Devotional Scripture: Heb 10:19-25

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND APPROACH TO LESSON

Key Verse: Ezra 3:4

Commentary from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary
Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
From Life Application Bible Notes
From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

RESTORING THE ALTAR (Ezra 3:1-3)

Restoration requires unity of the people (1-2)

- Christians today can approach the altar in unity because Jesus prayed for the unity of believers (John 17:20-23)
- Christians today can approach the altar in unity because the Holy Spirit provides the power of unity (Eph 4:3)
- Christians today can approach the altar in unity because unity in prayer produces power (Acts 4:24,31-32)
- Christians today can approach the altar in unity because in Jesus all are one (Gal 3:28)
- Christians today should approach the altar in unity because it is commanded (1 Cor 1:10)

Restoration requires overcoming of fear (3)

- Fear can be overcome because Jesus overcame the world (John 16:33)
- Fear can be overcome because there is a reward for overcoming (Rev 2:7)
- Fear can be overcome because of being born of God (1 John 5:4-5)
- Fear can be overcome because in Jesus, Christians are more than conquerors (Rom 8:37)
- Fear can be overcome because Christians do not have a spirit of fear, but of sonship (Rom 8:15)
- Fear can be overcome because godly love drives out fear (1 John 4:18)

RESTORING THE OFFERINGS (Ezra 3:4-5)

Restoration requires focus on obedience to God's Word (4)

- Obedience to God's Word pleases God (1 John 3:22)
- Obedience to God's Word results in my being blameless before God (Ps 119:1)
- Obedience to God's Word through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:4-7)
- Obedience to God's Word because of the certainty of God's word (2 Peter 1:19)

Restoration requires offerings to the Lord (5)

- Everyone who is willing should bring an offering to God (Ex 35:5)
- Sharing with others is considered a pleasing offering to God (Heb 13:16)
- The best offering to God is ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1)
- The most important offering to God is to love Him with all that we have (Mark 12:33)

RESTORING THE FOUNDATION (Ezra 3:6-7)

Restoring the foundation requires recognition of any problems (6)

- Mature use of God's Word trains to distinguish problems (Heb 5:14)
- The Church was setup to train Christians so that they would not be deceived into problems (Eph 4:11-14)
- Jesus warns Christians to watch and pray so that they will recognize problems (Matt 26:41)
- The Bible warns to be alert, that Satan is always prowling looking to get everyone into trouble (1 Peter 5:8)

Restoring the foundation requires provisions given to solve the problem (7)

- God gave His Word to provide solutions to problems (2 Tim 3:16)
God inspired everything that was written by His people in the past to teach and encourage about life's problems (Rom 15:4)
God's grace is given to teach us to say "No" to ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12)
God's divine power is given so that Christians have everything needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM STEVEN COLE
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR
Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews the steps in which Joyful Worship is Restored. The study's aim is to study the timeless worship spiritual principles that apply to us today. The study's application is to restore the joy of the Lord to our worship by applying the worship principles found in our lesson as we obey and honor God.

Key Verse: Ezra 3:4

4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.

Commentary from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Festival of Tabernacles goes by other names, and it’s easy to get confused. The first mention of this feast in the Bible calls it the Festival of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16b). It takes place in the fall at the end of the harvest season. This feast is sometimes referred to as the Festival of Booths. Leviticus 23:33-43 instructs the Israelites to use tree branches to construct “temporary shelters,” which older versions of the Bible call “booths.” The people are to live in them during the celebration, hence the name Festival of Booths. The purpose of living in these makeshift structures is to remind the people that their ancestors lived in tents during the 40 years of the wilderness wanderings. This event, then, is something like a seven-day campout, with feasting every day. It is a day for everyone to rejoice—the widows, orphans, Levites, and foreigners (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). The harvest is over, and it is a time to celebrate. The emphasis here, however, is on the altar. Detailed instructions regarding the types of sacrificial offerings that are to be made throughout the feast are found in Numbers 29:12-39. The altar has been built, and the people are experiencing the joy that comes from being able to worship the Lord again in the promised land.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

This feast was a reminder of how God had provided for the Israelites in all their needs as they marched away from Egypt toward the land that God had promised, and of how God had provided for all their needs during the wilderness journey. God had established this feast as a perpetual reminder that the Israelites were strangers and pilgrims on this earth. They would also recall that they never planted or had a harvest during their journey but that God had always supplied all their needs by His miraculous power. They were to remember they were just passing through and had not yet come to the land of God's promise. They were only strangers and pilgrims as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. In remembering the heroes of faith, the writer of the book of Hebrews made mention of this: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (11:13). This feast was a celebration of the 'harvest. However, at the time Moses was giving the law to God's people, they were still on their wilderness journey. By faith they were seeing the joy of God's promise as already fulfilled. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6). As the Israelites moved through the wilderness to a land that they had never seen, they still believed God would fulfill His promise to give them a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8). We too must stand faithful to the living relationship we have with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I wilt pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (John 14:15-16). This feast was also a reminder of Israel's continual need for God's mercy and forgiveness of sins. They "offered the daily burnt offerings by number" (Ezra 3:4). Today we need not have any sacrifice other than that which God has given us in His Son, Jesus Christ. "But this man (Jesus), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). Now our hope is in a promised land not of this world but of one that is yet to come. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the
heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). God’s people must always have hope—not in the temporal things of this world but in the treasures that are eternal and kept by the promises of God. While Israel was continually reminded by the Feast of Tabernacles, Christians move on in faith in God’s continuing promises that He “shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). No matter whether He is telling Israel or the Christians of today that they should be faithful, God looks for obedience in the hearts of His people.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson was adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

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Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The book of Isaiah provided the texts for the first four lessons this quarter, and that prophet’s ministry came to an end in about 700 BC. The lesson for today is from the first part of the book of Ezra, and the events described took place about 165 years later. Isaiah provides several fascinating prophecies that find their fulfillments in the early chapters of the book of Ezra. Assyria was the world superpower during Isaiah’s day. But he prophesied that it would be Babylon that would take captives from Judah (Isaiah 39:6, 7). Babylon was just a city of the Assyrian Empire when Isaiah wrote, but that status was to change. Nebuchadnezzar and his allies destroyed Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in 612 BC. By defeating the Egyptians in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar established what was known as the neo-Babylonian Empire. The people of Judah were not compliant subjects, however, and Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC (see 2 Kings 25). That was over a century after the time that Isaiah wrote. At the time when Babylon was just a city, Isaiah had prophesied that captive Israelites would return from there, and it all came to pass. An amazing prophecy in Isaiah is that of the specific name of the person who was to capture Babylon: King Cyrus the Great (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13). Isaiah also predicted that Cyrus would declare that the temple would be rebuilt. The troops of Cyrus captured Babylon in October of 539 BC. Ezra 1:2 (which repeats the last verse of 2 Chronicles) notes Cyrus’s authorization to rebuild the temple. His declaration is usually dated in the spring of 538 BC, at the annual New Year’s festival in Babylon. The Cyrus Cylinder, found in 1879, is an important archaeological discovery in this regard. This artifact does not mention Judah, but it has the actual decree of Cyrus that all captured idols were to take residence again in their respective dwellings. The Israelites could not take a statue of their God since there wasn’t any, but they could take vessels to the temple that they planned to rebuild. Ezra 1 tells us that this is what they did, which fulfilled the prophecy in Jeremiah 27:21, 22, given about 597 BC. Ezra 2:64, 65 reveals that there were 49,897 in the first wave of exiles who made the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, a trip of 880 miles. The primary purpose of the journey was spiritual: to rebuild the temple in order to renew the worship and rituals that had been given through Moses. The year of the return is one of the mysteries of history. The dates suggested by scholars range from 538 to 533 BC; we will use the date of 538. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, there remained no nation of Judah, no capital city of Jerusalem, and no
temple. Normally it would be impossible for a nation to come into existence again after an absence of 50 years. God was in this situation, however, and the impossible became a reality. As Jeremiah stated, nothing is too difficult for God (Jeremiah 32:17).

From Life Application Bible Notes

3:2, 3 The Jews built the altar as one of their first official acts. It symbolized God’s presence and protection. It also demonstrated their purpose as a nation and their commitment to serve God alone. Zerubbabel sacrificed burnt offerings as the law of Moses instructed (Leviticus 1-7). The sacrifices were essential because they demonstrated that the people were seeking God’s guidance, rededicating themselves to living as he commanded, and daily asking him to forgive their sins.

3:3 The Jews were afraid they were going to be attacked by the surrounding people—a mixed group whose ancestors had been conquered by the Assyrians. Foreigners had been forced to resettle in the northern kingdom of Israel after Israel was defeated and her people taken captive in 722 B.C. (4:1, 2). This resettlement procedure was a common tactic of the Assyrians to prevent strong nationalistic uprisings by conquered peoples. Some of the resettled people in Israel had migrated south near Jerusalem, and they may have thought the returning exiles threatened their claim on the land.

3:4 The Festival of Shelters lasted seven days. During this time the people lived in temporary dwellings (tents, booths, lean-tos) as their ancestors had done years before as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. The festival reminded the people of God’s past protection and guidance in the wilderness and of his continued love for them. The Festival of Shelters is described in detail in Leviticus 23:33-36. 3:5 Almost immediately after arriving in the new land, the returning exiles built an altar. The people began worshiping God through sacrifices even before the Temple foundation was laid. After many years in captivity, they had learned their lesson—they knew that God does not offer special protection to people who ignore him. They had been carried off by the Babylonians when they were relatively strong; here they were few, weak, and surrounded by enemies. If ever they needed to rely on God’s power, it was at this time. They realized the importance of obeying God from the heart, and not merely out of habit. If we want God’s help when we undertake large tasks, we must make staying close to him our top priority.

3:5 These sacrifices were originally set up under the law of Moses in Leviticus 1 and 6:8-13. The festivals are described in Leviticus 23. At the beginning of every month, they held a special observance (Numbers 10:10).

3:7 When Solomon built the first Temple (2 Chronicles 2), he also exchanged food and olive oil—plentiful resources in Israel—for wood, a resource Israel lacked. The wood came from Tyre and Sidon that time, too.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Only when something precious is taken away from us do we appreciate its true value. Family keepsakes lie neglected until they are destroyed by fire or flood; only then do their owners mourn the loss of these treasures. Sadly, the same principle holds true or the spiritual privileges we enjoy. Christians in free countries have access to Bibles, worship services, and open propagation of their faith. But those who live under repressive conditions eagerly grasp the few Bibles they can get and cherish their times of corporate worship. They are even willing to risk their lives for them. The Hebrews had been exiled to Babylon for their neglect and abuse of worship of the Lord. Their temple had been destroyed. Only then did they treasure the heritage they had despised. But now some of them had been permitted to return. As this week’s lesson reveals, they lost no time restoring true worship. We have seen in previous lessons that our worship can be worthless to God. It can also be less than worthwhile to people; it may even seem boring to some. Many people today attend services and perform acts of worship out of a sense of duty or obligation. They may hope to gain favor with God through their worship activities. We may rightly conclude that if our worship is worthless to God, it will also be worthless to us. People often begin again to worship God from the heart out of desperation. Israel was desperate, as seen in this week’s lesson. They had been allowed to come back to the Promised Land from captivity in Persia. They were under great stress from their enemies who lived in the land. They had the challenge of establishing a city and sustaining themselves agriculturally and financially. When they began to honor the Lord by restoring the prescribed worship, they moved from desperation to joyful worship.
Major Theme Analysis

Restoring the Altar (Ezra 3:1-3)

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.
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.
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.

Restoration requires unity of the people (1-2)

*Christians today can approach the altar in unity because Jesus prayed for the unity of believers* (John 17:20-23)

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

*Christians today can approach the altar in unity because the Holy Spirit provides the power of unity* (Eph 4:3)

3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

*Christians today can approach the altar in unity because unity in prayer produces power* (Acts 4:24,31-32)

24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. 32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

*Christians today can approach the altar in unity because in Jesus all are one* (Gal 3:28)

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

*Christians today should approach the altar in unity because it is commanded* (1 Cor 1:10)

10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Restoration requires overcoming of fear (3)

*Fear can be overcome because Jesus overcame the world* (John 16:33)

33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

*Fear can be overcome because there is a reward for overcoming* (Rev 2:7)

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
Fear can be overcome because of being born of God (1 John 5:4-5)

4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Fear can be overcome because in Jesus, Christians are more than conquerors (Rom 8:37)

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Fear can be overcome because Christians do not have a spirit of fear, but of sonship (Rom 8:15)

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Fear can be overcome because godly love drives out fear (1 John 4:18)

18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Restoring the Offerings (Ezra 3:4-5)

4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.
5 Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord.

Restoration requires focus on obedience to God's Word (4)

Obedience to God's Word pleases God (1 John 3:22)

22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Obedience to God's Word results in my being blameless before God (Ps 119:1)

119 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.

Obedience to God's Word through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:4-7)

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

Obedience to God's Word because of the certainty of God's word (2 Peter 1:19)

19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Restoration requires offerings to the Lord (5)

Everyone who is willing should bring an offering to God (Ex 35:5)

5 From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze;

Sharing with others is considered a pleasing offering to God (Heb 13:16)

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
The best offering to God is ourselves as a living sacrifice  (Rom 12:1)

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

The most important offering to God is to love Him with all that we have  (Mark 12:33)

33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Restoring the Foundation (Ezra 3:6-7)

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.

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.

Restoring the foundation requires recognition of any problems (6)

Mature use of God's Word trains to distinguish problems  (Heb 5:14)

14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The Church was setup to train Christians so that they would not be deceived into problems  (Eph 4:11-14)

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Jesus warns Christians to watch and pray so that they will recognize problems  (Matt 26:41)

41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

The Bible warns to be alert, that Satan is always prowling looking to get everyone into trouble  (1 Peter 5:8)

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Restoring the foundation requires provisions given to solve the problem (7)

God gave His Word to provide solutions to problems  (2 Tim 3:16)

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

God inspired everything that was written by His people in the past to teach and encourage about life's problems (Rom 15:4)

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
God's grace is given to teach us to say "No" to ungodliness  (Titus 2:11-12)

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age

God's divine power is given so that Christians have everything needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Steven Cole

While their new beginning of rebuilding the altar was good, something major was still missing: They had not yet laid the foundation for the temple. These verses contain three references to the temple (3:6, 9, 10) and five where it is called the Lord’s house (3:8 [2x], 11, 12 [2x]). The temple or house of the Lord was the place where He dwelled among His people and manifested His glory. His people went there to offer sacrifices for forgiveness of sins and for thanksgiving for His goodness to them. It was a place of corporate celebration, where all Israel gathered three times a year for the feasts of Passover (March/ April), Pentecost (May/June), and Tabernacles (or Booths; September/ October). The restored nation could not properly worship God until they rebuilt His house. The remarkable thing is that we as God’s church are now His temple or house, where He dwells in us and walks among us (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22)! The building where we meet is not God’s house; it is only the place where God’s house gathers for worship. God’s house or temple can meet in private homes or in a park or a barn or a cathedral. But we need to remember that the place isn’t sacred; the people are sacred! When even two or three of God’s people gather in the name of Jesus, He is there in their midst (Matt. 18:20). Note first that both personal and corporate worship focus on God and affirm by faith His goodness and covenant love (3:11). Worship requires skillful musicians (3:10), but if the focus is on them, you’re into entertainment, not worship. Worship praises the Lord, saying, “For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.” Remember, these people had just come through 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Many had lost loved ones, as well as possessions and homes, when Jerusalem fell. If they had been focused on themselves, they would have complained and impugned the goodness of God. But by faith they knew that the Lord had afflicted them out of His goodness (Ps. 119:67, 71). So now they could sing of His goodness and covenant love toward His people. Second, notice that these people expressed their emotions in their praises. They shouted for joy and it was a loud shout (3:12-13). Some of us non-charismatics are a bit too restrained in our worship. Certainly there is the danger of emotion pumped up by sentimental tunes sung over and over until they produce the desired state of ecstasy. That is wrong. But if our focus is on our great, faithful, loving, covenant-keeping God and the truth of His Word, it should affect our emotions! How can we not be moved when we think on His abundant grace?

(Adapted from Sermon notes by Pastor Steven J. Cole, Flagstaff Christian Fellowship www.fcfonline.org)

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. The work of God often requires that the people of God be fully united (Ezra 3:1)
2. Spiritual leaders should always be the first to take up any spiritual work (vs. 2)
3. Never allow fear of others to keep you from doing God’s will immediately and fully (vs. 3)
4. Obedience to God requires full compliance, even in the smallest details (vs. 4-5)
5. Worship that pleases God is worship offered according to His plan (vs. 6)
6. How we use our resources often indicates what or whom we truly worship (vs. 7)