

Ezra, Book Study

Chapters 3 & 4

Chapters 3 & 4 with Notes: NKJV

3 And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. **2** Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, 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. **3** Though fear *had come* upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, *both* the morning and evening burnt offerings. **4** They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. **5** Afterwards *they offered* the regular burnt offering, and *those* for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and *those* of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

- The seventh month held three main feasts: Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles (see Lev. 23:24-34). Notice that the altar was constructed first to offer the sacrifices (v. 2). Not only did the leaders reinstate the Feast of Tabernacles, they also restored sacrifices and offerings for all set feasts and new moons, making the required offerings. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 702*

6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. **7** They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

- The first day of the seventh month was the Feast of Trumpets. The offerings were needed to provide food for the carpenters, workers, and priests. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 702*

Restoration of the Temple Begins

8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began *work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

- The second month is in the springtime around April, or it can be as late as May. In the first month of every year, all males twenty years of age and older would attend the three main feasts in Jerusalem: Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. Here, all men over twenty years of age were called to work on repairing the house of the Lord, as all hands were needed. Normally, a man would enter the priesthood at age thirty (see Num. 4:3) and the military at age twenty (see Num. 1:20-45). – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 702*

9 Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers, Kadmiel *with* his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. **11** And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD:

“For *He is good*,
For His mercy *endures* forever toward Israel.”

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

- The people greatly rejoiced in praise to the Lord when the temple's foundation was laid. It is interesting to note that nowhere during the wilderness journey did God ever reveal to Moses the patterns of worship. This could be because the hearts of the people were so continually disobedient and rebellious that God could not receive their worship, as God must be worshipped in "spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). How to worship was later revealed to and initiated by King David, a man after God's own heart who praised the Lord with words, songs, and musical instruments as evidenced by his many Psalms (see Acts 13:22; see also Ps. 33:3; 47:6; 150:1-6). – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 702*

12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' *houses*, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, **13** so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

- This is the saddest moment of this great time of restoration. The younger generation, born in Babylon, had never seen the mighty Temple of Solomon with its gold, grandeur, and splendor; they were shouting and rejoicing at the laying of the temple's foundation. However, the old men were weeping; they knew this temple would not equal the greatness of Solomon's Temple they remembered prior to its destruction and their deportation. *It is difficult to settle for less, when you have experienced God's best.* – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 703*

Chapter 4 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, ² they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' *houses*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you *do*; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." ³ But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." ⁴ Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, ⁵ and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- There will always be adversaries and opposition to God's work. These individuals attempted to "weaken the hands" of the Jews repairing Jerusalem and the temple. During the seventy-year captivity of the Jews in Babylon, Samaria had become a spiritual and economic center; they collected taxes and followed the commands of the king ruling in Babylon. Now with the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of their temple, economics would change; the Samaritan leaders did not want to lose control of their economic empire. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 703*

Rebuilding of Jerusalem Opposed

⁶ In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

- This could not refer to the Ahasuerus of Esther 1:1... The word "Ahasuerus" is simply a title meaning *Mighty*, a title claimed by several kings of Persia. Here perhaps it refers to Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. It could not refer to Cyrus himself, for he is mentioned in this record (v 5); he was the one that made the decree of liberation for Israel in the first year of his reign (1:1-4). Such a letter would not have been written to him in the beginning of his reign, for he had just made the decree to liberate the Jews at that time. It is logical to believe that in the beginning of the reign of the next king, he was written to in such a manner. By then the Jews were back in Judah. It no doubt took several years during the reign of Cyrus for the people to return, get settled in the land, prepare materials and get started on the work. Cyrus reigned for 9 years and his son Cambyses reigned 7 which means that the work was done in the reign of both (see 6:15). – *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible, footnotes*

⁷ In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter *was* written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language.

- This king was Hystaspes, the successor of Cambyses; he reigned 7 months between Cambyses and Darius The Great who is referred to in v 24. He decreed that the work should be discontinued

and this was enforced. The work was stopped by force until the 2nd year of Darius the Great (v 17-24) when proper investigation was made and the original decree of Cyrus confirmed (v 24; 5:1-6:18). Hystaspes (along with other Persian kings) could have been called Artaxerxes, which means *Great King*. **Since the words "Darius," "Ahasuerus, and "Artaxerxes" are titles, any or all of them could have been used by any of these kings. To decide which king is specifically referred to on the basis of such titles is impossible. We can only go by the time element in such passages.** – *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible, footnotes*

⁸ Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion:

⁹ From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—*representatives* of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, ¹⁰ and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River—and so forth.

¹¹ (This is a copy of the letter that they sent him.)

To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men *of the region* beyond the River, and so forth:

¹² Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing *its* walls and repairing the foundations. ¹³ Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. ¹⁴ Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, ¹⁵ that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed.

¹⁶ We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

¹⁷ The king sent an answer:

To Rehum the commander, *to* Shimshai the scribe, *to* the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and *to* the remainder beyond the River:

Peace, and so forth.

18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. **19** And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. **20** There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all *the region* beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. **21** Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?

23 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter *was* read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. **24** Thus the work of the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- The letter sent to King Artaxerxes in Babylon was intended to stop the entire rebuilding program (see 4:7-8). However, it only delayed it for a season. We must remember that delays are not defeats and that our opposition does not have the final word; our God does. – *Perry Stone Prophetic Hebraic Study Bible, OT p. 704*