

The Temple Restored

Ezra 3:8-13

SS Lesson for 07/07/2013

Devotional Scripture: John 4:20-26

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson examines rebuilding and how this rebuilding of the foundation led to overwhelming worship experience. The **study's aim** is to emphasize how working together to restore the foundation of our faith can lead to a better spiritual worship. The **study's application** is to follow the example of the returning exiles by letting the preparation for worship, which is like a rebuilding project, build into a joyful and triumphant worship of God.

Key Verse: Ezra 3:11

11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Commentary from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

This is a great day for the Jews who have made the trip from Babylon! They can see their dreams being fulfilled one step at a time. The altar of burnt offerings was put into use the previous fall (last week's lesson), and now the foundation of the house of the Lord is finished. The praise he is good; his love toward Israel endures forever is very similar to what was voiced on two earlier occasions. One was when the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:34); the other was at the dedication of the first temple (2 Chronicles 5:13). The fulfillment of a prophecy by Jeremiah should also be mentioned. That prophet was a prisoner by his own people in the days just before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem (Jeremiah 33:1). The Lord assured him that even though the city would become desolate, a time would come when praises again would be heard; words very similar to those in the verse before us are given in Jeremiah 33:11. The type of singing that is being done is usually thought to be antiphonal—when one choir sings and another choir answers (compare Deuteronomy 11:29; Joshua 8:33). The word translated sang can take the meaning “to answer” in this regard. Psalm 136 is often cited as demonstrating this type of singing, for the same refrain occurs in all 26 verses.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Nothing is mentioned about the actual process of laying the temple foundation or the length of time involved. This is because the focus was on the results of this project on that community of people who had braved the rugged conditions. They were following the command of Cyrus but, more importantly, they were following the command of their God with whom they were in covenant. As the foundation... was laid the people were careful to follow in the traditions of their forefathers who had been rightly related to God under the Mosaic Covenant. As the priests... and the Levites led the dedication service for the temple's foundations, they did the things that were prescribed by David. The order followed was the same as when David brought the ark to Jerusalem. At that time priests blew trumpets and Asaph sounded cymbals (1 Chron. 16:5-6). Here the priests blew trumpets and sons (descendants) of Asaph played the cymbals. The order was also similar to the time when the ark was brought to the temple in Solomon's day (2 Chron. 5:12-13), when Asaph and others played cymbals, harps, and lyres; and the priests blew trumpets. In this rebuilding service the priests and Levites sang, He is good; His love to Israel endures forever, words almost identical to the song of praise in 2 Chronicles 5:13 (cf. Ps. 136:1). This song of praise is highly significant for by it the religious leaders were acknowledging that Yahweh had again established His loving protection over the nation. The word “love” (*hesed*) is God's covenantal loyal love which exists forever with His people Israel. Now that the temple worship was being reestablished, the people again recognized the commitment of God's unending covenantal love.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

People shout for many reasons—for danger, for pain, and in our text, for joy. Israel's captors had enslaved God's people for over seventy years as Jeremiah had prophesied. "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer. 29:10). Some if not most of the people who were in Jerusalem at this time would not have seen the temple and its glory. But they no doubt would have listened with excitement as the elders spoke of its glory and its holy beauty. The temple could be nowhere but in Jerusalem, for God had declared it to be the place where Israel would come before the Lord with their offerings and gifts. It was the place where offerings were to be given and where the high priest would bring them before God: "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (Ps. 132:13-14). Sometimes we need to feel the pain before we can appreciate the blessing. Pain tells us something is wrong and we need to make some kind of adjustment to relieve it. For example, the body hurts because there is a sickness in it. If a child never felt the pain of correction, he would continue doing the wrong thing. God allows pain when we stray from His love and seek things that are harmful to our spiritual life. This was the reason Israel was denied access to the temple for so long. "Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it" (Jer. 6:19). Now the waiting was over, and God's Word was being fulfilled. The Israelites were indeed coming home to the land that God had promised them. The waiting had been fulfilled. Just as a child, having been promised a family holiday trip on the following morning, would hardly be able to sleep the night before because of the excitement, so Christians also look forward to the coming of our King, when all tears will finally be dried and pain and suffering will be no more (Rev. 7:17). God never forgets His own. He desires only that they be brought to a fuller understanding of infinite love and forgiveness. When the prodigal son wandered away from his father's care and lost all his inheritance, the father's love never diminished. The father looked down the lane, awaiting his son's return. "He arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Our Heavenly Father also waits for the wayward child's return. When he does come home, shouting and joy are heard in the camp of the Lord, and heaven sings: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

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.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
8	Began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord	Preparation for the Restoration
11	They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD	Celebrating the Restoration

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

He was a college student, and his summer job became a learning experience. He had been accepted as a worker for a highway department, and he was assigned to one of the bridge crews. One day, the men of the crew traveled to the site of the bridge that they were ready to build. With the old structure already removed, the men made their way down the banks to the stream bed. The work was ready to begin—way down there—and the goal was to build a bridge that would be about 15 feet above them—way up there!

The young man simply did as he was instructed. The bridge floor would be poured “up there” some day, but first there was much work to be done below the surface of the ground. It was essential to have a solid foundation that would provide support for the bridge. Such a foundation included two abutments anchored deep in the ground and “wings” that deflected water away from the abutments and back into the streambed. When the bridge was finished, the student began to understand the reasons behind all the preliminary work. The necessity of the early work “down there” made sense; the stability of the new structure depended on the foundation—all the work in the ground that had to be completed before the superstructure could be built. Today’s text takes us back to certain events surrounding a foundation that was laid centuries before the bridge in this story.

One word summarizes the reason why the nation of Judah had to experience captivity in Babylon. The word is disobedience! One word is also behind what led to their disobedience. That word is idolatry, for the people had had a fascination with it. The Israelites seemed determined to want a pluralistic religion that involved the one true God alongside other, fictitious gods. In Moses’ farewell addresses, he warned the nation of the negative consequences for disobedience: idolatry would cause them to be scattered among the nations. From those distant places they would decide to seek the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:25-30; 30:1-3), and this is what they did. While in Babylon, almost 900 miles from home, the captives finally realized that God meant what he said. The temple had been destroyed, and they knew the reason was their disobedience to God. The prophets had said that there would be a return, and many people were ready to make the trip back. When they returned, they planned to build a new temple. It might not be as glorious as the one that Solomon had built, but they knew that acceptable worship for them could be complete only by having a temple that they would dedicate to God. It is generally true that it took the Babylonian captivity to cure the people of idolatry. There would be minor exceptions, but it was never again the problem it once was

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

It is not possible for us Christians to understand fully what the temple meant to Israel. From the New Testament we understand that the true dwelling place of God is in and among His people (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22). God is in our buildings when His Spirit-indwelt people are there to worship. But God revealed Himself to Israel in stages, and these included the temple as the place of His presence. At Sinai, He prescribed a way for them to know He was among them—the tabernacle (Exod. 25:8-9). When it was dedicated, the Lord's glory filled it. This tent structure accompanied Israel. David longed to build a more permanent dwelling for the Lord, but only during Solomon's reign was this accomplished. It became the centerpiece of Israel's identity. We can therefore hardly imagine their devastation and grief when foreigners pillaged the temple of all its sacred objects and eventually destroyed it. Now, however, they had the opportunity to rebuild it. As this week's text reveals, it was a time of great joy. In preparing a lesson from historical material, we must remember that the Scriptures were written for our instruction (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16). As God's people, we are much the same today as were His people in our lesson text. God's manner of dealing with them and His instructions to them are therefore of great practical value to us as well. What we are trying to do here is discern the timeless principles God is teaching us just as He taught the Israelites in their day and situation. The captives had been back in the Promised Land for just over a year. They had experienced the seasons of planting and harvest and had seen the faithfulness of the Lord in providing for them. Now it was time to begin the real reason for their return to the land: rebuilding the temple and restoring the worship of Almighty God, the God of the Jews. The joy of the Lord was to be their strength. But how could they experience it without a temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and all that God had ordained through Moses? All these things needed to be established and set in motion. It was time to return to the basics, time to start rebuilding the temple. In the life of a Christian or in the life of a church, it is sometimes necessary to start over. Just as the Jews had been carried away into captivity because of their sin, so too a Christian may experience a period of isolation, a time when God seems far away and His joy in our lives is not present. There is always a starting point. For the Jews in our text, it was necessary to rebuild the temple. For a Christian or congregation today, revival may be necessary. We must go back to the basics—back to the Cross—and start over.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Preparation for the Restoration (Ezra 3:8-9)

8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord.

9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

Selection of the overseers (8)

A prerequisite of the selection of leaders is prayer and fasting (Acts 13:3)

3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

A prerequisite of the selection of leaders is ensure they are kind and able to teach (2 Timothy 2:24)

24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

A prerequisite of the selection of leaders is testing (1 Tim 3:10)

10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

A prerequisite of the selection of leaders is they must be qualified (2 Tim 2:2)

2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

A prerequisite of the selection of leaders is their trustworthiness in sound doctrine (Titus 1:7-9)

7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Unity of the overseers (9)

Unity to follow Jesus and glorify God (Rom 15:5-6)

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unity to show others the love of God (John 17:23)

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.

Unity through being concerned for each other (1 Cor 12:25-26)

25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Unity through fellowship (Phil 2:1-4)

2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Unity through being of one body and calling (Eph 4:4-6)

4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Unity through love (Col 3:14)

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Celebrating the Restoration (Ezra 3:10-13)

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

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

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

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

Significance of Asaph (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

The mention of **Asaph** and *David* has a certain significance: when David moved the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, it was **Asaph** who sounded the *cymbals* (1 Chronicles 16:5). That was about 1000 B.C. It is now over 450 years later, and the sons of **Asaph** are still playing the cymbals! Twelve of the psalms have **Asaph** in the superscriptions as the author, so he must have been a capable musician.

Methods of celebration (10)

Celebrate! (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

C. S. Lewis once commented on the lack of emotion in the worship of his denomination. He said, "We have a terrible concern about good taste." Too many are more concerned with what looks good to others than with what looks good to God. King David didn't make that mistake. On the day the ark of God returned to Jerusalem, King David was a man caught up in worship. His celebration included leaping and dancing and music and praise and joy (2 Samuel 6). **Michal**, David's wife, didn't like it, but God did. I remember the first time I saw people raising their hands in worship. It shocked me. I wondered, "What are they doing? Is the roof leaking?" I felt a mild revulsion, but my revulsion had nothing to do with their worship. Since then I have learned the value of upraised hands in praise. This spirit of surrender and praise is something God encourages and desires. Don't be concerned with pleasing people. Please God. David's attitude should be our own. When we worship we need to get our eyes off people and get our eyes on God. Our worship is not to be judged by people, but by the Master. **Ezra 3:11** records ancient Israel's return to the spirit and action of David in worship. Celebration was alive in the hearts of the people of

God. Is that spirit of celebration alive in you? To come into his presence is to enter into joy. We are the beloved of the Father. He delights and takes pleasure in our praise. Let's celebrate!

Use of instruments (Ps 150:3-6)

3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, 4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. 6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Singing (Ps 30:4)

4 Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name.

Shouting (Ps 66:1-2)

1 Shout with joy to God, all the earth! 2 Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!

Weeping (Ps 126:5-6)

5 Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. 6 He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Reasons for the celebration (11)

God is good

Because Christians can take refuge in Him (Ps 34:8)

8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Because God's love endures forever (Ps 106:1)

Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

God is full of lovingkindness

God's lovingkindness is always before man's eyes (Ps 26:3)

3 For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth.

God's lovingkindness is magnified in His Word (Ps 138:2)

2 I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

God provides

God can provide the satisfaction of desires of every living thing (Ps 145:16)

16 You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

God who provides food can also provide anything else I need (2 Cor 9:10)

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

God can provide and meet all my needs (Phil 4:19)

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

God can provide all my wants (Ps 23:1)

23:1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

God can provide all things, if I seek His kingdom first (Luke 12:31)

31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

God can provide all things at all times for good work (2 Cor 9:8)

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Results of the celebration (12-13)

Joy (Ps 28:7)

7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.

Sadness (Ps 119:136)

136 Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

Effecting others (Matt 5:16)

16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Steven Cole

The various leaders “stood united” (3:9) with one another to oversee the workers who were rebuilding the temple. Unity was essential because of the enemy outside that would shortly threaten and shut down the work. The leaders wisely delegated the work so that it did not fall on just a few. Any significant work for God is the work of many members working together in harmony, under godly leaders. When the enemy wants to stop such a work, often he disrupts the unity. When that happens (as has happened here in the past few months), there are several dangers. Leaders can be tempted to compromise important truth for the sake of preserving unity, but this always leads to greater disaster down the line because it undermines God’s Word. Leaders also can react in the flesh by lashing out in anger or personal counter-attacks, thus tarnishing their qualifications as spiritual leaders. Workers can use the occasion to vent their frustration against the leaders because of personal issues that they feel have not been properly addressed. Workers also can form factions based on friendships and other emotional issues, rather than submitting to the God-ordained leaders. Gossip and false rumors can quickly spread through the body because people listen to those who are disgruntled and do not go directly to the source to ascertain the truth. All in all, Satan has a heyday and many of the Lord’s people end up wounded. So we must be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, while striving to attain to the unity of the faith that comes with spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:3, 13).

The young people were thrilled as they saw the foundation of the temple laid. All they had ever known was Babylon and its temples for idols. Here they were, back in the land of promise, in the city of God’s choosing, and the foundation for the Lord’s house was laid! They had never seen anything like it! But the old timers had seen something far greater: Solomon’s Temple in all its golden glory. For them, this puny foundation amidst the rubble and broken down walls of Jerusalem was pitiful. So while the young men shouted for joy, the old men wept in grief. You couldn’t tell who was laughing and who was crying, except that the division pretty much fell along age lines. There were two dangers, as there always are in these matters. The old guys could have discouraged the younger men from this new beginning. That would have been tragic. They had to start somewhere, and even though this new beginning didn’t match the former glory, it was a start, and it was where God was now working. The other danger was that the young guys could have ignored the wisdom and experience of the old guys, in which case they would have made more mistakes and repeated the failures of the past. The older folks needed the enthusiasm, energy, and joy of the younger folks, and the younger folks needed the wisdom, maturity, and experience of the older folks.

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

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Doing the work of God does not preclude proper preparation and organization (Ezra 3:8)
2. God's work requires God's people to be united in purpose and goal (Ezra 3:9; cf. Phil. 2:2)
3. Praise to God should be the daily activity and response of every believer (Ezra 3:10)
4. While doing God's work, be sure to take time to celebrate His faithfulness (vs. 11)
5. Never allow the memories of the past to overshadow God's present blessings (vs. 12)
6. The praise of God's people should often reach the ears of those around them (vs. 13)