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**C1319 – June 5, 2013 – Ezra 3:1-13**  
**The Altar & Foundation**

Alright, tonight we return to the Book of Ezra where we are studying the return of the Jews to the land to rebuild the Temple. Ezra was a priest and a scribe who had an intense concern for the Law and for the people obeying the Law in order to avoid discipline and enjoy blessing. As such he was stirred up by God to lead the second return of Jews to the land in the year 458BC. But before he recounts his return and the disobedience he found he records the story of Zerubbabel who led the first return of the Jews to the land 80 years before.

This period is known as the Partial Restoration because only a part of the nation returned to the land when Cyrus issued his decree. The partial restoration occurred in three returns; 538, 458 and 445. The first return of 538 was prophesied by Jeremiah. Cyrus was the instrument named by Isaiah 150 years before, who issued the decree to return and rebuild the Temple. In response to the decree a small minority of Jews left their fortunes and started the arduous 800 mile journey back to the land in obedience to the will of God. They had a desire to obey the Lord by aligning themselves with God's covenant program centering on the Temple.

These people we met last week in Ezra 2. In verse 2 we first met Zerubbabel, the political leader, he was of the royal house of David through Solomon and therefore mention of his name is key because it shows that God was still at work among them to fulfill His promises in the Davidic Covenant to establish an eternal house, an eternal throne, an eternal king in an eternal kingdom. Second we met Jeshua, sometimes called Joshua, the spiritual leader, he was the high priest from the course of priest's that descended from Jedaiah. He would have an intense interest in rebuilding the temple and establishing the sacrificial system. He would be the one who would annually enter the Most

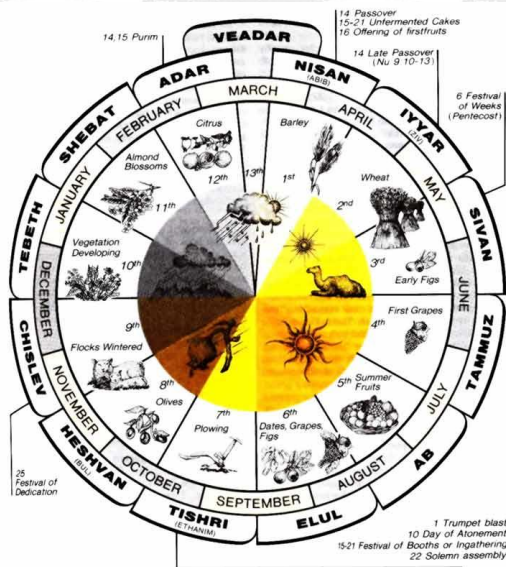
Holy Place to make atonement for the nation. Third we met three other courses of the priesthood who returned to administer the daily duties of the priests in the Temple. They would offer the sacrifices while wearing the special vestments, they would look after the Temple vessels and teach the nation the Law. Fourth we met the Levites and they were divided into a number of helping roles; the singers, the gatekeepers, the temple servants and Solomon's servants. Along with these spiritual leaders a number returned whose lineage was doubtful.

In all there were 42,360 Jews who returned. Even though all the numbers only add up to 29,818, a difference of 12,542. I mentioned before the problem of scribal transmission of numbers as a probable solution to this difference. Last time someone pointed out to me one of the other solutions, namely, that the 29,818 refers to the men only whereas the 42,360 refer to men, women and children. Support for this solution is found in the fact that at the end of 2:2 it specifies by saying "the number of the men" whereas 2:64 says "the whole assembly numbered 42,360." This is a possible solution. The number of men could have been 29,818 and the additional 12,542 that made up the whole assembly were women and children that traveled with them so that the grand total is 42,360. This solution, if correct, could also have contributed to the problem of intermarriage with foreign wives which we see later in the book. So this is another possible solution. The main thing to keep in mind is that these problems are attacked by people who hate the Bible and we need to be aware of where the Bible will be attacked and so you should know that there are viable solutions to these kinds of problems.

Now that we've been introduced to the people who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple we want to turn to Ezra 3 where we find Zerubbabel and Jeshua taking the lead in the rebuilding. These two men are major characters in the book and they both have a concern for obedience to Lord which necessitates rebuilding the Temple. So they're going to work together in leading the three stages of rebuilding the Temple. The temple is going to take 23 years to complete and it's completion can be divided into three stages; first the altar, second the foundation and third the Temple proper. Ezra 3 records the first two stages, the altar and the foundation, chapters 4 and 5 record the resistance they have to overcome to complete the Temple and finally in chapter 6 they will complete the Temple and have the dedication. So tonight the first two stages, building the altar and laying the foundation

and I'll be filling in a lot of details that aren't recorded here but we know took place from other passages and that way you'll have a fuller picture of what's occurring. But don't lose the forest for the trees. The big idea here is that the Temple has to be rebuilt so that the Law of Moses can be fulfilled by the Messiah and righteousness provided for the whole world. So if there is no rebuilt Temple then there can be no Messiah and if there is no Messiah there can be no righteousness and if there is no righteousness there is no salvation. So the rebuilding of the Temple here is God's way of preparing the way for His Messiah to provide redemption.

Verse 1, the historical setting, **Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.** They had now arrived in the province of Judah and returned to their various cities. After getting settled in **when the seventh month came**, the year was 537BC, they **gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.** Why are they gathering in Jerusalem in **the seventh month**?



Take a look at Israel's calendar. Nisan is the first month, Iyyar the second, Sivan the third, then Tammuz, Ab, Elul and seventh Tishri. These are the Babylonian names for these months. Tishri is **the seventh month** and corresponds to our September, October, so it's in the Fall. This is the Fall calendar. What occurs during Tishri for the Jewish people? On the 1<sup>st</sup> they celebrate the Feast of Trumpets, on the 10<sup>th</sup> is the Day of Atonement and on the 15-21 they celebrate the Feast of Booths or Ingathering, then the 22<sup>nd</sup> is a Solemn Assembly. This is a packed month for the Jews but only one of them

requires every male to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate. Which one? The Feast of Booths. And you see that feast mentioned explicitly in verse 4. Notice, **They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written...** Now there were sacrifices being offered before this as we'll see but at least in verse 1 we are reading about them **gathering together as one man to Jerusalem** in order to celebrate **the Feasts of Booths**. It was required for every man in Israel over 20 years of age to go up for this feast. And these Jews were going to keep the feasts. You can see that they didn't return just to return, they returned to keep the word of God. They returned to keep the biblical feasts that God stated in His word were necessary for the nation Israel to maintain fellowship with Him. And while we're thinking about them contrast the attitude of these Jews with Jews like Esther and Mordecai who didn't celebrate any of the feasts God instituted and instead created a new feast called Purim and kept it instead of the biblical feasts. I would argue that these Jews are very different from those Jews. Those Jews didn't care about the word of God, these Jews do care about the word of God.

Now since we've brought up the **Feast of Booths** what do we know about this feast? If you'll turn to Lev 23:34 you'll see several elements. Tonight is going to be something of a Bible drill so get ready. "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD.'" So the feast lasted seven days starting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishri. Verse 35, 'On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind.'" The first day was a Sabbath and no work and yet they're going to build booths on that day, you'll see what booths are in a moment, but notice you can build a booth on the Sabbath. Verse 36, 'For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.'" These are burnt offerings and each day they offered a big sacrifice. Middle of verse 36, "On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work." It was another sabbath on the eighth day, a solemn assembly. Verse 37, "These are the appointed times of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to present offerings by fire to the LORD—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, *each* day's matter on its own day— <sup>38</sup>besides *those of* the sabbaths of the LORD, and besides your gifts and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD. <sup>39</sup>On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land," there we learn it was after the harvest and after the

harvest you're joyful, you're ready to relax, so the Lord says, "you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day." It was a celebration, a big celebration. Verse 40, 'Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.' They were to build these little booths out of tree branches and live in them for seven days, it was like camping out, you were all living around Jerusalem, scattered throughout the hills at little campsites and this was to be a reminder of the Jews of the Wilderness generation that camped for forty years. Verse 41, 'You shall thus celebrate it *as* a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It *shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. <sup>42</sup>'You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, <sup>43</sup>so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'" So that's what they're gathering to celebrate here in verse 1. I might mention that one of the elements that isn't mentioned in this text but is mentioned in another one is that every seventh year when this feast was kept they were to read the entire Law of Moses to the whole nation, that way everybody was on the same page. The Law of Moses was their national constitution, it was the law of the land and so to keep everyone on the same page they read it to the whole nation once every seven years. Now, summing up so you get an idea of the atmosphere when you came into Jerusalem to celebrate this feast: "The feast of Tabernacles, the harvest festival of the Jewish" nation, "was the most popular and important festival after the Captivity. At Jerusalem it was a gala day. It was to the autumn pilgrims, who arrived on the 14th (of the month Tisri, the feast beginning on the 15th) day, like entrance into a silvan city. Roofs and courtyards, streets and squares, roads and gardens, were green with boughs of citron and myrtle, palm and willow. The booths recalled the pilgrimage through the wilderness. The ingathering of fruits prophesied of the spiritual harvest." Valling's Jesus Christ, p. 133."<sup>i</sup> It was a grand time.

Alright, so that's verse 1, now we come to verse 2, the building of the altar and who takes the lead but the high priest, **Jeshua the son of Jozadak**, and along with him we see **his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers**. Here's the leadership and the text says they **arose**, that Hebrew word means "to make preparations" (cf 1:5). So they

are making preparations. To do what? To build **the altar of the God of Israel** so they can **offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God**. That is, so they can be obedient. Now in order to be obedient they had to make these preparations. What preparations? Well, there were two things that were required by the word of God. First, identify the exact location where God chose to meet with man so as to build the altar in the correct place. Turn to Deut 12:5, people don't consider how technical an issue this is but there are eleven verses here that emphasize that God will choose the exact location where they are to meet with Him and offer sacrifices. Deut 12:4, where shall they seek the LORD? "you shall seek *the LORD* at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come." Again verse 6, what's the emphasis? Location. "There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. Verse 7, what's the emphasis? Location. "There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you." Verse 8, by contrast, "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes." No, it was do what God says. Verse 11, again the emphasis is location, "the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell. Verse 13, "Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every cultic place you see, 14but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you." It turned out that it was located within the land allotted to the tribe of Judah, in the city of Jerusalem on the Mt called Zion. So the first preparation for building the altar was to find the location and that wouldn't be too hard to do because while the Temple lay in ruins you could still make out the general layout. The second preparation was to construct the altar exactly according to God's instructions. And to see the construction design turn to Exod 27:1. I've got a bronze altar up here that I think reflects precisely what the text we're turning to reflects so you might take a look at this later tonight. Everything had to be perfect and the altar was where the sacrifices would be offered so that man could approach God safely. And the altar of sacrifice is described in verse 1, "And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide;" a cubit was 18-21 inches and there are big discussions regarding the length of the cubit used in different times and places, I won't

bother you with the details but if you get into archaeology you have to know these things. For our purposes five cubits is about seven and a half feet. “the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits.” About four and a half feet tall. Verse 2, “You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.” Which is why they call it the bronze altar. Verse 3, “You shall make its pails for removing its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. <sup>4</sup>“You shall make for it a grating of network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. <sup>5</sup>“You shall put it beneath, under the ledge of the altar, so that the net will reach halfway up the altar.” You had to have this grating on the bottom and on all four sides in order to get draft so the fire would burn. Verse 6, “You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. <sup>7</sup>“Its poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. <sup>8</sup>“You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was shown to you in the mountain, so they shall make *it*.” That’s the design and they prepared to follow it precisely in order to construct the altar properly and please God.

Alright then, in verse 2 when it says they **arose** it means they first identified the location in Jerusalem on Mt Zion, which we know as the Temple Mount, and second they reviewed the construction design for the bronze altar revealed in Exodus. This was essential to please God and verse 2 confirms our interpretation, they **built it...as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God**.

Now verse 3, **they set up the altar on its foundation** and then one of the major reasons they started construction is given, namely, **for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands**; we’re not given any details of what had happened but there was reason to be **terrified** and the people knew that terror meant the discipline of God and so they weren’t following the word of God. Therefore they better start obeying the word of God. So they set up the altar and started sacrificing. **they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening**. Turn to Exod 29:38: to see the passage that informed them what they needed to offer daily on the altar. And mind you this is every day. “Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two one year old lambs each day, continuously. <sup>39</sup>“The one lamb you shall offer in the morning and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight;

<sup>40</sup>and there *shall be* one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering with one lamb. <sup>41</sup>“The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD. <sup>42</sup>“It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there.” Alright, that’s the daily offering and what is signified was complete dedication and surrender to God. The lamb bore the worshipers sins dying a substitutionary death for the person and every day it reminded them of the ongoing necessity of cleansing and the importance of dedicating oneself to God and surrendering to Him.

Alright, now there is a NT counterpart to the burnt offering, anyone know what it is? Rom 12:1 which everybody quotes. Paul has just finished his great doctrinal discourse and now it’s time for application. And he begins, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” That’s the NT parallel to the OT burnt offering. The Christian is to recognize that he needs ongoing cleansing of sin and should therefore dedicate himself and surrender himself to God as often as necessary. That’s why I say Paul’s version of 1 John 1:9 is Romans 12:1. It’s the proper attitude behind confession, the idea that I dedicate and surrender my life to the Lord. I yield to Him. So these Jews in offering the daily burnt offerings were surrendering and dedicating themselves to God to be used by Him and we are to offer our own lives to Him as a daily sacrifice showing we surrender and dedicate ourselves to Him.

Now Ezra 3:4, **They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required; <sup>5</sup>and afterward *there was* a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD.** The emphasis time and time again is total obedience to the Lord. Whatever the LORD revealed in the text, they obeyed down to the nuts and bolts. Partial obedience is not acceptable to God, God accepts total obedience and of course in the Christian life that



means yielding to the Holy Spirit so that He produces His fruit through your new nature.

Alright, so here they come to **the Feast of Booths** and in addition to the two lambs that are the daily burnt offering there are other offerings that had to be given daily. To see them turn to Num 29:13. These instructions span seven days, actually there's an eighth day after, so eight days. Verse 13, 'You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire as a soothing aroma to the LORD: thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old, which are without defect; <sup>14</sup>and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an *ephah* for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, <sup>15</sup>and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; <sup>16</sup>and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. <sup>17</sup>'Then on the second day: twelve bulls,' so the first day how many bulls? Thirteen. The second day how many? Twelve, everything else remains the same, and this drop in bulls occurs each day down to the seventh day, verse 32, "'Then on the seventh day: seven bulls,' the total was 71 bulls plus all the others. And verse 35, "'On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no laborious work. <sup>36</sup>'But you shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect;'" Okay, that was the procedure and I wanted to show you how detailed the procedure was and that they would have followed this to the letter. Why did they do that? To obey the LORD totally so that God would stop disciplining them and bless them. So they were very careful to follow everything in the text as written. And they continued to do this, verse 5 **for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals**, whatever the LORD required they followed it; total obedience. They had gone into Exile and they didn't want to do that again.

Verse 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 had not been laid.** Now the note is made that the burnt offerings had been offered since **the first day of the seventh month**, that's 14 days before the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month when the Feast of Booths began. So these sacrifices were already being offered, then the Feast of Booths was celebrated with all its sacrifices and they continued. However, note that the altar was the only thing completed. **The foundation of the temple...had not been laid.** Now this is significant because it shows that neither the foundation nor

the completed Temple has to be in place before sacrifices can be offered. I'm looking ahead here to the Tribulation Temple that has to be built and operational to fulfill prophecy. And I'm suggesting that as soon as they can build the altar sacrifices can be re-instated. And I think it's going to mirror in many ways the re-instatement of sacrifices in Ezra 3. They're going to rebuild the altar and start sacrificing immediately, then they'll lay the foundation and finally they'll finish the Temple proper and dedicate it.

But there's one thing that stands in the way of rebuilding and sacrificing on a rebuilt altar? What is it? The red heifer. Numbers 19. You have to have a red heifer and you have to kill the red heifer and burn it and take its ashes and mix it with water, that way the priests can come and be ritually purified in that water, then they can start rebuilding and sacrificing, otherwise, no, won't work. So they had to have one in Jeshua's day or none of the sacrifices could be accepted by God.

And we're living in the same situation today. The Temple Mount lays desolate and there are Jews that want to rebuild but to rebuild they have to have a red heifer. Orthodox Jewish Rabbi Chaim Richman explains, "In truth, the fate of the entire world depends on the Red Heifer. For God has ordained that its ashes alone is the single missing ingredient for the reinstatement of Biblical purity—and thereafter, the rebuilding of the Holy Temple." So the red heifer is a big deal and if you're wondering about the status of the red heifer today a representative of the Temple Institute in Israel said in March of 2010, there is now "definitely a kosher red heifer here in Israel." So the red heifer is not a problem, it's there. There are other problems of course, like the Dome of the Rock sitting right on top of the Most Holy Place. But the red heifer is apparently not a problem because they claim to already have one. And so as soon as the Dome of the Rock is removed and I take it the anti-Christ will actually be the one who does that because he wants a counterfeit temple to be built so he can enthrone himself as god. So once he removes it then the orthodox Jews can slaughter the red heifer, burn it, be ritually purified and start rebuilding the altar so they can re-instate sacrifices just as they did in Ezra's day.

Ezra 3:7, stage one is complete, now they need to begin stage two, repair the foundation, that takes money and many people had given lots of money back in 2:68-69 so they had lots of money sitting around in the treasury to get

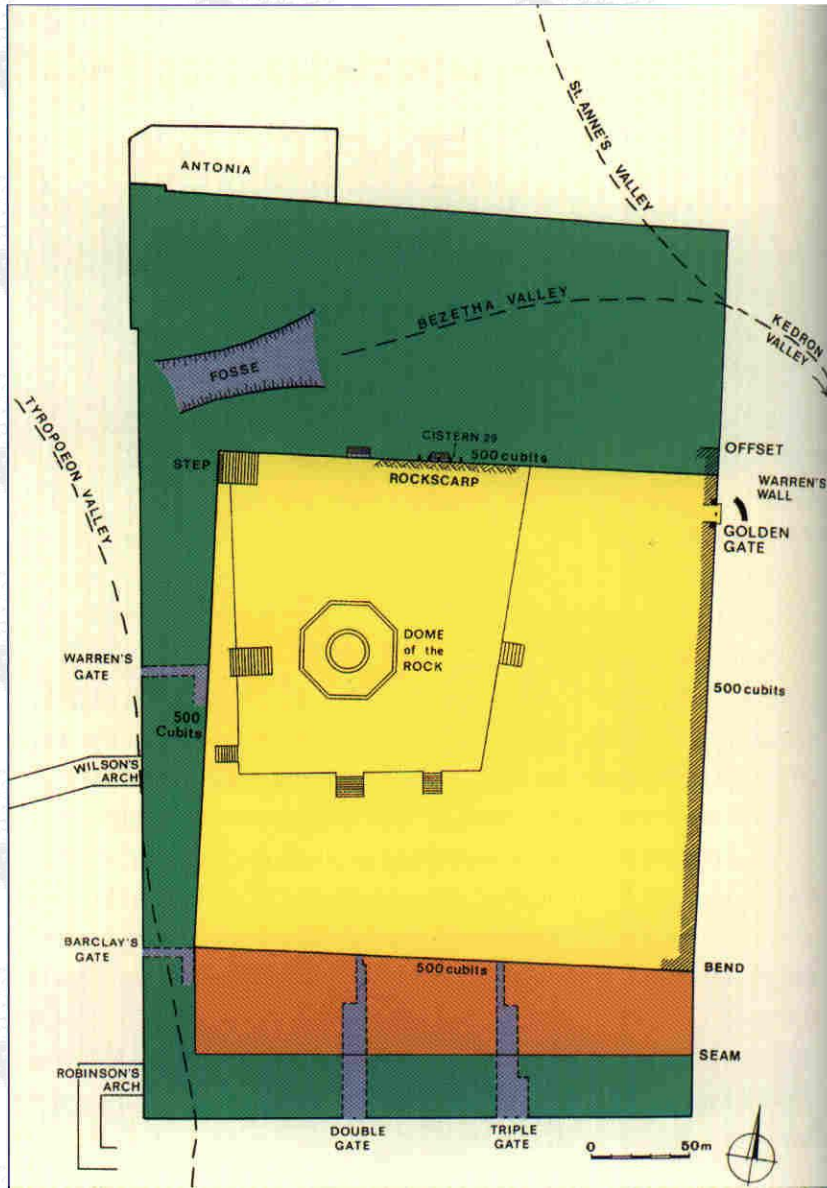
started. Verse 7, **Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.** Notice they imported? What did they import? They imported lumber. Is that okay, to get your materials from pagans. Sure, they're just materials. God made the materials, the materials belong to Him so if Sidon and Tyre have the best materials why not import the best. Is that all they imported? NO, they also imported their skills. These pagans had tremendous woodworking skills and so they're importing materials and skills. Is that a problem? Apparently not. Solomon did. Solomon imported the materials and the skills of the same region. The Sidonians were excellent carpenters. Can pagans be excellent carpenters? Sure. Why not, they're made in the image of God, they live in God's world and they inevitably show us that they are. The only thing is we don't over-import, that is we filter what we take from the pagan world so we don't suck up their entire worldview. But we can filter and take the good stuff and use that.

So they're importing the best materials here, cedar lumber from Lebanon, as well as workers, these were the famous cedars of Lebanon and they were huge so they floated them down the coast of the Mediterranean sea to **Joppa**, the ancient sea port that Jonah set sail from in defiance of God's love for all nations. And from Joppa they had a road that went to Jerusalem. It's a famous road, you can still travel that road today, lots of intense battles were fought along that road in the 1948 war and several memorials still exist along that road commemorating those battles. And apparently when they took the money up to these people to buy their materials and skills they also brought the letter from **Cyrus king of Persia** that you can read in Ezra 1:2-4. The letter says the king authorizes the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and that anyone in the vicinity should help them by providing materials, skills and whatever they need.

Verse 8 and by this time they've gathered the materials to Jerusalem, it took six months. **Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month**, this would be the month of Iyar, 536BC, in that month **Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work.** Now the important thing here was that they locate the exact place or

boundaries of the foundation of Solomon's Temple and built directly upon them (2:68). And apparently that's what they did, they located the four corners of Solomon's Temple set out to repair the foundation.

Now the prior foundation in Solomon's Temple was a perfect square 500 cubits x 500 cubits, it was this yellow area.



It was much smaller than the Temple Mount you see today in Jerusalem which is the green area, the much larger, rectangular shaped Temple Mount. This is because the one from Zerubbabel's Temple was enlarged twice, first by the Hasmonean Jews which is the orange area, and second by Herod the Great which is the green area. Now these aren't three different Temples,

they're all just one Temple, the Second Temple that was expanded twice. But in Zerubbabel's day it was just this yellow square. If you go to the Temple Mount or you see it in pictures or on TV, the only wall which is exposed today which was originally part of Zerubbabel's Temple is the central portion of the eastern wall opposite the Kidron Valley and Mt of Olives. The other walls are enclosed in the rock. So the yellow portion in this diagram is the original square Temple Mount that Solomon's temple was built on and which Zerubbabel and the returnees built on. Now I'm showing you the proposition of Leen Ritmeyer who I think is correct but understand that there are several archaeologists that have alternate proposals for where the actual square foundations are located. But what Ritmeyer observed was that there's a strange Step in the northwest corner which forms a right angle that runs parallel with the Rockscarp along the northern wall and makes a perfect right angle when it hits the eastern wall at 500 cubits. From there wall turns south and at 500 cubits there is a bend in the wall, a very slight deviation from the straight course. The bend forms another right angle that makes the southeast corner. It's hard to see the bend but you can identify it by looking for a rock jutting out of the wall which is called Mohammeds Pillar that approximately is where the bend is. And if you follow that right angle from the Bend and go west along the southern wall it will lead you to the southwest corner. From there you run north to the right angle of the Step where you started. And when you do this you find each side is a perfect 500 cubits according to the Egyptian royal cubit of 20.67in which is 861 feet per side making the total surface area of the Temple Mount 17.2 acres. This was the foundation area where Zerubbabel and Jeshua oversaw repairs.

So they were repairing the foundation on the identical square foundation that Solomon's Temple had been built upon and since it is on a large rocky hill there were probably many repairs that had to be made. Some of their stone work we can see lower down on the eastern wall. Verse 9, **Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.** <sup>10</sup>**Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel.** Or according to the skill of King David. These are all the spiritual leaders of Israel that we met

from chapter 2, the high priest Jeshua, the priests in their sacred vestments and the silver trumpets and the Levites and the singers and musicians, everyone is prepared to do what? What we were made to do! **Praise the Lord** with skill; skill in this case which had been passed down from **King David**. Praise is the proper response to God giving them success in rebuilding the altar and the foundation. Now what is praise? Praise fundamentally is calling up God's attributes, it's magnifying His name which is His person. And God had certainly done great things during this rebuilding. They had been terrified of the peoples throughout the land and you can't work very well when your terrified but God had removed their terror so they could successfully rebuild. So it's time to praise and praise should always focus on the Person of God and what God has done, not man and what man does for God or says he will do for God. That's not praise that's self-admiration.

So verse 11 we come to the two responses to the completion of the work. It wasn't a unified response. First, the response of those who were younger and they'd been working out in the hot sun and they were happy so **They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever. 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.** They praised God for His attribute of goodness. He had been good to them giving them peaceful times so they could rebuild. He had also been good to them by providing materials from the people in Sidon and Tyre. Now that the work was completed it was time to give thanks to God for His goodness. Second they highlight God's **lovingkindness**. Lovingkindness is God's *chesed* love which always refers to His loyalty to His covenants. Chesed love is love that is within a covenant. God had made everlasting covenants with the nation Israel through Abraham and David, the nation detected that their success in rebuilding was a function of God's loyalty to His everlasting covenants.

The second response in verse 12 and these are those who were older and had seen the prior Solomonic Temple in all its glory. **Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy,** <sup>13</sup>so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout

**of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.** So you see there was an ambiguous response when the foundation was laid. Even though the design of the second temple followed closely the design of Solomon's Temple it was much inferior. It did not have the adjacent royal compound, it did not have the two entrance pillars, it did not have the two olive wood cherubim and it did not have the most sacred piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant, that was lost during the Exile to Babylon. And above all else, the temple did not have the indwelling presence of the Shekinah Glory which signified God's presence at the temple. For these reasons verse 12 records that **many...who had seen the first temple, wept.**

So then, in Ezra 3 we have seen that the Jews returned and after settling in their homes they quickly organized at Jerusalem to rebuild the altar so that sacrifices could be offered that would be acceptable and pleasing to God so that God would solve the terror from other people in the land. After the red heifer purification took place they built the altar on the exact location and according to the exact design given by God and began offering the daily sacrifices on the first day of the seventh month. On the fifteenth of the month they celebrated the Feast of Booths with all its required sacrifices. After this they imported cedar from Lebanon in order to repair the foundation. Then they began the work upon the exact square foundations of Solomon's Temple. When it was completed there was an ambivalent response from the people; the young rejoiced by praising and thanking God, the older wept because this temple was so inferior to Solomon's.

Alright, what lessons can we learn from Ezra 3? First, it is important to surrender and dedicate ourselves to God. The returnees surrendered and dedicated themselves to God by offering the daily burnt offerings both morning and evening. The lamb was completely burned so that none of it could be reclaimed. We are called to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God so that we are holding back nothing but giving our whole lives to God, Rom 12:1-2. We should do this as often as is necessary. Second, it is important to give total obedience to God and not partial obedience. The returnees realized that everything must be done precisely according to God's word. They located the specific place for the altar, they built it according to the strict design, they offered sacrifices morning and evening according to the word of the Lord. They celebrated the fixed Festivals according to the word of the Lord. We also

should give total obedience to God and not partial obedience. God is not interested in partial obedience. He is interested in total obedience. Total obedience is possible only when we yield to the Holy Spirit which activates our new nature through which He produces His fruit which is perfect. Third, we can use pagan materials and skills as long as we don't import paganism. The returnees utilized building materials and skills learned by the Tyrians and Sidonians. These people, though pagan, were also made in God's image and live in God's world. Therefore they do discover truth whether or not they recognize that it is God who has revealed this truth to them. The skills people have are all gracious gifts of God and therefore He is to be praised for them. Despite the fact they did not praise God for them does not bar us from importing their skills that we will use for the glory of God. Fourth, we should praise and give thanks to God in worship. Worship is not a program we watch, a mere spectator sport, it is something we are to engage in. Praise and thanksgiving is primarily with the human voice and often accompanied by instrumentation. When God had been faithful and given them success in completing the first two stages of rebuilding many of the people praised God for His goodness and His covenant love. We as Gentiles should repetitively praise God for His goodness and for grafting us into the rich root of the olive tree so that we have become partakers of covenant blessings through the blood of Christ which we were once excluded from. We have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

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<sup>i</sup> Easton, M. G. (1893). *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

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