

# CHAPTER 3

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left Israel in their cities, but we may well imagine what a bad posture their affairs were in, the ground untilled, the cities in ruins, all out of order; but here we have an account of the early care they took about the re-establishment of religion among them. Thus did they lay the foundation well, and begin their work at the right end.

**I.** They set up an altar, and offered sacrifices upon it, kept the feasts, and contributed towards the rebuilding of the temple (v. 1-7).

**II.** They laid the foundation of the temple with a mixture of joy and sorrow (v. 8-13). This was the day of small things, which was not to be despised, <sup><3010></sup>Zechariah 4:10.

## <sup><1510></sup>EZRA 3:1-7

### THE RENEWAL OF THE SACRIFICES

Here is,

**I.** A general assembly of the returned Israelites at Jerusalem, in the *seventh month*, v. 1. We may suppose that they came from Babylon in the spring, and must allow at least four months for the journey, for so long Ezra and his company were in coming, <sup><1570></sup>Ezra 7:9. The seventh month therefore soon came, in which many of the feasts of the Lord were to be solemnized; and then they gathered themselves together by agreement among themselves, rather than by the command of authority, to Jerusalem. Though they had newly come to their cities, and had their hands full of business there, to provide necessaries for themselves and their families, which might have excused them from attending on God's altar till the hurry was a little over, as many foolishly put off their coming to the communion till they are settled in the world, yet such was their zeal for religion, now that they had newly come from under correction for their irreligion, that they left all their business in the country, to attend God's altar; and (which is strange) in this pious zeal they were all of a mind, they came *as one man*.

Let worldly business be postponed to the business of religion and it will prosper the better.

**II.** The care which their leading men took to have an altar ready for them to attend upon.

**1.** Joshua and his brethren the priests, Zerubbabel and his brethren the princes, built *the altar of the God of Israel* (v. 2), in the same place (it is likely) where it had stood, upon the same bases, v. 3. Bishop Patrick, observing that before the temple was built there seems to have been a tabernacle pitched for the divine service, as was in David's time, not on Mount Moriah, but Mount Sion (<sup><13023></sup>1 Chronicles 9:23), supposes that this altar was erected there, to be sued while the temple was in building. Let us learn hence,

**(1.)** To *begin with God*. The more difficult and necessitous our case is the more concerned we are to take him along with us in all our ways. If we expect to be directed by his oracles, let him be honoured by our offerings.

**(2.)** To *do what we can* in the worship of God when *we cannot do what we would*. They could not immediately have a temple, but they would not be without an altar. Abraham, wherever he came, *built an altar*; and wherever we come, though we may perhaps want the benefit of the candlestick of preaching, and the showbread of the eucharist, yet, if we bring not the sacrifices of prayer and praise, we are wanting in our duty, for we have an altar that sanctifies the gift ever ready.

**2.** Observe the reason here given why they hastened to set up the altar: *Fear was upon them, because of the people of the land*. They were in the midst of enemies that bore ill will to them and their religion, for whom they were an unequal match. And,

**(1.)** *Though* they were so, yet they built the altar (so some read it); they would not be frightened from their religion by the opposition they were likely to meet with in it. Never let the fear of man bring us into this snare.

**(2.)** *Because* they were so, therefore they set up the altar. Apprehension of danger should stir us up to our duty. Have we many enemies? Then it is good to have God our friend and to keep up our correspondence with him. This good use we should make of our fears, we should be driven by them to our knees. Even Saul would think himself undone if the enemy should

come upon him before he had made his supplication to God, <sup><01312></sup>1 Samuel 13:12.

**III.** The sacrifices they offered upon the altar. The altar was reared to be used, and they used it accordingly. Let not those that have an altar starve it.

- 1.** They began *on the first day of the seventh month*, v. 6. It does not appear that they had any fire from heaven to begin with, as Moses and Solomon had, but common fire served them, as it did the patriarchs.
- 2.** Having begun, they kept up the *continual burnt-offering* (v. 5), *morning and evening*, v. 3. They had known by sad experience what it was to want the comfort of the daily sacrifice to plead in their daily prayers, and now that it was revived they resolved not to let it fall again. The daily lamb typified the Lamb of God, whose righteousness must be our confidence in all our prayers.
- 3.** They observed all the *set feasts of the Lord*, and offered the sacrifices appointed for each, and particularly *the feast of tabernacles*, v. 4, 5. Now that they had received such great mercy from God that joyful feast was in a special manner seasonable. And now that they were beginning to settle in their cities it might serve well to remind them of their fathers dwelling in tents in the wilderness. That feast also which had a peculiar reference to gospel times (as appears, <sup><38418></sup>Zechariah 14:18) was brought, in a special manner, into reputation, now that those times drew on. Of the services of this feast, which continued seven days and had peculiar sacrifices appointed, it is said that they did *as the duty of every day required* (see <sup><04213></sup>Numbers 29:13, 17, etc.), *Verbum die in die suo — the word, or matter, of the day in its day* (so it is in the original) — a phrase that has become proverbial with those that have used themselves to scripture-language. If the feast of tabernacles was a figure of a gospel conversation, in respect of continual weanedness from the world and joy in God, we may infer that it concerns us all to do the *work of the day in its day, according as the duty of the day requires*, that is,

**(1.)** We must improve time, by finding some business to do every day that will turn to a good account.

**(2.)** We must improve opportunity, by accommodating ourselves to that which is the proper business of the present day. Every thing is beautiful in

its season. The tenth day of this month was the day of atonement, a solemn day, and very seasonable now: it is very probable that they observed it, yet it is not mentioned, nor indeed in all the Old Testament do I remember the least mention of the observance of that day; as if it were enough that we have the law of it in Leviticus 16, and the gospel of it, which was the chief intention of it, in the New Testament.

**4.** They offered *every man's free-will offering*, v. 5. The law required much, but they brought more; for, though they had little wealth to support the expense of their sacrifices, they had much zeal, and, we may suppose, spared at their own tables that they might plentifully supply God's altar. Happy are those that bring with them out of the furnace of affliction such a holy heat as this.

**IV.** The preparation they made for the building of the temple, v. 7. This they applied themselves immediately to; for, while we do what we can, we must still be aiming to do more and better. Tyre and Sidon must now, as of old, furnish them with workmen, and Lebanon with timber, orders for both which they had from Cyrus. What God calls us to we may depend upon his providence to furnish us for.

## ~~CHR~~ EZRA 3:8-13

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE LAID

There was no dispute among the returned Jews whether they should build the temple or no; that was immediately resolved on, and that it should be done with all speed; what comfort could they take in their own land if they had not that token of God's presence with them and the record of his name among them? We have here therefore an account of the beginning of that good work. Observe,

**I.** When it was begun — in the second month of the second year, as soon as ever the season of the year would permit (v. 8), and when they had ended the solemnities of the passover. They took little more than half a year for making preparation of the ground and materials; so much were their hearts upon it. Note, When any good work is to be done it will be our wisdom to set about it quickly, and not to lose time, yea, though we

foresee difficulty and opposition in it. Thus we engage ourselves to it, and engage God for us. Well begun (we say) is half ended.

**II.** Who began it — Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and their brethren. Then the work of God is likely to go on well when magistrates, ministers, and people, are hearty for it, and agree in their places to promote it. It was God that gave them one heart for this service, and it boded well.

**III.** Who were employed to further it. They appointed the *Levites to set forward the work* (v. 8), and they did it by *setting forward the workmen* (v. 9), and strengthening their hands with good and comfortable words. Note, Those that do not work themselves may yet do good service by quickening and encouraging those that do work.

**IV.** How God was praised at the laying of the foundation of the temple (v. 10, 11); the priests with the trumpets appointed by Moses, and the Levites with the cymbals appointed by David, made up a concert of music, not to please the ear, but to assist the singing of that everlasting hymn 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*, the burden of Psalm 136. Let all the streams of mercy be traced up to the fountain. Whatever our condition is, how many soever our griefs and fears, let it be owned that God is good; and, whatever fails, that his mercy fails not. Let this be sung with application, as here; not only his mercy endures for ever, but it endures for ever towards Israel, Israel when captives in a strange land and strangers in their own land. However it be, yet *God is good to Israel* (<sup>(1571)</sup>Psalm 73:1), good to us. Let the reviving of the church's interests, when they seemed dead, be ascribed to the continuance of God's mercy for ever, for therefore the church continues.

**V.** How the people were affected. A remarkable mixture of various affections there was upon this occasion. Different sentiments there were among the people of God, and each expressed himself according to his sentiments, and yet there was no disagreement among them, their minds were not alienated from each other nor the common concern retarded by it.

**1.** Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all praised the Lord with shouts of joy when they saw but the foundation of one laid, v. 11. To them even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls even this was sweet. They shouted, so that *the*

*noise was heard afar off.* Note, We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though we have not yet come to the perfection of it; and the foundations of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be fountains of joy to every faithful Israelite.

2. Those that remembered the glory of the first temple which Solomon built, and considered how far this was likely to be inferior to that, perhaps in dimensions, certainly in magnificence and sumptuousness, *wept with a loud voice*, v. 12. If we date the captivity with the first, from the fourth of Jehoiakim, it was about fifty-two years since the temple was burnt; if from Jeconiah's captivity, it was but fifty-nine. So that many now alive might remember it standing; and a great mercy it was to the captives that they had the lives of so many of their priests and Levites lengthened out, who could tell them what they themselves remembered of the glory of Jerusalem, to quicken them in their return. These lamented the disproportion between this temple and the former. And,

(1.) There was some reason for it; and if they turned their tears into the right channel, and bewailed the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. Sin sullies the glory of any church or people, and, when they find themselves diminished and brought low, that must bear the blame.

(2.) Yet it was their infirmity to mingle those tears with the common joys and so to cast a damp upon them. They *despised the day of small things*, and were unthankful for the good they enjoyed, because it was not so much as their ancestors had, though it was much more than they deserved. In the harmony of public joys, let not us be jarring strings. It was an aggravation of the discouragement they hereby gave to the people that they were priests and Levites, who should have known and taught others how to be duly affected under various providences, and not to let the remembrance of former afflictions drown the sense of present mercies. This mixture of sorrow and joy here is a representation of this world. Some are bathing in rivers of joy, while others are drowned in floods of tears. In heaven all are singing, and none sighing; in hell all are weeping and wailing, and none rejoicing; but here on earth we can scarcely *discern the shouts of joy from the noise of the weeping*. Let us learn to *rejoice with those that do rejoice* and *weep with those that weep*, and ourselves to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and weep as though we wept not.