

Worship Is Restored

Kelvin heard the music as soon as he opened the door leading from the garage. He moved further into the kitchen with a mixture of feelings—sadness, caution, hopefulness.

The sounds were coming from their bedroom. He didn't know if Tamar was upstairs by herself or with one of her sisters. His wife's sisters had been keeping a vigil-like watch over Tamar since their latest unsuccessful in vitro attempt.

Kelvin and Tamar had been well into their 40s when they married, and now three years later the couple had been trying for more than two years to get pregnant. It had been crushing—the disappointment, hurt, and anger. Yes, they could adopt. But Tamar always wanted to have children of her own.

As Kelvin climbed the staircase, his caution melted as he got closer to the worshipful sounds. What he loved most about Tamar was her fierce love for Christ. It is what first struck him and drew him to her. She was devoted. She was single-minded. She was a warrior. Yes, she was hurting. They both were. But praise is part of who they were. It is what they did. They wouldn't let anything keep them from praising Yahweh, their God.

Kelvin opened the bedroom door and saw Tamar standing there, signing. And he joined in with her, adding his voice to the chorus coming from the radio.

1. *Do you find it harder to worship during certain periods of life?*

2. *How can community lessen a hurting person's burdens?*

3. *What helps you to persevere in the midst of fear or disappointment?*

Rebuilding the Altar

Ezra 3:1–6 KJV

1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; 5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the

Ezra 3:1–6 NIV

¹ When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem. ² Then Joshua 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 Festival 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 festivals 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 temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

foundation of the LORD temple had not yet been laid.

After the Jews returned to the promised land, their first task was to reinstitute their worship and sacrificial system. The people prioritized the rebuilding of the altar before anything else, even before they gathered the money and materials to rebuild the temple (v. 7). Without an altar, they were unable to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Ezra says the people “assembled together as one in Jerusalem” (v. 1). This communal atmosphere was crucial for their rebuilding efforts, which soon would face opposition.

Sacrifices were supposed to begin on the first day of the seventh month, so the rebuilding had to be completed in time. Joshua and Zerubbabel led God’s people and organized the construction. Joshua’s name appears before Zerubbabel, who was the Jewish governor and heir to the Davidic throne. Joshua was a priest, so it was appropriate for him to initiate the reinstitution of Jewish worship.

The Jews carefully built the altar according to the Law of Moses. The altar needed to be made with uncut fieldstones, and upon the foundation of the original altar (Ex. 20:25; Deut. 27:6). It was important to maintain the traditional place of sacrifices to the Lord; this showed continuity with the former temple and its system of worship—a true restoration and return to proper worship.

By rebuilding the altar, the Jews expressed trust in God. The Jews were afraid of the neighboring people groups living within Judah who were not supportive of Jewish worship. When the Jews returned from exile, they met animosity and hostility from these people.

The people restarted the daily offerings exactly as Moses had instructed (Num. 28:1–8) by sacrificing burnt offerings each day (v. 3). The people also celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles, a religious festival that recalled Israel’s wandering in the wilderness under God’s protection.

Finally, the returned Jews offered proper sacrifices to commemorate the festivals, following Moses’ instructions

in Leviticus 23:1–44. They brought freewill offerings to God, which meant they were worshipping Yahweh out of their own volition. Although the Jews had rebuilt the altar and established regular sacrifices, the temple was nonexistent, lacking even a foundation.

4. *What did Joshua and Zerubbabel lead the people to do?*

5. *Why did the Jews rebuild the altar first?*

6. *How did the returning Jews view the people around them?*

The Temple Construction Begins

Ezra 3:10–13 KJV

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD;

because he is good,
for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.

And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of

Ezra 3:10–13 NIV

¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. ¹¹ With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD:

“He is good;
his love toward Israel
endures forever.”

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the

this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: 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 noise was heard afar off.

foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. ¹³ No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

As the builders constructed the temple's foundation, the people responded in celebration. Ezra emphasizes the communal worship that took place, rather than dwelling on the details of the construction. The temple celebration in verses 10–13 is reminiscent of the celebration at the completion of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 5:1–14). In both celebrations, the priests sound trumpets and cymbals and lead a song of praise with the words of Psalm 100:5.

However, this celebration after the exile was different. There was no ark of the covenant, no visible glory of the Lord, and no great temple. As a people, the Jews had endured a great deal of suffering and humiliation, and the rebuilding of the altar was the first step in restoring God's former dwelling place among them.

In verse 11, Ezra describes the people's "great shout of praise." Their joy and thankfulness overflowed into enthusiastic exclamations. Still, their celebration was joined by weeping and sadness. The elders in the community remembered the grandeur of Solomon's temple and recognized how inadequate the new altar appeared. The older generation might be disappointed with the new altar's diminutive size, but the materials and craftsmanship were also inferior. The crowd's mixed response of celebration and sadness was heard by neighboring peoples (v. 13).

7. *How did the Levites celebrate the rebuilding of the temple foundation?*

8. *Why did some people weep?*

Worship God to Battle Fear

What if I am mocked for expressing my faith in Christ Jesus? What if people don't like me? What if something bad happens? What if I die? These questions can tempt believers to fear. Fear has a way of grabbing our hearts and immobilizing us. In moments of fear or distress, it sometimes doesn't make a lot of sense to worship God. Instead, we strain with our whole beings to fix the issue, to bring resolution to the situation, to do something! Or, we simply try not to think about the issue at all.

To pause and worship can feel nonsensical in the midst of trials. At least, it feels that way until we realize that we can't fix our problems ourselves. As we come to realize that so many circumstances are out of our control, the idea of worship starts to make more sense. We must lay our quaking hearts at the feet of Jesus.

When we worship God, we are often reminded of the bigger context of our lives and gain the courage to face our fears. We remember who God is and who we are in Him. God is good (Ps. 100:5). He is in control. God is for us and not against us (Rom. 8:31–32). Our lives are secure in Him (Phil. 1:3–6). Death no longer has the last word upon our lives (1 Cor. 15:54–55). Through worship, we are bolstered with courage to face all kinds of fear. It is not that the feelings of fear necessarily go away, but that worship equips us with the courage we need to endure the fearful contexts that surround us.

9. *How have you dealt with fearful situations in the past?*

10. *How might worship change your perspective on the current, fearful contexts that you are in?*

11. *How can you build a habit to worship God in the midst of fearful contexts?*

Pray for Worship

Though life may shatter, God's love never does. The exile effectively shattered the lives of the Jews. Yet many years later, God brought them back to their homeland. God was faithful to love His people then, and He will be faithful to His people now. He shows us His love by making us whole through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of such love, we can worship Him amid fearful situations!

► *Every day for the next week, make an effort to pray that God will help you trust and worship Him amid fearful contexts, remembering that His steadfast love endures forever. Ask Him to help you through the circumstances that surround you so that in your weeping, you weep with hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

KEY VERSE

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 3:11b KJV

All the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. —Ezra 3:11b NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 19 through May 25

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Jeremiah 31:27–34—A New Covenant.

Tues. Ephesians 2:1–10—Saved by Grace.

Wed. Luke 22:7–20—A New Covenant.

Thurs. Nehemiah 8:1–12—Hear the Word of the Lord.

Fri. Nehemiah 9:2–18, 32—Remember God's Salvation.

Sat. Hebrews 8—A Better Covenant.

Sun. Nehemiah 10:28–39—Revitalized Worship.