

Free to Celebrate

Ezra 6:13-22

SS Lesson for 03/20/2022

Devotional Scripture: Ps 122:1-9

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Ezra 6:16

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Authorized because the greatest authority is a servant (Luke 22:25-26)

Authorized because authorities should be examples (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Authorized so that they are aware that it is God who provides strength (Zech 12:4-6)

Authorized because God stirs the hearts according to His good purpose (Phil 2:13)

Authorized to punish the wrong-doers and commend the righteous (1 Peter 2:13-14)

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Prophesied that work would be done (Hag 1:12-14)

Prophesied about King Cyrus (Isa 44:28)

Prophesied about King Darius (Hag 1:1)

Prophesied that God would accomplish His purposes (Zech 1:16)

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Service that meets the needs of others (James 2:15-17)

Service that has action, not just words (1 John 3:16-18)

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today's lesson continues the narrative of Ezra 6:1–12. The resettled Jewish exiles, under Zerubbabel's leadership, rebuilt the foundation of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 3:8). After the work began, Persian officials questioned under whose authority they rebuilt (5:3–5). Persian King Darius responded and reiterated a declaration of King Cyrus. Only then were the exiles free to rebuild without fear of interference (6:1–5). Further, King Darius made allowances to financially support the reconstruction (6:8–9). The exiles were able to rebuild a place fit for the Lord's worship. Humans often attach importance and significance to specific places. So it should be of no surprise that the exiles would value the temple and celebrate its reconstruction. The temple marked the place where God's presence was with his people (1 Kings 8:27–30). But if Israel were to disobey God, then his presence would leave the temple (Ezekiel 10:1–18). The temple (and its predecessor the tabernacle) allowed the Israelites to experience God's presence in their midst. It even allowed Israel to rightly follow the commands of God (see Deuteronomy 12:11). Construction of the temple was just the first step. The building had to be dedicated to signify its holiness before God. Previously, the temple of Solomon's time underwent the same. Sacrifices were offered and God's people celebrated his goodness (1 Kings 8:62–66; 2 Chronicles 7:4–11). In numerous instances the temple had undergone changes. For example, the unfaithful King Ahaz removed certain parts (2 Kings 16:17–18). In response, faithful leaders reinstated certain practices (23:21–23). It was important for the temple to be ritually purified (see 2 Chronicles 29). Even when used improperly, the temple's importance was not lost. It stood as a holy place where the presence of God was declared to Israel.

Key Verse: Ezra 6:16

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 Bible Knowledge Commentary

5:1-2. The work on the temple had been stopped (4:1-5, 24), from 535 to 520 B.C. Now under the influence of two important prophets, **Haggai** and **Zechariah**, it was resumed. The preaching of these two men is recorded in the biblical books bearing their respective names. Haggai prophesied from August to December 520 B.C., and Zechariah prophesied for two years beginning in October-November 520. They were **helping** by exhorting and encouraging (cf. 6:14; Hag. 1:8; 2:4; Zech. 4:7-9). They were vitally concerned with the building of the temple because they realized that their nation could never fulfill the obligations of the Mosaic Covenant till the temple worship was reinstated. Both of these **prophets** placed the blame for the hard times the nation experienced during this period on the people's lack of obedience in not rebuilding the temple. However, Ezra did not deal with that question in his book. He stressed the outside opposition which was also a factor in slowing the work. The building process itself was spearheaded by **Zerubbabel** and **Jeshua**, the civil and religious leaders, respectively.

5:3-5. But as soon as the work was resumed, another effort (cf. 4:1-5) was made to stop it. Israel's leaders came into direct conflict with the duly established local authorities who were responsible to the Persian crown. In a Babylonian record dated 502 B.C. the name **Tattenai** and his office as **governor of Trans-Euphrates** are mentioned. Syria-Palestine was under him, an area including but much larger than Israel. **Shethar-Bozenai** was probably an assistant to Tattenai. It would have been Tattenai's responsibility, on hearing of this building activity in his territory, to investigate it. Major political unrest was seething at the beginning of Darius' reign. Possibly Tattenai thought the temple-**building** project in Jerusalem would grow into a full-scale rebellion against the empire. The group of officials **asked** Zerubbabel and Jeshua **who authorized** the project (the word **structure** is lit., "wooden structure"), and asked for **the names of the** people responsible for it (cf. 5:9-10). But despite this challenge, the work did not stop because **the eye of**

their God was watching over them (cf. “God... was over them,” v. 1). Occurring frequently in Ezra and Nehemiah are the words “the *hand* of the LORD was on him” and similar expressions (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh. 2:8, 18). God was providentially caring for them (by His “eye”) and blessing them (by His “hand”). Clearly God was at work in spite of this opposition because through it the project was eventually given help.

5:6-10. Ezra recorded **the letter** (cf. **This is a copy** of the letter; 4:11, 23; 7:11) **Tattenai... sent to King Darius** about the building activity going on in Jerusalem (5:7-16). Tattenai began his letter by noting that **work** was being done on **the temple of the great God** in Jerusalem. This does not mean that Tattenai believed Yahweh of Israel was the supreme God. Most likely he meant that the God to whom the Jews were building the **temple** was the major God of the area. In the ancient Near East there was a highly developed belief in local deities. Tattenai noted that **large stones** and **timbers** (cf. 6:4; 1 Kings 6:36) were being used in the work and that the Jews were working **with diligence** and were **making rapid progress**. He added that he had asked **who authorized** the work (cf. Ezra 5:3) and that he had asked for **the names** of those who were leading the building program (cf. v. 4).

5:11-12. Tattenai’s letter then included the Jews’ answers to his questions (vv. 11-16). Zerubbabel and Jeshua called themselves **servants of the God of heaven and earth**, not servants of Persia! The true God, Yahweh, was superior to Darius’ god, Ahura Mazda, whom Darius called “the god of heaven.” **Years** earlier **Israel had a great king**, Solomon, and had had a beautiful **temple**. It was a prominent structure in the ancient world. **But because** of sin (**our fathers angered the God of heaven**), God **handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar**. The Jews knew why the **temple** was **destroyed** and the people **deported**. In God’s promise/threat (Deut. 28) He said that the people would be taken into captivity if they did not live according to the covenant He instituted with them as they were ready to enter the land of promise. Not only was Nebuchadnezzar involved in the fall of Jerusalem; God Himself was responsible! Nebuchadnezzar was merely an agent of God’s anger on His people (cf. “My servant Nebuchadnezzar” in Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10)—an anger which was designed to purify the nation so that some would return to the land as a believing remnant. The Exile did not mean that Yahweh was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar’s gods.

5:13-17. In response to Tattenai Zerubbabel and Jeshua stated that **Cyrus** had allowed a remnant to return to **Jerusalem** to **rebuild** the temple and even gave them **articles** which had been taken from Solomon’s **temple** (cf. 1:2-4, 7-11). The letter-writers also recounted the fact that **Cyrus** gave **Sheshbazzar** the task of carrying out the king’s command—to return the **articles** and to build another **temple** in the city. Sheshbazzar was mentioned to show Tattenai that the building program was legal. Thus it seems likely that Sheshbazzar was a Persian official whose name carried some weight with Tattenai. Are **Sheshbazzar** and Zerubbabel the same person? Many think so because Sheshbazzar **laid the temple foundations**, and so did Zerubbabel (3:8-10). However, this is not absolute proof that the two men were identical. Sheshbazzar could have been responsible, as the king’s representative, to see that the work was begun, and Zerubbabel the Jewish leader who completed the task. Tattenai and the officials asked that the king research the records in Babylon (cf. 6:1-2) to find out if what the Jews had said about **a decree** from **Cyrus** was true. That such records were carefully kept is attested by archeology.

6:1-5. Tattenai had requested that Babylon’s **archives** be **searched** for the document (5:17) but it was not found there. Instead the **scroll** (of papyrus or leather) **was found in... Ecbatana** (modern Hamadan), 300 miles northeast of Babylon and capital of **Media** (6:1-2). The scroll was in Ecbatana, because that is where **Cyrus** had spent the summer of 538, when he issued the **decree**. This Ecbatana record was an official “minute” with three details that the verbal and written proclamation (1:1-4) apparently did not contain: (1) **The temple was to be 90 feet high and 90 feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers** (cf. 5:8; 1 Kings 6:36). (2) The project was to be financed by funds from **the royal treasury**. This shows the earnestness of Cyrus’ repatriation program. (3) The returned **gold and silver articles** were to be put in **their places in the temple**.

6:6-12. King **Darius** then gave three instructions to **Tattenai** and his associates: (1) He told them to leave the Jews alone and **not interfere** with the building of the **temple** (vv. 6-7). The words **stay away from there** were a common Aramaic legal statement. This was to be in accord with the edict of the great King Cyrus. (2) Tax money was to be used to help finance the project and animals were to be supplied **daily** so that **sacrifices** could be made at the altar of the new temple along with food items for the **offerings** (vv. 8-10). Flour (from **wheat**), **salt**, and **oil** were to be used in the grain offerings (Lev. 2:1-2, 7, 13), and **wine** for drink offerings (Lev. 23:13) on feast days. (3) **Anyone** who disobeyed the edict was to suffer a horrible fate (Ezra 6:11-12). He was to be **impaled on a beam** taken from **his own house**, and **his house** was to be demolished. Execution by impaling was practiced in the Assyrian and Persian Empires. Darius wanted no

disturbance in this part of his vast kingdom. The pagan king acknowledged that **God had caused His name to dwell at Jerusalem**. Darius probably thought of Yahweh as a local deity (cf. 5:6-10), whereas Ezra, in recording that statement, knew of the covenantal significance in Yahweh's name dwelling in Jerusalem. So Tattenai's inquiry backfired. Instead of stopping the temple work, he had to let it proceed and even had to help pay for it out of his **revenues!** Darius' curse on anyone who would **destroy the temple** was fulfilled in: (a) Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated it in 167 B.C., and died insane three years later; (b) Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.), who added extensively to the temple to glorify himself, and who had domestic trouble and died of disease; and (c) the Romans, who destroyed the temple in A.D. 70, and later had their empire destroyed.

6:16-18. 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.

6:19-21. Beginning with verse 19 the text is again in Hebrew (4:8-6:18 are in Aramaic). **On the 14th day of the first month** (April 515 B.C.) **the Passover** was **celebrated**. The temple had been completed in the 12th month (Adar; v. 15) and fittingly, in the very next month, **the Passover** was reinaugurated. This was the first time in 70 years that the people partook of this feast which commemorated their forefathers' release from Egyptian bondage (cf. Ex. 12:1-14; Lev. 23:5). The Israelite returnees **ate** the Passover **with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors**. This second group might have been: (a) Gentiles living in Judah (cf. Num. 9:14), or more likely (b) Jews who had remained in the land and had defiled themselves by practices that went against the Law, and then repented of those sins, thereby "separating" themselves.

6:22. The **seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread** was on days 15-21 of the first month, immediately after the Passover (cf. Lev. 23:6-8). The reference to Darius as **the king of Assyria** is not an anachronism (though the Assyrian Empire had ended in 609 B.C.) for the Persian Empire included what was once Assyria. Perhaps this title was a grim reminder that Assyria's harsh tactics were now ended. She was the first to deport Israelites from their land; but now a contingent of Jews was settled back in their land. This eight-day celebration (the Passover, Ezra 6:19, and the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, v. 22), 900 years after the first Passover, signaled the end of the Exile for a remnant of the nation was once again back in fellowship with Yahweh. Since the temple worship was restored, it was important for people who wanted to be in fellowship with God and live according to the covenantal obligations to be in the place where the sacrificial system was being practiced. The people had seen firsthand that God works through history, for He had caused pagan kings to issue decrees which let them return to the land of promise (much as He had caused Egypt's Pharaoh to release Israel). The original readers of Ezra's book would rejoice in that fact and would be encouraged to participate fully in the temple worship, which had been reestablished at such great cost.

Major Theme Analysis

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

Celebrate Completion of the Temple (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.

Completion authorized by the King (13)

Authorized because all authority is established by God (Rom 13:1)

13 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Authorized because the greatest authority is a servant (Luke 22:25-26)

25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

Authorized because authorities should be examples (1 Peter 5:1-3)

1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Authorized so that they are aware that it is God who provides strength (Zech 12:4-6)

4 On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," declares the Lord. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. 5 Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God.' 6 "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

Authorized because God stirs the hearts according to His good purpose (Phil 2:13)

13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Authorized to punish the wrong-doers and commend the righteous (1 Peter 2:13-14)

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

Completion prophesied by prophets (14-15)

Prophesied that work would be done (Hag 1:12-14)

12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. 13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God

Prophesied about King Cyrus (Isa 44:28)

28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." '

Prophesied about King Darius (Hag 1:1)

1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

Prophesied that God would accomplish His purposes (Zech 1:16)

16 "Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,' declares the Lord Almighty.

Celebrate by Dedicating the Temple (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.

Dedicated with joy (16)

Joy through the refreshing of God (Acts 3:19)

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Joy through liberation (Rom 8:19-21)

19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Joy through reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-20)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Joy through God's salvation (Ps 98:1-3)

1 Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. 2 The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. 3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Joy expressed in praise and song (Ps 33:1-3)

1 Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. 2 Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.

Joy expressed in spite of circumstances (Hab 3:17-19)

17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Dedicated with sacrifices (17)

Sacrifices that are done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)

12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Sacrifices that are offered right (Gen 4:2-7)

2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Sacrifices that are given out of love (Eph 5:1-2)

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Sacrifices offered through sacrificial giving (Phil 4:16-18)

16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Sacrifices offered through steadfast faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Dedicated with service (18)

Service that has as its foundation that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Service that bears the failings of the weak and tries to strengthen them (Rom 15:1-2)

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

Service that bears others burdens (Gal 6:2)

2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Service that meets the needs of others (James 2:15-17)

15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Service that has action, not just words (1 John 3:16-18)

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Celebrate the 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.

Celebrate the Passover through purification (19-21)

Purification by God of His people (Titus 2:11-14)

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, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Purification from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Purification to complete cleansing (Ps 51:7)

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Purification by the washing of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Purification by the washing of God's Word (Eph 5:25-26)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

Celebrate the Passover because of Divine intercession (22)

Intercession by Jesus to save us (Heb 7:25)

25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Intercession by Jesus who is at the right hand of God (Rom 8:34)

34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Intercession by Jesus who is the only mediator (1 Tim 2:5)

5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Intercession by Jesus who as our advocate (1 John 2:1)

1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Intercession by the Holy Spirit of our prayers (Rom 8:26-27)

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Temple Construction Resumed and Completed (Ezra 5-6)

The prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah did the job. The rebuilding of the temple resumed, with the encouragement and support of the prophets. The peoples of the land were greatly disturbed to see that the temple construction had resumed. Tattenai, the governor of the Trans-Euphrates area, along with others, challenged Zerubbabel. They wished to know who authorized the temple construction and the completion of the walls. They also wanted to have the names of those who were in charge of the project. In contemporary legal terms, the enemies of the Jews were seeking an injunction against them. They hoped that an order would be given to cease and desist from this construction project until a hearing could be held and a verdict pronounced.

Had an injunction been granted, construction could easily have been delayed for a year or more, even if the king of Persia ruled in favor of the Jews. But God was looking after His people. No order was given to stop the construction until the king had reached a decision. I find the letter that was sent to Darius most interesting. The Jews' case was presented with amazing accuracy:

11 They responded to us in the following way: 'We are servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the temple which was previously built many years ago. A great king of Israel built it and completed it. 12 But after our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he delivered them into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and exiled the people to Babylon. 13 But in the first year of King Cyrus of Babylon, King Cyrus enacted a decree to rebuild this temple of God. 14 Even the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and had brought to the palace of Babylon—even those things King Cyrus brought from the palace of Babylon and presented to a man by the name of Sheshbazzar whom he had appointed as governor. 15 He said to him, "Take these vessels and go deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt in its proper location" (Ezra 5:11-15).

When Darius ordered the archives to be searched, he learned that the Jews had spoken correctly. Cyrus had given the Jews authority to rebuild Jerusalem, and the temple in particular. Darius gave very specific orders, permitting the Jews to continue, while prohibiting the peoples of the land from interfering:

6 "Now Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their colleagues, the officials of the Trans-Euphrates—all of you stay far away from there! 7 Leave the work on this temple of God alone. Let the governor of Judah and the elders of Judah rebuild this temple of God in its proper place. 8 "I also hereby issue orders as

to what you are to do with those elders of the Jews in order to rebuild this temple of God. From the royal treasury, from the taxes of Trans-Euphrates the complete costs will be given to these men, so that there may be no halt. 9 Whatever is needed—whether oxen or rams or lambs or burnt offerings for the God of heaven or wheat or salt or wine or oil, as required by the priests who are in Jerusalem—must be given to them daily without any neglect, 10 so that they may be offering incense to the God of heaven and praying for the good fortune of the king and his family. 11 I hereby give orders that if anyone changes this directive a beam is to be pulled out from his house and he is to be raised up and impaled on it, and his house is to be reduced to a rubbish heap for this indiscretion. 12 May God who makes his name to reside there overthrow any king or people who reaches out to cause such change or to destroy this temple of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have given orders. Let them be carried out with precision!” (Ezra 6:6-12)

I have to chuckle as I read the words of Ezra 6:13:

Then Tattenai governor of the Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their colleagues acted accordingly—with precision, just as Darius the king had given instructions (Ezra 6:13).

The words of warning contained in the decree of Darius took the wind out of the sails of the people of the land. They no longer opposed the rebuilding of the temple, and indeed assisted in whatever ways the Jews requested (which were probably few).

As a result, the temple was soon completed (Ezra 6:13-15). There was a great celebration as the temple was joyfully dedicated, and as they observed Passover.

19 The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 20 The priests and the Levites had purified themselves, and they all were ceremonially clean. They sacrificed the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their colleagues the priests, and for themselves. 21 The Israelites who were returning from the exile ate it, along with all those who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the nations of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel. 22 They observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, for the Lord had given them joy and had changed the opinion of the king of Assyria toward them, so that he assisted them in the work on the temple of God, the God of Israel (Ezra 6:19-22). This time there was no weeping.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/22-return-promised-land-ezra>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

By 1942 the gestapo had shut down numerous underground seminaries, including Finkenwalde. War was in full swing in Europe. Bonhoeffer’s former students were scattered around the continent. However, they were still faithful to their calling to serve the underground church. In an effort to encourage the leaders, Bonhoeffer wrote a series of letters calling the leaders to embrace joy. As suffering and indifference had become prevalent, finding joy was a challenge for these leaders. The rebuilt temple was a result of God’s provision and faithfulness toward his people. As a result, the exiles expressed their joyous worship and gratitude to God. These expressions took the form that had been prescribed to them centuries before. The temple’s dedication and the celebratory feasts invited the exiles to express proper joy toward God. Once again the people could experience right relationship with God, a true cause for joy and celebration. Our community of faith may be driven to build new buildings and establish new programs. But our primary challenge when building is to respond joyfully. God’s faithfulness to us demands such a response! From that foundation we are called to build ministries as an outpouring of God’s faithfulness. Ultimately, these become a sign for the world to see.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Time for Celebration - Those who experienced the Babylonian destruction and the remnant that returned to Judah greatly rejoiced once the temple was finished. The people had meager means and were small in number. Yet this did not stop them from bringing their sacrifices to the temple. The priest and Levites consulted Moses' laws and organized their temple responsibilities.

Remember the Past - Ezra labeled the remnant "children of the captivity/" a reminder of their former state, a congregation violently taken to a foreign country because of their disobedience. They served other gods, ignoring the voice of God through His prophets. But the same hand of God who chastised His people also rescued them. He provided what they needed to return to their homeland.

Celebrating Passover - Part of the celebration included the Passover ceremony. They desired to keep remembering what God had done for their ancestors in Egypt. God delivered His nation in the past, and now He's done the same. These facts inspired their worship. Each individual presented for slaughter a Passover lamb as an offering. Two different groups participated in the service: the Jews who came from Babylon and those Jews left in Judah after the captivity. The latter group were Jews who had intermarried with foreigners. To take part in the Passover, they had to renounce their allegiance to idols and became circumcised. The people also offered the Feast of Unleavened Bread, marking their purity. The people made bread products without yeast, which was considered evil. The Matzoth, or Week of Unleavened Bread, symbolized the entire separation from evil.

Hallelujah, What a Time of Rejoicing - It had taken this remnant almost 20 years to rebuild their homes, the temple, and reestablish worship in Judah. Jesus' death ushered Christians out of darkness and captivity—into God's marvelous light. Every day, Christians need to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice. These thoughts should become the reason for praising and celebrating the grace of God.