

**BOOK OF EZRA**  
**THE LORD MADE THEM JOYFUL!**  
**EZRA 6:1-22**

**Introduction**

The LORD wants us, as His people, to be joyful!

Many believers view the Christian life primarily in terms of just their duty and obedience—which, if we’re not careful, makes for a mundane existence!

But the LORD has so much more for us! Jesus said in *John 10:10*—“*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*” The LORD wants His children to be full of joy and gladness in their lives and to find their delight in Him!

All too often, some believers view the LORD as not wanting anyone to get too carried away with having a good time in life. Even the Puritans who are often characterized as being against joy and pleasure said, “*The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*”

We need to realize that God is most glorified in us when we find our satisfaction in Him!

We see in Ezra 6 how the LORD did some great things for His people which caused them to be joyful!

This chapter begins where we left off in Ezra 5—with a letter being sent by Tatnai the governor of the province and his delegation to Darius to confirm the details of the Jews story. (That Cyrus had indeed had given permission to this remnant of the Jews to return to Jerusalem for the express purpose of rebuilding the Temple and was even going to foot the bill for it!)

The outcome was still in question, though the work was allowed to continue while they waited for the answer. Because God’s eye was upon them, Tattenai permitted them to continue construction until word got back from the current king, Darius, as to what to do (5:3-5).

In chapter 6, we find that Darius makes a search and eventually finds the decree of Cyrus in the government archives. **(Read Ezra 6:1-5)**

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Thank the LORD for having good accountants and bookkeepers! (Divine Providence!)

In **Ezra 6:6-13**, we find that Darius respects the decree of Cyrus and sends back a ruling to Tatnai that not only should the work go on, but also it ought to be supported by government funds. (Divine Providence!)

In **Ezra 6:14-15**, we find that the temple was completed on March 12, 515 B.C. **Ezra 6:16** records that the Lord’s people gathered to celebrate the dedication of this temple with joy!

Look at the offerings they made to the LORD in the dedication celebration in **vs. 17-18!**

This was followed by a **celebration of the Passover in Ezra 6:19-20** and the **Feast of Unleavened Bread in Ezra 6:21-22**, “*with joy.*”

Ezra explains the source of that joy in the latter part of **verse 22!** The LORD gave them great joy in Him and His Providential or Sovereign ways!

**Understand that Joy and gladness in the Lord are not minor themes in the Bible.**

Look at what Moses said in **Deuteronomy 12:5-7:**

*Deuteronomy 12:5-7* <sup>5</sup> *But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:* <sup>6</sup> *And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks:* <sup>7</sup> ***And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.***

Later Moses warned them about not serving the LORD with joy in **Deuteronomy 28:47-48.**

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We know that the Psalms are full of joy and gladness!

*Psalm 43:4*—“Then will I go unto the altar of God, **unto God my exceeding joy**: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.”

*Psalm 100:1-2*—“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. <sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.”

*Psalm 32:11*— “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.”

*Psalm 5:11*—“But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”

*Psalm 16:11*—“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

**Listen to what the Lord Jesus Christ said:**

*Luke 10:20-21* 20—“Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. 21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

*John 15:11*—“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

*John 16:24* Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

*Hebrews 12:2* – “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

He promised that on judgment day, those who serve Him faithfully will be told, “...enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21).

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**Listen to the Words of the Apostle Paul:**

To the Philippians:

*Philippians 1:25*—“And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;”

*Philippians 4:4*—“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.”

To the Corinthians:

*2 Corinthians 1:24* – “...**but are helpers of your joy...**”

To the Galatians:

He listed joy as a fruit of the Spirit that should be evident in Spirit filled believers! (*Galatians 5:22*)

**Listen to the Words of the Apostle Peter:**

To brethren who were suffering greatly:

*1 Peter 1:8*—“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, **ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:**”

*1 Peter 4:13*—“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

The Apostle John records in *Revelation 19:6-7* a future scene of the saints rejoicing: 6 “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. 7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

Of course we’ve only skimmed the surface of this theme in Scripture!

But this is sufficient to show that joy in the Lord is not an optional or secondary matter for the believer. Rather, it is the very essence of our faith!

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In our text, I think we can see the joy that the LORD wants us to have as His people! I want you to note five things here:

**I. THE LORD WANTS US TO JOY IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE FOR US!**

God's providential care for His people underlies this entire account!

Tattenai had, no doubt, sent his letter to Darius expecting the king to send back orders for him to shut down this work at once.

But God's providence is seen in the very fact of the king finding the decree of Cyrus from some 18 years before!

God's providential care is further seen in that Darius did not say, "*I don't care what my predecessor said. I command you to stop this rebellious work at once!*"

But, what we see rather is that Darius not only told Tattenai to keep away from the project **(6:6)**, but he also ordered him to fund the project out of his tax revenues **(6:8-9)**!

And, to add some motivation, he commanded what was to be done to anyone who violated his decree! **(Vs 11)** And then he added the wish that the God who had caused His name to dwell there would overthrow any king or people who attempted to destroy this house of God!**(Vs 12)**

God's providential care is further alluded to in the mention that the building was completed according to God's command, and also "*the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.*" **(6:14)**

Why does Ezra mention *Artaxerxes*, who reigned some 50 years after the completion of the temple? *Artaxerxes* was the reigning king when Ezra wrote this. Since he had been kind enough to issue a decree for the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (as we will see in the Book of Nehemiah), Ezra wanted to give him credit in case he read this!

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Note how God's providential working is directly stated in **6:22**, where it says the Lord had "*turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them.*"

Now it is unusual that Ezra referred to the Persian king as the king of Assyria. He possibly did this to remind Israel that Assyria, Israel's former enemy, had been conquered by the Persians whose king was friendly toward Israel!

Nevertheless, behind all these remarkable events was God's mighty hand! As *Proverbs 21:1* puts it, "*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*"

Here is a good question for us: Do we see and rejoice in God's providential care for us in every little as well as major thing that happens to us?

Look at **Matthew 10:28-31**.

Since we are the LORD's we can rest assured that He orders all things for our ultimate good! He will not discard us or forget about His own!

**II. THE LORD WANTS US TO JOY IN HIS PROVISION FOR US!**

Tattenai and his colleagues didn't carry out the king's decree to fund the rebuilding of the temple out of their local tax revenues because they thought it was a great idea! **(6:13)**

They did it because they didn't care for the alternative! **(6:11-12)**

God used the decree of a pagan king to provide the materials for the temple and even the animals and other items for the sacrifices! **(6:9)**

King Darius was trying to cover all his bases by having the local people pray to their gods on behalf of him and his sons! **(6:10)** But God used the king's religious superstitions to provide for His people.

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The LORD does not usually use pagan governments as the main source of financial support for His work. But listen, however the LORD provides, whether it be through the tax breaks we receive from our government as a charitable, non-profit organization!

Or if it is through the generous giving of the Lord's people, God is the one who provides for His work as we wait upon Him through faith and prayer!

And whenever and wherever we see God's provision, it should fill us with joy!

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul expresses his joy in the Lord at the generous gift of the Macedonians for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He points out how generous giving not only meets the needs of others, but it also overflows through many thanksgivings to God, resulting in God being glorified! (**2 Cor. 9:12-13**)

We should rejoice daily not only in how God provides for the work of His Church, but also in how He provides for our personal needs!

*The songwriter Wendell Loveless told of a 64-year-old woman who had been confined to her bed for more than 16 years. She was in constant pain and unable to move her limbs. Yet she was one of the most thankful people Loveless had ever met.*

*She rejoiced that God had left her a great blessing—the use of her right thumb. Her other hand was stiff and completely useless. But with a two-pronged fork fastened to a stick, she could put on her glasses, feed herself, sip her tea through a tube, and turn the pages of a large Bible. Although it took great effort, everything she did was with the use of just one thumb.*

*She once told a visitor, "I have so much to be thankful for."*

*When asked why, she replied, "Now that my sins are forgiven, I can lie back and daily drink in the great love of Jesus my Savior." Asked if at times she became despondent, she replied, "I'm perfectly content to lie here as long as the Lord keeps me in this world.*

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*And I'm also ready to leave whenever He calls me." ("Our Daily Bread," May, 1993.) She knew the joy of God's provision!*

**III. THE LORD WANTS US TO JOY IN HIS PRODUCTIVITY IN OUR SERVICE FOR HIM!**

The temple was finally finished, about 20 years after the foundation was laid, and just over four years after the rebuilding began again under the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah.

The people came together and did the work, the temple was finished, and the people rejoiced at its dedication! (**6:15-16**)

While we can and should rejoice at the completion of any project for the LORD, we should find much greater joy when we see the Lord allows us to be used in His work and for His glory!

There can be a sense of frustration in ministry to people, in that the "project" is never completed, and there often seems to be many setbacks.

We can't step back and say, "Look at that person! They are now fully mature and complete!" Or, "Look at this Church: Harmonious, mature, fruitful—the work is done here!"

But while that is so, we can rejoice in *the progress* in godliness that we see in others' lives as God uses us in ministry to help them. We can rejoice in that our work in the Lord is never in vain!

*1 Corinthians 15:58—"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."*

When we glorify God by bearing much fruit, our joy will be full!

*John 15:8—"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."*

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*John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

*So, the LORD wants us to joy in His providential care for us; in His provision for us; and in the productivity in our service for Him...*

**IV. THE LORD WANTS US TO JOY IN HIM BY PRAISING HIM CORPORATELY!**

When the temple was completed, the people gathered and “*kept the dedication of this house of God with joy*” (6:16).

Their offerings were not nearly on the grandiose scale of Solomon’s dedication (1 Kings 8:63), but it was a sincere offering of what they had.

The appointment of the priests and Levites to their divisions and orders (6:18) shows their ongoing commitment to worship God.

Their observation of the Passover was a celebration of God’s gracious salvation, remembering how He delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread that immediately followed symbolized the holy fellowship of a redeemed people with their God.

For us, these feasts are consolidated in the Lord’s Supper, where we remember that Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us.  
*1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Sincere and heartfelt joy must accompany our praise in order for the praise to be genuine!

Spontaneous praise is good when you’re alone, but it’s better when you share the experience with others.

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It’s great to enjoy the beauty of the Lord in your private devotions, but it’s better to join with others and praise Him corporately. Finally,

**V. THE LORD WANTS US TO KNOW THE JOY OF PURITY AND OBEDIENCE TO HIM!**

It is stated that Israel rebuilt the temple “*...according to the commandment of the God of Israel...*” (6:14). They organized their worship “*as it is written in the book of Moses*” (6:18).

Further, it is stated that “*the priests and the Levites were purified together; all of them were pure*” (6:20).

Not only the returned exiles, but also “*all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land*” joined together “*to seek the LORD God of Israel*” by eating and celebrating the Passover and by keeping the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy. (6:21-22)

For there to be true joy in our worship, there must be holiness in our lives. We must separate ourselves from the impurity of those that don’t know the LORD.

It is hypocrisy that the Lord hates if we live “*like the heathen*” all week and then put on a pious front to worship Him on Sundays!

Contrary to popular opinion, purity of life and obedience to God do not rob us of joy. Purity of life and obedience to God are at the heart of true joy! Sin can give us brief pleasure but it can also give us lasting scars and pain. Obedience may be difficult at the moment, but it yields “*the peaceful fruit of righteousness*” (Heb. 12:11).

**Conclusion**