

January 28, 2024

Ezra 3:1-6 NIV

1 When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. *2* Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. *3* Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices. *4* Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. *5* After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred feasts of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the LORD. *6* On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid.

Haggai 1 NIV

1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua a son of Jehozadak, the high priest: *2* This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'" *3* Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: *4* "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" *5* Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. *6* You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." *7* This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. *8* Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. *9* "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. **10** Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. *11* I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands." *12* Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. *13* Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. *14* So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, *15* on the twenty-fourth day.



The Hand of God Gathers His People to Worship
Ezra 3:1-6

BIG IDEA: When God begins a new work of spiritual revival among his people, he always calls us to worship renewal.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction

- Worship renewal in biblical times
- Worship renewal throughout church history

2. Worship Renewal

- Highest priority
- Stirred up
- According to God's design
- Worship shapes us
- Blazing altars
- Worship because you must

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Have you ever made a radical change in your life? What compelled you to make the change?
2. Read Ezra 3:1-6. What evidence can you find that the Israelites were determined to worship God?
3. Can you recall a time when revival or renewal happened in your life or in your church? Describe what happened.
4. What is the cause for renewal in a Christian’s life?
5. What does spiritual renewal look like?
6. What happens when Christians make worshiping God their first priority?
7. Does your worship of God reflect excitement, enthusiasm, which results in joyful obedience? If not, what needs to happen for you to make a change in how you worship God?

Praise to Jesus. Praise the Lord that you live in the new covenant age where you see that even the offering of the Israelites was ultimately an anticipation of Jesus, who “loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Repentance through Jesus. Call a time out this week to reflect on your heart for worship. If you find your heart is hard or bored with worship, ask the Lord to forgive you. Confess any sin or delayed obedience you have allowed to distance you from God. From Colossians 1:13–14, see that Jesus has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom you have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Confess your sins to Him and ask Him to bring a renewed heart full of zeal and sincere worship.

Consecration for Jesus. Christ, the perfect sacrifice, offered his life to be united with you so that you and the people of God are “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Determine today to worship the Lord in mundane valleys and on the mountaintops with a renewed heart.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Israel's calendar of pilgrimage feasts, the seventh month, Tishri (roughly September), was the month of the great Day of Atonement, followed by the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles), which celebrated the exodus from Egypt. Thus, the people made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the first year of their return. They repaired the broken altar first to make sacrifices to the Lord again. The leading roles of Jeshua and Zerubbabel are again emphasized, with some stress on the role of the priests.

The remains of the original altar may have been visible because they knew the altar's location. The altar has absolute priority, as it had at the first entry into the land many years before. The fear of the peoples of the lands heightens the haste to erect it. The phrase “the peoples of the lands” (Ezra 3:3) refers to residents of Judah, and perhaps neighboring areas, who were not part of the group returning from exile. Some may have had Jewish origins, but they presented themselves as a distinct group and would soon oppose the work. The exiles' fear was another echo of their first occupation of the land when fear had at first overwhelmed the Israelites. On this occasion, despite their fear, they are resolute. Burnt offerings were to be offered daily on the altar, morning and evening, as Moses commanded. The people keep the Feast of Booths, with its proper sacrifices. The perspective shifts to regular sacrificial worship since the particular acts of worship in the seventh month portrayed a renewal and a beginning. The next task is to rebuild the temple, and the preparations recall those made by King Solomon half a millennium earlier. - ESV Study Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. When you are afraid, what are some of your reactions?
2. According to verse 3, why did the Israelites decide to rebuild the altar in the Temple? (Verse 3 states that they rebuilt the altar “for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands.” Make sure to talk with your children about how the worship of God calms our fears since it refocuses us on God and His sovereignty.)
3. What was the purpose of the sacrifices made on the altar in the Temple? (God commanded the sacrifices to remind the Israelites that they were sinful and in need of forgiveness. In Leviticus 17:11 and in Hebrews 9:22 we read that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. The sacrifices were an important part of God’s ordained worship and pointed to the greatest sacrifice that would occur when Jesus willingly gave His life to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).)
4. What is your favorite month of the year? Why?
5. Do you know the significance for the “seventh month” for the Israelites? (In Exodus 23:14-17 and Leviticus 23, we read of God commands for how His people were to worship at set times during the year. God ordained three special events for the seventh month of the year. The first was the blast of trumpets that later became the Jewish New Year celebration. The second was the Day of Atonement. The third was the Feast of Booths. Therefore, the seventh month of the year was a special month. In Ezra 3:1 when it mentions the “seventh month” that would have great significance to God’s people.)
6. How did the Israelites decide how to rebuild the altar and how to celebrate the Feast of Booths? (In numerous parts of our passage we read that the Israelites decided how to rebuild the altar and to celebrate the Feast of Booths according to God’s Word. See verses 2 (“as it is written in the Law of Moses”) and 4 (“as it is written”).)
7. Do you know what the Feast of Booths signified or what the Israelites celebrated in the Feast? (It commemorated the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Holy Land (Canaan) and celebrated God’s provision in the harvest of crops.)

Scriptures for further study:

Exodus 30:28

Leviticus 23:33-43

Hebrews 9:11-22

Hebrews 10:1-10

FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Exodus 29:38-46

Leviticus 16:29-34

Leviticus 23:33-43

Hebrews 10:1-14

Hebrews 10:15-25

Hebrews 13:9-15

1. An altar was for sacrifices offered to God – all kinds of sacrifices were made on ordinary days and feast days. Read in Exodus 29:38-46 about the daily sacrifices; in Leviticus 16:29-34 about special instructions for the seventh month; and in Leviticus 23:33-43 about the Feast of Booths. Why was the altar so important for the Israelites?

2. According to Hebrews 10:1-14, why don't believers today need a physical altar? According to Hebrews 10:15-25 and 13:9-15, what kind of altar do we have?

3. The text tells us that the people were afraid (Ezra 3: 3). How did the Israelites respond?

4 . How did fear influence the actions of the Israelites, and how did they overcome it?

5. How does the rebuilding of the altar symbolize the restoration of faith for the Israelites? Can you think of similar symbols in your life?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Why should worship of God be our highest priority? Has this ever been true in your own life? Is this true in your life currently? Are you instead busy “running after” other pursuits at the moment?
2. Worship is ascribing worth or assigning value to someone/something. Is God that someone? Do your priorities, actions, finances, time commitments (etc.), suggest so?
3. Are you like one of those people described in Haggai who is waiting to “settle down” before getting serious about surrendering your life to God?
4. Why and how does worship shape us so profoundly?
5. Who do you know who lives their life focused on God and worshipping him? Has this provided a good and inspiring example? Does this perhaps intimidate you instead?
6. What fears do you deal with that most show you your need for God and most drive you to your knees in prayer and worship?
7. How can worship be both an individual as well as a corporate experience?

Scriptures for further study:

Haggai 1

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork:

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." This artistic rendering by Blake serves to encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances.

William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to bringing prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible to life; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

As a child, he came home one day and told his parents he saw "a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His middle-class mom and dad greatly loved him and all their seven children but didn't appreciate their son's story. Only the pleas of his mom saved him from the "beating" his dad said he deserved! Blake's visions continued throughout his fifty years. Among his many visions, Blake saw Christ with his Apostles and a great procession of monks and priests and heard their chant." He saw "God's face pressed against his window, seeing angels among the haystacks, and being visited by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel." Blake believed the Bible was the most significant work of poetry ever written. It was the basis for the art. His love for the Bible and his visions were the stuff of a vast collection of visual and literary art through which Blake attempted to describe "the body of God.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.