

Eza 3:1-4:6**Rebuilding the Altar**

3 When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem. ² Then Joshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. ³ Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices. ⁴ Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. ⁵ After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the Lord, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the Lord. ⁶ On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, though the foundation of the Lord's temple had not yet been laid.

Rebuilding the Temple

⁷ Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters and gave food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia. ⁸ In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak and the rest of the people (the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem) began the work. They appointed Levites twenty years old and older to supervise the building of the house of the Lord. ⁹ Joshua and his sons and brothers and Kadmiel and his sons (descendants of Hodaviah) and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers—all Levites—joined together in supervising those working on the house of God. ¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. ¹¹ With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord:

“He is good;

his love toward Israel endures forever.”

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. ¹² But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. ¹³ No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

Opposition to the Rebuilding

4 When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, ² they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, “Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.”

³ But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.”

⁴ Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. ⁵ They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Later Opposition Under Xerxes and Artaxerxes

⁶ At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Acts 4:1-21

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

4 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening,

they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.'

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.

Please have your **Bibles opened to Ezra chapter 3 starting at verse 1**

There's an **outline** for you to take **notes**. Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Context/Recap

Last week we learnt that

[Slide-Map]

- The **tribes of Judah and Benjamin** in Israel had been **taken into exile in Babylon** in **586BC** – by King **Nebuchadnezzar** – who **destroyed the temple in Jerusalem** and **took all the gold and silver articles** from the temple back to Babylon

[Slide-Map]

- Then in **539BC** - King **Cyrus of Persia** took over the **Babylonian Empire** – and **God used King Cyrus** (even though he was a pagan king) **to allow the Israelites** belonging to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to leave Babylon where they had been in exile for 70 years – and **he allowed them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple** – in the year is **538BC**
- In doing so **King Cyrus fulfilled a prophecy** from the **prophet Jeremiah** whom God told – that when the **Israelites** were exiled they **would return after 70 years**
- When Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem – he **also returned** to them – all the **gold and silver articles** which King Nebuchadnezzar of

Babylon had taken from the Temple. In His providence - God had preserved all these articles!

- And we finished up last week - with a list of people **who returned from exile to Jerusalem**
- And we said that the return from exile
 - **Shows God's sovereignty and God's providence**
 - **Shows God cares about details**
 - **And requires a response from God's people**
- We also said – WE are in EXILE – **living in a Post-Christian society – living in a fallen and broken world which has moved far away from God – and living in a culture where our traditional Christians values are constantly under threat**
- And WE also need to REBUILD – **rebuild our community and our nation bringing them back to worshipping God again – and we're still rebuilding from covid**
- We pick up the story - in chapter 3 of Ezra – where the **Israelites are now back in Jerusalem and the rebuild starts**

We can learn 3 things from the Israelites as they rebuild

[Slide-#1]

1st point – **we need to prioritize worship** – that's verses 1 to 6

We Need to Prioritize Worship (Ezra 3:1-6)

What we notice is the first thing the Israelites do is to **rebuild the altar which was used for sacrifices for sin.**

V1 – It's the *seventh month* in the **Jewish Calendar** – which is a **busy month** for the annual **Jewish festivals** – **Feasts of Weeks** (Pentecost), **Feast of Trumpets**, the **Day of Atonement** and **Feast of Tabernacles**

And notice still in verse 1 – *the people are assembled together as one* – they are all on the same page -with the same priority to worship!

And verse 2 – **Joshua** and his fellow priests – and **Zerubbabel** and his associates *built the altar of God to sacrifice burnt offerings* – and they even build the **altar** on its original foundation (verse 3)?

Why do they **build the altar**?

Because **that's what God told Moses to do** – after the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 20:24; Deuteronomy 12:5-6) – **to build an altar**. In fact, way back in Genesis 12:7 – the patriarch **Abraham** had set up an altar when he arrived in the Land, showing his faith in God's promises!

And also, they build the altar - because – we have to remember WHY the **Israelites** **had been sent into exile in the first place** – it was because - **of their sin and**

rebellion against God – and they’ve had no altar to sacrifice on – and no temple to worship at – **for the last 70 years!**

So now that they are back in Jerusalem - **they’ve made - getting right with God – their priority** – by building the altar – so they can offer sacrifices for their sins – and reconnect with God!

And notice in v4 – *they celebrated the festival of the Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed each day.*

The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths, Sukkot) commemorated Israel’s 40-year journey in the wilderness during the Exodus from slavery from Egypt. During this journey, the Israelites built temporary tabernacles (booths/shelters).

The **Exiles from Babylon** - have now just made a similar journey -a bit like a “**Second Exodus**” from Babylon to Jerusalem; therefore, it is very appropriate they **remind themselves of their dependence on God – just like their ancestors did in the wilderness**

And it’s also very appropriate in verses 5 & 6 – that the **Israelites make all the sacrifices that the Lord requires in His Word – even though the foundation of the Temple had not yet been laid!**

Application: Like the Israelites built the altar before the temple was complete, we are called to worship God even when our lives, churches, or situations feel incomplete or broken.

We shouldn't wait for everything to be perfect before seeking God—we must worship Him now, in the midst of rebuilding.

Application: Just as the Israelites “gathered together as one” in unity (verse 1) - despite their trauma from being in exile and despite their current uncertainty - likewise even though we live in times of uncertainty, gathering together in worship brings us unity and a shared purpose in God – that must be our priority!

Application: - Just like the Israelites wanted to deal with their sin - It's important we are **quick** to confess our sins and **quick** to come and seek forgiveness – so that we don't continue down a path of sin!

Application: Just like the Israelites followed what was in the Law of Moses (verses 2-4) – it's important for us to come back to God's Word as our guide

Application: Just like the Israelites resumed daily burnt offerings (verse 4) – we must practice **daily** worship of God – with prayer and reading and meditating on God's Word.

Application: It's important we make our worship of God – a priority. If, for example, we skip Bible Study or Sunday Worship for a social event – what are we modelling to our family, our friends and non-believers, about our priority in spending time with God and His people? We're saying God's not that important to us!

Application: What if we bring a child or grandchild to church and put \$1 in the offering bag – and then – after church - take them out for a treat and give them \$10-20 to spend – aren't we're modelling the wrong thinking about what is important to us?

Application: When the Israelites celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles – it reminded the people to give thanks to God for His protection and faithfulness. Likewise, our worship – must include thanking God for His protection and faithfulness – and include counting our blessings from God!

Illustration: [A container of plastic toy dinosaurs – put the big dinosaurs first-put worship of God first]

Worship should be our number one priority – not our last resort!

2nd point – **we need to build our lives on the correct foundation** – that's verses 7 to 13

[Slide-#2]

We Need to Build our Lives on the Correct Foundation (Ezra 3:7-13)

Here we see **God's provision** for the temple to be built

We see in **verse 7** – the **people pay money to the masons and carpenters** who will build the temple – and they **give food and drink and olive oil to the workers from Sidon and Tyre** bring **cedar logs** from Lebanon to build the temple

God also provides leadership in verse 8 – from **Zerubbabel, Joshua** - and **God provides a work force** – priests, Levites and all the people who returned from exile – and in verse 9 – we see **teamwork**

Importantly – in verse 10 – **the builders laid** *the foundation stone for the temple*.

Like any house or building – **it must be built on firm foundations** – or it won't last!

[Illustration: Leaning tower of Pisa – very shallow foundations – and the word Pisa means 'muddy' or 'marsh' – which might have been a clue to not call it by that name]

For the Israelites **the laying of the foundation** – was a **monumental moment** in the life of the Israelites!

70 years without proper worship is about to end

So not surprisingly – **they celebrate**

In v10 – *with trumpets and cymbals to praise God!*

In v11 – with **songs of praise to God** – prescribed by King David – “*God is good – His love towards Israel endures forever!*”

We get the impression – **this worship was LOUD and EMOTIONAL!**

And we also see the **emotions are mixed** – in verses 12 and 13

Those who saw the previous temple – built by Solomon – **wept aloud when the foundation stone was laid** – their tears were because their **wait is finally over** and perhaps because this temple will not be quite as magnificent as Solomon's temple

But those who had never seen the previous temple – **shouted with joy!**

It's a bit like the response to Good Friday – we can **weep** because of Jesus' suffering and rejection – or - we can **shout with joy** – because Jesus has dealt with our sins! **Both forms of worship are valid!**

Application: As we rebuild our church – we can give and serve with confidence knowing that we're contributing to God's Kingdom here at Toukley **which cannot be shaken** because - **it's built on Jesus – our firm foundation**

Application: Just as the people celebrated the foundation stone being laid – **we can rejoice in Christ** – knowing **our hope of Heaven is secured in Him**

Application: Just like there was both weeping and rejoicing - **Jesus meets us in both our sorrows and our joys.** At the cross, He bore our sorrow; in His resurrection, He secured our joy.

He is the cornerstone who holds both together.

It's okay for us to grieve what was - while - rejoicing in what God is doing through Jesus now. **Jesus holds both grief and sorrow together.**

Application: As verse 11 says – *God's love endures forever* – that means we can trust the process of spiritual growth—if Jesus is our foundation, **the work God has started in us will be brought to completion** (Phil 1:6).

As I reflected this week on this passage

I asked myself...

What is our worship of God meant to look like?

Just Sunday or every day?

Is it about singing God's praises only?

Or is it about - **prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and asking for His help?**

Sometimes we will hear that - some churches – **are good for worship** – other churches are **good for teaching?**

Didn't the Israelites do both?

They **sang God's praises and stuck to God's Word!**

And is worship something we can do on our own?

Or is it something that we assemble together to do?

In Ezra – **they came together as one!**

Have you ever noticed how strong and secure and at peace you feel after worshipping together?

(pause)

Doesn't the writer of Hebrews tell us in Hebrews 10:24-25

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

And what about if we come to worship – and we're feeling sad – or struggling with a big problem?

Doesn't Jesus our foundation – tells us Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Isn't even our suffering – a form of worshipping Him?

(pause)

And besides **worship is not about us**

As the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 12:1

In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Just like the Israelites offered animal sacrifices – **we are to offer our whole being to God as a spiritual sacrifice – every day – not just Sunday!**

Why?

Because of the mercy we were shown by Jesus' ultimate sacrifice on the cross!

And because - our life is not about us – **it's about Him** – our foundation.

Our life must be built on Jesus!

3rd point – as we rebuild our spiritual house in this fallen broken world – **which is predominately anti-Christian** – **WE WILL face opposition**

[Slide-#3]

We Will Face Opposition (Ezra 4:1-6 and Acts 4:1-21)

We see this opposition in Ezra chapter 4 – verses 1 to 6

And the **opposition is quite subtle...**

The enemies of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin – **heard about the Israelites rebuilding project** (verse 1)

They come and offer their help (verse 2)

Their **strategy** was **infiltration** by **pretending to offer help**. They **claimed to worship Israel's God** – but notice in **verse 2** they say “**your God**” – not “**our God**”.

Their plan wasn't to help at all – but to undermine the work once they were involved.

But **Zerubbabel and Joshua** and the **heads of families** refuse their offer to help (verse 3)

Because they discern these **enemies are not truly part of God's people** – and because **the Israelites want to maintain spiritual purity**.

Don't forget – the **Israelites** were sent into exile for compromising with **surrounding nations and adopting foreign gods and idols**. They don't want to go down that same track again!

By turning this so called “help” away

It **results in sustained opposition and discouragement** in verses 5 and 6!

But there is to be no compromise!

The same thing happens in our **New Testament passage** from Acts 4

[\[Please turn there now\]](#)

The context is that the **Apostles Peter and John** had **healed a lame man** in the previous chapter – and are **now teaching people about Jesus and His resurrection** (verse 2)

But the **Apostles** are **arrested and put in jail**.

How do Peter and John handle this opposition?

V10 - they tell the people – they **healed the lame man** by the name of Jesus – who is the Messiah/Christ – **and you crucified Him!**

V11 – they tell the people – **Jesus is the cornerstone of faith** – and yet **Jesus is the stone the builders have rejected**

V12 – they tell the people – **Jesus is the only name** – **by which people can be saved for Heaven!**

Basically, the **Apostles** are **bold and courageous** and **stand for the truth**

And even when Peter and John are reprimanded and told not to speak or teach about Jesus (verse 18)

They say – verse 19 – “*who are we to listen to God or you?*”

And they say – verse 20 – “*we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*”

Application

How will WE handle opposition as we rebuild?

That **opposition might come from**

- People who think Christianity is a crutch
- People who don't believe in God (atheists) or people who are not sure if there is a God (agnostics)
- From Government policies which are **contrary to God's Word**
- From Government policies which try **to limit what we can talk about from the Bible**
- From woke people who **want to cancel our Christian beliefs and traditions**
- From Non-Christians **offering tempting partnerships**
- From false teaching – like saying - all religions lead to Heaven
- Opposition might be spiritual attacks because we are giving out Bibles to our community – and the devil doesn't like us doing that

- Opposition might even be - **physical sickness** – or **depression** – or **discouragement** –or **severe trials in our life** - which has us wanting to give up our faith – give up our ministry – give up serving!

Whatever the opposition...

We must follow the lead of the Israelite leaders in Ezra's day and **not compromise** with people who are not spiritually aligned with us

We must follow the lead of Peter and John in Acts – and **proclaim** “*salvation is found in no-one else but Jesus*” (Acts 4:12)

We need to “*do what is right in God's eyes not in other people's eyes*” (Acts 4:19)

And we must join the Apostles and say “*we cannot help but speak about what we believe*” about Jesus death and resurrection – and that Jesus is the only way to forgiveness and Heaven (Acts 4:20)

As we face opposition – **we must remain faithful by:**

- **Letting God's Word** remind us of His character and faithfulness – “*Your Word is a lamp to my feet*” (Psalm 119:105)
- Remembering Jesus suffered and He said **we will be have troubles in this world and also suffer** (John 16:33)

- Asking God for wisdom, strength and courage. “*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7)
- Continuing to meet together for encouragement
- Remembering who is in control – “*Unless the Lord builds the House, the laborers labor in vain*” (Psalm 127:1)

The bottom line is - **we should not give up** – when people are opposed to our faith

[Slide-Galatians 6:9]

Galatians 6:9 – is my mantra – and I pray it is yours too!

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you that you gather with your people and rebuild what is broken. Help us - as we live in this fallen broken world and rebuild our spiritual temple and our lives – to prioritize worshipping you – to build our lives on the foundation of our Lord Jesus – and stand firm in the face of opposition – knowing we can do all things – through Christ who gives us strength. In His Name. Amen.