

THE SECOND TEMPLE'S FOUNDATION

– *EZRA 3:1-4; 5.* – *OCTOBER 22.* –

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise." – Psa. 100:4.

THE JOURNEY from Babylon to Jerusalem required about five months. Ezra, with his smaller company, subsequently made the journey in four months. We can well imagine the enthusiasm of this company of captives, of all the tribes, people of all ages. A few of the very aged remembered having seen the land and the city in their childhood.

Arrived at their destination they found terrible dilapidation. The crumbling hand of time had co-operated with the destructive fires of Nebuchadnezzar's army, seventy years previous. To live in the city was scarcely practicable. The people scattered in the country round about for a distance of twenty miles. First, attention was properly paid to making themselves comfortable, preparing dwellings, training olive trees and vines. But shortly after, the religious sentiment stirred them to prepare for offering formal worship to the God whose favored people they were delighted again to be.

First, the altar was built on the height of Mount Moriah, supposedly the very spot where Abraham offered his son Isaac – the very spot which was the site of the altar in Solomon's temple. Divine worship began, and the Feast of Tabernacles was observed in the seventh month. By the next spring they felt ready to begin the reconstruction of the temple, and a start was made by laying its foundations. The enthusiasm of the people for the worship of the true God is noted in connection with this service; namely, a foundation celebration was held, and the people shouted and wept by turns as they thought of God's goodness and sought again to apply to themselves the Divine promises.

In this connection we read that some of the very aged of the company who had knowledge of the original temple of Solomon, wept, perhaps in appreciation of the fact that the one they were founding would be much less glorious than Solomon's.

The news of the return of the people and of their start to rebuild the temple of the Lord spread amongst the people of the land, who, in some respects at least, had been recognized as Israel's enemies. Now, however, they desired to join hands and become participators in the building of the new temple. They made overtures to this effect, saying, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as ye do; and we do sacrifice to Him since the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assyria, which brought us up hither."

However, this kind offer was refused, with the answer, "Ye have nothing to do with us, to build a house unto our God; but we ourselves will build it unto the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, hath commanded us." Then these people, repulsed, sought to delay the work and to hinder its building. They even hired attorneys to frustrate the matter at the court of King Cyrus in Persia, and through the days of his son, Cambyses, until King Darius came to the throne. The latter followed out the original policy of Cyrus and [R4894 : page 380] gave full authority to proceed with the work at Jerusalem.

WAS THE PROPER COURSE TAKEN?

Many have said that the Jews in this matter showed themselves narrow-minded and bigoted; that they should have been glad to have the assistance and the co-operation of their neighbors in the building of the temple, and in all the arrangements for God's worship; they should have had the missionary spirit.

Not so, we reply. Their course was the only proper one when we understand the terms and conditions under which God was dealing with Israel. It was not their commission to make Israelites out of all nations; they, as one nation, had been elected or selected by God to

establish and to offer the sacrifices and worship which God had ordained through Moses. They were not at liberty to change or amend the Divine proposition and to bring others into the "elect" nation. There was indeed a method by which outsiders, non-Israelites, might become Israelites – by becoming "proselytes of the gate"; but in no other than in such an open, public renouncement of their wills and by devotion to Jehovah could any one become a participator in the Divine promises made only to the Seed of Abraham.

The Jews are still following the Divine arrangement for them in keeping aloof from other religions and by refraining from inter-marriage with other peoples. God has thus preserved this nation separate from all others; and He tells us why. For them He has a great place in the Divine programme. They are again to become God's people, God's representatives in the earth, after the Elect Church shall have been completed and shall have been glorified on the heavenly plane. The latter will constitute the Spiritual Seed of Abraham and the Spiritual Kingdom of God, while the former will constitute the earthly seed of Abraham, and be the earthly representatives of God's Kingdom to the world. These two Seeds are referred to in God's promise to Abraham, saying, "Thy Seed shall be as the stars of heaven and as the sands of the seashore." And through these two Seeds, the spiritual and the natural, God's blessing of restitution is shortly to be showered upon mankind in general, under the reign of Messiah for a thousand years.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL'S POLICY

The same policy should be observed by Spiritual Israel – "The Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are." No outside, unconsecrated stones are wanted in this Temple. Let the world build its own. God Himself is the Builder of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. God permits his consecrated ones to be associated with Himself in the building of this Temple; as St. Paul declares, the saints, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are to "build one another up in the most holy faith." (Jude 20.) There is

absolutely no place for worldly workers in conjunction with this great work of God now in progress.

Incalculable harm has resulted from the failure to note this matter properly. The children of this world and the children of the Kingdom of God too frequently join, after the manner suggested in our study. The effect always is to bring in worldliness and to give the worldly mind a measure of control in respect to spiritual things, of which they have no real knowledge – "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." – I Cor. 2:14.

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