

## **Ezra 3:1-13 – The Altar and the Foundation**

God's plan for the people of the land of Judah was to go into exile for 70 years and then return to the promised land. God used King Cyrus to make this plan come true. King Cyrus told the Jewish captives in Babylonia to return to the promised land and to rebuild the temple of the God of Israel. God stirred up about 50,000 people to return from Babylonia to the land of Judah. They returned to Judah and Jerusalem most likely in the year 538 BC. The primary goal of the people who returned was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Once the people made the long journey back to Judah, it was time for them to get to work building God's house.

**Read Ezra 3:1-6.**

When is the seventh month, Tishri? On the Jewish calendar, what important events happened in the seventh month? By the seventh month, the returned exiles had begun to settle into the towns of Judah. When the seventh month came, what happened? (3:1)

What was the first thing the returned exiles built on the site of the old temple? Who was in charge of this building project? What pattern did they use to build the altar? Why didn't they use a "modern" pattern that was all the rage in Babylonia? Do you think that this was a good choice of what to build first? Why or why not? (3:2)

The phrase "for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands" has been translated another way by a number of translations. NKJV, NIV and others translate the same phrase as "though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries" or something similar to it. They either built the altar because they were afraid or they build the altar in spite of their fear. Which do you think is the best translation based on the context? The daily burnt offerings are detailed in Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:2-8. (3:3)

What was the Feast of Booths? Why was it significant? The offering regulations for the week long feast is found in Numbers 29:12-38. What was the importance of noting all the offerings which were offered? (3:4)

Verse 5 lists other offerings which were offered on the altar once the altar had been built. One sacrifice which is conspicuously missing is the offering for the Sabbath unless the Sabbath was considered one of the appointed feasts. While they were offering all these sacrifices, what was also obviously missing? Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement required the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies? Could they conform to the requirements of this day? (3:6)

**Read Ezra 3:7-13.**

With the prime objective of rebuilding the temple in mind, what did the returned exiles do to prepare for the temple rebuilding? This is similar to what Solomon did in 1 Kings 5:6-11. (3:7)

What happened in the second month of the second year after the exiles had returned to Judah? Who were the leaders? Who was given the job of supervising the work of the temple rebuilding? Who all was involved in rebuilding the temple? Solomon had over 180,000 people working on the building of the temple. Solomon also started building the temple in the second month of the year. See 1 Kings 5:13-6:1. Why was this a good time to start building? (3:8-9)

What did the returned exiles do to commemorate the laying of the foundation of the temple? (3:10)

What did they sing at the occasion of the laying of the foundation of the temple? (3:11)

How did many of the older men who had seen Solomon's temple react when they saw the foundation being laid? Was this an appropriate response? Is bigger always better? What impact did their weeping have on the other people? (3:12)

How did most people react when they saw the foundation? What was the measure of their excitement and joy? (3:13)

Do you think the people who stayed in Babylonia cared that the altar had been built and that the foundation of the temple had been laid? Why or why not?

When we compare the "good old days" to the present, sometimes that can cause discouragement. How should we respond if something doesn't measure up to the "good old days"?