

Zerubbabel

When God gives us important jobs to do, it is **not** because He needs our help, this is a lesson Zerubbabel had to learn and is also a lesson that we need to learn.

God allows us to be involved in His projects so that we can learn character and because we are potential created children who He wishes to have in His Kingdom [family grown large].

Every physical father enjoys the experience of having a son or daughter working alongside of him in a family project.

I know this from personal experience, which has now, in a limited way, been extended to my grandchildren.

Our spiritual Father experiences this same joy when working with His spiritual children.

In every spiritual project we have with our spiritual Father we need to realise that God is always in total control, we only play a part in His overall plan.

God had warned Judah about its sins and continually sent prophets to restore the people to His favour only to have them turn away from Him again.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 [NIV] *“The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.”*

Eventually the situation became beyond remedy.

2 Chronicles 36:17-20 [NIV] *“He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.”*

All who were left alive were taken into captivity in Babylon.

This captivity had been predicted in **Leviticus 26:27-45**.

2 Chronicles 36:21 [NIV] *“The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfilment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.”*

One of the laws Judah had broken was the land Sabbath law [**Exodus 23:10-11**]. The 70-year captivity allowed the land to rest.

The promise made by God is found in **Jeremiah 25:12-13; Jeremiah 29:10**.

Cyrus the King of Persia who had defeated the Babylonians in 539BC was used by God to bring about the return of part of Judah to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

The Persians had a relaxed policy towards their captives allowing them to own land and homes and to take ordinary jobs.

Many Jews such as Daniel, Mordecai and Esther rose to prominent positions in the nation.

King Cyrus went a step further, he allowed many groups of exiles, including Jews, to return to their homelands.

By doing this, Cyrus hoped to win their loyalty and thus provide buffer zones around the borders of his empire.

For the Jews this was a day of hope, a new beginning.

This is when God used Zerubbabel to lead the first group of captives home.

Ezra 2:64-70 [NIV] *“The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 200 men and women singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, camels and 6,720 donkeys. When they arrived at the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings towards the rebuilding of the house of God on its site. According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 drachmas of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments. The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns.”*

Everyone’s effort and co-operation were required, and the people gave as much as they could. [**2 Corinthians 8:12; 2 Corinthians 9:6**]

The money given was enough to start the rebuilding of Temple.

The people were enthusiastic and sincere, but this Temple would never match the splendour of Solomon’s. The money King David gathered to start building Solomon’s Temple, that had been destroyed, was a thousand times more. [**1 Chronicles 22:14**]

Some people wept as they remembered the glorious temple that had been destroyed.

Ezra 3:1-6 [NIV] *“When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices. Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred feasts of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the LORD. On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the LORD’s temple had not yet been laid.”*

Zerubbabel faced the first hostility to the work God had given him and his team of helpers.

These hostile people were a mixed group whose ancestors had been conquered by the Assyrians. Foreigners had been forced to resettle in the northern kingdom of Israel and had then migrated south near Jerusalem, when Babylonians had conquered Judah and sent captives north to Babylon.

This group would have seen the Jews under Zerubbabel as a threat to their right of occupation to this land.

Zerubbabel started the people’s focus on God by building an altar, the centre of worshipping God through animal sacrifices.

This was constructed even before the foundations of the temple were laid.

Zerubbabel and the people had learnt the lesson that God does **not** provide special protection and blessings to those who ignore Him.

They realised the importance of obeying God from the heart, by personal sacrifice, **not** just out of ritual habit.

If we want God's help we must make every effort to stay close to Him.

Ezra 3:7-13 [NIV] *“Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and gave food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorised by Cyrus king of Persia. In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers (the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem) began the work, appointing Levites twenty years of age and older to supervise the building of the house of the LORD. Jeshua and his sons and brothers and Kadmiel and his sons (descendants of Hodaviah) and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers, all Levites, joined together in supervising those working on the house of God. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: ‘He is good; his love to Israel endures for ever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No-one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.”*

Again Zerubbabel continued to focus the people on their God, laying the foundation of the temple before the rebuilding of the defensive walls of Jerusalem.

On completion of the foundations another round of celebration followed, which helped to bond all who were working under Zerubbabel and his team.

But Zerubbabel was now faced with two problems.

Discouragement among the older workers who remembered splendour of Solomon's Temple and compared it to what they were able to build with far less resources.

Ezra 4:1-24 [NIV] *“When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, ‘Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.’ But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, ‘You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.’ Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They hired counsellors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia. At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his associates wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. The letter was written in Aramaic script and in the Aramaic language. Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king as follows: Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary, together with the rest of their associates, the judges and officials over the men from Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, and the other people whom the great and honourable Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-euphrates. (This is a copy of the letter they sent him.) To King Artaxerxes, From your servants, the men of Trans-euphrates: The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations. Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are*

restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer. Now since we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonoured, we are sending this message to inform the king, so that a search may be made in the archives of your predecessors. In these records you will find that this city is a rebellious city, troublesome to kings and provinces, a place of rebellion from ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed. We inform the king that if this city is built and its walls are restored, you will be left with nothing in Trans-euphrates. The king sent this reply: To Rehum the commanding officer, Shimshai the secretary and the rest of their associates living in Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-euphrates: Greetings. The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence. I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition. Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of Trans-euphrates, and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them. Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order. Be careful not to neglect this matter. Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests? As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop. Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”

The enemies of the returning Jews tried to infiltrate the workforce and stop the building with political pressure.

This fear caused the work to grind to a halt, the workers returned to their homes and 16 years passed with no more construction. [v24]

Zerubbabel tried to stop the infiltration of their enemies [v3] but failed.

There is **no** record of what Zerubbabel did during this period of time but his discouragement must have been deep following those first months of excitement and accomplishment.

One cause of this deep depression and discouragement is highlighted in v2 the approach of these residents in land near Jerusalem rejected them, but the Jews with him must have been deceived by them to stop supporting Zerubbabel.

These enemies claimed to worship the same God as Zerubbabel and the rest of the Jews.

In one sense this was true, they worshipped the God of Israel but they also worshipped many other gods. [see **2 Kings 17:27-29, 32-34, 41**]

In God's eyes this was **not** worship, it was sin and rebellion. God was just another idol to be added to their collection.

True worship involves devotion to one God alone. [**Exodus 20:3-5; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 1:17; Isaiah 46:9**]

Believers today must be aware, like Zerubbabel, of those who claim to be Christians but whose actions, like the enemies of Zerubbabel, reveal they are using Christianity to serve their own interests.

How did God respond to this discouragement of Zerubbabel?

Ezra 5:1-2 [NIV] *“Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.”*

To help Zerubbabel, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah not only preached encouraging words but also got involved in the labour.

Ezra 5:3-5 [NIV] *“At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-euphrates, and Shethar-bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, ‘Who authorised you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?’ They also asked, ‘What are the names of the men constructing this building?’ But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.”*

The non-Jews who lived nearby now started a legal assault on the work. But God already had prepared to destroy this legal assault and actually turn it into a great profit for the Jews who continued to work on the temple. [**Ezra 6:1-12**]

Zerubbabel, like many of us, knew how to start well but found it hard to keep going. His successes depended on the quality of the encouragement he received.

Zerubbabel let discouragement get the better of him. But when he let God take control, the work was finished.

God is always in control so we must **not** let circumstances or lack of encouragement deter us from doing the work that God has assigned us to do.

Discouragement and fear are two of the greatest obstacles to completing God’s work. Most often they come where and when you least expect them.

Discouragement eats away at our motivation and fear paralyses us so we don’t act at all.

We need to recognise these common barriers.

Remember that God’s people in every generation have faced these problems and then with God’s help overcome them and completed God’s will, just as Zerubbabel did.

A good memory verse –

Zechariah 4:6 [NIV] *“So he said to me, ‘This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”*

With God’s power working with and before us preparing our path [**v7**] there is no work of God that will fail to be accomplished through us.