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BUILDING IN GOD'S KINGDOM



THE LORD SPEAKS TO HIS CHILDREN IN MANY WAYS.

How thankful I am that He reveals Himself to us. His written revelation in the Bible is a constant source of inspiration and direction. There, we find examples of times when God communicated with men in various other ways, some more unusual than others. Consider the donkey that spoke to Balaam. Once God caused writing to appear on a wall. Sometimes He sent angels to bring messages, and at other times, He gave dreams and visions. I have never had a donkey speak to me, or an angel visit me. Usually the Lord speaks to me through the Bible, often through the still small inner voice of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes He gives me dreams. When I have a dream that seems to be spiritual in nature, or that is very vivid and clear in my memory upon waking, I always pray and ask the Lord if it was from Him, and if so, what it means.

Recently I had such a dream. Of course, any extra-biblical revelation must line up with the written Word of God. So, my immediate reaction was to ask the Lord if this dream was the result of an overactive brain or if it was from Him. After much reflection and prayer, I do believe that it was a message from the Lord. It certainly caused much thought and prayer, which led me to a study in the Scripture that I will share with you.

In my dream, I saw skilled brick-layers building a wall. It was a beautiful wall. I watched for quite a while as they added brick to brick and the edifice grew taller. The bricks were perfectly formed, and the workers seemed to be highly skilled. Each brick was perfectly aligned with the others around it. The mortar appeared to be evenly applied. I was intrigued, and so I walked right up to the wall and touched it. Immediately, the wall swayed and even seemed like it might topple over. I was startled and ran around to the other side of the wall to investigate. To my great surprise, when I looked at the reverse



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side, I found that the wall was not standing on a foundation; neither was it supported by a building. It was simply bricks mortared together forming an unstable wall. It was clear to me that this edifice was not built according to a building code. It would not pass any safety inspections. Even though the brickwork was beautiful, it was clearly not well made. Then I woke up.



My immediate response was to call out to God for the meaning. First, it was clear to me that God was showing me the futility of man building anything in his own strength with his own skill or ideas. Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” It was board meeting time, so I shared the dream with our board and senior team and encouraged each of us to examine ourselves, our programs, and ministry.

At Bridges for Peace, we are blessed with an amazing Board of Directors and team of leaders who wholeheartedly want to follow the Lord. We are all in agreement that we only want to build according to the Lord’s plan. Anything else is worthless. We don’t want to invest time, energy, and money only to have the Lord judge it as “wood, hay, and straw” in the day of judgment (I Corinthians 3:10–15). It was a good start to applying the dream’s message and is an ongoing emphasis. In the days that followed, I continued to ask the Lord for revelation and also searched the Bible to see what was there about building. Let me share some of what I have found.

Building according to Our Own Ideas

In Genesis 11, we see men who all spoke the same language join together to build a tower that would reach to heaven, the tower of Babel. Their motivation was not to follow God or to bless the Lord, but rather to elevate themselves. God recognized their considerable abilities; after all, He created man in His image with the ability to think, communicate, and use the skills and talents given by God to create and build. But God was not pleased with the motivation of their heart, which was not God-centered but man-centered. Therefore, God acted to stop their action by confusing their languages, so they could not continue in their actions.

Much later, God had some scathing things to say about the prophets of Israel when they prophesied according to their own thoughts rather than speaking the mind of God. The prophet Ezekiel records God’s strong response in one of these cases:

And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the LORD!’” Thus says the Lord GOD: “Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. You

Their motivation was not to follow God or to bless the Lord, but rather to elevate themselves.



The Mishnah is commentary on the Scripture and was oral tradition in the time of Yeshua (Jesus). After the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the major emphasis of Judaism turned to learning and prayer. The codification of the oral tradition began to be recorded and was given final form early in the third century AD by Judah ha-Nasi (AD 135–220).

The Talmud is essentially a commentary on the Mishnah. There are actually two talmuds: the Babylonian Talmud (finished by the end of the fifth century) and the Jerusalem Talmud (completed in AD 425).

You may be thinking, “Why should we as Christians be interested?” The Tanach (the Old Testament) is written in Hebrew by Jewish men. Yeshua was an integral part of first-century Judaism and quoted from the Mishnah. We can gain contextual clarity by understanding Jewish thinking at the time of Yeshua and understand our Jewish brothers as we see how their understanding of Scripture developed over time.

*have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD. They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD!’ But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, ‘The LORD says,’ but I have not spoken.” Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you,” says the Lord GOD. “My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. **Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace—and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar—say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall. There will be flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it down. Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, ‘Where is the mortar with which you plastered it?’**” Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “I will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and great hailstones in fury to consume it. So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. Thus will I accomplish My wrath on the wall and on those who have plastered it with untempered mortar; and I will say to you, ‘The wall is no more, nor those who plastered it, that is, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace,’” says the Lord GOD (13:1–15).*

This passage particularly struck me since God equates their actions to a poorly built wall! This wall was made with untempered mortar, and God said it would collapse and bring great ruin and destruction with it. In the *Artscroll* translation and commentary of the book of Ezekiel, which contains anthologized commentary from Talmudic, Midrashic and rabbinic sources (see sidebar explanations), I found an interesting insight about this wall.

In the commentary on verse 10 (bolded in the above text), the *Ezekiel Artscroll* says this:

[The Hebrew words] boneh chaetz “He builds a partition.” According to Yerushalmi Shevi’is 3:6, chaetz denotes a partition made from stones arrayed on top of one another, but without any form of mortar to bind them together. Thus it is a very weak wall. To cover it with a thin veneer of plaster will ill-serve the builder, for the wall will still be fragile despite its illusion of permanence. When the elements finally break it down, it will be too late to correct the mistake.

Jerusalem’s inhabitants had thrown up a wall of illusions behind which they thought themselves securely protected. Had they not been reinforced in their fallacious thinking by the false prophets who promised peace where there was no peace, they would surely have come to realize the truth as it was presented to them by Jeremiah and Yechezkel [Ezekiel]. However, they were blinded by the veneer of hope with which the false prophets glossed over their wall of illusions.

I was pierced to my heart with the knowledge that we, in the 21st century could be in danger of the same kind of self delusion. Have we, the modern-day church, been guilty of wrongly interpreting the events of our day? Have we trusted in shoddily constructed walls of our own wishes and ignored the reality? Have we trusted the words of our politicians or even modern-day false prophets who speak what we want to hear? Are we crying out “peace, peace, when there is no



Man, the Builder

peace?” Are we building our lives on a strong foundation of the Word of God, and the Word made flesh, or do we trust in our own thinking, plans, and prosperity?

Yeshua (Jesus) warned of false prophets, the dangers of doing things our way and the importance of building the right way in Matthew 7:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall (vv. 15–27).

How much of what we have built into our lives, ministries, churches, and countries is like the wall I saw in my dream or the untempered wall Ezekiel speaks of, having a beautiful appearance, but unable to stand when presented with pressure?

I shared the dream with some close friends and prayer supporters in the United States. One of them became quite excited, because he had dreamed an almost identical dream at about the same time I had! At that time, he felt the Lord showed him that the interpretation for America was that a wall of trust had been built on materialism and prosperity—a wall that was not based on a firm foundation and was in danger of collapse. I think there are many things the Lord can show us as we pray into the idea of a poorly built wall, and perhaps the message will vary from person to person depending on the situations in our locale. I cry out to all sincere Christian believers: find out what God is saying for you today.

God, the Builder

As I studied biblical references to building, I was struck by the amount of building God directed His servants to do and how involved God was in the process. They are instructed to build altars; Noah is instructed to build an ark; Moses is instructed to build a tabernacle; and Solomon built the Temple. It seems that God takes great interest in building. He didn't just tell Noah to build an ark and then let him loose to design and build it; He was the architect and Noah was the builder. He didn't tell Moses to build a tabernacle and then let Moses figure it out himself.



Impressive skyscrapers



Beautiful cathedrals

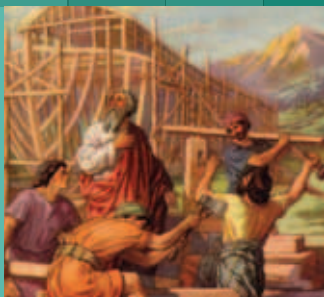


Churches

Photo by Annie Selby

www.israelimages.com

God, the Builder



The Ark



The Tabernacle



The Temple

How much of what we have built into our lives, ministries, churches, and countries is beautiful in appearance, but unable to stand when presented with pressure?



The Menorah near the Kotel



The Titus Arch in Rome

His instructions to Noah and Moses were incredibly detailed, including dimensions, materials needed, colors, etc. God gave Moses not only directions on dimensions, but also on the beautification of the edifice. God even designed the clothing the priests were to wear. He told Moses and the craftsmen how they were to be made. God was vitally involved in every stage of the building process.

Today in Israel, there are devout Jewish men who are desirous of building the Third Temple. They are studying every biblical and Talmudic reference to Temple worship. You can visit the Temple Institute Web site (see bibliography) and see some of the things they have created. For example, the golden menorah—a seven-branch candelabra, described in great detail in Exodus 25:31–40—has been cast of gold and can be seen in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem overlooking the Temple Mount.

“You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece...And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (vv. 31, 40). Careful attention was given to replicate the menorah according to biblical and historical descriptions. We can actually view the menorah on the Arch of Titus in Rome. This arch commemorates the Roman conquest of Israel and pictures the treasures of the Temple being brought into Rome. Cheryl Hauer, our International Development Director, recently visited Rome and this arch was the most important thing she wanted to see.

Why? Because we have an ancient sculpture of something God designed for worship. When I see the recreated menorah in Jerusalem, I get excited because the modern-day designers and craftsmen have caught the idea that how things are built is important to God.

What Is God Building Today?

One of the things God is building today is Zion. The Scripture talks of this day when God will bring back the captivity of Israel from the nations of their dispersion. In the Psalms, a couple of passages speak about this: *“For the LORD shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer”* (102:16–17). *“The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel”* (147:2).

God has a detailed plan for His people’s return to Israel, recorded by the prophets of Israel 2,500–3,000 years ago. Today, we see that plan developing exactly as prophesied. We have written extensively about this in books and teaching letters (see *“The Return to Zion—Aliyah in God’s Plan for Israel”* on our Web site).

The prophets told that God would use the Gentiles (non-Jews) to assist in this building project. Their wealth would be used to finance the project, and they would even physically carry them home to Israel (Isa. 60:1–10; 62:1–2, 6–7, 10). Bridges for Peace is involved in this endeavor of bringing the Jewish people home and helping them settle in their promised land. Christians all over the world have caught the vision to be part of God’s team in rebuilding Zion.

How Are We Building Our Lives?

God is also very interested in how we develop spiritually. He wants us to grow and mature in Him. In Jude 20–21, we read, *“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”* We must make sure that we are built on a sure foundation. In 1 Peter 2, we are referred to as living stones: *“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (v. 5).

What is a *living* stone? My husband Tom is a tour guide in Israel and spent two years in extensive training to be licensed. In his studies, he discovered that a living stone is one that has been chiseled and shaped for use in building. God wants to shape us for His purposes and use. Although chiseling and chipping away the stone doesn’t seem comfortable, it is the process of becoming a useful part of the spiritual house that God is building.

Are you willing to allow God to mold you, to chisel away the things that are not pleasing to Him, to make you a living stone among other living stones

One of the things God is building today is Zion.



Photo by Israelnet



A “living” stone is one that has been chiseled and shaped.

Let's submit ourselves to God's correction and building plan in order to be strong in Him for the purpose He has prepared.

in His edifice? That is what is necessary if we are to remain standing when the winds of adversity lash against us in these days. We need to be built according to God's plan, and it will be detailed because that's the way God builds. Let's submit ourselves to His correction and building plan in order to be strong in Him for the purpose He has prepared. Does He want to use you to help build up Zion? That is part of His calling on Bridges for Peace.

Whatever He has in store for you, I urge you to submit to His plan. Those who trust in the Lord do not need to be afraid when difficult times come. As Yeshua said, *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock"* (Matt. 7:24–25).

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.