

Let's Worship God

29th April - 4th May 2019

Ezra





Monday - Ezra 2:43-58 - Servants of the Temple and of Solomon

We saw last week that the LORD not only provided the material means to re-establish Temple worship, He also provided the priests and Levites who would lead and support that worship. Starting at Ezra 2:43, we see that He provided other support staff, as well. Since Ezra has just mentioned the Levite singers and gatekeepers, we might be tempted to think these are more families of Levites. However, the word translated as "servants" in most modern translations (it appears as "the Nethinims" in the KJV and "the Nethinim" in the NKJV) carries the meaning of "slave" or "bondservant." Therefore, it is best to understand these to be the descendants of the Gibeonites who, by deception, made covenant with Israel in the days of Joshua (as told in Joshua 9) and were made hewers of wood and drawers of water for Israel. After Solomon built the Temple, they performed these menial tasks in support of the public worship. Despite their Canaanite background, we see these Temple servants included in the list of returning Jewish Exiles. Citizenship in God's covenant people has always been more a matter of faith than of bloodline (think of Rahab or Ruth). Here we find descendants of Canaanites included in a list of families of God's Covenant People. Similarly, we also find a list of families descended from Solomon's servants, many of whom were also foreign-born. Nevertheless, these families are listed among the people of Israel.

Descendants of non-Israelite peoples who became Israelite by confession of the LORD as God in the Old Testament period are the forerunners of the Gentiles who, like wild olive branches grafted onto a cultivated olive tree, are grafted onto the tree of Israel through faith in Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul makes clear in Galatians 3, a child of Abraham is not one who merely shares the blood of Abraham but one who shares his faith in the promises of God fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

Questions

1. From whom are these Temple servants descended? Why is this important?

Prayer Points

1. Give praise to God for adding people of every nation to His Covenant People.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. Ezra 3:10

Praise: Psalm 99 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Tuesday - Ezra 2:59-63 - Excluded from the Priesthood

With the returning Exiles also came people who could not prove their Israelite heritage. While, as we saw yesterday, descendants of Gentiles could be counted as Israelites by faith, we also need to note the importance of property rights in Old Testament Israel. If a man could not prove his lineage, he could not lay claim to the property allotted to his ancestors. Verses fifty-nine through sixty list several families or groups who could not verify their Israelite ancestry (the records having probably been lost in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple or mislaid in the decades since then). This being the case, they could not immediately receive property in the land.

An even more serious consequence of lost records was that the claims of some to be descended from the priests could not be verified. Since God is never pleased when His people take liberties in matters of worship, the governor (probably Zerubbabel) wisely advised that these men be excluded from the rights, privileges and responsibilities of the priesthood for the time being. Once the altar to the LORD was re-established and a High Priest consecrated, he would be able to determine the legitimacy of the claims of these families by consulting the Urim and Thummim - stones kept in the High Priest's breastplate which could be used to discover the LORD's will in particular matters.

As in the days of Zerubbabel, it is important that we keep track of who is part of God's visible Church by carefully keeping records. It is of even greater importance that we take care in regard to matters of worship, always doing things as God has revealed He wants them done and being careful to place in positions of leadership only those men who can demonstrate that they are properly qualified.

Questions

1. Why were these families excluded from rights of property and priesthood?
2. What lessons do we learn in regard to worship and leadership in the Church?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we might always worship according to God's standards.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. Ezra 3:10

Praise: Psalm 100 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Wednesday - Ezra 2:64-70 - Ready to Work

Readers who are good at mathematics and who are careful to note such things may have noticed that there is a discrepancy between the totals of the numbers mentioned so far in this chapter and the total in verse sixty-four. Moreover, if we compare the parallel passage in Nehemiah 7, we find that Nehemiah's totals are different from Ezra's, though both say the whole assembly totaled 42,360. How do we account for this? As we piece together the information from Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, we find that each counts some families the other does not. This accounts for the differences in the numbers of specific families between the two books. Both books only specifically count families of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. The remainder (10,777 individuals), therefore, must be people from the other tribes of Israel, bringing the total to 42,360 (on which both books agree).

The returning Israelites brought with them 7,337 non-Israelite servants, including 200 men and women trained to sing. This tells us that the returning Exiles, even in the midst of the hardships of migration and resettlement, were not impoverished, but enjoyed some luxuries. In fact, they were able to add their own freewill offerings to the funds already provided by Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple. God made sure the people were equipped with what they needed in order to begin construction on the Second Temple.

For us, today, as for the Israelites in Zerubbabel's time, it is not a sin for God's people to enjoy luxuries that are the fruits of our labors and of living in prosperous times. However, we should remember to follow their example and give to the LORD's work from what He has been so generous as to provide for our needs and enjoyments.

Questions

1. Is it wrong to be prosperous? How should we use the wealth the LORD has given?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for wisdom to use the things God has given us in ways that advance His Kingdom in the world.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. Ezra 3:10

Praise: Psalm 101 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Thursday - Ezra 3:1-7 - Biblical Worship Re-Established

As the people settled again in the land the LORD had given to Israel, the time came for one of the great feasts during which the men of Israel were commanded to gather at the central site of worship - the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, which was to begin on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. No work had begun on the structure of the Temple, but the site had been cleared. It was possible, therefore, to build and consecrate a new altar of burnt offering (which would stand in the court of the Temple). Thus, under the leadership of Jeshua the priest and Zerubbabel of the House of David, a new altar was built. From this point on, at least part of the sacrificial worship could take place according to the LORD's commands. The Feast of Booths was kept, the daily burnt offerings were carried out, the regular sacrifices took place at each new moon and the appointed feasts could be observed. They did not have to wait for the Temple to be rebuilt to do these things.

However, in order for the LORD's regulations concerning worship to be kept fully, a new Temple would have to be built. Without it, among other things, there could be no offering of incense to represent the prayers of the people, and no proper observance of the Day of Atonement. Therefore, funds gathered for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple were used to hire skilled workers and purchase the necessary materials.

It is important that we worship God. That we worship Him is far more important than whether our place of worship looks like a "church" or not. The Church is God's people, not an earthly building. As it expands into new communities, it will meet in homes, in store fronts and other convenient places. As a local body of believers grows and is organized, it will likely build a house of worship, but not having such a place is no excuse for neglecting the public worship of God.

Questions

1. Do we need a church building in order to worship the LORD?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God's people will worship Him wherever they are.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. Ezra 3:10

Praise: Psalm 102 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Friday - Ezra 3:8-9 - The Work Begins

After much necessary preparation, in the second year after the return from the Babylonian Exile began, work on a second Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem commenced. The work was led by Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, the descendant of King David and ancestor of Jesus Christ, and Jeshua son of Jozadak, the new High Priest. As this was a massive project, under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the Levite Kadmiel, the priests, the Levites over 27 years old and some leaders of the tribe of Judah oversaw the work.

This event, which took place in 536 B.C. marked the official end of the Babylonian Exile. This was the seventieth year since the beginning of the Exile in 605 B.C. and, thus, is the fulfillment of the LORD's promise in Jeremiah 29:10. (Similarly, the second Temple will be completed in 516 B.C., exactly seventy years after the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C.).

Just as the LORD promised to end the Babylonian Exile and cause the Temple to be rebuilt, He has promised to build His Church - and just as He used Zerubbabel, Jeshua and others as His means of accomplishing this, He uses His people today as His means of building the Church. In II Corinthians 6:16, Paul reminds us that the Church is the Temple of the living God. Like the people of Zerubbabel's day, we need to get to the good work of building the LORD's Temple.

Questions

1. When did work on the new Temple begin?
2. How did the LORD fulfill His promise in Jeremiah 29:10?
3. How are Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the others good examples for us

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God will strengthen us for the labor of building His Church.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. Ezra 3:10

Praise: Psalm 103 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.



Saturday - Ezra 3:10-11 - Laying the Foundation

The laying of a foundation is key to having a sound structure. A building resting on a poorly constructed foundation will not last. Thus, the proper laying of the foundation of the new Temple was a project over which great care had to be taken. However, this was no ordinary edifice. It was not a house for a common family, nor even the mere palace of a great earthly king - it was the Temple of the LORD. The laying of this foundation, therefore, involved worship and celebration. The priests in their glorious vestments blew trumpets, the sons of Asaph clashed symbols and sang, and the people shouted in praise to the LORD. As the Levites played instruments and sang, we are told they did all things "according to the directions of David king of Israel."

Like the people in today's passage, we need to make sure that we do things as the LORD has commanded through His Apostles and Prophets. Indeed, the Church, as we saw yesterday, is the Temple of the living God. As such, it is built on a foundation, just like the Temple in Jerusalem. Ephesians 2:20 tells us the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." In fact, Psalm 118:22 predicts that Christ will be the "head of the corner" - that is, the chief cornerstone to which the entire foundation must be aligned. As we go about the work of building Christ's Church, we must take care to be building on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with all things aligned to Christ. In other words, we must build on the Scriptures. If what we build is not built on the Word of God, it is not really the Church we are building.

Questions

1. What did the people do when the foundations were laid?
2. Why are foundations so important?
3. On what foundation must the Church be built?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. Ezra 3:10

Praise: Psalm 104 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

Let's Worship God is produced for the RP Global Alliance
by Airdrie Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

If you have any queries please contact - admin@rpglobalalliance.org