CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
OCTOBER052024

Scripture Story: Ezra 4–6.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 46.

temple building and you



ALLEN O'BRIEN

flashlight

"This was a time of wonderful opportunity for the Jews. The highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, and it was for the people of God to labor with the utmost activity to carry out the decree of Cyrus. They should have spared no effort to restore the temple and its services, and to re-establish themselves in their Judean homes. But in the day of God's power many proved unwilling. The opposition of their enemies was strong and determined, and gradually the builders lost heart" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 572).

keytext

"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago."

(Ezra 5:11, NIV)

what do you think?

If you could design a Seventh-day Adventist church sanctuary from scratch, and money were no object, what elements would you include, if any, from the list below?

___ cushioned pews
___ wood floor
___ small electric organ
___ large pipe organ
___ piano
___ large screen and projector
___ plush, soft carpet on the floor
___ regular-size clear windows

Although these are important components of the structure of a church, none of these external things say anything about the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When you think of the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, you need to think of the distinctive beliefs that this church embraces. The beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are founded on Bible truth.

did you know?

The name "Seventh-day Adventist" was purposefully chosen as a testimony to our beliefs, "Seventh-day," of course, referring to the Sabbath, and "Adventist" referring to our belief in the second coming of Christ. Currently the Seventh-day Adventist Church numbers more than 21,912,161 members worldwide organized into nearly 95,297 churches and 72,975 companies.

INTO THE STORY

"Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them."

"As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read . . . , they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop.

"Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."

"King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon."

"Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.

"Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:

"Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, . . . so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed . . . must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

"Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. And for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.

"I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence."

"So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia."

(Ezra 5:1, 2; 4:23, 24; 6:1, 7-12, 14, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Why did the Temple rebuilders cease work during the reign of King Artaxerxes?

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The passage tells us that the prophets helped the Jews build the Temple. What does that tell us about the role of a prophet?

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Why do you think King Darius was so kind to the Jewish people?

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What role did records maintained in archives play in Ezra's chronicle of the Temple rebuilding?

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What lessons can we learn from the account of the efforts of God's people to rebuild the Temple over time? How can we apply these lessons to advance the unity and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church over time?

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punch lines

"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" **(Joshua 24:15, NIV).**

" 'Do not be afraid,' Samuel replied. 'You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart' " **(1 Samuel 12:20, NIV).**

"Jesus replied: ' "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" ' " **(Matthew 22:37, NIV).**

further insight

"God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling."

—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 578

Sabbath

Read Ezra 6:8, 9.

Here is a statement about stewardship that summarizes each person's responsibility to serve God with the possessions and abilities that He has given to us.

"We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church" (Fundamental Belief 21, Stewardship).

What does Temple building in Old Testament times and today have to do with stewardship (both in time and resources)?

Sunday

Read Haggai 1:13.

The remnant in today's Bible reading moved forward in rebuilding the Temple even when faced with opposition to obey God.

Had *you* been one of those Temple builders, what would be going through your mind as you felt moved by God to do His work yet were faced with armed resistance? What can you learn from Ezra and those faithful Israelites who kept building the wall in spite of fierce opposition from their enemies? How can you prepare spiritually for the conflict?

Monday

Read Matthew 22:37-39.

This week's lesson chronicles the efforts of God's people over time to follow God's leading in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Have you ever felt resistance as you sought to serve God with all your heart? How can you apply the principles from the Bible passage for today when you are facing resistance?

Tuesday

Read Luke 14:28.

The *Flashlight* quote taken from Ellen White's *Prophets and Kings* notes that the Temple builders in the days of Babylonian King Cyrus lost their enthusiasm for following God's leading in rebuilding the Temple. Have you ever been involved with an effort to build a church, literally with your labor, perhaps as part of a short-term mission project? What impact did that experience have on you? Have you been or are you part of a project to raise funds for a new church home for your congregation? If so, was or is the congregation fully supportive, or is it divided? The Old Testament Temple builders were guided by prophets, so there was strong evidence of God's leading. How do we discern God's leading today?

Wednesday

Read 1 Samuel 12:20.

The word "heart" is seen in the chosen *Punch Lines* as well as in *Flashlight*. The love and service to God noted in these texts are Christian hallmarks. Yet there are times that Christians may lose heart from any number of causes. Indeed, it may be that a Christian has done something truly evil, yet Samuel's admonition to God's people of his day to serve the Lord with all their heart remains true for us today. Through God's grace we are given opportunity to claim His forgiveness for being faint of heart or worse.

Thursday

Read 1 Chronicles 22:13 and 2 Chronicles 15:7.

How are you involved in the life of your church? Are you willing to share your abilities and gifts to advance the cause of God? Read and reflect upon this remarkable paragraph from page 576 of *Prophets and Kings* that speaks about God's leading, those who follow in faith, and how He uses us *today* in His service:

"To His children today the Lord declares, 'Be strong, . . . and work: for I am with you.' The Christian always has a strong helper in the Lord. The way of the Lord's helping we may not know; but this we do know: He will never fail those who put their trust in Him. Could Christians realize how many times the Lord has ordered their way, that the purposes of the enemy concerning them might not be accomplished, they would not stumble along complainingly. Their faith would be stayed on God, and no trial would have power to move them. They would acknowledge Him as their wisdom and efficiency, and He would bring to pass that which He desires to work out through them."

Friday

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58.

According to this Bible passage, what are the character traits of the person who labors for the Lord? How will you apply these qualities in your personal life?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 46.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.