

ONE STORY | ONE SAVIOR - UNIT 4 | LESSON 8A

The Major and Minor Prophets of Israel [and Post-Exilic History]




God is a Promise Keeping God

God 1) **PROMISES** a KING who 2) **RESCUES** His people, 3) **DEFEATS** His enemies, and 4) **RESTORES** them to the LAND 5) so that His people shall be with Him for their JOY.

“They Built the Altar of the God of Israel”

Ezra 3:1-13

Ezra 3:2 . . . his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

	<p>THE HEAD – Ezra emphasized what was most important. What did Ezra emphasize?</p>
	<p>THE HEART – How can we protect our “hearts” from seeking things that are less important than our relationship to JESUS?</p>
	<p>THE HAND – What are the kinds of things we need to give attention to in our relationship to JESUS?</p>

EMPHASIS

Upon returning to the Promised Land, the people of God are described doing four things from our passage. **First**, they *gathered* together. **Second**, they *offered* burnt offerings. **Third**, they *observed* the Feast of Booths. And **finally**, they began *rebuilding* the Temple.

They put in play those elements and practices that **enabled them and provoked them to remember** the Story in which they existed. These visual triggers are put in play so that we do not forget who God is, what He has done, and who we are. In their absence, they were no less God’s people. But their presence gave them cause for celebration through worship. Their presence enabled those around them to know who they were and who God was. The visuals are identifiers.

COVENANTS

- For Ezra and the Nation of Israel, the “covenants” operate on two levels.
- On the first level, they are to obey the **LAW**. This allows them to experience physical blessing from the Lord.

- On the second level, they are to believe the promise in the ROYAL GIFT. This will result in their spiritual blessing in Jesus.
- God graciously allowed the Nation to return to the land. Ezra was instrumental in bringing them back.
- Even though their hearts did not change, God would remain faithful to His Royal Gift Covenant.
- He would bring one who would keep the LAW in their behalf and thus enable them to receive the blessing.

HISTORICAL SETTING

- Jeremiah 32:36 “Now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, ‘It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence’: ³⁷ **Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety.** ³⁸ **And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.**

Ezra 1 Cyrus King of Persia responds to God’s direction to rebuild temple. God “stirred” some to return to Jerusalem.

Ezra 2 42,360 plus servants and singers returned to Jerusalem.

Ezra 3 Rebuilding starts.

Ezra 4 Adversaries intervene and new King of Persia halts rebuilding.

This was a time of great celebration because the re-establishing of the temple in Jerusalem had begun.

A study of Ezra and Nehemiah is a study in the post-exilic period of the Jewish nation. By post-exilic we are referring to the period of time that *follows* the exile from Judah into Babylon. The pre-exilic period is that period of time that *precedes* the exile from Judah into Babylon. The exilic period was from 606BC

STRUCTURE | THE BOOK

1. Restoration of the Temple Ezra 1-6 (ca. 539/38-515 BC [23 years])

Preservation Of The People **Esther 1-10** **(ca. 483 BC)**
58 year gap between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra [Book of Esther]

2. Purification of the People Ezra 7-10 (ca. 457 BC)

13 year gap between Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 1

to 536BC, or a period of 70 years.

Second Chronicles ends with the nation of Judah being taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the transition between Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus king of Persia, and his decree to allow the inhabitants of Judah to return to their homeland. Ezra and Nehemiah document this return.

586 BC exile in Babylon

539 BC Cyrus of Persia overthrows Babylon. His empire includes Jerusalem

538 BC Cyrus frees Hebrew exiles and encourages to return home.

535 BC rebuilding temple starts.

516 BC temple rebuilt.

The Pharaoh of Egypt refused to let the Hebrews return to the Land. King Cyrus of Persia enabled the Hebrews to return to the Land.

The book of Ezra is only one of ten Old Testament books never quoted in the New Testament

STRUCTURE | EZRA 3

I. The People Rebuild the Altar (vv. 1-7)

A. They gathered as “one man” (v. 1)

There is a solidarity in our longing for God.

B. They gathered to offer atonement ([Burnt Offering] vv. 2-3)

C. They gathered to offer thanksgiving ([Feast of Booths] vv. 4-6a)

- Q - Why is the rebuilding of the ALTAR so significant?

The altar in the Temple is the only place where a blood sacrifice can be offered. It is at the Temple through blood you have the forgiveness of sins. This happened daily as well as annually on the Day of Atonement. Once the Nation was deported and the Temple destroyed, the blood sacrifice ceased. For 70 years, the sins of the Nation were left in limbo.

- Q - Why are they keeping the FEAST OF BOOTHS? See also Nehemiah 8:13-18. What is it about this FEAST that causes it to be highlighted?

“God wanted the Israelites to observe this festival by living in temporary shelters for seven days as a reminder that when their ancestors were in the wilderness, God provided them booths to dwell in. As in every year, Sukkot is a time of rejoicing. Why? Because **it was at this time in ancient Israel when the harvest season was over that God had provided more than enough food for the people to survive.**”¹

“The Feast of Tabernacles or by its Hebrew name, Sukkot, this celebration was the last of the fall festivals and was held at the end of the agricultural year when the grapes and olives were harvested in Israel. This was a time to thank God for all of the preceding year’s provision and to pray for a good rainy season, which lasted from October through March. Primarily, however, Sukkot was designed to remember the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan, when God made the people live in booths (Lev. 23:33–43).”²

- Q - Why the highlighting of the BURNT OFFERING? What is the significance of this OFFERING?

A - “Sacrifice was central to their worship, and the most important sacrifice was the burnt offering. Leviticus 1 describes the burnt offering, which turned God’s wrath away from the people. Burnt offerings were the propitiatory sacrifices in ancient Israel. For God to maintain His justice, He must punish sin. To forgive at the expense of His just wrath would be inconsistent with His character; according to His holiness, those who have sinned must die (Gen. 2:15–17; Rom. 6:23). Once the Lord satisfies His wrath, it passes away, allowing fellowship between the Creator and His people. The burnt offering temporarily accomplished propitiation (satisfied God’s wrath) under the old covenant (2 Chron. 29:7–8), allowing God to stay His hand of wrath against Israel.”³

D. They gathered to rebuild the Temple (vv. 6b-13)

This leads us into the next larger section of our passage for this study.

II. The People Rebuild the Temple (vv. 6b-13)

A. They gathered resources (vv. 6b-7)

B. They organized workers (vv. 8-9)

C. They celebrated achievement (vv. 10-13)

1. They celebrated God’s spiritual provision [Burnt Offerings]
2. They celebrated God’s physical provision [Feast of Booths]
3. They celebrated God’s physical presence [Temple]

- Q - What is the significance of the TEMPLE being built?

A – The TEMPLE is a reminder of the Garden of Eden. The Garden is a place where God’s people would encounter God for their joy. The TEMPLE is God’s dwelling place and where His people find their joy.

- Q - Did they finish the building of the TEMPLE?

A – Short answer, NO. They re-laid the foundation, but did not finish the structure and let it lie dormant for 16 years until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah called them into action.

- How long did it take for them to complete the TEMPLE? What prophets called the people to finish the building of the TEMPLE (Haggai and Zechariah)?

A – The people who returned laid the foundation in 536BC. They would not complete the TEMPLE until 520BC. Thus, for 16 years the TEMPLE structure would lie dormant. It stood as a reminder that the people were forgetting God. The Prophets Haggai and Zechariah would come and remind them of who they were and what God did/was doing.

- Q - Why the mixed response to the foundation being finished (vv. 11-13)?

A - What they rebuilt could not compare to SOLOMON’S TEMPLE in overall size and splendor. However, only the very old [at least 70+] could/would remember what SOLOMON’S TEMPLE looked like. In addition, they might have wept because they reflected on why they were in this situation in the first place, their national apostasy and disregard for the LAW.

“Whether or not it compared favorably to the first temple, the restored temple marked a new epoch; it signified the renewal of Jewish life after the devastation of exile. Moreover, it signaled a new role for the people themselves. Whereas the first temple was credited to Solomon and was built with forced labor, the second temple was the work of the people themselves. Although it came into being under Persian royal auspices (see Ezra 1:1-4), the actual builders were the Judeans (Ezra 1:5-6:14), who also unilaterally vowed to maintain it (Neh 10:32-39). In the absence of a monarchy, the second temple came to occupy a greater place in Judean life than did Solomon’s temple.”⁴

JESUS IN THE TEXT

Ezra 3 is the fulfillment of Isaiah 44:28.

who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd,
and he shall fulfill all my purpose’;
saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’
and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

Returning to the PROMISED LAND and rebuilding the TEMPLE were reminders to the people of God’s original design and intent. This is what gathering at church does on a regular basis. It reminds His people of the larger Story in which they exist. It also tells those around them that His people are operating inside of another Story. When we do not do these things, we are no less the people of God, but we do not draw visuals that set us apart.

On a much larger scale, God regathering His people in the Promised Land calls them to remember the bigger promise of SEED PROMISE and BLOOD PICTURE. The BURNT OFFERING and FEAST OF BOOTHES call them to remember the SEED PROMISE and BLOOD PICTURE.

When God finally establishes His promise of a LAND and SEED, His glory will fill the earth as the waters cover the seas and all the NATIONS of the world will be BLESSED.

APPLICATION

1. The partial work of the Burnt Offering is perfectly completed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
2. The celebration of God's provision [Feast of Booths] and the coming together for joy in His presence [the Temple] are fully realized in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
3. God invites us to accept who Jesus is for our salvation and for our joy.
4. Do you have in your life the kinds of visuals that help you remember God's provision both spiritually and physically? Do you read the Bible and other Bible themed books? Do you go to church and participate in various church activities? All of these "things" help us remember God's Story.

MEMORY VERSE

Ezra 3:2

. . . his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

VISUALS

Show several family pictures or pictures of visited places and ask them what those pictures do. They enable us to remember people and places. This is what all of these visuals in our passage do. They help the people to remember the person of God and the place of God [Eden].

RESOURCES

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://www.jewishvoice.org/read/blog/sukkot-feast-booths-known-some-feast-tabernacles>

² <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/feast-booths/>

³ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/burnt-offering/>

⁴ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/related-articles/destruction-and-reconstruction-of-the-temple.aspx>