

Rebuilding Jerusalem

Hope In The Midst Of The Rubble

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.
Hebrews 12:22-24

Introduction

- **2 Chronicles 36:15-23**-Sent by the God of compassion, Micah was but one of many prophets sent to warn Judah of the coming wrath of God. But the people would not listen, and instead mocked and scoffed at the prophets, while despising all the words of God delivered by these messengers. So, the Lord brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of His people to Babylon in 586 B.C. to confirm and fulfill His words spoken through His prophets.
- But the people returned to build. Why? Surely they must have known that Jerusalem was a desolate heap, that the temple lay in burnt ruins, and that the walls of the city were broken down. Didn't they realize that their situation was hopeless and futile, and like the Jebusites, Perizzites, and Hivites that had gone before them, they too would be just another nation that had vanished into oblivion? But they came, driven by the hope of the promises given to them by the prophets. Under the providential initiation, guidance, and care of God, Mt. Zion was rebuilt upon the diligent and faithful labor of His people.
- We too find ourselves in a similar predicament. By sight, the true Jerusalem lies in ruins. Looking with our eyes, we see the walls of Jerusalem surrounded and being broken down, the house of God in moral and ethical shambles, and theological jackals freely roam the city. But, as Christians, are we to develop our conclusions based on what we see? Obviously not, for we are to be a people of faith, trusting the promises laid out for us in God's Word. So, we see Jesus, the One whom the Father put all things in subjection to, even though we do not yet see all things put under Him (Heb.2:8,9). Christ has all authority and dominion, so we walk with the eyes of faith that Hezekiah and Jehosaphat had before us. With salvation walls surrounded, we too may smile at all our foes while we diligently and joyfully labor in our duties by faith.

Obstacles To Rebuilding

- **External Adversaries: Ezra 4:1-5**-The adversaries of the Jews did not come announcing that they were wolves in sheep's clothing, bent on ensuring that the temple remain in its existing ruined state. Instead, they expressed solidarity with the Jews in their allegiance to Yahweh, indicating a similar desire to see the temple rebuilt. But this ungodly alliance, that would have blurred the antithesis, was detected for what it was: A syncretistic union that inevitably would have led the Jews into idolatry. When this deception failed, the adversaries of God resort to more overt forms of opposition. If an ecumenical alliance will not work, then spin-doctors would be employed who would distort the truth and utilize political legislation to achieve the purpose of the enemies of God. These cold war professionals were successful at frustrating the people of God as the work on the temple ceased for about 15 years, until God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1,2).
- **Nehemiah 4:1-15**-About 90 years later, when the Jews were in the midst of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, another attempt by the enemies of God was employed to bring work of rebuilding to a halt. Initially, the opposition was limited to verbal mockery and taunting (v.1-3). Rather than discouraging the people, it only brought about an imprecatory prayer upon these enemies and the greater resolve to work upon the people of God (v.4-6). So, the opposition escalates to threats of physical violence (v.7, 8). Initially, there was a similar faithful response as was seen in verse 6. However the people begin walking by sight, fear begins to set in (v.11, 12), and the rubbish now seems insurmountable (v.10). Fortunately, Nehemiah points the people away from what they see and to the God they serve (v.14). Remembering the great and awesome Lord (v.14) who will fight for them (v.20), all the people returned to the wall, everyone to his work (v.15), despite the magnitude of the task at hand (v.19).
- **Internal Rebellion: Haggai 1:1-15**-As if the rubbish and the external enemies were not enough, the people of God had to deal with their own sin. Delivered in August of 520 B.C., Haggai rebukes the people for the 15 years that the rebuilding of the temple had laid dormant. Their specific sin was complacency towards the things of God while possessing a great zeal for their own personal fortunes and prosperity. The issue here wasn't whether they were working or not, but what were they working on?? They all were busily running, but the issue was where were they running to: Their own houses, or the house of God (v.9)? And so, the blessing of the Lord was not upon them, and that which they sought eluded them (v.6). Because the Lord was not building their houses, they were laboring in vain (Ps 127:1). But the rebuke of the prophet brought about the fear of the presence of the Lord (v.12) as He stirred up the people to work (v.14), and the rebuilding of the temple began again. We

too must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and not the things that He promises will be added unto us (Matt 6:33).

Hope: The Cornerstone For Rebuilding The City

- **Zechariah 8:11-24**-The prophets sent by God during the rebuilding of Jerusalem brought promises of hope. This hope spoke to the Jews of their future Messiah, the future of the city of Jerusalem, and the future drawing of the nations to God. By faith they looked ahead. They didn't receive the promises, but saw them from afar off, were assured of them, and embraced them (Heb. 11:13). And so, by faith, they labored and worked for something they never saw.

Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. (Zech. 6:12,13)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zech. 9:9,10)

And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them towards the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be-"The Lord is one," and His name is one. (Zech 14:8,9)

- The promises are given to the people in order to produce the fruit of hope by faith. Faith then produces the fruit of courage and labor (v.13), personal and corporate piety (v.16,17), joyful feasting (v.18), and worship that pleases and glorifies God, while attracting the nations to the presence of the Lord (v.22,23). First, the promises promote courage, so that our hands will be strengthened. We work not to be justified, but because we are justified. Second, the promises ought to cause us to speak and think in such a way that is consistent with the Christian worldview. We must not be deluded to think that we can pursue the task of truth and justice while severing the unity of the Spirit, breaking the bond of peace, and sowing discord among the brethren. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the Sons of God (Matt. 5:9).
- Next, our hope by faith should create in God's people joy, gladness, and cheerful feasting. The celebratory nature of the Christian life is not a side issue we experience, but central to who we are, and what God has promised to do. Finally, we are promised that the nations will stream to the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem (v.22). The means of this attraction is not through the creative programs we may devise, but through their observation that the presence of God is indeed in the midst of His people (1 Cor. 14:25). Discipleship of the nations begins with God inhabiting the praises of His people.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. (Nehemiah 6:15,16)

Conclusion

- **Hebrews 12:22-29**-Quoting the prophet Haggai, the writer of Hebrews encourages the people of God that we "have come" to that which "we are receiving": A kingdom that cannot be shaken. So, how are we to respond to this truth? By grace, we are to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (v.28). We do this by faith, trusting in the integrated promises given to Christian parents regarding their children and regarding the future of the church. We walk not with the eyes of sight, but with the eyes of faith. If we walk with the eyes of sight, only despair, anxiety, and discouragement await us. But with our eyes on God and His word, we will abound with hope, optimism, and joy. God is building His house, and it will be built. So do not grow weary in doing good, for your labor is not in vain.