

From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Ezra) ch.3 & 4

by Zac Poonen

God's restoration of His people involves prioritizing purity, truth, and unity, and trusting in His sovereignty and power to remake and rebuild His people.

Duration: 1:01:16

Scripture: Ezra 2:64, Ezra 2:69 - 3:1, Psalm 122:1, Psalm 134:1, Acts 2:1

Topics: "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of the potter and the clay from the book of Jeremiah. The speaker emphasizes that God does not give up on us even when we fail to respond to Him as He desires. He uses the example of Israel to illustrate how Satan tries to discourage and frighten God's people. The speaker also highlights the importance of willingly and cheerfully giving to the house of God, as seen in the example of the Israelites in Ezra. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to trust in God's faithfulness and to remain steadfast in their commitment to Him.

Transcript

We have been considering what the Lord has to say to us from this Old Testament book, particularly since we are told that everything written in the Old Testament was for our instruction and it is for our encouragement. And if you will remember in our last study, we were looking at chapter 2 of Ezra and we saw that this was the list repeated twice, again in Nehemiah chapter 7, of the families that came out of Babylon into Jerusalem. And we praise God when whole families move out of Babylon and not just individuals.

When whole families move out of spiritual Babylon into Jerusalem, there is much cause for rejoicing. And we saw in an earlier study that God had sent the Israelites into Babylon as a judgment against them for their sins. And now God was bringing them back and making them into a nation once again.

And we could say that the book of Ezra is really dealing with the subject of the restoring of God's people to his original purpose for them. And this is what God is doing even in these days. He is restoring God's people, his people on the earth, to his original purpose for them.

I mentioned that Jeremiah was one of the prophets who prophesied to Israel immediately before they went to Babylon. And there is one illustration that the Lord gave Jeremiah in Jeremiah chapter 18, which I'd like you to look at because that illustrates what we're studying in the book of Ezra. And that is a word of

encouragement for us.

Jeremiah chapter 18, we read that the Lord told Jeremiah in verse 2, go down to the potter's house and there I'll announce my words to you. Then I went down to the potter's house and there he was making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter.

Now I want you to notice in verse 6, the Lord says in the middle of that verse, like clay in the potter's hand, so you are in my hand, O house of Israel. So this vessel that was being made of clay, of course it applies to us as well. You know that song we sing, have thine own way Lord, have thine own way.

As clay in the potter's hand, thou art the potter, I am the clay. And it says it was spoiled. That's a picture of Adam.

God wanted to make something out of him, but it was spoiled. That's a picture of Israel. God wanted to make something out of Israel, but it was spoiled.

And that's a picture of us. God speaks to us and he wants to make something out of our lives for his glory, but we don't immediately respond the way God wants us to and we're spoiled. But he doesn't throw it away.

And this is the interesting thing. He took that clay, and it says in the last part of verse 4, he remade it into another vessel as it pleased the potter to make it. God doesn't give up just because his first attempt was frustrated.

That's a tremendous encouragement to us. And God gave that word to Israel through Jeremiah. And Jeremiah must have gone up and down the land and told people about this illustration.

And that's what happened. When they went into Babylon, they went into Babylon because the vessel was spoiled. And they had this word of hope that God hasn't given you up.

God's going to do something. And God brought them back. And that's what we read in the book of Ezra.

The remaking of that spoiled vessel. And that's what God is doing even today. Restoring that original testimony to Christ that was found in purity in the days of the apostles.

And which was like a vessel spoiled during hundreds and hundreds of years of church history. But God didn't give up in saying there's no hope. He's picked up that and he's remaking that vessel.

And once again, he's going to manifest here and there across the face of the earth. A pure testimony for his name like there was right at the beginning of Christianity. This is what encourages us.

Not only in our personal life does he do it, but he does it together in groups of believers. And this is what the book of Ezra is all about. And in Ezra chapter 2, I just want you to notice one or two things before we move into the next chapter.

In the list of people, it says here in verse 61 about the sons of the priests. The sons of Habiah and so on. Among these priests, it says in verse 62, these searched among their ancestral registration.

But they could not be located. And therefore they were considered unclean and were excluded from the priesthood. And the governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest

stood up with the Urim and Thummim.

The Urim and Thummim were the means God had given the high priest in Old Testament times to find God's will. We don't know exactly what it was, but it was some means by which they could find out the will of God. Yes or no, God gave an answer through this particular thing which the high priest had.

And the thing I want to point out here is the emphasis on purity that was there right at the outset. In this restoration of God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem, the emphasis was not on a love which sacrificed truth. You see, in the ecumenical movement today, where they are seeking to bring Christians together irrespective of denomination, there is a sacrificing of truth.

We have to keep quiet about certain truths in order to be ecumenical. Even in the charismatic movement, there are a lot of truths you keep quiet on as you come together. And even in interdenominational Christianity.

But in this we don't see that. We see there was an emphasis on truth. You see, these people, they could not prove that they were really from the priestly line.

And there can be a false understanding of love which says, Oh well brother, it doesn't really matter, we just trust you, it's okay. You can be the priest. But no, the governor said no.

You are not to eat from the holy things and you are unclean and excluded from the priesthood. That looks like a hard saying. Can't you be a little more gracious and merciful and allow them to participate? No, we've got to be very firm here.

If there is no clear indication that they are from the priestly line, we have to wait till God reveals his will. If there is no record of their genealogy, that they are really from the priestly line, because God had said only the sons of Levi and the sons of Aaron must be the priests, and if there was no clear indication of that, the governor was very strict about that. And they were unclean, they were excluded from the priesthood, and they were not to eat from the most holy things.

I just want to mention that here, that in any restoration of God's people, as they seek to gather together back to the New Testament pattern that's found in the days of the apostles, it's very important that the leadership in such a gathering and a movement should be of this category. One who does not care what people think about himself. One who doesn't care what people think about him, what others think about him.

One who is willing to be strict, even if it makes him unpopular with a lot of people. One who is willing to be strict in obedience to the teaching and principles of God's word. God has said that the sons of Aaron must be the priests, alright.

Well, we're going to make sure that only the sons of Aaron are going to be the priests. And some person turns up who claims to be a son of Aaron, but he can't prove it. Well, sorry brother, we just can't let you in.

We're strict about that. And it's when people have sacrificed that strictness for God's principles, and had a false type of love, that you find that in a little while, this new group that started off with great ambitions has ended up as another Babylonian denomination in a very short while. So that's very interesting that that's included there.

Just a small little point, but there was purity and strictness in the leadership when it came to the principles of God's word. And it says here in verse 68, some of the heads of the fathers, it says, when they arrived at the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem. Now in those days, the house of the Lord was the temple.

And you know the temple was in ruins. The temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. There was nothing left of it, not even the foundation.

And yet, here is an amazing statement. They arrived at the house of the Lord. Where was this house of the Lord? By the eyes of faith, they saw the house of the Lord there, in Jerusalem.

They arrived there, into that place where the house of the Lord was going to be built. They came in faith, and that's why it says they arrived at the house of the Lord, instead of saying they arrived at the ruins. And then, I want you to notice here, there are a number of principles in these few verses, concerning how we are to build a New Testament church.

We consider the strictness in the leadership there. And we also see here, that when they came, they offered willingly for the house of God. And that's another very important principle.

That in building God's house, there must never be any compulsion. Any service that's done for God's house, must always be done freely, willingly. They offered, we could say they offered cheerfully.

God loves a cheerful giver. They gave themselves, their labor, their money, their time, willingly. It was not forcing this person to give so much money, and forcing that person to do this work.

You never build God's house that way. And wherever Christians are compelled, either to give their time, or their money, or anything else, it's almost impossible to build the house of God as Jerusalem. They offered willingly for the house of God.

It's a principle we must never forget. But you say, if we wait for the people who offer willingly, only very few people are there. That's enough.

God does his work with a few people, who offer themselves willingly, than by conscripting a whole lot of people. Have you ever thought of that incident, in the mountain where Jesus was feeding 5000 men, plus many other women and children. Maybe there were 10,000 people there.

And he was going to distribute the loaves and the fishes. Now, if we were there, we would have used human wisdom, and called for volunteers, to distribute the loaves and fishes, because we could do it in a quicker time. But it's very interesting to see there in John chapter 6, Jesus used only his 12 disciples.

That took a long time, for 12 people to go around distributing to 10,000 people. But there's a principle there. The Lord does not call people compulsorily to serve him.

Those who offer themselves willingly, for the house of God. And the other thing we see here, is another New Testament principle in giving. One, they gave willingly, cheerfully.

Secondly, verse 69, they gave according to their ability. That means, each according to his ability. And their ability was different, with the different people.

But each gave according to his ability, and thus Jerusalem was built. They gave to the treasury, for the work. There was no insistence there, you must give your tithes, and all that.

Even though, if somebody had said that, it would have been quite scriptural, because they were in the Old Testament. But in the midst of that Old Testament time, where tithes were compulsory, it was good to see something of the New Testament spirit, coming through at a time like this, when the temple of God was to be built in Jerusalem. And it's amazing, how in spite of something we see like this, how people have drifted back to the Old Testament spirit, in many Christian groups today.

They gave according to their ability. To the treasury, 61,000 gold rachmas, and 5,000 silver minas, and 100 priestly garments. Now, sometime, if you take the time to compare, what these people gave, with what David collected for the first temple, that was built, more than 400, nearly 500 years earlier.

There was quite a difference. In 1 Chronicles 29, verse 7, we read what David collected, and comparing the values, it was 500 times more. But it didn't make a difference.

God accepts according to our ability. David had the ability to give 500 times more. God accepted that.

These poor people didn't have much. They were not rich like David. They were poor.

They had struggled and saved a little bit in Babylon, and come back to Jerusalem, and from their few savings, they had given, because they were burdened for the house of God. And God accepted it, just like the widow's two mints. The spirit of sacrifice, joyfully, willingly, according to their ability, they gave.

And where that spirit of sacrifice is found, God's house is built. It's not the amount of money that determines whether God's house is built. But the spirit of sacrifice, and joyful giving, where God's house is built.

And that's another principle of building Jerusalem. And I just want you to notice one thing here. In chapter 1, verse 6, we read about those people who were in Babylon, who gave silver and gold to these people who had left Babylon.

People who didn't want to leave the Jews, who didn't want to leave Babylon, who wanted the comforts of Babylon, but wanted to support God's work financially. But have you noticed one significant difference between chapter 1, verse 6, and chapter 2, verse 69? And the difference is this. In chapter 2, verse 69, the amount of money given by those who actually left Babylon and came to Jerusalem, is listed exactly.

But the people who did not leave Babylon, but just gave money, it just says they gave silver and gold. There's no mention of how much they gave. And that teaches us that there is a difference.

God keeps a record of those who have actually left Babylon, not just those who are trying to ease their consciences by just supporting God's work financially and staying on in Babylon themselves. And we read further. Now you move on to chapter 3 now.

When the seventh month came, it says in chapter 2, verse 70, the temple servants and the priests and Levites came and lived in the cities. In chapter 3, verse 1, when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in the cities. The people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

It's amazing to see how many New Testament principles come through in these few passages. It's somewhat similar to what we read in Acts chapter 2, verse 1. They were all gathered together in one accord. It was not the number of people.

When they came out of Egypt, there were 600,000 people. In David's time, when they built the temple, there were thousands and lakhs of people there to build that wonderful temple in Solomon's time. But here, there were just 42,000, as we read in chapter 2, verse 60, for a small number, comparatively speaking.

But they came to Jerusalem not as 42,360 people. They came as one man. A New Testament principle.

This is essentially Jerusalem. Not size, not numbers, but one new man. And it's all written there in the Old Testament for our instruction to teach us what God is seeking to do in these days.

These are principles which are eternal and which we do well to take heed. They came together as one man in unity. And where there was unity, God could manifest his presence in their midst.

There's a tradition which says that in the Psalms, there's a group of Psalms called the Psalms of Essence, which begins in Psalm 120 and goes on to Psalm 134, 15 Psalms. And it's possible that these were the Psalms that were sung by the Jews when they came back from Babylon to Jerusalem. And if you would just turn to these Psalms for a moment, you'll see something there which teaches us that that is possibly true as they moved from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Psalm 120, In my trouble I cried to the Lord, and he answered me. Verse 5, Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshach. Too long, verse 6, as my soul hath its dwelling with those who hate peace and those who want war.

I'm fed up of living in these denominations where it's all strife and quarreling. Verse 7, This is the condition of the people as they started out. A burden, Deliver me, O Lord, verse 2. And then, this is the movement from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Psalm 121, I lift up my eyes to the mountains. From where will my help come? How will I be free from Babylon? My help comes from the Lord. He will not allow you to slip.

Your foot to slip. He's your keeper, verse 5. And he's your shade on your right hand. The Lord will guard your going out, verse 8. And your coming in.

And then the moving forward from there. Psalm 122, I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord. Let's leave Babylon.

Let's move into Jerusalem. Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem that's built as a city that's compact together to which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, to give thanks to the name of the Lord, verse 6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Then Psalm 123, To thee I lift up my eyes, O thou who art enthroned in the heavens. As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress. So our eyes look to the Lord until he shall be gracious to us.

Because God is judged of these 70 years in Babylon. Now he's going to be gracious to us. Lord, verse 4, Our soul is greatly filled with the scoffing of those who are at ease.

These are a broken people who are burdened that God will be gracious to them. And then, Psalm 124, If the Lord had not been on our side, when men rose up against us, they would have swallowed us up alive there in Babylon. The waters would have engulfed us.

But blessed be the Lord, verse 6, who has not allowed us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has escaped. They think of coming out of Babylon as an escape, like a bird out of the snare of the trapper.

Think that I could have spent all my life like a bird trapped in a cage in Babylon. And anyone who has really experienced freedom from the spirit of Babylon, that's true. The Bible says in Revelation 18, that Babylon has become a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

But these folks have escaped out of that cage and come out. Our help is in the name of the Lord. Psalm 125, You see, this is all the song of ascents, as it says in the heading of each of these 15 psalms.

Ascending up from Babylon to Jerusalem, the hill of the Lord. Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion as the mountains surround Jerusalem. Psalm 125, So the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth.

Verse 4, Do good, Lord, to those who are upright in heart. Those who have turned aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them to the doers of iniquity. And then, Psalm 126, When the Lord brought back the captive ones of Zion, that is out of Babylon, we were like those who dream.

We never thought that God would ever deliver us from those dead systems. Then our mouth was filled with laughter. Then people who saw what God had done said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them.

It's so real. Restore our captivity, O Lord. And we're sowing in tears now.

Verse 5, But we'll reap with joyful shouting. We're going forth weeping with our bag of seed. But we'll come again with shouts of joy when the house of God is built in Jerusalem.

And then concerning the building of the house itself, Psalm 127, Unless the Lord builds this house, we're going to labor in vain in Jerusalem. We're going to labor in vain. Their trust was in the Lord.

It's no use, Lord, if we just keep the city. The watchman keeps awake in vain unless the Lord guards the city. And then it speaks of the families that are there in Jerusalem.

The children given by the Lord as a gift. Arrows in the hand of a warrior. And the family life of people in Jerusalem.

Psalm 128, How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord. And the blessed family life that he'll have with his wife and children. And this is another thing in God's restoration of his people back to Jerusalem.

There's an emphasis on the family life, on the father, mother and the children sitting around the table and fellowship together. That's a very important part of the New Testament Church. The Lord bless you from Zion.

Verse 5, May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem. Psalm 129, Many times they have persecuted me from my youth. The plowers plowed upon my back.

Verse 3, I suffered in many ways. But the Lord, Verse 4, Has cut in two the cords of the wicked. He set me free.

May all who hate Zion be put to shame. And then, Psalm 130, Out of the depths I cried to thee, O Lord. Hear my voice.

If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, who can stand? But you have forgiven us all our sins. Verse 4, So that now we can go back to Jerusalem with a new fear of God. And build your house.

My soul waits for the Lord. Verse 6, Psalm 131, Maybe there was a time when we were proud. But when we were in the land.

But after this Babylonian experience, we've been humbled. Now, Lord, my heart is not proud. Nor my eyes haughty.

Nor do I involve myself in great matters. I've composed and quieted my soul. Verse 2, Like a weaned child rests against his mother.

My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord. Psalm 132, Then he says, Lord, remember David.

His affliction. How he did not sleep on his bed. He said, I won't enter into my house.

Verse 3, No lie on my bed. Until, verse 5, I find a place for the Lord. And he was burdened to build God's temple.

And they're thinking of that man of God who lived four, five hundred years before them. And what a burden he had to build God's house. He said, I won't sleep.

I won't rest. Until God's house is built. And these people moving out of Babylon to Jerusalem are inspired by that man.

Say, Lord, we want to have that same spirit. Let us go into his dwelling place. Verse 7, Arise, O Lord, to your resting place.

That is Jerusalem. Verse 10, For the sake of David, your servant. And there David is an example of Jesus.

Who began that work. And the zeal of God's house ate him up. And Psalm 132 is a description of the zeal for God's house eating up David in the Old Testament.

A picture of the zeal of God's house eating up Jesus in the New Testament. And as these people remember David, we are to remember Jesus. Verse 13, The Lord has chosen Zion, desired it for his habitation.

Verse 16, Her priests are clothed with salvation. And then Psalm 133. This is what we read in Ezra 2.1, Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.

For all these 42,360 people who had come back out of Babylon to be one man. This is almost the last of the Psalm of Ascent. He says, this is like the anointing of the Holy Spirit that comes down from Aaron's head.

And Aaron is a picture of Christ again. Flowing right down to the members of his body. To all the members of his body.

The anointing of the Spirit coming down upon the mountains of Zion. There, the last part of verse 3. The Lord commanded the blessing. And finally, the house of the Lord.

They have come to the house of the Lord. Bless the Lord. Psalm 134, verse 1. All ye servants of the Lord.

That chorus we sing. Lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the Lord. It's good to remember when we sing that chorus that this is the final Psalm of the Psalm of Ascent.

These people moved out from Babylon to Jerusalem. And sometime when you get time, it's good to study through Psalm 120 to Psalm 134. 15 Psalms that speak of the movement of God's people out of Babylon into Jerusalem.

I just thought I'd show you that. Go through it quickly just to stir us up to study that in the context of what we're studying in Ezra. Moving back to Ezra 3.1 We see there how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

The people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Wonderful. This is what God is doing even in these days.

It's not miracles but unity. In Egypt, when they came out of Egypt, the emphasis was on miracles. They were not united.

They were grumbling and complaining. They were a disgruntled lot. But they had plenty of miracles.

That's the picture of evangelism. Deliverance. And even today in evangelism, there are miracles, deliverance, etc.

But in the restoration from Babylon to Jerusalem, the emphasis is not on miracles but on unity. 42,360 people were one man. And that's a tremendous encouragement to us.

And then we see further in Ezra 3.2 something else which is part of the New Testament pattern. Ezra 3.2 Then Joshua, the son of Josedach, and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel. Two people joined together.

Throughout the Old Testament, you find God usually raised up one man to lead his people. Out of Egypt, though Aaron was a help, God's original plan was Moses. And essentially, Moses was the leader of the people.

They had one leader. But in the movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, they had two. And that was a picture of that new age that was coming when there would be a body ministry.

And that's a preview of that that we see here in Ezra 3.2. Joshua and Zerubbabel. Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel from the royal line. And together, they worked.

In the Old Testament, one man. In the New Testament, Jesus sent his disciples two by two. And here was an indication that a new age was dawning when God was going to work with plural leadership.

In the New Testament church, the apostles would have found and also the New Testament epistles that New Testament leadership is never anywhere in the New Testament after the day of Pentecost found in the hands of one person. The single priest or pastor or full-time worker is an Old Testament concept.

There they had a Moses, a David, an Elijah, an Elisha.

One great man of God and everybody sort of looking up to this one great man of God. But in the New Testament, the only one who has that position is Jesus Christ the head. And he manifests himself through a body.

Always plural leadership in the hands of more than one. There are different gifts. Zerubbabel, for example, was not a priest.

Joshua was the priest. Zerubbabel didn't do the things that Joshua did out there in the holy place, putting the incense on the altar, etc. And Joshua didn't do what Zerubbabel did.

Different ministries, different gifts. But plural leadership. And here was a foretaste of that.

We'll see a little bit more of that in some of the other restoration books of the Old Testament. And Joshua, the son of Josedach and Zerubbabel, these were the two leaders together and it's amazing to see how they did not fight or quarrel with each other. They did not seek to see who is senior here or who is greater.

Wonderful. And they built the altar of God to offer burnt offerings on it. The altar is a picture of the cross.

And here's another New Testament principle. That when they came, one would have thought, well, let's lay the foundation. Right? But let's begin with the cross.

Not just the cross where Jesus died for us, but the cross where we die with Jesus. The reason I say that is, as you read the latter part of verse 2, it says here, they built the altar of the God of Israel to offer, notice, not sin offerings, but burnt offerings. Now in the Old Testament, if you read the book of Leviticus, particularly the first six chapters, you read there about the burnt offering in chapter 1 and about the sin offering and trespass offering in chapter 4. Now, there was a difference.

The sin offering symbolized Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sins. But the burnt offering, mentioned in Leviticus 1, symbolized not Jesus dying for our sins, but Jesus offering his body as a living sacrifice to the Father all through his earthly life. That was the meaning of the burnt offering.

And we are exhorted in Romans 12 1 to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. In other words, as a burnt offering to God. Romans 12 1 could be paraphrased like this, I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a burnt offering to God.

Now, we could never have an exhortation which says, present your bodies as a sin offering to God. There is only one sin offering, that is Jesus on the cross. But the burnt offering is an area where we can follow Jesus in offering our bodies as a living sacrifice that the lusts of the flesh are not fulfilled in our bodies.

And that is what we see here symbolized in Ezra 3.2. That when they built the altar of God, they did not offer sin offerings but offer burnt offerings on it, symbolizing the presenting of our body as a living sacrifice to God. And that is how the New Testament church is built. And you will never build a New Testament church anywhere unless people have light on this aspect of the altar and the burnt offering that is to be placed on the altar.

That's how they began. And unless you begin here, you are never going to build God's house as Jerusalem. And because so many Christian groups have come out of various denominations and have tried to build a New Testament church, but they haven't started here.

And therefore they have become Babylon after a little while themselves. These things are written for our instruction. They offered burnt offerings on it as written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

And here is another principle. I'm just going through slowly here because we see here a number of principles. Notice this phrase, as in the last part of verse 2, as it is written in the word of God.

And again in the middle of verse 4, as it is written in the word of God. You see, they were coming back to an exact obedience to everything that was written in God's word. They were not going to say, well, these things were, you know, way back there a thousand years ago.

Moses wrote all that. But things have changed now. We've got a bit civilized in Babylon now and we can't follow all those old concepts which those slaves came out of Egypt and Moses gave them some rules and regulations.

They were all a bunch of uncultured slaves. They're not civilized people like us. No.

They went exactly according to the word of God written down by Moses. And that's another principle in the restoration of Jerusalem. That those who are really concerned about the restoration of that pure testimony, go exactly as it's written in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

It's amazing how all these things come out in the short passage in the Old Testament. And thus, they set up the altar on its foundations. They began not with the foundations of the building, but with the altar with the personal life where each person presented himself as a burnt offering, symbolically speaking.

Then we could move on to the building of God's house. And there's another reason for this. It says here they set up the altar on its foundation because they were afraid, terrified, because of the people of the lands.

They knew that we have no strength. We are just weak people who have come out of Babylon. All these enemies of the Jews are living around here, around Jerusalem.

They will attack us and the way to protect ourselves is not by first building a huge wall, but by building an altar. And presenting burnt offerings to God, and God will protect us from these enemies. It is through the cross that the enemy is defeated.

They built an altar, it says, because they were afraid of the enemy. And they wanted to overcome the enemy. And that's a very important principle.

That the only way to overcome Satan is if we have presented our lives, our bodies as burnt offerings to God upon the altar. If we begin there and get everyone who comes into Jerusalem to begin there, we can build the house of God. Not otherwise.

And thus the enemy will be defeated. And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening. Just like it was commanded in the Old Testament, morning and evening they had to offer the burnt offering.

In verse 4 they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles as it is written. And offered the exact number of burnt offerings daily. They didn't modify it.

They did it exactly as it was written every day, according to the ordinance. Again, an emphasis on the written word of God, as each day required. And afterwards, there was a continual burnt offering also for the new moons.

Just by the way, whenever you see new moons in the Bible, it doesn't mean they placed any emphasis on the moon, like a lot of heathen religions do. The Jews had their calendar according to the moon. That was the way they regulated their months.

Each month was from a new moon to a new moon. And in the Old Testament, in Numbers chapter 28, verses 1 to 11, we read there that they had a monthly offering. In the first day of the month, they were to have an offering, in Numbers 28, verse 11.

And the way they recognized the first day of the month was by the moon becoming new. That's all the significance to it. In other words, the first day of the month for the fixed festivals of the Lord that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the Lord.

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 yet been laid. Notice that emphasis again.

They began with burnt offerings, individual burnt offerings on the altar, before they built God's house. You've got to get people to understand what it means to present their body as a living sacrifice, otherwise the house of God will not be built. I just want you to see one verse in Romans 12 to point out this to you.

This is not something that is just found there. It's found in the New Testament too. Romans 12, verse 1. I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, which means a burnt offering, which is your spiritual service of worship.

And then, when you do that, verse 5, we who are many are one body in Christ. You see, our presenting our body as a living sacrifice, when a number of people do that, that leads to verse 5. And that's the first time in Paul's letter to the Romans that the body of Christ is mentioned. You can't get to Romans 12, 5 unless you go through Romans 12, 1. It's the same thing back there in Ezra.

That you can't build God's house until you've got to the place of presenting the burnt offering on the altar. And so we see in Ezra 3, verse 7. They first presented the burnt offerings, then they gave money. Then they began to build a house to the masons and the carpenters.

Ezra 3, 7. Food and drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus, king of Persia. And in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Josedach, again the mention of this dual leadership, came and the rest of their brothers and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from 20 years and old to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. Then Joshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Gadmeel and his sons, the sons of Judah, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

Verse 10. And when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord. What is the foundation of the temple of the Lord in New Testament terms? There in the Old Testament it was big huge granite stones or whatever stones they had cut in the quarry which they were laying as the foundation.

In the New Testament, if you turn for a moment to Hebrews chapter 6, we are told what the foundation is. Hebrews chapter 6 and verses 1 and 2. We are told there, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation. And the foundation is mentioned here in repentance from dead works.

Repentance from sin and dead works, that is from legalism and from sin. Second, faith. In other words, that is how you are born again.

And then, baptisms. Baptism in water, baptism in the Holy Spirit, which often comes as it says there with the laying on of hands for the receiving of spiritual gifts connected with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. And then the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Instruction concerning the future life. The future resurrection of believers and eternal judgment and the giving out of rewards. That is the foundation.

Repentance, faith, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and faith concerning the future life, the resurrection and eternal judgment. So, keep that in mind. That is the foundation.

Just before you turn back, leaving this, he says in verse 1, let us press on Hebrews 6.1 to perfection. Perfection is the superstructure. That's why we got that verse in the front of this pulpit.

Let us press on to perfection. Because that is the superstructure. On this foundation, we have to build a superstructure.

And the superstructure is let us press on to maturity and perfection. Which perfection he speaks about in chapter 5. About Jesus being made perfect in chapter 5 verse 9. Because he came in our flesh and he was obedient and suffered in the flesh, etc. That's the way to perfection.

Hebrews 5 verse 7 to 9. That's the perfection he's talking about. That's the context. If you read Hebrews 5 and 6 together, you find one very simple truth.

And that simple truth is this. The foundation is Jesus Christ, savior from sin, baptizer in the Holy Spirit, the giver of spiritual gifts, and future coming king. The superstructure is Jesus Christ come in the flesh, was made perfect, and has been our forerunner, as he says in the end of Hebrews 6.20. Jesus our forerunner, was made perfect, has entered through the veil of the flesh into the most holy place for us to go through after him.

So that is the superstructure. We keep that in mind as we go through Ezra and the succeeding books. And we'll see something very interesting as we keep it in mind.

Now Ezra chapter 3 verse 10 again. The foundation was laid, and that's a wonderful thing when the foundation is laid, when people are brought to repentance and faith, they're born again, and they take water baptism, and they're baptized in the Holy Spirit, and they receive spiritual gifts, and they have faith in the coming of Jesus again in glory. It's wonderful when you get unconverted people to that place.

And the foundation, the priest it says, verse 10 of Ezra 3, stood in their apparel with trumpets and the Levites to praise the Lord with symbols. And they sang, verse 11, praising and giving thanks to the Lord. That's wonderful.

We can lay the foundation and praise the Lord. You see, that's what's happened in a lot of charismatic groups. They've laid the foundation, they've brought people to repentance, faith, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and then they're praising the Lord.

Very good. For he is good, they shouted. 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 of the Lord was laid. And we ought to be enthusiastic about that shouting and praising the Lord for the foundation of the house of the Lord is laid. The only point is we don't stop there.

Yet, many of the priests and Levites, the heads of the fathers, households, the old men, who had seen that first temple, 70 years, these were people who were taken away 70 years earlier, who are now old people. And when they were young men, they had seen that wonderful temple that Solomon had built, and now they saw this small beginning, and they wept. And they must have thought, oh God, will this thing ever be like that wonderful temple that we saw in our younger days, like Solomon built.

And there were people shouting and praising on one side, and there were people weeping on the other side. Many shouted for joy, it says, in the last part of verse 12, many wept. Verse 13, so the people could not distinguish between the sound of the shout of joy and the sound of the weeping of the people.

But the people shouted with a loud shout. And I just want to say that in every church, both these things must be found. There must be the shout of praise and the weeping.

Praise because God has done wonderful things. And weeping because we long for the restoration. Just like these people longed for what they had seen earlier in the first temple that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

These were people who were taken by Nebuchadnezzar as young men. Now 70 years later, probably as 80-90 year old people, they're coming back. And in the church there must be that longing also to see how it was in the early days.

And to see it like that in our midst now. The purity and the power of the apostles. Shouting with joy and weeping and mourning.

Jesus spoke about that. Jesus encouraged the children in the temple to shout his praises. He also said Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

And in the New Testament, there is place for shouting and praising and also for weeping. And then we move on to chapter 4. And verse 1. And when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they began to oppose. And that whole chapter is a chapter of opposition.

Opposition. Now I want you to notice one thing. These people had already come back from Jerusalem and we saw in chapter 3 verse 8 that it was only in the second year of their coming that they began to build.

For two years they had been there. At least for one year or more. They had built their houses.

They had started gathering material. We see in chapter 3 verse 7 for the foundation. And they gathered and they started building the foundation.

And you know the foundation for that temple couldn't have been built in one day. It took quite some time, probably weeks and months to build the foundation and the enemies never did a thing. But now that the foundation was completed and they were beginning to build a super structure then we read about the enemies.

Then we read about the opposition. And that's exactly like that today. You can preach about repentance, faith, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment and the enemies don't disturb you.

But you go beyond that to build a super structure. You go beyond that to preach about perfection, about Jesus coming in the flesh being made perfect. The type of things that Paul writes in Hebrews 5 and Hebrews 6. And there these enemies are coming out of everywhere.

All of a sudden. Now that shouldn't discourage us if you've studied the book of Ezra. We say well we're in the pattern.

It's exactly like that. It's written there that in fact we can almost predict that this is going to happen if you've studied the book of Ezra beforehand. And the enemies, they never oppose the foundation.

What they oppose is the teaching of discipleship, the teaching of perfection, the teaching of Christ coming in the flesh in the rent veil, about Jesus being a forerunner and about the one body and the one new man. That's what the enemies oppose. That's what Satan opposes.

That's what the evil spirits oppose. And that's what many blind Christians who are unconsciously agents of Satan oppose. And so these enemies approach Zerubbabel.

Now I want you to notice here how these people approached. Very subtly. They said let's build with you for we like you seek your God.

We've been sacrificing to him since the days of Ezra had on king of Assyria who brought us up here. I want to tell you who these people are. These people are sort of half breeds, we can say.

You know, I told you that the nation of Israel was split up into two. Ten tribes became the northern kingdom of Israel. Two tribes became the southern kingdom of Judah.

And the ten northern tribes were taken away by the king of Assyria. More than a hundred years before the Nebuchadnezzar took the southern kingdom captive, the king of Assyria took the northern kingdom captive. But do you know what the king of Assyria did? I want you to turn to 2nd Kings chapter 17.

This is in the northern kingdom. The king of Assyria after he took away these ten tribes captive he did something. 2nd Kings 17 24.

He brought men from Babylon, from Qutb, Abba, Hammad, Sepharim, heathen people and settled them in the cities of Samaria. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. Of the ten tribes.

In place of the sons of Israel. I don't know why he did that. But he sort of tried to integrate these other people with the Jews and mixed marriages and all that and put these people there.

And they probably got married to the Jewish girls there and all that. And they sort of became half breeds and they possessed Samaria and lived in its cities. And it says about these people in verse 33 They feared

the Lord but served their own gods.

That's a perfect picture of compromise. They feared the Lord and served their own gods. There are many people like that today.

Who fear the Lord and serve their own gods. They fear the Lord they say but they live for money and for honor and things like that. And these were the people from whom descended the Samaritans.

They lived in Samaria. That's why you read in John chapter 4 that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Because they said these Samaritans are half breeds.

They're not really Jews. And so it's these Samaritans who came these compromisers, these half breeds who feared the Lord and served their own gods who came to Zerubbabel in Esra 4 verse 2. And they said let's also build with you. You see that's the first scheme of Satan.

We're all brothers. We're all believers. We all believe in Jesus.

We all praise the Lord. Let's all let's build with you. Let's have a great big ecumenical movement.

For we like you seek your God. He said we seek your God. Because we've also been sacrificing to the true God since the days of the king of Assyria who brought us up here.

They weren't really, they're not really wholehearted people who want to follow the Lord. They're the people who fear the Lord and serve their own gods. And that is the first approach of Satan through ecumenical cooperation.

Now I want you to notice here five methods by which these enemies tried to hinder God's work. Five methods by which Satan tries to hinder God's work today. Number one, ecumenical cooperation.

But Zerubbabel and Joshua had wisdom and the rest of the heads of Israel they said to them you have nothing in common with us. Sorry. That looks a bit ungracious you know.

It's not nice to talk to people like that when people are wanting to come and help you to do God's work and you say sorry, nothing doing. You've got nothing to do with us in building a house to our God. But we ourselves will build it.

We are few but we are enough. We don't want you. And that's the thing that provokes the enemy.

When you say to them sorry, we are a bit exclusive you know. We have certain standards. We believe you must be born again.

We believe you've got to be a disciple. We believe you've got to obey the Lord in water baptism. We believe you've got to leave these dead denominations.

They say no, we also believe in Jesus. You think we are some type of heathen worshipping idols? No, we believe in Jesus and that's, it's at that place where the devil comes and pollutes God's work. And Zerubbabel and Joshua had wisdom.

Number two when they didn't succeed in ecumenical cooperation the second method is discouragement. Then the people of the land, verse 4, discouraged the people. Yeah.

Yeah, you'll never do anything. It's impossible. You people trying to restart something and try to have a pure testimony so many people have tried like that and they always split up after a few years and they always have fights and quarrels and discourage them.

Like that, it's the same old story. Discouragement. If Satan can't get us to cooperate with compromises, the next thing he'll do is discourage us.

Look at the look at these so called wholehearted brothers and sisters you are sitting with and discourage us by various things various weaknesses he tries to show us in one another. And if he doesn't succeed there in discouragement, then he tries to frighten us. The last part of verse 4. To frighten.

They frighten them and harass them and that's the other method of the devil. To frighten God's people and to terrify them. You won't be able to be married decently if you join that group or have a decent funeral or it's any odd little thing like that which the devil can pick up and put fear into people's hearts.

If you go there you're going to lose this. You won't get that scholarship there or you won't get the admission here or some free treatment there in a hospital or whatever it is. It's amazing the number of things the devil's got up his sleeve to frighten people with to prevent them from wholeheartedly obeying God and doing his will.

You lose your business if you do things like this. Frighten them. And if only people would believe one word of God.

One word. You don't need two. 1 Samuel 2 30 which God says Them that honour me I will honour.

I tell you you can take that one verse and go all through life and overcome every fear that the devil tries to put upon us. Silly fears. Them that honour me I will honour.

And then number 4 Turn people against us. That's the next trick of the devil. First ecumenical cooperation.

Second discouragement. Third fear and harassment. Fourth turn people against us.

Verse 5 They hired counsellors. These are the gundas of those days. They hired them to frustrate their counsel and hinder these people from doing God's work.

Turn people against us. There are respectable gundas and there are uncouth gundas. When the people oppose us they don't all oppose us with sticks and stones.

There are very subtle ways in which some of these sophisticated gundas also behave. In hindering, trying to hinder God's work. Hired counsellors to frustrate God's work.

Even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. And then finally, fifth governmental obstruction. All these things didn't succeed, then they put government pressure to try and hinder the building of God's house.

They wrote, it says in verse 6, in the reign of Assyrius, they wrote an accusation in the days of Artaxerxes and they wrote a big accusation there. A letter saying that this is from so and so. We are writing to you, your servants.

Verse 11 Let it be known, O king, these Jews have come, verse 12, to build Jerusalem. They are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city. They are finishing the walls, which is an absolute lie.

Because they hadn't even started on the walls. It's amazing how the devil gets people to tell lies against us, all to hinder God's work. And the wonderful thing we see in it all is finally how God's purposes are furthered.

But that we'll see in our next study. But the thing I want you to notice here is that God permits this opposition. He could have stopped it.

He could have killed those enemies, but he didn't do it. He permitted that opposition. He permitted them to write the letter.

He permitted the king to reply to that letter and to say, yes, we have read this letter the king wrote in verse 17 onwards and said, we are now going to stop these men from working, verse 21. Issue a decree to make these men stop work so that the city is not rebuilt. Why did God permit this opposition? To test His people.

To see whether they are wholehearted enough to overcome the enemy at each point. I just want to say in the building of God's house, God permits opposition. He permits the temptation to compromise.

Discouragement. Fear. Turning people against us.

Governmental obstruction. All types of things. But God wants us to overcome every one of them.

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