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The Start of Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 3: 6b-13

The start of rebuilding the Temple DIG: What did it take to lay the foundation for this new Temple? Read First Kings 5:1 to 6:1 to see what went into building Solomon's Temple the first time. What parallels do you find? Why does Ezra pointedly accent such parallels (3:2)? What does this say about the God of second chances? Why would some who knew the "former" Temple cry, while others shouted for joy?

REFLECT: Ezra had the Temple rebuilt on Solomon's original foundation. What is the lesson for you in this? What "cornerstone ceremony" has helped you celebrate new beginnings (in your marriage; in your work; your retirement; your walk with the Lord)? Ezra waited for the second year post-exile before doing what he wanted. How patient are you (with self, with God, with others) when waiting for a new beginning?

May-June 536 BC during the ministry of Zerubbabel (to see link click [Ag](#) - The First Return).

Compiled by the Chronicler from the Ezra memoirs

(see [Ac](#) - Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: **The Ezra Memoirs**).

Jeshua and his fellow priests, together with Zerubbabel and other returnees, had rebuilt the bronze altar that stood next to where the Temple had been. They did this in time to celebrate Sukkot, the last of several important festivals that fell in the seventh month (see [Aq](#) - Rebuilding the Bronze Altar and the Festival of Sukkot). Hundreds of animals were slain on the bronze altar to make atonement for sin, something that had not taken place in Yerushalayim for over half a century.⁶⁰ The bronze altar, however, was only the beginning. Although the foundation for the Temple had already been laid under the direction of Sheshbatar (see [Aj](#) - The Return to Isra'el Under Sheshbatar), construction of the Temple itself had not begun (3:6b).

Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters (Ezra 3:7a). The particular kind of money that the workmen were given is not mentioned here. It may have been gold or

silver, but perhaps it was clay. For it is a fact worth mentioning that in Babylonia and in **Persia** at that very time there were in use certain clay tablets that were used for the same purpose that we now use as checks! They were issued by the government for the convenience of circulation, representing a certain value, which was always expressed in measures of weight, of gold or silver, and redeemable on presentation to the royal treasury. They were two to five inches long, and one to three inches wide. They had on them the name of the king and a date. Among them was the name of **Cyrus**, the king who directed **the work** for which the money was given.⁶¹

When **Solomon** built **the First Temple**, he hired **Phoenicians** from **Tyre** with wheat, barley, olive oil, and wine (**First Kings 5:6-12; Second Chronicles 2:10 and 15**) to send **cedar, juniper and algum logs from Lebanon to Joppa (Second Corinthians 2:8)**. Even the way of describing **Solomon's** building of **the First Temple** reminds us of **Zerubbabel's** similar efforts (**Second Chronicles 2:8-15 and First Kings 5:11 and 18**). **And food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia (Ezra 3:7b)**. This was a tiny foretaste of the **wealth of the nations** and the **glory of Lebanon** that was promised would one day **adorn the place of God's Sanctuary** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Jw - Foreigners Will Rebuild Your Walls, and Their Kings Will Serve You**).

Now the building began **in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month** (six months after they arrived and exactly 70 years after the first deportation, see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gt - In the Thirty-Seventh Year of the Exile Jehoiachin was Released from Prison**). **Solomon** also began **his** project in **the second month (First Kings 6:1)**. This is the month after Passover (April-May) and the beginning of the dry season - an ideal time to start building. Centuries earlier **the Levites** were involved in the construction of **the Tabernacle (Exodus 38:21)**. All this goes to show the many similarities between the building of the **First and Second Temples**.

The Levites were the supervisors and were directed by the leading families. **Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. According to the Mosaic tradition, the Levites entered upon their ministry at the age of twenty-five (Numbers 8:24); but an ordinance of David (First Chronicles 23:24, 27) reduced the age to twenty, perhaps because the number of Levites had decreased.** These verses stress the unity, cooperation, and enthusiasm for the

project. Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood to sing united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah (the sons of Hodaviah in Ezra 2:40) and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God (Ezra 3:8-9).



The workmen stood before a flat, empty foundation. Nevertheless, there was a celebration in anticipation of the House of the LORD being back in Jerusalem once again. When they started working, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Isra'el when he brought the ark to Jerusalem (First Chronicles 16:5-6). They sang, praising and giving thanks to ADONAI, saying: For He is good, for His lovingkindness (see the commentary on [Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed](#)) is upon Isra'el forever. 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 and work on the Temple itself had begun (Ezra 3:10-11). The worship of Isra'el was (and is) not a dull affair. The great shout indicates that the people expressed their emotions in their praise to ADONAI, for they praised Him with their whole hearts.⁶²

Even though the work had just begun, it signaled that the LORD had not forgotten His promises. They sang: For He is good, for His faithfulness is upon Isra'el forever (Psalm 136:1). In the long, dark night of the exile they despaired, hanging their harps on willow branches (Psalm 137), unable to find within themselves a song to sing to praise God. They must have wondered whether they would ever see the chesed of ADONAI again. However, all the doom and gloom evaporated in the blazing sunlight of the building of the Second Temple. God had remembered His promises. He always does. This story - the story of the exiles return to Yerushalayim - is part of our story, too; without it there would have been no Savior and no way of forgiveness for our sins. Those foundation stones

cry out and remind us that **God** has kept **His** promise to send a **Savior**, “**When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman and born under the Torah, to free those under the yoke of the Torah so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters (Galatians 4:4-5)**. The words of the **Psalmist** ought to be in our mouths: **For ADONAI is good. His lovingkindness endures forever, and His faithfulness to [our] generation (Psalm 100:5)**.⁶³

At this time **Zechariah** delivered a prophecy to **Jeshua, the High Priest**, and to **Zerubabel**, the Jewish governor. **Jeshua** seems to be on trial in a heavenly courtroom with Satan accusing **him**. In defense of **Jeshua**, **ADONAI** says: **Listen, cohen gadol Jeshua, both you and your colleagues seated here before you, because these men are a sign that I am going to bring My Servant Tzemach, or Shoot** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Dc - A Shoot Will Come Up from the Stump of Jesse**). In **Zechariah 6:12** the prophet says: **There is coming a man whose name is Tzemach. He will sprout up from His place and rebuild the Temple of ADONAI. Yes, He will rebuild the Temple of ADONAI; and He will take up royal splendor sitting and ruling from his throne** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fi - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom**). **Zechariah** saw the **high priest Jeshua** as a type of that promise, but only a pledge of **God’s** future fulfillment in **Yeshua**, the coming **Messiah (Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 33:15)**.

Present on the occasion were people of all ages - children, youth, adults, and the elderly. **Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ households, the old men who had seen the first Temple, wept in disappointment with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this House that was laid before their eyes. They wept when they contrasted the simplicity of the current project with the grandeur of Solomon’s Temple**, which is considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world along with the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal, the Roman Colosseum, the Great Wall of China and Petra. **Perhaps they also wept remembering the tragic events which they had experienced since those days in Babylon, and the reflection that they would not live to see the national revival foretold by the prophets. While many others shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout**. Thus, joy was mixed with sadness. The two **sounds** mingled together and were so loud that **they** were **heard far away (Ezra 3:12-13)**. The celebration had an impact on the whole community.⁶⁴