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WHO MAY BE COWORKERS.

SEPT. 3. – EZRA 3:10 TO 4:5.

"The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." – 1 Cor. 3:17.

ABOUT FOUR months must have been required for the return of the captives from Babylon to Palestine, for later Ezra, with a smaller company, required that length of time. (Ezra 7:9.) Arriving at their destination about July or August, probably the first steps were to provide at least temporary homes amid the ruins of Jerusalem and the small towns in that vicinity. But as it was a religious motive which prompted their return – faith in God and his promises – we find, as we might reasonably expect, that very speedily after their arrival the public worship of Jehovah was begun – probably about the beginning of their "new year," October. – Verse 6.

Evidently the Lord's hand was with them, and it was of his providential guidance that their first work, in connection with the restoration of the Temple and [R2510 : page 201] its divinely appointed services, was the building of the altar. This will at once appeal to the intelligent Christian as an illustration of the truth so forcefully set forth in the Scriptures, that all approach to God, all reconciliation, all at-one-ment with him, must be by and through the great sacrifice for sins which Israel's altar typically represented. Vain are all the approaches to God which recognize not as their basis the sin-offering which God himself provided – the "ransom for all." – 1 Tim. 2:6.

The site of the Temple was Mount Moriah, and one of the most prominent spots on that mount is supposed to have been the site of the altar. This place selected for the altar, under divine guidance, is believed to have been the same spot upon which Abraham offered his son, Isaac, the type of Christ, and received him again as from the dead in a figure, the Lord providing as his representative, upon the same

spot, the ram caught in a neighboring thicket. – Gen. 22:3-13; Heb. 11:17-19.

It is supposed that this same spot was subsequently the threshing-floor of Araunah, where David offered the acceptable sacrifice to the Lord which stayed the plague. (2 Sam. 24:21-25.) The Mosque of Omar now occupies the site of the ancient Temple built by Solomon; and the Mohammedans, who have great respect for the holy places, have left the site of the ancient altar exposed to view, protecting it with a railing. The visitor may there see to-day the very spot on which thousands of typical sin-offerings were sacrificed, the base of the various altars which were erected from time to time. It is of solid rock, and has a rather distinct groove or trench about it, which probably conducted the blood of the slain animals to what seems to be a natural drain or sewer by which the blood flowed in the direction of the Valley of Jehoshaphat – the valley of graves.

As we viewed this historic rock some years ago, and thought of the thousands of beasts slain there as types of the great ransom sacrifice, and noted the natural passageway by which the blood was carried off, our thoughts reverted to the Lamb of God, the great **[R2511 : page 201]** sacrifice for sins, and how the life which he laid down became a fountain or stream of life, not only for the dead of Israel, but all who died in Adam. The flow of blood toward the valley of graves seems to speak symbolically of life for the dead, secured through our dear Redeemer's sacrifice. But we remember that not only the bullock of the sin-offering was slain at this altar, but as well the goat of the sin-offering was slain there: not only the blood of the typical bullock, but also the blood of the typical goat, then, must have passed through that natural channel or drain; and this reminds us of how the Church, as members of the body of Christ, are during this age filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, sacrificing even unto death – for we know that, as the bullock represented the great High Priest, our Lord, so the goat represented the under-priests, the Church which is his body.* (Col. 1:24; Rom. 8:17.) And, as we

have already seen, all the members of the body of Christ, the Church, must finish their course and lay down their lives, before the great work of this Atonement Day, the Gospel age, will be accomplished, and the healing and life-giving stream reaches the dead world with blessings and opportunities of eternal life.

See **Tabernacle Shadows of Better Sacrifices.*

The beginning of the offering of sacrifices in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles, at the beginning of their "new year" (in the seventh month of their civil year), was a time of special rejoicing with the Israelites – it was always the most joyous season, but on this occasion the return from Babylon and recent evidences of returning divine favor added to its joys. And immediately the work of repairing the Temple was decided upon. They had brought certain gifts from the Israelites still remaining in Babylonia, and these were added to from the means of those who had returned, and the sum thus accumulated gives good evidence of the zeal of all concerned. As nearly as we may be able to judge, the total value of the gold and silver donated would amount to about \$400,000. (Ezra 2:68,69.) It would appear that this sum was of three parts of about equal proportions, one-third contributed by those who remained in Babylonia, one-third by the few wealthy of the returned Israelites, and one-third contributed by the mass of the people, about \$3 each. – Nehemiah 7:71,72.

We have never considered it proper to solicit money for the Lord's cause, after the common custom; and yet we are thoroughly convinced that there is a great blessing in giving, and that those who do not learn to give deprive themselves of a great spiritual grace, and endanger their spiritual prosperity, if not their spiritual life itself. But the giving, to be acceptable in the Lord's sight, must be voluntary – free-will offerings – "not of constraint." Accordingly, it is our judgment that money raised by the various begging devices in the name of our Lord is offensive, unacceptable to him, and does not bring his blessing either upon the givers or the work accomplished. "The Lord loveth a

cheerful [willing] giver." He seeketh such to worship him as worship and serve in spirit and in truth. – 2 Cor. 9:7; John 4:23,24.

Full of zeal for the Lord's cause, the people celebrated the cornerstone laying of the new Temple with great *eclat*. One of the special features of their worship was praise, and we think it safe to say that singing the [R2511 : page 202] Lord's praise has been amongst the greatest blessings and privileges of worship enjoyed by the largest number of the Lord's people throughout this Gospel age also. The power to praise God in song has been conferred upon man only of all earthly creatures, and how appropriate that he should use this power to praise the King of kings!

If those Israelites, the house of servants, returning from their bondage, and remembering the covenant promises of God to them, had cause for singing and shouting Jehovah's praise, much more have we, who belong to the house of sons, great cause to tell abroad the great things which the Lord hath done for us. We were all servants of sin once, under the bondage of sin, ignorance, superstition and death, but God, through the great Cyrus, has permitted us to go free. Appropriately, therefore, our first step should be to recognize the sacrifice of the altar, and then to offer praise to him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, for "He hath put a new song into our mouths, even the loving kindness of our God."

The Apostle assures us that, however appropriate, inspiring and refreshing are the songs of our lips, still more appropriate and still more appreciated of the Lord are our heart-songs, the joy and rejoicing of the new nature – "singing and making melody in our hearts unto the Lord." (Eph. 5:19.) And this joy and singing in the heart, this heart-thankfulness to the giver of all good, necessarily finds expression, not only in Christian carols, but also in all the acts and words of life – all of which constitute the hymn of praise and thanksgiving continually ascending before God from his people.

"My life flows on in endless song,

Above earth's lamentation;
I catch the sweet not far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul;
How can I keep from singing!"

We read, "They sang one to another in praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel." (*Rev. Ver.*) This is considered by some to be an indication of the Lord's will respecting Christian worship – that it should be done by choirs instead of by the congregation, and that it should be in the nature of solos and choruses. There can be no doubt whatever that selected and trained choirs can render better music than can the general average of Christians. Nor can we doubt that this would be particularly true of the time mentioned in our lesson, when musical and other education was very deficient, and when the most that the majority of people could do was to "make a joyful *noise* unto the Lord." But two things in this connection should be kept in mind: –

(1) That so far as the Christian Church is concerned, the Lord has left her entirely without restrictions in such matters – to praise the Lord with heart and voice, according to her love and zeal and judgment. It is not, therefore, for one to judge another respecting the use of his love, zeal and judgment in offering the Lord worship in songs of praise, whether with instrumental accompaniment or without: it is for each individual and each church to exercise the liberty which the Lord has granted. However, we do urge that all remember that it is not the excellence of our music that will make it acceptable to our Lord. For we may well suppose that the harmonies of the heavenly choirs quite outmeasure the best efforts of earthly choirs, and hence could not hope that the Lord will receive our songs of praise because of their intrinsic merit. Their acceptance at all will be because they are expressions of the heart sentiments; and this being true all who have heart sentiments

of thankfulness and gratitude should be encouraged to make "a joyful noise unto the Lord," as acceptable and pleasing to him through the merit of our Redeemer.

"Let all his children sing
Glad songs of praise to God!
The children of the heavenly King
Should tell their joys abroad."

(2) It should be remembered that fleshly Israel was typical, and that their priests and Levites, selected for the offering of sacrifice and for the offering of praise, typified the Church, the "royal priesthood," and household of faith. We are to remember, too, that their songs of praise typified the songs and melodies of *our hearts*. From this standpoint we see that the setting apart of a special choir of Levites for praise would not be in any sense of the word a sanction or command for the selection of trained choirs, separate and distinct from the congregation of the Lord's people: indeed, it would quite contradict the common practice of hiring unbelievers to do church singing. None can offer acceptable praise to God except those who are of the priestly tribe, – "the household of faith."

Amongst those who were present at the laying of the foundation stone at the rebuilding of the Temple were some who probably as small children could dimly recollect the glorious Temple of Solomon, and who now, returning from seventy years' captivity, were eighty or more years old. These wept as they contrasted the glorious things of the past with the small beginnings before them. Doubtless there was a great contrast, and yet quite probably distance and childhood's eyes lent an enchanted glory to their recollection of the former things. But their cries were drowned with the rejoicing of hope, and this was well. So with Christians **[R2511 : page 203]** who have gotten free from Babylon, and who are seeking by the Lord's grace to build their faith again on the old foundation laid by Christ and the apostles at the beginning of this age – they are apt to think backward to the blessings

and privileges of the early Church, and to weep and sigh for those by-gone blessings. It is well that we should highly esteem the favors of God manifested in the primitive Church, its simplicity of worship and purity of faith and apostolic privileges, to the intent that these may stand before our minds as ideals in the work of reconstructing our faith and hope and love upon the old foundation; but it would be quite improper for us to give way to weeping at such moments; [R2512 : page 203] rather should the necessities and exigencies of our time lead us to energy and the thought of divine favor in our deliverance from Babylon, lead us to rejoice and to sing the new song which the Lord has put into our mouths, even his loving kindness.

"The people of the land" were of mixed nationality, placed as colonists in that portion of the country of Palestine previously occupied by the ten tribes. This colonizing of mixed peoples was in pursuance of the general policy of the Assyrian and Chaldean empires, of removing captives from their native soil to new homes, thus breaking the ties of the fatherland, destroying patriotic feelings, that by these means the sympathies and interests of the people might be the more readily attracted to and united with the one central government at Babylon.

These "people of the land" (subsequently known as Samaritans) were disposed to be friendly to the returned Israelites, and proffered their aid in the building of the Temple, but their assistance was refused, the Israelites realizing that if these "strangers" were permitted to share in the work of constructing the Temple they could with propriety claim a share also in the character of the worship which would be established therein, and they foresaw that it would open the door to laxity in religious matters, and perhaps to the old idolatry, on account of which the Lord had so severely chastised them. Their course in this matter has been freely criticised as "narrow" and ungenerous, by those who have not rightly appreciated the situation. We are to remember that God's covenants were exclusively to the seed of Abraham, and not to other peoples, who were known as Gentiles.

As an illustration of this exclusiveness, and a proof of its propriety, we note the fact that our Lord did not preach to others than the seed of Abraham, saying to his disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And of himself he said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." – Matt. 10:5; 15:24.

It would be well for those of Spiritual Israel who are now returning from captivity in the various provinces of "Babylon the Great" to remember this lesson. They find mixed peoples ready to express more or less of sympathy with them, and to offer more or less of cooperation in the reestablishment of the true worship of God in its primitive simplicity. The natural inclination would be to accept such proffered assistance, and to call every such assistant a "brother," and to accept and use not only the labor but the gold proffered, regardless of the fact that it comes not from true Israelites. Indeed, the general tendency of our time is not only to be willing to accept the money and other aid of worldly people in the Lord's service, but to beg for it, and to scheme to get it by every device conceivable, – fairs, suppers, subscriptions, collections, etc., etc. The tendency in every case must be to bring in a foreign and unsanctified influence, and to do great injury to the true Israelites. This indeed may be said to be one of the chief troubles with nominal Protestantism to-day. Zion is full of "strange children," and their voice and influence predominate in the business affairs of the churches, in the doctrines, etc., etc. The true Israelites in comparison are but as a little flock of sheep amongst many goats and some wolves.

When "the people of the land" found that their money and services were not acceptable, and that they could have neither part nor lot in the construction of the Lord's house, it offended them and made them enemies; and from that time onward they persistently opposed the work of the Israelites. So it will be with Spiritual Israel; those who conscientiously live separate from the world in spiritual matters, and

recognize as brethren in Christ only those who confess to circumcision of the heart and adoption into God's family, will find themselves opposed by moralists, liberalists and higher critics, as well as by the masses, who hate the light, because it condemns their darkness – doctrinal and otherwise. Nevertheless, this is the only good and safe course to pursue. Better far is it that only true Israelites should be recognized as brethren, and thus the wheat be separated from the tares.

Some one has well said: – "The Christian in the world is like a ship in the ocean. The ship is safe in the ocean so long as the ocean is not in the ship." One of the great difficulties with Christianity to-day is that it has admitted the strangers, the "people of the land," and recognized them as Christians. It does injury, not only to the Christians, by lowering their standards (for the *average* will be considered the standard), but it also injures the "strangers," by causing many of them to believe themselves thoroughly safe, and needing no conversion, because they are outwardly respectable, and perhaps frequently attendants at public worship. It [R2512 : page 204] lowers the standard of doctrine also, because the minister who realizes that at least three-fourths of his congregation would be repelled by the presentation of strong meat of truth, withholds the same, and permits those who need the strong meat, and could appreciate and use it to advantage, to grow weak, to starve. Furthermore, the worldly spirit and the fuller treasury have attracted "strangers" into the professed ministry of the Gospel, many of whom know not the Lord, neither his Word, and who consequently are thoroughly unprepared to feed the true sheep, were they ever so well disposed.

The lesson in connection with the building of the Temple, the Lord's Church, "which temple ye are," is that worldly persons, worldly methods and worldly aid and wisdom are to be rejected. As all the living stones are to be polished, fitted and prepared under the eye and direction of the great master-builder, the Lord, so all the servants, all the ministers of the truth, engaging in this work, are to be, so far as we have to do with the matter, such only as manifest a circumcision of

heart, and thus show themselves to be Israelites indeed. Much and serious has been the injury done to the Lord's cause by the selection of workmen whose chief recommendation has been that they had some ability as public speakers, a good address. Rather let us remember that none may engage in this work as true Israelites unless they be in full accord with the Master-builder, and by their ability in rightly dividing the Word of truth show themselves to be workmen that need not to be ashamed. – 1 Pet. 2:5,9; 1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Tim. 2:15.
