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## **Ezra: Chapter 3 to Chapter 4: 5**

### ***Background***

In our previous study, we looked at Chapters 1 & 2 of the book of Ezra. In Chapter 1, we read about the return of the main party of exiled Jews to Jerusalem, beginning in around 538 BC, as a result of a decree from Cyrus the king of Persia. What was so incredible about this decree was the requirement that the Jews also rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem - something that must have been the fulfilment of their wildest dreams.

Chapter 2 details the list of returning exiles that almost exactly parallels the list found in Nehemiah 7:6-73. This main party, made up of “*everyone whose heart God had moved*” (Ezra 1:5) was special due to the wide variety of talents they brought with them - priests (Ezra 2:36), singers (Ezra 2:41), gatekeepers of the temple (Ezra 2:42) etc. Everyone had a significant role to play, and despite the wide variation of skills and abilities, these people had one thing in common - they were all chosen by God to participate in the rebuilding of His temple. This is an important lesson for us to remember, particularly concerning our own calling and place in the Body of Christ. There is no better place to be than in God’s will.

### ***The Message***

Of the people that returned:

- **Jeshua** was the son of the high priest Jehozadak (Jozadak) whom Nebuchadnezzar took into exile (see 1 Chronicles 6:15, Haggai 1:1, Ezra 3:2);
- **Zerubbabel** was the son of Shealtiel (1 Chronicles 3:17, Ezra 3:2), the grandson of king Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) (1 Chronicles 3:16, Matthew 1:11-16, 2 Chronicles 36:5-10), and an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:12-13, Luke 3:27, 1 Chronicles 3:19). Note that the Jews in Babylonia reckoned the years by those of Jehoiachin’s captivity (Ezekiel 1:2).

Ezra 3 is a very challenging passage. The Israelites seem to have had a specific plan of action worked out for when they arrived in Jerusalem and there are important spiritual truths for us to discover in this passage. On one level it is history in the making, but we need to remember that these are the actions of people who were stirred by God in their hearts. The design and order of their actions offer us a window into God’s design and purpose for our lives and our continuing walk with Him.

### ***Questions***

1. What was the first act that the people carried out? (3:1)



2. What is practically important about this?
3. What was the second act that the people undertook? (3:1)
4. What is spiritually significant and practically important about this?
5. What practical lesson does this teach us about fellowship and worship?
6. What was the third act that the people undertook? (3:2, Exodus 20:24-26)
7. What did the people do then? (3:4-6, Leviticus 23:1-44, Numbers 28:1-31, Numbers 29:1-40)
8. Why do you think the high priest Jeshua was mentioned before the leader Zerubbabel in 3:2, and not in 3:8?
9. What do you notice when you compare 1:5 to 4:2? What can we learn from this?
10. What else can we learn from 4:1 - 4:5?



Leader's notes:

(Some suggestions are included below. You may wish to consider these questions in the context of your specific fellowship.)

Answer's to questions

1. The people settled in their towns (v1)
2. Important for the Israelites to reconnect with their ancestral homes as part of rediscovering their identity in God. As we know today with the Israelis and the Palestinians, the land is of real significance
3. The people assembled as one man in Jerusalem (v1)
4. Matthew 12:25
5. We need to be part of One Body, with Jesus at its heart
6. Sacrifice of burnt offerings (v2)
7. Note that the restoration of sacrifices preceded the erection of the temple itself. What counts is what is in our heart, not what is visible on the outside!
8. Important to get it right with God first
9. God moved the heart of the exiles. The enemies of Judah and Benjamin were driven by other motives - power (1 Kings 12:21)
10. After the fall of Samaria circa 722 BC, the Assyrian kings brought in people from Aram and Mesopotamia. These people served their own gods, but also took up the worship of the Lord as the god of the land (see 2 Kings 17: 24-41). The true intentions of the enemies of Judah and Benjamin are revealed. If they can not have a share of the glory, they will seek to make the builders afraid.