

Chapter 3

Put yourself in the Israelites shoes. In light of being in captivity for 70 years, obeying the call of God to go back to their true home, and completing a very long journey to get there, **what would be the likely attitude of their hearts?**

Service to God
begins with a
correct attitude of
the heart!

Perhaps there was a...

...**sense of relief**...to be gathering to worship again.

•They had been captive and didn't have the freedom to celebrate the way they used to in their temple that was destroyed. For so long, who they were, **their identity, was lost for a time.**

...**sense of remorse**...as they wept when they considered the privileges they once had and forfeited because they didn't keep the covenant God made with them.

•They were on the site where **they had offended God by their disobedience and idolatry and had provoked God to punish them.**

...**sense of elation**...because they had suffered the consequences of their obedience and **now God had brought them a new beginning!**

• He had preserved a remnant once again.

...**sense of unity & urgency**...as "they gathered as one man in Jerusalem" (v.1) in the face of a daunting task to rebuild.

• They were now committed to the work of the Lord, united as a people gifted and refined by the calamity that had befallen them as they realized that **the monumental task ahead would require a united effort.**

Service to God
requires a united
effort!

The work begins.

In verse 2-3a, the leadership built an **altar** so they could worship God according to the Law. This altar was built in its place (v. 3a), on God's Holy Hill (Ps. 2:6) in His Holy Land (Zech. 2:2). The leadership was careful to obey where they built the altar but more importantly **why they built the altar first.**

• They built the altar before the temple because practically it was all they could do right away and they wanted to start worshipping as soon as possible. **We begin a great work by doing what we can first.**

Don't think, "When I'm more settled I'll get to serving God, or When I have more resources I'll do this or that for God." Start now and trust in expectation of His provision!

Service to God
requires
obedience !

•They recognized the spiritual significance of **the altar being where sin was dealt with and where the common man met with God** (the temple was only for the priests to enter).

- God is in the business of saving souls and He doesn't care where you're from or who you are. He just wants to meet you at the altar of your heart!

• They started with the altar because it was a **wise spiritual priority**, showing they understood they needed atonement from sin and acts of dedication to God.

- **God meets us where we're at.** He doesn't require us to "get it together" first. He desires a repentant and contrite heart that recognizes how much we need Him to save us.

“There can't be a temple without an altar but there can be an altar without a temple. God meets men at the place of sacrifice, even though there be no house for His name.” (MacLaren)
 - God puts more weight on **the substance** of the worship we give **then where** we give it.

- We must worship God by **obeying** the principles He gives us in His Word asking what does the Lord require of us? Scripture is the absolute rule in matters of faith and practice - it guides our behaviors and beliefs. (1 Pet. 1:13-16)
- We have to recognize that **worship isn't for us!** While it does warm our hearts; we should not come to God with a “What can I get out of the worship time?” Worship is about **giving to God first**, then we will sense the nearness of His presence. (Matt. 6)

In **verse 3**, it says they built the altar “for fear was upon them because of the peoples of the land”. Notice they didn't start to build an army and weapons, they didn't seek a peace treaty, and they didn't run away.

What did they do?

- **They took courage** (being scared but forging ahead and doing what needs to be done) and got down to business - worshipping Yahweh!
- **They knew in order to be safe they had to seek God.** In order to reestablish ministry and worship they needed the one true living God. Safety isn't about found in us but in obedience and worship of God. Their **foundation for ministry was Calvary!**

There is no other altar on which ministry can stand. **Our worship is to be built on the foundation of the cross** because it is a celebration of **redemptive love** and **eternal justice accomplished** by the **blood shed** by Jesus. (isa. 53)

The verse ends with, “and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening.”

- They didn't just have a great worship session one day and stop, no, **they continued every morning and evening bringing God the sacrifices He required** to atone for their sin. They didn't become complacent.
 - Have we allowed **our level of commitment** to fall?
 - Do we treat church as something to do once a week to put our “time” in?
 - Are we complacent with our comfortable lives?
 - Are we worshipping by sacrificing our time, money, comfort etc. for Him?

Or do we worship everyday with **the way we live our lives?** Do we **seek fellowship** and do church with fellow believers taking part in *koinonia*? These people fresh out of Babylon **saw it as a great privilege** to engage in communal worship at the beginning and end of the day.

It's a privilege because **the God of the universe meets us** personally and **is intimate** with our souls - the only requirement is we bring ourselves as we are in humble recognition of our need for Him to save us!



Service to God
requires courage
in the face of
opposition.

Verses 4-6: The what.

The **Feast of Booths**, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot in Hebrew, was a celebration at the end of the fall festivals when the grapes and olives were harvested in Israel. Primarily it was designed to remember the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan when God made the people live in booths (Lev. 23:33-43). During this time **the family was supposed to construct a booth or sukkah**, and live in it for a week. It was a small, temporary shelter with thatched roofs of palm fronds and other plants, and they were decorated with different kinds of fruit that grew in Palestine. **It was a time to commemorate the way that God provided for them in the wilderness on their way to the promised land.**

The significance:

Keep in mind that when they celebrated this festival, **they left their homes-unguarded**. There was no one to make sure their homes were safely kept. Why do this? They gave up the comforts of their homes **in order to remember God's salvation**, that in order to be redeemed, the people of the Lord must surrender certain things like self-reliance and selfishness. They knew that **when you respond in worship to God, you declare and celebrate God's power to protect you.**

Service to
God
requires a
biblical
worldview.

The why:

These festivals were **powerful worldview builders** in Israel. Your worldview consists of your:

- **dogma** - what is taught;
- **narrative** - the story you believe about the world;
- **symbols** that celebrate the truths of your dogma in the sweep of the narrative in which they make sense;
- and **liturgy** - the use of your *dogma, narrative* and *symbols* in worship.

In this case, the *narrative* of God's provision for Israel in the wilderness **became the dogma** that was *symbolically reenacted every year* at the Festival of Booths. All of this was built into their *liturgy*, or order of worship. **All of which produced a powerful concoction: a biblical worldview.**

So it makes more sense why they made sure to celebrate this festival and build the altar to worship instead of create an army and weapons and/or start building the wall first when they were afraid of the peoples of the land. **When they responded to intimidation with worship, they brandished God's truth** in overcoming lies and insinuations of the enemy.

→ *If we are to overcome the enemy in our lives → we must respond in worship. (2 Chr. 20:19-21) Since that worship is shaped by our worldview, → it is imperative that our worldview is a biblical one - shaped and informed by the inerrant, infallible truth of God's World!*

A few references for further study on a biblical worldview

(Eph. 1:3-5, 2:2; Matt. 6:19-24; Rom. 1:18-23, 8:7; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; 1 John 2:15-17; Gen. 3:5-7; Deut. 8:11-13; Lk. 14:6-27; John 6:63; Rev. 12:9)

Verse 7 - the rebuilding of the temple is underway.

They didn't start building the foundation until the 2nd month of the next year, which means they spent nearly 7 months gathering materials and preparing to build. Great care was taken as they started to build the temple. First they **sought those** who were skilled in the work, **gathering the best** materials (the timbers of Lebanon were legendary for building drawing up plans.



Service to God requires us to
tender our souls!

This is so important because it is in this time of preparation as we **tender** our own souls by seeking discipleship, and searching the scriptures as a Berean (Acts 17:11) that we learn or re-learn how to practice what God asks of us - **to glorify Him with our whole life!**

- David asked in **Psalm 11:3**, “if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”
The answer, rebuild! **Rebuild when the enemy trips you up, get back up, run to Jesus!**
- If we are to continue “**building**” our temple in which God Himself resides, our bodies, does it not **implore** us to learn how to do it correctly?

John Calvin said in the book, *The Essential Commentaries and Works of John Calvin*, on the topic of worship and ethics,

“for it is an indignity to the holiness of God that anything should be offered to him **unless it first becomes holy**. Granted this, It follows that **our whole life should be an exercise in holiness** and that we would not be free from sacrilege if we lapsed into uncleanness; for sacrilege is nothing else than to profane what is consecrated.”