

Joyful Worship Restored

Bible Background • EZRA 1:1–3:7

Printed Text • EZRA 3:1–7 | Devotional Reading • MATTHEW 23:29–39

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** that we should celebrate and express thanks to God for His goodness; **DESIRE** to praise God for His goodness; and **PRAISE** God for His goodness.

In Focus

Andre was a faithful church member who led the praise and worship portion of services. He met a woman that he liked and began to spend more time with her than in church. He sought God's approval of the relationship, though, he felt in his heart that God was not pleased.

Andre came home after work one evening to find two police officers waiting for him with a search warrant. Andre had been under surveillance because of the woman he'd been dating. She'd been identified as a co-conspirator in intricately planned robberies. The warnings of the Lord came back to Andre's mind. Ashamed, Andre stopped going to church completely and shied away from praising and worshiping God.

Weeks later, while remembering the praise and worship services, Andre began to sing to the Lord. In tears, he called his pastor and the minister of music, and both readily accepted him back. Andre gladly worshiped the Lord to prepare for the next Sunday's services. There, Andre experienced an anointing in worship like none he'd ever seen before.

Today's lesson is about how we as believers should ask God to help us maintain joyful worship of God, who is worthy to be praised.

Keep in Mind

“They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required”(Ezra 3:4, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Ezra 3:1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings

by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

The People, Places, and Times

The Feast of Booths (or the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot). This celebration is a harvest festival that lasts for one week. Jeshua is a descendant of Jozadak, who had been the high priest at the time Judah went into exile. Zerubbabel was appointed governor of Judah either by Darius or his predecessor, Cambyses, about 525 B.C. The altar described was built on old foundations, underscoring the continuity with the first Temple. The text notes that the reinstatement of sacrifices was not accompanied by the laying of the Temple's foundations. Fear of reaction by neighboring people accounted for this delay.

Background

Throughout the history of the Children of Israel, we see a pattern where one ruler obeyed God and his successor would disobey and lead the nation into a path of unrighteousness. In the

historical era prior to our lesson, King Josiah sought to cleanse and restore true worship among the people of Israel. He rebuilt the Temple and led the people in obeying the Law of Moses to follow all the required feasts and sacrifices and the Passover.

After his death, his brother Jehiahham was placed over the Children of Israel, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. The people disobeyed God, and the chief priests defiled the Temple. The Lord sent prophets to warn them, but the people mocked and misused them. God's wrath against them became unquenched. The king of Chaldees came and slew them unmercifully: young, old, men, and women alike. The king took everything of value in the land and removed everything from the Temple before he burned it and destroyed the wall of Jerusalem. Those who remained were taken into captivity for 70 years, the time God appointed.

At-A-Glance

1. Worship Restored (Ezra 3:1–5)
2. The Temple Restored (vv. 6–7)

In Depth

1. Worship Restored (Ezra 3:1–5)

The Children of Israel gathered in Jerusalem after their release from Babylon to find their city and Temple in ruins. Jeshua and the other priests worked to restore the altar to observe the customary feasts with the people. Over time, the morale of the Children of Israel suffered after their bondage, and their spirits were in ruins like their precious Jerusalem: broken and, in many ways, desolate.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which they celebrated, is similar to our Thanksgiving. It commemorates the 40 years they worshiped in tents while in the wilderness. As with all required feasts and observances, it came with a promise and restoration of God’s covenant with His people. Worshiping God is the best way to re-establish joy after emerging from a difficult time.

2. The Temple Restored (vv. 6–7)

The Temple of God represents a special place, and the things inside had a special meaning. The Children of Israel endured many transitions while serving their God. They carried the Ark of the Covenant, they served Him in a tent, and they built a beautiful Temple—all so His presence could continually dwell among them.

The people were moved as they watched Jeshua and the other priests rebuild the Temple to its original order. The skilled tradesmen gave their time and skill to restore the Temple. King Cyrus of Persia preserved the pieces that belonged in the Temple and returned them when

the Children of Israel returned to Jerusalem. He also gave a grant to help with its completion.

More important than the dedication of the people to rebuild the physical Temple was their renewed spirit, the true Temple, figuratively speaking. What good is a temple if no one comes to make sacrifices to God? The Children of Israel in the past had failed to see the significance in observing the required sacrifices and didn’t for quite some time before going into captivity. After deliverance from their captors, the Children of Israel longed for those old traditions; their significance, no doubt, brought new meaning to their hearts.

It is important that we, too, recognize the significance of God and the Temple where His presence dwells.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was significant in the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles among the Children of Israel (Ezra 3:4)?
2. Who granted permission to the Children of Israel to rebuild the Temple (v. 7)?

Discuss the Meaning

What observances or sacrifices do we need to reinstitute to restore and rebuild our relationship with God? As you ponder this question, think of your own relationship with the holy God.

Liberating Lesson

Unbroken fellowship with God is so vital to our existence and peace of mind in today’s perilous world. Our praise and worship bring us into God’s presence and protection. Our continual disobedience only stirs the wrath of God and places us in a position to lose our greatest possession: our relationship with God—the source of our praise, worship, and more importantly, our joy.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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- McGee, J. Vernon. *Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther*. Pasadena, CA: Thru the Bible Radio Network, 1988.
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Say It Correctly

Pentateuch. PEN-tuh-took.
Zerubbabel. zuh-RUB-uh-buhl,
zuh-RUHB-uh-buhl.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem
(Matthew 23:29-39)

TUESDAY

The Coming Judgment
(Jeremiah 7:30-8:3)

WEDNESDAY

Jerusalem Falls to the Babylonians
(2 Kings 24:1-12)

THURSDAY

The Destruction of Jerusalem
(2 Chronicles 36:15-21)

FRIDAY

Rebuild a House for God
(Ezra 1:1-8)

SATURDAY

The People Respond
(Ezra 2:64-70)

SUNDAY

Restoring the Worship of God
(Ezra 3:1-7)