

Ezra 3-4 – Thursday, July 20th, 2017

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

- So chapter three begins by telling us that it was the seventh month that the children of Israel gathered together in Jerusalem.
- This particular month was a very significant month for Israel, such that they celebrated three of the seven Feasts of the Lord.
- Namely, that of the Feast of the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and 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 Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening burnt offerings.

- Here we're told that the first thing they do is build the altar of the God of Israel in spite of the fact that the Temple was in ruins.
- To their credit, the Israelites knew that they had to do first things first, as it were, in their worship of the Lord, first and foremost.
- This was the problem with Ephesus, the first of the seven churches in Revelation chapter two that left, not lost, their first love.

Revelation 2:4-7 (NKJV) — 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. 5 Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

- This detail of their daily burnt offerings to the Lord, without the foundation of the temple, speaks to a very important principle.
- Specifically, that of our worship of the Lord being more important than our service to the Lord, which we can get backwards.
- I like how one said it related to the altar of worship, "you can have an altar without a temple, but not a temple without an altar."

7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

- While I realize I may be reading too much into this, it does strike me as interesting that giving came as a result of worshipping.
- Actually, this is why tithes and offerings are seen as an act of worship, such that, it's really a continuation of worshipping God.
- In other words, our worship of the Lord, and our giving to the Lord are linked together in the sense that they go hand-in-hand.

8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. 9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites. 10 When the builders 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 ordinance of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

- You'll forgive me for pointing this out and bringing this up, but this is what a praise and worship service is supposed to be like.
- There is no holding back; there is neither reservation, nor hesitation in singing, praising, and thanking God for His goodness.
- So much so, we're told that they were shouting aloud with a great shout as they praised the Lord simply for the foundation.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, 13 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 sound was heard afar off.

- This is interesting because these old men who wept had to be at least 80 years old, if they were to remember the first temple.
- The question becomes one of why they were weeping at all when the occasion was one of celebration for what God had done.
- There are two thoughts on this, one of which is that it didn't compare with the first, and second, it was a reminder of their sin.
- Regardless of which one it was, or if it was both, this response was prompted by dwelling on the past, diminishing the present.

G. Campbell Morgan - "The backward look which discounts present activity is always a peril. Regrets over the past, which paralyze work in the present are always wrong. Moreover all such regrets, as in this case, are in danger of blinding the eyes to the true value and significance of the present."

Ezra 4 -- 1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

- So this is a textbook case of, "if you can't beat them, join them," and as such, one of the most effective devices of the devil.
- By the way, from the beginning of Ezra chapter four on to the end of the book of Nehemiah, the work is riddled with conflict.
- This because, nothing we do in our service for the Lord, and commitment to the Lord, will ever go unopposed by the enemy.

3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

- To me, this verse should be indelibly etched on the heart and mind of every Christian who is serving in an area of leadership.
- The reason being is that this is an example of unflinching fearlessness on the part of leadership when faced with opposition.
- It takes a strong leader who's willing to take a strong stand and make an unpopular decision knowing the criticism they'll face.

4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- I find it interesting that when their attempts of assimilation fail, they resort to discouragement and accusation, as we'll see next.
- The reason I mention this is because this is exactly what Satan tries to do with us in his efforts to destroy and even devour us.
- Actually, from verse six on to verse 24, we have a parenthetical passage providing us with the detail of the adversary's attacks.

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7 In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion: 9 From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—representatives of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River—and so forth. 11 (This is a copy of the letter that they sent him) To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: 12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations. 13 Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. 16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River. 17 The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. 18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. 19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. 21 Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. 22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? 23 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. 24 Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- So the chapter ends with the work ceasing because of this letter, but spoiler alert, it is resumed and it is completed in spite of it.
- However, the problem with this ceasing is it was a huge mistake because the gifts and callings of God are without repentance.
- In other words, God had called them to do this, and they acquiesced to the opposition against that which God already ordained.