

Ezra 3

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- [0 : 0 0] Amen. Take your Bible. Let's go into the book of Ezra. Ezra chapter 3. Ezra chapter 3. I was going to break this chapter apart, but we'll look at it in its entirety.
- It's only 13 verses. In Ezra chapter 3, we'll look at the entire chapter because, again, it is one of those... It's not so much as a transitional chapter as it's really a series of really important events take place here in this third chapter.
- And then we have a delay in the book of Ezra. So if you follow the successive chronological order of Ezra, after the third chapter, there's a 15-year delay in the events.
- Now, that's recorded for us. We have the reasoning behind the delay. We'll see that in the chapters that follow. But it is in that 15 years of delay. What has begun in the third chapter is delayed for 15-plus years.
- It is in that delay that we have the prophets Zechariah and Haggai prophesied during the time of the post-Babylonian exile.
- [1 : 0 7] So coming back, the return, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, if you will. So we're still looking at the decree of King Cyrus, that whosoever will let him go back and rebuild the temple of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem.
- So they're still a part of the Persian Empire. They're not a standalone nation. They are still really dependent upon the people around them, which kind of ties to what happens in the fourth chapter and following.
- But this evening, I want you to see laying the foundation in Ezra 3, laying the foundation, more than just laying the foundation of the temple, but the laying of the foundation for the nation, the rebuild and return of the nation of the people of the Lord.
- As they answer that call, we don't want to lose sight of the reality that it is God who is moving their hearts and minds and leading them back to come. So we need to keep in mind that those that are there were those whose hearts were stirred.
- And I keep bringing that up because it matters. These are the ones who didn't just make a decision and say, oh, that sounds like a good idea, but rather their heart was stirred by the Lord to return and to take on this work.
- [2 : 1 4] It says, burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening.
- They celebrated the Feast of Booths as it is written and offered the fixed number of the burnt offerings daily according to the ordinance as each day required. And afterward, they were continual burnt offerings.
- Also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the Lord, they were consecrated. And from everyone who offered a free will offering to the Lord and 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 had not been laid.
- Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrenians to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the Sea of Joppa according to the permission they had from Cyrus, king of Persia.

Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua, the son of Jehoshadak and the rest of their brothers, the priests and Levites and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem began the work and appointed the Levites from 20 years and older to oversee the work of the house of the Lord.

[3 : 52] Then Joshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Cadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Hinnadad with their sons and the brothers, the Levites to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets and the Levites, the sons of Asaph with symbols to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel.

They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, For he is good for his loving kindness is upon Israel forever. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house or foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Yet many of the priests and Levites, the heads of the fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple wept with a loud voice when the foundation of the house was laid before their eyes while many shouted aloud for joy so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people for the people shouted with a loud shout and the sound was heard far away.

Ezra chapter 3, I want you to see laying the foundation. Again, we know that they are responding to the decree of King Cyrus, a decree which he put in writing that will be important as we make our way through the book of Ezra.

[5 : 13] It is equally important because we understand that their gathering and collecting of supplies to rebuild the temple is according to the decree or the rite that they have from Cyrus. Cyrus' decree did so much more than just say whoever wants to go back can go back.

The decree he put in writing said whoever wants to go back can go back and let them gather timber from these people and let them get stones from these people and let them erect the building according to this. That is important.

When we get into it we'll see. The decree of Cyrus as he was so moved of the Lord had grand detail in it. Detail as to the structure could be so high, the stones could be so large, the timbers could be used from certain regions.

Those things are important and we'll find because of the challenges that come upon the people of the Lord as they're doing the work. But they begin to respond. Now it's kind of parallel to the construction of Solomon's temple.

If you remember in Solomon's temple he began the building of the temple in the second month. The rebuilding of the temple was began in the second month. We know that when Solomon gathered resources and supplies to do it he also gathered it from the Sidonians and the Tyrenians the people from Tyre to send timber down.

[6 : 22] So much the same way they're doing it they are again laying the foundation of the house of the Lord. It is the fulfillment of the promise of God that he would bring them into captivity for the purpose of restoring them so that they could come back.

And he was bringing them back if you remember not just so that they could have a building in Gaul look how grand this building is. It is so that he can continue his covenant promises which he has made with his people namely that Christ would come to Temple Mountain and the Mount of the Lord it would be provided.

And so it is here that we begin to see this foundation being laid for the ongoing continuing work of the Lord among his people for the redemption of all mankind.

But I want you to see how it began and I want you to see kind of what has taken place and what leads us up to this 15 year delay. Number one we see that there is a priority of worship there is a priority of worship among the people.

It says now when the seventh month came that is the first year of their return back to Jerusalem everyone is in their own cities. Everyone didn't come back to the city of Jerusalem proper.

[7 : 27] If we go back and we read the genealogy and the listing of individuals recorded for us in the second chapter we will find that some were from Bethlehem others from other regions and people were living in the various places.

Each man returned back to his city and each one went back to their home. But the decree was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and whoever wanted to go back could so the work and the center of their focus should be in Jerusalem.

It says now in the seventh month came understanding that the seventh month happens to be about this time of the year on the Jewish calendar it parallels our it is the end of September to the beginning of October would be the seventh month of the Jewish calendar and it was also the seventh month was the most holy month of the year for the Jewish people.

It is there when they were to celebrate the festival booth they were to have the day of redemption they were to have the day of atonement they were to have all those things these sacrifices that were brought now when this time came it says that they gathered as one man each one came out of their cities and they came to Jerusalem now the decree of King Cyrus was to rebuild the temple that was the decree that was what Cyrus had ordered he said to return and rebuild the temple but that was not the first thing that they did because when they came back and if you remember when Nebuchadnezzar and his men surrounded the city of Jerusalem and Nebuchadnezzar then the captain of his guard came in they raised Jerusalem they destroyed the temple they tore the temple down most people believe they did it for the same reason that the Romans did it they set the temple on fire in order to get the gold out of the temple when Jerusalem fell in AD 70 the Romans did the same thing there was so much gold inlaid within the temple they burned it so that they could collect the gold out of it so that the gold would melt down and they could gather all that and they could carry that away with them as well so you're looking at a temple that's in ruins the stones have been cast aside every stone is turned over everything has been taken out of it it has been ransacked but there are some attributes that are still there and one of the things that is still there is the foundation for the altar still remains the altar that was outside of the temple if you were to look at kind of the drawing or the architecture of Solomon's temple there was this huge altar that was outside of the temple proper in which they were to offer these sacrifices and it is that that the foundation is still there so the very first thing they do when they gather together is not to begin to lay again the foundation of the temple but it says they came together and they built the altar of the God of Israel that is the very first thing they did was build the altar because you do not have to have a temple to have worship but in their time you did have to have an altar altars are important because the way that God has declared and decreed in this time to worship him was through the sacrificial system so the temple was to be the representation of God's glory among his people the place where his name would dwell but the altar was to be a place where the people of God met with the

Lord God Almighty in relational worship so the priority in this holy month of the seventh month was not to begin to build the temple but rather to restore the relationship and the very first thing they did is rebuild the altar and they paid particular attention to how they rebuilt the altar because it says that they rebuilt it and built it according to the law of Moses that is by the standard they paid particular attention it is important that we notice this and we get it to the end of the chapter and we'll pay attention to that in just a moment they weren't so concerned as to rebuild the temple exactly how it had been built before but they were concerned to rebuild the altar exactly how it was to be built the temple does not the building structure does not even compare to what had been there before but the altar that place of worship of communion between man and God that place of atonement and redemption that place was built according to the law of Moses and we love how the word of God defines the man

[11 : 50] Moses he is the man of God we find that just several times in the Old Testament so they set up the altar and its foundation and notice why they set it up why was this priority and it's kind of tucked there in that verse in verse three it says for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands so their fear of the people around them they are not an independent nation dwelling in the security of their own land they are a small remnant of people who have returned to the land that once belonged to them within the realm of the Persian empire so their neighbors are not Jewish people there are people living in the land of Israel that are non-Jewish we meet them very quickly when we get to the fourth chapter we know them so well through the study of the book of Nehemiah and the book of Ezra we know them as Sambalat Tobiah and all the others that are there those who bring so much havoc upon the work those who do not want a city rebuilt and really are intertwined really very deeply so with the Jewish people that had remained behind they had even intermarried with them but it says that these people who came back had a fear of the people that surrounded them and their fear of the people led them to worship it did not lead them to isolation they had a right to be there right but the very first thing that they did was rebuild the altar so that they could restore worship that's important for us because we understand that apart from the altar the temple means little if there is no worship then it's just a building and so we notice here the priority of worship that exists among the people and laying the foundation

I love walking in old church buildings and I have made it my practice especially several years ago when I was still with the phone company and I was a lineman we'd be working out in the country and one thing you notice is old church buildings are never locked and old church buildings make great places to eat lunch so we would be out most of the time they don't have locks in the doors it's okay and I don't know how many times I've eaten lunch in old church buildings I love old church buildings I've seen some of those nicest outhouses by the way I've been in church buildings I've seen some really nice outhouses and some church buildings and had a wonderful time just visiting these places and standing in them and being amazed at the testimony of these structures but one thing I've noticed that without a group of worshiping people then it's just a building no matter how ornate no matter how simple no matter how marvelous no matter the testimony of the ages that it's went through that without a group of worshiping people then it's just a building and we've seen buildings be transitioned from being places of worship to places of occupation people live there people work in them they change these structures to be something else and we know that it is not the structure so much that matters as the worship that infuses the structure and so the priority here is given on let's restore our worship before we restore our building and that's important so we notice the priority of worship the second thing that we notice in this passage is not only the priority of worship but it's really a testimony to the way that the Lord

God moves we see that there is a unity of purpose it tells us there that they gathered as one man now when we go back and we read this listing we know that it is not a overwhelming majority of the people it's a small remnant of people who return we know that there are only 42,360 people who come back it tells us in the second chapter but among those 42,360 people those are people of differing regions geographically differing backgrounds economically differing life circumstances surely and they are also moving in with the people who remained behind about this time Jeremiah is no longer alive but you remember that Jeremiah was left behind with the poorest of the poor to maintain the land so there are other people there too and they are coming together but it tells us that they came together as one man to Jerusalem and then we notice all the they's in this passage because they gathered together it tells us just when we read through this chapter that as they gathered as one man in

Jerusalem then we notice that they set up and they built it tells us in verse three they set up the altar on its foundation and then it tells us in verse four they celebrated the feast and then they offered the offerings and they came together in verse seven it says they gave money to the masons and carpenters and then it tells us a little bit later that after they built all these things they sang praises and thanksgiving to the Lord and for he is good and all the people shouted with a great shout and all these people were together and what we notice is that they are doing everything together and that as they are a united people not just in the seventh month of the first year but also in the second month of the second year because it took some time by the time they rebuilt the altar and they began to restore the sacrificial offerings and the burnt offerings were going on an ongoing basis not only just a celebration of booths and all those festivals there but the new moons and people bringing offerings so for the next several months they begin to collect supplies and then on the second month of the second year that is the next year they begin to rebuild the temple proper and they begin to lay again the foundation but what we notice is throughout all that time they are all doing it together there seems to be no division it is a wonderful thing that when we understand this because we know that when they went into

Babylonian captivity they were a very divided nation brother was set against brother and we find that very quickly following the reign of Solomon when Rehoboam his son comes upon the throne and we know it's because of the sins of Solomon that now there is a segmented and fragmented society and the people are fighting and they're not a united nation but God had declared through the prophets and through his word that he did not see a segmented group of people but rather he saw a united group of people it is Ezekiel that he tells to take the two sticks and to make them one stick because he's going to unite them and bring them together coming out of Babylonian captivity we understand here that they are working in unity and what is really amazing is that when the people of the Lord are united in purpose and focus they accomplish a tremendous amount Paul would say it this way we are intent on one purpose we are laboring together it is the unity of the body of Christ in the New Testament that matters so much to Paul when he is writing so many of his letters to the churches making sure that there would be no schism or division among them but that they would be intent and focused on one thing and doing it well it is here in the

[18 : 56] Old Testament that we begin to see the unity of the people of God and as they are restoring worship they begin to reconstruction they are gathering stuff together they are giving financially and they are moving forward in what God had called them to do by the way it is this very unity that the enemy will attack because we know that the enemy comes to divide to steal kill and destroy and the best way to do that is to bring division that when the enemy raises his head it is the unity that he is attacking in various means in various ways we see it even in the book of Nehemiah the enemy there is trying to break their unity and that's why Nehemiah stresses so much that everyone is standing shoulder to shoulder as Spurgeon used to say with a sword and a trowel he Spurgeon's book or monthly paper that he put out he called it the sword and a trowel and he gets that from the the book of Nehemiah that they had a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other hand they were building the wall and defending the faith at the same time right they were united notice here the united or the unity of purpose they were coming together as one people for one goal and one glory and that is to not only be restored in worship but also to fulfill the thing that God had called them to do third we notice there is a diversity among them there's a diversity among them we saw that in the genealogies for sure but we see that here and if we're not careful we would pass over it it is quite a sight really when they lay the temple foundation because after collecting the supplies and bringing things in they are finally ready to start construction they've given the money it tells us to the carpenters and the masons and the stone masons and the levites are brought in and those 20 years and older are set over the construction not the priests but the levites the levites there are a few in number by the way they are not the majority of the people who came but they're the minority but

God had ordained and called the levites to serve first in the tabernacle and latter in the temple so now we see that the levites are given charge of the service that's going on and it tells us there in verse 10 now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the lord so they're going to stop and have a praise service here that the priests stood in their apparel with the trumpets and the levites and the sons of asaph with symbols to praise the lord according to the direction of king david of israel and they sang praising and giving thanks to the lord and saying for he is good and his loving kindness is upon israel forever and it tells us that all the people shouted with a great shout and there was rejoicing and there was celebration but notice in the midst of that rejoicing there's also weeping and this is where we begin to see the diversity because it tells us that as the people were shouting and rejoicing there were some some of the priests and some of the levites and refers to them as the old men who had seen solomon's temple now that had been 50 plus years since the last people had left it was 70 years since the clock had started on the deportation of the people of god so these people were a little bit advanced in age but there were some it tells us that had come back that were not shouting for joy but they were weeping in sorrow and they were weeping because they had seen the former glory of solomon's temple that was no longer there and surely this temple that is rebuilt during these days is very very small in comparison if you were to look at the reconstruction of this temple it does not really even compare to the glory and splendor of solomon's temple and it is for these reason that these older people are weeping and crying and mourning but then there are among them the others that are shouting and what we have here is this diverse group even though they are of one people and one mind we have the younger ones who are for the first time in their life rejoicing and celebrating over the reality that is before them there is a temple began or begun and in the midst of them there are the older ones who are weeping over the former glory that is now behind them we would say there are those who are pining for the good old days and those who are just rejoicing in the present day but this is where I asked you to be mindful of the reality that everyone that was present there were those whose hearts were stirred by the Lord to move to Jerusalem now we can say and there's one other time I believe it's a 2018 we preached to the first six chapters of the book of Ezra and even then when I preached it in 2018

I highlighted in this particular passage if any of you were here you would know that that this is the first time we see the break in the unity now we have a division we have those celebrating and we have those weeping and we have to be cautious here because there's there's a division but I would say even now that more than that what we also understand is that it's going to take both groups of people to accomplish the work that God has put before them God stirred the hearts of those who had seen the former glory of Solomon's temple and who would mourn over the reality that the nation of Israel was not what it used to be that they realized the full weight of the loss and the responsibility of their sin that because of their disobedience and their rebellion against a holy God God had they're not pining for the good old days as we would say them but they would say because of what we did we no longer can see what used to exist but he would also need those who would stand in excitement in reality that they are taking place in no matter how small it may be of what used to be but it is still a reestablishment of the temple of the Lord so that the name of God can be manifest among the people of God and the diversity was a strength moving for for God needed them both and it is God that had called and stirred the hearts of these individuals so that they would be present so that there would be this intertwining of rejoicing and weeping because if all we do is rejoice we do not forget that there are consequences for our sins but if all we do is weep we forget that we have the joy of the Lord for the present day for his loving kindness never cease and we need to have this reality right it is a balance that we need to understand that there is the rejoicing and what the

Lord God Almighty is doing today but there is also the sorrow and the weeping over the reality that because of the sin of man we are not what we used to be and it is diversity of past experiences and diversity of the people group that is going to make them so strong now for a moment for 15 years 15 plus years it may cause them to hinder the work but when they come back and they restart the work it is that that background that reality that understanding now that when the temple is reconstructed they will dedicate it again to the Lord and they will respond we have to ask ourselves why do these people respond so quickly and really obediently to the prophecy of Zechariah and Haggai when the ones before them would not respond to the prophecy of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the like of that I mean think about it for just a moment if I say well Isaiah says this and Jeremiah says this we would pay a little bit more attention because we know they are what we would call the major prophets right they're not only the longer books but they have a major point in the history Haggai and Zechariah are what we refer to as minor prophets they are a smaller portion they speak for just a moment their prophetic ministry does not last as long why do the people respond and they do so quickly and so obediently to the prophetic word of Haggai and Zechariah when it is the same demographic people group who did not respond to the prophecies of Isaiah and

Jeremiah I believe it is because there are those who are weeping over the former glory that used to be that they say hey we heard this before and we didn't respond and guess what God kept his word if you just had a bunch of rejoicing people said well we got a good start well a good start's not enough you know who could tell them a good start was not enough the ones who had been there and seen it and had been carried away into exile those younger ones who are rejoicing over the temple that has begun were those who were born in exile they had never suffered loss they were born in Babylonian captivity and they had never known what it was like to be chastised for their disobedience but rather now they're beginning to see that God is doing something great so I would say that the diversity among them is probably one of the strongest things and it is the reality of that why God put them together we have to always ask ourselves why did God put this group of people together it's so that there would be those who would rejoice and keep the nation moving and there would be those who would mourn and weep and keep the nation humble and God is using this body of believers much like when he builds the church why does he build the church the way he does because if we all saw things the same way we would be a very weak body of believers it is our diversity that strengthens us and it is our diverse and differing backgrounds and how we perceive things that makes us stronger to accomplish the things that God has called us to do so we notice here the diversity among them fourth and finally I want you to see the testimony that rang forth from them so we see here there is a priority a unity a diversity and a testimony look at the testimony that rang forth from them the first thing that we notice is when they rebuilt the altar it tells us in the third verse that they rebuilt the altar because they feared the people of the land and they had a right the people of the land did not want them there the people and it was so much more than not wanting the walls rebuilt they did not want the Jewish people there because they had occupied that land when the

[29 : 27] Assyrians carried away the northern kingdom the Assyrian practice was to not just leave the land desolate but to repopulate the land with people from different geographic regions that they had already conquered lands they had already conquered so they would move them in there and they would let them settle there and when the Babylonians did the same thing they would leave behind just a small amount of people to maintain the land and they would ask other people to get there you know it when you read the New Testament because there was a woman at the well in Samaria and you know that the Jewish people never went through the region of Samaria because those were the half Jews well those half Jews came from this time period it's because the Assyrians had filled the region of Samaria which by the way is just north of Jerusalem and Bethlehem on the map and they had repopulated it with people from different countries and the people left behind in Jerusalem during those days well they intermarried with those people that were there because you know for lack of better way of saying it pickings were slim if you have to go for about 70 years right and your people group are gone but so there's this unwelcome blending of nations now because all of a sudden the Jewish people come back we're seeing that lived out in our history today right it is still this same conflict over the same land by the way and over the same purity of a people and who really does the land belong to so they were afraid of the people that were around them because this minority had come back and they said well we'll come back and the first thing they do out of fear is to rebuild the altar now as they rebuild the altar the temple has not started yet so the question just that rings and resonates with them my mind they were afraid of the people around them but the very first thing they did was to make a public display to the people around them that they were there because when you start offering that many sacrifices on an altar it becomes a visible reality the smoke is going to be seen everybody's going to know by the way Jerusalem is and you always refer to as going up to Jerusalem going up to

Jerusalem going up to Jerusalem because it is a higher elevation than any region around it and it's also when you go into the presence of God you're always going up so it is a very visible display that we are here and we are worshipping so that's the first testimony that they give because you cannot hide that reality and they began to because of their fear for the people of the Lord they began to worship the Lord God Almighty they began to fear those around them but they did not hide their worship but then we see the testimony at the end of the chapter it tells us that when the foundations were laid and there's this shouting and rejoicing and weeping and crying and you cannot differentiate between the two it tells us that the sound was heard far far away that there was such rejoicing over the laying of the foundation of the temple that it was heard far away so now we have two testimonies that are given to the people that they are afraid of we're worshipping the Lord according to his ways on his altar and we are fulfilling what we came here to do we are rebuilding and reconstructing the temple and it is a visible testimony because the people around them take notice and it is this testimony that awakens the enemy it is this testimony that brings the trouble if you will because if they had just come in remain silent maintain their own cause and we'll know it because it shows us they weren't concerned if they just came lived in their houses dwelt in their houses and left everything well enough alone the enemy has no problem with that but it is this testimony that brings the attention of the enemy and raises the enemy up because now they are making a public display out of their obedience and their worship and the enemy wants nothing to do with that and this testimony which is to those who are around them will bring trouble upon them and for 15 years it will stall the work we'll see it but praise be to

God God has a prophet for every season and he has a word for every every temptation and the prophecies come and the people respond and then we will see that the response and when they begin to testify again through their actions not so much their words but just by obedience that the enemy keeps showing up keeps showing up keeps showing up until finally we find a king and we'll find this this is something unique to the book of Ezra we'll find the king that says that if someone stands against us let him take a timber from his house and crucify him on it impel him with it and so what we find is this reality that the people as they lay the foundation are also testifying but the testimony brings about the trouble but it's okay because God will see them through they doubt for a moment but he is building the people to accomplish the work and the task before them and they're beginning to lay that foundation he is not in a rush he is patient he is loving kind and he will surely see them through though they delay we will get to that he will bring them through it and we find it here in Ezra chapter 3 let's pray we'll be dismissed father we are so thankful for your word we are more thankful for your work and for the way you move throughout history we thank you that your word records for us your activity among your people that you are glorified and honored through things that you accomplish at times even in spite of them and in spite of us so we praise you for who you are and we praise you for the work that you accomplished through us for your glory and pray that we as your people would be given into your service we pray right now just for those of our own number continue to pray for miss Peggy and the pain family pray that you wrap your arms around them pray that you be with brother Jamie's mother and be with that family I pray Lord that you be with those of our membership that will be going to the doctors this week those that are facing difficulties and trials and we ask that you would walk beside them in all of that Lord we ask that you help us to be a light in the community you've placed us in we praise you for the opportunity we have to serve a savior to testify to the reality so may our testimony ring true for the glory of the king and may you be exalted in all you do to us be with us as we leave here may we draw closer to you each and every day and may our fellowship with you lead to a greater fellowship with one another and we ask it all in Jesus name amen thank you guys really appreciate you