

Lesson 5 The Altar Rebuilt and Sacrifices Restored

Key Themes in the Book of Ezra

- Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness and man's covenantal unfaithfulness
- Yahweh sovereignly and providentially works out his redemptive purpose in history despite human evil.
- Yahweh's intention for Israel for purity in worship and obedience to the law
- Yahweh's grace and mercy exceed his anger
- Sinful man's need for a changed heart

Background

Altar: the central altar in Jerusalem stood in the court outside the temple. Its main purpose was for blood sacrifice. The temple itself was where the presence of Yahweh dwelt. Before entering into the presence of a holy and pure God the sinful Israelites were required to sacrifice an animal on the altar. The shedding of the blood of the animals represented atonement for the sin of the worshiper. The law required the altar and temple to be in the place of God's choosing. Before the exile that place had been Jerusalem. The altar and the temple in Jerusalem had been completely destroyed by the Babylonians. For 70 years the Israelites residing in Babylon had been deprived of a place to worship Yahweh,

altar foundation: the exact site of the altar in Jerusalem before the exile.

burnt offering: This sacrifice represented complete dedication and surrender to God. The animal was to be an unblemished male. The worshiper would place their hands on the animal symbolically transferring their sins and then the animal died in the worshiper's place. The blood was then sprinkled on the altar.

Feast of the Booths: One of several feasts the Israelites were commanded to observe. It occurred in the fall and coincided with the harvest. They lived in booths for 7 days to remember the wanderings of their ancestors in the wilderness.

Key Words:

altar: Strong's H4196 "mizbah" an altar, a place of slaughter

Read Ezra 3:1-5

1. The first group of exiles arrived in Jerusalem and Judah and settled in the cities. According to Ezra 3:1-2 what did the people and the leaders do and for what purpose? Whose instructions did they follow? See Exodus 27:1-8

2. According to 3:3a where did they put the altar? See Deuteronomy 12:5-14. Why was the location of the altar important? What do you think was motivating the builders?

3. As soon as the altar was built what does 3:3b say the Israelites began to use it for? Was this according to God's instructions? See Exodus 29:36-46. In the first chapter of Ezra we read that the Israelites were to return in order to build the house of the Lord. Having read Exodus,29:36-46, why do you think they began with the construction of the altar rather than the temple?

Application: Scripture informs us that sinful man cannot come into the presence of a holy God or have a right relationship with him. Our sins must be dealt with first. What does Hebrews 10:1-18 teach us about the old sacrificial system? Who was sacrificed for our sins? How is Christ's sacrificial death superior to the sacrifices made under the old system. What other benefits are available to us as a result of Christ's sacrifice? See Hebrews 10:19-25. According to Hebrews 10:22 how should we be responding to what Christ has done?

Read Leviticus 23:39-43

4. The system of offerings was put in place at the altar. According to Ezra 3:4-5 what was done next? What does this reveal about the hearts of the people towards God? What does it say about their regard for his word?