

## Study 0056

### The Old Covenant Era Worship: Lessons from The Post-Exile Period (1)

In our last study, we took a cursory look at the return of the Jews from exile, and the events that occurred thereafter. These included the rebuilding of the temple, the rebuilding of the city walls, and the rebuilding of the lives of the people. We shall, in this study, focus on the lessons we can learn from the worship of God in the Old Covenant Era, after the return from exile.

The post-exile period consisted of a people who returned from their backsliding, as well as a people who had just newly come to know God (those born while their parents were in captivity). We can thus apply the lessons of the returning Jews to backsliders who return to God, as well as to new believers who are coming into a relationship with God for the first time. Also, those believers who already know the Lord can learn from these lessons.

1. The returning exiles came under the leadership of a prince and a priest. When a person comes to Christ, he must submit himself to Christ's leadership and lordship. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Peace (**Ephesians 2:11-14**), and our High Priest (**Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-15; 6:20**), provides leadership to the believer through His Spirit (**Romans 8:9, 14; Galatians 5:16-18**). As we walk with the Holy Spirit, we remain in the kingdom of God, and are directed to live as He wants us to. The returning backslider must remember that he backslid because he had not submitted to the lordship of Christ in the first place. If Christ is your Lord, you will willingly submit to His leadership!
2. The first thing that the returning Jews did upon their return was to restore the worship of God by first setting up an altar for the offering of sacrifices. When Israel left Egypt and got to the Mount of God, they first set up an altar even before the sanctuary was built. The new believer and indeed, the returned backslider, must first set up a place where he meets with God on a daily basis, and where he gets to dedicate himself unto God, even before he is able to get to a place of corporate worship. This is what we commonly call, quiet time, or a personal altar. This is the time when we worship God personally and privately, and get to talk with God and hear Him speak to us through His word, as a result of meditation on God's word and prayer. The focus of every believer should be on worship of God (fellowship, prayer, bible study, fasting, etc.), even before finding a local assembly to be part of. The first things that believers should focus on as a congregation should be to worship God, even before they talk about building a permanent structure.
3. After setting up the altar and worship was restored, the returned exiles then set about rebuilding the house of God by first laying the foundation where the old temple once stood. The returning backslider and the new believer in Christ must first get the foundation of their Christianity settled, for it is upon this foundation that their eternity will be established. A poor foundation, will lead to a building that will inevitably collapse. The foundation of Christianity is Christ (**1 Corinthians 3:11; Acts 4:12**), and all that we need do is follow the teachings of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ (**Hebrews 6:1-2**). Many people who say they are Christians, but have not built a firm foundation of their Christianity, end up losing all, while those who build the proper Christian foundation gain everything (**Matthew 13:19-23**).
4. Once the foundation was properly laid, the returned exiles then set about the task of building the structure of the house of God. For the returning backslider and the new believer, and indeed, for all Christians, the building of the house of God must be seen in two main contexts: the physical building where believers gather to worship God, and the spiritual building, which is the individual believer (**1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16**), as well as the congregation of Christians (**1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:19-22**).

- 4.1. The physical building where believers gather to worship God, which is what we mostly call 'church' today, is to be built and maintained by the believer, who has been sufficiently endowed with gifts from God to use for the building and maintenance of the physical house of God.
- 4.2. The spiritual building, which is the individual believer, as well as the congregation of all believers, must be built up with gifts which God has given. The ministers of the gospel are the gifts whom Christ has given for the edification and maintenance of believers (**Ephesians 4:8-14**). The backslider who is returning to Christ must remember that he got to his state of backsliding because he did not yield himself to the teachings of the ministers of the gospel (**John 8:31-32**), neither did he apply faith to the word which he heard (**Hebrews 4:2**), nor did he put to practice what he heard (**James 1:22-25**). It is when we are properly built up (**1 Peter 2:1-5**) as a spiritual house that we can properly be the house of God (the place of residence of God)!
5. When the returning Jews commenced the building of the house of God, people who claimed to be worshippers of God (but who were really idolaters) asked to join them in the building of the house of God. Christians must realize that once we are ready to be built up a spiritual house unto God, there will be those who would seek to join in the building effort, presenting themselves as ministers of the gospel, but who really are false ministers and agents of the devil (**2 Corinthians 11:13-15**). We are warned to beware of false prophets (**Matthew 7:15-20**) who come to us in sheep's clothing, but within, are ravaging wolves! The goal of such false prophets is to cause the children of God to err from the truth, so they present a 'gospel' which is no gospel at all (**Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3**). The opposition to the believer being built up a spiritual house will come in various ways and in various degrees:
  - 5.1. They could come as discouragement, so that you become weary of being a part of God's spiritual house.
  - 5.2. They could come as persecution to weaken your faith in God.
  - 5.3. They could come as false teachings, to cause you to err from the truth, which alone is able to keep you falling.
  - 5.4. They could come in the form of government policy which seek to curtail, hinder, or even cause the building of the believer and congregation of believers to cease.
  - 5.5. They could come in the form of lack of funds for the payments necessary to maintain a continued preaching and teaching of the word of God.
6. The people of God who had returned from exile thus stopped the rebuilding of the house of God for upwards of 15 years or so, and turned to building their own houses. Interestingly, there was no opposition to that, and so they continued in their personal ventures until God used famine to bring them back to their senses (**Haggai 1:3-11**). Many Christians today have abandoned the building of the house of God (both physical and spiritual), and are now focusing on themselves, becoming selfish and self-centred in the process. They talk about "my money" not "the Lord's money"; they talk about "my vision", not "the Lord's vision"; they talk about "my ministry", not "the Lord's ministry"; etc. Such things lead to a famine of the word of God, a famine in the land of promise, a famine in the lives of the people of God, a famine in the businesses of believers, and so on. When you experience a famine in your life, in your land, in your business, in your ministry, then "*consider your ways*" and "*go up to the mountain and bring wood and build the house of God*" so that God can take pleasure and bless you! We should never let things that are contrary to the word of God discourage us into abandoning the work of building the physical house of God, and the building of our lives in Christ!

## **EXERCISE**

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. A returning backslider must come under the leadership and lordship of Jesus Christ.
2. It is possible to submit to the leadership of Christ, without submitting to His lordship.
3. Every believer must first focus on his personal relationship with God in worship even before seeking out a place of worship.
4. Without a physical building, we cannot effectively worship God.
5. Returning backsliders and new believers alike should focus on building a firm foundation for their lives.
6. A poor foundation is responsible for the falling away of many Christians.
7. The house of God can be physical, and can be spiritual.
8. Apostles, prophets, etc., are gifts to the body of Christ for the building of the physical house of God.
9. The spiritual house of God is built through the word of God and faith in the word of God among others.
10. Opposition will always arise whenever you are focused on building the house of God, be it physical or spiritual.
11. Opposition makes the believer shift his focus away from the worship of God to himself.