun to sacrifice burnt offerings to the LORD. This was even before they had started to lay the foundation of the LORD's Temple. 7 Then the people hired masons and carpenters and bought cedar logs from the people of Tyre and Sidon, paying them with food, wine, and olive oil. The logs were brought down from the Lebanon mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, for King Cyrus had given permission for this.

The People, Places, and Times

The Feast of Booths (or the Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot*). This celebration is a harvest festival that lasts for one week. Jeshua is a descendant of Jozadak, who had been the high priest at the time Judah went into exile. Zerubbabel was appointed governor of Judah either by Darius or his predecessor, Cambyses, about 525 B.C. The altar described was built on old foundations, underscoring the continuity with the First Temple. The text notes that the reinstatement of sacrifices was not accompanied by the laying of the temple's foundations. Fear of reaction by neighboring people accounted for this delay.

Background

Throughout the history of the Children of Israel, we see a pattern where one ruler obeyed God and his successor would disobey and lead the nation into a path of unrighteousness. In the historical era prior to our lesson, King Josiah, at 8 years old, sought to cleanse and restore true worship among the people of Israel. He rebuilt the temple and led the people in obeying the Law of Moses to follow all the required feasts and sacrifices and the Passover.

After his death, his brother Jehiahah was placed over the Children of Israel, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. The people disobeyed God, and the chief priests defiled the temple. The Lord sent prophets to warn them, but the people mocked and misused them. God's wrath against them became unquenched. The king of Chaldees came and slew them unmercifully: young, old, men, and women alike. The king took everything of value in the land and removed everything from the temple before he burned it and destroyed the wall of Jerusalem. Those who remained were taken into captivity for 70 years, the time God appointed.

At-A-Glance

1. Worship Restored ([Ezra 3:1-5](#))
2. The Temple Restored ([vv. 6-7](#))

In Depth

1. Worship Restored ([Ezra 3:1-5](#))

The Children of Israel gathered in Jerusalem after their release from Babylon to find their city and temple in ruins. Jeshua and the other priests worked to restore the altar to observe the customary feasts with the people. Over time, the morale of the Children of Israel suffered after their bondage, and their spirits were in ruins like their precious Jerusalem: broken and, in many ways, desolate.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which they celebrated, is similar to our Thanksgiving. It commemorates the 40 years they worshiped in tents while in the wilderness. As with all required feasts and observances, it came with a promise and restoration of God's covenant with His people. Worshiping God is the best way to reestablish joy after emerging from a difficult time.

2. The Temple Restored ([vv. 6-7](#))

The Temple of God represents a special place, and the things inside had a special meaning. The Children of Israel endured many transitions while serving their God. They carried the Ark of the Covenant, they served Him in a tent, and they built a beautiful temple — all so His presence could continually dwell among them.

The people were moved as they watched Jeshua and the other priests rebuild the Temple to its original order. The skilled tradesmen gave their time and skill to restore the Temple. King Cyrus of Persia preserved the pieces that belonged in the temple and returned them when the Children of Israel returned to Jerusalem. He also gave a grant to help with its completion.

More important than the dedication of the people to rebuild the physical temple was their renewed spirit, the true temple, figuratively speaking. What good is a temple if no one comes to make sacrifices to God? The Children of Israel in the past had failed to see the significance in observing the required sacrifices and didn't for quite some time before going into captivity. After deliverance from their captors, the Children of Israel longed for those old traditions; their significance, no doubt, brought new meaning to their hearts.

It is important that we, too, recognize the significance of God and the temple where His presence dwells.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was significant in the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles among the Children of Israel ([Ezra 3:4](#))?
2. Who granted permission to the Children of Israel to rebuild the temple ([v. 7](#))?

Discuss the Meaning

What observances or sacrifices do we need to reinstitute to restore and rebuild our relationship with God? As you ponder this question, think of your own relationship with the holy God.

Lesson in Our Society

Unbroken fellowship with God is so vital to our existence and peace of mind in today's perilous world. Our praise and worship brings us into God's presence and protection. Our continual disobedience only stirs the wrath of God and places us in a position to lose our greatest possession: our relationship with God—the source of our praise, worship, and more important, our joy.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Ezra 3:1-7

Introduction:

There is a noticeable distance in time between Ezra chapters 2 and 3. The Children of Israel have returned home to their land, bringing a substantial amount of wealth along with them. This of course is primarily for the sole purpose of rebuilding Yahweh's Temple. We read in Ezra 2:68-70 that the people built homes for themselves before even establishing the foundation of the temple. This later ignites the rage of the prophet Haggai as the Lord commands him to rebuke Israel for their distorted priorities. "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" (Haggai 1:4, NASB).

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.

Ezra 3 opens with a remarkable statement. Everyone "gathered themselves together" (*'acaph*, **aw-SAF**), "as one man to Jerusalem."

This is a distinct expression of unity among people of Israel. Undoubtedly, the people's unity was influenced by the permission that King Cyrus gave to people scattered throughout the land to return home to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-4). An additional factor was Haggai's prophetic message rebuking them for their selfish actions, which involved them building homes for themselves first rather than the Lord's Temple (Haggai 1:1-5). "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'" (Haggai 1:5, NASB).

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 individuals prominent in this verse, Jeshua and Zerubbabel represented both the priestly and royal roles of Yahweh. The divine and political authorities of Israel were not only present, but led in the construction of Yahweh's "altar" (Heb. *mizbeach*, **miz-BAY-akh**).

Continuing in the spirit of being united as "one," they were accompanied by their fellow brothers of spiritual and political kin.

Even more impressive is their recognition of and return to obedience toward the Law of Moses (Pentateuch). An assumption can be made that upon reading the Pentateuch, they realized the supreme importance of the Lord's altar and the significance of the burnt offering.

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.

Fear can cause us to do many things; some are good and some stem from bad consequences and situations. Regardless of this fact, the intense emotion in most cases will cause some form of action. In an odd set of influences, fear led to the urgent construction of the Lord's altar. The serious threats from neighboring ethnicities and cultures around them influenced a troubled and frightened nation of Israel to seek the protection of Yahweh.

It's very interesting to see the hostility from the surrounding people. This hostility could have resulted from a variety of situations and consequences. The surrounding group could have had a lasting memory of Israel when it existed as an established, unified and strong

nation; interactions at the time could have varied from subtle negativity to complete disaster. Also, jealousy could have arisen from within the surrounding people, a direct result stemming from King Cyrus issuing a royal decree to allow them to return home in order to rebuild the Temple. This was an extremely important privilege that no other group enjoyed within its own contexts. As the altar was constructed, the people of God worshiped Him and sought His protection every day and night.

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; 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.

The altar of the Lord being fully established brought about resurgence among the people of Israel. It encouraged them to seek the Lord and worship Him in their culturally traditional ways. "They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month" (Nehemiah 8:14, NASB). The Feast of "Booths" (Heb. *cukkah*, **sook-KAW**) was a celebration of remembrance, pertaining to the time Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Deuteronomy 2), homeless (having shelter in tents); a consequence of their rebellious disbelief in Yahweh (Deuteronomy 1). A particular observance of the burnt offerings was emphasized also. Within this offering a male ram, bull and lamb without defect were sacrificed on the altar. Having the animal's blood sprinkled during the ceremony was a means to satisfy Yahweh, and was "a soothing aroma to the LORD" (Numbers 29:2, NASB).

As the fire within the chosen people's hearts burned to worship Yahweh, the flames and intensity were kept ablaze. We see from Ezra 3:4-5 that their participation in the various celebrations, festivals and offerings was "continual." From the first day of their cultural month to the last day, the people of Israel realized the extreme intimate bonding and unity that could be established as they worshiped Yahweh as "one." The Hebrew word used for "freewill offering" is *nədabah* (**ned-aw-BVAW**) and signifies that one is incited or impelled to give voluntarily. *Olah* (**o-LAW**) is the Hebrew word used that means "burnt offering." It signifies an ascent, stairway or steps, in conjunction with an offering used with fire. The imagery is of the smell rising upward toward the Lord, becoming a sweet aroma to His nostrils.

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. 7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Sidon, 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.

Worship of Yahweh at the altar remained constant and strong among the people of Israel. In particular, we have the burnt offering, which served as the primary sacrificial ceremony in reverence to the Lord. Another interesting addition pertains to the people groups aiding in the reconstruction of Yahweh's Temple. It must be recognized in at least the slightest sense, that non-Israelite people helped construct the Temple of God, even if they never physically worshiped there. Jeshua and Zerubbabel sought the support of the Sidonians and the Tyrians, without which obtaining the material to build the Temple would have been extremely difficult. This is simply following another pattern initiated by David and Solomon. David and Solomon both utilized the efforts of non-Israelites to construct the first Temple of God. In 1 Chronicles 22:2, we read how David gathered foreigners within the land of Israel to be stonecutters in the assisting of building the house of God. First Kings 9:20-21 depicts a more oppressive Solomon utilizing non-Israelites as slave workers in the building of the Temple. The descendants of the Jebusites, Amorites, Hittites, Hivites and Perizzites were used as forced labor.

Say It Correctly

Pentateuch. PEN-tuh-took.

Zerubbabel. zuh-RUB-uh-buhl, zuh-RUHB-uh-buhl.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY	Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem	(<u>Matthew 23:29-39</u>)
TUESDAY	The Coming Judgment	(<u>Jeremiah 7:30-8:3</u>)
WEDNESDAY	Jerusalem Falls to the Babylonians	(<u>2 Kings 24:1-12</u>)
THURSDAY	The Destruction of Jerusalem	(<u>2 Chronicles 36:15-21</u>)
FRIDAY	Rebuild a House for God	(<u>Ezra 1:1-8</u>)
SATURDAY	The People Respond	(<u>Ezra 2:64-70</u>)
SUNDAY	Restoring the Worship of God	(<u>Ezra 3:1-7</u>)

Notes