

## Celebrate Passover of Completion

Sasha stood before the eight people in the church's conference room with a smile that was a mixture of delight and intrigue.

Sasha wanted to give her parents, Pastor and First Lady Scott, a celebratory event. Exactly what it would look like is why she had called the meeting—pending everyone buying into the idea.

Shining Star Fellowship Church had been less “shiny” when, about 10 years earlier, about 1/3 of its church members left. But Sasha had witnessed the love of Christ in the aftermath, people coming together and putting the good of church before their own. The result had been an influx of new members that almost equaled its membership loss.

It had not been Sasha's idea to “circle the pastor and first lady with love and support.” She had heard it many times from numerous people. Ideally, the church could have done so at a “church anniversary,” but Shining Star didn't have official anniversary services. Sasha also suspected that the new parishioners, who were mostly previously unchurched, would be open and keen to the idea.

After she explained the idea of a celebration of love for the Pastor and First Lady and Shining Star, Sasha received a thunderous round of applause.

“Yes!” said Deacon Oscar. “Finally. Let's get this party started!”

- 1.** *When are some times that you celebrate what God has done for you?*
- 2.** *From what crises in your life has God rescued you?*
- 3.** *How do you glorify the Lord when He saves you from personal troubles?*

## The Completion of the Temple

*Ezra 6:13-15, KJV*

13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

*Ezra 6:13-15, NIV*

<sup>13</sup>Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. <sup>14</sup>So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.

<sup>15</sup>The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

When the second temple was finally completed, the people had great reasons to celebrate. Even though this version of the temple was much smaller and less glamorous than the first, it represented the return of God's people from exile and the fulfillment of the promise that He would free them. However, the Book of Haggai says little progress had been made on the temple because those who had returned were focused on building their own homes (Hag. 1:3-4). After Haggai's admonishment, they focused on building God's house.

As expected, Darius's officials were also 100% behind the project, perhaps because of the severe penalties

associated with non-compliance. The author of Ezra reminds us that the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah gave the people of God the spiritual perspective that they needed. Zerubbabel gave the needed organizational leadership. The author also reminded his readers that God was able to motivate pagan kings to support the project. Cyrus and Darius openly acknowledged the hand of God in the re-building of the temple. Artaxerxes was added to the names of foreign support because he later made a contribution to the temple (Ezra 7:21-23).

Ezra tells us the exact date of the temple's completion, which would have been March 12th on our calendar in 515 B.C. Adar was the last month in the Babylonian calendar. This was almost exactly 70 years after the first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

**4.** *Who were the spiritual leaders of the rebuilding of the temple?*

**5.** *Who is given credit for the completed building?*

## **A Time to Celebrate**

*Ezra 6:16-18, KJV*

16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.

17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites

*Ezra 6:16-18, NIV*

<sup>16</sup>Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. <sup>17</sup>For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. <sup>18</sup>And they installed the priests in their divisions and the

in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

Once the temple was completed, the priests and the Levites were ready to begin the sacrifices again. Thanks to Darius, plenty of ceremonially acceptable livestock was there. Food was not as easily available to those in Jerusalem as it had been in the past, so to see over 700 animals given to God was truly a sacrifice on their part. In addition to the sacrifices, the people were diligent to go back to the law and fulfill all its obligations. The priests and Levites were divided into “teams” in order not to overburden any of them. The people’s joy likely came from seeing what God had done through them—and that was reason enough to celebrate.

**6.** *What was the emotional state of those who celebrated the dedication of the temple?*

**7.** *What guided the activities and roles associated with the second temple?*

## A Special Passover

*Ezra 6:19-22, KJV*

19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out

*Ezra 6:19-22, NIV*

<sup>19</sup>On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover. <sup>20</sup>The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their relatives the priests and for themselves. <sup>21</sup>So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves

of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat,  
 22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel. <sup>22</sup>For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

The people had not been able to experience the full expression of Passover during their exile because there was no temple (and therefore no sacrificial lamb could have been presented). Though they had been enslaved by three superpowers (the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians), the people were back in their homes where they could worship God as in the old days. Also, when the people left Egypt, the Egyptians had given gold, silver, and other valuable items to the Israelites. God had led the Persians to do essentially the same thing, giving the people all the resources they needed to resume temple worship in Jerusalem—even the temple building!

In keeping with the law of Moses, the priests had made themselves ceremonially clean in order to be qualified to offer the sacrifice. The exiles did not exclude any Jews who had not been exiled—as long as those people had separated themselves from any pagan practices and idolatry. Again, the joy of the people is emphasized. Knowing that God is in control and keeps His promises deserves celebrating.

**8.** *What was significant about celebrating the first Passover in the new temple?*

**9.** *Who is attributed with changing the minds of their oppressors?*

## Let Us Rejoice!

Nathan was lost in a world of self-gratification, trying to make money as a substitute for the friends he never had and wanting to be an “important” person. Alcohol, pornography, and sex became the driving forces in his life until one Sunday he found himself at a church with a woman he would later marry. It was there he found Christ, and since then he praises God for totally changing him. He reminds himself what God did for him with this verse: “LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me” (Ps. 30:2).

James Barrie, a Scottish novelist and the creator of Peter Pan, once wrote, “God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December.” There are those who dwell on disappointments, harbor resentments, and cling to grievances; their Decembers are full of shadows that haunt their consciousness. Others, however, reminisce on God’s intercessions in their lives; their Decembers are joyfully blessed with fragrant and lovely roses.

Recollections of the Lord caring so deeply that He uses His divine power to be active in our lives liberates us from worldly cares. Indeed, memories of His lifting us when we are sinking or shielding us when we are besieged motivate our souls to rejoice.

“I will remember the works of the LORD,” sang the psalmist, “surely I will remember thy wonders of old” (Ps. 77:11, KJV). Let us then rejoice today and be glad.

**10.** *How does keeping your sights on Christ help you from sinking into the sea of self-pity?*

**11.** *How do you distinguish between those memories that are a curse to you and those memories that are blessing to you? Which occupies your thoughts more? Explain your answer.*

**12.** *In what ways can you rejoice more while recalling how God has delivered you in the past?*

## Reflect and Celebrate

God gave us memories of His demonstrative love in our lives so that we won't lose faith in Him when life seems meaningless. And like the Jews who witnessed the rebuilding of the house of the Lord, we too can celebrate what the Lord has accomplished in our lives. We too can glorify the one true God with joy and thanksgiving.

► *List here some things the Lord has delivered you from in the past. Did you celebrate when He did those things? If you did, write what you did next to each occasion. If not, plan to celebrate them this coming week.*

### KEY VERSE

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of with joy.  
—Ezra 6:16, KJV

Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.  
—Ezra 6:16, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of March 21 through March 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 8:12-20—Remember God's Blessing.
- Tue.** James 1:19-27—Hear and Act.
- Wed.** 1 Peter 5:5-9—Show Humility and Resist the Adversary.
- Thu.** Psalm 103:1-10—Bless the Lord, O My Soul.
- Fri.** Psalm 103:11-22—God's Love Is Everything.
- Sat.** 2 Timothy 2:8-13—Remember Christ and Endure.
- Sun.** Deuteronomy 8:1-11—Keep the Lord's Commandments.