



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Ezra 3:1-13

Topic

Some of the old men who had seen the splendor of the first Temple wept aloud with disappointment at the simplicity of the second Temple

Title

"Temple Tantrum"

You can perform an unclaimed property search on the California State Controller's website.

I searched on Wednesday, and was surprised to find a result. I have an accounts receivable credit of \$7.99 reported by Microsoft Corporation.

I decided not to claim it; I'll save it right there for the next recession.

There was a second result pertaining not to me, but to my dad. He died with Farmers Insurance owing him \$0.61 from a court deposit.

It's always nice to receive unexpected money. Just ask John Helinski. This is from a 2015 article:

For three years, John Helinski's home was a cardboard box at a Tampa Bay bus stop.

The 62-year-old had all of his personal identification stolen - so struggled to apply for a place at a homeless shelter.

But when a police officer and his case manager looked into his past, they found a forgotten bank account with money and enough social security benefits to buy his own house.

I mention all this because we're going to highlight **untapped spiritual resources** in today's Bible study.

We're told in the New Testament that God has "blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3); and that God's "divine power has granted to us **all** things that pertain to life and godliness" (Second Peter 1:3). It prompted one commentator to say, "If you find one single blessing with which God might bless us today, with which He has not already blessed us, then what He told Paul was not true, because he said, '**All.**'"

If that's true - and it is - why do we who are in Christ often do life in our own strength, as if we don't know spiritual resources are available?

The return of the exiles to Jerusalem can help us answer that question. The first thing they did upon their was build an **altar** to the Lord.

It will suggest to us that we have an altar from which all of our promised spiritual resources are guaranteed.

I'll organize my comments around two questions: #1 Do You Know That You Have An Altar?, and #2 Do You Show That You Have An Altar?

#1 Do You Know That You Have An Altar? (v1-7)

Whether you prefer Les Stroud, *a.k.a.*, Survivorman, or Bear Grylls - survival skills shows are popular.

42,360 returning exiles found themselves in a survival situation:

- Jerusalem was in ruins.
- The returnees had an abundance of livestock, and lots and lots of money.
- There was no army, and there were no walls or gates to protect the city from the hostiles around it.

Les Stroud... Bear Grylls - What is the first order of business? I think they would say “build the walls for protection.” Sounds smart.

The Jews “built the altar” (v2). Sounds dumb; but it was spiritually brilliant. If this endeavor was going to succeed, it would be by depending upon God. Building the altar first was a bold declaration that they intended to put God first.

With God on their side there was no need for physical walls. He would be their shield.

Let’s say your family was going through a rough patch. Do you think it would be smart to continue to be involved with the church, or to put that on hold while you spend more time together in recreation? Put God first.

Ezra 3:1 And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

The seventh month, Tishri, began with the blowing of trumpets on the first day of the month. The Day of Atonement followed on the tenth day; and the Feast of Tabernacles on the

fifteenth through the twenty-first. It was a good season to begin their rebuilding in earnest.

“They gathered as one man” is a great compliment. Unity is something we have already, by virtue of being in Christ. We maintain it by yielding to God’s authority, to His earthly authority over us, and to one another, in love.

Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as *it is* written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

To start with the altar, when so much else could have logically been put ahead of it, is an incredible show of faith. They were, in a sense, putting God to the test. They’d put Him first, trusting He would come through for them.

Before we move on, notice they referred to Moses as “the man of God.” There were a lot of titles they could have given him - Prophet, Law-Giver, Deliverer. They chose the simplest, and it is the most profound because it emphasizes his dependence upon God.

Ezra 3:3 Though fear *had come* upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, *both* the morning and evening burnt offerings.

You might think that your fear indicates a lack of faith. Not always. What indicates a lack of faith is disobedience and surrendering to your fear.

God didn't take away their fear. Instead they struggled against it, growing in faith as they did.

Ezra 3:4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.

Ezra 3:5 Afterwards *they offered* the regular burnt offering, and *those* for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and *those* of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

They immersed themselves in their religious calendar with its daily and monthly rites and rituals, and their feasts. It must have been beyond exciting to establish worship after 70 years of exile.

We don't have a prescribed calendar. Some denominations do follow an arbitrary calendar; that's OK, I guess. I'd rather have the freedom we have in Christ to be led by His Spirit.

Ezra 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

They did what was prescribed in God's Word.

Any and every time you hear or read God's Word it has the power to teach you, to reprove you, to correct you, and to train you in righteousness (First Timothy 3:16). If you're not in Christ, it is the power of God unto salvation.

- Upon encountering the Word of God, you might therefore ask yourself, "Am I saved?"
- If you are, then ask, "What was I taught? How was I reproved? Where was I corrected? What training did I receive in righteousness?"

Ezra 3:7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

Sidon and Tyre were their closest Home Depot (or Lowes). They started gathering the building materials they would need.

First things first is always a good principle. Emphasize the basics. In our case, that means prayer, the Word, fellowship in the local church, and revealing Jesus to other through your witness.

They had the government on their side. That's going to change, but either way, their task never changed.

You've waited long enough for me to explain what it means that you have an altar. I'll let the writer to the Hebrew believers tell you:

Hebrews 13:10 **We have an altar** from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

Let me quickly give you the context for that statement. The Hebrew believers were being persecuted by their Jewish relatives and friends, and pressured to give up Jesus and return to the Temple with its sacrifices.

The writer to the Hebrew believers throughout the letter shows that the Temple and its sacrifices are cancelled out now that Jesus has fulfilled all of its symbolism. It was a shadow; He is the substance.

“We have an altar” first means that the whole Temple system is to be abandoned.

But what, or who, is *our* altar?

- Some suggest it's the Cross.
- Some suggest it's the communion table.
- Others say it is Jesus Himself.

Our altar **is** Jesus - but in a much fuller way than we sometimes realize. It is Jesus and everything He did, and does, for us. It is the totality of being in Christ - His substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf, the forgiveness of our sins, our salvation, the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit, our on-going sanctification, our

future glorification, and our eternal life with God in Heaven.

It is every promise that He has made to you. It is every word He has given us in the Bible. It is the church on earth as His dwelling place. It is the Gospel we share with others.

Let me again quote from the apostles, Paul and Peter. They said God has “blessed us with **all** spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3); and that God’s “divine power has granted to us **all** things that pertain to life and godliness” (Second Peter 1:3).

All means **all**. “We have an altar” means you have **all** of Heaven’s resources to draw from. Otherwise, on your way home to Heaven, you’ll live as if you’re homeless not knowing you have a full account to draw from.

#2 Do You Show That You Have An Altar?

(v8-13)

The homeless man we mentioned earlier - he didn't *show* that he had resources he could have drawn from because he didn't know about them.

Richard Leroy Walters, who died in 2009, was a homeless man who left an estate worth \$4mil. In his case, he knew he had the money, but chose to live as if he did not.

While we might admire Walters, it's not a good example for a believer in Christ. We should not live as if we had few resources, but ought to tap into all of them, and show it.

Ezra 3:8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to

Jerusalem, began *work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

A year had passed since the returnees first arrived. A lot of planning took place during that year.

God is orderly. That doesn't discount the miraculous or the spontaneous, but it does encourage us to do all things decently and in order. Spontaneity itself is not more spiritual.

Levites were chosen, and probably trained, to serve as on-site building inspectors. I'm intrigued by their age. Some were as young as twenty.

Youth does not always mean immaturity. Some who have been in Christ for decades remain immature for one reason or another, while younger believers can be solid and settled. Life-experience is important, but the lack of it doesn't mean a person can't be used by God.

Ezra 3:9 Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers, Kadmiel *with* his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

When I was in sales a million years ago, one of the motivational mantras we used was, “Plan your work, then work your plan.” Trite, but effective. The returnees had a plan, and they worked together as one man to accomplish it.

Ezra 3:10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.

Ezra 3:11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For *He is* good, For His mercy *endures* forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

The “foundation” wasn’t much; but the returnees looked beyond it to the finished work.

Trumpets, cymbals, responsive singing. They celebrated by worshipping the Lord for His eternal goodness and mercy.

While worship is so much more than instruments and singing, it’s a privilege to sing to the Lord. He sings over us (Zephaniah 3:17). We ought to sing unto Him.

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' *houses*, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes... [Stop there for a moment].

Solomons Temple had been magnificent. Opulent. Extravagant. This second Temple - it was going to be plain and basic. It was built on a smaller scale and with much fewer resources.

Also, Solomon's temple had housed the Ark of the Covenant, which was no longer in Israel's possession. And at the first Temple's dedication, the altar had been lit by fire from Heaven, and the Temple had been filled with the glory of God. That wasn't going to happen in the second Temple.

The prophet Haggai would rebuke these old timers, and he predicted a greater spiritual glory for the Second Temple. It's glory would be that Jesus would visit it at His first coming.

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' *houses*, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,

Ezra 3:13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

Joy drowned-out the joy-less. Joy is a great weapon in our witness:

- We have the joy of His salvation (Psalm 51:12).
- The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).
- The fruit of the Spirit is joy (Galatians 5:22).
- We rejoice with a joy inexpressible (First Peter 1:8).

Are you joyful, or joyless? Since joy is a fruit of the Spirit, you can be joyful.

And that brings us to **showing your altar**. If knowing your altar is the realization that “all” Heaven’s resources are in your account; then showing it is withdrawing them when they are called for.

There’s a word we use to describe this: it’s the word *appropriate*.

One commentator said, “Appropriation does not necessarily mean to gain something new, but to set aside for our practical possession something that already belongs to us.”

“All spiritual blessings” and “everything that pertains to life and godliness” already belongs to you. It belonged to you the very moment you were born-again. It belongs to you after you’ve walked with Jesus for decades.

Once you know what is yours, your need will cause you to draw from it. Here is a great quote:

Life is meant to bring a succession of discoveries of our need of Christ, and with every such discovery the way is opened for a new inflow of the supply. This is the explanation of so much that we cannot otherwise understand - this plunging of us into new tests where only a fresh supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ will meet our need. And as our need is met, as we prove the sufficiency of Christ to meet our

inward need, so there can be a new showing forth of His glory through us.

Appropriation of spiritual resources requires waiting. After we know our resources and become aware of our need, then we must give Jesus the necessary time to work the appropriation into our everyday walk.

When the prophet Habakkuk was troubled by God's prophecy of the exile in Babylon, he waited, saying, "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected" (2:1). Not sure how long he waited. In the end, he appropriated joy, exclaiming, "Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls - Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (3:17-18).

Don't build walls when what you need is going to be provided as you wait upon the Lord.

Endure by faith in what God has promised, and show the world you have an altar.