

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Ezra 3:8-13

Lesson Title: The Temple Restored

Introduction

The days of captivity in Babylon for the nation of Israel were sad days indeed. Prior to being carried off to Babylon to serve 70 years of captivity the nation had received repeated warnings from God's prophets. Those warnings went unheeded and punishment was inevitable. As God's people were carried away from their homeland in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar wiped out the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple of Solomon, and left their sacred homeland in ruins.

In 538 BC, the Persian army, led by Cyrus the Great captured Babylon. One of the first things that Cyrus did when he crushed the Babylonian empire was to declare freedom to all the captives. He ordered all those who had been held by Nebuchadnezzar to return to their homelands and rebuild their cities and temples. The Jews were part of those he set free. Cyrus also ordered that all the treasures that had been taken from all the world's temples be returned.

The first group of Jews to return home numbered around 50,000. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they built an altar and began to once again offer sacrifices to God (Ezra 3:1-7). Now the time for rebuilding the Temple had come. It was a time of taking the ruins of life and building a Temple.

Working (Ezra 3:8-9)

Verse 8

"Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD."

A period of "*seven months*" (Ezra 3:6) passed from the restoration of the altar until the time mentioned in Ezra 3:8. The period of preparation for building the temple foundation did not begin until "the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem." Why this delay of "*seven months*" after the altar was built? Most likely it was because they had to get organized and secure the building materials. The wood (cedar trees) came from Lebanon and was shipped along the coast to Joppa and then carried overland to Jerusalem. Cyrus had to give his authority for everything to happen so all of this would take time.

The "second month" was also the same month (May-June) when Solomon began building his Temple (1Kings 6:1). It is now the spring of 535 BC, and it has been 70 years since the first

captives were taken off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. The rebuilding of the Temple has been a long time in coming but now the time has arrived.

"Zerubbabel" and "Jeshua" are the two main men behind the building of the Temple. The name "Zerubbabel" means "sown in Babylon." He was the grandson of King Jehoiachin and a descendant of King David. He is the *civil ruler* in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:2). The name "Jeshua" means "he is saved." "Jeshua" is called "Joshua" by the prophet Haggai and Zechariah. He is the high priest, a descendant of Aaron, and the grandson of Seraiah, the priest who was killed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 26:18-21; 1 Chronicles 6:14; Haggai 1:1). "Jeshua" is the *religious authority* in Jerusalem.

Along with "Zerubbabel" and "Jeshua" were "the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem..." This great work of rebuilding the Temple could not be accomplished by just a few men. A good leader knows that he cannot do the work of the Lord alone. The word "and" means that both "Zerubbabel" and "Jeshua" joined together with "their brethren the priests and the Levites" and "all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem." This was why God had allowed them to be set free from Babylon and come back home (Ezra 1:3). This was their purpose and it is to their credit that they worked "together."

"Zerubbabel" and "Jeshua" did not discriminate in those they appointed to help them in the work. However, it was important that they appoint mature men, "twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD." This age for the "Levite" overseers is in keeping with maturity requirements for the Levites in God's Word. The words "set forward" means "to oversee." If the "Levites" are to "oversee" this great work of restoring the Temple they must be mature. The work of the Lord is important and must not be taken lightly in any generation. There is far too much triviality and immaturity today in the work of Lord (1 Timothy 3:6). When people are placed in positions of leadership and authority before they are ready it often becomes an opportunity for pride. "Zerubbabel" and "Jeshua" are to be commended for their appointment.

Verse 9

"Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites."

"Jeshua" and "his sons and his brethren" or, his family, joined together with "Kadmiel" and his extended family "to set forward the workmen in the house of God." The names "Kadmiel," the "sons of Judah" and "Henadad" are not significant in and of themselves. The importance of their names is what they represent in relation to the restoration of the Temple. They all worked "together" to oversee and keep in motion the work of the house of God. This is an example of admirable leadership, great organization, and wonderful cooperation.

So much of spiritual activity today has become self-centered. We hear words such as, "my church," or "our worship services." There seems to be too little cooperation in the work of the Lord. It isn't just about the "Jeshua's" and the "Levites" or the "sons of Judah." It is about each of

them doing what God had called them to do and fulfilling the task at hand. The Apostle Paul addresses this same thought in 1 Corinthians 4:7 when he asked the Corinthians, *"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* Whoever we are and whatever abilities we bring to the work of God has been given unto us by the Lord.

Question: Who are you? What is your place in the kingdom work of the Lord? If the church family were asked to describe you would they describe you as one who cooperates or one who divides?

Worshipping (Ezra 3:10-11)

Verse 10

"And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel."

"And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD," means that when the foundation was complete the workers and people stopped to celebrate! People respond and react to the work of God one way or another. In this instance the "priests" put on "their apparel" and had their "trumpets" in hand. They are ready to celebrate and worship. The "Levites" had their "cymbals" and were ready "to praise the LORD." Their praise followed the same formula of worship that was established by David when he brought the Ark of the Covenant home to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16). That is the meaning of the words "after the ordinance of David." This is also the same formula of worship that Solomon followed when he had placed the Ark in the first Temple (2 Chronicles 5:12-14). So there is a pattern or precedence set that the leaders and people are following.

Although the "ordinance of David" was followed the worship and celebration taking place on this occasion fell short of how the people worshipped in David's day. There were no psalteries or harps, which were an essential part of David's system. The absence of these particular instruments and musical skill of the Levites may be because their musical skill had declined during the days of their captivity. Our worship today has declined. It's louder, more lights, motion, emotion, and a lot of other dramatic stuff connected to the flesh, but it's missing so much of "the ordinance of David." There is little knowledge of what biblical worship is and tradition carries much weight in determining how men respond to God. As mentioned in last week's lesson from Ezra 3:2, worship must be *"as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God."* God only accepts biblical worship!

Note: What is happening here in verse 10 is a reminder to us that present worship must never be disconnected from past worship when both are biblical. Methodology in worship is a divider of congregations today and that should not be the case. If the returning people of God had something to celebrate when the Temple foundations were laid, how much more do we have to celebrate today as born again believers?

Verse 11

"And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."

"By course" means "to respond, answer, testify, speak, shout." The people sang responsively. It is possible that one group of people would sing, "Praise the Lord for he is good," and another group would respond in song, "For His mercy endureth forever." Their singing would have been much like responsive Bible reading where the pastor reads a verse and then the congregation responds by reading a verse. The Levites of King Solomon's time sang in this same manner as recorded in 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, *"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."*

"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." "Shouting" has normally been practiced by the world in ancient and modern times to celebrate joy and gladness. However, there is a difference in "shouting" for God's glory and shouting at worldly events. The problem today is that verbal expressions of joy from God's people are not much different from the world. The world applauds men and the church has followed the world's example. Verbal responses that focus on what is taking place in front of you instead of the Lord above you is not a biblical response. Applauding a praise team, a preacher, a singer, or an entertainer is not what is taking place in Ezra 3:11. The Psalmist helps us understand what is taking place when he wrote, *"Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness"* (Psalm 29:1-2).

Note: There are times when it is appropriate to recognize the accomplishments of people. But it is never appropriate to respond to God in the same manner as we respond to man.

Is "shouting" an appropriate response to God's work today? Yes. But be sure you don't confuse uncontrollable fleshly emotions with a proper biblical response to God's presence. There is clear evidence that God's people responded with "shouting" to His work. When the ark of the covenant was taken into the Israelite camp near Aphek, *"all Israel shouted with a great shout"* (1 Samuel 4:5). When David solemnly brought the ark up from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem there was *"shouting"* (2 Samuel 6:15). Shouting appears also in the Psalms (Psalm 47:5) and in Zechariah 4:7 in connection with the work of God among His people. It is always indicative of religious joy. The people of Ezra's day "shouted with a great shout" because "the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid." If you're going to "shout," you should know why you are shouting!

Weeping (Ezra 3:12-13)

Verse 12-13

"But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."

Ezra 3 closes with a strange scene. Suddenly, in the midst of all the victorious "shouting" there were some who "wept with a loud voice." Some suggest that the "weeping" of the "ancient men" was their way of expressing joy. But that doesn't seem to be the case. The Hebrew word for "wept" and "weeping" is "*bakah*" and is most often used to express sadness. The prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah also suggest that the "weeping" was due to sadness (Haggai 2:3; Zechariah 4:10).

Were the "ancient men" just being sticks in the mud? Were they trying to rain on the party? That's not the case. The "ancient men" made up of "the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers" were perhaps 70 years of age or older. Even though the period of captivity began in 605 BC, the Temple of Solomon wasn't destroyed until 586 BC. It is now 535 BC, some fifty-one years later. Some of these men were still alive who had seen Solomon's Temple before it was destroyed. To these men, the small foundation that has been built is nothing compared to the glory of Solomon's Temple. That is the cause of their "weeping." And to some degree their "weeping" is understandable. They are honestly displaying their true sentiments.

There would be a period of sixteen years where the building of the Temple would be suspended. When the rebuilding started again, Haggai addressed this problem of the "ancient men" weeping (Haggai 2:1-9). His words were an encouragement for Zerubbabel and Jeshua to keep working. They were not to stop working on the Temple, even though some thought it wasn't as valuable as the first Temple. In spite of the mixed reaction the "noise was heard afar off." The point is that our reaction to the work of the Lord has far-reaching effects. We should always be honest about our response to God's work but we should always understand that others are looking on.

Conclusion

There are several important lessons to learn from Ezra's account of the building of the Temple foundation. We need to be careful with our attitude about the things that God has called us to do.

Sometimes we are tempted to think that we are wasting our time on things that don't seem too important or as productive as they were years ago. Maybe you are a single parent and you regret that you can't do all the kinds of things you'd like to do because you have to stay home with your kids while two parent families seem to accomplish so much more. Perhaps your Sunday School class is small and you feel like weeping instead of shouting when you think about larger classes. Maybe you are in a troubled relationship or difficult job situation and you wonder why you waste your time with such hopeless people.

The restoration of the Temple was a massive undertaking. Everyone who contributed is to be commended for their vision and labor. It is understandable that the older generation with their memories of Solomon's Temple would be somewhat disappointed by the smaller new foundation. It is also understandable that the younger generation some of who had never seen Solomon's glorious temple would be so excited they shouted.

There is room for shouting and weeping in God's work. Those of us who remember by gone days when the church was united, filled with God's power, and reaching out to a lost world can't help but be saddened by the spiritual climate of this hour. Those who have just been introduced to God's saving grace are excited about a fresh new life and can't help but be glad over the life they now have in Christ. Somehow in God's wisdom and plan He can take the joyful shouters and the weeping patriarchs and get glory to Himself.

Amen.