

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)

Faithful Lord, we are happy to worship you and give you praise. Thank you for giving us a community of faith where we can come together. Help us to listen to your Word and trust in your promise, that we may go forth to serve you in our daily lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

When King Cyrus came to power in Persia, he allowed the exiled Jews to return to their homeland and restore their nation. The Book of Ezra tells the story of how the temple was rededicated and worship of the Lord was reestablished in Jerusalem.

Read: Ezra 3:1-13

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

God brought King Cyrus of Persia to power over the Babylonians. God's people were allowed to return home to rebuild their temple and their nation under leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, the returning exiles were not necessarily welcomed back with open arms. Many of the poorer people who had remained in the land resented the return of the upper class who had left them behind. There was resistance to the restoration of Judea as a kingdom — both from the local people and from the nations in surrounding lands.

Israelite history is often broken down into three sections: the pre-exilic period, exilic period, and the post-exilic period — referring to the time before, during, and after the exile to Babylon. There were prophets who taught in each of these periods.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the names of the two important leaders mentioned in Ezra 3:2? (These two figures are also spoken of by the prophet in Zechariah 3:6-8 and 4:8-10.) Which was the political leader and which was the religious leader?
2. The Feast of Booths (v. 4) was a commemoration of the time when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. How was that time similar to what the exiles experienced in Babylon? Where did God's promise bring them in the end?
3. How was the expense of rebuilding the temple paid for? Who carried out the work? In what way does our worship of the Lord also include offerings of our time and money?
4. Why is the Levite tribe mentioned so often in these verses? What special function did they serve?
5. According to verses 10-11, what was the atmosphere on the day that the temple was rededicated? Are there special times of year when worship in your congregation is particularly festive? Why are times like this important for a community?
6. Why do you think that some of the old-timers wept at the sight of the temple being rebuilt (v. 12-13)? What do you think they were feeling?
7. The theme of change runs throughout the Book of Ezra. How can change bring excitement and renewal in faith? In what ways can change also be a scary thing? How do both require trust in God?
8. Read John 2:18-22. The temple was destroyed and rebuilt several times over the years. How did Jesus use this metaphor to give a promise about himself?