

FPFWC Christian Development



Liberating Passover

March 2022

Spring Quarter

MARCH 19, 2022

Lesson #3 – Free to Celebrate

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Ezra 6:13-22

ICE BREAKERS-

1. What prevents believers from experiencing the joy of the Lord?
2. Why is your attitude of heart important for God to work through you?

Key Verse: 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.—Ezra 6:16

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Today's lesson continues the narrative of Ezra 6:1–12 (see lesson 2). The resettled Jewish exiles, under Zerubbabel's leadership, rebuilt the foundation of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 3:8). After the work began, Persian officials questioned under whose authority they rebuilt (5:3–5). Persian King Darius responded and reiterated a declaration of King Cyrus. Only then were the exiles free to rebuild without fear of interference (6:1–5). Further, King Darius made allowances to financially support the reconstruction (6:8–9). The exiles were able to rebuild a place fit for the Lord's worship.

Humans often attach importance and significance to specific places. So it should be of no surprise that the exiles would value the temple and celebrate its reconstruction. The temple marked the place where God's presence was with His people (1 Kings 8:27–30). But if Israel were to disobey God, then His presence would leave the temple (Ezekiel 10:1–18). The temple (and its predecessor the tabernacle) allowed the Israelites to experience God's presence in their midst. It even allowed Israel to rightly follow the commands of God (see Deuteronomy 12:11).

Construction of the temple was just the first step. The building had to be dedicated to signify its holiness before God. Previously, the temple of Solomon's time underwent the same. Sacrifices were offered and God's people celebrated His goodness (1 Kings 8:62–66; 2 Chronicles 7:4–11).

In numerous instances the temple had undergone changes. For example, the unfaithful King Ahaz removed certain parts (2 Kings 16:17–18). In response, faithful leaders reinstated certain practices (23:21–23). It was important for the temple to be ritually cleansed (see 2 Chronicles 29). Even when used improperly, the temple's importance was not lost. It stood as a holy place where the presence of God was declared to Israel.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Temple Finished and Dedicated (6:13–18)

6:13–18. The provincial officials and the local collaborators **carried out the decree with all diligence**, providing much needed political and economic support. The prophetic and spiritual support continued from **Haggai** and **Zechariah** (Hg 1:12–15). As a result, **they finished building** the temple, a project completed through God's **command** and the political proclamations of the Persian emperors on March 12, 516 BC, **the sixth year of the reign of King Darius**.

Next, the community gathered to dedicate **this house of God with joy** (cf. 1Kg 8 for the first temple's dedication). The hundreds of animal sacrifices offered were small in comparison to previous dedications (1Kg 8:5, 63; 2Ch 30:24; 35:7). Also, the **sin offering for all Israel** indicated social identification with **the tribes of Israel**. The leaders organized ritual life in a manner consonant with the preexilic community and in accordance with **the book of Moses**. The returned exiles thus embodied the identity of the covenant people of God.

4. First Observance of the Passover (6:19–22)

6:19–22. A month later, with the temple dedication complete, the community **observed the Passover**. This was the first time in 70 years that the reconstituted **sons of Israel** were able to observe, in Jerusalem, the feast that commemorated their liberation from Egyptian oppression (Ex 12:1–14) and redemption as a nation. The joyous, worship-focused seven-day **Feast of Unleavened Bread** followed (Lv 23:5–6; Ps 105:42–43; Neh 8:10). **The priests and the Levites had purified themselves** with the washings outlined in the law of Moses (Ex 29:4; Nm 8:7).

The returned exiles, though committed to purity within their community, included among their group others **who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land**. These inhabitants of Judah had to make two decisions. (1) They had to reprioritize any aspects of their social identity inconsistent with their identification with the people of God. (2) They had to reorient their religious and political focus and **seek the LORD God of Israel**, because it was God who **had turned the heart of the king of Assyria** (Pr 21:1; Herodotus 1.178). This unexpected title for Darius, king of Persia, rhetorically connected him with the history of Israel, where in 2Kg 17, with the fall of Samaria, the northern tribes were deported to Assyria. Also, Kidner points out Assyria is functioning here as the quintessential oppressor (see Neh 9:32) (F. D. Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, TOTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979], 60). The reference to Assyria also provided a subtle reminder that God's providence oversees the course of history (Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 122). The renaissance of Jerusalem during the Persian period occurred because of God's faithfulness to His promises (Jr 23:3).

LESSON NUGGET – Though no ark was in the Most Holy Place, and no glory filled the house, the temple was still dedicated to the Lord because it was His

house, built for His glory. Instead of weeping over what they didn't have, the Jews rejoiced over what they did have, and this is always the attitude of faith.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Life Application Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*