

What Comes First When Rebuilding? Ezra 3:1-7 Explained

Scriptures for Today: Ezra 3:1-7

Ezra 3:1-7

And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. 3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; 5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. 7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

INTRODUCTION

Let me ask you a question. Imagine everything you've built in your life is suddenly gone. Your house is gone. Your city is gone. Your church is gone. Your business is gone. You get one chance to start over. What's the first thing you rebuild?

Think about it. You can only choose one thing. What comes first? That's exactly where Israel finds itself. They can make a lot of different choices. What would you choose first?

They've returned from seventy years of captivity. Jerusalem is a disaster. The walls are broken. The Temple is gone. Everything is in ruins. They could choose to rebuild their homes first. That might sound right to us. If we don't have a home first, how will we make it? Is that what they chose?

What they choose to rebuild first tells us everything about their priorities. Because what comes first reveals what matters most. Maybe you believe you must take care of your home first. That's what many of us would choose. And you need to think about this as we go through the Scriptures.

I. THE CITY WAS IN RUINS

Ezra 3:1

And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

Before we talk about what they built, let's talk about what they didn't have. Imagine arriving in Jerusalem. Broken stones everywhere. Burned buildings. Collapsed walls. The Temple destroyed. Wild animals wandering through places where people once lived. This isn't a construction site. It's a disaster site.

Have you ever had to start over? Maybe financially. Maybe spiritually. Maybe in your marriage. Maybe in your family. Starting over is hard. Israel is starting over.

It's easy to put God first when everything is going well. What do you do when everything falls apart?

In the seventh month, the children of Israel gathered themselves together as ONE MAN to Jerusalem. Thousands of people. Different families. Different backgrounds. Different opinions. Different experiences. Yet God describes them as ONE MAN. Why? Because they were united.

What happens when God's people are united? What happens when everybody pulls in the same direction? What happens when everybody gets behind the same mission? Things get done.

Imagine trying to move a huge boulder. One man pushes north. One pushes south. One pushes east. One pushes west. The boulder doesn't move. Why? Because everybody is pulling in a different direction. But when everybody pushes together, things start moving.

That's what we see here. The city was still broken, but the people were united. And what they choose to do next reveals exactly what mattered most to them. **What comes first reveals what matters most.** Let's see what they do next.

II. THE FIRST THING THEY BUILT

Ezra 3:2-3

Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. 3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

Now comes the mystery. Why not build the walls the first? Don't they need protection? Why not build houses so they have a place to live? Why not build protection FIRST? Why not build the Temple first?

Imagine walking through the ruins. Everybody is discussing priorities. Someone says: We need walls. Someone else says: We need homes. Another says: We need security. Then Jeshua and Zerubbabel say: Build the altar.

Why? Because they understood something. If God isn't first, nothing else matters.

Before they rebuilt their city, they restored their worship. Before they fixed their problems, they sought God. Before they built anything for themselves, they built something for God. What comes first reveals what matters most.

III. THEY WORSHIPED WHILE THEY WERE AFRAID

Verse 3 may be the most important verse in the chapter. Look at verse 3 there. "And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries." Stop right there. They were scared.

What would you do? You're surrounded by enemies. The city has no protection. The walls are gone. The Temple is gone. The future is uncertain. What would most people do? Hide. Wait. Delay. Protect themselves and forget about everyone else. This world will teach you: "You've got to take care of yourself."

But What Did They Do? They worshiped.

Faith is not waiting for fear to disappear. Faith is obeying God while fear is present. A lot of people say: I'll serve God when things settle down. I'll read my Bible when life gets easier. I'll get serious about church when things calm down.

Israel couldn't wait. They put God first. They needed Him right now. They were afraid. Many people come here because they are afraid. Many people listen to the Gospel because they are afraid.

What comes first reveals what matters most.

IV. THEY RETURNED TO THE WORD OF GOD

I am going to read verses 3 through 6 here. Notice how many times the passage says: "as it is written."

Ezra 3:2-6

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the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; 5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

They weren't inventing worship. They weren't experimenting. They were going back to what God already said. They returned to the word of God. Sometimes we get away from God's words, and we need to return to the word of God.

Why does revival happen? Why does a renewal happen? Why do people get things right in their life? Is it because people discover something new? No. It's simply because people return to something old. God's Word.

Revival doesn't begin when people start doing what they want. Revival begins when people start doing what God said. They weren't asking: What feels right? They were asking: What did God say? Don't go by your feelings. Go by what God says. "IT IS WRITTEN." That phrase is in the Bible 80 times. Jesus says it many times in the New Testament.

That's a hint for you. We MUST return to the word of God. God's words come first.

V. THE FOUNDATION OF EVERYTHING

Ezra 3:7

They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

Now materials begin arriving. Money is being collected. Workers are preparing. The Temple still isn't built. But something important has happened. The altar is standing. And that's important. They are making offerings to God.

The very first offering they is the burnt offering. Then they restore the appointed feasts. Then they bring voluntary offerings. They begin to offer to God immediately. This is the foundation of everything, but many people today target offerings to God. They think a man who preaches about giving offerings to God is evil. And people fall for that.

So, Israel, here in Ezra, started with the altar so they could offer to the Lord God Almighty. They didn't start with the walls or the temple. They started with the altar.

Think about a house. Nobody admires the foundation. Nobody invites friends over to look at concrete. They admire the finished house. They want to see it when it's all completely finished. But without the foundation, the house never stands. The foundation is required for a strong house.

Years later people would come to Jerusalem and admire the Temple. The gold. The beauty. The size. But before there was a Temple, there was an altar. Before there was glory, there was worship. Before there was a building, there was obedience.

What comes first reveals what matters most.

CONCLUSION

Imagine standing in Jerusalem that day. The city is broken. The people are afraid. The future is uncertain.

And someone asks: What do we rebuild first? The answer tells you everything. Not the walls. Not the houses. Not even the Temple. The altar.

Because they understood a truth we often forget. If God isn't first, nothing else matters.

Let me ask you one final question. When your life gets busy, what comes first? When your life falls apart, what comes first? When you're rebuilding, what comes first?

Because what comes first reveals what matters most.

Let's pray.