

What Motivates God
International Bible Lesson
Ezra 3:8-13
Sunday, July 7, 2013
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“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.” (Ezra 3:11—KJV).

“And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.’ And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid” (Ezra 3:11—NRSV).

In 538 B.C., many Israelites returned to Judea from exile in Babylon. Following the orders of King Cyrus of Persia, who had conquered the Babylonians, the returned Israelites almost immediately began to rebuild the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. When they laid the temple foundation, they invited everyone in Jerusalem and in the surrounding towns to join in celebration. With cymbals, trumpets, responsive praises, weeping and joyful shouts, they thanked the LORD for allowing them to return with their temple utensils and enough sacrificial animals provided by King Cyrus so they could worship the LORD in the ways of their greatest king, King David.

Some of those who returned wept because they remembered the beauty and glory of King Solomon’s temple. Some wept when they remembered that their sins had led to God’s punishment and the temple’s destruction. Whether with weeping or joyful shouts, they praised the LORD for the kind of God He is. The God of heaven and earth is good. Whatever God does, God does with good reasons. God’s steadfast love motivates Him to do what is right and best, which includes the discipline and punishment of the stubborn and rebellious among His people. God will never change from being a God of love. Love will always motivate God to act with justice and mercy. Today, everyone can praise God for His goodness and never-failing love, for God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (see Hebrews 13:8).

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Thinking Further

1. Why do you suppose they chose Levites to supervise the construction of the house of the LORD and Levites 20 years and upward?
2. What are some events that encouraged the returnees to start reconstructing the temple as soon as they returned to Jerusalem?
3. If you had returned and seen the new temple foundation laid, would you have wept or shouted with joy? Give a reason for your answer.
4. Do you use responsive readings in your public worship? Of what value might responsive readings from the Psalms serve in your public worship of the LORD?
5. For what moral qualities of God did the returnees praise God? Can you think of other moral attributes of God that are worthy of praise today?