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Ezra 3

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Ezra 3

Topics.

- In the seventh month Israel gathered as one to Jerusalem.
- Jeshua the priests, Zerubbabel and his kinsmen, build the altar.
- Feast of Booths, burnt offerings, the new moon and freewill offering.
- They gave to the temple according to the grant Cyrus gave.
- Levites are appointed to supervise the work of the House of the LORD.
- The builders laid the foundation and the people praise to the LORD.
- Many who had seen the first house wept when they saw the foundation.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ended as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28) the Persian King Cyrus had sent exiles led by Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (Persia had defeated Babylon in 539 B.C.). Despite opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and after encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.).

Then in 458 B.C., Ezra led the second of three waves of returning exiles. By the time Ezra arrived, the people had again fallen into sin, Ezra preached God's word and the people repented (10:9-17). Ezra succeeded because God's hand was upon him (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) (Ezra 8:18, 22, 31). This book (probably written by Ezra), shows that God uses pagan kings to accomplish His purposes and His faithfulness to His promises and His people.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: focuses on the record that was kept of the families that came up out of captivity with Zerubbabel and priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the temple servants, the sons of Solomon and those who came up from Tel-melah that returned to Jerusalem and Judah.

EZRA 3:1

In the Seventh Month Israel Gathered as One to Jerusalem.

- **Ezra 3:1:** When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns (cities in KJV), the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem.

The seventh month is the month Tisri (our September and part of October). This was the most sacred month in the Jewish year. Following is a list of the feasts and Sabbaths held in the seventh month:

- **The first day:** was a Memorial Day of solemn rest, a holy convocation proclaimed with a blast of trumpets and in which no ordinary work was to be done. (Lev. 23:23-25).

- **The ninth day:** was a Sabbath beginning at evening, from evening to evening. (Lev. 23:32).
- **The tenth day:** was the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 23:27).
- **The fifteenth day:** was the Feast of Booths (also called the feast of the LORD) for seven days on the first day and the eighth day no ordinary work was to be done. (Lev. 23:34-36). All native Israelites were to dwell in booths, so that following generations would know that the LORD had made the people of Israel dwell in booths when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. (Lev. 23:39-43). Besides these feasts and Sabbaths, they were to keep their regular daily sacrifices and offerings and all their freewill offerings, which they also gave to the LORD. (Lev. 23:38). All these extra offerings given during the Feast of Booths did not abolish the regular daily offerings and sacrifices.

The following verses show that Ezra and those with him journeyed across the desert for around four months.

- **Ezra 7:8-9:** And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.⁹ For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him.

The children of Israel, now settled in their cities resolved to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles in KJV) (v4), just as if the temple had been fully restored.

The people gathered as one man to Jerusalem: (v1) by agreement rather than by the command of authority the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. There is no doubt that these people had longed to have the freedom to celebrate together this most holy feast.

EZRA 3:2-3

Jeshua the Priests, Zerubbabel and his Kinsmen, Build the Altar.

- **Ezra 3:2-3:** Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they 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.³ They set the altar in its place (its bases in KJV), for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

It is interesting to notice that in the following verse sometimes Jeshua the ecclesiastical dignitary precedes Zerubbabel the civil leader, while at other times Zerubbabel precedes Jeshua:

- They came with Zerubbabel, and Jeshua. (Ezra 2:2).
- Then arose Jeshua with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel. (Ezra 3:2).
- In the second month, Zerubbabel and Jeshua made a beginning. (Ezra 3:8).

And in Haggai, the priest is pre-eminent, but in Zechariah the prince. The truth seems to be that each was supreme in their own department, and that each worked in harmony together, respecting each other's authority and office. Jeshua was the grandson of Seraiah, the high-priest who was carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar (1 Chron. 6:15) and whose eyes Nebuchadnezzar put out after the fall of Jerusalem. After he was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (2 Kings 25:18-21) his son Jozadak (Josedech) succeeded him to the office of high-priest (Haggai 1:1), even though there could be no Jewish sacrifices made in Babylon. After Jozadak died in Babylon his son Jeshua succeeded him to the office of high priest. Joshua would not have been a young man at the time of their return; but no matter how aged he was his enthusiasm toward the LORD and his

Temple had not diminished, and as high-priest he was where he ought to be, in the forefront of the returning exiles. Jeshua also called Joshua brings to mind another Joshua, who was also a leader who led God's people from the bondage of the wilderness into the Promised Land, it is hardly likely that the significance of these two names in Scripture are accidental and that both leaders and deliverers had similar work to do, nor can it be supposed that it is accidental that their names are the same as a third and far greater Joshua who also is a leader and High Priest who brings his people from bondage into His own land of peace, and builds the heavenly Temple of God (i.e., the body of Christ).

Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel: meaning his grandson for correctly speaking, he was the son of Pedaiah. (1 Chron. 3:17-19). The direct line of David through Solomon died with the wicked Zedekiah and Jeconiah, but the descendants of Nathan another son of David survived. Their representative was one Salathiel (Shealtiel), who, on the failure of Solomon's line, was regarded as the 'son of Jeconiah' (1 Chron. 3:17). He seems to have had no son, and Zerubbabel, who was really his nephew (1 Chron 3:19), was raised by him and adopted as his son. In this way, the ancient royal line of David continued over the restored people.

We see Zerubbabel prince and governor of Judah better in the books of Haggai and Zechariah than here in Ezra, and from these books discern the character of Zerubbabel to be strong and bold in nature. He had a hard task and he did it with patience, enthusiasm and courage putting the harsh injustice done to him behind him and focusing on the task ahead.

They set the altar in its place (its bases in KJV): (v3) on a careful examination of the site after the rubble had been cleared and removed from the ruined temple foundation the base of the original altar became clear. It was upon this base that the restored the brazen altar of burnt offerings in the outer court, which was more necessary than the temple, for the following reasons:

- Due to the people of the neighbouring countries fear was upon the people of Israel for the Holy Land was surrounded by enemies, only the territory of Judah and Benjamin were left free for the exiles. The land of Samaria and the central regions were in the hands of bitter enemies. Across the River Jordan in the east, down on through to the Philistine plain in the west, and in the south where Edom had influence, enemies were watching the small beginnings of a movement which they had interested in hindering and preventing.
- It was needed to offer sacrifices and make atonement to God for their sins and to obtain God's favour for the building of the temple and strengthen their hearts for the sacred work.
- There cannot be a temple without an altar, but there may be an altar without a temple. God meets us at the place of sacrifice, even though there is no House, Temple or Church for His name. They could not immediately have a temple, but they would not be without an altar to have communion God
- Since the seventh month was approaching, they would have been fully aware that the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles in KJV) was approaching (v4) and to keep this Feast they needed the altar to offer their sacrifices on.

Building the altar manifested their faith and devotion and their godly passion to establish the LORD's ways throughout the Holy Land. The altar was the first to be built, and afterward the temple was built around it making the altar the center of all, much like the bloodstained cross of Calvary is our altar and center of all with the global church (i.e., the body of Christ), being built around it. The order of events here teaches us what is essential for communion with God, which is the altar. Sacrifice before God is accepted, whether it stands on a bare hill-top, or standing in the courts of the LORD's House.

Feast of Booths, Burnt Offerings, New Moon and Freewill Offering.

- **Ezra 3:4-6:** And they kept the Feast of Booths (feast of tabernacles in KJV), as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule (custom in KJV), as each day required, ⁵ and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. 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 was not yet laid.

They kept also the Feast of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles in KJV): (v4), from the first day of the seventh month was proclaimed with a blast of trumpets, on this day they revived the Memorial Day of solemn rest, which was a holy convocation in which no ordinary work was to be done and offered burnt offerings. (Lev. 23:23-25). This feast of Booths is most likely mentioned because it ran for seven days, on the first day and the eighth day no ordinary work was to be done (Lev. 23:34-36) and during this feast all native Israelites were to dwell in booths, so that following generations would know that the LORD had made the people of Israel dwell in booths when He brought them out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 23:39-43), which made this feast the most prominent; for it is not probable that they would neglect the day of atonement, which was held on the tenth day (Lev. 23:27).

Added to this the Feast of Booths celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and now they are celebrating their deliverance from Babylon so it is very apt that the Feast of Booths should be the Feast that is mentioned.

According to the rule (custom in KJV), as each day required: (v4), according to the law of Moses (Deut. 16, Lev. 23, Num. 29), which is not limited to the sacrifices offered for the Feast of Booths, but also embraces all the sacrifice offered for the morning and evening offerings and any other sacrifice required during the seventh month.

The foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid: (v6) the restoring of altar was completed; the following verses focus upon the foundations of the temple being laid.

EZRA 3:7

They Gave to the Temple According to the Grant Cyrus Gave.

- **Ezra 3:7:** So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

They gave money: (v7) when the exiles returned contracts were made with the masons and carpenters, and arrangements made with the Phoenicians for timber, but naturally some time elapsed before the stone and timber arrived to begin the building. Israel's own workmen, the masons and carpenters were paid with money to buy stone and timber for the building of the temple. The following verses show that the Sidonians and those of Tyre were paid on the same terms and with the same views as Solomon had done.

- **1 Kings 5:10-11:** So Hiram supplied Solomon with all the timber of cedar and cypress that he desired, ¹¹ while Solomon gave Hiram 20,000 cors of wheat as food for his household, and 20,000 cors of beaten oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year.
- **2 Chronicles 2:2:** And Solomon assigned 70,000 men to bear burdens and 80,000 to quarry in the hill country, and 3,600 to oversee them.

- **2 Chronicles 2:15-16:** Now therefore the wheat and barley, oil and wine, of which my lord has spoken, let him send to his servants. ¹⁶ And we will cut whatever timber you need from Lebanon and bring it to you in rafts by sea to Joppa, so that you may take it up to Jerusalem.”

The inhabitants of these towns preferred provisions more than money, so they were paid in food, drink and oil, because there was a lack of such things in their country.

The sea of Joppa: they cut down cedars at Lebanon and sent them by sea to Joppa, which was the nearest Jewish seaport to Jerusalem, about forty miles inland from it.

- **2 Chronicles 2:16:** And we will cut whatever timber you need from Lebanon and bring it to you in rafts by sea to Joppa, so that you may take it up to Jerusalem.”

According to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia: (v7) Cyrus not only gave leave to the Jews to get cedar wood from Lebanon, but also gave orders to the Zidonians and Tyrians to supply them with it, for they were under his dominion.

- **Ezra 1:1-4:** In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ² “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

EZRA 3:8-9

Levites are Appointed to Supervise the Work of the Temple.

- **Ezra 3:8-9:** Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their kinsmen, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to supervise the work of the house of the LORD. ⁹ And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers, and Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Henadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers.

In the second year: (v8) their second year in the holy land was from the second year of Cyrus conquering Babylon, (B.C. 537). After settling in their towns and villages they came up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month, and then returned to their homes again, most likely leaving a sufficient number of men to clear away the rubble, and prepare things for the beginning of the building of the temple. They then returned in the second month of second year to begin building the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The second month was the same month in which Solomon laid the first foundation (1 Kings 6).

- **1 Kings 6:1-38:** In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD.

It took Solomon seven years to complete the building:

- **1 Kings 6:37-38:** In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid, in the month of Ziv. ³⁸ And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

The Jeshua spoken of here is not the high priest previously mentioned, but Jeshua the Levite mentioned in the following verse:

- **Ezra 2:40:** The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.

He was the head of one of the two Levitical houses which had returned and was appointed to encourage and oversee the workmen.

Appointed the Levites, from twenty years: (v8), ever since David's time the Levites were employed from twenty years of age to do the work for the service of the House of the LORD.

- **1 Chronicles 23:24:** These were the sons of Levi by their fathers' houses, the heads of fathers' houses as they were listed according to the number of the names of the individuals from twenty years old and upward who were to do the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

The following verse show that only seventy-four Levites returned from Babylon.

- **Ezra 2:40:** The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.

Jeshua, Kadmiel, Henadad with their sons and brothers and all Levites twenty years and older and the sons of Judah, were entrusted to act as overseers of the workmen building the House of God and direct and encourage all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity in the work.

EZRA 3:10-11

The Builders Laid the Foundation and the People Praise God.

- **Ezra 3:10-11:** And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel.¹¹ And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love (mercy in KJV) endures forever 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.

The sons of Asaph meaning the descendants of Asaph. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their priestly garments with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the following example of David king of Israel.

- **1 Chronicles 15:16:** David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy.

The priests, with the trumpets, the Levites with cymbals and the singers made up a concert of praise when the laying of the foundation of the temple was completed. The words, "for his steadfast love (mercy in KJV) endures forever," recalls to mind the everlasting song of Psalm one hundred and thirty-six that will never be out of date, and can be sung no matter what our condition may be.

EZRA 3:12-13

Many who had Seen the First House Wept.

- **Ezra 3:12-13:** But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy,¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.

Some suppose the reason those who had seen the first temple wept was because it was much larger than this second temple, but this is not necessarily so, since the following verse show that the second temple was at least equal in size and maybe even larger.

- **1 Kings 6:2:** The house that King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high.
- **Ezra 6:3:** In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices were offered, and let its foundations be retained. Its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits,

Taking a cubit to be around half a metre, Solomon's temple would have been about 30 cubits long 10 metres wide and 15 metres high, while the second temple was around 30 metres high and 30 metres wide. It should also be kept in mind, that only the foundations are in focus here, not the entire temple. A more likely reason that caused those who had seen the foundations of the first House of the LORD to weep would be the fact that Solomon had placed enormously large and very costly stones in the foundations of his temple.

- **1 Kings 7:9-10:** All these were made of costly stones, cut according to measure, sawed with saws, back and front, even from the foundation to the coping, and from the outside to the great court. ¹⁰ The foundation was of costly stones, huge stones, stones of eight and ten cubits.

Due to the lack of prosperity (compared to Solomon's era) at the time of building the second temple such magnificent stones could not be laid in its foundations which means that they would have appeared far inferior to the foundations of the previous temple, but not in size, but in magnificence and beauty. A second reason may have been the fact that they would have been aware that when this new temple was completed it would be lacking those things which formed the great and distinguishing glory of the first, such as the Ark of the Covenant, the shekinah glory and the Urim and Thummim, and that it could not be as richly decorated with gold and silver as the first temple was. This does not mean that second temple was not a very grand and beautiful structure. But no matter how great its material splendour was, it was inferior in this respect to that of Solomon's. Yet the glory of the second far outshone that of the first temple in another and more important way, namely, the receiving within its walls the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world. The prophet Haggai spoke to Zerubbabel the governor of Judah, and to Joshua the high priest, and all the remnant of the people saying, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is, it not as nothing in your eyes, yet now be strong" (Haggai 2:1-4). He then goes on to say:

- **Haggai 2:6-9:** For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷ And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹ The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place, I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts."

The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, carries the following three ideas:

1. The first temple was built with forced labour, the second temple was the voluntary work of the people themselves.
2. The second temple would be more beautiful than the first, because it was to this temple that the promised Messiah the Christ came.
3. The latter glory of this house refers to the glory that will come to the Temple of God when Christ returns to establish his Kingdom on earth.

Herod, the Roman governor of Judea, made extensive modifications which enlarged this second temple; however, it met the same fate as the first and was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

An observant commentator noted the following interesting facts.

- God's word is most and holy and the holiest land in the world is the land of Israel and in the land of Israel the holiest city is Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the holiest place was the Temple, and in the Temple the holiest spot was the Most Holy Place (also called the Holy of Holies)
- Amongst all the people in the world, the holiest is the people of Israel and the holies people amongst them is the tribe of Levi. In the tribe of Levi, the holiest people are the priests and amongst the priest the holiest was the High Priest.
- There are 354 days in the (lunar) year and the holiest amongst these are the holidays and amongst these the highest in holiness is the Sabbath and amongst the Sabbaths, the holiest is the Day of Atonement, the Sabbath of Sabbaths.
- There are seventy languages in the world, the holiest amongst them is Hebrew and holier than all else in this language is the holy Torah (the law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures) (also called the Pentateuch) and in the Torah the holiest part is the Ten Commandments and in the Ten Commandments the holiest of all words is the name of God.
- Once during the year, at a certain hour, on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place and uttered the name of God these four supreme sanctities of the world were joined together one with another. To this day, traditional Jews pray three times a day for the Temple's restoration.

Many wept and many shouted aloud for joy: (v12) the younger generation who had never seen the grandeur of the first temple and therefore could not compare the two, naturally rejoiced to see the completion of the foundation and the beginning of the new temple rise from its ruins shouted aloud for joy at the hope of seeing it finished. But many seventy years of age and over who that had seen the first temple built by Solomon, were able to contrast the two and wept with a loud voice; because they saw that the foundation was not nearly as glorious. They may also have wept because it was being built during a time of unrest in contrast to the time of Solomon's temple being built in a time of peace and the fact they would have been aware that the Ark of the Covenant, the shekinah glory and the Urim and Thummim, would be missing when the temple was completed. This is an error on their part since they should have been looking forward and not backward and greatly rejoicing in the fact that they were free from Babylon's dominion and after seventy years of being without the temple, the generation that had come out were tremendously excited to offer their time, labour and money to rebuild the temple and establish the Jewish faith and the worship of the Lord their God throughout the nation.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.