



## World Christian Fellowship

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### Focus on the Glory of God!

In the second year of the exiles' return, they began to rebuild the temple. This began with the laying of the foundation of the temple.

When the builders completed laying the foundation of the temple, there was a great celebration. There was the music of trumpets and cymbals, along with joyful singing. There was something strange about this "celebration."

**Ezra 3:11-13**, *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.*

*<sup>12</sup>But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, <sup>13</sup>so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the*

*noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.*

- o The older generation who was weeping loudly.
- o The younger generation was jubilant.

### **Why?**

Because the older generation was living in the past.

They were re-living “the good old days.” These people could remember the temple in Jerusalem.

How much more beautiful it was than what the reconstructed temple would look like. This living in the past and weeping was wrong.

It is at the prompting of the prophets **Haggai and Zechariah**, that the temple will be completed. When the temple is completed and the people celebrate, there are no tears.

### **Why?**

I believe it is because the prophets corrected the error of their thinking.

Think about it for a moment.

These older men could only have seen the temple in its last days, just before its destruction. These older men would have been quite young when they last saw the temple. No doubt

they were overly impressed with its appearance, just as our Lord's disciples were awe-struck by the beauty of Herod's temple:

Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts, one of his disciples said to Him.

**Mark 13:1**, *Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"*

We know that in its last days, temple worship had been greatly corrupted.

What, then, was so "good" about the "good old days"?

The only thing one can say was "good" was that it was a beautiful building.

The "peoples of the land" hear that the Jews are rebuilding the temple and offer their assistance. They, too, worship the God of Israel. The Jews know that if these peoples worship the God of Israel, it is only as one of many gods, rather than as the one true God.

**Ezra 6:14-18**, *So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of*

*Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. <sup>15</sup> Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. <sup>16</sup> Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. <sup>17</sup> And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. <sup>18</sup> They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.*

There was a great celebration as the temple was joyfully dedicated, and as they observed Passover.

**Ezra 6:22**, *They observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, for the Lord had given them joy and had changed the opinion of the king of Assyria toward them, so that he assisted them in the work on the temple of God, the God of Israel.*

This time there was no weeping.

Nearly **60 years** pass from the end of **chapter 6 and 7**. It is during this interval that the drama in Persia, depicted in the

Book of Esther, takes place. It is also during this time that Artaxerxes issues a decree, forbidding the Jews to continue work on the walls and city of Jerusalem.

For seventy years, the southern kingdom of Judah has been in bondage to Babylon and then to Persia. The godly saints have yearned to return to the land of promise, and it has happened at last.

**Psalms 137:1-9**, *By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion. <sup>2</sup>We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it. <sup>3</sup>For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" <sup>4</sup>How shall we sing the Lord's song In a foreign land? <sup>5</sup>If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! <sup>6</sup>If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy. <sup>7</sup>Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!" <sup>8</sup>O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy the one who repays you as you have served us! <sup>9</sup>Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock!*

What should we learn from this return, as Ezra describes it?

We should certainly learn about man.

When given the opportunity to return to the land of promise and of blessing, a mere 50,000 Jews chose to do so.

The Book of Esther, which takes place during the 60-year period between **Ezra 6 and 7**, deals with many of the Jews who chose to stay behind.

This is not particularly encouraging.

But even those devout people who did return were “prone to wander.” We see from chapters 3 and 4 that a little opposition and difficulty was all that was required to terminate the rebuilding of the temple.

When Ezra returns to Jerusalem, he soon learns that, beginning with some of the leaders, a number of the Jews have intermarried with the peoples of the land.

If one were to dare to speak of some of the events of Ezra as a revival, we must also acknowledge that revival is short-lived indeed!

The initial enthusiasm of those who first returned with Zerubbabel quickly faded to the point that Haggai and Zechariah had to prompt the people to return to the task of rebuilding the temple.

We can also see that the next generation quickly fell into the sins of their forefathers.

The Jews began to intermarry with the same people who sought to hinder the building of the temple!

They became sons-in-law to their enemies, those with whom they formerly would not even share the building of the temple.

If we expected the Jews of the return to be different from their forefathers, we are sadly disappointed.

We can certainly learn much about God. The Book of Ezra portrays a God Who is sovereign and Who is faithful to His covenant promises, in spite of the failures and faithlessness of men.

**Jeremiah 50:5**, *They shall ask the way to Zion, With their faces toward it, saying, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord In a perpetual covenant That will not be forgotten.'*

This prophecy of Jeremiah was concerning the destruction of Babylon. Israel and Judah had been carried away into captivity by the domineering power. The captives lived far away in Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion.

The Prophet foretells that in the day when God should break the power of Babylon and cast down all their false gods.

Time will come when the captives should return to their own land.

Those who would make their future different from the past must cultivate two things.

- a) The spirit of inquiry
- b) Spirit of determination.

These Israelites for the words are written figuratively we have been going "from mountain to hill," that is, from one form of idol worship to another, till we have forgotten our resting-place.

There is but one resting place for the creature, and that is the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, apprehended by the soul, fled to, clung to, and trusted.

They who would find rest must find it in God.

There is always something beautiful in the spirit of inquiry. The very face of the inquirer shines. That kindling of the eye as a man listens the man who has a thirst for knowledge the man whose soul is set on finding its way into some new region of science, or into some new joy.

Of all inquiries the way to Zion is the first and foremost. Even intellectual inquiry is often either the escape from, or a substitute.

We all believe in a heaven after this life and the way to it is our question.

Those who ask the way to Zion must also have their faces towards the place. The spirit of inquiry must be also the spirit of resolution and determination.

For there is an inquiry about the way which is all speculation. There may even be a questioning about the way to Zion with the back turned upon it, instead of the face.

There once was a rich young man who said to Jesus Christ.  
*"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

But when the terrible words came, "Go and sell.... come and follow," then he went away sorrowful.

There was inquiry, but there was no determination. He asked the way to Zion, but his face was not towards that place.

By nature, all are captives under the power of Satan, sin, and death. That is the great Babylon that has carried captive even the elect of God!

There are multitudes, redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, who are still in bondage under the powers of darkness.

Now, just as Israel found comfort and hope, and had an expectation of getting back to the promised land when the might of Babylon was broken, so there is comfort for every sinner who desires to escape from the power of sin and Satan.

In this great fact that Christ has broken the power of the old dragon. They met in deadly combat. All the hosts of Hell were mustered in that dark and dreadful hour when our lone Champion, whom God had anointed that He might fight our battles, met the whole of them and overthrew them!

They bruised His heel, for He left His body bleeding on the Cross, but He broke the head of the archenemy.

As He cried, "It is finished," He dashed to pieces the powers that were arrayed against Him. Babylon was then and there overthrown!

We who are in the fetters of Satan, may yet overcome him by the blood of the Lamb. For the Lamb Himself has overcome

him and all who trust in His great Sacrifice shall come off more than conquerors!

He has led captivity captive!

He is the master of the situation and His adversaries He has utterly overthrown.

Let every sinner who desires to escape from the bondage of Satan, take heart of hope from the good news that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has triumphed over our great enemy!

Babylon's destruction is Israel's salvation.

**Jeremiah 50:4**, *“In those days and in that time,” says the Lord, “The children of Israel shall come, They and the children of Judah together; With continual weeping they shall come, And seek the Lord their God.*

When men's hearts are set upon seeking the Lord, it is wonderful how loving they become!

The children of Israel and the children of Judah had separated from one another. They each had a king, and they were frequently at war. They envied one another, though they ought to have been brethren.

But now, when God begins to deal with them and they start back to seek their God, they become friends with one another!

We forget our enmities against men when we begin to repent of our enmities against God!

It is time for a man to forgive his brother and his trespasses when he, himself, prays to the Lord, "Forgive me my trespasses."

It will be a very great hindrance to any seeker if he tries to find the Lord and yet, in his heart, harbours enmity against anyone who has offended him.

There are many persons who long to find peace with God, who never will unless they first make peace with their fellow men.

**Matthew 5:23-24**, *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Will you go and ask the great King to forgive you the enormous debt that you owe Him when you are about to seize your brother by the throat because of the few pence he owes you?

Israel and Judah will then be praying and weeping together—and seeking the same Lord.

How often this has happened in times of revival!

You who are encouraged by the fact that the power of Satan is broken, take care that you make up all quarrels and put an end to all envying and disputes, for thus you will be helped in seeking the Lord.

The right way for a sinner to return is first to seek the Lord and then to seek Zion—that is, the Church, or Heaven, whichever you understand Zion to be.

**Jeremiah 50:4**, *“In those days and in that time,” says the Lord, “The children of Israel shall come, They and the children of Judah together; With continual weeping they shall come, And seek the Lord their God.*

There is a difference between seeking Christ and seeking Christ's people that should always be noticed.

You are not to seek Christ's people to join with them until you have found Christ first!

When you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then Christ is yours and you are saved!

Then come and join with the Church below, and you shall, in due time, join with the Church triumphant above!

But remember that the **first business of a sinner is not to seek Heaven, nor to join a church, but to seek the Lord.**

You must be reconciled to the God who made you.

You must experience the power of the God who alone can re-create you and make you a new creature in Christ Jesus.

You must seek the Lord.

"But," says one, "God is a consuming fire." Therefore, come to Him that everything in you that can be consumed, may be consumed, and that God may give you an inconsumable life which shall dwell even in the midst of the fire and not be consumed!

There is no Heaven apart from God,

There is no peace of conscience apart from God,

There is no purification from sin apart from God.

The Lord still says, "Seek My face."

You must first be joined to the Head, then to the members!

First to Christ, then to His Church.

***"going and weeping."***

Some are weeping, but never going and some are going, but never weeping.

It is a blessed thing when we have the two together practically drawing near to God and passively feeling deep sorrow for sin. There are two kinds of tears and I think that they who truly seek the Lord shed both.

- The one is a tear of sorrow because of sin,
- The other is a tear of joy because of forgiveness.

Repentance is not a thing to be once manifested and then to be done with forever. Repentance and faith go hand in hand all the way to Heaven!

In Heaven we will not be able to shed the tears of repentance there, for God will wipe all tears from all faces there. But till we get to Heaven, let us always be repenting of sin, always lamenting that we ever plunged into it and, at the same time, be always rejoicing that our sins are forgiven!

**Jeremiah 50:6**, *"My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray; They have turned them*

*away on the mountains. They have gone from mountain to hill;  
They have forgotten their resting place.*

Our lives are consumed by many pressures which are constant.

- Social pressure
- Financial pressure
- Emotional pressure
- Physical pressure

These pressures force us to look for a solution.

People look to alcohol, drugs, TV, friends, etc.

God wants us to reach Him.

- ✓ He has promised to help us.
- ✓ He will be our shelter from the storm.
- ✓ He is our resting place

They had forgotten the resting place.

Reason they were in captive for 70 years and, they forgot how to be in rest.

They had been the lost sheep!

But now we have come to the good shepherd!

As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ today let us know we have our Great and Good Shepherd.

**John 10:11**, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*

### **1. Set your face towards Zion.**

God made us.

We owe everything to our Creator. Every minute that we live, the breath in their nostrils is His gift!

But how many there are who live as if there were no God at all. This is a terrible thing because God will require all this at their hands.

**Isaiah 1:2-3**, *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, And they have rebelled against Me; <sup>3</sup>The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider."*

After speaking about doom and the destruction God gives the instruction how to be right with Him.

**Isaiah 1:18-19**, *"Come now, and let us reason together;" Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. <sup>19</sup>If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;*

There is no joy like the joy of salvation in Christ!

There is no bliss under Heaven that can parallel the bliss of the man who has committed himself into Christ's hands and is resting calmly in Him!

## **2. Ask the way to Zion**

"Tell us the way to Heaven,"

Yet, when we have told them, that they should set off walking the other way!

**2 Corinthians 2:14-16**, *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. <sup>15</sup>For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup>To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?*

**John 14:6**, *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

## **3. Even during trial focus on God's Glory**

The Israelites return from Babylon found that the land is desolate.

- No temple,

- No walls,
- No resource to live.

Yet they focused on God's glory.

**1 Peter 1:4-9**, *to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup> receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.*

Trials are used to refine us (like gold), and to make us more in Christ's image.

When we are in trials, instead of asking "why me?", we should respond

Confidence that God knows, plans, and directs our lives for good.

Perseverance when facing grief, anger sorrow and pain — we can express our feelings, but we don't give in to bitterness and despair, instead we praise the Lord.

Courage because with Jesus we need not be afraid as He has promised to be with us always.

A better question than “why me” is “what do you want me to learn from this experience, Lord?”.