

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 3

This chapter relates how that the people of Israel returned from captivity, gathered to Jerusalem, and set up the altar, where sacrifices were offered, (^{<1510B>}Ezra 3:1-3), and kept the feast of tabernacles, and offered the sacrifices of that, besides the daily sacrifice, and of other festivals; and contributed to the workmen that prepared for the building of the temple, (^{<1510B>}Ezra 3:4-7) and began it by laying the foundation of it; which to some was matter of joy, to others of grief, on different accounts, (^{<1510B>}Ezra 3:8-13).

Ver. 1. *And when the seventh month was come*, etc.] The month Tisri, which answers to part of September and October; or when it “was approaching”^{f33}, for before it was actually come some following things were done, the people met, and an altar was built; for on the first day of it sacrifices were offered, (^{<1510B>}Ezra 3:6),

and the children of Israel were in the cities; their respective cities, settling their domestic affairs:

the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem; the thing was universal, and done with as much dispatch as if only one man was concerned; and it seems to denote as if they were under a divine impulse, and came together without any consultation, or knowledge of each other’s designs, and without summons.

Ver. 2. *Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak*, etc.] Who was the high priest, and the proper person to give the lead in the following work:

and his brethren the priests; the common priests, very fit to join him, and assist him in it:

and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel; the prince and governor of Judah, whose presence was necessary to give countenance to the work, and animate to it:

and his brethren; the princes and heads of the people, particularly those mentioned (^{<1510B>}Ezra 2:2)

and builded the altar of the God of Israel; the altar of burnt offering, gave orders for the building of it, and directions about it:

to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God; or prophet of God, as the Syriac version; (see ^{<B001>}Leviticus 1:1-17).

Ver. 3. *And they set the altar upon his bases,* etc.] Which might remain of the old altar; or the meaning is, that it was fixed and settled on the same spot where it stood before:

for fear was upon them, because of the people of those countries; and therefore they hastened to erect an altar, and offer sacrifices to the Lord, in hope that he would appear for them, and help them against their enemies; or rather, as some render the words ^{f34} “though fear was upon them”, etc. yet they were not deterred from the work, worship, and service of God:

and they offered burnt offerings unto the Lord, even burnt offerings, morning and evening; the daily sacrifice, as directed to (^{<0238>}Exodus 29:38,39).

Ver. 4. *They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written,* etc.] According to the rules prescribed for the observation of it in (^{<0234>}Leviticus 23:34-42) this began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month:

and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; for on all the eight days of the feast there was a certain number of sacrifices fixed for every day; and exactly according to the law concerning them did they offer them at this time; (see ^{<0212>}Numbers 29:12-38).

Ver. 5. *And afterwards offered the continual burnt offering,* etc.] Not after the feast of tabernacles, as if they then began to offer the daily sacrifice; for that they did as soon as the altar was set up, and on the first day of the month, (^{<1513>}Ezra 3:3,6), rather the sense is, that after the daily burnt offering of the morning, they offered the other sacrifices peculiar to the several days of the feast of tabernacles; they never neglected that, yea, always began with it; all the rest were after it, and so on other festivals:

both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated; to the service of the Lord, and the honour of his name, as every first day of the month, and every other appointed festival, they

offered the sacrifices appropriate to each; but not to the neglect of that sacrifice, and always after it:

and of everyone that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord; these they were careful also to offer in their proper time.

Ver. 6. *From the first of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord,* etc.] And which day was not only a new moon, but a grand festival, the feast of blowing of trumpets, (^{<R234>}Leviticus 23:24,25), and no doubt but they observed the tenth day of this month, with all the rites of it, which was the day of atonement, (^{<R237>}Leviticus 23:27-32),

but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid; they began first with sacrifices, that having thereby given thanks to God for their return to their own land, and for all the benefits they enjoyed, and made atonement for their sins in a typical way, they might be the more prepared and fit for the work of building the temple; or, “though the foundation” of it was not laid ^{f35}, yet they offered the above sacrifices.

Ver. 7. *They gave money also to the masons, and to the carpenters,* etc.] To buy stone and timber with for the building of the temple:

and meat and drink and oil unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre; which were more agreeable to them than money, because there was not plenty of such things in their country, as in the land of Israel:

to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa; as they did at the first building of the temple by Solomon; they cut down cedars at Lebanon, which belonged to them, and sent them by sea to Joppa, the nearest seaport to Jerusalem, about forty miles from it: (see ^{<H216>}2 Chronicles 2:16),

according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia; for Tyre and Zidon being under his dominion as well as Judea, he not only gave leave to the Jews to get cedar wood from Lebanon, but gave orders to the Zidonians and Tyrians to furnish them with it, paying a valuable consideration for it; and so some ^{f36} render the word, “according to the commandment of Cyrus”.

Ver. 8. *Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem,* etc.] The place where it formerly stood; the Jews seem to have set out from Babylon, in the spring of the preceding year, as it was now of

this; which to Jerusalem was a journey of about four months, as Ezra performed it, (^{<15709>}Ezra 7:9), but might take up longer time for such a body of people to do it in, being larger than that with him; wherefore, after they had visited their respective cities, and settled their affairs there, they came to Jerusalem on the seventh month, or September, and kept the feast of tabernacles, and then they returned to their cities again, the winter season being an improper time to begin the building of the temple; having given money to workmen to purchase materials with, and no doubt left a sufficient number to clear away the rubbish, and get things ready by the returning spring to set about the work:

in the second month; the month Ijar, as Jarchi observes, answering to part of April and May, having, as may be supposed, kept the passover the month before:

began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak: the prince, and the high priest:

and the remnant of their brethren, the priests and Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; whose names and numbers are given in the preceding chapter:

and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and upwards to set forward the work of the house of the Lord; to put men to work upon it, and direct them what to do, and urge them to attend closely to it; ever since David's time the Levites were employed at twenty years of age, when before not till thirty, or twenty five; (see ^{<13224>}1 Chronicles 23:24).

Ver. 9. *Then stood Jeshua, with his sons*, etc.] Not Jeshua the high priest before mentioned, but Jeshua the Levite, (^{<15740>}Ezra 2:40),

and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together; the same with Hodaviah, (^{<15740>}Ezra 2:40)

to set forward the workmen in the house of God; to give them orders to begin and lay the foundation, and hasten and animate them to it:

the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites: two of this man's sons are mentioned in (^{<14185>}Nehemiah 3:18,24 10:9).

Ver. 10. *And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord*, etc.] The masons, whose work it was, (^{<15747>}Ezra 3:7)

they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets; these were set in a proper place by the prince and the high priest, in their priestly garments, with trumpets in their hands to blow with, as the foundation was laying:

and the Levites the sons of Asaph, with cymbals to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel; these were instruments of brass, and made a tinkling sound, and were by the order of David; and the persons that made use of them; and the songs of praise they were played upon unto; all by his appointment, as well as harps and psalteries, which might now be used, though not expressed; (see ^{<31516>}1 Chronicles 15:16 25:1). So the Messenians, when the walls of their city were raised by Epaminondas, and their houses and temples erected, attended it with sacrifices and prayer, and with piping and singing ^{f37}.

Ver. 11. *And they sang together by course*, etc.] They sang by turns in responses, and answered one another, as the word signifies; when one company had performed their part, another took theirs:

in praising and giving thanks to the Lord; for returning them to their own land, and giving them opportunity, ability, and will, to set about the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord, and restoring the pure worship of God;

because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever towards Israel; which words are often repeated in (^{<3101>}Psalm 136:1-26) and which might be the psalm the Levites now sung by responses:

and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord; to express their joy, in the best manner they could, on this solemn occasion:

because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid; which gave them hope the temple in due time would be rebuilt, and the service of it restored; (see ^{<3806>}Job 38:6,7).

Ver. 12. *But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men*, etc.] Seventy or eighty years of age:

that had seen the first house; the temple built by Solomon, as they very well might, since then it had been destroyed but fifty two years; for the seventy years captivity are to be reckoned from the fourth of Jehoiakim,

when it began, and which was eighteen years before the destruction of the temple; the beginning of the next clause,

when in the foundation, according to the Hebrew accents, is to be connected with this,

that had seen the first house; not when first founded, for that was five hundred years ago, but in “its foundation”; they saw it standing upon its foundation, in all its glory, and so the Septuagint version; and we may read on, when

this house was before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; seeing what it was like to be by the foundation now laid, and was in their sight as nothing in comparison of the former; (see ^{^SHag. 2:3) but Aben Ezra connects this clause as we do,}

when the foundation of this house was laid; not but that the dimensions of this house strictly taken were as large as the former: (see ^{^E Ezra 6:3,4), but not the courts and appendages to it: besides, what might affect them, there was no likelihood of its being so richly decorated with gold and silver as the former temple, and many things would be wanting in it, as the Urim and Thummim, etc.}

and many shouted aloud for joy; of the younger sort, who had never seen the grandeur of the first temple, and were highly delighted with the beginning of this, and the hope of seeing it finished.

Ver. 13. *So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people*, etc.] That is, not clearly and distinctly, they were so mixed and confounded together, and made such a jarring and discord:

for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off; the shouting being of young people, whose voice was strongest, and they the most numerous, the noise of shouting prevailed over the noise of weeping; and it was heard further, and at a distance appeared more distinctly to be the noise of shouting, that of weeping not reaching so far; though Jarchi is of opinion that the noise of weeping was heard further than the noise of shouting, which is not likely.