

WEeping FOR THE PAST OR REJOICING FOR THE FUTURE?

Sunday, December 28, 2025 – Pastor Ruben Hernandez

EZRA 3:8-13

English Standard Version

⁸ Now in the second year after their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their kinsmen, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to supervise the work of the house of the LORD. ⁹ And Jeshua with his sons and his brothers, and Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together supervised the workmen in the house of God, along with the sons of Henadad and the Levites, their sons and brothers.

¹⁰ And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. ¹¹ 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 shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.

What are some emotions that we may experience while reflecting upon the upcoming New Year?

- Sadness – perhaps we have lost a family member, lost a job, or lost status
- Regret – decisions we wish we had made or not made
- Satisfaction – about the things we did well
- Hope – possibilities we see in the near future
- Determination – to make this year a different year (i.e. resolutions)

As a church: how can we reflect well? What are some considerations we should have?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Israel had experienced judgment for their repeated rebellion against God.
- God had used the Assyrian and Babylonian empires as His instruments of justice.
- These two empires had taken most of the people into captivity
- 70 years later God worked through the pagan King Cyrus to bring his people back to their Promised Land
- Ezra chapter 3 recounts how the first wave of returning exiles began to rebuild the Temple.

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I. Some of the exiles celebrated the future

The Temple was more than just a building: it represented the very presence of God among His people.

In verses 1-7 they built the altar first. Why?

- They knew they were vulnerable and needed God to protect them
- They knew they didn’t deserve his protection
- They knew God could not dwell among them unless their sin had been atoned for.

Notice the gospel truth that can’t be ignored! Your most pressing need this new year is not losing weight, exercise, etc. Your most pressing need is to be reconciled with God.

- Backslidden Christians – if you are indulging in sin, you walk the slippery slope that Israel once walked. Like any good parent, God does not allow His children to go undisciplined, for their own good.
- Christians – We are no longer separated, vulnerable, or exposed! Our city is rebuilt, God’s presence is in our midst!

After the rebuilding of the altar, plans were made, and work began on the Temple construction (verses 8-10).

- This was led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the leaders of the first wave of exiles.
- The foundation of the Temple was laid and they came ready to celebrate.
- They followed the directions that David gave when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:7)

New beginnings are a time to celebrate!

- It could be a new opportunity to grow.
- It could mean seeing God at work.
- It could mean an opportunity to serve.

They sang responsively – We should as well!

II. Some of the exiles lamented the past

While many may celebrate new beginnings, some moments of celebration may be full of grief for others.

Verse 12: Many of the priests, Levites, and heads of houses – they were involved in leading the celebration, and yet they wept.

Why? These were older men who had seen the previous Temple in their youth and presumably had seen it's destruction as well.

- Maybe they thought of people that they wished could have seen it but were no longer around to do so.
- They had seen the glory of old and felt the loss of it
- Maybe they didn't think things would ever match the glory days: lost hope.

As members of the body of Christ we cannot fail to remember that there may be many among us for which New Years can be a difficult time.

- Lost a family member – Remember Psalm 34:18. Jesus wept with those who wept (John 11:35)
- Difficult circumstances you have or are experiencing make it difficult to see things in a hopeful light – don't allow your focus to be misplaced. (Cf. Matthew 14:22-33)
- You might think that some aspects of the glory days are lost and will never be regained – don't allow your focus to be misplaced. The glory days were not without those who wished for the glory days before. Could our desire for the former times reveal a lack of faith?

Some of us may have legitimate reasons that tinge our celebration with sadness, and grief may be an appropriate response. However, we do not grieve as others do.

III. What to remember in our time of reflection

Verses 12-13: The celebration for what was to come was such that it overpowered the grief that was experienced. It is not that they were insensitive to those who were weeping, but rather that the joy could not be drowned out by the tears.

The remnant celebrated a new beginning in spite of the challenges that they were facing, they celebrated in spite of their struggle, in spite of their past, because they trusted in God's promises of what was to come.

The Second Temple would not compare to God incarnate dwelling among His people, or the Holy Spirit dwelling in each and every believer. The former temple may have been glorious, and the second temple may have been glorious, but it was never as glorious as what would come in Christ.

Christians have a cause to celebrate loudly, in a way that overpowers our grief.

- If we have lost family members who were believers, we will see them again. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Samuel 12:23)
- In Christ we have peace that surpasses any earthly peace we think we will have from any job (Philippians 4:7)
- Our status in Christ as adopted sons outweighs any earthly status (John 1:12; Romans 8:15-17)
- Regardless of whether we have made right or wrong choices, God works all things together for good (Romans 8:28)

The reason why we can look to the future with hope is because we know in whom we have hoped.

Verse 13 “The sound was heard far away.” The way we face a new beginning doesn’t just affect us; it is noticed by others as well.

- How we express our grief speaks to others about the God in whom we have trusted.
- How we celebrate all that we have in Christ speaks to others about how good it really is to be His.

1 Corinthians 10:31 - Whether grieving or celebrating, may it be to the glory of Christ