

## EZRA 3

## A DAY OF SMALL BEGINNINGS

A general assembly of the returned Israelites convened at Jerusalem in the seventh month of the year. In this month, many of the feasts of the Lord were to be celebrated. The people had just returned to their homeland; and they surely had their hands full of necessary business in their cities, in order to provide for themselves and their families. This might have made them think that they could excuse themselves from observing these feasts until the hurry had slowed down a little – just as many foolishly put off their worship of the Lord until they are settled in this world. Yet such was these people’s zeal for religion, that even though they had recently come from Babylon, they put all their worldly business aside in order to worship Jehovah.

Jeshua the high priest and his priestly brethren, and Zerubbabel and his princely brethren, rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel. They could not immediately build the new Temple, but they would not allow themselves to be without a new altar. It is interesting to observe that the reason why they hurried to set up this altar was because “fear was upon them, because of the people of the land.” They were in the midst of enemies who hated them and their religion, and who were stronger than they were. But the apprehension of their danger spurred them to their duty. Our fears *do* have one good effect: they should drive us to our knees before the throne of grace! It is good to have the Lord as our Friend, and to keep up our regular communication with Him through prayer.

After the altar had been rebuilt, the people kept up the daily burnt-offering – morning and evening. The lamb that was offered in these sacrifices was a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God, Whose blood takes away our sins. The people also observed all the appointed feasts of the Lord – particularly the Feast of Tabernacles. Now that they had received such great mercy from God, that joyful feast was especially seasonable. Also, since they were beginning to settle in their cities, it would serve well to remind them of their forefathers dwelling in tents in the wilderness. This feast had a special reference to the life of a believer, for it was a picture of continual separation from the world and perpetual joy in God.

Immediate preparations were also made for the building of the Temple. Work on this great project was begun in the second month of the second year, as soon as the season would permit; but in the meantime, they had surely prepared the ground and the building materials. However, when the foundation was laid, the Lord was praised. The priests and Levites made up a concert of music – not to please the people’s ears; but to assist in the singing of that everlasting song which will never be out-of-date, and to which our tongues should never be out of tune: “God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever!” (Ps. 136)

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ The Lord’s people go about to re-establish true religion among them – verses 1-7
- ❖ The Temple foundation is laid with a mixture of joy and sorrow – verses 8-13



Truly, all the streams of mercy that flow down upon us ought to be traced up to the Fountain! Whatever our condition is, and however great our griefs and fears may be; let it be acknowledged that God is good, and that His mercy never fails! And when we see the reviving of the Church's interests, when they seemed to be dead, it must be entirely ascribed to the continuance of the Lord's mercy forever; for that is the reason why the Church continues.



There was a remarkable mixture of various feelings and emotions upon this occasion. Different sentiments were expressed among the people of God. Some of them only knew the misery of having no Temple at all, and so they praised the Lord with shouts of joy when they saw the foundation of this one laid. To them, this foundation seemed great; to their hungry souls, even this was sweet. They shouted so loud that the noise was heard afar off! But some of the people who were advanced in years still remembered the glory of the first Temple which Solomon had built, and they saw how far this new Temple was likely to be inferior to that one; and so they wept with a loud voice. If they were bewailing the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. But if they were simply lamenting the lack of magnificence and splendor in the building itself, it was not good to thus despise the day of small beginnings (Zech. 4:7-10). This mixture of sorrow and joy that was expressed upon this occasion is a representation of our condition as believers in this world. Some of us are bathing in rivers of joy, while others are drowned in floods of tears. Here on earth, we can sometimes hardly discern the shouts of joy from the noise of the weeping. But in heaven, all will be singing, and none will be sighing! What a glorious thing to be looking forward to!

No doubt, from the standpoint of narrow common sense, those who wept had more reason for their conduct than those who rejoiced. But the despair that is often associated with old age makes one great mistake, because it ignores one great truth; for while it notes (perhaps correctly) that many good things have passed away, it forgets to remember that God remains! He is not dead! And therefore, the future is safe. In the end, the enthusiasts of Jerusalem were justified in expressing their joy. The prophet Haggai arose and declared that a glory which the former Temple had never known would adorn this new one, in spite of its humble beginnings; for it would enjoy the honor of being visited by the Lord Himself, in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ!

*We thank You, O Lord, that Your mercy endures forever; and we thank You that we are blessed with the privilege of worshiping You in spirit and in truth! We repent of times when we may have despised the day of small beginnings; and when we have forgotten the great truth that You, O God, remain – even though all else may change and pass away. Amen.*