

THE WHOLE STORY

From Genesis to Revelation

Ezra 3:1-13

Introduction:

The book of Ezra tells us of a time in Israel that was both triumphant and fearful. Many of the people are returning from exile as the city of Jerusalem was being reestablished. In chapter 3 we see sacrifices once again being brought before the Lord and the foundation of the temple being rebuilt. Their reasoning for these offerings and this temple are also important. Before the exile, the temple created awe in those who saw it and Israel had a vibrant economy, but the hearts of both the leaders and the people strayed from following the Lord. Generations later in their return we see that the people are fearful of the surrounding nations who wish them harm so they run to the Lord for his protection. The offerings and the festivals are done just as God commanded Moses, (Ezra 3:2) which shows the seriousness and devotion of the people to pleasing God according to his terms.

The rebuilding of the temple also shows us that the returned exiles longed for the presence of God to be among them. First the tabernacle, and then subsequently the temple were physical signs that God dwelt with the people. This temple would not be the magnificently adorned temple of Solomon, *but this text shows us that a simple temple and a repentant heart is far better than even the grandest of buildings without God's presence.* While the offerings bring us to recall Moses we see that the temple evokes the memory of David as another leader who sought after God. The high point of this rebuilding is the priests exclaim the Lord is to be praised "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." (Ezra 3:11) We see the people shout for joy in praise of God and at the symbol of his presence. In a world where they fear for their existence at the hands of enemies they sought God and trust in his protection.

We no longer have tents or temples as a sign of God's presence in our life today; our sign is the Spirit of God himself that indwells us and the power of Jesus in our lives. Jesus himself lets us know that he is the new temple in the book of John when he says "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up... but he was talking about the temple of his body." (John 2:19,21) Just like the people returned from exile and sought God in the ways of men who were faithful to him, we can be released from the sin that causes us to be exiled from God's presence by having faith in the one man who was God himself. Because of Jesus we too can know that God is good and his steadfast love for his people endures forever.

Sermon Response Question:

1) In what ways did this week's sermon give you insight into this passage?

Bible Study Questions: Read Ezra 3:1-13

2) The text tells us that the people were afraid (Ezra 3:3). What response does this create in the people of Israel?

3) List the different ways that the people celebrated the foundation of the temple being laid in verses 8 through 13.

4) How did different types of people react differently to the rebuilding of the temple?

5) Why does the author specifically tell us that these things were done in the way of Moses and David?

6) Why was it so important that the temple be rebuilt?

Group Application Questions:

7) Why is it important that we follow the example of faithful believers that have come before us?

8) Is there anywhere you are comforted more by nostalgia (old temples in your memory) than the immediate presence of God (through his Spirit)? How does this affect how you deal with those around you on a daily basis?

Prayer: Ezra 3:11, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever..."

- Declare three ways in which God is good according to his word.
- Thank God for loving you "steadfastly" or continually no matter your circumstance or sin.
- Ask God to help you understand how his enduring, forever love should shape the way we live today.