

EZRA: STARTING OVER WELL AFTER GROUP FAILURE
Part IV: Helping The Group By The Leaders Courageously Exempling Obedience To God
(Ezra 3:1-6)

I. Introduction

- A. It is rather easy to do what is right when "everybody else" among God's people is doing so.
- B. However, it is more difficult to obey the Lord when we are in the minority, or when no one else around us wants to heed God, and when we face foreboding opposition to doing so.
- C. Ezra 3:1-6 details a very courageous step of faith that the most qualified leaders of Israel's returning exiles took to step out as groundbreakers against grave opposition -- all just to obey God's Word. This event encourages God's people throughout history to obey Him in all trying circumstances (as follows):

II. Helping The Group By The Leaders Courageously Exempling Obedience To God, Ezra 3:1-6.

- A. The returned Hebrew exiles recalled the seventh month in Israel's history used to be a time of great feasts and worship celebrations unto the Lord, cf. Bible Know. Com., O.T., p. 658: it was the month of celebrating the Feast of Trumpets on the 1st day (Lev. 23:23-25), the Day of Atonement on the 10th day (Lev. 23:26-32) and the Feast of Tabernacles on days 15-21 of that month (Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43), Ibid.
- B. Yet, at the time, imposing obstacles hindered God's people from observing these feasts at the temple site:
 - 1. The temple site had been in ruins since Judah's fall to Babylon for decades, so any worship on the spot would have been a struggle to overcome discouragement from a purely human perspective.
 - 2. Besides, the temple site was surrounded by Gentile peoples hostile to a renewed Hebrew state, making the Hebrew people afraid even to **dare** to practice their temple worship on the site, Ezra 3:3b NIV.
 - 3. Also, worship in ancient Israel had occurred under the protection of their own nation's military might, but the returned exiles were now vulnerable to Gentile military retaliation for instigating such worship. They lacked even a building in which to protect themselves from attack during their worship meeting!
- C. However, full of faith, a few of the most qualified leaders of God's people courageously reconstructed the altar on the temple grounds and instituted the complete sacrificial system amidst their ruins and enemies:
 - 1. In complete **unity**, the people of God under their **leaders** met at Jerusalem in the seventh month to worship the Lord, Ezra 3:1. The phrase "as one man" highlights the great motivation they possessed.
 - 2. Then, the leading descendant of Aaron in Joshua (Ibid.) and the leading descendant of the royal seed in Zerubbabel (1 Chr. 3:15-19), men who best represented the Old Testament high priest and king offices with other leading men stepped out in courageous faith to rebuild the altar of God in the open air amidst the temple ruins even though they were afraid of Gentile opposition around them, Ezra 3:2-3a.
 - 3. In so doing, they acted in obedience to Moses, the man of God in setting up the altar of the God of Israel in accord with Israel's need to renew the Mosaic Covenant for divine blessing, 3:2b; Ibid. (Notice the formal titles given to Moses and to God in this verse to highlight the import of their effort.)
 - 4. Their obedience was not half-hearted either, for they established the **full** sacrificial system as follows:
 - a. They began to keep the daily burnt offerings, offering burnt offering sacrifices twice daily, Ezra 3:3.
 - b. They also kept the feast of Tabernacles, sacrificing many more animal, grain and libation sacrifices daily for the days comprising this feast's seven days of observance, Ezra 3:4-5a & Num. 29:12-39.
 - c. In addition, they began offering the new moon sacrifices once a month, cf. Ezra 3:5b.
 - d. Besides, they kept all the **other** feasts of the Lord, Ezra 3:5c, not to mention the numerous offerings of every individual who gave a personal freewill offering to the Lord, Ezra 3:5d.
 - 5. Even though the temple around them was still a shambles of burnt rock and wood covered in weathered soot, and they were exposed to potential repercussions of nearby Gentiles, these militarily vulnerable Hebrew exiles began to keep all the aspects of the Hebrew sacrificial system in obedience to God, 3:6.

Lesson: *Though opposition was formidable, though the worship site was a shambles, and though the people were vulnerable to military repercussions, the most qualified leaders of the people chose to heed God's Word and courageously stepped forth to set up the altar and institute the full range of the Mosaic Covenant's sacrificial system. In this way, the foundation was laid for the nation's spiritual renewal.*

Application: *May a few good men courageously step forward today to set the example for the Church.*