

## The Work Begins

### *The Altar is Rebuilt*

**Text:** Ezra 3:1-6

#### **Introduction:**

1. In this chapter the work of re-building the temple gets underway starting with the altar of worship and then moving to the laying of the foundation. So, the chapter divides fairly neatly in two sections:
  - Vs. 1-6 – The rebuilding of the altar.
  - Vs. 7-13 – The relaying of the foundation.
2. One preacher's<sup>1</sup> outline for the chapter is as follows:
  - Worship was Restored (Vs. 1-6)
  - Work was Resumed (Vs. 7-9)
  - Witness was Recorded (Vs. 10-13)
3. In this message we will study the first section (Vs. 1-6) that deals with the rebuilding of the altar and the lessons we can learn in the area of worship. We will note **7 lessons** about biblical worship in these verses.

#### **I. THE PRIORITY OF THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 1A)**

Their priority for worship is seen in:

##### **A. The Season for the Altar (Vs. 1a)**

1. This was the seventh month in the year since they had returned. Evidently the first six months had been spent getting re-settled and preparing. Their choice of the seventh month is significant as the seventh month contained several significant feasts in the worship life of the nation.
2. Of the seventh month, Wiersbe writes, "The seventh month would be Tishri, our September-October, a month very sacred to the Jews (Lev. 23:23-44). It opened with the Feast of Trumpets; the Day of Atonement was on the tenth day; and from the fifteenth to the twenty-first days, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles."
3. The seventh month was therefore a good time to commence worship.

##### **B. The Sequence for the Altar (Vs. 2b)**

1. The altar was the very first thing to be constructed in the order of the rebuilding work. The altar was therefore the first priority to the returned remnant.
2. Revival always involves a return to worship as a priority. We see this illustrated in the life of Abraham. In Canaan, Abraham built an altar and "called upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 12:8).

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<sup>1</sup> D. Lyle Northern Ireland.

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Interestingly, during Abraham’s Egypt sojourn, there is no reference to an altar. But when he returned out of Egypt, the first thing he did was go back to the altar (Gen. 13:4) and again “called on the name of the LORD.”

3. Do you have an altar of worship in your life?
  - a. The altar of personal worship (daily devotional life).
  - b. The altar of family worship.
  - c. The altar of public worship (local church). Is it the Lord’s Day for you on a Sunday or the Lord’s half day?!
  - d. When God’s people get revived and stirred of the Lord, they get back to the Word and prayer in their daily lives and they get back to the house of God. When you are spiritually stirred, you won’t need the preacher to constantly beg you to come to church. You will be there because in your heart that is what you desire!
4. Our worship is distinct from the old dispensation in that it is primarily spiritual in nature. We do not offer blood sacrifices as Christ offered Himself as the once for all sacrifice for sin. But we do offer spiritual sacrifices such as the sacrifice of praise. Heb. 13:15 “By him therefore let us offer **the sacrifice of praise** to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” We worship God by giving our time, talents, treasure and tongues.

## II. THE UNITY OF THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 1B)

This chapter is a wonderful testament to the unity of the remnant. Their unity was a unity in the truth, not outside of the truth as we will see. These godly folk had been stirred by the Spirit of God to return to the Word of God and this brought about a oneness of heart and purpose. Note the word ‘together’ in relation to this remnant.

### A. They Assembled Together (Vs. 1b)

1. Their unity is described in the words “as one man”. An assembly of people is not necessarily unified. You can have a congregation assembled in one place that is full of division. They are in one place but are not unified. Pastor Hester in his Old Testament Bible History course gave the illustration of putting a cat and a dog in the same cage. They might be in the same place but they certainly aren’t unified!
2. The mark of the early church was that they were **both** “in one accord and in one place” (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). Interestingly the word “one accord” is made up of “together” and “passion”. To be of “one accord” is to be of one passion together!
3. The standard of unity God wants for the local church is spelled out in 1 Corinthians 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of

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our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak **the same thing**, and *that* there be **no divisions among you**; but *that* ye be **perfectly joined together in the same mind** and in **the same judgment.**”

### **B. They Served Together (Vs. 9)**

1. Their oneness of heart in the Word of God found expression in harmonious service together in building up the house of God.
2. A divided church will accomplish very little in the area of Christian service. For the work of God to go forward, the people of God must first be of one heart and mind in the doctrines of the Word of God and the direction for the work of God.

### **C. They Sang Together (Vs. 11a)**

1. Their unity was also expressed in song. They were united in one heart, one purpose and in one song. It was a unified sound.
2. Does our singing as a church bear witness to our unity in the Lord? Carnal strife and division dampen the singing in the house of God. It is like trying to light a fire with wet wood (a lot of smoke, a few sparks but not much life).

### **D. They Stood Together (4:3)**

1. Their unity found expression in standing together against the enemy. We will talk more about this when we study chapter 4.
2. If the devil can get a church divided on the inside it makes it a lot easier for him to then destroy it from the outside.

## **III. THE TYPOLOGY OF THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 2a, 3, 4a, 5a, 6a)**

Observe that the emphasis was upon the burnt offerings. The altar was the place of sacrifice and speaks to us of Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. Consider:

### **A. The Specialness of the Burnt Offering**

1. The burnt offering is the first offering detailed in the Book of Leviticus.
2. The burnt offering was wholly offered to the Lord. With some other offerings, the priests were entitled to take a portion but not so with the burnt offering. It was offered in its totality to the Lord.
3. Of the Burnt Offering, M.K. Hall writes, “It speaks of what Christ and His sacrifice on Calvary mean to God. It is the first offering. It is the core of the offerings. It is the central offering. All the other offerings are based upon it and often could not be offered without an accompanying burnt offering.”
4. How beautifully this pictures our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who offered up His total Person as an offering on the cross for our redemption.

### **B. The Sweetness of the Burnt Offering**

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1. Eph. 5:2 “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us **an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.**”
2. This verse points us back to the “sweet savour” offerings described in Leviticus. They were the first 3 of the 5 offerings described in the first part of Leviticus. They are:
  - a. The Burnt offering (Lev. 1:1-17) which depicted Christ’s total devotion to God in giving His very life to obey and please His Father.
  - b. The meat (meal, grain) offering (Lev. 2:1-16) which depicted Christ’s perfection.
  - c. The peace offering (Lev. 3:1-17; 4:27-31) which depicted His making peace between God and man.
3. The central thought is that of an offering that is well pleasing to the Father.
4. The lamp on the altar was the focal point of their worship. In like manner, Christ and His sacrifice for us on the cross needs to be the central focus of our worship.

### IV. THE AUTHORITY FOR THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 2B-4)

The worship of the remnant was in strict conformity to the Written Word of God. This is the kind of worship revival produces! The obedience of their worship is demonstrated by:

#### A. The Precepts governing their Worship (Vs. 2b, 4, 10b)

1. Notice the reoccurring theme.
  - a. “as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God” (Vs. 2).
  - b. “as it is written” (Vs. 4)
  - c. “according to the custom” (Vs. 4)
  - d. “after the ordinance of David king of Israel” (Vs. 10)
2. Obedient worship is focused on God. Disobedient worship is focused on self. There is so much talk about worship today in Christendom but in reality, most people come to “worship” for themselves and it has little to nothing to do with God. It is all about coming to church to get an emotional high. The modern “worship” movement has actually done a tremendous disservice to genuine, biblical worship as people have been conditioned to think of worship in terms of a rock concert with darkened auditoriums, smoke machines and sensual performers.
3. A revived remnant will seek to worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). A rebellious people will offer a “strange fire” (Lev. 10:1), “new cart” (2. Sam. 6:3), “golden calf” (Ex. 32) kind of worship. The “worship” we are seeing in much of Christendom is not the soundtrack of revival but the soundtrack of apostasy.
4. Just as this revived remnant of old was concerned to uphold the Old Testament standards of worship, so should we seek to uphold the

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New Testament standards of worship set out in Scriptures such as Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

### **B. The Place of their Worship (Vs. 3a)**

1. The faithful remnant did not sit the altar anywhere. They set the altar “upon his bases”, meaning they located the place where the altar used to be in the ruins of the temple. Again, it highlights their attention to detail stemming from a desire to be obedient to God’s revealed will. They understood that at that time in Biblical history, the temple was the place God had ordained for the sacrifices to take place.
2. Note: No doubt they would have needed to clear the debris and rubbish to find the base for the altar. What a picture of spiritual recovery! Returning to the Lord after a period of captivity (backsliding) involves removing rubbish and putting the basics back in their proper place in your life.

## **V. THE URGENCY OF THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 3A)**

They understood:

### **A. The Danger of the Enemy**

1. They were conscious of the threats and dangers that were around them as the people of God – “for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries” (Vs. 3a).
2. It wouldn’t take long for the enemy to attack as we will see in chapter 4.

### **B. The Defender against the Enemy**

1. An understanding of the danger of the enemy gave the people of God a sense of urgency to seek the Lord.
2. In like manner, when we understand the battle we are in as builders on God’s construction site, we will be a praying people.

## **VI. THE REGULARITY OF THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 3B-6)**

There was:

### **A. Daily Worship (Vs. 3B)**

1. They offered burnt offerings “morning and evening”. This is also referred to as “the continual burnt offering” (Vs. 5a).
2. We note the principle of starting and finishing the day with the Lord. This is a great practice to establish in the area of daily devotions. Start the day with the Lord, finish the day with the Lord and endeavor to walk with the Lord in between.

### **B. Special Worship (Vs. 4-5)**

1. Not only was there the regular, daily offerings and the weekly Sabbath Day offerings but there were also special periods set aside for the feasts of the Lord.

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2. The “feast of tabernacles” is mentioned as this was a feast held in the seventh month. There were daily offerings to be given during the feast of tabernacles. The instructions are found in Numbers 29:12-38.
3. The seventh month was a month of considerable significance in the Jewish year. Three Feasts fell within the seventh month.
  - a. The feast of trumpets (first day).
  - b. The Day of Atonement (tenth day).
  - c. The Feast of Tabernacles (fifteenth to twenty-second day).
4. As New Testament believers, not only do we need daily worship in our personal lives and weekly worship in our local church but it is also a Scriptural principle to set aside special seasons for spiritual edification such as Bible conferences, camps and extended seasons of prayer.

### VII. THE GENEROSITY OF THEIR WORSHIP (VS. 5B)

Opportunity was also available for worshippers within Israel to bring God an offering. Look at:

#### A. The Freewill nature of the Offering

The offering is described by two phrases, both which again emphasize the voluntary nature of the offering.

1. “willingly offered”
2. “freewill offering”

#### B. The Focus of the Offering

1. The Lord Himself is the focus of the gift. The offering was offered “unto the LORD”.
2. We can bring God our freewill tithes and offerings as a part of our worship in the local church but we shouldn’t limit our worship to giving only. We can also offer our God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15) and worship Him by being a “living sacrifice” in our lives (Rom. 12:1-2).

**Conclusion:** How important is worship to you? Does it occupy a special place in your daily life? Are the public worship services of your local church a priority in your weekly schedule? How passionate are we about obedience to God?