



Good day Worthy Knights, in this part 113, Zerubbabel

Wikipedia

Who was Zerubbabel in the Bible?

What happens when a nation is conquered, burned to the ground, and left in rubble? When its wealthiest and most prominent citizens are carried off as slaves and dispersed into a powerful foreign country?

Well, if the experience of the Jewish people is any indication, those left behind together suffered an impoverished existence, surviving despite the odds, rebuilding lives as best they can. This is what happened when mighty Babylon razed Jerusalem in 587 B.C., destroying its Temple, stealing its wealth, and leaving behind only ruins and “some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields” (2 Kings 25:12).

Then Zerubbabel came marching into town.

Where did Zerubbabel come from?

Zerubbabel was an aristocrat born in captivity after his parents had been exiled into Babylon. The son of Shealtiel, he was also the grandson of Jehoiachin—the last king of Judah before the Babylonian conquest. Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah, reigned in Jerusalem for only three months after replacing his father King Jehoiakim, who had died during the first Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.

Although Jeconiah was imprisoned at first, Scripture indicates that in his later years he was shown uncommon favour from a new king: “So Jeconiah put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table” (2 Kings 25:29 NIV).

It's likely, then, that the boy Zerubbabel benefited from his grandfather's favoured status, growing up in Babylon's royal court and being educated in politics and military as well as in strong roots of Jewish faith. When Persia overthrew the supposedly invincible Babylon around 539 B.C., he apparently found new favour from the conquering king, Cyrus II. Under orders from the victorious Persian ruler, Zerubbabel was appointed “governor” over Judah and sent back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. to lead the effort to rebuild God's Temple.

He was the leader of the first group of Jews, numbering 42,360, who returned from the Babylonian Captivity. His name meant “offspring of Babylon”.

Zerubbabel at work.

According to Ezra 3-4, Zerubbabel, together with the high priest Joshua and others, erected an altar for burnt offerings in the seventh month after the return. There, they offered morning and evening sacrifices and kept the Feast of Tabernacles. In the second month of the second year, they together laid the foundation of the Temple. The foundations showed that this new temple was going to be much smaller than Solomon's original, to the disappointment of those who remembered the former structure:

“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” (Ezra 3:12).

The prophet Haggai addressed their disappointment: “‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty” (Haggai 2:3–4).

They then received an offer of aid by "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (apparently northern Israelites of mixed Assyrian lineage, or converts to the worship of Yahweh), but Zerubbabel and Joshua rejected this aid on the grounds that it did not accord with Cyrus' instructions:

They came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build as, 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, Joshua, 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." (Ezra 4:2-3).

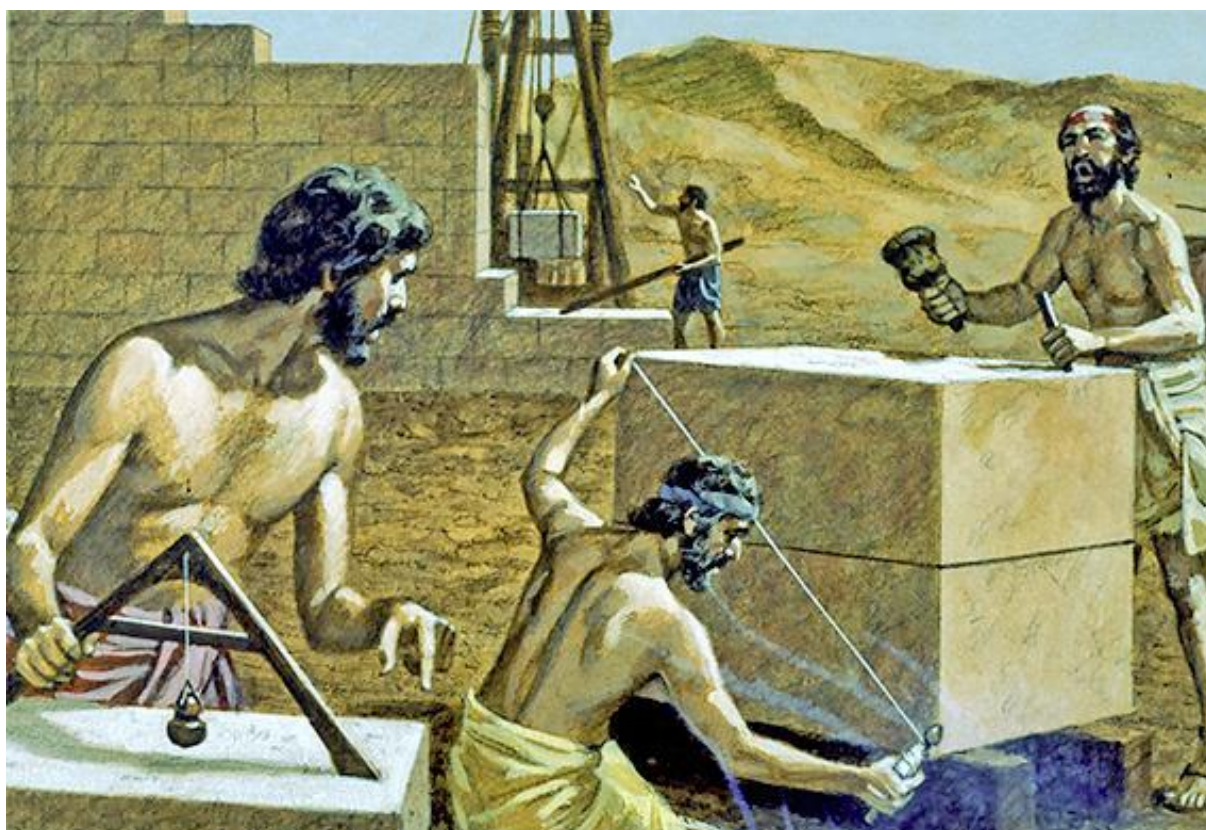
After this, the opposition of these "enemies" caused a delay of seventeen years. Zerubbabel and Joshua were then aroused to fresh activity by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Work was thus resumed in the second year of Darius I (520 B.C.). Within three and a half years after the second effort began, the temple was completed in 516 B.C.

Although Zerubbabel's temple was smaller than Solomon's had been, God promised a greater glory: "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," said the Lord (Haggai 2:9).

Curiously, even before the temple was completed and dedicated, Zerubbabel's name disappears from the biblical record. It's possible that Zerubbabel may have returned to Babylon soon after finishing his work on the temple, or it could be that the Persians feared a Jewish uprising, had Zerubbabel removed or executed.

Regardless, Zerubbabel is revered as one of the Bible's great heroes, labouring to reconstruct the Lord's house of Worship.

While the temple Zerubbabel helped rebuild paled in comparison to the size and grandeur of Solomon's, it far outlasted it. In fact, Zerubbabel's temple was still standing 500 years later when the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, graced its courts.



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