

Ezra 3:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

Analysis

From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. The specific dating—'the first day of the seventh month'—corresponds to Tishri 1, the beginning of Israel's civil year and the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25). This precise chronological marker (538 BC, approximately) emphasizes the importance of this moment in redemptive history. The seventh month held special significance, containing the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10) and Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15-22), making it the most sacred month in Israel's calendar.

The phrase 'began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD' marks the formal resumption of Mosaic worship after decades of cessation. The burnt offering (olah), completely consumed on the altar, symbolized total consecration to God. That they 'began' suggests sustained, ongoing practice, not a single ceremonial gesture. This represented genuine restoration of covenant relationship through blood atonement.

The contrasting clause 'But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid' is theologically profound. The adversative 'but' emphasizes the remarkable reality: sacrifice preceded sanctuary, worship preceded architecture. This teaches that God's primary concern is hearts consecrated through blood atonement, not impressive buildings. The altar could function without the temple, demonstrating

worship's essence transcends physical structures. This prefigures New Testament truth that believers themselves constitute God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Historical Context

The first day of the seventh month (Tishri 1) in the Jewish calendar fell in September/October by the Gregorian calendar. This timing placed it approximately one year after the initial return from Babylon. The intervening months likely involved settling in towns, establishing households, and preparing materials for worship resumption. The deliberate choice to begin on Tishri 1—the Feast of Trumpets—carried symbolic weight, as this feast proclaimed God's sovereignty and called Israel to sacred assembly.

That sacrifices began before the temple foundation seems unusual but reflects biblical priorities. The original tabernacle functioned for centuries before Solomon built the temple, proving that proper worship doesn't require permanent structures. The altar's location was crucial—it stood on the exact site where Solomon's bronze altar had stood (2 Chronicles 4:1), maintaining geographical and theological continuity despite the destruction.

Archaeological evidence from this period is limited, but the biblical account's internal consistency and precision regarding dates, sequence of events, and Mosaic law details suggest reliable historical reportage. The tension between resumed worship and absent temple characterized the early restoration period and motivated the community to eventually rebuild, as later chapters describe.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does beginning sacrifices before building the temple teach about the relationship between worship and religious architecture?
2. How does the priority of the altar over the temple building challenge modern church emphases on facilities and programs over spiritual vitality?
3. In what ways does this verse's emphasis on blood sacrifice point forward to Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of the sacrificial system?

Interlinear Text

לַיְלָה	וְתַהֲרֵת	הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	לֹא	בְּשִׁבְעַת	יְמִינָה	וְמִזְבֵּחַ	אֲפָקָד	מִי	וּמִ
day	From the first	month	of the seventh	began	they to offer				
H3117	H259	H2320	H7637	H2490	H5927				
burnt offerings	of the LORD	of the temple	of the LORD			לֹא	יְהִי	הַ	עַל וְתַ
H5930	H3068	H1964	H3068	H3808	H3245	לִ	יְהִי	הַ	יְסִידָה

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