

## Home Group study: week beginning 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021

### Ezra 3: The return of the exiles

#### *Introduction*

On Sunday we looked again at the Jewish Exiles' return. The account in Ezra 3 is taken after the Jewish people have returned, having been exiled to Babylon (modern-day Iraq) roughly 900 miles away, for about 70 years. In this passage the Jewish exiles do not seem content just to return home. Instead they press on purposefully with rebuilding the altar and the temple foundations.

*Optional warm-up question:* What is the longest time you have been away from home? What did you miss the most?

#### **Read: Ezra 3:1-4**

What do these verses suggest about what the Jews' priorities?

It has been commented that, for the Jewish people, the opposite of the word 'exile' is 'restoration', not 'return'. Do you agree with this idea? Why?

On Sunday we thought about the importance of our Offering as we reflected on its significance to the Jewish people in this passage. What does 'offering' mean to you? What do **verses 5 and 6** tell us about the Jews' offering?

#### **Read: Hebrews 13:15-16; Romans 12:1-2**

How do these verses help us to consider how we might give our offering/sacrifice?

What do they tell us about the importance of us giving our offering/sacrifice?

Looking back at Ezra 3, are there any verses from the first half of the chapter that clearly demonstrate the Jews' obedience to God? (*eg vv2- 4*)

Why do you think the Jews were afraid of the peoples around them (as in v3)?

Are there particular fears we might have to overcome as we seek to honour and obey God?

Any encouragement for how to best overcome these fears?

What might the exiles have learnt about obedience/disobedience during their time in captivity?

How does grace fit in with the importance of our obedience and our offering (Romans 12:1)?

### **Read: Ezra 3: 10-13**

What do you make of this final scene of the Jewish people's response to seeing the temple foundations laid?

What are the different responses from the Jews and why do you think they have these different responses?

It is interesting to note that the Jews had these different emotional reactions. Perhaps for individual reflection: what do you think are the main feelings you have about your current circumstances or our (church/nation etc) circumstances?

### **Application**

- When it comes to our **offering** to God, what more can you give of yourself to God? Are there new ways you can serve him and honour him at work/home/church?
- The Jews obediently adhered to their festivals and made their offerings despite 'fear of the peoples around them'. To be **obedient** to God's word requires knowing and following His word. What might help us with this endeavour to obey God always? What about different ways of praying/discipling/bible reading or any other spiritual disciplines?
- We can be passionate and emotive about certain things. Yet we can also be more reserved about other things. How can we have more **openness** in our relationship with God? Are there things we tend to discuss more with our friends/families instead of spending more time bringing those things to God? Pray for each other that we might be real/authentic with God by noticing and bringing to him our difficult feelings. Pray also that when we feel particularly disappointment or despondent, we might gain a spirit of thankfulness. A spirit of thankfulness that helps us, like the worship team, to burst into song declaring that 'this is the day that the Lord has made'! 😊