

Worship and Rebuilding

William Mikler

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices" (Ezra 3:1-3 NIV)

Introduction

In or around 538 b.c., nearly 43,000 Hebrews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon for the express purpose of rebuilding their fallen Temple. Once settled in their towns, these Hebrews gathered in Jerusalem for the important *first step* that had to precede the rebuilding of their Temple. The first step was the renewal of Faith and Worship, based on the reinstatement of the morning and evening sacrifices of the lamb. Because these sacrifices were foundational to the life, worship and work of the people, there could be no hope of rebuilding anything without them.

The morning and evening sacrifices of the lamb had been instituted by God through Moses at Sinai. According to God's appointment, weekday and Sabbath, morning and evening, day by day, a year old lamb was sacrificed as a burnt

offering to the Lord. These sacrifices were to be carried out perpetually and they were requisites for God's *meeting* and *speaking* with Israel, for His *consecrating* of the priests and the Tabernacle (and later the Temple,) and for His *dwelling* among the people. In short, God would not meet with or dwell among His people, nor would Israel know Him, if the lambs were not sacrificed daily (cf. Exodus 29:38-46; Numbers 28:1-10). Thus, Israel's ongoing fellowship with God was made conditional upon her faithfully maintaining the daily sacrifices of the morning and evening lambs. The Hebrew rebuilders knew that the rebuilding of their Temple (and later, their Nation) was doomed if they didn't reestablish their fellowship with God on the basis of these sacrifices. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah should be read as one book. Ezra tells us of the rebuilding of the Temple, and Nehemiah tells us of the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem *after* the Temple had been rebuilt. In the order of things, the rebuilding of the Temple preceded the rebuilding of the city Walls. *The lesson illustrated in this biblical narrative is that the establishment of worship necessarily precedes the rebuilding of society.* It is worshipping faith that must precede and accompany the Christian rebuilding of society and its institutions. Our Ezra text suggests many things to Christians who take seriously their responsibility to "...rebuild the old ruins, raise up the former desolations...repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations (Isaiah 61:4). May the Holy Spirit help us as we examine His word.

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The New Beginning in a Call to Worship

Let us first acquaint ourselves with the historic facts of the remarkable first assembly of rebuilders which our text features, making some New Testament applications as we go along.

The Unified Assembly

"When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem."

The first day of every festival month was a day of blowing of trumpets (Numbers 10:10). The first day of the seventh month was unique. It was the Day of Trumpets. This day was a sabbath, a day of blowing of trumpets, a day of holy convocation, and a day of offerings made by fire to the Lord (Leviticus 23:23-25). It was on this very special day that the newly arrived exiles of Israel assembled as one man in Jerusalem for the reinstatement of the daily sacrifices. We may assume that it was the clear sound of trumpets blown by priests (cf. Numbers 10:1-10) which signaled the day and summoned Israel to holy convocation on the site where the sacrifices would be offered to Jehovah. The great multitude of rebuilders was marked by unity of faith and purpose as they assembled, not for business or political reasons, *but for Worship*. What a lesson this suggests for those of us who wish to rebuild the ruins of our fallen world. Public Worship *before* Public Work - gathering to God through Christ crucified is the proper starting point for all of our rebuilding efforts.

The Significance of the Seventh Month

The seventh month, Tishri, was the last month of the Mosaic calendars' religious festival year. It was during this "last" month that the year's worship culminated in three great and holy worship events. *First*, there was the Day of Trumpets on the first day (Lev. 23:23-25; Nu. 29:1). *Second*, on the tenth day was the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32). This day secured right standing

(justification) for Israel for the entire year to come. *Third*, beginning on the fifteenth day, was the seven day long celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-43). This feast reminded Israel that she had dwelt in booths on her sojourn from Egypt to the Promised Land. This Feast was also a harvest feast: a feast of ingathering (cf. Lev. 23:39-43)÷ that under normal circumstances celebrated the past year's productivity and looked forward to productivity in the coming year. For the rebuilders, this Feast would primarily look ahead.

The Christian is able to understand that the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles each prefigured Christ and His gospel in profoundly symbolic ways. The Day of Trumpets symbolized the gospel call and the inauguration of the New Testament era. The Day of Atonement symbolized the atoning work of Christ and all the benefits of redemption and justification that are ours by God's grace and doing. The Feast of Tabernacles prefigured, among other things, the future ingathering of the Gentiles into the Church and the development of the world under Christian stewardship. One might say that the seventh month itself, filled as it was with awesome and glorious worship, provides us a typological figure of the entire New Covenant dispensation.

The Offerings on the First Day of the Seventh Month

Though our text makes special mention of the morning and evening sacrifices, it must have been that all the burnt offerings prescribed by Moses for this day (including grain and drink offerings) were offered up to God on this day. These offerings would have included, in addition to the regular burnt offerings of the *lamb* (Nu. 28:3), one young bull, one ram, one kid, and *seven lambs* (cf. Nu. 29:1-6). The assembly thus gathered to worship God on the basis of substitutionary sacrifices, among which the lambs were most prominent. How this preaches to the Church, which gathers unto God because of

the sacrifice of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

The Priests Build the Altar and Offer Sacrifices on It

Because the Temple had long lain in ruins, the priests necessarily had to construct the altar of burnt offering in order to reinstitute the sacrificial system. Once it was built, the priests then offered the sacrifices commanded by Moses. They did so with courage that overcame their fear of long time residents of Judea who were hostile to the Jews' return. In the rebuilding of the altar and the offering of sacrifices on it according to divine precept, the rule of the Word of God was reestablished in Jerusalem. Today's ministers need not build an altar for the people of God, but if the Church would rebuild the world, her ministers must as a first duty call the Church to worship by clearly setting forth Christ and Him crucified (cf. I Corinthians 2:2) in all the depth, clarity and power of the gospel.

The Trumpets Sound Again

We return now to the trumpets. The trumpets that had sounded to call the people to assemble were now, according to the command of God, blown over each of the burnt offerings (cf. Nu. 10:10). The trumpets foreshadowed the preaching of the gospel in ways that these rebuilders could not imagine. Even so, the trumpets announced the sacrifices with a joyful sound that doubtless stirred the hearts of the worshipping multitude. In like manner, Christian ministers must blow the

trumpet of the gospel so as to call attention to Christ's sacrifice, to honor it, to celebrate it, to noise it abroad, and to give the people

of God a clear sound that stays with them, like a melody, when they lift their hands to worship, and when they set their hands to work.

Sight, Sound, Smell

This remarkable assembly of rebuilders was witness to holy and dramatic events. Their ears *heard* the trumpet blasts that called them to worship and sounded over the sacrifices. Their nostrils *smelled* (and breathed into their own lives) the aroma of the burnt offerings that permeated the

assembly. Their eyes saw the mediatorial work of the priests and the ascending smoke of the sacrifices. Certainly their hearts were quickened and their minds were illuminated by the awesome pageantry as all the senses were called to attention. In all, faith was directed heavenward by the ascending smoke of the sacrifices as the Holy Spirit preached to them in ritual imagery to trust Almighty God. Would that all our senses were aroused and brought to keen and respectful attention by the gospel that is sung and prayed and seen and heard in the assemblies of God's Church. It is in worship that lives are quickened and that the desire to obey is sharpened. It is in worship that the motivations of the will are purified and the thoughts

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Conclusions

The whole of our text preaches Christ and His gospel to us. Of the many lessons and parallels we could draw from our text, I will conclude this message with four of them.

First, for rebuilders, our text calls us to the right order of things. Just as the Temple was the first order of business in the restoration of Jewish life, so must Faith and Worship be rebuilt before any serious Christian Rebuilding of civilization can be done. *Second, our text points us to the only true foundation for faith, worship and life, and that is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.* Just as faith and worship for the returning Jews was based primarily on the mediatorial sacrifices of the morning and evening lambs, so must the redemptive sacrifice of Christ be foundational to our faith and worship.

Third, our text shows us the importance of the gospel preached in calling the Church to worship. Just as the trumpets summoned the Jews to assemble for worship, so the gospel summons us. Just as the trumpets were blown over the burnt offerings, so must the gospel be heralded over the sacrifice and ascension of Christ.

Fourth, our text demonstrates the underlying importance of true worship to all Christian rebuilding and development efforts. For old Israel, the rebuilding of life and culture began in earnest with a holy convocation centered around the gospel as

they knew it in their day. Can we expect to rebuild our world with any other starting place than solemn and holy assemblies that approach God on the basis of Christ crucified? I think not. For rebuilders, rightly ordered worship is the necessary first call of the hour. It is time for God's ministers to blow the gospel trumpet and for God's people to assemble in solemn assembly so that God might be worshipped, and so that mercy and grace might be obtained by the Church on the basis of Christ's finished sacrificial work. There is no other starting place than this for the simple reason that Faith and Worship must both *precede* and *accompany* the Rebuilding of our fallen world, and must do so on the basis of the gospel that honors Christ, instructs our faith, calls us to worship and sends us into the world with power to refashion it in the limitless power of grace.

A Closing Prayer

May the ministers of the gospel sound the gospel trumpet in such a way as to call all Christian rebuilders to worship God, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. May the worship of the Church become what God wishes it to be. And may worshipping rebuilders be graced by God to rebuild and develop the world for the glory of God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

