

# Ezra 3 – Rebuilding and Revival

In our last time of study together, Dale opened the book of Ezra for us, and he explained how the nation of Israel had wound up in such a lowly state.

After the time of the **JUDGES**, the Nation demanded to be **ruled by a king** like the surrounding nations, and though it wasn't God's will, He allowed it.

It was a **DISASTER**. The kings ended up **leading the people to rebel** against God in more and more heinous ways, so God **punished them through exile**.

Then, after 70 years, just as Isaiah and Jeremiah both prophesied (Isaiah 44:28; Jeremiah 25:12), God moved the **PAGAN PERSIAN KING CYRUS** to send Israel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of God.

This happened in **THREE WAVES**. The Book of Ezra records the first **TWO**.

**Zerubbabel led the first wave** of returning Jewish exiles in (583 BC), and Ezra 2 records that only about 50,000 **OUT OF THE MILLIONS OF JEWS** who were taken into exile actually returned...

## **Ezra 2:64-65**

**64 The whole assembly together was 42,360, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers.**

Later in the study you'll see **Ezra lead the second wave** of returning exiles (458 BC), which included less than two thousand more returnees.

**Nehemiah led the third wave** of exiles (445 BC).

The reason I make a point of these numbers is **ONE**, God makes a point of them, and **TWO**, there is a message for us not only in the number of people who returned, but also in the number who stayed behind in Babylon.

You see, when Israel came out of **EGYPT**, **they were 2 to 3 million strong**, some scholars even indicating more! The Nation wasn't an endangered species with their numbers trickling down over centuries of living in the Promised Land. If anything, their numbers had **GROWN!** With that in mind, you can see that **a little more than 50,000** returning exiles was actually **A PALTRY AMOUNT**.

WHY HAD SO MANY REMAINED BEHIND?

**They had become comfortable in Babylon.** Think about it. They had been there as a Nation for 70 years. Many who were originally exiled **HAD DIED!** We'll see in a moment that not everyone who had gone into exile had perished, but many had. For many of them, **Babylon was the only home they'd ever known.** Did they continue to teach their kids to worship the Lord? Did they intermingle pagan worship like they had done in the Land before they were exiled for it?

This massive group of Jews makes up much of what we know as the **DIASPORA, Jews who lived outside the Land.** Whether they continued to worship God in a pagan culture (UNLIKELY) or not, it's clear they were **COMFORTABLE THERE.**

They had grown comfortable with the pagan surroundings of Babylon.

Now, I know I'm kind of "**preaching to the choir**" tonight. You guys represent the CORE of Mt. Pleasant Baptist, but because I wish to teach this to you as I would to anyone else, and because I know **WE ALL HAVE ROOM TO GROW,** I'll ask...

Have you grown comfortable living in Babylon? Are there **aspects of Satan's world system you've come to accept and abide by?** Like the Israelites, have worldly values and thought processes found a home beside the teachings of God's Word in your heart? If so, what **TRUTH had to be uprooted** to make room?

You see, the impact of getting comfortable with any degree of wickedness is like painting in a poorly ventilated space. You know it's bad for you, but the longer you do it, the less the smell and fumes bother you. Eventually, you don't even notice the noxious fumes, though their effect remains the same.

What do you think the people told themselves to reassure themselves about staying?

Perhaps some didn't fully see God as their PROVIDER, saying, "**I can better take care of my family here.**" They thought of themselves as **sensible,** when they really were just **untrusting.**

Perhaps others had become more "**enlightened,**" deeming it better to raise their kids in such a cultural crossroads, and "**let them decide**" what they believed. "**I would go back,**" they said, "**but I don't feel I should force the same decision upon my family.**"

You would be **SHOCKED** at how many parents have that **pluralistic, "all roads lead to heaven" mentality.**

Maybe there were some who piously thought, "**I can be a greater witness for the Lord in this environment than in the bubble of the Promised Land.**" Would they, though? Besides, the wrong thing done for the "right reasons" is still the wrong thing. God's will was for His people to live in the Land.

And, of course, there had to have been the **REALISTIC** follower who said, "**There's no need to upend my whole life for God. I'm no prophet or spiritual leader.**" No need to be fanatical, right? I mean, let's be realistic.

For whatever reason, in the end, **they COMPROMISED in order to be COMFORTABLE.**

The truth is, the closer we walk with Jesus, **the more ALIEN this world should feel.** Less and less of our hope should be found in it, and we should increasingly be ready, even **EAGER, to cut ties** with it just **to be a little closer to the Father.**

The Lord, and not the world, should be who **MOTIVATES** our goals and actions.

So, I ask again, is this world **ALIEN** to you, or does it **FEEL LIKE HOME**? I pray the Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts and minds to the things in this world that **steal our time and affections from the Lord**, enticing us to walk a guilty distance from Him instead of ever closer.

*"Lord, change us. Help us be genuine followers."*

Can I put it a different way? Regardless of whether it was the nation of **Israel** before the cross or the redeemed **Church** afterward, **God has always called His people to be SEPARATE.**

However, sanctification isn't merely separation **from** things; it's separation **TO** something else, in this case, **to the purposes of God!**

You see, when I'm **playing with Legos with my son**, I could **feverishly toss pieces** I don't need over my shoulder (like he does) in my search for what I do need. Those pieces have been *separated*, but for **NO PURPOSE!** That's very different from **taking a piece and setting it aside because I intend to use it later.**

I came across this quote from H.A. Ironside the other day. He said, "**Separation from, may end in mere Pharisaism. Separation to, will result in practical godliness, and be evidenced by devotedness, with brotherly love and unity.**"

*THAT'S* precisely what we see as we catch up with the returned exiles in Ezra 3. They were **pursuing God's will for this life**, and they knew they'd **never find it in Babylon.** They uprooted their whole lives to chase after Him.

Before we jump into the passage for tonight, **what's God calling you TO?** We can vaguely talk about avoiding sin and sinful influences in our day-to-day lives, but I want you to **forget about the DON'TS for a second.**

What is God calling you *TO*? You know what it is. Who's He calling you to be in your home? What's He calling you to in your work? Your personal relationship with Him? Your relationships with others? What's He calling you *TO*, **how's He calling you to GROW**, and what steps can you take NOW to actively set yourself apart *FOR* that purpose?

All the exiles were allowed to go home, **God beckoned to them all**, but **only a few went**. Praise the Lord they did! They weren't bewitched by the comforts of Babylon. They knew intimacy with God wasn't to be found in Babylon.

Do you sense their urgency, **the fire in their bellies?** With that in mind, let's take a closer look at their actions in Ezra 3...

### **Ezra 3:1-3**

**1 When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they 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. 3 They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening.**

Chapter two ended telling us that the children of Israel had gotten settled in their towns. Now we see them get to work.

The scriptures tell us that **"the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem."** THEY WERE UNITED!

**THEY SHARED A PURPOSE!** They had uprooted their lives to **pursue God in the Land** He had given them. They had the chance to **rebuild the Temple** of the Living God and the backing of a **PAGAN KING** to get the job done!

**THEY WERE LED BY PASSIONATE LEADERS!** They were led by Jeshua ("Joshua" in Haggai and Zechariah), who was a descendant of the high priest Aaron, and Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David.

**Isn't that neat?! I LOVE THE CONTINUITY!** David desired to build the Temple, but God told him his son would do that. Later, Solomon indeed built the Temple of God. Now at the construction of the second Temple, a son of David once again presides over construction. Two thousand years ago the Son of David was nailed to a tree to make

YOU AND ME His Temple, and one day that same Son of David will sit enthroned in a Temple that will encompass all of Jerusalem for 1,000 years!

Finally, **THEY WERE UNITED BY THE WORD OF GOD.** Time and again in Ezra we see references to the Word.

**TRULY, THE SUCCESSES RECORDED IN EZRA WERE ACCOMPLISHED BECAUSE OF A "REVIVAL OF BIBLE STUDY." THAT'S THE THEME OF THE BOOK.**

D.L. Moody said, "**The next revival will be a revival of Bible study.**"

J. Vernon McGee went on to say, "**Those who have tried to whip up revivals by organization, by methods, and by gimmicks have failed. Revival will come only as people come back to the Word of God.**"

That's what was happening with the returning Jewish exiles. I mean, in TONIGHT'S passage alone we see repeated phrases like...

"...as it is written in the Law of Moses..."

"...by number according to the rule,"

"...according to the directions of David king of Israel."

The **exile** these Jews had just experienced was **due to the Nation's rebellion** against the Word. **These exiles weren't just returning to the Land God had given them; they were returning to His Word.**

The first thing they were led to do was **REESTABLISH REGULAR OFFERINGS**, and for that **THEY NEEDED AN ALTAR.**

Now this might sound like getting the cart before the horse. **Cyrus' decree was for the children of Israel to return and rebuild the Temple of God.** So, build the Temple! They could build the altar later, right?

WRONG. This wasn't about building **some cold monument to some distant, obscure deity**. They knew the God of their Fathers, and they knew how to have communion with Him, and it was going to be on His terms. In Exodus 29, God explains the **CONTENT** and **PURPOSE** of the daily burnt offerings these exiles were so eager to reinstate...

**Exodus 29:38-43**

**38 Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. 39 One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you**

shall offer at twilight. 40 And with the first lamb a tenth seah of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. 41 The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord. 42 It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. 43 There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

More than getting the job done, more than building something awesome as the Temple to the Living God, they wanted to be RIGHT with God. **They wanted to be close to Him! They wanted to commune with Him again.**

Go back to Exodus 29:42-43...

#### **Exodus 29:42-43**

**42 It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, WHERE I WILL MEET WITH YOU, to SPEAK TO YOU there. 43 There I WILL MEET WITH THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.**

They were eager to rebuild the Temple, but this was more than completing a building program. They were **running after the heart of God!**

So zealous were they that **they made sure to put the altar back in its place.** It was important for **CONTINUITY OF WORSHIP.** Middle Eastern cultures understood this. There was one account of a Mesopotamian worship center unearthed by archaeologists where it could be seen that it had been rebuilt in exactly the same spot (to the INCH) TWELVE TIMES. Well, if pagans were so careful about the made-up gods, the followers of the One True God were ever more so. I believe the Jews found that precise location amongst the rubble and put it back perfectly in place.

I think of it this way. **The physical location of the altar is kind of synonymous with God's place in our lives.** If the precise location didn't matter, they could've rebuilt in Babylon and skipped moving, but that would've been to bring God into the midst of sin.

No, **God says, "I will be found HERE, and you will come to ME."** The altar had a specific place, and THERE the true worshipers went to worship. Just as these Jews had to replace the altar in its precise location for effective worship, we as the Temple of God must make sure Jesus is in the highest most perfect place in our lives if we're going to live lives pleasing to Him.

Verse three further explains that these returning Jewish exiles rebuilt the altar and offered burnt offerings even though **they knew their actions would provoke the surrounding nations to hostility**. Again, they weren't motivated by anything in this world, not even fear. They were motivated by **GOD** and **HIS WORD**.

Beside the daily burnt offerings, **Israel kept the Feast of Booths...**

**Ezra 3:4-5**

**And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, 5 and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the Lord.**

I want to zero in on the Feast of Booths...

Remember, verse one of this chapter tells us these events took place in the SEVENTH MONTH, and we know that refers to the SEVENTH MONTH of the Jewish calendar called *Tishri* because that's when the Feast of Booths was observed.



This feast was also known as the Feast of **Tabernacles** or the Feast of **Ingathering**. It was observed from the 15th of the month, and it was an **EIGHT-DAY FEAST** during

which time Jews would construct "booths" or "tabernacles" out of branches and other materials and **LIVE IN THEM for a WEEK.**

Feasts had their own prescribed offerings, and the offerings for the Feast of Booths is outlined in Numbers 29. What I want to get to is **the PURPOSE of the feast**, which the Lord gives us in **Leviticus 23...**

### **Leviticus 23:42-43**

**42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.**

WOW! How appropriate is *THAT?!*

Israel's disobedience had torn them out of the Land for 70 years, and the first feast they observed upon their return was the one commemorating the 40 years they were prevented from entering the Land because of their disobedience.

DO YOU THINK THE LORD WAS TELLING THEM SOMETHING?!

He was telling them, **"I've punished you like this before, and YOU KNOW I'LL DO IT AGAIN!"**

The returned exiles were **eager to honor and obey God**, though, and verses six through eight, I believe, show that.

### **Ezra 3:6-8**

**6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. 7 So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.**

**8 Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their kinsmen, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to supervise the work of the house of the Lord.**

Did you catch that?!



The people had been at Jerusalem for TWO YEARS, and **they still hadn't begun rebuilding the Temple**—THE WHOLE REASON GOD MOVED CYRUS TO SEND THE NATION HOME!!!

Not only was the foundation yet to be laid, THEY HADN'T EVEN ORDERED THE SUPPLIES FOR IT!

Judging by their actions as recorded in Ezra 3, **their primary concern was reestablishing sacrifices to the Lord in order to "meet with Him" once again.** Now that they had obeyed God they keeping the Feast of Booths, and the regular offerings were commonplace once more, Temple construction could get under way.

### **Ezra 3:9-11**

**And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers, and Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Henadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers. 10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,**

**For he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.**

**And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord,  
because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.**

As soon as the foundation had been laid, **they had a worship service "according to the directions of David."** Now this was done upon the COMPLETION of Solomon's Temple. We see it in 2 Chronicles 5...

### **2 Chronicles 5:13**

**and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,**

**For he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever,**

**the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud,**

Are you picking up on those oft repeated words? **"For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever."**

## **HEBREW**

It's a precious thing to be REMINDED of the goodness of God. That's what we do for ourselves every time we thank Him. He give Him GLORY--the very purpose for our creation--and we give ourselves PEACE as we remember His goodness.

It was so precious to these returned exiles that they didn't wait until the completion of the Temple; they were ready as soon as the foundation was laid! The Bible says they "**sang responsively**," meaning that the sons of Asaph (the singers) would sing one part, and the people would sing a refrain. It would be like Psalm 136, and I'd like you to turn there and do this with me. I'll read the first half of the verses, and you tell me the repeated portion.

However, don't mindlessly repeat the words just to be repeating them. Say them in agreement with me in RESPONSE to what I tell you. Let it cause you to MEDITATE upon the Lord's goodness...

### **Psalm 136**

**1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

**2 Give thanks to the God of gods,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

**3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

**4 to him who alone does great wonders,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

**5 to him who by understanding made the heavens,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

**6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

...

**23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

**24 and rescued us from our foes,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;**

**25 he who gives food to all flesh,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

**26 Give thanks to the God of heaven,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

"His steadfast love endures forever."

The youth who had returned from Babylon, those who had never beheld the Temple, were ECSTATIC! They loved everything about what was going on. However, there were those who LET DOWN by the whole situation...

### **Ezra 3:12-13**

**12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.**

The grandeur of a temple in that middle eastern culture was a reflection of the worshipers' reverence and devotion to the deity. In a lot of ways, it seemed pagan societies were trying to entice the deity to dwell in the temple they had made for it. Perhaps the old men of the returned exiles mourned because they wanted to do more for the Lord but lacked the lavish resources of King Solomon. Who knows?

Tell me this, though? Do you think they were down in the mouth about the new Temple?

"Oh, you young bucks think this place is wonderful? You should've seen the Temple Solomon built! It makes this house seem like a dirty little shack!"

Do you think their attitude about the situation poured water on the fire of the zealous, young Jews who were excited about the rebuilding of the Temple? OF COURSE!

Sadly, this wasn't an isolated occurrence. The prophet Haggai had to address this attitude when the Temple was completed (Haggai 2:1-9). The Lord through Haggai told the people that the house wasn't sanctified by the precious metals and jewels; He sanctified the house and the riches within. HE FILLED THE HOUSE WITH GLORY.

They all should have REJOICED! They had a Temple again! They could meet with God again!

The MORAL OF THE STORY is that you're either the old saint now, or you will be one day. Spirituality in those around us, especially in younger generations, is to be ENCOURAGED. As long as the fire in someone's heart for Jesus is biblical, POUR GAS ON IT!

I'm thankful that, in a lot of ways, that's the testimony of Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church. I don't mean to pat people on the backs, merely to point out a real life example of a church that, I feel, is effectively passing the spiritual baton to the next generation.

If a church can't encourage the next generation in their biblical pursuit of Jesus, especially when it looks different than the way they pursued Him, that church's days are numbered.

God made a way for all the exiled Jews to return to the Land--His will for them. Some went, but most didn't; they were comfortable in Babylon. Are you?

God calls us to be SEPARATE and SET APART FROM sin and the world's value system, but He also calls us to be separate TO HIM. What's He calling you TO? What steps can you take to meet Him where He wants you?

Just as the alter was in the right place for continued worship, does Jesus occupy the right place--first place--in your life for reasonable worship? If not, what in your life comes before Him?

The returned exiles were determined to not fall back into the rebellion of their fathers, and they made sure of it by LIFTING UP THE WORD. We talk so much about "REVIVAL," but revival isn't an event. It's a CONDITION, it's a SYMPTOM of a life lived under the Word of God.

FIGHT FOR THAT! Your flesh will tell you that you don't have time for it. The world will tell you that it's antiquated and impractical. But Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says...

### **2 Peter 1:3**

**His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,**

That's His Word. Revival begins with YOU IN GOD'S WORD. Ezra teaches that you don't have to wait on anyone else to have it.