

Dedicating the Temple with Joy

Ezra 6:13-22

SS Lesson for 07/14/2013

Devotional Scripture: 2 Chron 6:12-42

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews the activities and joyful participation of the people in the **Dedication of the Temple**. The **study's aim** is to discover the spiritual principles involved in the history of God's work with His people. The **study's application** is to purify our lives and separate ourselves from the spiritual filthiness around us, so that we will be able to worship the Lord in purity, spirit and truth. We will then receive the joy of the Lord.

Key Verse: Ezra 6:16

16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

Commentary from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The dedication of the house of God is a joyous occasion for all the people of Israel! The ones who left Babylon to come back had first dedicated themselves to endure the travel and toil. Things have not gone just as they had wished, but the wait is worth it. The celebration when the foundation was laid some two decades prior included the sounds of weeping (Ezra 3:12, 13, last week's lesson). Nothing is said about any such emotion this time, but there are probably some who have moments of quiet reflection about family members who have died in the years since the return, family members who did not live to see this milestone

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

After the temple was finished, it was then dedicated. The comparatively small number of animals sacrificed (100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 male lambs, and 12 male goats) contrasted sharply with the tremendous amount sacrificed by Solomon at the dedication of the first temple (22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats; 1 Kings 8:63). This points up the comparative poverty of the postexilic community. The 12 goats for the sin offering show that the postexilic community still envisioned a unified Israel consisting of all 12 tribes even though only 2 had survived with any strength. The leaders of the sacrificial system—the priests and the Levites—were installed... according to... the Book of Moses, that is, according to that portion of the Law in which the legal system is described—in parts of Leviticus and Numbers (Lev. 8; Num. 3:5-10; 8:5-14). One of the motifs of Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles is that the postexilic community was under the leadership of godly men who were steeped in the Scriptures and attempted to do everything according to the Law. This shows that they had learned from the Exile that God's people suffer if they do not live up to their covenantal obligations.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

This was a very special day for God's people. They would see the temple. Something that they had only heard about was now a reality. Once more the glory of God would descend upon the mercy seat and receive the offerings of His people. Of course, they would remember Solomon's prayer to God concerning the chastisement of the people: "When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers" (1 Kings 8:33-34). Now they were living in the joy of God's forgiveness and could praise Him once again in the house of God as they had before the Captivity. God is a forgiving God and takes no pleasure in punishing anyone, but He reaches out to His children in love and compassion. The Word of God speaks often about the joy, not the sorrow, of the Lord. Before the tabernacle was built, the ark of God was not where it belonged. With joy and gladness David brought it to its rightful place again. "So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obed-edom with

joy" (1 Chron. 15:25). God's house is a very special place, and He will not allow it to be used in any way other than for His glory. When Jesus entered the temple, He witnessed the disrespect of God's house by those who had made it a place of merchandise. In His wrath, He spoke out against it: "[He] said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:13). Now the house of God is where God's people are. They are holy vessels in whom Christ lives. Christians now celebrate continually the joy of His presence. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The joy of Christians does not rest on circumstances but on the presence of God within them. God is ever present with us. He is the authority of the Christian's heart. Even when in custody, the Apostle Paul could rejoice because he knew God would always be there for him, no matter where that might be. As Paul wrote from his imprisonment, he could assure the church that it was God's purpose and design for him to be there. "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). The purpose of the church is for Christians to gather together, especially on the Lord's Day, to celebrate God's presence. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Wherever the Christian may find himself, he is never far away from the love of God, for God lives in him.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson was adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
15	Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius	Dedication of Provisions and Completion
17	And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God	Dedication Through Offerings and Assignments
19	And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.	Dedication Through Observance of Passover

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The lesson today continues the account of people who bravely made the journey to a very special place—Jerusalem. It was in Jerusalem where the temple had been built, and it was only there that they could obey many of the ordinances given by Moses. Jerusalem was indeed a very special place! We must know two things in order to interpret the book of Ezra correctly. The first is that the book has two major parts: chapters 1–6 and chapters 7–10. The first section describes the events associated with the first return from Babylon to Jerusalem. The book begins with the decree of Cyrus that permitted the return, and this decree was perhaps given in the spring of 538 BC. Ezra 6 concludes the first section as it describes the completion of the temple 23 years later. The final four chapters of the book of Ezra provide information about a second return to Jerusalem that Ezra himself led in about 458 BC. Events associated with this second return are subjects of the next two lessons. The second important factor for understanding the book of Ezra is to recognize that much of Ezra 4 is a parenthesis. Ezra 4:1-5 tells how opposition to the building efforts in Jerusalem became very intense. The result was that the rebuilding of the temple came to a halt. The parenthesis of Ezra 4:6-23 indicates the continuation of this hostility, primarily during the reigns of two future kings: Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus, reigned 485–465 BC) and his son Artaxerxes (reigned 465–425 BC). Xerxes was the king who

became the husband of Esther. Artaxerxes was the Persian king in the days of both Ezra and Nehemiah. After the parenthesis, the narrative returns to the time of Darius (reigned 522–486 BC). Something special happened on August 29, 520 BC: the Lord sent a message of rebuke and challenge through Haggai the prophet (Haggai 1:1). “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” (1:4). While making sure their own houses were comfortable, the people were ignoring the sad state of God’s temple! The message produced positive and almost immediate results. Slightly over three weeks later, on September 21, the work on the temple began again (1:14, 15). In February of 519 BC, another prophet provided additional encouragement with these words: “My house will be rebuilt” (Zechariah 1:7, 16). Both Haggai and Zechariah are cited in Ezra 5:1, 2 as being the prophets who stimulated Joshua (also known as Jeshua) and Zerubbabel to resume their leadership roles in completing the house of God.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Many of us were brought up with the motto "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." We have applied this adage in schoolwork, sports, courtship, employment, and a variety of other endeavors. Sometimes we eventually succeed; sometimes we do not. But we work with the assumption that failure is not inevitable. The returned exiles to Judah had to learn the importance of a second try. The original group who returned under Zerubbabel's leadership had much reason for optimism. They had quickly rebuilt their altar of sacrifice and laid the foundation of the temple. But their progress had come to a grinding halt when local adversaries, having been excluded from the project, began to oppose them. Construction stopped for at least sixteen years. But this week's lesson reveals how, when given a second "try," the Jews succeeded in their task.

It is probably not often in our experience that we can with certainty observe and discern the hand of God at work in human history. The forces of evil and darkness seem so eager, so capable of oppressing and destroying good people and good intentions. God can and often does intervene and change the minds of ungodly people so that they carry out His will. He coordinates this with His leading of His own people, so that all history can be viewed as "His-story," if we know and understand what is really happening and where it is all headed. When God is at work and we cooperate with Him, God will be glorified, and we will experience the joy that He alone can give. Seeking joy in and of itself will result in the same frustration as all other entirely human endeavors. Seeking God's will and unreservedly following Him will result in a right relationship with Him and the benefits He alone can design and accomplish.

Major Theme Analysis

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

Dedication of Provisions and Completion (Ezra 6:13-15)

13 Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent.

14 So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

Provision of God's providential care (13)

Providential care over life (Job 34:14-15)

14 If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, 15 all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust.

Providential care over of all destiny (Ps 135:6-7)

6 The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. 7 He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

Providential care over creation (Amos 4:13)

13 He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth — the Lord God Almighty is his name.

Providential care over all authority (Matt 28:18)

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Providential care over time and places (1 Cor 12:18)

18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Provision of joy through productivity (14)

Productivity because of fearing God (Ps 128:1-2)

128 Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

Productivity that results in rewards from God (1 Cor 3:8)

8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

Productivity through giving all of one's strength to the work of God (1 Cor 15:58)

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Productivity through work produced in love and faith (1 Thess 1:3)

3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Productivity from God because He is the one who establishes the work of man's hands (Ps 90:17)

17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us — yes, establish the work of our hands.

Provision of abilities for completion (15)

Provisions through God using others (2 Cor 8:14)

14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

Provisions through God's supplying directly (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.

Provisions of faith (1 Thess 3:10)

10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Provisions that should evoke thanksgiving to God (2 Cor 9:12)

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Provisions through God's glorious riches (Phil 4:19)

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

Dedication Through Offerings and Assignments (Ezra 6:16-18)

16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

17 And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

18 They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

Joy of praising God through corporate worship (16)

Corporate worship before God (Ps 22:27-28)

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Corporate worship so that we may give thanks, and praise to God (Ps 106:47)

47 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

Corporate worship full of joy and thanksgiving (Ps 100:2-5)

2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Corporate worship where Jesus' presence is found (Matt 18:19-20)

19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Corporate worship where the power of Jesus is displayed (1 Cor 5:4)

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

Corporate worship where saints don't forget to assemble (Heb 10:25)

25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Dedication through sacrificial offerings (17)

An offering beyond ability (2 Cor 8:3)

3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

An offering that is all one has (Mark 12:43-44)

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on."

An offering that is given, even though it is the last (1 Kings 17:8-13)

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" 11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." 12 "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

An offering of a life of service that is almost to death (Phil 2:29-30)

29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

An offering that starts with offering self to God (Rom 12:1)

12 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.

Dedication through service (18)

Faithful service is not letting anything move us from the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58)

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Faithful service is to be fixed and unshaken, firmly establishment in the faith (Col 1:23)

23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Faithful service is to consistently do God's work and what He has assigned us (Heb 6:10)

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Faithful service is to steadfastly press on toward the goal God has set for us (Phil 3:14)

14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Faithful service is to do God's will (Heb 10:36)

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Faithful service is to do good works (Eph 2:10)

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Faithful service is being zealous in doing those things that God has defined as good works (Gal 4:18)

18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

Faithful service is to conduct myself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27)

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

Dedication Through Observance of Passover (Ezra 6:19-22)

19 And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

21 Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel.

22 And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

In worship God desires purity and obedience to Him (19-20)

Purity that leads us to help others (James 1:27)

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Purity that comes from the hope and trust in God (1 John 3:3)

3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Purity that comes from obedience (1 Peter 1:22)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Obedience that is consistent with God's will (Isa 58:6-9)

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

Obedience that delights God (1 Sam 15:22)

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Obedience that is from humble, praying, repentant people of God (2 Chron 7:14)

14 If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Obedience that is bold and steadfast (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

In worship God desires sanctification (21)

Sanctification is when God makes one blameless (1 Thess 5:23)

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sanctification through the blood of Jesus (Heb 9:13-14)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Sanctification is setting apart Jesus as Lord in our heart (1 Peter 3:15)

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Sanctification is presenting our body as a slave to God in righteousness (Rom 6:19)

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

Sanctification is the purpose for which God has called His people (1 Thess 4:7)

7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Sanctification into salvation (2 Thess 2:13)

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

We must pursue sanctification (Heb 12:14)

14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

In worship God desires our joyful participation (22)

Joyful participation of the righteous (Ps 68:3)

3 But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

Joyful participation in worship (Ps 100:2)

2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Joyful participation even in trials (Hab 3:17-19)

17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

Joyful participation through fasts (Zech 8:19)

19 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace."

Joyful participation in hope (Rom 12:10-12)

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Steven Cole

How high is the pursuit of joy on your priority list? Do you view it as something that is not only nice to pursue, but absolutely necessary? Many Christians view the Christian life primarily in terms of duty and obedience, and those are not minor themes in the Bible. But how many Christians view the pursuit of joy, gladness, and delight in God as a prime duty? The joy that God imparts to His people is the theme of Ezra 6. The chapter begins with the outcome in question. The work on rebuilding the temple had stopped for 16 years due to opposition from the people in the land. Then, under the ministries of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the work resumed. But they barely got started again when Tattenai, the governor of the province that included Israel, confronted the Jews with whether they had proper permission to rebuild the temple. They told him about Cyrus' decree. Because God's eye was upon them, Tattenai permitted them to continue construction until word got back from the current king, Darius, as to what to do (5:3-5). In chapter 6, Darius makes a search and eventually finds the decree of Cyrus in the government archives. He respects that decree and sends back a ruling that not only should the work go on, but also it ought to be supported by government funds. Thus the temple was completed on March 12, 515 B.C. The Lord's people gathered to celebrate the dedication of this temple with joy (6:16). This was followed by a celebration of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread "with joy." Ezra explains the source of that joy: "for the Lord had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel" (6:22). C. S. Lewis said, "The ultimate purpose of God in all His work is to increase joy" (source unknown). He makes the radical suggestion that the thought that it is bad to desire our own good and enjoy it, is not a part of the Christian faith. He explains, Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased (in Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 17). Lewis was saying what John Piper preaches so clearly, that God Himself is the source of infinite joy, and that we should pursue joy in Him with all our hearts.

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

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Joy is associated with the festivals that Israel kept. Joy is listed among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. Paul states in Philippians 4:4 that Christians are to rejoice, and then he repeats it: "I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul stresses this yet again in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament: "Rejoice always!" (In the Greek, this is shorter than the two words "Jesus wept" of John 11:35.) The dedication of a new building produces joy for the ones who had the vision for it, but there is a greater joy for people in Christ. As expressed in 1 Peter 1:8, we have not seen Jesus Christ, but we love him and believe him, and we rejoice "with an inexpressible and glorious joy." The people of Ezra's day built a building with stones; for our part, we "are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Rejoice!

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Our great God uses both believers and unbelievers to do His will (Ezra 6:13-15)
2. Joy is the proper response of God's people when they recognize His blessings (vs. 16)
3. Sacrifices and offerings are always a part of true worship (Ezra 6:17; cf. Rom. 12:1-2)
4. Any work of God should be care-fully organized and biblically founded (Ezra 6:18)
5. The true worshipper is concerned about spiritual purity (vs. 19-20)
6. All are always welcome to celebrate the faithfulness of God (vs. 21 -22)