

# **BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS**

## **Ezra Nehemiah Esther**

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*People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).*

### **Ezra**

#### Chapter Three

#### *"This Old Temple Needs Fixin' "*

#### Introduction

You're a student at a Christian college or university. You're going to school because you sincerely want to be able to counsel Christians. What should you choose for your major?

If you're thinking psychology, don't! First of all, there's really no such thing as Christian psychology. Second, psychology isn't a science as much as it is a philosophy. Third, you should be suspicious if your Christian college or university offers a degree in it.

If you want to really help people, I'd recommend archaeology.

Think of it. An archaeologist deals with ruins. When people need help, when their lives are broken and shattered, their like a ruin. They are God's temple on earth, but something has brought them to ruin, and they need rebuilding on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

It's biblical to see broken and hurting people as ruins that can be rebuilt. You see it in Ezra. The city, the walls, and the Temple at Jerusalem all lay in ruin. A remnant of the Jews had returned; now it was time to rebuild. As they did, I'm sure that many of them began to see a spiritual picture: Just as the city, the walls, and the Temple were in ruin and in need of rebuilding, so their *spiritual* lives were in ruin and in need of rebuilding. As they rebuilt the altar and, later, the Temple, they were learning how to rebuild their own ruined lives.

The lessons that these Jews learned about rebuilding the ruins of their spiritual lives are the same lessons you must learn to rebuild the ruins of yours. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1

## Rebuild The Ruins Of Your Spiritual Life, and #2 Resist The Ruin Of Your Spiritual Life.

### #1 Rebuild The Ruins Of Your Spiritual Life (v1-6)

The Jews had ruined their spiritual life. You can read about their backsliding and their falling away in the pleadings of the Book of Jeremiah for them to repent. Refusing to repent, God disciplined them by bringing them into captivity in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had ruined their city, its walls, and their Temple. In His mercy, God had determined that their captivity would last no more than 70 years. God, in His providence, had raised-up the Medo-Persian Empire to defeat the Babylonian Empire. Now, at the end of their 70 years, King Cyrus of Persia had issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their promised land and rebuild its ruins. Led by Zerubbabel, a remnant of 50,000 had made the 900 mile, four month journey home. We pick up their story in these verses.

As they return to rebuild the ruins, it's a picture for them, and us, of rebuilding ruined spiritual lives. We're talking more about believers whose lives are ruined by sin than unbelievers. After all, you can't rebuild something if it was never established.

[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](#) on the Jewish calendar is equivalent to our September-October. This was a month for gathering together for three great festivals: The Feast of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles on days fifteen through twenty-one.

These feasts were times for great joy and rejoicing. Rebuilding your ruined spiritual life requires a restoration of joy. More specifically, it requires a restoration of the joy of your salvation.

When King David had sinned, and his life lay in ruin, he prayed, [Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation](#) (Psalm 51:12). We often

return to the same sin that God set us free from when we were first saved. We need a restoration of that joy.

Next in verse one we read that they **gathered together as one man**. Fifty-thousand people were acting as one person. I'd say they were fully submitted to the Lord and to one another.

Submission usually accompanies salvation, but we quickly find that our own will remains and is at war with God's will for our lives. When your will overrules God's, you are headed for ruin. Return to a place of submission.

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.

Whenever there was an **altar**, there was a sacrifice. Rebuilding will require sacrifice. The Bible calls upon you to present yourself as a **living sacrifice** (Romans 12:1). It's a denial of, and a death, to everything selfish and self-centered.

It's often here where rebuilding meets the most difficulty. The joy of salvation is exhilarating. A return to submission makes sense, since going my own way failed so miserably. But laying down as a living sacrifice... That's asking a lot if my wife won't change; or my boss won't budge; or my kids remain defiant. I want others to meet me half-way at least, but the Lord wants me to go all the way regardless what others may or may not do.

The altar was a critical moment for the returnees as well:

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.

They overcame their fear of **the people of those countries** because they had a greater fear of the Lord. So with us, when rebuilding; we must persevere and do what is right as unto the Lord, not regarding what others do or do not do.

## Perseverance profits:

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.

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.

Because they did not faint at the critical point of sacrifice; because they feared the Lord; they persevered. Because they persevered, God added spiritual blessings to them.

Ezra added an interesting comment at the end of verse six when he said, *the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid*. It seems that they started with the altar, then turned their attention to the rest of the Temple.

From a strictly architectural standpoint, we might have started with the Temple. But this is spiritual architecture, and the Temple was nothing without the altar. It's a reminder to us to rebuild using spiritual priorities. For example: Often marriages or families in crisis, when desiring to rebuild, minimize spiritual commitments and maximize worldly activities. They get some toy or treasure and spend their time together around the new habit or hobby – usually when they ought to be worshipping together.

You can't build much of a Temple without an altar. Start at the altar and build out from there, not in.

Looking back, here are the materials used in rebuilding ruined spiritual lives: the joy of salvation... submission to the Lord... and sacrifice (especially dying to self). The critical point seems to be when you know what to do, but are fearful of doing it, because others are not doing their part. Persevere, fearing the Lord, and He'll add the spiritual blessings and resources sufficient to your need.

## #2 Resist The Ruin Of Your Spiritual Life (v7-13)

Perhaps your life is not in ruins... or it was and you have rebuilt it. What can you do to keep it in repair, to resist its ruin?

Let's see what the returnees did.

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.

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.

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.

It wasn't until the second month of the second year that work on the Temple itself began. Why the delay?

1. For one thing, they needed to get settled in their respective cities.
2. For another, after they kept the Feast of Tabernacles, it would be winter, and not the right season for building.

The work seemed to be delayed. But they were not deterred from it:

1. They gave regularly and generously toward it.
2. They planned and prepared for it.

God is doing a work in your life. It can be compared to a building project. Jesus laid the foundation when He saved you. He promised to complete what He began in you. The time between His saving you and His completing you can seem like a construction delay! Do not be deterred. God is at work. Any delays are either divine delays; or they are just your perceived delays.

As far as resisting the ruin of your spiritual life is concerned: Don't let life interfere with your spiritual life. The Jews had homes to build and cities to reestablish. They had crops to plant and livestock to feed and tend. Life was breaking out all around them. But they didn't let it interfere with their spiritual rebuilding. They kept it in perspective.

Don't be deterred; and, next, don't get discouraged:

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.

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.

This is one of my favorite scenes in Scripture – because it is so real and true to life. Despite everything the Lord was doing, there were those who were discouraged and who were discouraging. Just as a personal note: Many wonderful things God has done in our twenty years here have been analyzed by discouragers who have their own idea of what God ought to be doing.

Discouragement is a greater foe than you might think. It is a nuclear-type weapon in the devil's arsenal – more so because we don't fear it as we should. Discouragement has brought down more Christians than many other sins combined. In fact, discouragement is the climate within which so many other sins get committed.

Comparison is the root of much discouragement. You compare yourself to someone else. They are happier, or healthier; they are wealthier; they are more successful by both worldly and spiritual standards.

Don't compare. Think of it in terms of great art; let's say music. Is Beethoven greater than Mozart? You can argue one way or the other, using any number of criteria. But once you're done debating, both created beautiful, moving, inspiring masterpieces. Comparison only robs each of them of their own intrinsic beauty.

It may not seem like it; you may not feel like it; you probably don't look like it; but you are each a masterpiece in the making. Trust the Lord for His work in your life. You are incomparably loved by Him – so don't compare. It cheapens His effort upon you.

Applying the Word...

You either need to rebuild; or you are resisting ruin. Both activities occur within a context of abundant grace. Jesus is more than just your foundation. He doesn't leave you to build on your own. He's your partner, with the plans; and the outcome is assured.

If you are not yet a Christian... You are building, but you're doing it on a foundation of sand by the ocean and you will eventually experience ruin. Build upon the Rock. Come to Jesus and experience the joy of His salvation.

Calvary Hanford  
- being changed to bring change -

