

The Celebration of Completion

General Topic: Liberating Passover

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Author: Rev. Spencer L. Braddix

Lesson Text: Ezra 6:13-22

Background Scripture: Ezra 6:13-22; Leviticus 23:4-8

Ezra 6:13 *Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions,*

according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the

prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the

commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and

Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the

reign of Darius the king.

16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity,

kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.

17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four

hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the

tribes of Israel.

18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God,

which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together; all of them were pure, and killed the

passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated

themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel,

did eat,

22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful,

and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the

house of God, the God of Israel.

Lesson Objective(s):

This week's lesson will reveal the joy of celebrating the delivering power of God and in turn encourage us to thank God for all He has done.

Teaching Tools:

Word puzzles may be developed from the following site: www.puzzlemaker.com. Also, www.dtlk.com has several visual aids that may be beneficial, as well as www.kidssundayschool.com which provide other helps for teaching.

Bible Journaling may be an interesting way to involve older teens in self-expression of the lessons they are taught. Visit www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps to find ways to use this valuable tool to learn and reinforce Scripture.

The Lesson:

In the current presented passage, we see God's hand at work in unfolding His divine plan for mankind. Through the prophets, God had given His prophecy that the children of Israel would go into captivity for seventy years because of their sin.

In our text, we see God having moved on the hearts of pagan rulers as well as His own people to get them out of captivity and back to the Promised Land. Once back home, the Israelites were to rebuild the temple and re-establish the prescribed worship at Jerusalem. Out of the chaos of defeat and captivity, God was restoring worship and great joy to His people.

Background

As mentioned in the previous text, the decree had gone forth from King Cyrus for the Children of Israel to rebuild the Temple after their captivity in Babylon. Unfortunately, the job was not completed under Cyrus's reign. Because of this, when the Jews were trying to complete the Temple later on, local leaders raised concerns about who told them to rebuild it. Darius was king at the time, and he issued an order that the archives be searched for the decree made by King Cyrus.

The decree was discovered. King Darius in turn issued his own decree to finish the work (Ezra 6:8). The expenses of this project were to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work would not stop. Whatever was needed, young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the

God, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem, must be given to them daily without fail, so that they could offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

Pagan Cooperation (Ezra 6:13–16)

The Temple was finally completed. God's people had been through so much. They had endured many obstacles, but the finished product was now visible. They rejoiced because the favor of the Lord had been upon them as they sought to honor God by re-instituting worship at the Temple. To start a work and see it to completion is a sign of the grace of the Most High. Israel knew this.

Ironically the regime that oppressed the Israelites in slavery, became the vessel of their emancipation. The Temple was completed, but not by human powers. From the touching of the hearts of Cyrus and Darius, to providing funds to complete the work, it was all of God. It was God who initiated the project by His Spirit. It was God who guided their hands to its completion. The house belonged to God. It was therefore logical to dedicate the building back to God. All our victories and accomplishments are because God has favored us. We can be encouraged to know that God can use our enemies to elevate us out of the dungeon of bondage.

Temple Dedication (Ezra 6:17-18)

The Children of Israel did not just sing and dance and shout; they brought an offering. They could have said, "We have already worked. We gave our time, and we gave our talent; we do not need to give any more sacrifices." But they went a step further and gave an offering.

The Children of Israel were doing things in order and according to what was written in the books of Moses. During the dedication of the new Temple, they offered sacrifices. Sacrificial offerings in the Old Testament were a means to atone for human sins and restore people back to God. Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, did away with all of that when He died for us once and for all on the Cross. The Children of Israel offered what is called a sin offering. This included the blood from bulls, rams, lambs, and goats.

There's not very much joy in simply going through the motions of what we might call worship. If joyful worship is to be restored, it must begin with the restoration of God's people to a right relationship and fellowship with Him. This involves the confessing and forsaking of our sins. It also means that we have to seek Him in order to know the true worship of owning Him as our Creator and Sustainer.

We must seek Him because He is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, the supreme Judge of all the earth. We must seek Him because He alone is worthy of praise and obedience. We must also leave the joy and blessings up to Him since He knows us and how best to manage our lives.

Be Salt! Be Light! Be Blessed!

Passover Celebration (Ezra 6:19-22)

In a sense this was a second exodus. The freed captives had just been delivered from the house of exile. The Passover, as celebrated by Hebrew people, is the archetype (or pattern) of divine intervention in the life of God's people. It is not a coincidence that the Temple's dedication occurred just before Passover. What better time to declare the glorious grace of the Most High who rescues the lonely and restores those who are accounted dead?

It was the 14th day of the first month, and everyone was ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their brothers, the priests, and for themselves. They separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel. For seven days they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread joyfully because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Persia, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel. When the Lord blesses us to complete a task, may we rejoice in hope and rededicate ourselves to God.

Final Thoughts