

## Back to the Foundation

**Text:** Ezra 3:7-13

### Introduction:

1. In this chapter the work of re-building the temple gets underway starting with the altar of worship and then moving to the laying of the foundation. So, the chapter divides fairly neatly in two sections:
  - Vs. 1-6 – The rebuilding of the altar.
  - Vs. 7-13 – The relaying of the foundation.
2. In this message we will study the second section (Vs. 7-13) that deals with the relaying of the foundation. Spiritual revival involves getting back to the right foundation for the Christian life.

### I. THE WORK ON THE FOUNDATION (VS. 7-10A)

Note several key points that relate to the laying of the foundation.

#### A. The Supplies for the Work (Vs. 7)

1. The manpower for the work (Vs. 7a)
  - a. The skilled workers on the temple site – the masons and carpenters.
  - b. The procurers of the raw materials – those of Tyre and Sidon.
  - c. Note: It is not unusual on a church building site for there to be a need to hire some skilled labor. There will often be a mix of volunteer and paid labor. The point is that God's work requires funding which requires sacrifice on the part of God's people.
  - d. Spiritual Principle: The work of God needs the right kind of workers.
2. The materials for the work (vs. 7b)
  - a. The hand of God upon this work is again highlighted by the fact King Cyrus gave the remnant a grant allowing them to import the cedar trees from Lebanon they needed for the temple construction.
  - b. The Book of Ezra is a testament to the truth that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). God is able to move in the hearts of even unsaved rulers to support His work.
  - c. Spiritual Principle: **The work of God needs the right kind of materials if it is to be a lasting work.** We are reminded of this in 1 Corinthians 3 where particularly those in church leadership are reminded that the future judgment seat of Christ will reveal whether they built God's work in gold, silver and precious stones or wood, hay and stubble (See Vs. 11-15). We can either build God's work in perishable materials or precious metals!

#### B. The Season for the Work (Vs. 8a)

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1. The second month was a logical start date for the work to commence as the first month was busy with the “set feasts” of Passover, Unleavened bread and First Fruits.
2. The second month was a significant date for the work commence as it was the same month Solomon commenced the work of the original temple (See 1 Kings 6:1). It is not likely that this was a coincidence. With the remnant’s attention to detail we have seen already so far, they were likely seeking to closely follow the pattern of the original temple construction. The same is true of the procurement of the materials from Lebanon.
3. This is a good reminder of the truth of not removing the ancient landmarks (Prov. 22:28). Our job is not to reinvent the methods for doing God’s work but to return to the tried, tested, and proven methods in the Word of God.

### C. The Servants for the Work (Vs. 8-9)

God not only provided the supplies for His work but also the servants for His work. God used these willing servants to:

1. Set forward the work of God’s house (Vs. 8)
  - a. Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel – the representative of the Davidic line and the civil ruler of the returned remnant. He leads the work of laying the foundation of the temple.
  - b. Jeshua the son of Jozadak – the representative of the priestly line and the spiritual ruler in the house of God as High Priest.
  - c. The Levites – these were given responsibilities from the age of 20 years and above (See also 1 Chr. 23:27 & 2 Chr. 31:17). The men were also numbered for war from the age of 20. This is a repeated theme in the Book of Numbers (e.g., Num. 1:3). It is a reminder that positions of leadership need to be occupied by those who have reached a certain level of maturity.
  - d. The people in general – “all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem”.
2. Set forward the workmen in God’s house (Vs. 9)
  - a. These men evidently had an important role in overseeing the other workmen on the temple project. The need for godly oversight of God’s work is a principle that runs throughout the whole Bible. Helpers need helping!
  - b. The blessing of families serving God together is again highlighted.
    - i. Jeshua with his sons and his brethren.
    - ii. Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah together.
    - iii. The sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites. Here you have Henadad, his sons and his grandsons so three generations are mentioned.

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- iv. The word ‘together’ is a reminder that their labors were characterized by a spirit of unity. Remember, “we are labourers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9). May that word ‘together’ be the spirit of our local church. Together in supplicating, together in singing, together in serving, together in soul-winning and together in suffering.

### D. The Starting point for the work (Vs. 10a)

As we have already mentioned, the foundation was the first major part of the re-construction of the temple. The foundation is mentioned four times in this chapter (Vs. 6,10,11,12). In any construction, the foundation is critical. Get the foundation wrong and the whole building will be affected (Psalm 11:3). Just as the foundation for the physical temple of the Jews was critical, so also the foundation for the spiritual house of the church is vitally important. There are two New Testament texts that draw our attention to the foundation for the local church.

1. Christ is the Foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) “For other **foundation** can no man lay than that is laid, which is **Jesus Christ.**” (1 Cor. 3:11)
2. Christ is the Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)  
“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*,” (Eph. 2:20). In the foundation we have:
  - a. The support stones – “the apostles and prophets” (Vs. 20a). The church is built upon the foundation of Apostolic doctrine as found in the Epistles. It is interesting to note that the Apostles names are in the 12 foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:4).
  - b. The Supreme Stone – “Jesus Christ Himself” (Vs. 20b)
    - i. The Cornerstone (as explained by Harold Hoehner): In ancient times it was the **first** stone laid. The builder was very careful to properly set this stone. “The cornerstone is the primary foundation-stone at the angle of structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout.” (Lloyd)
    - ii. The cornerstone was the most important stone in the whole building. All the other stones were to be in line with it. It was that stone by which every other stone in the foundation and the superstructure was measured. Thus, the building of the new person, the church, must be in conformity with the cornerstone, Christ Jesus. The Apostles and prophets were to be correctly aligned with Christ and the same applies for the saints which form the walls of the building.

## **II. THE WORSHIP AT THE FOUNDATION (VS. 10B-11)**

The remnant greatly rejoiced at the completion of the foundation. Their joy found expressing in two ways. There was:

### **A. The Song of Joy (Vs. 10b-11a)**

1. The Singers of the Praise Song (Vs. 10b)
  - a. The garments of the singers – “the priests in their apparel”. The New Testament believer is a priest of God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Without the garments of salvation and the Mediatorial ministry of Christ, our praise would never be accepted by a Holy God. We have been clothed for worship.
  - b. The goal of the singers – “to praise the LORD”. Remember our singing in church is for each other and for the Lord (See Eph. 5:19 & Col. 3:16). It is so important that we learn from our hearts to “sing to the audience of One”. It is very easy for carnal motives to get tangled up in any form of service for Christ but particularly in up the front ministry like choir and orchestra. For those in music ministry it would be very wise to pray two things before you minister:
    - i. “Lord, please empty me of self”.
    - ii. “Lord, please fill me with Thyself”.
  - c. The guide for the singers – “after the ordinance of David king of Israel”. God had used David to put structure in place for the temple singers so that the worship of God would be conducted in an orderly and God-honoring fashion. It highlights the truth that the singing in God’s house is to be kept sacred and pure within the Divine boundaries of the Word of God.
2. The Sounds of the Praise Song (Vs. 10b)

Two instruments are mentioned as accompaniments to the singing:

  - a. The Trumpets – these were the silver trumpets blown by the priests. Ellicott writes, “The trumpets belonged to the priests, the cymbals to the Levites, in the ancient ordinances of worship.”
  - b. The Cymbals – these were instruments of brass and represented some form of percussion. Not all percussion is wrong if it is supportive of the Melody as the dominant, leading element in the music (See Eph. 5:18-19). The rock beat is autonomous and does not qualify! <sup>1</sup>
  - c. Note: Musical instruments are found all through the Bible and even in heaven itself (Revelation). Godly instrumentation can be a beautiful aid and accompaniment to the singing of God’s people.
3. The Structure of the Praise Song (Vs. 11a)

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<sup>1</sup> Refer series by Pastor S. Western entitled “Measuring the Music”. Visit [www.baptistexpositor.com](http://www.baptistexpositor.com)

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- a. They sang “by course”. This either means there were groups that took it in turns singing or more likely it describes a form of antiphonal singing where you have the singers split into two groups with one group taking up a phrase of the song and the other replying. John Gill says it means “they sang by turns in responses, and answered one another, as the word signifies; when one company had performed their part, another took theirs.”
  - b. So, it might look something like this:
    - i. Group 1 sings “Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good”.
    - ii. Group 2 replies “for His mercy endureth forever”.
4. The Subject of the Praise Song (Vs. 11a)
- The theme of the song was fitting for the occasion. It was:
- a. A song of praise and thanksgiving – “in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD”.
  - b. A song concerning the goodness and mercy of God – “because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.” Evidently, they were singing from the Psalms. These words are often repeated in Psalm 136. Note: Repetition of key themes is not wrong in itself so long as it is not vain repetition without substance. In Psalm 136 this is the repeated theme but it is connected to a lot of other truth.
  - c. We have so much to thank and praise the Lord for in song. We too can rejoice in the foundation for our faith we have in Christ. If you rest on that foundation, you are safe and secure for all eternity!

### B. The Shout of Joy (Vs. 11b; Also, 12b & 13)

1. The Motivation for the Shout – Joy over the completion of the foundation. With Christ as our foundation, we have something to shout about too! There is nothing wrong with godly enthusiasm and excitement in the Christian life for all the glorious truths that underpin our faith. If the world can get excited about the temporal things of this life, how much more should we get excited about the eternal things of the next life!
2. The Might of the Shout – Look at the volume and reach of this shout.
  - a. “a great shout” (Vs. 11)
  - b. “many shouted aloud for joy” (Vs. 12)
  - c. “the people shouted with a loud shout” (Vs. 13)
  - d. “the noise was heard afar off” (Vs. 13)
  - e. Does our testimony for the Lord speak volumes to the world around us? Paul could say of the Thessalonian church, “For from you **sounded out the word of the Lord** not only in

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Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” (1 Thess. 1:8)

### III. THE WEEPING AT THE FOUNDATION (VS. 12-13)

#### A. The Category of those Weeping (Vs. 12a)

1. Among the priests, Levites and chief of the fathers, there were many “ancient men” and they were the ones who were weeping. There were both the old and the young in this returned remnant.
2. Someone wisely commented that older men tend to mainly look back whereas younger men tend to mainly look forward. In reality we need both. We can look back and learn from the past and thank God for His faithfulness back then but we also need to look forward to what God is doing now and what He will do in the future.
3. The younger you are, the more you feel there is to laugh about, the older you get the more you find out there is to cry about!
4. Harry Ironside offers some words of wisdom for the young and old based on this passage,

“Youth is the period of enthusiasm and exuberance of spirit, while age is the time of sobriety and serious contemplation. Young men are apt to be over sanguine (optimistic) looking on to the future; aged men, on the other hand, are likely to be reminiscent and unduly occupied with the past. It is often difficult for youth to comprehend the fears of the old and experienced regarding any new work in which they are involved. It is equally hard, frequently, for the elder men to recognize any special work for God entrusted chiefly to the young and in which they cannot share for long. They are too apt to forget their own youth, and as they think of ruined hopes would put the brake on any who do not now occupy their standpoint. Hence much patience is ever needed in a movement such as we have been tracing. The young need grace to profit by the godly, sober counsels of the fathers, who, in their turn, need grace to rejoice in what God is doing through those as yet immature. Critical, fault-finding old men, even though devoted saints, may be a great hindrance to young brethren, ardent in faith and love until chilled by continual carping or objecting on the part of their elders. On the other hand, cheery, fatherly brethren, who are ever ready to see God’s leading in any fresh work of His Spirit, who have grown old gracefully, and are “mellowing for heaven”, as one has put it, can be both helpers and counsellors of great value to their younger brethren.”

5. The Bible gives instructions that will help both the younger and the older men in their relationship one to another. Younger men are not to disrespect older men (1 Tim. 5:1) but at the same time, older men are not to despise younger men of God (1 Tim. 4:12).
6. Illustration: A dear elderly brother shared an article with me recently which addressed the sad state of affairs in our day compared with his earlier years in Australia. I agreed with the majority of what he shared except one statement where he said, “the day of godly pastors and Evangelists and the faith Missionary societies has ended.” Part of my reply was as follows:

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“Thank you brother \_\_\_\_\_ for the excellent article.

May I ask what you meant by this statement? **"The day of Godly pastors and Evangelists and the faith Missionary Societies has ended..."** I assume you mean this in a general sense? Obviously, there are still godly pastors, evangelists and missionaries in our day who have not bowed the knee to Baal. God always has a remnant! I agree with what your article presents about the state of affairs in our day but would respectfully suggest it might be better worded to say something like "While there are exceptions, sadly the day of godly pastors and evangelists has generally ended." There are still Philadelphian churches shining the light of truth in a Laodicean age.

One observation I would make as a young pastor earnestly seeking to remain faithful to the old paths (Jer. 6:16) is that the problem in our day is not just my generation. Sadly, many of the "oldies" have chosen not to take a stand against apostasy and have gone down with the ship. Worse still, I have found that some older men seem to be more interested in attacking and discouraging younger pastors who are seeking to stand for what's right rather than having a ministry of encouragement to strengthen their hands for the battle we face in our generation! So, we have the problem of much compromise in the younger generation but there are also "old prophets" (1 Kings 13) who have compromised with sin and error and are active in seeking to lead young men astray. One thing I have gotten rather weary of is the politics that exists in some circles where it becomes all about "the club" you are in as opposed to standing for the truth.

I am very thankful for the few older men who have sought to encourage me as a young pastor but sadly, they are very few in my experience to date.

Just a few musings to share for what it is worth.”

7. Wiersbe writes, “These godly old men longed for “the good old days”, but it was the sins of their generation that had caused the fall of the kingdom to begin with! Had their generation listened to the prophet Jeremiah and obeyed God’s Word, Jerusalem and the temple would still be standing.”

### **B. The Cause of their Weeping (Vs. 12b-13)**

Were these tears of joy or sadness?

1. The text itself indicates the weeping was in contrast to the shouts of joy – “But”. The contrast is further highlighted in verse 13.
2. Haggai the prophet also reveals the inner thoughts of this group of older men concerning the temple project which no doubt led them to cry in this way. They were comparing the second temple to the first temple (Solomon’s). See Haggai 2:1-5.
3. They were in danger of being discouraged as they compared the present temple structure in comparison with that of Solomon’s day (the first temple). Solomon’s temple was possibly the most glorious structure on earth at that time. It is described as “exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries (1 Chr. 22:5) The queen of Sheba, who herself ruled a wealthy kingdom with its own glorious palaces and temples, was overwhelmed at the sight of Solomon’s kingdom and temple to where “there was no more spirit in her” (See 1 Kings 10:4-5). Compared to Solomon’s

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temple, the second temple was “as nothing” (Hag. 2:3) but God, through his prophets Haggai and Zechariah to not “despise the day of small things” (Zec. 4:10) and to “be strong...and work” (Hag. 2:4) knowing that the Lord was with them.

### 4. David Cloud comments,

“There were some among the remnant in Haggai’s day who had seen Solomon’s temple, but God instructed them not to “despise the day of small things” (Zec. 4:10). It is not wise to compare one’s situation with that of other people, places, and times. A church in America or England in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would do well not to compare itself to former times. God’s work in a day of national apostasy will not be the same as in a day of national revival, but God is the same in every time, and His people can be encouraged in Him and in whatever He is doing...The work of Christ’s Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) appears small and insignificant in comparison to the great things of this present world. The progress is slow and the difficulties are great. Most New Testament churches are insignificant. Most New Testament believers are “the weak things of the world” (1 Cor. 1:27). In most places and times, the response to the gospel has been small. But in truth, the work of Christ’s churches, if done faithfully according to God’s Word, is the most important business on earth, and the lowly saints of this present age will rule and reign with Christ in His glorious eternal kingdom (Rev. 5:10).”

5. Whether the work is big or small, it rests upon the same foundation – Jesus Christ and in that we rejoice. Whether God ordains that our ministry be large or small rests in His hands. Any work of God, small or large, owes its existence to the power of God. Left to ourselves and our own resources we would produce nothing of eternal value (John 15:5). This temple was smaller than the first one but it represented a fresh move of revival for Israel. They had come out of captivity as a revived remnant and were now restoring biblical worship in the nation. This project had God’s blessing! I would rather be a part of a small work with separated, “remnant minded”, saints who know something of the blessing and presence of God than be in a Laodicean church that is rich materially but bankrupt spiritually. These thoughts are timely given our anniversary next weekend. As we look back and ponder God’s goodness and give thanks, let us also look forward with anticipation, believing that God is also at work in our day as we remain submitted and surrendered to Him.

**Conclusion:** What foundation is your life and ministry being built upon?