CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
OCTOBER19 2024

Scripture Story: Zechariah 2; Ezra 6.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 48.

build it



THINKSTOCK

flashlight

"Throughout the history of God's people great mountains of difficulty, apparently insurmountable, have loomed up before those who were trying to carry out the purposes of Heaven. Such obstacles are permitted by the Lord as a test of faith. When we are hedged about on every side, this is the time above all others to trust in God and in the power of His Spirit. The exercise of a living faith means an increase of spiritual strength and the development of an unfaltering trust" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 594).

keytext

"So he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.'"

(Zechariah 4:6, NIV)

what do you think?

Being a part of God's people involves personal commitment.

Check all of the answers below that describe God's end-time church:

___ Jesus is the head of the church and the chief cornerstone.

___ The church's beliefs are founded on the inspired Word of God, which consists of the writings of the prophets and apostles.

___ The church has a worldwide mission and message.

___ The church keeps the commandments of God and has the faith of Jesus.

___ The members of the church not only hear but also put in practice the principles of God's truth.

___ God's end-time church has the Spirit of prophecy through the writings of Ellen White.

Now read the following passages from the Bible and try to find these and other characteristics of God's end-time church: Matthew 7:24, 25; Matthew 28:19, 20; Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10.

How is this knowledge about the church important for us who are living in the twenty-first century?

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did you know?

Did you know that at the time that Zechariah was given his message of encouragement to Judah, the man leading the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem had never before seen Jerusalem or the former Temple? His name was Zerubbabel, which literally means "seed of Babylon" or "born in Babylon." "Z," like many of the Judean exiles, was probably born during the captivity in what is today southern Iraq. Not only that, he was a direct descendant of King David, who was a direct ancestor of Jesus.

INTO THE STORY

"In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem:

"Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be sixty cubits* high and sixty cubits wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God."

"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, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—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."

"Then I looked up, and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, 'Where are you going?'

"He answered me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.'

"While the angel who was speaking to me was leaving, another angel came to meet him and said to him: 'Run, tell that young man, "Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it," declares the LORD, "and I will be its glory within."'"

(Ezra 6:3-5, 8-10; Zechariah 2:1-5, NIV)

*That is, about 90 feet or about 27 meters.



OUT OF THE STORY

The Scripture story for this week splices together the messages of two separate prophets who are writing about the same event—the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

What do you find unique about Ezra's message, the first part of *Into the Story*?

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What do you find interesting about Zechariah's message?

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Underline the promises of God that you find in these scriptures.

How did God help smooth the way for the rebuilding process? How did He help the returning exiles?

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What do you think God meant when He stated that Jerusalem would be a city without walls, that He Himself would be a wall of fire around it? Here's a hint: Consider why ancient cities erected huge walls.

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God said that He would be Jerusalem's glory within. What do you think He meant?

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What do these passages tell us about God's love for humanity?

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punch lines

"What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!' " **(Zechariah 4:7, NIV).**

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?' " **(Hebrews 13:6, NIV).**

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" **(Psalm 46:1, 2, NIV).**

"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" **(Revelation 21:1, 2, NIV).**

further insight

"Human power and human might did not establish the church of God, and neither can they destroy it."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 595

Sabbath

Read Ezra 6:3-5.

The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head" (Fundamental Belief 12, The Church).

Think carefully about the following question: If something happened to your church, perhaps a fire that destroyed the entire structure, what would you be determined to do along with the other members of the congregation?

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Now think about how the church would react if a wealthy neighbor in the community decided to rebuild the church at their own expense. Write one word to describe how you would feel.

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How do you think the people of God responded when they heard the decree to help them rebuild the Temple?

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Sunday

Read Revelation 21.

After reading the *Into the Story* and completing the *Out of the Story* questions, what is new to you in these passages?

When Zechariah saw in vision the man (angel) with the measuring line going over to measure Jerusalem's dimensions, almost immediately another angel arrived on the scene to stop the man from measuring Jerusalem. Why? Because the people and livestock of Jerusalem would overflow whatever boundaries were erected.

Do you think this promise of a new and beautiful Jerusalem bears any connection to the new Jerusalem described in today's Bible reading? Explain. _____

Monday

Read this week's *Key Text* again. The decree to allow the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by the newly freed people of Judah was no small blessing.

Although the enemies of Judah tried to discourage Zerubbabel and his fellow workers from rebuilding the Temple and the city, they continued working, in the power of the Spirit of God.

How do you stay focused on doing what God tells you to do when others are disregarding His commands? When you are facing such difficult situations what Bible promises do you recall as reminders of God's love and desire to sustain and help you?

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Tuesday

Read Psalm 146:3 and Matthew 17:20.

This week's *Flashlight* quotation highlights the importance of trusting God through difficult circumstances. A little later in this same chapter of *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White makes a very powerful statement that one might easily overlook. She writes: "The way of the world is to begin with pomp and boasting. God's way is to make the day of small things the beginning of the glorious triumph of truth and righteousness" (p. 595).

In your own words, write what you think she means by this statement.

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Wednesday

Read this week's *Punch Lines*. The first *Punch Line* scripture is one of the most powerful verses in all the Bible. Who is the speaker in Zechariah 4:7? What is the unmistakable message that God wants to deliver to Zerubbabel and all of Judah?

What often-quoted verse precedes Zechariah 4:7? What point do you think God was making to Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Judah?

These two verses remind us that God is truly the "author" and "finisher" of our faith, and everything else in our lives.

Thursday

Read Ezra 4:4, 5.

The remnant of the tribe of Judah that returned from Babylonian captivity was small and seemingly insignificant. That is one of the reasons the surrounding nations targeted them for destruction once they saw them rebuilding the Temple of God.

In every age Satan has attacked those who were faithful to God. How do you respond when your faith is tried? Are you prepared to surrender your life to God regardless of the risks involved? List one or two Bible passages that will remind you that God is your trusted source of strength and help:

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Friday

Read Matthew 7:24-27.

God promised Judah protection as they rebuilt the Temple, as well as the resources needed to do it. Think about your future, your life, where you want to be in, say, 10 to 15 years.

Based on today's reading, reflect for a moment on this question: On what foundation are you building your house—your life?

Are you willing to give God your dreams about your future and let Him lead you as He knows best? What are you willing to give up to let God "build" your life?

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this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 48.

**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.