

Temple Restored

Key Verse: *“They sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”*
—Ezra 3:11

Selected Scripture:
Ezra 3:8-13

stunning proclamation—made, in fact, according to God’s will. The king said, “The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem.” He went on to explain that any of the Israelites who desired were free to go to Judah to engage in this work. As Cyrus encouraged them to go and “build the house of the LORD God of Israel,” he even offered to help the efforts of the people

THE EVENTS OF THIS LESSON

took place at the close of the seventy years of desolation of the land of Israel and the captivity of the people in Babylon. They had fallen into idolatry, and had neglected to be obedient to the arrangements that God had enjoined upon them. So great was their lapse in following God’s commandments that they had failed to keep some of the typical feasts, and had even polluted the house of the Lord. Their Temple now lay in ruins, and it appeared that it would stay that way without God’s intervention.

The impetus to now rebuild the long-ruined Temple came from a seemingly unlikely source. Cyrus, king of Persia, issued a

who would go—"help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God."—Ezra 1:2-4

As these events continued to unfold, we read that God's Spirit raised up leaders of the people, such as the chief of the fathers, the priests, and the Levites. (vs. 5) The amount of gold, silver, and other precious materials that were gathered was very great. King Cyrus also ordered that all of the vessels from the original Temple, that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen seventy years earlier and brought to Babylon, should be returned to Jerusalem.—vss. 6-11

We see that a remnant of the people, who had evidently now learned the lesson that idolatry was an abomination to God, were ready to return to Jerusalem and no more practice the worship of other gods. After completing their long journey, the people first built the "altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God." (Ezra 3:1,2) Their first desire was to approach God with thanksgiving for giving them the opportunity to return to their land. They also desired to establish again the feasts and ceremonies that had for so many years been such an important part of their covenant relationship with God. While they were rejoicing, at the same time "fear was upon them." (vs. 3) They had returned to a land which many of them did not really know, and in which now dwelled new enemies. It was a land that had lain waste, for they saw ruins, desolation, and disorder which would try their faith and zeal.

However, they persevered and, in the second year after coming back to Jerusalem, they "appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD." The first work was to build the foundation. When it was completed, so great was their joy that the priests dressed in their robes and blew trumpets, played cymbals, and praised the Lord, "because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."—vss. 8-13 ■