

Ezra

Chapter 3

Rebuilding the Altar

When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, 5 and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. 7 So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

3:1 *seventh month.* Tishri (September-October), about three months after the arrival of the exiles in Judah (in 537 B.C.). Tishri was one of the most sacred months of the Jewish year. (CSB)

Tishri (in autumn) of the first year after the children of Israel had settled in their various towns (2:70). They assembled in Jerusalem for a “holy convocation” (Nu 29:1) (TLSB)

3:2 *Jeshua ... Zerubbabel.* The priest takes precedence over the civil leader in view of the nature of the occasion (contrast 3:8; 4:3; 5:2; Hag 1:1). (CSB)

Later high priest (Hg 1:1; Zec 3:1). Also spelled “Joshua”; a popular name (cf 2:2, 36, 40), making individual identifications difficult. (TLSB)

Zerubbabel. Cf 2:2. Likely that Cyrus had originally commissioned Sheshbazzar to head up the temple rebuilding project (1:8; 5:14–16), but he soon disappeared from the scene. Zerubbabel and Jeshua became the leaders (5:1–2). (TLSB)

built the altar ... Law of Moses. Follows the example of what Moses had commanded when the children of Israel first entered Canaan (Dt 27:6–7). (TLSB)

3:3 *in its place.* Lit, “upon its base,” the site where it formerly stood. (TLSB)

fear. Returnees wanted the altar built in order to have a place where they might gather to implore God’s help against the surrounding “peoples of the lands.” (TLSB)

offerings morning and evening. Daily sacrifices (the Tamid) consisted of lambs with flour, oil, and wine. (TLSB)

3:4 *Feast of Booths.* See Lev 23:33–43 and notes. (**23:24** *first day of the seventh month.* Today known as the Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*, “the beginning of the year”), but not so called in the Bible (the Hebrew expression is only used in Eze 40:1 in a date formula). *trumpet blasts.* Trumpets were blown on the first of every month (Ps 81:3). With no calendars available, the trumpets sounding across the land were an important signal of the beginning of the new season, the end of the agricultural year. See note on 16:29; see also chart on “Hebrew Calendar”. **23:27** *Day of Atonement.* For details see notes on 16:1–34. Aaron was to enter the Most Holy Place only once a year (16:29–34) on the day called by modern Jews *Yom Kippur*. The Biblical name, however, is the plural *Yom Hakippurim* (as in this verse), derived from the Hebrew words *yom* (“day”) and *kipper* (“to atone”). The day was typological, foreshadowing the work of Christ, our high priest (see Heb 9:7; 13:11–12). *deny yourselves.* See note on 16:29, 31. **23:29** *cut off from his people.* See note on 7:20. **23:34** *Feast of Tabernacles.* See notes on Ex 23:16; Jn 7:37–39. Tabernacles was the last of the three annual pilgrimage festivals (Ex 23:14–17; Dt 16:16). **23:42** *booths.* The Hebrew for this word is *Sukkot* and is also translated “Tabernacles” (as in v. 34), giving the feast its name. Even today, orthodox Jews construct small booths (see Ne 8:13–17) to remind them of the booths they lived in when God brought them out of Egypt at the time of the exodus (v. 43). (CSB)

Third of the annual festivals, celebrated from the 15th to the 21st day of the seventh month (Lv 23:33–43). Circumstances may have permitted only a token observance of its elaborate festivities. The first complete celebration came after the temple had been built (Ne 8:17). (TLSB)

3:5 *New Moon.* Each month of the year was consecrated to the Lord by the bringing of special sacrifices (Nu 28:11–15) and the blowing of trumpets (Nu 10:10; Ps 81:3). This observance also involved cessation from normal work, especially at the beginning of the seventh month (Lev 23:24–25; Nu 29:1–6; 2Ki 4:23; Isa 1:13; Am 8:5). (CSB)

freewill offerings. It is noteworthy that the restoration of the sacrifices preceded the erection of the temple itself. (CSB)

3:6 *foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid* – This gives the first hint of enemy opposition and the negligence of the people. These factors would delay the completion of the temple for about twenty years. (PBC)

Rebuilding the Temple

8 Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their kinsmen, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to supervise the work of the house of the LORD. **9** And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers, and Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Henadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers. **10** And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. **11** And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever 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. **12** But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many

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

3:7 Sidonians ... Tyrians. People from the Great Sea coastal cities of Sidon and Tyre. Solomon made a similar agreement with them for building materials. (TLSB)

grant. Rebuilding costs were taken from the royal treasury (6:4). (TLSB)

cedar trees. As in the case of the first temple, the Phoenicians cooperated by sending timbers and workmen (1Ki 5:6–12). (CSB)

3:1–7 Within about a year of Cyrus's decree, the Judeans are settling in their homeland and beginning to work on the altar to restore the sacrifices, showing their sincere desire for true worship and for honoring their emperor's decree. As you offer daily sacrifices of thanks and praise to the Lord, request a deep and lively sincerity for yourself, your family, and your congregation. The Lord sincerely receives your worship and requests; He has promised to answer according to His goodwill and the mercy He demonstrated in His Son, your Redeemer. • Grant me a sincere and thankful heart, dear Lord, that my mind, hands, and feet may carry out Your good and gracious will. Amen. (TLSB)

3:8 The following year in our Apr/May, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, assisted by clergy and laypeople, began construction on the temple. Priests and Levites served as supervisors (v 9). (TLSB)

second month. The same month (April-May) in which Solomon had begun his temple (1Ki 6:1). (CSB)

second year. Since the Jews probably returned to Judah in the spring of 537 B.C., the second year would be the spring of 536. (CSB)

twenty years. In earlier times the lower age limit for Levites was 30 (Nu 4:3) or 25 years (Nu 8:24). It was later reduced to 20 (1Ch 23:24, 27; 2Ch 31:17), probably because there were so few Levites. (CSB)

Age when Levites began temple service as specified by King David, corresponding to the age when men of other tribes became warriors. (TLSB)

work. Construction on the temple's foundation. (TLSB)

3:10 Completion of the foundation called for a service of praise, much as we do when a church's cornerstone is laid. (TLSB)

vestments. Garments worn by the priests (cf Ex 28; Lv 8). (TLSB)

directions of David. The celebration at the dedication of Solomon's temple had similar features (2Ch 5:11–14; 7:3). (TLSB)

trumpets. Made of hammered silver. According to Josephus (*Antiquities*, 3.12.6—written c. A.D. 93), the trumpet was “in length a little short of a cubit; it is a narrow tube, slightly thicker than a flute.” With the possible exception of their use at the coronation of Joash (2Ki 11:14; 2Ch 23:13), the trumpets were always blown by priests. They were most often used on joyous

occasions, such as here and at the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem (Ne 12:35; cf. 2Ch 5:13; Ps 98:6). (CSB)

cymbals. The Hebrew for this word occurs 13 times in the OT, all in Chronicles except here and Ne 12:27. (CSB)

3:11 sang. May mean “sang responsively,” referring to antiphonal singing by a choir divided into two groups. (CSB)

Two groups (or leader and group) sing alternately, as is still practiced in liturgical worship. (TLSB)

the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. No doubt some of the stones from the ruins of the first temple were used in providing a solid base for the new building. (TLSB)

3:12 wept with a loud voice – They saw that the glory had departed from Israel; in their circumstances it was impossible to build such a house as the first temple was; and had this been even possible, still it would have been greatly inferior, because it wanted the ark of the covenant, the heavenly fire, the mercy-seat, the heavenly manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, the Divine shechinah, the spirit of prophecy, and most probably the Urim and Thummim. (PBC)

Their memories went back 50 years to the grandeur of “the first house,” built with the resources of Solomon’s empire. No doubt some of the tears were salted with remorse over the folly that had destroyed temple and nation. The glory had “departed from Israel” (1Sm 4:21) because their great guilt “mounted up to the heavens” (9:6). (TLSB)

shouted aloud for joy – Finding they were now restored to their own land, and to the worship of their God in his own peculiar city: these, in general, had not seen the original temple; and therefore could not feel affected in that way which the elderly people did. The sight must have been very affecting: a whole people, one part crying aloud with sorrow; the other shouting aloud for joy; and on the same occasion too, in which both sides felt an equal interest! The prophet Haggai comforted them on this occasion by assuring them that the glory of this latter house should exceed that of the former, because the Lord (Jesus Christ) was to come to this temple, and fill it with his glory. See Haggai, Haggai 2:1-9. (PBC)

Many other voices were raised in thanksgiving for this new beginning. Their shouts were heard “far away” (v 13). (TLSB)

3:13 joyful shouts... sound of the people’s weeping. The people of Israel were accustomed to showing their emotions in visible and audible ways (10:1; Ne 1:4; 8:9). The same God who had permitted judgment had now brought them back and would enable them to complete the project. A Babylonian cornerstone reads: “I started the work weeping, I finished it rejoicing.” Cf. Ps 126:5-6. (CSB)

3:8–13 The service dedicating the foundation for the new temple stirs deep emotions for the Judeans because of the memory of their shortcomings and because they are eyewitnesses to God’s renewed mercy for them. God’s Word of Law and Gospel will likewise move your heart. That Word is your focus for comfort and for hope. By the Word, the Lord lays a foundation for new life and peace in your life. • All I am, good Lord, belongs to You, including my tears and my shouts of joy. May I praise You in thought, word, and deed. Amen. (TLSB)