

Joyful Worship Restored

Key Verse: *“They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required.”*
—Ezra 3:4

Selected Scripture:
Ezra 3:1-7

were willing to do so should return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple.—Ezra 1:1-4

As a result of Cyrus’ proclamation, about fifty thousand of the congregation of Israel, including servants and maids, returned to Jerusalem. (chap. 2:64,65) They took with them many of the gold and silver vessels of the Temple, numbering more than five thousand, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out of Jerusalem. In addition, many freewill offerings were given to those who returned.—chap. 1:6-11

Upon their return to Jerusalem, the first thing the Israelites did, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, was to rebuild the “altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt

CYRUS, KING OF PERSIA,

had been informed through the words of Israel’s prophets, Jeremiah and Daniel, that the foretold seventy years of Israel’s captivity to Babylon had come to an end. (see Jer. 25:10,11; 29:10; Dan. 9:2) Indeed, the kingdom of Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians. Cyrus was evidently very respectful to the Israelites, their prophets, and their God. He proclaimed that all those of the Israelites who

offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses, . . . and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, . . . morning and evening.” (chap. 3:2,3) Shortly thereafter was the time of Israel’s Feast of Tabernacles. As our Key Verse indicates, they temporarily ceased from the rebuilding work and obediently kept the feast, doing so according to the requirements of the Law. Subsequent to the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites began keeping many of the other required feasts and offerings provided for in the Law. The account states: “Afterward [they] offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.”—vs. 5

The Israelites had now reestablished many of the various ceremonial features of the Law, but “the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.” (vs. 6) With the encouragement of Zerubbabel and Jeshua the high priest, the work again began. A little more than two years after their arrival back in Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the foundation of the Temple was completed. (vss. 8-11) Several years later, the rebuilt Temple was completed, according to the proclamation given by Cyrus.—chap. 6:14-16

Although numerous lessons can be learned from this experience of Israel, the general import lies in their being a fitting representation of the world of mankind in general. Like Israel was in bondage to heathen Babylon, mankind has been in bondage to sin and death, under the power of Satan, since the fall of our first parents in Eden. As with Israel, however, God has provided the means by which mankind will receive salvation—through his son, pictured by Cyrus—and be released from this bondage. God has also been building a spiritual temple—Christ and his faithful associates—through which all the families of the earth will be blessed, taught, and come to obey God’s righteous laws. Those who do so will receive the promised blessings of perfect human life. ■