

Ezra #2: Revival Starts at the Altar

by Ed Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of total reliance on God's Holy Spirit, seeking God with all one's heart and soul, and returning to the altar for growth and advancement in the Lord.

Duration: 1:02:20

Scripture: Ezra 3:5, Ezra 6:19-22, Psalm 80:3-19, Jeremiah 32:37-38

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the reasons why people quit and fail to complete their spiritual journey. He uses the example of the Israelites building the temple in the book of Ezra. The people initially had unity and enthusiasm, laying the foundation of the temple and praising God. However, after 15 years, they stopped building. God reveals the real reasons for their failure and provides the solutions. The speaker encourages the audience to examine their own spiritual history and seek revival in their lives.

Transcript

As we come again to look at God's precious Word, I remind my own heart, I remind you of that principle of Bible study that is absolutely indispensable. Total reliance upon God's Holy Spirit. We do praise the Lord for His Word and for every assistance that we have, every help to help us understand His Word.

But the bottom line is always this, that God Himself must unveil the Lord Jesus to our hearts. As you go through the Bible, often you read those, they're more than suggestions, sometimes commands to seek the Lord. And often God adds this little expression, with all your heart, with all your soul.

When He adds that little expression, with all your heart and soul, not only seek the Lord, but seek Him with all your heart and all your soul. By adding that, what is God communicating? What's the point of with all your heart and all your soul? I'm going to ask you to turn, just before we pray together, to a passage as I was studying this getting out of Babylon and God's heart concerning the restoration. I came to Jeremiah chapter 32.

If you just look there for a moment, a couple of verses. This is God's heart as He anticipates the restoration and bringing His people back. Chapter 32 beginning at verse 40.

Well, actually verse 38. Let's start there. I keep backing up.

37, I will gather them out from all the lands to which I've driven them in my anger, in my wrath, in great indignation. I'll bring them back to this place. I'll make them dwell in safety.

They shall be my people. I will be their God. I will give them one heart, one way that they may fear me always for their own good and for the good of their children after them.

I'll make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them to do them good. I will put the fear of me in their hearts so they will not turn away from me. And here's the verse.

I will rejoice over them to do them good, will faithfully plant them in the land with all my heart and all my soul. The desire He has to give a full restoration and plant us in the land. He said, I will do that with all my heart and all my soul.

It's one thing when that's applied to man. It's another thing when that's applied to the Lord. And God says, you don't know how much I desire to have you back in the land and enjoying my rest.

I'll plant you there with all my heart, with all my soul. Let's pray. Our Father, we desire to seek after Thee and we desire to seek with all our heart and all our soul.

But Lord, when we read a passage like this, that you desire more than we desire and you desire with all your heart and soul to plant us in the land of rest and to bring us into the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ, how we can only praise you. And so this morning, Lord, we ask you with all your heart and soul to accomplish what's on your heart. We thank you in advance and in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Brothers, we're looking this weekend at the Lord's wonderful heart as it's revealed in the book of Ezra. As I suggested to you last evening in the introduction lesson, Ezra stands at the opening of a great segment of Bible history.

It's the first book of the last 100 years of redemptive history. And he tells us the story, lays out the great principles of what has been called the Great Restoration. As I was preparing my heart, I thought it would be helpful for me to look up every verse in the Bible on restoration, restore, restoration, revive, revival, quicken, and all those verses.

And I did that. And how many, many passages touched my heart as I just wanted to get the truth of restoration in my own soul before I started this great book on restoration? So I just went through the Bible and looked up all those precious, precious passages. And I'm going to ask you to turn as we introduce this morning's lesson to a Psalm of Asaph, a Great Restoration Psalm, Psalm 80.

I just want to get one truth before your heart from Psalm 80. I hope when you study the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with a desire to go forward in a heart knowledge of the Lord, I hope you note recurring expressions and recurring emphasis, things God says again and again and again. Well, in this Psalm, I noted a recurring emphasis.

I want you to notice how each of those prayers, restore us, has an enlarging vision of the Lord. And cause thy face to shine upon us. And then verse 7, O God of hosts, restore us and cause thy face to shine upon us.

And then verse 19, O Lord God of hosts, restore us and cause thy face to shine upon us. God encourages our faith for restoration by the progressive revelation of Himself. In other words, as we cry out for restoration, the vision of the Lord increases.

And the more we see the Lord, then the deeper our cry for restoration will be. All right, back to Ezra, please. We're looking at the truth of revival.

The word means to live again. The truth of revival as it's given in the book of Ezra. Now, it's not that we're seeking something called revival, but the God who revives.

It's always our hearts are seeking after the Lord. But as I suggested last evening, as God gets ready to close the Bible, as He gives us the history of the last hundred years, He gives us His servant, Ezra, and Ezra lays out before us the three great revivals that took place in the last hundred years. And after God gave us that story, He closed the Old Testament, and then we wait for Messiah who will come and make those realities true in our life.

And so, it's those three great revivals that we're going to be focusing on. Now, what's true by the way of the individual is also true of the group. Here's the outline of the book.

Ezra's chapter 1 and 2 give us the first revival. And in each case, there's a picture. This is a picture of the decree of Cyrus.

It's getting out of Babylon and returning to the land of peace, to the holy city, to Jerusalem. That first revival has to do with getting out of bondage, getting out of captivity, and coming into freedom. We live again when God shows us, discovers to our hearts the secrets of getting out of captivity and living in liberty.

The second revival takes place in chapters 3 to 6. And that picture is different now. This is the rebuilding of the temple. This is revival 2, how to build a temple.

It's one thing to learn how to live free. It's another thing to learn how to go on, how to build, how to grow, how to advance, how to progress, how to mature in the Lord. And in this second revival, and this is the one that we'll focus on this weekend together, we see that the great truths of what it means to have a complete temple, what are the causes of an incomplete temple, and so on.

God lays it all out in revival 2. We live again when God teaches us to live free. We live again when God teaches us how to go forward, how to build a temple. And then the third revival begins in Ezra chapter 7. It goes through the rest of Ezra.

In fact, it goes all the way through the first 10 chapters of Nehemiah. Ezra chapter 7 through Nehemiah chapter 10. The picture changes again.

This is not some decree of Cyrus to be free. This is not the building of the temple. This is the rebuilding of the wall.

Revival 3 is closely tied in with the exposition of the Word. Ezra now appears as the great expositor, showing us the Lord in the Word, and it has to do with fruit. It has to do with production.

I need to know how to live free. I need to know how to grow. I need to know how to produce fruit.

Those are the three great revivals, and after God lays those out, He said, all right, now let's wait for Jesus. And we close the Old Testament, and we wait for Bethlehem, and for our Lord to come and make these things real. Those are the matters of life that Ezra lays before the hungry heart.

As I mentioned last evening in our introduction message, we're going to be focusing on Revival 2. Ezra chapter 3 to 6. The glory of the completed temple. The temple that honors the Lord. How to build the temple and bring it all the way to completion.

Now, we're going to be looking at the pictures in the Old Testament. We'll look at life principles. They're everlastingly the same.

But don't get lost in the pictures. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in the pictures and in the history that we forget the reality. We study the Bible to know the Lord, not just to know Bible history.

The pictures are designed to simplify. The pictures are designed to assist. They're there to help us.

They should make grasping the truth a little bit easier. And so don't let the picture get in the way. We're going to follow the escaped remnant.

We're going to watch what they did and what they didn't do and what they did first and what they did next. But those are all pictures. Their history is redemptive history.

It tells a spiritual story. And if you follow the picture, then you can see, I think, a little bit of your own spiritual history. So God help us with this and may He grant us a little reviving in our own bondage.

It was a little difficult for me to decide on Revival 2 because you had to step over Revival 1 and my real heart is in Revival 3, how to see Jesus in this book, how to study the book to produce fruit. But I honestly felt inclined to the Lord to look at Revival 2. So we have to assume a few things. And I pray that they're real.

I pray God has done it. I pray you know about Revival 1. I'm not talking about the facts of Ezra. I pray that God has given you some experience in being delivered out of captivity and being brought into the liberty of the Lord.

That you know a little bit about being free because we're going to pass that and then go to the next revival. And so that's sort of assumed. We begin with a freed people who have now returned to the city of peace.

They had been in captivity because they did not rest. Babylon describes the life of one who has not entered into rest. And now God is bringing them out.

Of course, as you know, not everyone responded to the decree of the man with beautiful feet. You know that beautiful verse on how lovely are the feet? That was first applied to Cyrus in the Old Testament. He's the first one mentioned with beautiful feet because he had the gospel.

And that was used later as the He announced everything is provided. Everyone is invited. Come and come back to the city.

But only a remnant responded. Just a handful. About 50,000 out of several million.

And this escaped remnant when they came back following the decree also had a mandate. It's not only go back and live free. But they had something to do when they went back.

I'm going to ask you to turn to chapter one of please. Begin at verse two. Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord, the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth.

He's appointed me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God be with him. Let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel.

He's the God who's in Jerusalem. Every survivor at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God, which is in Jerusalem. Not just go and live free, but go back free and rebuild the temple.

And so they all went back with that mandate. They knew what they were to do. Glance if you would at chapter two and verse 70.

When they first arrived in the land, chapter 270 says that the priests and the Levites and some of the people and the singers and the gatekeepers and the temple servants lived in their cities. And all Israel in their cities. In other words, if you're following the record, you say, well, they were 70 years in captivity.

They made a 700 mile journey. When they got back, what did they do? What's the first thing they did? Well, according to this, the first thing they did was look up the old homestead. They all went back to their own cities.

Now God leaves it up to our sanctified imaginations. What it must have been like. But I think it must have been a happy time and a sad time.

As they went back, they must have been thrilled to be back in the land of promise and identified with the Lord again. But a lot of the happiness was only on the inside. Because outwardly, from what we read, they went back to a mess.

It wasn't a very, very pleasant place. A lot of cleaning up to do. Have you ever left your house for a week or two weeks or a month? What's the garden look like? What's the lawn look like? They've been gone for 70 years and some of their property had been possessed by the enemy.

Don't get the idea they could just knock at the door of the old homestead and then just say, excuse me, please, I know I've been away 70 years, but you're in my grandpa's home. And my dad lived here. My grandfather lived here.

And if you don't mind, would you please leave? I'm back. You see, we just sort of read these things, but that's what they came back to in many cases. Their land had to be repossessed again.

We don't know much about how long the trip took. Now later we get a clue in chapter 7, because there was another group that came, not this large. That was only about 5,000 people.

But 5,000 people under the blessing of God, and according to Ezra chapter 7 and verse 9, it took four months. How long did it take 50,000 people to get there? Some people said it took over a year. We don't know how long it took.

God doesn't tell us how long it took. But we know this, that the building of the temple, the rebuilding, didn't begin, look at the first six words of chapter 3. Now when the seventh month came, I made some comments about the seventh month last night. That was the holiest month in the Jewish calendar.

You know, they had two calendars. They had the civil calendar, and then they had this religious calendar. And they were different.

They had to keep track of bowls. But in their religious calendar, this was a great month. It began with a trumpet blast.

Leviticus 23 talks about that. And it starts with rest. They said this month will begin with rest.

You're going to rest. And of course, this is the month, the only fast in the Jewish calendar was in the seventh month. They had many feasts.

They only had one fast, that great day of atonement. That was in the seventh month. And then, beginning at the 15th to the 22nd, they had the great feast of tabernacles.

That's in the seventh month. You see, it was failure to enter into rest that brought them into captivity. And it's not surprising to me that God waits until the seventh month.

And He says, this is all about rest. This is all about rest. Now you're going to rebuild the temple, but let's wait until the seventh month.

And then in this month of rest, this special month, I'll begin to teach you these principles. Now look, please, at chapter 3. Now when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in the cities. People gathered together as one man in Jerusalem.

Then Jeshua the son of Josedach and his brothers the priests, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers 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. And so they set up the altar on its foundations. They were terrified because of the peoples of the lands.

They offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord. Burnt offerings morning and evening. Now here's a wonderful truth here.

Again, don't get lost in the picture. But don't despise the picture either. God gives us these wonderful pictures so we can learn His heart.

The rebuilding of the temple does not begin with the rebuilding of the temple. The rebuilding of the temple begins with the rebuilding of the altar. Very important principle.

As you look at chapter 3.1, it looks like they didn't start restoring the altar until the seventh month. But if you read carefully, look at chapter 3.6. Chapter 3.6 says, from the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. In other words, the altar must have already been built by the time the seventh month came.

When the seventh month came, they already, on the first day, they began to offer offerings, which means at least by the end of the sixth month, the altar had already to be built. Some think or might think that the altar, that's way back. That's when you get saved.

That's a good starting point. But after God has made me live again and I'm free, now let's talk about building the temple. Don't talk about the altar.

Teach me how to build the temple. See, they didn't select some new thing. God said, are you serious about wanting to go on? Then you better start at the altar.

You better go back to the altar, the old boundaries. And so from verse 3 we read that they set the altar on the foundation. They went back and looked for the place where Solomon had the altar.

The very same place. And they built this altar on the same foundation. Fifty thousand people gathered as one man.

And they began to sing. Now, this is not in your Bible. It's only in mine.

But I know what they sang. They went back to the altar. They began to sing, give me that old time religion.

Give me that old time. It's good enough for father. It's good enough for mother.

Good enough for brother. It's good enough for me. They went back to the old altar.

Revival number two begins, brothers, with a return to the altar. Now, in New Testament terms, we wouldn't say return to the altar. No, we'd say the cross.

Return to the cross, the finished work. That's what we would say in the New Testament. See, the altar was the place where the sacrifice was offered.

And the cross is the place where the sacrifice is offered. You say, how am I going to build? How am I going to go forward? How am I going to advance? How am I going to grow? You've got to go back to the cross. That's where it starts.

Begins at the altar. I get uneasy in my heart the way some Christians talk about growing in the Lord. And I don't know, I know it's not intentional, but they sort of leave the cross behind.

I've heard people say, you know, I just don't like that particular teacher or preacher always preaching about the cross. That was good when I need to get saved, but now I'm saved. I don't need that anymore.

Let's move on. And let's forget that. I tell you, you're not going to put one board on the temple if you depart from the cross.

Begins at the altar. You say, I needed that to be saved. Yes, you do.

And you need that to grow. You need that to go forward. I'm not ready to go forward if I'm not standing at the altar.

You know, when you read the Ezra record, you can't help but notice how careful they were to follow the word of the Lord. Glance at chapter 3, verse 2, as they began to put things back together as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. And chapter 3, verse 10, according to the direction of King David of Israel.

Why'd they start with the altar? You don't need to turn to this verse, but listen as I quote Exodus 29. It's about the altar, when God was instituting the altar. Exodus 29, 42.

It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the Lord. There I will meet with you to speak with you. I will meet there with the sons of Israel.

It shall be consecrated for my glory. God promised that He'd meet them at the altar. The altar was the place that brought God and man together.

And so we're talking about how can I build a temple? Brothers, the starting point is not the building of a temple. It's not a new emphasis. The Bible's full of this.

What's the first thing Abraham did when he left Ur of the Chaldees, Genesis 12? He built an altar, an altar unto the Lord. I read a book on revival in my heart preparation for this. It's a famous book.

I don't want to defame the author of the book, but in the book he made this comment. God will not send revival until we are willing to pay the price of revival. What do you think of a statement like that? I told you in our introduction lesson that in my understanding the remnant represents the spiritual, the cream of the crop, those that said yes to the Lord.

In other words, though all were invited, though everything was provided, when the invitation was given there were some that decided not to say yes. And they didn't return. They stayed behind.

I can see the opportunity for those that responded, those that we are calling the escaped remnant. I can see the opportunity that they could have become a little bit proud. They could have become a little exclusive.

They could have had a little esoteric spirit there and say, you know, we said yes to God's invitation. Cyrus gave out the decree and we responded. They didn't take the 700 mile journey in this trackless desert.

They didn't identify with the rejected people of God. They didn't come back to this rubble that is now the temple and the wall and all of that and the enemies possessing the land. We're paying the price for revival.

We're sacrificing. We're something. God must have very high thoughts of us because we're willing to say yes to Him and sacrifice and go against the natural grain and all of that.

We paid the price of revival while others chose to remain in captivity and remain comfortable. Oh yeah, they threw us a few coins. They provided financially, but we're the ones that went.

We're the ones that laughed. We're the ones that sacrificed. Do you see, brothers, how the altar was God's great safeguard against that proud spirit? What a tremendous thing God did because in verse 3, on the altar they had to offer burnt offerings to the Lord every morning and every evening.

That's known in the Bible as the morning and the evening sacrifice. In other words, 9 o'clock every morning, 3 o'clock every afternoon, they had the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice. Now, what's the basic idea of the burnt offering in the morning and the burnt offering in the evening? You see, the worshiper, as he came to the Lord, was basically saying this.

This animal, this lamb, is getting what I deserve. I deserve to have my throat split. I deserve to have my lifeblood poured out on the ground.

I deserve to be consumed upon this altar, but I have a substitute. And this animal is my substitute. And this animal is getting what I deserve.

In other words, to check the proud spirit, we must really be something. God must be proud of us. We're the remnant.

We said, yes. We came all the way. God said, no.

Two times a day you will stand as death-deserving sinners. Two times a day every day you'll stand before me as one who deserves to be condemned. Oh, it has to begin with the altar.

That's the death knell to pride. You know, it's very refreshing to be in the company of a believer who honestly believes all he deserves is hell. All he deserves is the wrath of God.

It's almost impossible to offend a person like that. You meet somebody who honestly believes, I deserve nothing. Everything is the mercy of God.

That's what I deserve today. That's what I deserve tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, all the days of my life. It wouldn't be possible for me to have my sissy feelings hurt if I really believed that.

Well, that's what God did for this remnant. He says, you coming back? You going to be free? You really want to know how to build the temple? Then you come back to the place. You stand at the altar and you remember your substitute and all he's done.

God wanted a humble remnant to build the temple. Not some who think that they're special because they said yes to the Lord. You know, the altar was there many years before the temple was rebuilt.

Many years before the wall was rebuilt. Remember I told you they went 70 years in captivity because they didn't rest for 70 Sabbaths. We looked at that last evening.

Well, they were real anxious to build the wall. They couldn't wait to get back because they thought that was their protection. The wall is there.

That's my separation. That's my protection. That's my beauty.

Let's build the wall. God said, not yet. I'll be your wall.

You're going to learn to rest. You're going to learn to trust me. They said, can we build a wall now? No, you wait 10 years.

Can we build a wall now? No, you wait 20 years. Can we build a wall now? No, you wait. You know when they built the wall, they had to wait 70 years to build the wall.

You know why? God says, you're going to learn. I'm your wall. I'm the glory in the midst.

You're going to have to trust me. You're going to have to rest in me. The altar begins the building of the temple.

God takes us back to the truth that every good thing God has ever done for us is based on the atonement. Now, I deliberately stated it that way. I didn't say every good thing God ever did for us is in the atonement.

You know, there's this quarrel, what's in the atonement and what's based on the atonement. I don't doubt there's some technical difference, but I'm not going to get into that now. But I know this, every blessing in your life, every blessing in my life, and that includes physical healing.

Every good thing God has ever done for you is because of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And every good thing God has ever done for me is because of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can't talk about growing and going forward and advance.

Give me some great truth so I can learn how to develop and go forward. I need something deeper. There's nothing deeper than the cross.

Nothing deeper than the blood He shed. Nothing deeper than the substitution. And if you're serious about wanting to live again, that's how it starts.

It's how it started then. They came back in that book. God's not sending revival because we're not willing to pay the price of revival.

He gives a list. Are you willing to pay the price of revival? And then He goes on. Are you willing to sacrifice fame and fortune? Are you willing to sacrifice time? Are you willing to sacrifice resources? Are you willing to pay the price of revival? Are you going to spend the time needed in fasting? Are you going to spend the time needed in prayer? Are you going to spend the time needed in dedication? Are you going to spend the time needed in information, getting the Word out, and so on? And that's paying the price of revival.

The basic error in His statement is this. That's what the altar's all about. Christ has paid the price of revival.

That's why I know I can live again. Because I don't have to pay any price for revival. He's already paid it.

Some people are so busy paying the price of revival, they'll never be revived. They'll never live again. God brought them to the cross to live again.

Notice these verses, please. Chapter 3, verse 3 and 4. The morning and evening. Verse 4, daily as each day required.

Ezra 3.5, for the new moon. What's that? 3.5, for the fixed festivals. What's that? I'll tell you what it is.

The morning and evening, that's the daily. The new moon, that's the monthly. The fixed festivals, that's the annual.

In other words, it's the cross all the way through. Every day, every month, every year. He's constantly showing it.

This revival begins in chapter 3, and it ends in chapter 6. Just glance at the end. How does it end? Chapter 6, verse 19 to 22. We won't read it.

Just look at it. It ends with the celebration of the Passover. There it is, from start to finish.

This whole revival begins at the altar, and it ends with the Passover. It's all about the blood. It's all about the sacrifice of Christ.

Brothers, you will not advance one step in your growth in the Lord, and I will not advance one step in my growth in the Lord if I don't take my stand on the finished work of Christ at the altar. It always begins there. And so now we begin.

The altar is completed. The rebuilding of the temple. Now, to save time, I want to go immediately to the reality, the spiritual significance of the temple.

I don't need to tell you. I'm going to tell you, but I don't need to. You know what the temple is.

It's awesome to realize, brothers, that we are the house of God, that we are the temple of the Lord. We are His residence. Where do you live? Well, my address is 35 Mohawk Drive, Portsmouth, Rhode Island, 02871.

That's my address. What's his address? He lives in you. 1 Peter 2, verse 4, Coming to him as to a living stone, which has been rejected by men, is choice and precious in the sight of God.

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. The house of God, that expression, house of God, is mentioned 50 times in the book of Ezra. House of God.

2 Corinthians 6, verse 16, What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. Just as God said, I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God, they shall be my people. 1 Corinthians 6, verse 19, Do you not know that your body, finished, is the temple of the living God, the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, you are not your own.

You have been bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. How can I build this temple? I think thousands of Christians that love the Lord, they've been set free from Egypt, they have neglected God's rest, they've been chastened, they've been set free, they've tasted a measure of liberty, and they've even been back to the altar.

But they don't have a clue how to build a temple. We have a record of the beginning of the work, chapter 3, verse 8. It was the second year of their coming into the land that they begin their work on the temple. Notice chapter 3, verse 9, in the beginning of the work, the Bible says they stood united.

They were all agreed, this is the will of God. This is why we're set free. This is why God brought us back, to build the temple of the Lord.

They had one purpose. They were united in that. It was that way at the beginning too.

In chapter 3, verse 1, I love that expression, they all gathered together as one man. 50,000 people gathered as one man. Did you ever see 50,000 people in a one group in agreement with anything? You got 12 guys in a room, you got 12 opinions.

One man. They all came and they said, we know God's will, build a temple. Now to save time, I want to just sort of tell you the history here.

I'm sure you know it already, but let me just jump ahead and show you what took place. Then back off and we'll look at it in detail. Here's what happened.

They came back. They had one heart. They had one mind.

They stood as one man. They were agreed, this is God's will. We'll build the temple.

And so they began to build and they laid the foundation. Chapter 3, verse 10, 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 cymbals to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, he is good, 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 had been laid. They built a foundation. They began to praise God and sing.

And then the story takes a turn. Something happened. Chapter 4, verse 4 and 5, then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and frightened them from building.

Hired counselors against them to frustrate the council all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even unto the reign of Darius, king of Persia. Jump down please to chapter 4, verse 24. Then work on the house of God.

The God in Jerusalem ceased and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius. Now if you've done any donkey work, you know that when the work began, Cyrus was king. And if you've studied outside of the Bible history, you know that later his son became king.

And then Darius became king. Brothers, we're not talking about days. We're not talking about weeks.

We're not talking about months. We're talking about years, brother. From the time the foundation was laid, the work stopped.

They've been saved. They've been freed. They've been to the altar.

They had a foundation and the work stopped. And it stopped for 15 years. 15 years, nothing.

Nothing on the foundation. Now that would be tolerable if the temple was just wood and stone and mortar. But if, as I suggested, the reality is you or me, it's a terrible thing when the work stops.

When the work of building the temple stops, it's tragic. I think in the book of Ezra, one of the most tragic sentences is verse 24. The work of the house of God in the city of peace ceased.

We've all known Christians. Sometimes we don't have to look further than the mirror. We've all known Christians who've been delivered out of Egypt and neglected to rest and tasted some of the bitterness of Babylon and set free.

They know a little bit about freedom. They've been to the altar. They know a little bit about the finished work.

They have a foundation. They know a little bit about doctrine. And they stop.

And you scratch your head and you say, how come you stopped? What's going on? Why'd you quit? Why'd you get stuck? The whole goal, the whole purpose of being delivered and set free is to go back and build a temple and give them a completed temple. Don't just read this history, la, la, la. The work stopped.

It began so well. They had such a good start. It began in unity, one person, a united voice, praise to God.

Look, we have a foundation. And it stopped for years and years and years. And this is really, brothers, where my burden for this weekend begins.

It's a word for those who have or may be tempted to drop out. Such a good start. Seen so much.

You've been so privileged. You've tasted so much. You know what it is to be free out of Babylon.

You know what it is to identify with the altar and the finished work and all those identification truths. You know that. You do have a foundation, a good foundation, but hard to build.

Thousands don't know. They don't know. Where do you go from there? And so they stopped.

Ezra chapter 4, 24, the work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased. How God dates it, and you note that date, it becomes very important. It was stopped until the second year of Darius.

Why is that important? I'm going to ask you to turn, if you would, please, to the prophet Haggai. Haggai chapter 1, verse 1. Still hear pages going, Haggai. Hard to find him, isn't it? Last three books of the Old Testament.

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Way in the back. Haggai chapter 1, verse 1. In the second year of Darius, ever seen that date before? In the sixth month, the first day of the month came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel.

All right, hold that. Turn to the next prophet, Zechariah. Zechariah chapter 1, verse 1. In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, ever hear that date before? Came the word of the Lord to Zechariah.

It's the same thing. They came back to the land. They were free.

They were one. They stood at the altar. They built the foundation.

And for 15 years, the work stopped. The work stopped. The work stopped.

And in the 15th year, second year of Darius, God opened the heavens. He said, I have a word for you. And he began to speak to his two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah.

Now, go back to Ezra, if you would, because the history records this. Chapter 5, verse 1 and 2. Now the prophets Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah, in Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel. They prophesied to them.

Then rose up Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, Joshua, the son of Jazadak, and began to build a house of God in Jerusalem. And with them were the prophets of God helping them. Fifteen years later, God said something to the prophets.

And they went back with that word. And they presented it to them. And whatever that was, that something, they started building again.

Chapter 6, verse 14. And the elders of the Jews builded and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo. They built it and finished, according to the commandment of God of Israel.

They not only resumed the building under whatever God told Haggai and Zechariah, but they finished the building because of what God told Haggai and Zechariah. Now the Bible, I don't know how important this is, but the Bible tells us that Haggai was an old prophet. Evidently, he had seen Solomon's temple.

Zechariah was a young prophet called a young man. My wife gave me an association how to remember which was the old prophet, Haggai, which was the young Zechariah. I won't share that association with you.

You can probably figure it out. God used the old man and God used the young man. It's amazing when you, I don't know if this is always the case, but I read Haggai.

It's so severe. Some of the things he said, there's encouragement in it, but strong words. I look at the young man and there's such comforting words and soothing words.

I wonder if God uses the elder saints to give the strong word. I don't know about all that. I'll just leave that to you.

But the point is this, after all that time God spoke. Now don't get the idea if for some reason you stop along the way and you have everything. You've tasted freedom in the Lord and you've tasted a little of the finished work and you have the good doctrine and you have a foundation and all of a sudden you stop building.

Don't think that down the road after a while you're going to say, I think I'll start seeking the Lord again. I think I'll start building now. That's not going to happen.

God's the initiator. God was patient, teaching them a lot of things during this time. Now let me just present this to you and we'll pick it up here tonight.

If you read Ezra, you're reading the outside story. We're going to look at it tonight. The outside story.

If you read Haggai and Zechariah, you're reading the inside story. In other words, if I go through Haggai and Zechariah, I'm amazed because you can follow the reasons. If you ask this question, why did they stop? You can see it.

It'll tell you. You know, the Samaritans came in and they came with force. There's reasons.

And there are good reasons. And they're logical. And if you read it carefully, most of them are spiritual.

We got to submit to government. Of course, God expects us to submit to government. Government said don't do it.

Good reasons. You ask somebody that has not been building the temple, why did you stop? He'll give you a good reason. Ezra, the outside reason.

God waited 15 years. And then from heaven, he revealed. He said, now I'm going to give the real reasons.

You quit. They're not what it looks like. You read Ezra.

You see the outside story. You see Haggai, Zechariah. You see God's heart.

Every time someone has an incomplete temple, it's because of this. And God said, these are the reasons and the only reasons anyone ever quits. And then he said, and here's my answer to that.

And he gives the perfect cure for an incomplete temple. We don't have time to look at everything. But starting tonight, what I would like to look at with you, brothers, is the real causes for an incomplete temple.

We're going to look at four of them. There are more we're looking for. The real cause is people get stuck.

People quit. People throw in the towel. People don't build.

They go as far as the foundation and then they just let it be overgrown with thorns. God said, here's the real reasons. And in each case, he said, here's my answer to that.

Here's my answer to that. And when they heard what they didn't see, after 15 years, nothing changed on the outside. So all their reasons went down the drain.

When they saw the real reasons and God's answer, they went back to building and they finished the temple. That's what we need to look at. May God prepare our hearts.

Let's pray. Father, thank You again for Your precious Word. These wonderful stories.

How You have fossilized Your truth in these histories. Thank You for Your servants, Haggai and Zechariah, and their openness to hear from heaven. Their willingness to share it with those who've been stopped along the way.

We pray as we look at these precious passages that You might show us all the real causes of an incomplete temple and the perfect provision in Christ Jesus for those incomplete causes. That we might offer You, even this weekend, temples that are built up and complete. That You might have Your residents here.

Work this in us, we pray. In the matchless name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.

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