

Ezra

Chapter 3

Rebuilding the Altar

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. ² Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. ³ Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices. ⁴ Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. ⁵ After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred feasts of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the LORD. ⁶ On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid.

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 (see Lev 23:23–43 and notes (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 Tabernacles. 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 Hakkippurim* (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. See note on 1Sa 20:5. (*New Moon festival.* 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)

appointed sacred feasts. See note on Lev 23:2. (CSB)

freewill offerings. See note on 1:4. It is noteworthy that the restoration of the sacrifices preceded the erection of the temple itself. (CSB)

3:6 FOUNDATION OF THE LORD'S TEMPLE HAD NOT YET BEEN 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

⁷ Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and gave food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia. ⁸ In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers (the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem) began the work, appointing Levites twenty years of age and older to supervise the building of the house of the LORD. ⁹ Jeshua and his sons and brothers and Kadmiel and his sons (descendants of Hodaviah ^a) and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers—all Levites—joined together in supervising those working on the house of God. ¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. ¹¹ With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: “He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.” And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. ¹³ No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. 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 logs. 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 (see Nu 10:2 and note). 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)

He is good ... endures forever. See, e.g., 1Ch 16:34; 2Ch 5:13; Ps 100:5. (CSB)

Common refrain of praise to God, based on Ex 34:6–7 (Ps 136:1). (TLSB)

great shout. See Jos 6:5, 20; 1Sa 4:5; Ps 95:1. (CSB)

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 ALOUD – 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.

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)

OTHERS SHOUTED 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.

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

3:13 *shouts of joy ... sound of 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)