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REBUILDING THE TEMPLE.

– EZRA 3:10-4:5. – *OCTOBER 22.* –

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

LOYALTY to the Lord, and faith in his promises, are costly. The Lord has so arranged the matter, to the intent that only those who are willing to pay the price may enjoy these blessings. Only the faithful and the obedient are willing to pay the price. Thus the Lord proves his people, separating the merely nominal believers from the true, selecting to himself his "jewels," his "peculiar people."

This principle applied to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon captivity, in response to the Lord's provision through the proclamation of King Cyrus. Out of the great hosts of that nation carried captive – first the ten tribes, and later the two tribes – there were only Forty-two Thousand Three Hundred Sixty (42,360) of the proper faith in God and the Abrahamic promise, and of the proper zeal and courage, etc., ready to respond. The remainder of the nation had become so comfortably settled in Babylon, socially and financially, that their interests in these things outweighed their faith in the Abrahamic promise. Thus God sifted the nation, and in this motley group from all the tribes he had the jewel class – the very best and most loyal part of all the seed of Abraham. As the Apostle explains in respect to the elect Church in this gospel age, so we might say of these Jews returning from Babylonian exile, that there were not many of them [R3648 : page 314] great, or wise, or learned, or noble, according to the course and wisdom of this world.

HOPES DEFERRED. TRIALS MANY.

Nor had their trials ceased with the surrender of brighter prospects in Babylonia. They left their friends in Babylon, full of zeal,

and to some extent admired by their more worldly-wise compatriots, who preferred to remain in the foreign land. The escort granted them by the king, the presents of money, and the costly vessels of the temple service, were with them, and their hopes ran high as they began their journey of nearly 800 miles, about the distance from Philadelphia to Chicago. According to tradition, they must have been about four months travelling, whereas an express train in our day would make the distance in seventeen hours.

The toilsome journey ended, they finally rested at Jerusalem, only to find still greater discouragements. But a very few of them had ever seen the place before, and those few had seen through the eyes of childhood, for the city had lain desolate, according to the Word of the Lord, for seventy years. (2 Chron. 36:21.) The wall and the temple had been demolished by Nebuchadnezzar's orders, and many of the private residences were also left in ruins, and now for seventy years of such desolations, "without inhabitant," the place was a wilderness. Trees were growing in what formerly were streets. Everything was disorder. Any other class than those full of faith and zeal, as these were, would have been utterly discouraged. We are to remember that the Lord thus tries our courage, and faith and zeal, not to destroy these qualities, but to deepen and fix them – to establish us, to develop us in character. As with the typical Israelites there, so it is now with the spiritual Israelites – all such trying experiences, under divine providence, will work out to our advantage if we will but persevere in our faith, and love, and zeal. **[R3649 : page 314]**

It required more than a year to put themselves in reasonable condition for living, and then their attention turned to the rebuilding of the temple. That they should have begun so soon to think of the house of the Lord speaks well of their spiritual condition. It is at this point that our lesson properly begins, describing the laying of the foundation of the temple, and the priests and the Levites, appropriately robed, making a joyful noise before the Lord, as representing the faith and confidence of the people in the precious

promises associated with that temple and with that city. Alas, poor Jews! we sympathize with them greatly as we remember that as a nation they clung to those Abrahamic promises for over 1,600 years, and yet finally rejected the Prince of life, and in consequence were left desolate, as a house, or nation. The Apostle remarks, concerning their faith in the Abrahamic promise, "unto which promise our twelve tribes instantly serving God hope to come."

How glad we are for the poor Jews that although Israel hath not obtained the chiefest favor, but only the "elect" have obtained it, while the rest were blinded, nevertheless God's mercy and favor still have them in mind, and assure us that they shall obtain mercy through our mercy, shortly – that the blindness that has been on Israel, during the selection of Spiritual Israel, will surely pass away, furnishing them the chief opportunity for reconciliation to God, under the New Covenant provisions of the Millennial age. – Heb. 8:10-12.

A NEW SONG IN MY MOUTH.

As with the mind's eye we see those poor but faithful Israelites, out of all the tribes, praising God as they laid the foundation of the Temple, it suggests to us how much more the spiritual Israelites who have returned from mystic Babylon should shout and sing the praises of our King from our higher standpoint of knowledge and appreciation of his grace and truth. Speaking of us, the spiritual Israelites, the Prophet declares, "Thou hast put a new song into my mouth, even the loving-kindness of our God." All spiritual Israelites, who are in the right attitude of heart toward the Lord, are full of songs of gratitude and praise – not always audibly, however, for many can best sing and make melody in their hearts unto the Lord; and indeed the Psalm of Life, which each of the Lord's followers declares in actions and words to those about him, is the best testimony, the best praise we can raise, more to the glory of our King than any others.

If the Israelites who remained in Babylon, whose faith and courage were insufficient, could have witnessed the scene at a

distance, they doubtless would have shouted for joy, that they had not undertaken such a pilgrimage and such a work of restoration; but as Paul and Silas could sing in the prison, with their backs bleeding from the cruel lash, while others enjoying every luxury of life in the same city were miserable, so it was with those returned Israelites. Full of faith and hope, they were also filled with joy as they looked forward in prospect for still further favors from the Lord, in harmony with his glorious promises. And so it is with the Lord's people to-day: our rejoicing is not because of temporal favors and advantages and privileges, but on account of those joys which are ours through faith and hope, inspired by the divine promises – the culmination of the same promises for which the natural Israelites were aspiring, and which are secured to us through the great Jew of the seed of Abraham, our Redeemer, our Bridegroom.

The shouts were discordant – some of joy, some of weeping. Those who looked forward in hope shouted for joy. Those who looked backward, and pictured before their minds Solomon's grand Temple, wept as they thought of the insignificance of the present one in comparison. And so to-day among spiritual Israelites, there are some who weep for the past, when they should be rejoicing for the future. The Apostle exhorts us to "forget the things which are behind, and to press forward to the things which are before." The lessons we learn from past experiences, even from adverse experiences, while they should be kept in memory, need not be mourned over by spiritual Israelites, for they can call to mind that the merit of Christ's sacrifice covers all of their unwilling blemishes and mistakes. Carrying with them their experiences they should press forward to fresh victories and fresh joys in the Lord.

"FIRST PURE, THEN PEACEABLE."

We are to remember that these 42,000 people, about 35,000 of whom are supposed to have belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and Levi, and about 11,000 from the other nine tribes,

occupied only a small district in Palestine, about twenty-five miles square, Jerusalem being the center. The remainder of the territory of Palestine was more or less settled by immigrants. The king of Babylon followed the practice of moving the [R3649 : page 315] captives from one nation into the territory of another, so that their old associations being broken up they would be more dependent upon the Babylonian government and lose their own natural traits. These people of various nationalities that had settled in Palestine had acquired some of the traditions of the land and its religious customs, and in our Lord's day, 566 years later, they were known as the Samaritans. Of them our Lord said, "Ye believe ye know not what; we know what we believe, for salvation is of the Jews." Respecting the same people, we remember our Lord's commandments as he sent forth the twelve apostles and later also the seventy disciples to proclaim him, he said, "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." – Matt. 10:5,6.

These mixed peoples, whom we will for convenience call Samaritans, paid little attention to the Jews returned from Babylon until they heard of their project of rebuilding the Temple on its own site, the consecrated site, for it is supposed that Abraham's typical offering of Isaac was made upon this very "dome of the rock" upon which the Temple was built, a rock that to this day is held sacred by Musselmans, Jews and Christians. The Samaritans had been unneighborly up to this time, but now seemed to catch an inspiration from this Temple building as they remembered the ancient glories of the nation of this land, whose great king Solomon had built the first Temple. Ceasing to act as enemies, the Samaritans proffered their assistance in the building of the Temple. We cannot doubt that they were sincere in this proposition, and that really their religious fervor impelled them to make it.

Many commentators think the Israelites made a great mistake in rejecting their aid and declining to affiliate with them. But such

commentators are evidently in error, since our Lord Jesus by his conduct and words fully substantiated the thought that the Samaritans had nothing whatever to do with the true Temple and its building. God had been sifting the true seed of Abraham to select from it the faithful few, and now to have invited the Samaritans to come in and join them in the Temple building and Temple services would have been to bring in a semi-heathen mixture, which the Lord did not desire. Why the Lord did not desire it can be seen only from the one standpoint – not that it was his wish to send those Samaritans to eternal torment, nor that he wished to destroy them in the Second Death, but that he has for future development a great plan of salvation which will affect every nation, people, kindred and tongue, including these Samaritans. In the interim he wished to develop the typical seed of Abraham, and subsequently the spiritual seed of Abraham, to be his agents and representatives in conferring his blessings upon all nations.

"WHICH TEMPLE YE ARE."

We find the same thought abroad to-day, troubling those who have come out of Babylon, and who are wishing to build the true Temple of God referred to in our golden text – the holy temple, the antitypical temple, "which temple ye are." The foundations of our temple were laid at Pentecost, under apparently very unfavorable conditions from the world's standpoint – a dead leader, and a handful of a few hundred disciples scattered and considerably discouraged. Nevertheless, those who recognize the Lord's hand in the matter see things differently: with the eye of faith they discern in Jesus the great rock of our Salvation typified by the "rock of the dome," the top of Mt. Zion, on which the altar of sacrifice stood. The same eye of faith now discerns that the twelve apostles are the foundation stones of divine appointment, built upon the rock Christ Jesus; and that upon the ministries of those appointed representatives of Christ, a glorious church, a glorious temple of the Lord is being erected. Those who then had the eye of faith shouted for joy, and all who since possess the same spiritual vision rejoice in the greater work which the Lord is

accomplishing, as they see the preparation now of the "living stones," which, by and by, in the first resurrection, shall be brought together complete as the glorious temple of God, in and through which all the families of the earth may have intercourse with God to their blessing.

There are numerous "Samaritans" to-day who have neither part nor lot in this great temple and its construction. These Samaritans are found in churches of nearly all denominations, men and women of good character and of religious inclinations. Some of them are "good Samaritans," ready to relieve the sick, the indigent. Worldly wisdom says that these should all be recognized as "Israelites indeed," even though they be not fully consecrated to the Lord to do his will. Many are inclined to upbraid us now, as they upbraided the natural Israelites, for refusing the fellowship and cooperation of the Samaritans of their day.

ONLY ONE NARROW WAY.

There is but one course for the Lord's people to follow: they should appreciate whatever is good in these their neighbors and friends, they should deal justly and kindly with them, but they should remember that as **[R3650 : page 315]** oil and water will not mix, so likewise there cannot be any real union between the consecrated and the unconsecrated in respect to their religious views and their endeavors to cooperate in the divine service. Their standpoints are opposite, affiliations are injurious to both parties. If the spiritually begotten ones, the Israelites indeed, attempt to meet the ideas of the Samaritan class, they will be compromising their own covenant with the Lord. Likewise, if the Samaritan class or the churchianity class of our day be encouraged to affiliate with the consecrated, it will injure them in that it will deceive them into thinking that they have become joint-heirs in the divine promises; whereas none can inherit under those promises except through faith in the Redeemer, circumcision in the heart, and a full consecration unto the death. Such only become

regularly and legitimately Israelites indeed, probationary members of the "very elect" Church.

When their cooperation in temple building, etc., was declined, the Samaritans became the bitter opponents of the Jews, whom they, no doubt, described as bigoted. Consistently with their views of the subject they did all in their power, politically and otherwise, to hinder the temple building, and thus the trials and difficulties of the servants of God were greatly increased and multiplied.

So it is to-day. Those who are faithful to the Lord, "the people who do know their God," are esteemed to be religious bigots and fanatics by some of the respectable [R3650 : page 316] of churchianity, who, in harmony with their erroneous conceptions of the situation, are doing all in their power to hinder us in the great work of this Gospel age, the preparation of the living stones of this Temple. We need to understand the situation properly, otherwise we would soon be discouraged, and think of God as being against us because he permits such opposition. But with the right view of things before our minds we may realize that all the oppositions of churchianity are really beneficial to us, helpful in that they serve to do the chiseling and polishing of our characters, necessary to fit and prepare us for honorable stations in the temple of glory soon to be completed. One thought not to be lost sight of is, that in the Lord's arrangement we are the stones, he the master workman – and all the trials and difficulties and oppositions and perplexities and disappointments of our experience are the chisels and the wheels and the emery-sand for our preparation. From this standpoint only are we able to follow the Apostle's advice to rejoice in tribulations also.

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