

Ezra 3 LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Good evening and thank you for joining us! Would you please turn in your Bibles to Ezra 3?

Remember, a small contingent of less than 50k Jews have left Babylon. King Cyrus of Persia has declared that the Jews were free to leave, fulfilling God's word that the Jews would spend 70 years in captivity.

So this contingent of Jews comes back to Judah, determined to rebuild the temple of God.

We're only gonna study chapter 3 tonight, and the title of tonight's message is LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Let's pray

539 BC Cyrus conquered Babylon

538, Cyrus' first year, he issues his decree

537, the first wave of nearly 50k Jews returns

Tonight verse 1 kicks off and scholars typically date this as taking place in 536 BC

1 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. The month was Tishri – the festive or holy month. The Feast of Trumpets, and Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles all occur in the month of Tishri.

This was an encouraging sign of obedience among the returned exiles. In a time of limited resources and incredible work to be done, they took the time and effort to obey God's command to gather in Jerusalem for the major feasts.

2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak^[fn] 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. Notice that before they begin the reconstruction of the temple, they first built a brazen altar on which to offer sacrifices to God.

They built the altar first because they understood its spiritual significance. If you recall, the altar was where sin was dealt with and where the common man met with God (the temple was only for the priests to enter).

They returning Jews started with the altar as a spiritual priority, showing they understood their need to have atonement from sin and perform acts of dedication to God.

Now you know and I know, that whenever a person is serious about their walk with God, in their drawing deeper in their relationship with God, that opposition will arise won't it...

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. We don't know exactly what drove this fear. There is all sorts of speculation, but we don't know for sure. But

no matter the reason, the fear that came upon them didn't stop them in their quest to draw near and obey God.

Notice in verse 3 it says they set the altar on its bases. This means that they found the old foundations for the previous altar and built the new one right where the old altar was.

So picture this scene—imagine the returning Jews, groping amid the ruins on the Temple hill, to find ‘the bases,’ the half-obliterated outlines, of the foundations of the old altar of 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. The Feast of Tabernacles was the week-long celebration where God's people took time to remember God's faithfulness to them as they made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land.

During this feast the families of Israel were commanded to camp out in temporary shelters, which would remind them of how their forefathers lived during the exodus.

But of course now, while returning to destroyed cities, they were forced to live this way until they could properly rebuild. So you can imagine how the Feast of Tabernacles held a special meaning for these returned Jews.

5-6

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. 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.

Before they began constructing the temple or securing the city, the leaders of Israel built an altar. And you can hear the criticism—"hey that's not practical," "You should build the building first or build the wall to make sure you're safe before you get too spiritual."

Why were they so focused on the sacrifices? As mentioned, they were seeking God first. And this should remind us... **Matthew 6:25** "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

The Lord is clear, He wants us to seek Him first, and our walk with Him to be our top priority. Yes we all have responsibilities, and tasks we must do, but the Lord must come first.

Now you'll notice the fact they prioritized the altar didn't mean the people weren't to be practical, and plan. After all, they had a temple to rebuild.

So while they're seeking the Lord and going through the sacrifices, they make plans to rebuild the temple.

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 men from Tyre and Sidon floated trees down to Joppa, where they were taken from Joppa to Jerusalem. Here they showed great wisdom because this was the same procedure used when Solomon built the first temple **2 Chronicles 2:16 And we will cut wood from Lebanon, as much as you need; we will bring it to you in rafts by sea to Joppa, and you will carry it up to Jerusalem.**

Hey why try and reinvent the wheel?

What's cool is that both for the first temple and the 2nd temple, we see both Jews and Gentiles working together to build God's house. This is a fulfillment of what Christ did, because the church is composed of both Jew and Gentile.

Joppa has a lot of history, including in the Bible. It was at Joppa that Jonah refused to go to preach to the Gentiles in Nineveh (Jonah 1:3), but also where Peter was called to minister to Gentiles (Acts 10).

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,[fn] 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. At twenty years of age, here the Levites were ordained to ministry. Initially, the law declared that Levites had to be thirty years old to be ordained (Numbers 4). But here, the age of ordination is twenty in accordance with David's last act as king **1 Chronicles 23:27 For by the last words of David the Levites were numbered from twenty years old and above;**

9-11

9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah,[fn] 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[fn] 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.”^[fn]

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. Seven months after the Jews arrive home the foundation of the temple was laid. The priests and people respond with a shout of praise! “He is good... His mercy endures forever toward Israel.” It was a glorious day.

Now if you’ve ever built a structure, even a small structure like a card house, you know the most important phase of construction is the laying of the foundation. Without a solid foundation the rest of the structure is in jeopardy.

The same is true in the Christian life. **In Matthew 7:24 24**

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

A wise person builds their life on a good foundation, so it survives the storms that come into our lives. And here’s how we lay a solid spiritual foundation – by hearing God’s Word, then applying it to

our life. There is no other short cut. In order to have a strong foundation our lives must be built on God's word.

The foolish person builds their life on the sands of emotion, or opinion, or what's trending.

This is also how the church – lays a sturdy foundation. We exalt God's Word. We take it seriously – we teach all the Word - apply it to all of life - and seek to obey it all the time.

Now, one of those scenes you wish you were there for... 12-13

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. There were old men in the crowd – 80-90 plus years old. Before being dragged off to Babylon, they'd personally seen Solomon's Temple with their own eyes, and knew this rebuilt temple paled in comparison.

For one reason this new temple was smaller. It was obviously going to lack the lavishness, ornamentation, craftsmanship of the first Temple. It was also lacking spiritually.

According to the Babylonian Talmud there were 5 items missing from second temple that were present in the first temple...

First, the Ark of the Covenant.

Second, the holy fire on the bronze altar.

Third, the Shekinah glory in the Holy of Holies.

Fourth, the Spirit of prophecy, or Holy Spirit.

Fifth, the Urim and Thummin – tools the priest used to discern God's will.

This lack caused the old men to weep. Compared to Solomon's Temple, Zerubbabel's was a shanty-shack. They compared the old to the new, and the wind was sucked out of their sails, and they wept.

Whereas the young men shouted for joy! Their eyes were on the future. This was a significant step toward the reconstruction of their temple and their nation.

As the foundation of the temple was being laid, two things were happening: The young men were saying, "Alright! We're getting it done! A new temple is being built. Praise God! This is exciting!"

While the old men were saying, "This is nothing like it was in the old days. Things were really great back then. Solomon's temple was full of gold and silver, but this one is just stone."

Thus, the shouts of joy of the young men mingled with the cries and complaints of the old men.

There is a valuable lesson in this for us today, because God continues to do something new and fresh. That is why Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to the wind, for no one can predict or tame

it **John 3:8** “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Hey the Lord is always on the move, but we all have a tendency that lurks within us to desire that which is comfortable and predictable.

“This is nothing like it was back in the revival of 1970,” we grumble. “That’s when the Holy Spirit was really moving.”

God sent a prophet to tell these people that the glory of the new temple would actually exceed the glory of the old temple **Haggai 2:9** The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

We need to be on guard against longing after the old days. Stay young in the Spirit. Shout for joy at what God is doing now, for He is doing marvelous things indeed.

How do we keep from thinking the old days are best?

Jesus told us new wine can’t be put into old wineskins because as the wine ferments, it expands and the old wineskins would burst **Matthew 9:17** Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

For “new wine,” Jesus used the word neos. For “wineskin,” He used the word kinos. Neos means “brand new.” Kinos means “renewed.” In other words, when the Lord wants to do a new work, He pours the new wine of His Spirit into renewed wineskins.

How were wineskins renewed? By soaking them in water. This is great news because it means that the Lord doesn't discard us if we're old, but renews us by soaking us time and again in the water of the Word.

I don't care how old you may be, if you stay in the Word, and you let God's word work through your life, you'll remain flexible, pliable, and usable in the new work the Lord continually desires to do.

God is still doing new things on the earth, and when He begins to work in a new way, we have to be moldable, adaptable, willing to change our approach and adapt to the Spirit!

If we're resistant, the Spirit of God will move right past us!

Always remember the last words of a dying ministry, or a dying church are, "We've always done it this way."

The Holy Spirit is like new wine! He's moving, and expanding, and growing – and if we want to keep up we need to be flexible. Let's make sure we're not an old, brittle wineskin.

There is always the urge in ministry to get more structured and more organized, but when human ingenuity gets involved we push the HS right out of the exact place where we need Him the most.

