

Ezra 2:1-6a

Finding a place to live is one of the top priorities when you move to a new location. So it was for the returning Jews do when they arrived home.

Ezra 2 ends with a reference to the fact that some of the exiles remained in the city of Jerusalem and others went to “their towns” (**Ezra 2:70**).

Ezra 3 begins with a reference to the “seventh month,” the children of Israel are “in the towns,” and then they gather together “as one man to Jerusalem” (**Ezra 3:1**).

It is most likely that the “seventh month” is a reference to the Hebrew month of Tishri (~September/October); the most important month in the Hebrew religious calendar. It is merely weeks after the exiles’ return.

This is another indication of God’s sovereign plan that the Jews would happen to be back in Jerusalem in time for the most important month of the year.

Summary

Ezra 3:1-6a shows that in the midst of other human responsibilities and needs, the greatest priority of the people of God is to engage in God-centered, biblically informed worship.

1. Ultimate Goal of the Church vv. 1-3

The ultimate goal of the church is not missions but rather the right ordered Worship of God.

Worship is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the enjoyment of God’s glory (**Psalms 97:1**).

Worship is also the fuel of missions. Preachers will never call out, “Let the earth rejoice” who cannot say from the heart, “I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High” (**Ps. 9:2**).

Missions begins and ends in worship.

The exiles have returned to Jerusalem and the surrounding area with one principal aim: to worship God according to His commandments.

This would involve rebuilding the altar before setting to work on the temple itself.

Ezra 3:3 introduces a note of anxiety, caused by the tension between the exiles who have returned and “the peoples of the lands”—here referring to surrounding peoples of Ashdod, Samaria, Ammon, Moab, and Edom and persons of foreign descent now living in Judah.

The exiles, fearful at this stage of rebuilding the temple, turn their attention to the altar. This is the place where God had promised to be with his people (**Ex. 29:43**).

2. Prioritized Worship vv. 3-4

We do not know for certain how long the exiles had been back home when they were summoned to Jerusalem to rebuild the altar and reinstate several weeks of corporate worship.

None of this had been possible in exile, and for most of them this kind of worship was an entirely new experience. Nothing was more important than worship—not homes or families or jobs. Worship was the priority.

It was why God had called the Jews together as a people. It was the goal or “chief end” of their existence—“to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

The text informs us that they built the altar and offered sacrifices (**Ezra 3:3**).

It is not surprising, therefore, that tensions existed between those Jews who had remained and those who had returned from exile.

The “peoples of the lands” considered the returning exiles as refugees.

The sudden presence of over forty thousand people needing food and shelter created huge administrative problems.

Additionally, the returnees regarded themselves as the true worshipers of God, the rightful administrators of the temple and its surroundings.

When offers of help in the rebuilding of the temple were flatly refused, there was a great potential for civil unrest (c.f. **Neh. 4:13–14**).

What do fearful believers need to do?

They need to turn to the Lord and worship Him aright. Why?

Because, most of all they need forgiveness and a sense of the Lord’s gracious presence that is experienced only with reconciliation between the sinner and the Holy God.

Once the altar was rebuilt, the returnees could offer sacrifices again.

Over two hundred sacrifices of bulls, rams, and male lambs were prescribed in the festivals of Trumpets and Tabernacles, as well as the daily morning and evening sacrifices of burnt offering (**Ezra 3:4**).

Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22 “without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness.”

The substitutionary nature of animal sacrifice spoke of both the magnitude of Israel’s sin and the need for justice to be met so that forgiveness could be granted

The blood of bulls and lambs could never take away sin, however..

Only the blood of Christ, shed in substitution for sinners, could do that: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (**Heb 10:4**).

The setting up of the altar in Jerusalem signaled the exiles’ need for the coming Messiah, the Savior of sinners.