

# **Rebuilding The Temple**

*Chuck Faupel*

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## **TRANSLATION NOTE**

All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise specifically noted.

## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to the faithful remnant who have found themselves in exile too long, and know the call of God on their lives to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of God. Be encouraged, because He who began this good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

## PREFACE

This call to rebuild the temple of God in our day has gone through several revisions since it was initially birthed in me several years ago. When I first sat down to write what was on my heart, I was still functioning as an elder in a local church. I was deeply committed to the institutional church, and believed that God was seeking to revitalize something that had been lost over the years. Then, for reasons that I did not understand at the time, God called me out of the institutional church. This didn't make sense. I loved my local congregation, as it had nurtured me in my faith since coming back to full surrender to the Lord. I was misunderstood for leaving.

During my time “outside the camp”, the Lord has revealed more and more about the nature of the temple that He is building. This revelation could only come as I have walked the way of the cross, enduring suffering, scandal and great misunderstanding for decisions that I had to make if I were to be faithful to my commitment to the Lord more than 15 years earlier, when I told Him that I was ready to now do things His way. This way of the cross, I would discover, is the path that the Lord has prepared for all who would follow Him faithfully. This is the only way (to decrease so that Christ can increase) that we are positioned to hear and see, indeed to *experience* God's heart clearly.

Since beginning this project, my journey has not only taken me out of the institutional church, but, in coming out, it has allowed me to see this mega-structure that we call “the church” through very different eyes. I have not come to perfect clarity even now. God continues to reveal Himself and His heart and as He does, this call will continue to be revised. But this much I do know: God is creating something new, something fresh. Old wineskins cannot contain what God is doing. This call to rebuild the temple is no longer a call to the institutional church to repent and reform. I believe that we are far past that point. God's judgment is already being exacted upon His church, which some have now called Babylon, or the harlot. Whatever it's name, I have seen that much of it is “Ichabod” and no longer will God's glory rest there for it is a compromised church. Jesus is coming back for a bride without spot or wrinkle who will never compromise. He is now calling for that bride, that remnant, wherever you may be found after so many years in exile to come together to rebuild the holy temple of the Lord.

To those of you who have experienced the bitter taste of rejection by those close to you; to those who have suffered persecution, even at the hands of those you trusted as followers of Christ, for your faithful obedience to the Lord; to those who have suffered shame for the cause of Christ; to all those who have taken up the way of the cross in order to be readied as a bride without spot or wrinkle—This is YOUR call and as a fellow traveler and one who is hearing this with you and desires to respond as He wills, I invite you to consider prayerfully this word with me.

Chuck Faupel  
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## INTRODUCTION

I believe we are living in the most exciting time ever in the history of God's people! We are, in fact, at the threshold of a *new age*, a Kingdom age, which is in direct opposition to Satan's counterfeit "new age;" in this Kingdom age, God's people, not the elite of this world, will rule and reign as co-heirs of the Kingdom with Christ. Sadly, for those of us in the western world, we are not experiencing this excitement in the same way that the first-century believers did, much less in the glory that God intends for the overcoming remnant upon which He would pour out His Spirit. Indeed, when we look at what God is doing in our day globally, the West is *not* where the action is. This does not negate my conviction, however, that this moment in history is a *kairos* moment. God urgently desires to prepare a bride that is spotless for His Son's great wedding day. This is something to be excited about! This will be an event that has no comparison in human history. Our imaginations are not big enough to even begin to take in what all of this means. The anticipation of this event, which will literally be *earth shattering*, should catapult the church to prepare herself to see her long-awaited bridegroom. "*It is time for us to be glad and rejoice and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her (the wife of Yashua) was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints*" (Revelation 19:7-8).

Because the church is so compromised and full of apostasy, this has *not* been the reaction of the church in the West; though there is certainly evidence that God has always had a remnant who is listening to His heartbeat. He is calling us to rebuild the temple where He once resided in all of His glory. I am not talking about church buildings here. Church buildings have become mausoleums that are worshipped by dead souls who have become slaves to programs which have a built-in agenda to control and create in their own image. Neither am I talking about better programs or even missions or evangelism efforts to reach a world ripe for harvest. While we certainly cannot fault the church for wanting to reach a lost and dying world with the gospel, we must ask, "What gospel is being preached to this world?"

The gospel that must be preached can only come out of a vibrant worshiping community which is committed to its Master *to the death*. There is a cross that each of us must endure who would become overcomers. It is a cross that will subdue *our* will to conform to the will of God. This is a death that must occur within each of us individually, and one that will characterize our corporate community of faith. Until this community is established within our own spheres, the church has no corporate testimony of the gospel. The task of God's people is to build this worshiping community. This will not be an easy task. It is a task that works death in us. There is a built-in resistance to such a process because it inevitably undermines the agendas of church buildings and programs that seek to build for the glory of man by way of increased numbers, attendance, membership, "souls saved," baptisms, or budgets.

The call to rebuild the temple is not an invitation to greatness or recognition for ministry. It is, rather a call to be misunderstood, to suffer disrepute, to endure hardship and to risk

rejection. It is an invitation to take up our own cross and to die to all self-life so that we might realize the establishment of the Kingdom of God and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It requires people who are willing to risk and to suffer to the death for this cause. The first century Christians were willing to do this, and we see this poignantly expressed by the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 4:6-12). The church today in China and other parts of the world are willing to do this, and have had to pay a dear price. These people have suffered persecution to the point where those who have determined to build this temple have been driven underground. We marvel at what God is doing in these places, and wonder why He is not doing this in our midst. The reason is that, to date, so few have been willing to make the sacrifice to rebuild the temple.

This small book is about rebuilding the temple of God in our day. The biblical center for this call is found in the prophet Haggai, along with its historical counterpart, the book of Ezra, though other scripture bears importantly on this process as well. Haggai's prophecy was immediately to the people of Israel returning from captivity in Babylon; but it is no less a call to the people of God today. It is an urgent message that must be heard. Indeed, it must not only be heard—it must be believed and responded to in faith.

*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man ye was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:22-25).*

The message is urgent. God is calling us to rebuild His Holy Temple. I trust that this treatise will guide our path in becoming *doers* of this important work ahead of us. Chapter 1 provides a historical background for the rebuilding of the physical temple in Israel following the Babylonian captivity. Chapter 2 applies the spiritual principles found in that Old Testament experience to what God would accomplish among His people in our day.

The rebuilding process was not without challenge. The people of God encountered many obstacles as they responded to the call of God to rebuild Solomon's temple. When they were disobedient, there were consequences for that disobedience. As they repented, however, and became obedient *doers*, the temple was built to the glory of God. We, too, must expect to encounter obstacles along the way; and the lessons of obedience and disobedience that we might learn from Israel's experience are taken up in the last chapters of this book.



## **CHAPTER ONE: The Situation in Israel The Need to Rebuild the Temple**

We begin this discussion with a brief overview of the historical circumstances that necessitated the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in the first place. These are circumstances that are not unlike the spiritual condition of the church today.

### **The First Temple and Its Destruction**

The people of Israel had wandered in the desert for 40 years after their dramatic departure from Egypt. During this time, they worshiped the Lord in a tent, known as a tabernacle, which had to be set up each time they settled for a period of time. When they finally reached the Promised Land, they continued to bring sacrifices and to worship in this tent-tabernacle for some 500 years, under the leadership of a series of judges and two kings--Saul and David. King David, however, had it in his heart to build a permanent dwelling place for the Lord God of Israel. King Solomon brought to fulfillment the vision that God had given his father David—to build a temple to the Lord that would replace the tent-tabernacle that had been God’s dwelling place from the time of the Exodus. This was an exquisite temple that took seven years to complete employing literally hundreds of thousands of workmen. It was ornate, incorporating vast amounts of gold, silver and other precious materials that David had been assembling in anticipation of this project before his death. And it was huge—some 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. We are told that when the temple was dedicated there was a visible expression of the glory of the Lord descending from heaven and filling the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). The site of this temple was supposedly Mount Moriah, where Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, and also where David purchased a threshing floor from Araunah to build an altar to the Lord. Surely, a more appropriate site could not be found for this dwelling place of the Lord where sacrifices would be brought to him in worship!

Following Solomon’s reign, however, Israel experienced a civil war, and split into two political units. This came about because Rehoboam, son of Solomon, ruled harshly and wickedly over his subjects and stirred the people to anger. Jeroboam, who was in exile in Egypt because he had earlier rebelled against King Solomon, led the people of the northern tribes in a civil war against Rehoboam, resulting in a secession of the northern tribes that took in most of the territory north of the Dead Sea. The Bible refers to this kingdom as Israel. Rehoboam maintained control over the southern kingdom, which included only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and which included the city of Jerusalem. The southern kingdom came to be called Judah. Over the next two hundred years, both Israel and Judah were ruled by a series of very evil kings which displeased the Lord greatly.

Israel, the most wicked of the two nations, was taken captive in 722 BC by its neighbor Assyria to the north. Judah was taken captive about 150 years later in 587 BC. Just before this takeover, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw the glory of God lift from above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies in the temple. In this vision, the visible manifestation of God’s presence left the temple and indeed departed the city of Jerusalem in response to the detestable practices that were taking place there (Ezekiel, Ch. 8-11). Indeed, the glory of God did depart

from the temple, and the temple, along with the city of Jerusalem was razed to the ground in 587 BC by the Babylonians to the east. It is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36 that the destruction of Jerusalem was complete devastation. All articles, large and small were looted from the temple, after which Nebuchadnezzar's forces set fire to it, leveling it to the ground. The walls of the city were broken down, and the city itself was desecrated. This total devastation also took out most of the citizens. It is recorded that Nebuchadnezzar "*had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age*" (2 Chr. 36:17). The Lord delivered them all into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This defeat was also prophesied by Isaiah more than 100 years earlier as well as by Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk. This was judgment on Israel and it was extended most severely.

As severe as this judgment was, however, God preserved a remnant who escaped the sword. God has always preserved a remnant. These are the ones who God uses to bring about His purposes. We see this "remnant principle" again and again throughout scripture—most notably in the story of Noah who, along with his family were preserved amidst the great flood. Israel itself was a remnant unto God, and He delivered them from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Once again, we see in this story God preserving a remnant who will be responsible for the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Babylon, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, had taken control of Judah several years earlier, and began deporting some 3,000 Jewish inhabitants in 598 BC (2 Kings 24:12-16), including young Daniel. This would be the first of three major deportations of Jews. Included in this first wave of exiles were the highest ranking Jews in city and state government, including the king and his family. After this first wave, the city of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah were without any experienced leadership. Zedekiah was appointed governor at this time, but he revolted against the Babylonian king.

The second deportation, which marks the official counting of the 70 years in exile, took place in 587 BC (See accounts in 2 Kings 25:8-21; Jeremiah 39:8-10; 40:7; 52:12-34). This deportation took place in direct retaliatory response to the revolt by Zedekiah, and included more than 800 of the upper echelon of Jewish society in Judah, in addition to nearly 10,000 others. It was at this time that the sacred items from the temple were confiscated and taken back to Babylon. Gedaliah was appointed governor of Judah by the Babylonians, but was assassinated after only 2 months in office.

There was still a third deportation of Jews in 582 BC, which was a punitive response to the assassination of Gedaliah. Some 4,600 heads of households, along with their wives and families, were deported at this time. The only people left in Judah and Jerusalem were the poorest of the poor who tilled the soil and tended the vineyards. Judah was, essentially, left in a state of anarchy and desolation. Isaiah 61 takes on fresh meaning when we understand these historical circumstances:

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me;  
because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.  
He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and the opening of the prison to those that are bound;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,*

*and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all that mourn;  
to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion,  
to give unto them beauty for ashes,  
the oil of joy for mourning,  
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;  
that they might be called trees of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord that He might be glorified.  
And they shall build the old wastes,  
they shall raise up the former desolations,  
and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.  
And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,  
and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.  
(Isaiah 61:1-5)*

What an encouragement this prophecy must have been to these down-and-outers who remained in Jerusalem, these who were not even worthy by Babylonian standards, to enslave and take captive to Babylon! Later in the same chapter Isaiah tells them that they will feed on the wealth of nations, and that they would receive a double portion.

This prophecy is no less encouraging to those who would seek to rebuild God's temple today. Those with spiritual eyes to see, look around to see the desolation of their society, and also of the temple, the body of Christ, that was once glorious. American and other western societies were once humble before the Lord God Almighty. The temple of the Lord was once a glorious church that breathed life wherever it was found. This church is now as lifeless as the culture of which it is a part. But there is good news for the brokenhearted, the captives. God is preparing to do a new thing! We are not to look back upon the glory of the old temple. He says, *"Remember ye not the former things; neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it?"* (Isaiah 43:18-19). Be ready, people of God. He will bring life out of these ruins!

### **Life in Babylon**

There was now a very sizable population of Jews in Babylon, and as is typical when immigrants settle in a foreign land, they established their own ethnic community there. Life in captivity was extremely difficult for the Israelites, particularly as they recognized that God had allowed this captivity because of their idolatry. There is strong evidence in the texts of the Old Testament that the Jews were persecuted and discriminated against while in exile. Haman's hatred for the Jews in the book of Esther, and the set-up of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, resulting in them being thrown into the fiery furnace, are but two examples of the poor treatment that the Jews received. On the other hand, certain of the Jewish exiles were almost treated royally. Esther was treated in this way, literally, as she became queen. Nehemiah and Ezra both had the respect of the Babylonian king, who allowed them to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild. Daniel also had a place of high authority in the Babylonian hierarchy, though he eventually lost favor with the king when he would not bow down to worship him.

Babylon was itself conquered by the Medes and Persians, just as it was prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 5:25-51). Indeed, the takeover happened on the very night that Daniel prophesied it! The first “foreign” king to rule over Babylon was Darius, a Mede. Darius was succeeded by Cyrus the Great, a politically astute leader who had been successful in uniting the empires of Persia and Mede. His political skill is evident, for example, when he refers to the God of the Israelites as the “god of heaven.” It wasn’t that he *knew* the God of Israel, but he knew how to use their religious zeal to his advantage. God also used Cyrus to accomplish His purpose, however. In Isaiah, God even calls Cyrus “his anointed” and says of Cyrus, “*He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure*” (Isaiah 44:28). We shall see shortly, that all of this was crucial in the eventual rebuilding of the temple.

As for the Jews in Babylon, whether treated poorly or royally, it would seem that they were model citizens throughout their Babylonian captivity. This is quite a contrast to their earlier revolts in Judah while being ruled there by the appointed governors. This was no doubt the reason that they would eventually be allowed to return to Jerusalem. But they were becoming settled in Babylon. Far removed from their life and culture in Jerusalem, they found it much easier to accommodate to life in Babylon. Furthermore, as long as they did so without rocking the boat, they were treated quite well. This is always the seduction of Babylon. Babylon is powerful and efficient and it dominates every area of life, including the church. The Babylonian church has lost its sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and His direction, as it relies on surveys and polls and seeks to find the lowest common denominator so as to increase in numbers and finances. It is a church of false prophets who tickle the ears. It is, above all, a *successful* church by all Babylonian standards. Babylonian society and the Babylonian church are difficult to come out of. There is strong pressure to stay and to support the Babylonian system. But—and I am speaking now to the remnant who are called—we have a calling upon us that bids us leave Babylon, our place of exile. And let us be very clear here—Babylon *is* a place of exile; it is not our home. Like our forefathers in Babylonian exile millennia ago, we, too, are being called to a rebuilding project.

### **The Return to Jerusalem**

Just as there were three “waves” of deportation, there were also three waves of refugees returning to Jerusalem. “Company A” returned about 537 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-11). Their primary task was the rebuilding of the temple, and to do this, they brought back with them many of the sacred vessels that had been taken from the temple by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. The text in Ezra says that God put a great desire in the hearts of the leaders of the tribes of Judah to accomplish this task. . Haggai, the prophet who occupies center stage in our present study, was the prophet to Company A.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of this desire that motivated the leaders to accomplish this task. This would be a monumental task, one that encountered great opposition. Nothing short of a fire-in-the-belly passion for this work would get this job done. *And it was God that put this desire in the hearts of these men.* This sort of desire cannot be worked up through any human effort. It is a passion that must come from the Lord Himself

“Company B” returned almost 80 years later under the leadership of Ezra, in 458 BC. Ezra was trained as a priest, and it was his task to re-establish proper worship in the temple of the

Lord. Once again, the Persian government, this time under the leadership of Artaxerxes, sent with this second company of returning exiles silver and gold from the Persian treasury. “Company C,” the last wave of exiles to return, did so under the leadership of Nehemiah in 432 BC. Their primary task, which occupies much of the book of Nehemiah, was to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem which had fallen into ruins.

### **The Historical Significance of Rebuilding the Temple**

In the days of Ezra and Haggai, the temple was the place where God’s presence dwelt. The very term in Hebrew (*hekal*) suggests “great house.” This was a generic name that could apply to the house of a pagan god, or even of an earthly king (e.g., a “palace”), and the term was used in this way many times in the Old Testament. The term was also used, however, to refer to the House of Yahweh at Shiloh, and it was used to refer to Solomon’s temple specifically. God had promised Moses that he would choose a particular place for the dwelling place of His name (Deuteronomy 12:11). This was, moreover, to be the only place where the Israelites could sacrifice to God:

*Then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there; thither shall you bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord. And ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God, ye, and your sons and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gate; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you. Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest; but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes; there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee. (Deuteronomy 12: 11-14).*

During the time of their wandering in the desert, a temporary tabernacle was constructed. The establishment of a permanent temple by Solomon represented nothing less than God’s permanent dwelling in the land promised to Israel. As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we are told in 2 Chronicles 7:1-3 that when the temple was dedicated, a visible expression of “the glory of the Lord” descended from heaven and “filled the temple.” More than this, the temple represented the unity of God with his people. This was the one place where they could come to worship and offer sacrifices to God. This was a unity with God, based not on color, social status, or tribe; it was based solely on loyalty to the God of the covenant.

So we can understand why the rebuilding of Solomon’s temple was so important to the Jewish people. *This was the dwelling place of the Lord, established by God himself!* This act was not only important in Jewish history, however. This was a prophetic act that has great significance for God’s people today as well.

## **CHAPTER TWO: The Temple in the New Testament**

We have seen that the temple replaced its predecessor, the tent-tabernacle. The temple became the permanent dwelling place of God which was its primary function. With this in mind, the New Testament brings a radically new understanding of the temple. Because the Old Testament temple was the place where God dwelt—a physical building that contained the very presence of God—the temple was also the place where sacrifices to the living God were brought. The finality of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, however, made a central physical location unnecessary because animal sacrifices were no longer required of God’s people. Nevertheless, the writers of the New Testament retained the concept of the temple, but infused it with radically new meaning.

There are two Greek terms that the New Testament uses that are both translated as “temple.” The first term *hieron*, is generally used to refer specifically to the overall temple in Jerusalem, including the inner court (Holy of Holies), the outer sanctuary, and the whole temple complex. The second Greek term *naos*, is more restrictive, referring to the inner sanctuary and Holy of Holies only. Because he was not a priest, for example, Jesus was not allowed to enter the *naos* during His earthly ministry, though he was permitted to enter the *hieron*. It is the more restrictive *naos*, which is of greatest interest to our study, and indeed, which is the primary focus of the New Testament understanding of the temple. The New Testament shifts our attention away from the idea of the temple being a building, though there are some passages that clearly have reference to a building. Moreover, “building” metaphors are used, especially by the apostle Paul, to convey certain truths about the nature of the new temple. We will explore in this chapter three distinct ideas that the New Testament writers have when they speak of the temple: (1) a building (as used in the Old Testament); (2) the flesh and blood body of the individual believer; and (3) the corporate body of believers, commonly called the *ecclesia* or church.

### **The Temple as a Building**

Generally, when the word temple is used to refer to a building in the New Testament, the Greek word that is used is *hieron*. When Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, for example, Satan took him to the highest point of the temple, the *hieron*, and dared him to throw himself down. The references to Jesus teaching in the temple courts also refer to the *hieron*. The only time that *naos* is used to refer to a building in the New Testament are the occasional references specifically to the sanctuary itself, as when Judas threw the blood money into the *naos*, the temple sanctuary (Matthew 27:5); or to pagan temples or shrines. Paul addresses the men of Athens regarding the altar dedicated “to an unknown god:” “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth dwelleth not in temples (naos) made with hands.*” (Acts 17:24). Paul is specifically testifying here that God does *not* live in buildings! With these exceptions, the Greek word *naos* is reserved by the New Testament writers for purposes of referring to either the individual flesh and blood body of the Christian believer, or to the corporate body of Christ.

While the New Testament presents a radically different understanding of what the temple is, it is worthwhile to reflect on the importance of buildings in contemporary church culture.

Throughout Christendom today, at least in the West, the church is almost always identified with a building. While we recognize theologically that the church is something other than this, our *experience* of the church is almost always identified with a building, and for many, it amounts to nothing more than a building. This is a tragic commentary on the state of the church in the West today. There is simply no New Testament support for the commonly-held notion today that the church building is the “Lord’s house;” nor is there a basis in scripture for any of the corollaries of this idea such as “We need to dress our best to go to the house of the Lord,” or “We should be reverent (usually meaning “tombstone quiet”) in the house of the Lord.” Given the brief glimpse of the kinds of people who made up the New Testament church, we can be quite certain that they neither dressed in clothing uniquely set apart for Sabbath gatherings, nor is it likely that these Jewish Christians were somber, expressionless or even very quiet at their gatherings. The Biblical evidence suggests otherwise, intimating that they might have even been a bit raucous at times. Would I be wrong in suggesting that Jesus himself established the precedent, partying with Matthew and his crowd?

It is true that in our culture and throughout the West, most practicing Christians *do* congregate in a physical facility that is specially designated as “the church.” The New Testament, however, knew nothing of a special building called the church. They met in homes, in open air markets, and in the courtyards of the synagogues. What has happened, as the church has come to occupy a place of dominance in our culture is that it has grown in wealth and built for itself edifices that are not so much a testimony to the glory of God as to human pride. I recall a conversation that I overheard in a local church between two middle-aged women. One of the women was complaining to the other that “when the Methodists built their church, they built their steeple six inches higher than ours.” What was sad about this statement is that it was obvious that this fact pained this woman greatly. Unlike Solomon’s temple, which was built in response to a deep worship of the Living God, and according to His specifications, the great cathedrals of today are generally built in response to self-worship designed to facilitate carefully orchestrated human agendas. Even more troubling is the fact that “the church as building” mentality has been the basis for actually dividing and tearing asunder that which is really Christ’s church, His corporate body, over whom He is to be Head. We have witnessed church splits over everything from architecture, whether we have a single pulpit or a divided pulpit, organ music or “contemporary” music, what hymnals we use, or whether we have pews or folding chairs. And this does not exhaust the list of things that divide the body of Christ. All of these divisive issues are *temporal* in nature, deriving ultimately from an understanding of the essence of the church as a building and/or the programs that take place in that building.

While there is no scriptural basis to understand the building as the Lord’s house, we must concede that it is the Lord’s *resources* that are being used for the construction and maintenance of these buildings. These resources do not belong to any individual, nor does ownership reside with the ruling body of any church. These are *the Lord’s* resources, and those in leadership positions are but stewards of them. Hence, it is mandatory that those entrusted with the stewardship of God’s resources be directed by God in how those resources are to be used. I believe that any newly forming body of believers must ask some very tough questions regarding whether they should be congregating in a special building at all, or whether they should be meeting in homes, in rented hotel space or even in businesses such as day care centers. If special facilities are required because of the unique call that God has on a local congregation, the leadership of that congregation should be prayerfully considering whether they should rent or

own such facilities. Newly-forming congregations should be very deliberate and intentional about seeking the Lord for *His* design for physical facilities, much like the designers of the tabernacle (and later the temple) were taking their direction from the Lord.

There are also questions of stewardship that long-standing congregations with current real estate holdings must address. Facilities do need to be maintained properly, but where is the dividing line between faithful stewardship of physical facilities and extravagant “extras”? Such extravagance is so easily justified with rationalizations such as “We want to become a seeker-friendly church,” or “God’s house deserves nothing but the best” (again, a result of the error of seeing the physical facilities as God’s house). These are but rationalizations for extravagance. There is, I believe, an even more radical question that established, property-owning congregations must ask and answer: that is whether or not their holdings should be liquidated and the money obtained used to do the real mission of the church. Regardless of how the question of ownership of church property is answered, it is mandatory that we abandon the idea that physical facilities in any way constitute “the church.” Such facilities, when used properly, are merely *a means* by which the true temple of God is created, maintained and nurtured.

### **The Temple as Our Bodies**

The first reference to the body as a temple in the New Testament is from Jesus himself, where he responded to the Jews asking for a miraculous sign proving that he had authority to drive out the money changers by saying, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (John 2:19). The Jewish leaders to whom he was speaking thought that he was referring to Herod’s temple, but John makes it clear that he was referring to his own body. The term here for temple is the Greek *naos*. Matthew writes that when Jesus cried out in a loud voice and gave up his spirit, that the curtain of the temple (*naos*) was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Christ’s body was not only the temple, but in the tearing of his body, the barrier—the veil that is His flesh (Hebrews 10:20)—that kept us from entering into the *naos*—the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God—was ripped from top to bottom, never to be a barrier again.

It is Paul, however, who makes the case for *our* physical bodies (*soma*) being the temple of God. He writes,

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is Holy, which temple ye are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)*

And again,

*Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body, but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)*

In both of these instances, the Greek *naos* is used to refer to the temple. Paul is emphatically stating that our physical bodies (*soma*) house the very presence of the Lord, in the same way that the Holy of Holies contained God’s presence. This is revolutionary in its implications. We—



you and me—who have accepted Christ’s atoning work on the cross and call him Lord, have the very presence of God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, residing in us! This is a mystery that defies rational comprehension; that the God of the universe would actually take up residence within the flesh (*soma*) of a mortal human being.

That this is the case carries with it enormous responsibility for the temple-person. Indeed, this is precisely Paul’s point in his exhortation to the Corinthian church. Our physical bodies are not our own. They now belong to Christ. What does this mean, in practical terms, and what does it mean, then, to “rebuild the temple?” Paul is admonishing us to abstain from sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6, and this is certainly an important application of this principle. The first passage in the third chapter of 1 Corinthians, however, suggests a far broader application than merely abstaining from sexual immorality. Paul suggests here that anyone who destroys this temple, God will destroy him. Paul further advises us that this *soma* temple is sacred, which is to say “set apart.” We are, as believers, set apart unto God for His permanent dwelling place. We—our bodies, and all that is unique to us as persons—are the dwelling place of God. Any time that we do or fail to do anything that would desecrate this temple, we stand under God’s judgment.

We can readily identify many aspects of the American lifestyle that come under indictment here. Many Americans live a very sedate lifestyle. We simply do not get enough exercise. This wreaks havoc on this holy temple. We overeat, and we eat the wrong kinds of food. The temple is destroyed one bite at a time. Most of us would be amazed (and hopefully convicted) at the way we destroy this temple, our bodies, if we were to take an honest inventory of our lifestyles.

Our bodies are much more than physiological temples, however. We are also psychological entities, and how we “feed” ourselves in our day-to-day experiences has the capacity to either build or destroy this temple. What do we take in with our eyes? Men especially are vulnerable to destroying their temple by succumbing to pornography. We also can destroy this temple by giving way to vain imaginations that promote fear or discouragement. For that matter, whenever we succumb to setting our eyes on our *circumstances* as the reality by which we live our lives, rather than the truth as revealed by God’s Spirit, we leave ourselves vulnerable to defeat in our personal lives.

Our task is to *rebuild* these temples that have been taken captive by Babylon. This must begin with an acknowledgement that these temples *have* in fact been taken captive. Once there comes this acknowledgement of where they are and a true repentance to leave captivity, we are then positioned to receive the materials for the rebuilding process. The problem with many Christians today is that having come to this place, they assume that once they have repented of a particular issue in their lives, prayed for forgiveness and made confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior, Babylon is behind them. Not so! There are crooks and crannies in our hearts still attached to Babylon. We must be in a posture of allowing the Lord to continually search our hearts to identify those areas that are still in captivity to Babylon; and repent as the Lord reveals these strongholds. It is with our hearts that we believe and the confession of our mouths that we are saved (Romans 10:8-10). This repentance process is critical to our sanctification and is the brick and mortar to rebuilding our temples.

The Greek word for repentance in the New Testament, *metanoia*, literally means “to change one’s mind.” It means that we must come to look at these areas of our lives through a completely new lens—God’s lens—that will then lead to new actions. Part of the repentance process is to “*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Indeed, we are told that this is the weapon that we fight with, a weapon of the Spirit that has the capacity to demolish strongholds, and through weapons such as these we “*demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God*” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Simply put, we do not allow thoughts or fears or emotions that would destroy to take up residence in our hearts. We recognize them for what they are. We speak them forth as Babylonian lies (out loud if possible), and in doing so we take them captive and offer them to God, being careful that we not hold onto them or take them back once offered. He will then begin the work of rebuilding this temple. The fact is, we are powerless to rebuild the temple of our lives and our bodies apart from the power of Christ in us! Jesus said without Him we can do nothing. Paul said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we can do all things *through Christ* who strengthens us. We must adhere to these truths for the rebuilding of the temple, which is our bodies, our broken lives which are in ruins. Our responsibility in this rebuilding is but to recognize our Babylonian state, confess the specifics of that condition, and to offer that part of our lives up to God for Him to rebuild. Certainly, there will be things that He will require of us, but this path will be made clear, and we will be empowered—even motivated—to do so by the Holy Spirit.

### **The Temple as the Corporate Body of Christ**

The *corporate* body of Christ is clearly the dominant image of the temple presented in the New Testament, and particularly in the writings of Paul. This body is *relational* in nature, and the focus in rebuilding the corporate temple is the relationships between members of the body of Christ. As we think about the temple as the corporate body of Christ, there are several features of the body as an organism that come to mind:

***The body has a head.*** It may seem obvious that any living body must have a head if it is to function properly. The head (brain) is the control center of the body. It coordinates all other organs in the body. Can you imagine what chaos would result if each organ of the body decided to act and function according to its own impulses, independently of the coordinating directives of the brain? Yet, this is too often how fellowships of believers who call themselves the body of Christ operate. Everyone has their own thoughts and wisdom as to what should be done, how worship should be conducted, or what the mission of the church should be. These fellowships have not yielded to the authority of their Head, King Jesus. This submission is an absolute prerequisite for the body of Christ to function properly. This submission is not merely a matter of reciting creeds that acknowledge Christ as Head. Submission to the headship of Christ demands a death—*our* death. Each of us, as individuals, must die to our flesh, and submit our wills totally to Christ. When believers come together who have allowed themselves to be crucified in this way, and the headship of Christ is recognized and honored, this body will function as it was intended.

***The body is diverse.*** The organism that is the human body consists of many different parts that look and function very differently from each other. This is also true of the body of Christ when it is functioning as it should. There is, first, a diversity of gifts that God has

bestowed upon his body in any given community. The apostle Paul identifies nine such gifts in his first letter to the Corinthian church: *wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, and interpretation of tongues*. In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul further identifies a diversity of offices in the church: *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*. The point here is that not everyone looks alike; each person brings his or her unique gifts to the body of Christ, His temple.

We also know that the corporate temple includes a rich array of personalities, social classes, ethnic backgrounds and yes, even doctrinal beliefs and emphases. The church today, especially in the West suffers because this diversity has been a cause for division. We have confused uniformity for unity, a point which I take up below. *The church is not to be uniform!* We are not all to look alike, whether in social class, ethnicity, belief or lifestyle. This is a diverse body that comprises the temple of God, and He intended it that way. Understand, I am not condoning sinful lifestyles, ones indulging the flesh and its desires in rebellion against the Spirit of God, as part of this diversity. The Bible is clear on this. The church has for too long, however, used divergent lifestyles that depart from cultural norms as an occasion to separate believers from one another. More often than not, such actions are not a biblical response to sin but rather an attempt to achieve uniformity of lifestyle in ways that go far beyond any biblical conception of sin. Such congregations operate under a legalism that equates godliness with conformity to the law, and sin as that which would violate the law. This gives occasion for a controlling spirit to rule and reign under the domination of authoritarian or manipulative leaders in an effort to achieve conformity and uniformity. The New Testament proclaims freedom, and in this gospel message, we find room for a much greater diversity of lifestyle than most churches will allow today. This is a topic that demands much more extensive treatment than I am able to provide here, but I would urge the reader to spend much time in the book of Galatians and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal and imprint upon your heart the depths of the freedom that we have in Christ.

It needs to further be stated that the temple which God is rebuilding consists of both men and women, *working as equal partners* in the Kingdom of God. The contribution of women to this rich and diverse mosaic has too long been stifled by well-intentioned and not-so-well-intentioned male leaders in many congregations today. The temple that God is rebuilding in our time requires *all* of God's anointed people working hand-in-hand. Paul, in writing to the Galatians states it most strongly: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). While it has been argued that this principle does not apply to function or office in the church, if it is true that in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, slave or free, male or female, we cannot allow these divisions to operate in any capacity in the corporate body of Christ. That which qualifies a person for gifts or office is none of these distinctions, but rather the Holy Spirit who generously pours Himself out in diverse ways across the body of Christ in any given community. *Any other basis for determining gifts or office is divisive and grievous to the Holy Spirit.*

***The body is one.*** The human body is a paradox of sorts. While there is a diversity of function and purpose among the organs that make up this organism, they function as one. This is because each part of the body is under the direction of a supreme commander, the brain, which coordinates all of the functions of the various organs. When the body is functioning properly, in fact, we are not even aware of the individual organs that comprise the body. They draw attention

to themselves only when they are not functioning properly. Indeed, when one of the organs fails to function properly, the other organs compensate for the well-being of the entire organism. When the sense of sight is taken from the organism, the sense of hearing develops with much greater precision to assume greater responsibility for the sight that was lost. This is an amazing organism, the human body.

The corporate body of Christ is a paradox as well. When this body is working as it should, the diversity described above operates as a seamless organism. The task of each member of the body is to build up the entire body. This theme is emphasized especially in the letter to the Ephesians. This was a highly diverse church comprised of hostile cultures—Jews and Gentile pagans. All of their natural loyalties and hostilities would pull against them becoming one in Christ. But Paul stresses that they are *one*; that their identity in Christ transcends any cultural identity that they might have:

*Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22).*

In this passage, Paul actually characterizes the church as a temple with Jesus as the chief cornerstone that holds the entire building together. Whether we use the analogy of the body or a building, with Jesus as the head or the chief cornerstone, the implications of this are powerful, indeed, nothing short of revolutionary. *Our identity in Christ transcends ethnic, regional, denominational, even lifestyle identities that we might have.*

There is another emphasis in Ephesians that we sometimes miss in the western church. This is the message to the pagans, often thought of as *barbarians*, that they are also fully part of the body of Christ. This, too, is phenomenally revolutionary. Paul is saying emphatically that these people do not have to become like the Jews in order to be part of the body of Christ. Indeed, Paul went to the mat on this one with the church leaders in Jerusalem regarding the issue of circumcision. This was no small matter for the early Jewish Christians. Circumcision was a sacred issue to them, much more central to their beliefs and practices than the rituals and doctrines to which we force people to conform in the church today. (The list is almost endless here, ranging from water baptism to church music to the rituals imposed for a genuine “born again” experience.) Paul emphatically said “No!” to such requirements. We must get this. People who join our corporate temple, our body, who are from different cultural or even sub-cultural backgrounds do not have to become like us to be one with us. It is very critical that we take a sober look at those practices which have been part of western Christian *tradition* that would tend to disenfranchise those who are not trained in or comfortable with these traditions. Even the “spiritual language” that we use is foreign to many who would otherwise passionately receive the good news that we so desire to share. We need to look closely at the spiritual jargon that we use in the church. Much of it, I am afraid, is used to distinguish and separate us from other members of the body of Christ in different theological traditions. Our spiritual language that has become encrusted with centuries of tradition can also seem irrelevant to a world for whom Christ gave His life. Paul understood this when on his missionary journeys he addressed

the Greek philosophers of his day on their terms and in their language with a powerful message of good news. Examining our esoteric jargon, especially when trying to communicate the good news of Jesus to the uninitiated, is just one way that we need to scrutinize our traditions and take great care not to impose them on people who are “different” from us.

***The body is distinct from all other bodies.*** As a holy temple being built in God’s image, we are unique from all other organizations and groups that do not have Jesus as their head. We are to remain separate from them. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot have any interaction with those outside of the body of Christ, but our identity is not to be there. Paul said it most clearly in his second letter to the Corinthian church:

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said; ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).*

Paul places great stress on unity *within* the body of Christ. Here, he is stressing the importance of breaking rank with any loyalties that would distract us from that unity. As stones that are being laid as part of the building of this temple, we cannot have any loyalty that competes with our loyalty to Christ. This is why it is so important that we not be yoked with unbelievers, whether that be in marriage, in business partnerships, or any other relationship that holds a central place in our lives. Indeed the church itself can become a competing loyalty if the emphasis is on programs, numbers, or any other priority that is not borne out of the heart of God himself. We are a separate people, and our consciousness as the body of Christ—the temple of God—must be our overriding identity.

This truth is emphasized by the fact that the writers of the New Testament chose the Greek word *ecclesia* (*ekklēsia*) to refer to the body that they were being built into. This term, which is translated as “church” in most English translations of the Bible, is an interesting choice, because its use in biblical times was in reference to a totally secular political assembly. It referred to a gathering of full citizens of Greek city states who were called together to make political and judicial decisions. There was, in fact, another term in common use by Jesus’ time to refer to a religious gathering that the New Testament writers might have used. That term was *synagōgē* (translated *synagogue*), which we use generally to refer to the gathering place of Jewish congregations. But the Biblical writers chose not to use this term, which suggests to me that they were very intentional about wanting to be identified, *not* as a religious body, but rather as an alternative community loyal to an alternative government. In the more than 100 times that the word translated “church” appears in the New Testament, only once is a word other than *ecclesia* used. In this instance (Acts 15:30) the Greek word is *plēthos*, which simply means “a crowd.” The reference here is to a gathering of the church together to hear the reading of a letter coming out of the Council at Jerusalem. In fact the word from which we get our word “church” in the Greek, *kuriakē*, is never found in the New Testament in reference to the gathering of God’s people. This term, meaning “of the Lord” (*kurios* meaning ruler or lord), is found but

twice in all of the New Testament, once in 1 Corinthians where Paul is referring to the *Lord's* supper, and again in Revelation, in reference to being in the spirit on the *Lord's* day.<sup>1</sup>

So it seems quite clear that the New Testament writers wanted to convey that what they were about was something far different than merely establishing another religious order. It was *political* in its implications and in its referent. This is not to say that they were establishing another earthly kingdom. Jesus made it very clear that His Kingdom was not of this world. This is a *spiritual* kingdom. But a kingdom indeed it is, and it demands our loyalty in the same way that any earthly kingdom does. It involves a *lifestyle* lived in allegiance to an alternative government, that being Jesus Christ Himself as our King.

If we read the New Testament with the idea in mind that this body of believers, which were being established in the various cities throughout that world, constituted an entirely different *society*, certain things begin to come into focus. First, this “society” was made up of people who were also citizens of earthly kingdoms. Paul very explicitly claimed his Roman citizenship. The Jewish apostles were also part of an earthly government and culture. But this *ecclesia* transcended all of these loyalties. The citizens of this society would be in subjection to earthly governing authorities insofar as this did not compromise their loyalty to King Jesus. Any loyalty to an earthly kingdom was never an end in itself, but always a demonstration of their subjection to Christ and citizenship in His kingdom. There was also the recognition that one day, *this* kingdom manifest by the *ecclesia* of God would rule and reign with Christ Himself. This is a consciousness that God is once again imparting to His remnant with spiritual eyes to see, a glorious truth that we will discuss in Chapter 6.

## Summary

We have seen here how the temple is used in three ways in scripture—as a physical building, as our individual bodies, and as the corporate body of Christ. It is this latter image that the New Testament emphasizes the most. I am convinced that this is the temple that we are called upon to rebuild at this time in history. This temple has been decimated over the years. This temple, as we read about it in the New Testament accounts, certainly had problems, but it was a glorious temple. People were one in spirit following that incredible Pentecostal experience. The disciples were empowered to preach the word and share their testimony in the face of all manner of persecution. And it was not just the twelve who were so persecuted. We know through the various letters to the churches that persecution was rampant against the *ecclesia* in this time. Yet they persevered. Jesus was their head, their chief cornerstone, and they operated as one under his headship and authority. Over the years, however, this temple has come under assault. It has come under the assault of human control, and become a highly repressive social institution that would not allow for any diversity, demanding strict conformity. This was not only in the Roman church, but we saw this in Calvin's theocratic Geneva, in the Puritan's Massachusetts Bay Colony, and in scores of denominations and congregations around the world today that demand strict conformity to a set of doctrines and practices. This temple has also come under the assault of a divisive denominationalism that has been justified on the grounds

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<sup>1</sup> For this reason, I will from this point forward be using the term “church” to refer only to the apostate church or to the institutional structures that we typically identify as the church today. I find the New Testament writer's deliberate use of the term *ecclesia* compelling, and will be using this term when referring to the true church, the called out body of believers who comprise the bride of Christ.

that right doctrine is more important than our unity in Christ. Jesus said “I am the truth.” He promised his disciples the Holy Spirit—not a book of doctrines. He said that it was the Holy Spirit that would guide them into all truth. The temple that God is seeking to rebuild today will be built on *the* truth, Christ Jesus himself.

## CHAPTER THREE

### False Starts: Laying the Foundation

I have entitled this chapter “False Starts” because we will see that after all of the preparation, gathering of resources, and setting priorities, the Israelites abandoned the project for 27 years because of opposition and fear. This chapter will draw largely from the first four chapters of Ezra, and will explore three broad themes:

- (1) identifying the resources necessary for the rebuilding of the temple;
- (2) identifying the priorities in rebuilding the temple; and
- (3) recognizing the obstacles to rebuilding the temple.

#### Identifying the Necessary Resources

*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it also in writing, saying: “Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build Him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (He is the God) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”*  
(Ezra 1:1-4)

Jeremiah had prophesied for 23 years Israel’s exile into Babylon if they did not repent of their evil ways (Jeremiah 25:3). Through the same prophet, the Lord also declares that after 70 years He will return them to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 25:13). He initiates this return through a proclamation by Cyrus, king of Persia, an act that the Lord also foretold through His prophet Isaiah. It is most worthy of note here that God moved upon the heart of Cyrus to provide the resources necessary for rebuilding the temple. Cyrus was a pagan king who did not know the Lord; yet God chose such a man to make provisions for making his temple (see Isaiah 45 for the prophetic word of how God will use Cyrus). It is not often understood by those in the church, any more than it was understood by Isaiah’s listeners, that God will use pagans to accomplish his purpose. That God fingered Cyrus for this purpose was not coincidental when we look at scripture. Cyrus issued this proclamation very shortly after Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall, in which it was declared that Babylon would fall to the Medes and the Persians. The prophecy was fulfilled that very night (See Daniel 5:21-51). It has been suggested that Daniel probably pointed out to Cyrus other prophesies that had been fulfilled as well, including the prophecy by Isaiah (chapter 45) some 200 years earlier in which Cyrus was mentioned by name as the one who would be anointed by God to raise up his people Israel.

There are three types of resources identified in these first four verses of Ezra that Cyrus was instrumental in providing. The first of these resources is the *authorization* to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord. This came directly from Cyrus himself, as the



people were held in captivity under his rule. If the people were to go back to build the temple, Cyrus must release them to go. Moreover, this authorization insured safe travel for the people of Israel. This had become a hostile land to the Israelites, and without this protection from the king, they would have been much more vulnerable to the inhabitants of the land who had taken over. Finally, Cyrus' authorization included instructions for the current inhabitants of Jerusalem to assist the Israelites with material resources to engage in the rebuilding process.

We have the authorization in scripture that we need to set about rebuilding the temple today. The writer of Hebrews issues the clarion call:

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful who promised). And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:23-25)*

These people met *daily* in one form or another. We must be no less diligent, for “the day” surely is approaching. This is the challenge laid down in scripture and it is the only authorization that we need to come together, to encourage one another and “provoke unto love and good works.” Please understand that this is not a call for more church services. We have more of those than we need. This is a call to the *remnant* of God to be coming together as the ecclesia of God for purposes of rebuilding His holy temple. This remnant has been in exile. Many have left their churches and institutional Christianity altogether. Others have remained within what some have called the Babylonian church system, but have been isolated, alone, misunderstood, and perhaps even persecuted and slandered for their radical obedience to the call of God on their lives. These are the contemporary descendants of those first-century Hebrew readers who had been part of an established synagogue (church) system, but who were being persecuted for their obedience to the call of Christ on their lives. This is the remnant who God has authorized to rebuild the temple today.

While we have the authorization in scripture to rebuild the temple by coming together, there are specific acts that will be required of us depending on the situation that we are in. Encouraging one another and spurring one another on to do good deeds will take a different form depending on the unique situation of the local body in which we find ourselves. It may require counsel or discipleship. Our encouragement may take the form of financial assistance. We may be called to take on the humble task of changing the diapers of a working mother's child. The Bible does not speak directly to all of the specific circumstances that we will confront, or the specific tasks that God will call us to do. The authorization for the carrying out of the details of our rebuilding will come from the Holy Spirit Himself. If we are truly emptied of self, and our desire and will is that of Christ in us, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to direct us in these details. It is so easy in local bodies to get ahead of the Lord here. We are an action-oriented society, and we are naturally affirmed by the success of the programs and initiatives that we launch. We stagger in the drunkenness of numbers. Anxious to add to our numbers we launch a television ministry, or programs that will provide a basis for building the mission of our local body. These may all be good activities, but if they are not done under the authorization of the Holy Spirit, they will accomplish nothing. Indeed, faulty temple rebuilding will only result in the

*appearance* of much being accomplished. In this case, all of our efforts will amount to nothing in Christ's Kingdom economy.

The second type of resource required in the rebuilding of the temple is *material resources*. As recorded in the book of Ezra,

*Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things beside all that was willingly offered. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods (Ezra 1:5-7).*

In addition to silver and gold required for purchase of materials and furnishings, raw materials were required including logs from Lebanon, stone for the stone masons. All of this was provided through the authorization of Cyrus who commanded that it be so. In all, scripture records, there were 5,400 articles of gold and silver donated to this cause.

We can be certain that when the Lord calls us to rebuild it will be costly. It will require great sacrifice. Jesus told the story of the man who found hidden treasure in a field. The treasure, of course, represents the Kingdom of heaven. The man went out and sold *all that he had* so that he could purchase the field in which this treasure was buried. Elsewhere, Jesus admonishes to count the cost of being His disciple before engaging on this adventure. And what is the cost? In Jesus' words, "*whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:33). The cost is *everything we have!* Not only will this require our most precious spiritual resources, but it will most certainly also cost us something materially. As we come together to be the body of Christ corporately, it will require that we pour ourselves out materially on behalf of one another. In this temple-rebuilding process we will discover needs that we never knew existed among our members, to say nothing of the needs that we will encounter among those we are attempting to reach—we will discover these needs if we are truly rebuilding the temple. This will be a costly corporate effort.

Finally, the people of Israel were provided *human resources* necessary for the rebuilding of the temple. We are told in the account of Ezra that the total number of exiles who returned for the rebuilding project were 42,360, besides 7,337 men servants and maidservants and some 200 men and women singers. These returning exiles comprised all of the types of people that would be necessary to complete the job. There were the leaders—Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bishhan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah (Ezra 2:2). Additionally, there were priests (v. 36), Levites (v. 40), singers (v. 41), gatekeepers of the temple (v. 42), servants (v. 43), and, we presume, many workers (vv. 3-35). The account of Ezra also indicates that there were stonemasons and carpenters required in the rebuilding.

I have to believe that it was something of a sacrifice for the Israelites to move out of Babylon and return to Jerusalem to rebuild. Jerusalem was by now not much more than a wasteland. These Israelites had settled into a way of life in Babylon, and by all accounts were

treated decently there. But Babylon was not their home. Regardless of how well they were treated, they were in exile there. Their home was in Jerusalem.

So it is that this world is not our home. Truly, as Christ's disciples, we are exiles in this world. We have been born from above. Many of us have, during our time in exile here, built up a very comfortable lifestyle. We live in spacious homes. We drive luxury automobiles. We have accumulated not only wealth, but also prestige and standing in our communities. We have put down roots in our land of exile. We must be careful so as not to let these roots go too deep, because one thing is certain—we will be uprooted. We must never forget that our home is somewhere else, and if we are truly followers of Christ, we will be called out of this land of exile in which we have become so comfortable. We will be called to leave our comfort zones to rebuild the temple of God in our day. All of us who are truly called of God are a necessary and critical part to the rebuilding process. Each of us will bring unique gifts (building material) that are necessary for the rebuilding of the temple in our day.

### **Priorities for the Temple Rebuilding**

We see in the account of Ezra clear priorities established in the rebuilding of the temple. The very first thing that the people of Israel did—before they ever thought about rebuilding the temple structure itself—was to build the altar.

*Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening (Ezra 3:2-3).*

The Hebrew word for altar is *mizebeha*, which literally means “to slaughter and cut up for purpose of sacrifice.” The altar was the place where the people came to make sacrifices to the Lord. This was established early on as the highest priority in response to what ever God did among them. Wherever Abraham went, he built an altar unto the Lord. Moses and Joshua did the same thing. The making of sacrifice played an absolutely central role in the life of the Old Testament Israelites. These sacrifices represented a very personal commitment of *individual* Israelites to the Lord. The sacrifice usually entailed a substantial cost to the individual as they were to select animals that were without blemish. These animals were the best of their herd!

The altar in the New Testament is the very throne of God. Jesus is the one-time sacrifice that tore the veil between man and God from top to bottom, giving us access to the very throne of God. This does not mean that there is no cost to us. On the contrary, Jesus calls us to take up *our* cross and to follow him. Our cross, our personal living sacrifice is our very lives. This does not mean that we will have to give up our physical lives to die for the cause of Christ, though we may be called to be martyrs in this way. Are we ready for this sacrifice? Those of us who are not called to be martyrs in this way are still required to sacrifice our very lives. Paul says that we are to be *living* sacrifices. He goes on to say in Romans 12 that we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The old has got to go. This transformation process, which is always costly, is our living sacrifice. *It is our*

*personal commitment to the Lord—with the recognition that all we have and that all we are is His—that is the foundation for all that we are and do as a body of believers.*

Second, it is worth noting that the altar was built on the *old foundation*. It is not clear in scripture that this was, in fact, the foundation of the old temple. The King James simply says that they rebuilt the altar on “his bases,” the meaning of which is not entirely clear. Most translations suggest that the altar was, in fact, built upon its former foundation. The instruction here for us, I believe, is that we must be careful to build on foundations that have been laid before—most importantly the foundations laid down by Jesus himself as well as other principles laid down in scripture under his authority. This does *not* mean crystallizing scriptural principles into a set of legal obligations. Jesus himself said that he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill the law. He has fulfilled all of the obligation of the law. Praise God, we are not under that burden! I can say with absolute certainty that the new life in the Spirit is sure to involve a departure from traditional ways of doing things. Indeed, it will involve doing things that will be certain to raise concern and opposition (which will be discussed in the next section). This is the very nature of life in the Spirit—it brings with it a freedom to be obedient to the Spirit rather than to the bondage of tradition. This does not, however, invalidate foundations that have been laid before. While what we do may not look exactly like the old foundation—the new temple or its altar did not look exactly like the original—this foundation does, nevertheless, provide a place from which to begin building. The problem is, of course, that we don’t always agree on what that foundation is; we have a tendency to make *everything* in our tradition an essential part of the foundation upon which we build future work. We must be careful not to engage in idolatry of tradition. We can, however, *use* revelation to God’s people in a previous time as a base upon which we begin construction on the new temple that God is building *as the spirit so orders*.

Finally, I would point out that the Israelites began sacrificing immediately after they rebuilt the altar. They did not wait for the entire temple to be rebuilt before sacrificing to the Lord. Indeed, they had not even laid the foundation for the temple when they began offering sacrifices and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles! We do not have to wait—indeed, we *should not* wait—until everything gets in place before we begin our offering of sacrifice to the Lord. We can come together to bring our sacrifices of prayer, praise and worship as we wait upon the Lord for rebuilding directions. The altar is, essentially, the prayer room, the place where we come to make our sacrifices. It is the place where we come to offer our very selves to the Lord, to give him permission to use us, to make his will our will, to put his desires into our hearts and make them our desires. The altar is built. Let’s begin making our sacrifices at once!

### **Initiating the Rebuilding**

After the altar was built, the people began rebuilding the temple itself. This involved two tasks. First, they had to *assemble all of the resources* that they needed. This involved giving money to the masons and carpenters for the work required, and also providing food and drink to the people of Sidon and Tyre so that they would bring the logs from Lebanon to Joppa. It was also necessary to *organize* for the task of rebuilding. All of the Levites 20 years and older were appointed as supervisors to the laborers doing the work.

Beginnings are exciting. I have been privileged to be involved in the raising up of a number of ministries, and it is always an exciting time. It is also a time of much needed

resources and organization. New works must often operate on shoestring budgets. Organization is a much needed commodity. Everybody has their ideas on how things should be done. Often there is a lack of clear leadership. All have a voice. There is probably never a time when there will be a more pure democracy than at the very beginning of any building process. Eventually, leadership begins to emerge, and this must be so. As we engage in temple rebuilding in our day, identification of leadership is critically important. The temptation is to select individuals who have been successful in the secular world, or who have a track record for “getting things done.” This is *not* the basis for leadership in God’s economy. God is looking for men and women who have been set aside for his purpose, just as the Levites were set aside for the priestly role. Who are these men and women? They are individuals who have taken up their cross, and who have died to their flesh. The leaders in the temple rebuilding process that God is about today are individuals who have so consecrated themselves to the Lord that His will has become their will; His desires are their desires. There is no need to promote self among these individuals because they have truly died to self. These are the leaders that God is raising up. Because of the process that must bring them to this place, these men and women are often the last people we would consider for leaders. They have been humbled by their circumstances, perhaps even scandalized. But because of this, they have the heart of God. Samuel had to look past all of Jesse’s sons, men of great physical stature whom in the natural he thought surely, they must be God’s choice, to finally set his eyes on young David who was God’s choice. Why? Because his *heart* was beating for the Lord of Israel, and God looks on the heart. As we prepare and organize for that rebuilding work which God is calling us to in this day, so too must we understand that God’s selection criterion is the condition of the heart. All of the other attributes which we are so prone to consider count little in God’s economy and are of no use if the heart is not ruled by the Lord. A heart that has been truly circumcised, which involves a dying to self, and has been consecrated to Him is the prerequisite that God is looking for in heading up the rebuilding of his temple in our day.

### **Opposition to the Rebuilding**

Opposition to rebuilding the temple took two basic forms: *dissension within, among the people of God*; and *external opposition*. This opposition began almost immediately after the foundation to the temple was laid. Hear how the people of God reacted to the laying of the foundation:

*And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers who were ancient men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice and many shouted aloud for joy. 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 noise was heard afar off (Ezra 3:11-13).*

Amidst the rejoicing among the people over the foundation of the temple being laid, there were sounds of weeping. It was a *cacophony*; there was disorder and confusion. The reason for the disorder is that not everyone was pleased with the direction that the temple rebuilding was going.

Certainly one of Satan's tactics is to bring disorder, confusion and division; and one of the ways that he does that is to turn people's attention away from what God is doing presently to an earlier, nostalgic time. This is especially so in the church. I wish I could count how many times I have heard the cry go up for revival, recalling times in the past when God has moved in a great way. I have also witnessed those very individuals who have been praying the hardest for such a move of God, resist the movement of God's Spirit when it did come because it didn't look like their expectations of God based on past experiences that they were praying for! *I have become convinced that a basic principle of revival is that God's new work will not look like what he has formerly done.* The reason for this, I believe, is that if he were to repeat Himself, we would seek a particular experience rather than God Himself. God wants a people who are committed to Him, and who are ready to respond obediently to His voice. He is not interested in people building ministries based on some sort of experience that they have had in the past.

Who were the dissenters? It was the older priests and Levites and others who had seen and remembered the glory of the former temple. Predictable. God's work is always a new work, and it involves people who have no vested interest in the institutions that have been built up around past works of God. The revivals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in a proliferation of new movements that became institutionalized into denominations built around their understanding of the truth that was revealed in the last move of God. When something different comes along, they don't recognize it. They have become so myopic in their vision that even scripture itself has been bent to their experience and interpreted accordingly. Hence, these leaders, rooted in the past, become the strongest opponents to the new. They are committed to an old paradigm that cannot possibly contain what is new. Jesus stated it clearly:

*No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved (Matthew 9:16-17, NIV).*

The patch of unshrunk cloth, and the new wine clearly represent the new work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks these words in response to being questioned about why His disciples are not fasting as John's disciples did. Jesus proclaims that the new has come, the Bridegroom is here! Something different is required at this time. The old institutions and patterns cannot contain it. Those caught up in these patterns will pull away from the new. Old wineskins become brittle, and if they cannot be softened they will burst when the new wine of the Holy Spirit is poured in. The result will be that the old wineskin will be ruined, and the new wine poured out on the ground and wasted; or that both the old garment and the new unshrunk cloth will be torn. Jesus makes it clear here, that the new work of His Spirit must be poured into vessels that are not brittle with layers of caked-on tradition and theology.

Who are these vessels? They are usually not going to be church leaders. Church leaders have a strong vested interest in the old. Whether we are talking about paid clergy or lay leaders, these individuals have, over the years, invested heavily in the institution, system, or governing traditions that have been built upon the past. They will also be the ones most opposed to the new because it doesn't "fit" with the old paradigm to which they are so committed. No, the new wineskin will be the young mother who has been yearning for something more of God than she

found in her Sunday school class or prayer group. It will be the drug addict who has had an encounter with Christ which doesn't exactly conform to the expectations of traditional churches. This new wineskin will be made up of homosexuals who struggle in their lifestyle, rejected by the "church," yet knowing that there is something more to God than the condemnation that they have repeatedly experienced at their hands; they will not let go of God until they have encountered Him in a way that transforms and brings new life. The new wineskin will be made up, in large part, of people in the cracks, people who have been almost invisible in the old paradigm. In most cases, they will not have a voice in the traditional church, though there will be rare exceptions. These are at least many of the people who comprise a growing "out of church" movement that is marching forward in this country and around the world. Most of them have found it necessary to leave the institutional church because of the compromising pressure and opposition that they have encountered there.

This opposition is the *first* of Satan's tools in his strategy to sabotage the rebuilding of God's temple in our day. If he can divide the body of Christ in this way, thereby creating doubt and confusion, he will have succeeded in foiling the rebuilding enterprise. God is faithful, however. There are people, even leaders, in some local churches whose hearts have been truly gripped by God's Spirit and are able to give Him room to move across their congregations and so transform them into soft pliable wineskins to receive this new wine. Even as I write, God is calling church leaders to repentance, to surrender their ministries to Christ as Head over the flocks that the Lord has entrusted to their care. Some will respond to this call to repentance. Most, I'm afraid will not because they are too vested in the comfort and position of Babylon. God is even now in the process of bringing His judgment on these leaders and their ministries. This judgment is not limited to denominational churches but to independent bodies as well that have partaken of the delicacies of Babylon (Revelation 18). In the midst of this judgment, there are faithful souls who are willing to be obedient to the witness of the Holy Spirit in their lives, even to the point of having to leave their apostate churches and risk persecution and scandal for their convictions. God's rebuilding work *will* go forward, just as it did in the days of Ezra and Haggai, as long as there is a remnant of His people who are willing to risk all, even death, for this cause.

A warning is in order, however. It will not be smooth sailing once this decision to be faithful is made. As we read in the book of Ezra, there was also *external opposition*. Initially, this opposition was subtle. Opposition leaders simply approached Zerubbabel, and the heads of families and offered to help them in the building process. The opposition said to them, "*Let us build with you: for we seek your God as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither*" (Ezra 4:2). How kind! This is frequently how the enemy attempts to destroy God's work. If he can infiltrate the ranks of God's people and begin to suggest something other than what God has commanded, he has won a major victory over God's people. Indeed, this was his very tactic in enticing Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Satan convinced her that he really had her best interests at heart.

Zerubbabel did not fall for this tactic, however. He told the opposition, "*Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia hath commanded us*" (Ezra 4:3). We must not fall for this tactic of the enemy either. We must be alert to this strategy. How many times has

the work of the Kingdom been set back because men and women who are being used by Satan infiltrate a group or congregation and because of their charismatic personality, steer a local ecclesia in a direction that suits them, but away from God's vision for that body? It happens all too frequently. We must be ever attuned to the Holy Spirit, and know his voice and His word to us so that we can be discerning of enemy voices. Like Zerubbabel, we must say "no" to offers and ideas that seem too good to be true, that appeal to the mind of natural man but are contradictory to where God has been taking us.

Having failed at sweet talking themselves on to the work team, the opposition became more direct.

*Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:4-5).*

The opposition has "upped the ante." They now set about consciously to discourage and to intimidate, even going so far as to hire outside agitators (counselors) to frustrate their plans. It is confrontational now. I have personally experienced this shift in the enemy's tactic. Satan will use people who we have even come to trust to persuade and cajole us. If we refuse to be persuaded, and don't give ear to their counsel, these same individuals may turn on us, confronting us with the error of our ways. We may be accused of being selfish, or deceived, or even arrogant. Our closest friends and even family can become our adversary. We should not be surprised at this. Jesus warned us about this when He said that He came, not to bring peace but a sword, dividing even families. This is a difficult place for the follower of Christ, intent on being faithful to His Lord. It is sure to be a place of major decision, a decision that he or she knows will be extremely costly. It involves a death—a dying to one's friends, family and very life—to be faithful to Christ.

*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26-27).*

These words of Jesus demand a preference and loyalty to Him that exceeds that of our most intimate relations. It cannot help but be offensive to those who have their reputations, friendships, marriages or family on the throne of their hearts.

The people were not intimidated. They kept on working. And the opposition grew even more forceful. They eventually enlisted the power of the state, crafting a letter to Xerxes, the new king of Persia. Their letter is most inflammatory:

*Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.*



*Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace , and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore have we sent and certified the king; that search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river (Ezra 4:12-16)*

The opposition raised the fears of a new king by telling half and twisted truths, and engaging in highly inflammatory charges against the people of Israel. They depict the Jews as having an agenda that undermines the authority of this new king; indeed, they suggest that these Israelites are a threat to the very kingdom! The returning exiles are being charged with nothing less than sedition.

These charges were not true, of course.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there had been a rebellious remnant in Jerusalem and there was an uprising in the city that resulted in yet another wave of exiles to Babylon from the city of Jerusalem. The returning workers were not, however, acting out of rebellion. They were acting on the authority of King Cyrus. The new king was, unfortunately, taken in by the craftiness of these opponents to the rebuilding of the temple, and he ordered a work stoppage.

The enemy of God's temple rebuilding will stop at nothing to foil God's work. Typically, he begins in a subtle way, "under the radar." Indeed, he would prefer not to bring attention to himself in his undermining effort. But when this fails, he brings in even greater forces. It is such a common experience of God's people that the enemy attacks with even greater ferocity after a victory has been won. We must also brace ourselves for such an attack, and recognize when it comes. Satan is the author of doubt and confusion, and we are often lulled into believing that we are deceived. I have to believe that the returning exiles began asking themselves some serious questions about the legitimacy of their enterprise. Indeed, this opposition was effective in bringing about a work stoppage, and the work of God was held up for 27 years!

This is not the end of the story, however. It is at this point that the prophet Haggai speaks forth the word of God to the people to get back on task. They eventually do this, but not before they suffer certain consequences. We examine these consequences in Chapter 4.

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<sup>2</sup> There was a sense in which this charge was true, and this merits further discussion. These returning exiles, or at least their leaders, were very conscious that they were returning to Jerusalem in response to the call of God upon them to rebuild His Holy Temple, and eventually the walls of Jerusalem. This would eventually result in re-establishing the Kingdom of Israel. This same call is upon the remnant of God today, to establish Christ's rule in His ecclesia, and it will be regarded as sedition by the Babylonian church system and its leaders when these called-out ones act on their convictions. The point being made here, however, is that this true remnant of God will be charged falsely as being motivated by rebellion, selfishness and all other manner of false accusation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Consequences of Disobedience

The prophet Haggai speaks forth the Lord's chastisement to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They were disobedient, and the Lord was displeased:

*Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, "This people say, 'the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.'" Then cameth the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, "Is it itme for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:2-4).*

#### The Disobedience

The disobedience of the people of God was not flagrant. They were not worshipping highly offensive false gods, such as Solomon did when he married foreign women and began worshipping Molech and other foreign gods. They were not even complaining against the Lord as their forefathers did so often during their forty years in the desert. No, their disobedience was much more subtle: they failed the Lord in their *procrastination* and in developing *wrong priorities*. The people said, "*The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.*" It wasn't that the people didn't recognize that the temple needed to be built. Their intentions were good. They were simply procrastinating! They had become discouraged and worn down by the opposition. Over the years, they lost the fervor that they had 27 years earlier for the rebuilding process. During this time, they developed other priorities, rather selfish priorities. They had built luxury houses for themselves and became rather satisfied with a fat and comfortable lifestyle. Their eyes were off the prize, they became focused on themselves, and they lost interest in God's agenda.

This was almost certainly a gradual and subtle erosion of their zeal for the Lord. These ancient Jewish believers are no different than most believers in the West today. Our disobedience is not usually a considered choice to lead some blatant sinful lifestyle. Rather, the cares of life, the assaults of the enemy wear us down and we lose that fervor that we once had for the Kingdom of God. We recall that this happened to the ecclesia in Ephesus, which was charged by the Lord in Revelation to rekindle their first love. This was an ecclesia that persevered through many trials; but in the process they abandoned their fervor. Brothers and sisters, this rebuilding project requires perseverance. We must not get faint-hearted, and this will require that we encourage one another, even daily:

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10: 23-25).*

The writer of Hebrews is urgent in this message, and recognizes, I believe, that the opposition will increase as the day of our Lord approaches. We are encouraged to come together, to exhort one another. It is not enough to greet one another after a Sunday service. As the day

approaches, those of the remnant will become lifelines to one another, encouraging one another to hold the course in the face of seeming insurmountable opposition.

### **Possible Reasons For Disobedience**

Almost certainly, the earlier opposition to the rebuilding of the temple was a major factor in the disobedient procrastination. These Israelites had experienced great discord as they began the rebuilding process. Older members of the community were dismayed at the small dimensions of the temple because it wasn't as big as Solomon's temple which it was replacing. The Israelites would also have remembered the strong opposition from the Persians, who even enlisted the power of the state against their efforts. The people of God had no doubt been in a place of great fear in response to this opposition. Fear cripples. Fear is *not* a reason to abandon our Kingdom building, however. Jesus told his disciples (including us) to *expect* persecution and opposition.

It should be an encouragement that where the church is most persecuted, it is thriving most strongly. The church in Ethiopia is a case in point. Believers in that country doubled, from four to eight million between 1984 and 1999 according to the international evangelization network AD 2000. This all took place despite the fact that churches were being shut down, Christians were being arrested, tortured and sentenced to prison for years under the harsh rule of Marxist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam. AD 2000 emphatically declares that persecution was the prime vehicle through which the church in Ethiopia grew so dramatically (ReligionToday.com, 1999). We have a choice to make when facing opposition: do we succumb and give up? Or do we resolve together to be obedient to the Lord despite the persecution, even to the point of our death? The Ethiopians were faithful; the Israelites were not.

The church in the West has not suffered persecution. Despite the wailing of conservatives in the culture wars, the church in the United States, and throughout most of the West, has not only been free from persecution, but has enjoyed special protection of the state even to the point of having tax exempt status! There is a massive effort afoot to not only protect this freedom, but to impose a cultural agenda on all Americans that reflects the values of conservative Christianity. I seriously wonder if these very efforts work against the possibility of true revival in this country by seeking to insure a comfortable situation for Christians.

A second possible reason for the disobedience of the Israelites was that they were facing economic hardship. This is clear from the Haggai prophecy. What the Israelites did not realize is that their economic hard times were actually the *result* of their disobedience! We shall return to this point later. The temptation is to retrench during lean times. We begin to count the cost and find that it is too high. The passage (vv. 1-3) emphatically declares, however, that this is *not* an excuse to neglect the rebuilding of the temple. Indeed, this may be the very time that we are to move out boldly in the Lord, as it is in times such as these that require the greatest amount of faith. The Lord states it very clearly through his prophet Malachi,

*“Bring ye all the tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall*

*not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:10-11)*

Finally, these repatriated Jews were just too comfortable. They lived in their paneled houses. They spent their wealth on themselves. They were cozy. This is an awful place for the Christian to be; yet everything in our culture screams at us to seek out our own comfort—to build our houses, to fatten our bank accounts, to seek to maximize our own pleasure. We must fight against this force of culture with every ounce of our spiritual fiber. God’s kingdom operates according to economic principles that are diametrically opposed to those of the world. When we govern our lives by the principles of this world we are living a disobedient lifestyle, which is exactly what the Jews in the days of Haggai were doing. We are being called *out* of our comfort zones. We are being called into a life of faith. Ironically, the only way that we are going to be able to sustain a life of faith over comfort is to do so as the established temple of God. If the temple is not rebuilt in our day—if we are not functioning together in unity of spirit, coming together daily to spur each other on as the writer of Hebrews implores us to do—we will not be able to sustain a life of faith. Individuals operating on their own, apart from a vibrant community of believers who are similarly sold out to a Kingdom consciousness, will become discouraged and soon lose their zeal for God’s work. The temple rebuilding is *mandatory!*

### **Consequences of Disobedience**

The prophet Haggai speaks with powerful clarity regarding the consequences of the failure of the Israelites to persevere in the rebuilding of the temple:

*“Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. (Haggai 1:5-6)*

When we do not seek the Kingdom of God first in our individual and corporate lives, when we become preoccupied with our own personal agendas over God’s temple-building agenda we can expect very certain spiritual consequences. The failure to reap a harvest, the continual hungering and thirsting, and the failure to flourish financially may well be direct consequences for placing our own agendas ahead of God’s purposes. They are also material metaphors for spiritual consequences that we can expect when we are disobedient to the Lord.

How do we sow to our own agendas? We seek public recognition. Perhaps it is individual wealth into which we are investing our lives. Possibly it is simply our own comfort. Many of our efforts *look* righteous and honorable in the eyes of others. We build ministries, establish outreach programs, even plant churches, all activities that appear to be godly, and there may be instances that these are godly activities carried out in direct response to God’s call on our lives. All too often, however, those planting in these areas are sowing to their own glory. We will not reap a harvest if our motive is anything less than obedience to the Lord. Until the temple is built—until the true temple of God’s people knitted together in selfless adoration of Christ comes together in vibrant worship—none of these activities will reap much of a harvest. When such a temple of God’s people is in place and functioning properly, any ministry effort will take on a new power and authority that will revolutionize the communities of which we are a part.

The motive will be love and such ministry will be propelled by faith, rather than a carnal human reasoning that results in “filthy rags.” The difference is the operation of the Holy Spirit in His body.

Furthermore, failure to rebuild God’s temple according to His specifications will result in continual hunger and thirst among those who call themselves Christians. No matter how much we try to fill that hunger with material things or activities—even church activities—we will never be filled. We will be forever dissatisfied. All of the activities of our churches and parachurch organizations, if they are not empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit, and if we do not order our activities according to the directive of the Holy Spirit, will never result in satisfying or full lives.

Our clothes, like our homes, represent warmth, security, comfort. We long to keep ourselves warm. Our personal security is a very strong driving force in our lives. The prophet is warning here that, ironically, the more we strive to maintain our own comfort level, to guarantee our own personal security, the more we find that this very security becomes elusive. My brother, a Certified Public Accountant, who is also a dear brother in the Lord, once made the observation that in his experience, the more money that people have, the more time, money and worry they spend in trying to protect that money. The only basis for our security can be in Christ Jesus and the Kingdom that He is building. Indeed, we work hard to build this security and guarantee our comfort, only to encounter unexpected circumstances that threaten this security. We put our money in pockets with holes when we build on any foundation other than that foundation which the Lord has laid for His Holy temple. We invest in so many church programs designed to bring in more people. We stress the importance of maintaining a “reserve” in our bank accounts to guarantee financial solvency into the future, all the while neglecting the true temple of God. We end up with mausoleums, not a vibrant worshiping community when we do this.

If I were to summarize the consequences of disobedience of the people of Israel—and us—it would be this: *it causes us to atrophy spiritually*. We cease to be a robust, vibrant church, opting instead to become preoccupied with *tradition*, wondering whose feelings are hurt, the size of our bank account, etc. ***We eventually die***. The only antidote to this condition is *radical obedience* to the Lord. This is the good news that we address in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Getting It Right: Consequences of Obedience

We have observed the consequences of disobedience in the last chapter. It is so often the case that we do not make the connection between the spiritual and the natural, or in this case, between our spiritual disobedience and the consequences in the natural which follow. We are much more ready to explain our natural circumstances in terms of natural causes. Those of us who have been trained in the sciences and naturalistic enlightenment ways of thinking find this spiritual connection especially elusive. The ancient Jews did not have this problem. They were trained to recognize the unity of the spirit and the natural. And so it was when Haggai spoke the word of admonishment from the Lord that we saw in the last chapter, these Jews recognized and understood the consequences of their disobedience.

*Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai their prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord (Haggai 1:12).*

The Lord honored their obedience, and was moved by it. The following verse (Haggai 1:13) reveals how God was stirred by their obedient hearts:

*Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people saying "I am with you," saith the Lord.*

Things began to change as the Lord's heart was moved!

### Consequences of Obedience

***Stirring of the Spirit.*** The first consequence of the obedient spirit that we observe is a stirring of the spirits of Zerubbabel and Joshua—a stirring that was initiated by God himself:

*And the Lord stirred upom the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God. In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king (Haggai 1:14-15).*

We cannot do anything with a dead spirit. There is no motivation. Nothing comes together. We are defeated before we even begin! Disobedience leaves us with a dead spirit. As we are obedient to the Lord, however, he breathes life into our being. What we do has purpose. We have a spring in our step once again. Our external circumstances may not have changed at all, but they are not overwhelming as they once were.

What was taking place among the Israelites at this point was nothing less than a *spirit of revival*. This fresh wind of God's spirit was released by the deep repentance of the people of God to Haggai's prophecy. It begins with repentance. Frank Bartleman, a participant in the Los Angeles Azusa Street revival which launched the fresh move of God in 1905 now known as the Pentecostal Movement, has written, "The depth of revival will be determined exactly by the

depth of the spirit of repentance.” God responds to this kind of repentance with a stirring of His Spirit. It began with a stirring in the heart of Zerubbabel and Joshua. There was an *individual revival* taking place in the hearts of these men. But that individual revival spread to all the people. It spread like wildfire, and soon became a *corporate revival*.

The temple rebuilding requires such a revival in the hearts of God’s people who have been deeply repentant. The temple cannot be rebuilt in our own strength. We will become disheartened when opposition from the enemy comes. We will burn out quickly. We will fail. We can only move forth in the Spirit of the Lord. This is why Jesus said in Acts 1:4-5:

*Wait for the promise of the Father, which...ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

Jesus knew that these disciples could not go forth in building his ecclesia without this special empowerment of the Holy Spirit. He had just witnessed Peter deny him three times to a little girl! But look at Peter’s response after Pentecost (Acts 2:14-39), where he boldly proclaimed Christ to a mocking crowd—only about two months later!

All too often we attempt to go about Kingdom business in our own strength. Most western Christians are not well schooled in the ways of the Holy Spirit. We have inherited a spirit of self-reliance—something that is part of our sin nature, but, unfortunately, glorified to a major virtue in American society and in the church. *We must lose this sense of independence if we are going to be effective in rebuilding the temple.* We are absolutely dependent on the Spirit of God empowering us for this task. This work is so much bigger than any of us is capable of doing in our own strength. We must experience a stirring of the Spirit of God within us with such certainty and power that we cannot hold back from responding to His call. And as we are stirred individually and respond, it is contagious. This will become a corporate revival. We will then see communities changed. Nations will bow in worship to the living God. His temple will be rebuilt and his bride restored. This all begins with deep repentance on the part of God’s people.

**Opposition.** A second consequence that we can expect from our obedience to the Lord is opposition. We saw this in Chapter 3. We can be certain that it will come. There is a very real enemy who does not want us to be obedient, and he will do everything that he can to discourage us in that endeavor. Satan is opposed to everything of the Spirit. As long as we are satisfied to “do good things” in the natural, he will leave us alone. He is very willing for God’s people to do all sorts of wonderful things, whether these be feeding starving children, ministering to drug addicts or building houses for poor people who have been left homeless in the wake of natural disaster—as long as we are doing all of this merely out of a heart of human compassion. Our enemy is *not* opposed to good works! He is opposed to the Spirit of God, and when we begin to truly rebuild the temple of God, we are essentially declaring war against Satan. The temple is of the Spirit, and this task of rebuilding is fundamentally a spiritual activity.

In the case of rebuilding Solomon’s temple, the enemy was external, and highly political in nature. It came in the form of the citizens of Babylon, probably government bureaucrats stationed in Judah. We have already examined their strategies of cooptation, intimidation, fear,

and ultimately political force to stop the rebuilding process. The enemy that we face in our day of rebuilding the temple will probably not look exactly like this. Because this is a spiritual enemy, much of our opposition will be of an internal nature. Satan will whisper lies to us that will discourage us; or, on the other hand, lies that might puff us up and make us feel self-important and resulting in false pride. Corporately, we may experience dissension among our body as the Israelites of old did. We see this manifest in hurt feelings and people taking offense. This destroys the unity of Spirit that the Lord wants to build among the members of His body. There will also be attacks on our reputation as we seek to be faithful to the call of God in a world that has been turning a deaf ear to the things of the Spirit. ***We must be prepared for all of this opposition that will surely confront us.*** Jesus knew this, and he warned his disciples of it:

*If the world hate you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you: "The servant is greater than his lord." If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not Him that sent me (John 15:18-21).*

When this opposition comes, our natural tendency is to lose heart and want to retreat. We begin to question ourselves and our motives. Did we really hear from the Lord? Did we understand correctly? This is our *natural* tendency, and it is the response that Satan is hoping to elicit in us. The response of the Spirit is exactly the opposite. It is in the very face of such opposition that we have reason to take heart! We are doing something right! This very action that in our natural selves we would question as to whether it is truly of God is what brought on this attack from Satan. This should tell us that we are responding faithfully to the Lord. What is called for at this time is perseverance. And perseverance will bring victory!

***Eventual Breakthrough.*** The breakthrough that followed the long 27-year work stoppage involved God changing the heart of the king. What is almost unbelievable about this is that this change of heart was actually initiated by the original opposition to the temple rebuilding process, namely Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai. These men sent a letter to King Darius asking him to search the archives because the Jews claimed that they had been authorized by Cyrus to rebuild the temple. Tattenai and his associates were, in fact, trying to intimidate the Israelites once again by getting the names of all of the workers so that they could report them to King Darius. They did not believe Zerubbabel, and they were going to settle this dispute once and for all. What happened next they could not have imagined. The original decree was found which firmly supported Zerubbabel's claim. The response of Darius was decisive and resounding. Not only were they to be allowed to continue, but they were to be given any resources needed to successfully complete the job. Moreover, anyone who interfered with the rebuilding process was to be punished by being impaled!

Darius went even further in his support for the rebuilding of the temple. He sent a priest-leader, Ezra, back to the people to lead them in the worship of God in the temple. The rebuilding of the physical facility was not enough, and Darius recognized this. The temple was being built for a specific purpose, and that purpose was to *worship God*. Ezra would lead and teach them to worship God.



The awesome thing about this story is that God used those who were most actively opposed to the rebuilding of the temple—those who were successful in bringing the rebuilding to a halt for 27 years—to accomplish the very opposite thing and therefore fulfill his purpose in facilitating the completion of the temple. There is no doubt in my mind that Tattenai and his henchmen believed that their letter would be the closing curtain to the efforts to rebuild the temple. But God had other plans. God *does* use the enemy to accomplish his plans. Just when it looks like the enemy has the upper hand, we see God move in extraordinary ways. We need to be encouraged by this. Our only task is to be obedient to the word of the Lord. It is not our job to strategize, nor to be successful in our own strength. It is not even our job to figure out how God is going to accomplish it. Our only task is to keep our hearts true to the Lord so that we can hear him clearly, and then be obedient to what we hear him say. Let's learn to do this, and we will be amazed at how he transforms the events of history to accomplish his wonderful purpose!

### **Response of the People to God's Intervention**

The Israelites responded to God's intervention with *celebration*. And what a celebration it was! The text says that for the dedication of the temple they offered 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 male lambs and 12 male goats (one for each tribe of Israel). Later, they celebrated the Passover for seven days because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the heart of the king. We need to learn how to celebrate the way the ancient Jews did. God delights in our celebration! He is the one who puts the joy in our hearts! Too often, we get the idea that such festivity is not becoming of a serious Christian. Our attitude is much like Michal who took offense at King David dancing in his underwear without inhibition, leading the procession that was bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. David understood something about this joy, and the delight of the Lord in our expressing this joy in such an uninhibited fashion. David's response—not Michal's—should be the response of the people of God to the work that he does in facilitating the rebuilding of His temple among us. We need to learn how to feast together. We need to discover the joy and delight in making sacrifices to our God in whatever form that might take. Indeed, we need to learn to be *extravagant and even undignified*, when called for, in our worshipful response to God's victories through this battle of rebuilding the temple.

Following their celebration, the people of God completed the act of rebuilding the temple. *They followed through on their commitment to the Lord*. It is not enough merely to make a commitment. God is looking for the *follow-through*. This is why Jesus told his disciples that whoever hears his words *and puts them into practice* are like the wise man who built his house upon the rock. Knowing that the cost of following him was great, he further instructed his disciples to carefully count the cost before beginning on this journey. Just as those ancient Jews encountered a long, arduous journey in the rebuilding of the temple, a journey filled with obstacles and opposition, we can expect no less. We *will* experience many obstacles along the way, and much opposition from those we least expect it. Our task is to count the cost and to *persevere*. When we encounter the opposition, rather than become discouraged as the original exiles initially did, we can take heart for we know that the enemy does not want us doing what we are doing!

Finally, I want to note that the response of the Israelites to the hand of God was to *worship Him*. God built his temple for a purpose—it was to be a place where people came, made sacrifices and worshipped him. We, too, are being knitted together into a holy temple—*for a*

*purpose!* Like the Israelites of old, we are to bring our sacrifices to this temple of believers who are being knitted together. Our sacrifices consist of any number of things. The psalmist says that God wants our sacrifices of *praise*. Our sacrifice also involves the sacrifice of our wills in exchange for God's will. This sacrifice will often involve monetary sacrifice. Sometimes it will be a sacrifice of our time. It will often be a sacrifice of our egos and our reputations for the cause of Christ. We are, as the apostle Paul says, *living sacrifices*. Our very lifestyle is to be one of sacrifice to our Lord.

We need to understand this sacrificial lifestyle differently than what we are accustomed to, however. Sacrifice is a painful lifestyle to cultivate, especially in the western world, because our culture is so hedonistic. As long as we are governed by the paradigm of this culture, a sacrificial lifestyle means nothing but pain and suffering. As we learn to live our lives under the control of the Holy Spirit, however, these sacrifices are no longer something that are *demanded* of us (as by the law), but rather something that we *voluntarily do out of a deep desire instilled within us by God himself*. ***It becomes our desire!*** This is when the temple of God is most glorified. For too long, the church has been acting out of a legalistic duty and our sacrifice has been begrudging at best. There is no glory in this. There is no satisfaction in this, either for us or for God. Let's allow God to first bond our hearts to Him so that our desires become one with His desires. This is what our ancient ancestors learned upon returning from exile to rebuild the temple. The result was that this temple—even though smaller in size physically than the original temple built by Solomon—was a most *glorious* temple.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A Call to Rebuild

This short book is a call to all those with ears to hear what the Spirit is saying, to come together as co-laborers to rebuild the temple in our day. The rebuilding of the Solomon's temple was but a shadow and type of the temple that God is rebuilding in our day as He is preparing His people, His bride, for His great wedding day. This will be an event unparalleled in human history; but the saints of God must prepare. Like our spiritual ancestors of old, we must come together, learn from their successes and failures, and become fitted together as "living stones" to form the great temple of the Lord.

In this final chapter, I want first to review and tie together how the rebuilding of Solomon's temple was a foreshadowing of what God is now calling forth in our day. Following this review, I want for us to consider how we are to respond.

#### **Solomon's Temple as a Foreshadowing**

Most of us in the church today have been taught to understand the Old Testament primarily as a history of the ancient Israelites and their predecessors. Books of prophecy are typically taught as prophecy relevant to the ancient Israelites, in addition to those Messianic prophecies speaking of the coming of Christ, Israel's Messiah. Most of us have not been taught to understand the Old Testament as a type and representation of spiritual realities to come, even in our day.

The New Testament writers understood this foreshadowing role of Old Testament scripture very well. Paul, for example, had a clear understanding of the Adam of Genesis to be a forerunner of Jesus, the second Adam—a profound reality that he expounds upon in several of his writings. Similarly, the writer of Hebrews understands Christ's flesh as the veil that has now once and for all been rent, giving us access to the Holy of Holies—making us now His chosen priests and royal priesthood. Jesus himself recognized his body as the Passover lamb that would be sacrificed for the sins of the people. On the first day of the Jewish Passover feast (Feast of Unleavened Bread), He broke bread with his disciples and told them to eat of it because it was His body. He was the Passover Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world, once and for all. The Passover was a foreshadowing of that great event in history that provided a way of escape for all of us who are covered by the shed blood of the Lamb.

There were, in fact, three great feasts established by the Lord shortly after the Great Escape of the children of Israel from Egypt. These three feasts were Passover, the Feast of Weeks (or Feast of Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>3</sup> These feasts represent spiritual realities which were and are to come. The Feast of Tabernacles is especially relevant in our day because this is the feast of in-gathering which came in the seventh month on the Jewish calendar. Seven is, of course, the number of perfection in Biblical numerology. More than this, however, the Feast of Tabernacles commenced in the *first month* of the Jewish agricultural calendar, and it was during this feast, on the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the month), that the trumpet was

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<sup>3</sup> I will not expand greatly on these three feasts here. I would refer the reader to George Warnock's wonderful book, [\*The Feast of Tabernacles\*](#) for an extended discussion of these feasts, and the spiritual foreshadowing that they represent.

to sound and the year of Jubilee was established (Leviticus 25:9-10). This Jubilee year was established to set the captive free and to release all debts. Indeed, the Feast of Tabernacles is a foreshadowing of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the end of the age which will set the captive free and release the sons of God upon the earth to proclaim their freedom that will establish the Kingdom of God as Christ did. .

The rebuilding of Solomon's temple following the exile in Babylon is another shadow of a spiritual reality that, I believe, is upon us at this very hour. God is rebuilding His temple. He is rebuilding this spiritual temple out of the ruins of a once glorious temple that was his ecclesia. The glory has departed from this church, however. It has "Ichabod" written all over it. It has fallen into disrepair. It has been neglected. The body of Christ, the temple of the Lord, has been laid waste. This temple, this once *glorious* temple, that our Lord Jesus created through the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit, has been desecrated. In its place are edifices and organizations built by man unto the glory of man. Clergy and lay leaders have conferred upon themselves the preeminent position that Jesus has reserved for Himself as the head of His Church. Consequently, the life-giving power that once flowed in and through the *ecclesia* of Christ has been usurped by a spirit of control and domination by some men (and women) over others. This has been going on practically since the first century, but in blatant form since the official recognition of Christianity by Constantine in the fourth century. The Protestant Reformation, which represented a correction in many areas of theology and practice resulting in a fresh outpouring of the presence of God, did almost nothing to counteract the insidious Nicolaitan system that was introduced and nurtured by a professional clergy system that sought to control the work of the Holy Spirit. There have been other great revivals since when, following an obedient response to the convicting call to repentance by the Holy Spirit, God moved and brought to life the living stones to form His living temple. But, alas, these oases would dry up and once again God's people would find themselves in a dry land panting for the living water of God's fresh word breathed by the Holy Spirit. And so here we are—thirsty, having been in exile in a foreign land, and for most of you reading this book, having been called out of exile to rebuild. Those of us with spirit eyes to see, survey the desolation that has been wreaked upon God's holy temple. The task of rebuilding seems overwhelming, and even as we begin this task, we are faced with opposition. Just as in the days of our spiritual forefathers, this opposition is coming primarily from the occupants of these desolated ruins. Contemporary church leaders tenaciously maintain a squatters' right to maintain control of a temple that is no longer even a temple of the living God. They are squatting over the ruins of an old temple that was once glorious but is now desolate. They do not know it is in ruins because, unlike that shadow of Solomon's temple, the physical stones are still in place. People continue to flock in to these buildings, and programs are in place that keep these people very busy, clergy and laity alike. There is an appearance of everything being okay, and cursed be anyone who would try to rebuild, or for that matter, even think of "their church" as in need of repair. But these aesthetically-arranged stones, the throngs of people and all of the programs, are but a façade to maintain the appearance of life in the midst of death. That remnant of the Lord—those returning exiles—see the devastation for what it is and they are coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon their Beloved to do His bidding in rebuilding this temple, even in the face of ardent opposition.

## A Call to Rebuild: The Road Ahead

While this entire book is written and dedicated to that remnant of returning exiles intent on rebuilding the temple of the Lord, this short section is especially and uniquely for you. It will be misunderstood and probably offensive to anyone else reading this book. If you are *not* one of that remnant and have not been offended to the point of discarding this book already, be warned because what I am about to share may well be regarded as high treason by institutional church leaders.

The call to rebuild is nothing less than a call to spiritual warfare against anything that would set itself against the true knowledge of God. You will recall that when Nehemiah was overseeing the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, which took place following the rebuilding of the temple itself, opposition to that project came as well. Nehemiah stationed some of his men with swords and bows to engage the enemy should they be attacked. We also read in this account that those who carried materials did so with one hand, carrying a weapon in the other, and that the builders themselves carried a sword at their side. These rebuilders were also waging war! The warfare that we wage is spiritual in nature. Furthermore, this warfare is an *offensive* warfare. Jesus told Peter that *...upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matt. 16:18). This was a powerfully offensive call to action. This church that Jesus is building is an army, storming the gates of hell, and those gates will not ultimately be able to withstand the incredible force of this army, which is the temple that is being rebuilt in our day. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God suffers violence, and violent (passionate) men take it by force. More often than not, this offensive warfare is a call to humility, to be misunderstood, even scandalized and persecuted. The strategies of spiritual warfare might involve overt confrontation, but will first involve much time in the prayer closet. The strategies discussed here are not intended to be exhaustive. They are strategies that have come out of my own limited experience and what the Lord has shown to me. Many of you have much to contribute, and hopefully what is written here might begin a discussion of how we go forward rebuilding the temple.

**Repentance.** Rebuilding begins with serious repentance. Those on the journey from Babylon home to Jerusalem *must* ask the Lord to search their hearts, to surface any impure motive, any unforgiveness—anything that God would need to surface in them for purposes of laying it on the altar in order to move forward with a pure heart. Coming out of Babylon—which for many, if not most, is represented by coming out of the institutional church—will almost certainly come at a cost. We are misunderstood, and often persecuted and scandalized. This can leave scars and wounded places that must not be allowed to take root. It is so critical that we go before the Lord and confess our woundedness, and place it on the altar. We cannot heal our own wounds through therapy or sheer will power. But He can heal, and he stands ready to heal because such healing is so critical if we are to be about the task of rebuilding with a clean heart. We will, with Paul, then proclaim that *“we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed* (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Because of these battle scars, most of us find ourselves in a position of needing to forgive those who have wounded us. This, too, is difficult because such forgiveness is often necessary in the face of continued persecution. Many relationships will never be restored, because there is no fellowship between the spirit and the law. Nevertheless, forgiveness is required if we are to have

a clean heart; yet, we do not have the capacity to forgive within ourselves. This task of letting go of the hurts and not holding them against our aggressor is something that only the Holy Spirit can work in us. And He will. All that is required is our willingness for Him to do this.

Most of the time, repentance is a process, sometimes a rather long process. We should not be discouraged if the feelings of anger or doubt do not leave us quickly. We continue to persevere, to go back to the Lord with our confessions and state our willingness and desire for Him to do this work. He will, and even unbeknownst to us, He *is* at work doing this very thing as we go through the crucible of hurt. Take courage, for He who has begun a good work in you *will* bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ!

***Understanding Who We Are Individually.*** Those of us who have spent any time in institutional churches have been taught that we are sinners and have a fallen nature. This is true, of course. It is also true that as we are confronted by our fallen state through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we must confess our sin and repent of it. Unfortunately, the “good news” preached in our churches today doesn’t really get any better than this. This is only half of the message. This partial message has left generations of Christians living a defeated lifestyle. They live under the dominion of the flesh, the old nature from which they have been set free. The experience of most Christians is a continual battle between the demands of the flesh and the law of God. And in this battle, defeat is inevitable because the law has no power to overcome.

The fact is, we have been made into new creatures. This is revolutionary. It is not merely that God has forgiven us for our past through Christ’s shed blood, but He has come to reside within us. Our war with our flesh is not our own. Christ has come to take up residence within us, and He takes up war against our old man which is controlled by the prince of this world. And we know that greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world! And the good work that He has begun in us He *will* bring to completion! But it is *His* work, not ours.

Once again, we need a paradigm shift, which is the essence of repentance. We have been taught to keep the law. Even so-called spirit-filled churches drip with law-based behavioral expectations. The fact is, Christ has already fulfilled all of these expectations. They are no longer our obligation. The Christian, now indwelt by the Spirit of God, has but one obligation—that is to love and be obedient to the Spirit of God within. This is a totally “other” obligation which is not experienced as an obligation at all, but a wonderful privilege. The law is a set of obligations that are externally imposed upon us, and which are at war with our flesh. The Spirit, by contrast, is an inward work, conducted by God Himself, that irresistibly draws us into conformity with the Spirit of God (Romans 8:2).

We are no longer judged by the law. Therefore, we need no longer struggle to keep the law. We strive no longer, but rather rest in the power of the Spirit. In this, we overcome. It would really be more accurate to say that Christ who is in us, overcomes. Failure to overcome is no longer an occasion for redoubling our efforts, or coming up with more New Year’s resolutions or any other manner of trying to live righteously to conform to a legal requirement. Rather, our failure is an occasion to go running back into the arms of Father, experiencing His forgiveness, and return to our rest in the power of His Spirit.

We are new creatures. *We must get this.* As people who are born from above, we are now vessels of Christ who has taken up residence within us through the Holy Spirit that He has

sent. We must learn who we are, and we learn this through the School of the Spirit. We are victorious because He is victorious. Even our failures—*especially* our failures—are part of the curriculum of the School of the Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ. He is doing this within us, and for this we always rejoice.

***Understanding Who We Are Corporately.*** As we come to understand the freedom and overcoming power that we have in Christ as individuals, we can only imagine what a corporate body of such believers might look like. This imagining, born of the Spirit, is nothing less than His vision of the temple rebuilt. This corporate identity that we have and our functioning in it, *is* the temple of the living God. I trust that this discussion will stimulate our imagination for who this temple is.

We have said in an earlier chapter that Jesus Christ is the head of His body, His ecclesia, this rebuilt temple. *There can be no other head.* There is no place for prominent positions by whatever label (pastor, preacher, minister, elder, bishop, etc.) that would rule over everyone else without a complete submission to this Head and a mutual submission one to another of that body as unto the Lord. There is but one ruling authority in the true ecclesia of God who is not accountable to the body, and that authority is Jesus Christ. Any other authority is, first, subject to Christ, and second, accountable to the full body of Christ, as together we are in mutual submission to one another.

I believe that the local body of believers is not without order, nor is it without leadership vested in human representatives. This is scriptural, and anyone who has ever attempted to function in a pure democracy devoid of human leadership will testify that it is practical as well. The church has failed to understand the nature of this leadership, however. The “offices” of leadership discussed in the New Testament are not titles and positions with corresponding rights and responsibilities conferred upon certain individuals by some hierarchical ruling body. This is a Babylonian system of government, and it is oppressive. The government of the ecclesia, spoken of especially in the writings of Paul, is one in which spiritual leadership *emerges* in the refining fires of the life of these bodies of believers. **God** raises up these leaders in these crucibles, and their spiritual maturity becomes evident to all who are of the Spirit. The ordination of leadership is but a public recognition of what God has already set in place. The characteristics of leaders that Paul sets forth are guides or signposts to provide clarity to these bodies as to the spiritual qualities of men and women who God has been raising up.

It is not my intention to discuss the specific qualities of true spiritual leadership here. This is a topic that would require extended discussion, and there have been many good books written on this topic. I do feel compelled, however, to alert the reader that this is a potentially divisive topic, and requires absolute submission to the Holy Spirit on the part of a local body as its leadership structure is formed. One extremely divisive issue over the years, for example, is the role that women should play in leadership. God-fearing, spirit-filled believers have honest differences of opinion on this issue. It must not divide the body of Christ because such division grieves the heart of God. I strongly believe that God raises up women as well as men to leadership of various forms in the local body. I have seen Him use women in all capacities of leadership in powerful ways, and I have spoken of the importance of women functioning fully in the body of Christ in an earlier chapter. Others, whom I love and respect deeply, believe just as strongly that women should not be in positions of leadership, and base their beliefs on scriptural instruction. The question then becomes, how do we handle these differences of conviction when

both individuals are part of the same local body? All too often the answer has been that the body is fractured and one individual (perhaps taking many with him or her) leaves the fellowship of that body. This is grievous to the Lord.

When we encounter differences of this nature (and there will be other differences as well), it will require that we lay our beliefs and convictions on the altar. Nothing less will do. We must be willing to lay the most precious convictions that we have at the feet of our Lord. This does not mean that we succumb to the convictions of the person on the other side of the fence. It means simply that we open ourselves up to the *possibility* that we might have to do this, thereby clearing ourselves of any false or selfish agenda. Parties on both sides of the issue in question must be willing to do this, and then come together seeking the mind of the Lord. This is the essence of mutual submission, and it must be alive and at work if the body of Christ is to function as it should, under the headship of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, the headship of Christ is nothing more than empty words. A detached head is useless to the body.

This brings us to the next characteristic feature of who we are as the corporate body of Christ. We are *united* under the Lordship of Christ. There is a unity in the body of Christ, His living temple, that is not known in any other organizational context. I am not speaking here of uniformity (of belief, lifestyle, etc.). Unity is something very different than uniformity. Uniformity is an oppressive agenda that demands that everyone believe and act in the same way. The only ones to whom such an agenda is not oppressive are those who, in fact, look, act, and believe in an identical fashion. Anyone who holds to a differing view, or leads a lifestyle that is not in conformity to that being espoused, must either change their belief/behavior or be labeled some variant of a sinner. Such an understanding of unity was never God's intention, and in my view, is a major reason for many heresies in the church today because there is no built-in check and balance that comes with true unity. True unity is a oneness of mind regarding the Lordship of Christ, and out of that singular focus, we celebrate the diversity of the body of Christ and uniqueness of each individual part represented in that body. *Christ* is the focus, and despite all of our differences, we are united by our love for Christ and His body.

Nowhere is this model more clearly demonstrated than in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. This was a body of believers who were different in almost every respect. Some were Jews; some were barbarians (Gentiles). The Gentiles shared almost none of the beliefs or practices so precious to the Jewish believers. These issues, such as circumcision, the practice of eating meat offered to idols, and even sitting down to eat with Gentiles, were matters of central importance to the Jewish believers. But Paul was asking them to lay down their insistence on these matters for the sake of unity in this body of believers. *None of these issues was more important than the unity of the body.* And none of the issues that confront the body of Christ today are more important than the unity based on our love for, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our midst.

Does this mean that anything goes and everyone can do as he or she pleases? Of course not. There is a place for correction and reproof. It has been so abused in the church, however,

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<sup>4</sup> There may be divisive issues that may arise in a local body that are insurmountable and will demand a parting of ways. Such issues would include the all-sufficient atoning work of the cross, and the absolute Headship of Christ in His ecclesia. Most issues that threaten to divide, however, including the issue of women in leadership, do not constitute such centrality so as to require such a separation.



particularly in theologically more conservative churches. Correction and reproof have so often been used to enforce uniformity. The purpose of correction and reproof is to set straight individuals or pockets of individuals who have failed to be guided by the Holy Spirit, whose hearts have become hardened or calloused to the Spirit, and are engaging in behavior or espousing doctrine that is not of the Spirit but out of the mind of man. To those who are of the Spirit, such works of the flesh are clearly perceived. Correction is then required. Even then, however, we are called upon to do this in a spirit of love and to restore gently, lest we ourselves be tempted (Galatians 6:1). Any correction must be done in such a way that it maintains the unity (*not* uniformity) of the body of believers and at the same time preserves the freedom that we have in Christ.

The last theme that I want to explore briefly regarding our understanding of who we are as the corporate body of Christ, is the *freedom* that we have in Christ. We have incredible freedom in Christ, beyond what most of us could possibly even imagine. Paul went so far as to write to the Galatian church that we must stand fast in this liberty, not succumbing to the law lest we be entangled in a yoke of bondage and Christ profit us nothing (Galatians 5:1). This is an incredibly powerful exhortation. The whole purpose for Christ coming to redeem mankind, Paul is saying, is to set us free! We must guard this freedom with the tenacity of a mother bear protecting her cubs. We have sacrificed this freedom, I'm afraid, because we have confused unity with uniformity, and have succumbed to the oppressive demands of uniformity.

Inevitably, the question will arise (as it should), does not this freedom give rise to licentiousness and all manner of sin? Paul answered this in his clarion call to freedom—the letter to the Galatians—with a resounding “NO!” This is not a freedom to indulge our flesh man. It is a freedom of the Spirit, and dear brothers and sisters, the Spirit of God is moving in new and powerful ways in our day. He is calling forth a remnant who are willing to follow Him to the very point of death, even when such obedience means violating the demands of the law for the sake of the higher law of love for Christ which involves faith and obedience to His will in any given situation.

This principle of freedom in the Spirit can be found even in the Old Testament. God handed down to Moses ten commandments, written in stone, one of which was “Thou shalt not kill.” Moses no sooner received this law of the Lord than, upon coming down from Mount Sinai and seeing the people were building a golden calf, the Lord instructed Moses to order each of the Levites to strap a sword to his side and go forth and kill his brother, friend and neighbor, resulting in the killing of some 3000 Israelites! (See Exodus 32) The Lord had just given Moses the law, “Thou shalt not kill.” This was followed by another word of the Lord to kill some 3000 of his own people. My point here is that Moses was listening to the voice of the Lord, and was compelled by the Spirit of God to act in a way that was not in conformity to the very law that God had given him. This will happen, and especially so in the days in which we live. God is preparing His remnant to do some radical things that will be offensive to anyone under the bondage of a law-based system.

Our freedom is not a freedom to indulge the flesh, but a freedom to be obedient to the Spirit of God, regardless of what that might look like. This freedom is not truly understood by anyone who has not had the cross of Christ applied to their lives, working death to their flesh-man. Apart from this, such a message of freedom can only be understood as a call to a hedonistic lifestyle. Quite to the contrary, it is a freedom to deny that self-centered hedonism.

And it is also a freedom from the oppressive demands of the law. This freedom from the law will be in direct proportion to our faith. The freedom that I have as a believer will not be the same as what you might have. Let me illustrate. Perhaps I enjoy drinking occasionally, or smoking a pipe. I have perfect freedom to engage in these activities. My brother in Christ, however, has just been delivered from the bondage of alcoholism or nicotine addiction. Depending on where this brother is with regard to living out the reality of this deliverance, he may not have freedom to even passively enjoy the smoke of somebody else's cigarette! This does not mean, of course, that I am to flaunt my freedom before such a brother. The principle of walking together in love so as not to cause my brother to stumble would require that I keep this freedom to myself, and certainly not flaunt it in such a manner (see Romans 14). Choosing such a course of action so as to preserve my brother is itself a manifestation of my freedom and in no way diminishes the freedom that I have.

In sum, the body of Christ, the rebuilt temple, has an incredible freedom in the Spirit. This freedom will be expressed in diverse ways across the ecclesia. Characterizing this body, however, in the midst of all of the diversity, will be a unity in our love for Christ and devotion to Him as our head. As it is functioning properly, there will be no need to impose one's views or standards on anyone else. Any correction is the work of the Holy Spirit as He moves upon other members to do so, and when it is done it will be done in a spirit of meekness, gentleness and humility. If such correction is truly of the Spirit, it will penetrate the heart of a believer and unity will be maintained.

### **Let's Build Together!**

This chapter has outlined the basic ingredients necessary to move forward in the great building project that God now has underway. This is by no means an exhaustive discussion. I hope that it stimulates you, the reader, to seek God for direction as to your part in the rebuilding program. The ingredients discussed here—repentance, understanding who we are as individual vessels of the Spirit of God, and understanding who we are as a corporate body of Christ—are processes or steps that we must *all* move in and through. What each of these looks like specifically will vary; that which the Spirit convicts me as needing repentance will be different than that of which you are convicted. Nevertheless, repentance and a humble heart are required of all of us. So too must we all come to a radical understanding of who we are, and the specifics of this will be uniquely breathed into us by the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit. But however it looks in the details, we are *all* overcomers as we are yielded to the power and authority of Christ Jesus within us.

I challenge each reader to take this short book, and especially this last chapter, to the prayer closet and to seek the Lord for where He would take you next on your journey. If you struggle with a sin area in your life, confess this to the Lord, and let go of trying to conquer it yourself, but yield it to Him to work His grace in you in this area however He chooses. Be free from *both* the bondage of the sin *and* the bondage of the law that condemns you for it. It has been taken care of at the cross. Accept the gift. If you are struggling with a sense of defeat in your life, confess this to the Lord. You may be (probably are) suffering from a wrong paradigm, one that has permeated the Christian church for generations. Repent of that, and ask the Lord to speak to you about who you are in Him. This may involve revisiting areas of your own past—an authoritarian or impossible-to-please father; abusive parents; or perhaps an event or incident in

your life that has left you wounded—and allowing the Lord to heal these places. He wants to do this! You are his Holy Temple! The prayer closet is where it all begins.

As you continue pressing in to the Lord, becoming more intimate and honest with Him, you will see things begin to happen. There may be opportunities to share with friends and discover that God is doing similar things in their lives. A corporate body begins to form! You will find new boldness in what you speak and what you do as an in-dwelt spirit man or woman. **Understand: God wants this to happen, and it will be done in and among sincere believers. The temple is being rebuilt and it is us!** The apostle Paul states: “*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty* (2 Corinthians 6:16-18). **Amen, may it be definitely so!**

## Reference

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