

Exploring Ezra

2. Ezra 3: New Beginnings A Fresh Start

Note to Leaders: Last week we looked at the background to the story of the remnant of Israel returning to rebuild God's temple in Jerusalem. This study continues the narrative - looking at the actions of those who returned. There is also a suggested worship/response activity you might like to consider at the end.

Aim: To consider the response the returning Jews had to God, praising him in a challenging situation; to consider how we might encourage each other to do the same; to think about what 'temple worship' means for us and to take the opportunity - like the Jews - for a fresh start with our faithful God.

To Start With

Share with the group an example of a 'tradition' your family has for celebrating events (e.g. Christmas, Birthdays)
Why is it significant for you?

And/Or

Which Christian festivals/celebrations do you particularly find helpful in your Spiritual life? Why? (You could make a list of people's suggestions to discuss). What value do you think these traditions can have?

Engaging with the Text

This narrative considers the festivals the Jews celebrated on their return to Jerusalem.

Read Ezra 3.1-7

1.
 - a) What factors appear to have motivated the initial building of the altar even before there was a temple structure?
 - b) How far do you think these are positive or negative motivations? How far do our motivations matter when we come to worship or cry out to God?

Read Ezra 3.8-11

2. In light of all they had suffered in captivity for 70 years and the current trepidation they felt, what strikes you about the worship - especially the priests' song in v11? (See Psalm 136 for its origins)
3. When would you say you find it difficult to sing this 'song'? How as a cell community might we encourage each other in this truth? (What would you find helpful?)
4. What do you know about the significance of the temple for Jews in their relationship with God?

Now read Ezra 3.12-13

5.
 - a) How do you respond to these verses?
 - b) What do you imagine the elders were mourning for?
 - c) Why might the new generation have such a different response?
 - d) How do you think God might have reacted to such differing cries?

The New Testament picks up many of the themes of temple worship. Read Romans 12.1, 1 Corinthians 6.19-20, 1 Peter 2.4-8

6.
 - a) How do you respond to the idea of your life being...
 - A Living Sacrifice?
 - A temple for the Spirit of God?
 - A Living stone in the temple of God?
 - b) How far do you find these helpful or challenging metaphors for how we view our relationship with God? Why?

Responding

The Jews were making a fresh start - restored to the land of their ancestors after the punishment of exile in Babylon. We are able to make a fresh start with God every day through Jesus. Take some time to reflect on whether you need a fresh start right now.



You might like to spend some time in quiet allowing people to talk to God and repent individually - followed by a time of praise, or reading part of Psalm 136.

(NB. Psalm 136 was read in two groups, or a leaders and congregation- one reading the first line and the others responding with 'his love endures forever'; this might be a powerful way to respond in worship and close the meeting.)