

The Motivation for Obedience
International Bible Lesson

Ezra 3:1-7

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“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” (Ezra 3:3—KJV).

“Even though the returning exiles were afraid of the people who were living in the land, they rebuilt the altar where it had stood before. Then they began once again to burn on it the regular morning and evening sacrifices” (Ezra 3:3—GNB).

“They set up the altar on its foundation, because they were in dread of the neighboring peoples, and they offered burnt offerings upon it to the LORD, morning and evening” (Ezra 3:3—NRSV).

God sent some of His people into exile in Babylon for seventy years of suffering because they had rebelled against Him and the laws of His Kingdom. Then, after King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon, God inspired him to free His people and allow them to return to Jerusalem and their hometowns. Most of the people surrounding them opposed their return and tried to hinder their rebuilding of their homes, their temple, and the walls of Jerusalem.

God’s people learned to obey God through suffering God’s discipline, and when they returned they wanted to

obey the Law of Moses, whom they recognized as a man of God. They learned from their prophets and their long punishment to fear God. They chose to rebuild the altar at the site of the temple in Jerusalem because they feared their neighbors and they wanted God to protect them. By worshiping God morning and evening and by returning to obedience to God, they hoped God would help them rebuild their homes and their nation.

When they ceased to fear God and their neighbors, they fell back into sin. Therefore, God sent Ezra, Nehemiah, and the prophets to call them back to obedience. Finally, God sent the Messiah into the world, and by His demonstration of the love of God, even unto death, Jesus won the hearts of God's children and they came to love God and their neighbors. Because they love God, the followers of Jesus resist the world, the flesh, and the devil. Love, not fear, motivates them to obey and serve God.

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Thinking Further

1. Give at least one reason why it is important to study Ezra.

2. Why do you think some (or many?) of the Jews who had been in exile chose to stay in Babylon under the rule of King Cyrus rather than return to Jerusalem and Judah?

3. What are some of the challenges the returning Jews would have faced in their homeland after they returned?

4. What is the reason Ezra gave for the Jews rebuilding the altar of the Lord and making morning and evening sacrifices?

5. Give some possible reasons why some people go to church or worship God in a variety of ways.

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