

**BOOK OF EZRA
BEGINNING AGAIN
EZRA 3:1-13**

Introduction

The year is 537 B.C. The place is Jerusalem. A remnant of the Jews had recently returned from a 70 year exile and captivity in Babylon!

They were sent into captivity as part of God's judgment on them because of generations of disobedience and failure to heed the prophets that God sent their way!

So, the time had come that the LORD had promised by Jeremiah the prophet—the time that Daniel discovered in his Bible study and prayer time in Daniel 9 that caused him to go to the LORD in prayer and confess his sins and the sins of his nation! This was the time when God allowed them to return to their land!

But when they got back into the land they found that everything has changed! The countryside is in the hands of their enemies! The city of Jerusalem lies in ruins! The walls have been torn down and buildings have been looted! And worst of all, the magnificent, glorious temple built by Solomon some 500 years earlier was no more! It had been utterly destroyed!

The temple had been leveled. The Ark of the Covenant was gone and the altar of sacrifice was gone! In its place lay just a field of rubble.

So, after settling back into the land the best they could, we see the Jews went to work with vigor and determination.

I. WE SEE A NEW DEDICATION—THEY REBUILT THE ALTAR!

Now, we've already looked at this part, but let's review:
The returning exiles began by rebuilding the altar so they could offer sacrifices to God. Verse 1 notes that all the people ("*as one man*") assembled in Jerusalem.

The two key leaders knew what to do. Jeshua the high priest and Zerubbabel (the man who led the exiles back from Babylon) led the people in reconstructing the altar of God.

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When it was finished, they began to offer the morning and evening sacrifices as God had mandated in the book of Leviticus. Then they made offerings for the Feast of Tabernacles (**v. 4**). (**Then vs 5-6**).

They built the altar even before they started rebuilding the temple!
Because **our worship** must always precede **our work**!

Out of the rubble of their past disobedience, they first made sure they were **right with God!** By making sacrifices first, they were saying, "*Lord, we want to get right with you!*"

The altar was the symbolic center of Old Testament worship. It was the place where they brought their lambs, goats and bulls to be offered to the Lord. They killed the animal, poured out its blood, and burned the flesh before the Lord.

Without the altar there could be no proper worship, no assurance of divine protection, no guarantee of forgiveness, no access to God, and no lifting of the burden of their guilt and failure!

The altar was the link between God and man! During all the years in Babylon, the people had no altar and thus no clear access to God and no assurance of forgiveness! Their disobedience had taken the altar away and broken their fellowship with God!

There are times when we all need a new beginning with God!
Sometimes we need a new beginning because of our own sin!
Sometimes the circumstances of life have so defeated us that we need a fresh start! Sometimes we may feel that all hope is gone forever!

And it is in those moments that we must do what the Jews did!
We must return to the altar of sacrifice! For Christians, that means returning to the cross of Jesus Christ where his blood was shed for our sins and applied to our hearts! We all need the healing and cleansing that comes from the blood of Jesus Christ! (**Cf. 1 John 1:5-10**)

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No matter how great our sin may be, if we turn to the Lord, he will abundantly pardon!

Micah 7:18—“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”

WE SEE A NEW DEDICATION—THEY REBUILT THE ALTAR!

II. WE SEE A NEW OBEDIENCE—THEY RELAID THE FOUNDATION!

Having rebuilt the altar, and thus re-established their relationship and fellowship with God, the Jews proceeded to relay the foundation of the temple!

This, no doubt, involved a massive cleanup effort! Remember that when they came back, they found a city basically turned into rubble, like a war zone! It has been a war zone!

Where Solomon’s temple had been, they found a field of rubble—piles of smashed rocks, burned bits of wood, with weeds and bushes growing up amid the debris.

When they first saw it, there was nothing that looked like a temple! All of it had been destroyed, torn down, and burned. Now look at **vs 7-9**.

A. They Committed Themselves To Follow The LORD!

Verses 2 and 4 emphasize that when they rebuilt the altar, they did it “*according to the Law*,” that is, they got back and followed the details of what God originally told Moses for them to do at the beginning!

They followed the “*old paths*” so to speak! If they didn’t get back to the Word of the LORD, then all they did would be in vain!

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This was a “*new beginning*” for them—It was time to start over. So, what do you do then? You go back to the basics, back to the drawing board, you go back and read the instruction manual so you don’t make the same mistakes all over again! That’s what they did in Ezra 3.

They Committed Themselves To Follow The LORD!

B. They Relaid The Foundation In Spite Of Their Circumstances!

As the story unfolds in the chapters yet to come, we’ll see that they were surrounded by their enemies—People who wanted to see them fail! Those enemies would do everything they could to discourage them, to harass them, to oppose them, and to stop them altogether! And in fact, we’ll see that the enemies actually succeeded for a period of time!

Listen, it takes courage to stand against a hostile world!

Anybody can serve the LORD in the good times!

But, when the enemy lines up against us, what will we do then? We have to put our faith ahead of our fears!

In spite of the rubble, and in spite of the opposition, and in spite of all that had happened in the past, the people of God banded together and got to work!

They organized their workers into teams, and everyone pitched in and went to work! Little by little, day by day, week by week, they worked to clean out a the mess that sin had caused!

Don’t miss the point here! When we are disappointed and don’t know where to start, we need to take a lesson from these Jews. We need to do what we know is right!

Don’t let your discouragement keep you from doing what you know you need to do!

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If you can't see ten steps into the future, then take two or three steps. Or just take the next step in front of you!

Motivational speaker John Maxwell said, "*The smallest act of obedience is better than the greatest intention.*" Listen, we're better off doing a little that we can do than to sit around dreaming about doing a lot and doing nothing!

ObeY the LORD in the small things of life! Don't sit around and talk about what you CAN'T do! Do what you CAN do! Do what you know needs to be done, and do it for the glory of God!

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WE SEE A NEW OBEDIENCE—THEY RELAID THE FOUNDATION!

III. WE SEE A NEW PRIORITY—THEY RESOLVED TO PRAISE THE LORD! (vs 10-13)

Once the foundation was laid, the people and their leaders stopped and gave thanks to God! This was a united, public praise service! No doubt it was intense and emotional as well as God-centered!

When they sang, they declared, "*He is good,*" not "*We are good.*" They gave God all the glory and credit!

They did not wait until the building was done to praise the Lord! Even though laying the foundation was a significant task, there was still a monumental amount of work left to do! In fact, we'll find that a number of years would pass before the temple was finished! This was only the first step, but they stopped anyway and gave thanks and praise to the Lord!

By the way, praise is a choice, not a feeling! We aren't supposed to wait until we feel like praising the LORD! We are to praise the LORD at all times whether we feel like it or not!

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*Psalm 34:1—“I will **bless the LORD at all times**: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

*Psalm 62:8—“**Trust in him at all times**; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.”*

*Psalm 106:3—“Blessed are they that keep judgment, and **he that doeth righteousness at all times.**”*

Many times we may not feel like praising the LORD! That doesn't matter! Praise isn't suppose to be about our feelings! Praise is a choice we are make without regard to our feelings or our circumstances!

Don't wait until the victory is won to praise the LORD! Stop and praise the LORD even before the battle is begun! Then praise the LORD in the midst of the battle! And we need to praise the LORD even when things seem to be going against us!

Praising the LORD puts our soul in the right place to continue to work with joy in the days to come when the enemy is advancing and the circumstances seem to be against us!

When you can praise the LORD even when things are not seemingly going well or the way we planned, that's when we show spiritual maturity in your life! "*Well, just praise the LORD anyway!*"

In the midst of the devastation of Jerusalem, with only the foundation of the temple relaid, with rubble still on every hand, after returning to find their homeland controlled by their enemies, with a monumental task yet to do, the people praised and gave thanks to the LORD because He is good! That's a good testimony to those round about!

Anyone can praise God when the sun is shining, the bills are paid, the marriage is strong, the kids are doing well, you just got a raise, and the future is bright!

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It's something else to praise God when things are far from perfect!
It's a great thing to be able to look at your life and say, "*It's not what I wish it was, but God is still good to me.*"

Conclusion

As we stand back and survey this amazing scene let me share one last morsel to help you overcome the disappointments of life.

Yield Your Past, Present, And Future To The LORD!

1. PAST—We can't undo our past, but we can learn from it and have a new beginning! We don't have to repeat the mistakes of the past!
2. PRESENT—Regardless of what our present circumstances may be, let's determine to obey, thank and praise the LORD!
3. FUTURE—Let's not borrow from tomorrow's problems! Trust your future in the hands of the LORD and take one step at a time!