



BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2351 ~ Back to Jerusalem.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

Because the people of Judah had been chosen by God to be His own special people but they continually disobeyed Him, they were exiled to Babylon for seventy years. They'd settled down to life in that pagan country. But the time now had arrived for the exiles to think about returning home to their land of Judah again.

When Cyrus the Great issued a decree that the Jewish exiles could return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel was in charge of their return and Joshua was their high priest. When the people heard about this decree, some were overjoyed that they would soon be free again but others weren't so enthusiastic; they were either too old to make the 4-month journey back, or had small children and didn't want to travel so far with their little ones. Some others had grown rather comfortable in Babylon and didn't want to face the hard work of rebuilding a ruined city and temple.

Zerubbabel was a direct descendant of King David and his name meant 'stranger in Babylon.' He's listed in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 1, as an ancestor of Jesus Christ. In the Bible book of Ezra, Chapter 2, it says that Zerubbabel had almost 50,000 people, including servants, travelling back with him to Jerusalem around the year 536 BC. This was only 50 years since Nebuchadnezzar's army had destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem. But the first group of exiles, including Daniel, had left 20 years before, in 605 BC. All those whose hearts God had moved to go back were helped by those who had decided to stay. Even Cyrus returned the Temple's treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from King Solomon's temple.

On the way back to Jerusalem, the older ones in the travelling group could remember seeing how beautiful the temple of Solomon was and spoke gladly about it. But when they arrived, what a disappointment they saw.

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When the exiles arrived back in Jerusalem, they first collected voluntary offerings to help in the construction of the temple on its original site. Some of the people settled in villages near Jerusalem, but the rest returned to their own towns throughout Judea. An altar was built and the priests began offering sacrifices on it, even before the foundation of the new temple was laid.

The first step in re-establishing the Judean nation was to re-establish the worship of God by rebuilding His Temple. The people reassembled at Jerusalem to start work and everyone helped, including the priests. Stone masons and carpenters were hired to do building work and King Cyrus gave the people permission to cut down logs from the Lebanon mountains and float them down the Mediterranean Sea coastline to the city of Joppa. Within two years of returning to Jerusalem, the people had laid the foundation for the new temple. How they praised and thanked God! But some of the older priests wept aloud when they saw how small the new temple would be in comparison to what Solomon's original temple had been.

When the exiles had returned to Judah, they found some people from Samaria living there. These people were mostly non-Israelite people brought to Samaria by the Assyrians when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered in 722 BC and the Israelites were taken away to other places. When Judah was also conquered, some of those people in Samaria moved south and they were naturally displeased to see the original landowners return. These Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the Temple but claimed that they also worshipped the same God as the exiles. In reality, they still worshipped their own pagan gods and the God of Israel was just one of their many 'gods'.

At first, the Samaritans were friendly but when the leaders of Judah wisely refused their help in the building work, they quickly became hostile and tried every way to oppose the work of the Temple. Indeed, they succeeded in delaying the construction of the Temple for about 15 years.

If those people had become part of the Jewish community, they would have gradually undermined the community's purity and unity as God's own people. Enemies within are far more dangerous than enemies outside.

God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to the returned people to encourage them to restart the building work on the Temple. Haggai's messages were given over a 4-month period. The people told Haggai that the time wasn't right for the Lord's house to be rebuilt but this was only an excuse. The people had been off working on their own fine houses while God's house still lay in ruins. As a result, the people didn't have enough food, clothes or money. They should have been asking themselves: "Why?" Because they were disobeying God and not honouring Him first, they were suffering another punishment for their continual disobedience. God wanted them to put Him first in everything; and we need to do the same if we want God's blessings too.

Haggai's words persuaded Zerubbabel and the people to act. When God saw that the people feared Him and were ready to submit to Him and obey Him, then He said the most comforting words: "I am with you, says the Lord!" They were further encouraged by understanding that the Messiah would stand in this temple building in due time.

Zechariah began his ministry in Jerusalem a month or two after Haggai had begun his. Zechariah began his book with a strong call for Israel to repent. This theme of repentance is developed more fully throughout the subsequent eight visions in the first six chapters. In general, these visions speak of God's plans for Israel and especially for Jerusalem and the temple.

Zechariah's messages were of encouragement, not only for the rebuilding of the temple but looking ahead to the coming of the Messiah, the defeat of God's enemies and the establishment of God's rule on earth. He also prophesied that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey, that He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, and finally, that He would be killed.

Zechariah's name means 'the Lord remembers'. The Lord remembers His covenant promises and always acts to fulfil them. Just as the Lord promised to restore the Jewish exiles to their homeland, so through Zechariah, He promised a much greater restoration to take place when the Messiah comes to establish His kingdom at the end of time. In Chapter 2 of his book, Zechariah told the rest of the exiles to return from Babylon because at some time in the future, the Lord will come and live among His people. He said: "The land of Judah will be the Lord's special possession in the holy land and He will once again choose Jerusalem to be His own city."

The land of Israel has always belonged to God. Those who try to take some of it from the Israelites and give it to God's enemies will be punished. Our present-day world leaders need to take note of this. It's completely impossible to defeat the God of Heaven's plans for this land. Those who try to claim Israeli land for themselves will be the object of God's anger and suffer defeat from His hands.

About two years after Zechariah had received these night visions, the Lord again spoke to him. A delegation of Jews was coming to Jerusalem to ask the priests about fasting. During their exile in Babylon, the Jews had set aside a time of fasting and mourning each year to remember the fall of Jerusalem. Now that they were back in their homeland, they wanted to know whether they should continue this practice or not. There was nothing wrong with the Jews keeping traditions which didn't involve practices that were contrary to the Word of God. But it was good for them to examine these traditions from time to time just to make sure that they were still meaningful and important to keep.

Do our traditions make us obedient to God's Word? The previous generations of Judeans before their exile into Babylon carried out their traditions dutifully, but hardened their hearts to the Scriptures; and if we're not careful, we can do just the same.

The only fast God required of the Jews was on the annual Day of Atonement. For He said in Zechariah, Chapter 8, that the four fasts listed had ended by saying: "They will become festivals of joy and celebration for the people of Judah. So love truth and peace."

The rest of Zechariah's book contains two predictions. The 1st prediction covers Christ's first coming when He presents Himself to the Jews as their king and was rejected. The 2nd prophecy highlights the Messiah's second coming and the establishment of His glorious kingdom here on earth. When the nations gather together against Jerusalem in the great military campaign that we commonly call the 'Battle of Armageddon', He will come in power and deliver His people from their enemies. The Israelites will also recognise Jesus Christ as their Messiah at that time. They will repent and be cleansed of their sin and prior unbelief in Him; then Jesus Christ will reign as King from Jerusalem over the whole world. When God appealed to the Jews still living in Babylon and urge them to return to their homeland, He promised them blessings for doing so. God also promises twice as much blessing to those who obey Him, so we need to be sure that we're always in the place of His choosing, and not in ours.

There are a few verses that mention the Antichrist, who will be the last world ruler before Christ's return. Zechariah predicts that the Israelites will accept the Antichrist as their friend, who will agree to protect Israel but then, will break his promise. When you reject the truth (as the Jews rejected Jesus as God's Son), it's much easier to accept false things. But God will strike Antichrist and judge him.

The last of the seven feasts that God has ordained for the Jewish people to remember each year will then be fulfilled. The Feast of Tabernacles will be a joyful celebration, as God's kingdom age will be a time of holiness and happiness in worshipping and serving the Lord. Each year thereafter, people from all parts of the world will travel to Jerusalem to worship King Jesus at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Shelters. Yet those who refuse to go will not be given any rain for their crops.

In Psalm 122, it says: "Pray for peace in Jerusalem. May all who love this city prosper. O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls and prosperity in your palaces ... For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek what is best for you, O Jerusalem."

Just before the rise of Antichrist, many Christians believe that the Lord Jesus will call up to Himself in the air all the people who have devoted themselves to love and serve Him, and by faith believe that He died for their sins. This is called the 'rapture' and will occur in the blink of an eye and without warning. Is Christ your Saviour today? Call on Him now to wash away your sins and put you in right relationship with God in Heaven before Jesus returns!

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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