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**— June 2004 —**

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1 May – 15 June	BREAK (please take this opportunity to fill out the Bible Reading Program survey — see below)	Personal study
16-18 June	Samaritan opposition to the returned Jews continues; Temple reconstruction ceases	Ezra 4:6-24
19-21 June	Resumption of temple reconstruction in response to Haggai and Zechariah's preaching	Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1
22-24 June	The glory of the latter temple to be greater than the former	Haggai 2:1-9;
25-27 June	Call to repentance	Zechariah 1:1-6
28-30 June	The uncleanness of the people; Punishment on disobedience but now God will send blessing; Nations to be shaken; Zerubbabel to be chosen as a signet	Haggai 2:10-23

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Pastors or elders should send collected survey forms to the address given on the forms (not to the home office).

## Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

### The Samaritan Antagonism Continues (Ezra 4:6-24)

**June 16-18**

The chronology of this passage is debated based on differing opinions regarding the identity of the Persian kings mentioned within it. Recall from verses 4-5 that the Samaritans were constantly attempting to thwart the Jews who had returned to Judea (the tiny Persian district of Yehud), efforts that often included accusing them before the Persian court. This continued throughout the reign of Cyrus the Great.

Yet Cyrus, whom God had foretold would give the word to restore Jerusalem and its temple, was not swayed by the Samaritan arguments. But he eventually passed from the scene. As historian Werner Keller writes: "Cyrus, the liberator, died on an expedition to the east in 530 B.C., and was buried in the royal palace of Pasargadae near Persepolis [30 miles northeast of Shiraz in southern Iran]. His palace was built in the form of individual pavilions: each one lay in the centre of a magnificent garden: the whole area was enclosed by a high wall. On the southern slopes of a long range of hills there still stands among the rough grass of the highlands a small unpretentious stone building dating from the time of Cyrus. Six square blocks form the steps which lead up to a small chamber, above the entrance to which there could at one time be read the following plea: 'O man, whoever you are and whenever you come, for I know that you will come—I am Cyrus, who gave the Persians their empire. Do not grudge me this patch of earth that covers my body.' Alas, the small stone chamber in which a golden sarcophagus enclosed the mortal remains of the great Persian is now as empty as the place above the entrance which bore the inscription. Occasionally shepherds with their flocks pass unconcernedly by this forgotten spot, as they did in olden times, across the wide plateau where the lion is still lord of the chase.

"Cyrus was followed by his son Cambyses II. With the conquest of Egypt [in 525 B.C.] Persia became under him the greatest empire that the world had ever seen: it stretched from India to the Nile" (*The Bible As History*, 1980, p. 303).

According to verse 5, the Samaritans would continue to present their grievances against the Jews "until the reign of Darius king of Persia." This is generally recognized as referring to Darius Hystaspes (Darius I)—not to be confused with the earlier Darius the Mede mentioned in Scripture.

### Royal Identity Dispute (Ezra 4:6-24)

**June 16-18 Cont'd**

The identity controversy mentioned above starts in the very first verse of our present reading, verse 6, with the identity of the Ahasuerus mentioned there and continues through the rest of the chapter over the identity of Artaxerxes. The Darius of verse 24 is the same as the one in verse 5 (as the temple was rebuilt during the reign of Darius I).

Notice the succession of Persian emperors (dates are B.C.):

Anglicized Greek Form	Persian Form	Dates of Reign
Cyrus II (the Great)	Koorush	559-530
Cambyses II	Kambujiya	530-522
<i>Pseudo-Smerdis (Comates)</i>	Bardiya ( <i>Gaumata</i> )	522
Darius I (the Great) Hystaspes	Darayavahush/Darryoosh	522-486
Xerxes I (the Great)	Khashayarsha	486-465
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus)	Artakhshathra or Ardashir	465-425
Xerxes II	Khashayarsha	424
Secydianus/Sogdianus	(Known only in Greek)	424
Darius II (Ochus/Nothus)	Darayavahush/Darryoosh	423-404
Artaxerxes II (Mnemon)	Artakhshathra	404-359/8
Artaxerxes III (Ochus)	Artakhshathra	359/8-338/7
Artaxerxes IV (Arses)	Artakhshathra	338/7-336
Darius III (Codomannus)	Darayavahush/Darryoosh	336-330

So who is the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6? This name is now generally understood as a parallel to the Greek name Xerxes. Notice that the Persian form is *Khashayarsha*. Where the name Ahasuerus occurs in Scripture, the actual Hebrew form is *Akhshurosh*, much closer to the Persian form of *Khashayarsha*. Of Xerxes the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states, "The Babylonian tablets spell his name Khislarshu, Akhshiyarshu, etc." ("Ahasuerus," <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=967&letter=A>).

And what of the name Artaxerxes? Where this name appears in Scripture, the actual Hebrew form is *Artakhshasta*. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* explains: “In the Persian name Artakhshathra...the ‘thr’...is pronounced with a hissing sound, and is therefore represented in other languages by [an s or sh]. Thus in Babylonian, Artakshatsu, Artakhshassu, and numerous variations; in...Hebrew... Artakhshasta...in Greek, [Artaxesses]...and by assimilation with the name Xerxes [it becomes Artaxerxes]” (“Artaxerxes I,” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1827&letter=A>).

It would seem, then, that Ahasuerus in Ezra 4:6 is King Xerxes I, the husband of Esther. And Artaxerxes in verses 7-23 would appear to be Artaxerxes I, the king under whom Nehemiah later served. If that is the case, as most scholars now maintain, then chapters 4-6 are out of sequence. Here’s how *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* explains Ezra 4: “This chapter summarizes various attempts to thwart the efforts of the Jews. In vv. 1-5 the author describes events under Cyrus (539-530), in v. 6 under Xerxes (485-465), in vv. 7-23 under Artaxerxes I (464-424). He then reverts in v. 24 to the time of Darius I (522-486), when the temple was completed (cf. Hag 1-2). The author drew on Aramaic documents from [Ezra 4] v. 8 to 6:18, with a further Aramaic section in 7:12-26” (note on 4:1-5). Chapters 5-6 concern events during the reign of Darius I. Chapter 7 advances the story to the time of Artaxerxes I.

Following the above interpretation, *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible* has this to say in its note on Ezra 4: “Verses 1-5, 24: the opposition succeeds in bringing the work [on the temple] to a standstill for 15 years, until Darius is king. Verses 6-23 interrupt the chronological sequence to carry the account of the opposition through to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Here the bone of contention is the rebuilding of the city walls ([verse] 12).” This would mean Ezra interrupted the sequence of the book to drop in an overview of the antagonism even beyond the time of Darius, which seems a likely conclusion, especially given the mention of the city and its walls in the correspondence rather than the temple.

However, there is another school of thought that sees Ezra 4 as presented in chronological order—wherein the Ahasuerus or Xerxes of verse 6 is another name for Cyrus’ son Cambyses (530-522) and the Artaxerxes of verses 7-23 is a reference to the imposter king Gaumata (522), who posed as Cambyses’ slain brother Bardiya (Smerdis). *Expositor’s* notes: “Some scholars claim that the parallel account in Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chapters] 21-25...), which substitutes Cambyses for Artaxerxes I, gives the correct order” (note on verse 7). Yet what of the fact that the names Xerxes and Artaxerxes are specifically applied to other kings? “Some historians believe that the names Akhshurosh [Ahasuerus/Xerxes] and Artakhshasta [Artaxerxes] were general titles for kings, such as ‘Pharaoh’ and ‘Shah’ or ‘His Majesty’ and that they were not specific names” (Allyn Huntzinger, *Persians in the Bible*, chap. 6, <http://www.farsinet.com/persiansinbible/images/chapter6.pdf>).

Yet it seems more likely that the majority opinion is correct—that these names refer to Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I. This would seem to be more consistent with other passages and avoids the problem of assigning these appellations to whomever “seems” to fit. Indeed, one might wonder why these names are used in Scripture if they provide no identification of particular kings. Regarding Josephus’ identification, *Expositor’s* notes: “[H.G.M.] Williamson (*Israel [in the Books of Chronicles]*, 1977), p. 50) points out that ‘at Ezra [4]...it seems likely that the author has grouped by theme rather than by chronology. Josephus’ corrections, therefore, which rest from one point of view on accurate historical knowledge, result in the end in unhistorical confusion’ (cf. also [C.G.] Tuland, [“Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 12] ‘Josephus,’ [1974]” (note on verse 7).

The truth is that we can’t know the answer to this matter for sure either way. It should be noted that if the majority opinion is correct, as seems likely, then we are reading the current passage out of chronological sequence. However, that is really no dilemma since, in any case, we are reading the verses in order of scriptural arrangement—which, if not in chronological sequence, is nevertheless thematically consistent here. We will note these verses again where they more likely occur chronologically.

### **Letter Writing Campaign Against Jewish Rebuilding (Ezra 4:6-24)      June 16-18 Cont’d**

Whoever the Ahasuerus of verse 6 is, whether Cambyses or the great Persian emperor known as Xerxes I (see previous comments), he apparently paid no heed to the Samaritan complaints. In verse 7 Artaxerxes, whether pseudo-Smerdis or Artaxerxes I (again see previous comments), at first pays no heed either. But another letter in verses 8-16 gets his attention.

Verses 9-10 identifies the plaintiffs as descendants of those the Assyrians had transplanted from the east into the land of Samaria after the northern tribes of Israel had been deported. Osnapper is evidently another name for the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.). His resettlement of people into Samaria was in addition to that of Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.) mentioned in verse 2. Where the NKJV has “the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites” (verse 9), the NIV has instead, “the judges and officials over the men from Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa” (see *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* for a technical explanation of the differences here). In identifying their nationalities, the Samaritans emphasize the kinship many of them share with the Persian authorities.

Furthermore, the Samaritans refer to themselves in the letter as “your servants” (verse 12)—implying a faithful vassal relationship. By contrast, they refer to Jerusalem as “the rebellious and evil city” (verse 12) and warn that the Jews will again revolt if they manage to rebuild and fortify it (verses 13-14). “A search of the king’s official records confirmed the Samaritans’ allegation of rebellion and sedition on the part of the people of Jerusalem, no doubt referring to the revolts under Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (see 2 Kin. 24:1-20). The fact that these revolts were against the Babylonians and not against the Persians was not important. The Persians had become the heirs of the Babylonian Empire, and they would take such a report seriously” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on Ezra 4:19). Evidently Cyrus’ decree regarding the Jews and Jerusalem had been forgotten by this point, as the Persians had an important precedent of unchangeable law (see Daniel 6:8, 12, 15).

It is also interesting to note in the king’s response that he discovered that past kings of Jerusalem had ruled over all the region west of the Euphrates River (Ezra 4:20)—evidently referring to David and Solomon and perhaps a few later kings who had experienced periods of dominance over nearby nations.

The Persian ruler commands that the restoration of Jerusalem be brought to a halt but he leaves open the possibility of a change in policy, saying that “this city may not be rebuilt *until the command is given by me*” (verse 21). If the Artaxerxes here is pseudo-Smerdis, it would appear that the directive is later overturned when the next king, Darius I, finds the earlier decree of Cyrus (see Ezra 6). If the Artaxerxes in chapter 4 is the one known to history as Artaxerxes I, as most scholars believe, then the king ends up reviewing his own decision and issuing commands regarding rebuilding to Ezra and Nehemiah.

One important factor to note is that if the chapter is in chronological sequence, then the Jews were evidently forced to stop work on the temple (Ezra 4:24) when imperial decree and force of arms brought the rebuilding of Jerusalem to a halt (verses 17-23). But if the chapter is, according to the majority view, out of sequence, then the Jews simply gave up in the face of ongoing resistance (Ezra 4:4-5, 24). Once again, the latter seems more likely given that there is no reference to the work having been forced to cease when the rebuilding is questioned in chapter 5. The latter also seems more in line with Haggai’s criticism of the Jewish neglect of temple reconstruction in the second year of Darius (see Haggai 1:1-11).

In any case, Ezra 4 ends with the fact of temple reconstruction ceasing until Darius’ second year (verses 24). The recommencement and completion of the temple during the reign of Darius is the subject of the next two chapters in Ezra.

It may be of interest to note significant events transpiring elsewhere in the world at this time. It was during this period that Gautama Siddharta (Buddha) lived and taught in India (ca. 563-483 B.C.) and K’ung Fu-tzu (Confucius) lived and taught in China (ca. 551-479 B.C.). This was nearly a thousand years after the time of Moses (and nearly half a millennium from Solomon’s building of the first temple).

### **Turmoil at the Beginning of Darius’ Reign (Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1)**

**June 19-21**

The Samaritan resistance to the Jews of Judea had taken its toll. The Jews quit the rebuilding of the temple and went about their own affairs. This resulted in a period of national punishment, as the prophet Haggai explains. Yet rather than seeing events in this way, the people looked on their “misfortunes” as simply more reasons to not resume the construction. As time went on, the orientation of the people changed until the rebuilding of the temple perhaps seemed like something that would never happen.

“The reconstruction project may have faltered also because of the unstable political situation that followed the death of Cyrus in [530] B.C. [His son] Cambyses came to the throne and reigned for seven years. His major accomplishment was his bringing Egypt under Persian control. The

passage of his armies through the land of Israel may have worked a hardship on the native population. Demands for food, water, clothing, and shelter may have greatly diminished the meager resources of a people engaged on a building project well beyond their means” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, introduction to Haggai).

Ezra 4:24 gives the time frame for the first two verses of Ezra 5: the second year of the Persian king Darius (ca. 520 B.C.). His accession was a time of major change in the empire. An overview of this period provides us with a context for events in Judea described in our current and subsequent readings.

John Bright’s *A History of Israel* states: “Beginning in 522, the Persian Empire was racked by a series of upheavals that bade fair to rend it asunder. In that year, as Cambyses was en route through Palestine on his return from Egypt, news reached him that one Gaumata had usurped the throne and been accepted as king in most of the eastern provinces of the empire. This Gaumata gave himself as Cambyses’ own brother Bardiya [Smerdis], whom Cambyses had had secretly assassinated some years previously. Cambyses thereupon, under circumstances that are obscure, took his own life. An officer in his entourage, Darius, son of the satrap Hystaspes, and a member of the royal family by a collateral line, immediately claimed the throne. Accepted by the army, he marched eastward into Media, brought Gaumata to heel, and executed him” (2000, p. 369).

*The Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes, “Some modern scholars consider that [Darius] invented the story of Gaumata in order to justify his actions and that the murdered king was indeed the son of Cyrus” (“Darius I,” *Micropaedia*, Vol. 3, 1985, p. 887). Yet this is mere conjecture, as there is no way at present to really know.

Bright goes on to say: “But Darius’ victory, far from establishing him in his position, set off a veritable orgy of revolt all over the empire. Though Darius in his great trilingual inscription on the cliff of Behistun sought to belittle the extent of the opposition to him, it is clear that unrest exploded from one end of the realm to the other. Rebellions broke out in Media, Elam and Parsa, in Armenia, all across Iran to the farthest eastern frontier, while in the west both Egypt and Asia Minor were affected” (p. 369).

*The Encyclopaedia Britannica* further explains, “In Susiana, Babylonia, Media, Sagartia, and Margiana, independent governments were set up, most of them by men who claimed to belong to the former ruling families” (p. 887).

Continuing in Bright’s account: “In Babylon, one Nidintu-bel, who claimed to be—and possibly was—a son of [the last Babylonian king] Nabonidus, set himself up as king under the name of Nebuchadnezzar III and managed to maintain himself for some months before Darius seized him and executed him. The following year saw another rebellion in Babylon, the leader of which likewise called himself Nebuchadnezzar [IV] and claimed to be a son of Nabonidus. He, too, made trouble for some months until captured and impaled by the Persians, together with his chief supporters. Throughout his first two regnal years Darius had to fight without cessation on one front after another in order to win through. It was probably not until late in 520 that his position was actually secure.

“Meanwhile, it must have seemed that the Persian Empire was literally flying to pieces. As nationalistic feeling exploded everywhere a tense excitement was created from which the little community in Judah was by no means immune. Dormant hopes were awakened. Perhaps the awaited hour, the hour of the overturn of the nations and the triumphant establishment of Yahweh’s rule, had come at last!” (2000, p. 369).

For those focused on the world scene at the time, certain statements in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, who then preached to the people of Judea, could easily have been interpreted in that way. This might well have played a part in the positive response of the people to their exhortations. Moreover, it was less than four years until the end of the 70 years since the destruction of Jerusalem and the first temple (586-516 B.C.). It was time to get busy and get the job done. Through world events, the inspired preaching of His prophets and directly stirring the hearts of Judah’s leaders and people, God provided the needed motivation to ensure the fulfillment of His promises.

### **Introduction to Haggai (Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1)**

**June 19-21 Cont’d**

As Ezra 4:24–5:1 makes clear, in the second year of Darius (ca. 520 B.C.), two prophets came on the scene in Judea exhorting the Jews who had returned from Babylonian captivity to resume work on the temple of God. These two prophets were Haggai and Zechariah. Recall that in the Hebrew Bible, the 12 “Minor Prophets” constitute a single book of Scripture—concluding the Prophets division of the Old Testament. Haggai is the 10th book of the Minor Prophets. It is the first of the

last three—Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi—which together are known appropriately as the Postexilic Prophets.

The name Haggai means “Festive,” “Festal One” or “My Feast”—the Hebrew *hag*, the word for festival, coming from the concept of moving or dancing in a circle. “It has been suggested that the name was given him because he was born on some feast” (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 1952, p. 237). Some think this name might be a shortened form of Haggiah (a name borne by another individual in 1 Chronicles 6:30), which means “Feast of YHWH” (see *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, introduction to Haggai). It is interesting that the prophet Haggai’s mission was to call on the Jews to restore the temple and its worship—making it once again the center of Jewish festivity and of God’s sacred feasts in particular. In any event, as *Expositor’s* states in a footnote to Ezra 5:1, Haggai “was a popular name. It was borne by eleven individuals at [the fifth-century-B.C. Jewish community at Aswan in Egypt on the Nile island of] Elephantine and by four in the Murashu texts [of Babylon] ([Michael] Coogan, [*West Semitic*] *Personal Names [in the Mura\_û Documents*, 1976], p. 23).”

Nothing else is known about Haggai apart from his short book, the two occurrences of his name in the book of Ezra (5:1; 6:14) and an allusion to him in Zechariah 8:9. Some have seen Haggai 2:3 as an indication that the prophet himself saw the earlier temple of Solomon, which would put Haggai in his 70s or older. His old age is given as the reason for the brevity of his work and writing—cut short, it is presumed, by death. Yet the verse in question does not actually say that Haggai saw the former temple. Perhaps he merely knew of its dimensions—or was afforded a glimpse of it in inspired vision. So we really have no clue as to the prophet’s age. He could well have been a young man. The placement of Haggai before Zechariah in Ezra and of Haggai’s book before Zechariah’s in scriptural arrangement could indicate that Haggai was older, but that is not really telling of age as Zechariah himself was young (see Zechariah 2:4). Moreover, the book placement could simply signify the fact that Haggai’s book began first (see Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1).

Haggai’s book was meant for the people of his own day but its scope clearly goes far beyond this. “He begins with the rebuilding of the temple, but goes on to speak of the shaking of all nations, the coming of the Lord, and the glory of His millennial reign” (Feinberg, p. 237).

The word Haggai consistently uses for the temple in His book, as in many other places in Scripture, literally means *house*, as the King James Version renders it. The idea is that of a dwelling place for God. Of course, since God is in heaven, we realize that it is through His Spirit that He dwelt in the temple Solomon had built. We should consider that the temple of God today is His people, the New Testament Church in which He now resides through His Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 3:15). And so the book of Haggai has much to say to true Christians. Indeed, there have been times over the centuries where the temple-building tasks God has delegated to His servants—preaching the gospel as the means by which He calls new members and nourishing those members to steady and strengthen them in the structure—has been neglected. And yet God has always stirred some to resume the work. Even now, we must realize that God is still in the process of building His spiritual temple, adding people to it. We must be careful, then, not to neglect participating in God’s work of building His temple today. In fact, we should consider that God considers each of us *individually* as His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). So part of our work is to, with God’s help, take care of ourselves—body, mind and spirit—cooperating with Him in His work of spiritually building each of us up personally, growing and overcoming with His help to become the kind of temple He desires. And in that light we must also work to serve and help the interests of every individual in whom God’s Spirit dwells.

God’s Word through Haggai today is the same as it was to the people of the prophet’s own time: “‘...Build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,’ says the LORD” (Haggai 1:8). This is the message of the whole book.

### **“Wages...Into a Bag With Holes” (Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1)**

**June 19-21 Cont’d**

The date on which Haggai’s first message commences corresponds to August 29, 520 B.C. It is immediately directed to the leaders of Judea—Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua or Jeshua the high priest (Haggai 1:1). Yet it is evidently also announced to all Jews of the land (see Ezra 5:1).

The people maintained that it was not the appropriate time for reconstruction (Haggai 1:2). We can look at this in two ways. First, circumstances did not appear “ideal” to them. They had given up the reconstruction in the face of the Samaritan antagonism. That antagonism had probably not abated. God had not seen fit to remove the Samaritans from the land and replace them with people friendly to the Jews and their efforts. The Persian overlords had not quashed the Samaritan resistance

and given new declarations of support and provided financing for the Jewish rebuilding effort. The Jews were waiting for some forthcoming miraculous circumstances. But God had already given them the task and provided miraculous assistance in the past. Their responsibility now was to step out in faith to continue in obedience to God—and He would continue to see them through.

If we wait until circumstances are “ideal” to obey God, we will *never* obey Him. Our faith is tested through adversity. God wants to see how we will handle His commands even in the hard times. Moreover, we must never put off obedience to God until some later, more “propitious” time. Consider when a person has a new job and learns that his employer expects him to work on the Sabbath. He might think, “Well I’d better not try to take off on Saturdays now. My supervisors won’t go for that. I’d better wait until I’ve been here a few more months or a few more years and then press my case.” This attempt to “work matters out to obey God,” thereby delaying obedience, is still *disobedience*—sin against God. In such a situation, the person should immediately inform his employer, politely and respectfully of course, that he henceforth will be unable to work on the Sabbath—and then stand by his convictions. This is the attitude God will bless, not an attitude of compromise and faithlessness.

The second sense of it not being time to renew work on the temple involves the idea of there not being *enough* time. “How modern an objection!” notes *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, “Sorry, there just isn’t time right now for prayer. I’d like to read my Bible, but I have to get up so early for my work. And at night I’m too tired to do anything but read [or watch] the news [or some relaxing entertainment]. The people of Judea were also busy: too busy with their own affairs to have time or money to invest in rebuilding the temple of God. As a result *they* lost out!” (note on verse 2).

In verses 3-4 and 9, the Jews are chided for somehow finding enough time and money to build up and adorn their *own* houses—*running* to serve themselves—while letting *God’s* house lie in ruins. He tells them to take stock of their situation (verse 5). All of their efforts produce little income. Their food and drink is not enough to satisfy them. Their clothes are not sufficient to keep them warm. Their wages seem to go into a “bag with holes” (verse 6). The reference here is to a money sack, which people carried before pockets and purses came into use. The people’s income seems to leak away. The harder they work, the further they get behind.

“Haggai rebuked the people with a...play on words.... He proclaimed that because the Lord’s house had remained ‘a ruin’ (*hareb*, Hag 1:4, 9), the Lord would bring [or, rather, had already brought] ‘a drought’ (*horeb*, Hag 1:11) on the land” (*Expositor’s*, note on Ezra 5:1). Indeed, God had cursed the people’s efforts because of their failure to honor and obey him (Haggai 1:7-11; see also 2:16-17). “There’s a lesson here for us. God is the one who makes any effort bear fruit. We need to put Him first. When we do, the Lord will bless” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on 1:5-6).

The irony is that the reason the people did not have the time or substance to expend on the work of God is that they did not expend time and substance on the work of God first. People often feel that they “cannot afford” to support God’s work. Yet they have it backwards. The truth is that they cannot afford to *not* support it. They cannot afford to *not* take time to pray, to study God’s Word, to meditate on His laws and to obey Him and support His work. If we put God first, devoting ourselves to His service—in our hearts and minds, in our time and energy, in our finances, in every area of our lives—God will take care of us. If we support His work through our time and means, He will see to it that our remaining time and means are sufficient for the rest of our needs. God promises this in regard to His command about tithing in Malachi 3:8-12—and in regard to proper prioritizing of life’s demands in Matthew 6:25-34.

After presenting God’s rebuke, Haggai has the distinction of being one of the few prophets in the Bible whose words were positively heeded. The leaders and people, with an appropriate fear of further neglecting their relationship with God, determine to now obey Him and renew work on His temple (Haggai 1:12). God then encourages them with the wonderful news that He will be with them (verse 13)—a necessity for their success in this and every spiritual venture. Verse 14 reveals that God Himself has inspired the national recommitment. The work recommences a little more than three weeks from Haggai’s initial message (same verse). Perhaps the intervening time was “spent in taking inventory of their supplies, assessing and assigning jobs, and completing plans” (*Expositor’s*, note on verses 13-15). It seems likely from the wording of Ezra 5:1-2 that Zechariah had also preached to the people prior to their renewed work even though his book does not actually begin until afterward.

**“The Glory of This Latter Temple Shall****Be Greater Than the Former” (Haggai 2:1-9)****June 22-24**

The people of Judea had recommitted themselves to the work of God and had gotten off to a good new start. Through Haggai, God had exhorted them to the task and then encouraged them with the assurance of His presence with them. But that was of course not enough. This next message of Haggai illustrates the need for *ongoing* exhortation and encouragement—just as God’s people need today and at all times.

This next message comes just under a month from the recommencement of the temple construction. Interestingly, it comes on the 21st day of the seventh month, the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:33-44). It was at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that Solomon had dedicated the first temple. And for those who were old enough to remember, the annual Feast of Tabernacles was probably the time of the greatest expression of joy before the splendor of the former temple.

In recalling these things, some measure of disappointment may have set in—just as had happened when the foundation of the second temple was first laid, when those who remembered the former temple of Solomon wept (see Ezra 3:12-13). This could have been part of the reason for previously quitting the reconstruction—the idea of “What’s the use? It will never be as good as it was before.”

Haggai now “puts the discouraging sentiments into the mouths of the audience. They were all thinking it, and now Haggai has said it. The new is inferior to the old, and that fact along with the other discouraging circumstances had thoroughly depressed the people and stifled their initiative. One account of the effort Solomon put into his temple is recorded in 2 Chronicles 1-4. Compare this with the meager means of the returned exiles, whose temple must have looked small indeed” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Haggai 2:3-5). We can fall into this way of thinking with regards to the spiritual temple of God—His Church, considered either collectively or personally. Perhaps we reflect on the material accoutrements and accomplishments of the Church of God in the last century—with huge congregations, superb buildings and grounds, abundant financial means and a powerful, globe-girdling work. We could then look on the more modest physical situation of today and become discouraged—wondering what the use is of carrying on with the temple-building work God has delegated to us when our physical circumstances will seemingly never match what was there before. Maybe similar reasoning is applied to our spiritual condition if we have neglected our relationship with God: “I was so spiritually focused years ago. But I’ve made some wrong choices. I’ve done some bad things. I’ll never be where I was before. Why even bother?”

God did not leave the returned exiles hopeless. As *Expositor’s* notes: “Having brought the very problem of discouragement into focus, Haggai next offered the divine antidote: ‘Be strong...be strong...be strong... and work. For I am with you’ (v. 4). Notice the same imperative thrice repeated—to Zerubbabel, to Joshua, and to all the people. Notice also the threefold repetition of the formula ‘declares the LORD.’ The problem was essentially one of attitude. So the primary command was to take courage. When the people did that, the command to ‘work’ would be fulfilled quite naturally. For the Lord to have only said ‘work’ without giving assurances would have been inadequate motivation. These people did not need to be whipped but encouraged—not cudged but made optimistic. The most uplifting thing they or anyone could hear was that God was with them....

“The thought must have passed through some minds that God was with them no longer. There must have been those who were theologically naive and doubted that God could be with them if the temple and the ark [of the covenant] in particular were not intact. Undoubtedly fear gripped many of the returnees—fear that God had...[eternally abandoned] Jerusalem, fear that no amount of praying or piety would induce him to bless them again, fear that the whole endeavor was in vain, fear that the political enemies would in fact win, fear that all was lost. Therefore, the words of God through Haggai, which must have had a ring of authority to them, would have been of great comfort. And that encouraging word that shored up the sagging spirits of our spiritual forefathers should serve to bolster our spirits as well when we are spiritually discouraged” (note on verses 3-5).

Verse 6 is the only verse of Haggai quoted in the New Testament—in Hebrews 12:26. Haggai 2:5 is a reference to God’s Spirit being with the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai. This is the time when Hebrews 12:26 says God’s “voice then shook the earth.” Haggai 2:6-7 goes on to describe the time when God “once more...will shake heaven and earth...and...all nations.” Hebrews 12:26-28 shows that the final shaking to come will leave only the Kingdom of God. This is certainly an end-time prophecy. It should be noted, though, that, as commentator Charles Feinberg explains, some have

viewed Haggai 2:6-7 as referring “to the revolutions in the Persian and Greek empires. There were such shakings in these governments, but they can only be considered as initial and preparatory steps in the long process where the kingdoms are shaken from their position of rule, and finally the kingdom of the Lord Christ is realized upon earth” (*The Minor Prophets*, pp. 243-244). Given the turmoil at the beginning of Darius’ reign, it is conceivable that the returned exiles took this prophecy as applying to events of their own day—and misunderstanding this and the rest of Haggai’s prophecy as indicating the imminence of the messianic age.

Verse 7 mentions the “Desire of All Nations” and filling the temple with glory. Many have seen in these words a reference to the Messiah, Jesus Christ—that is, all nations desire a divine Savior and Deliverer and a relationship with the Creator of mankind even though they do not know His actual identity or understand God’s will. Others link the phrase “desire of all nations” to the mention of silver and gold in verse 8, seeing the “desire” as the precious things of the gentile nations being brought into the millennial temple of Ezekiel 40–44. Yet the mention of all the gold and silver in the world belonging to God may simply have been His way of telling the people that they need not fret over the absence of such precious metals from their present construction. After all, no matter how things look to them, God states that the glory of “this latter temple” shall be greater than the former (verse 9).

It perhaps seems odd that the millennial temple would be in view here considering that it will be a different temple than the one Zerubbabel built. Zerubbabel’s temple, the second temple, later renovated by King Herod, was utterly destroyed by the Romans. The millennial temple, as described in the final chapters of Ezekiel, will not be built until Christ’s return. It would seem, then, that the second temple must have been intended on some level here in Haggai 2. Consider that a comparison is being drawn with Solomon’s temple, and God is encouraging the people about the temple they are working on. How would it be an encouragement if the point were that the temple they were working on would not receive the greater glory—that the greater glory was instead reserved for a later temple to be built millennia after the one they were working on was destroyed?

Of course, Haggai’s immediate audience would not have known any of this bad news. Moreover, we should return to verse 3, where Haggai asks, “Who is left among you who saw *this temple* in its former glory?” Feinberg remarks, “From God’s viewpoint there was only one house of the Lord on Mt. Zion, whether it was the Temple built by Solomon, Zerubbabel, or Herod later” (p. 243). Indeed, there is continuity between the temples. Nevertheless, we should recognize that a contrast is being drawn between “this latter temple” and “the former.”

What, we might ask, did the second temple experience in the way of divine glory? After all, we’ve already seen that it was smaller. Moreover, factors evident upon later completion could have seemed to belie the idea of greater glory. “The Babylonian Talmud indicated five things were lacking in the Temple of Zerubbabel which were present in the Temple of Solomon: (1) the Ark of the Covenant [containing the Ten Commandments]; (2) the holy fire; (3) the Shekinah glory [the divine presence of God]; (4) the spirit of prophecy (the Holy Spirit); and (5) the Urim and Thummim” (p. 240). Yet consider that to this very temple, as later renovated by Herod, would come the Creator incarnate—God made flesh—Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as we will later consider in reading Acts 2, there is reason to believe that the temple may have been the “house” where Jesus’ disciples were gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost following His death and resurrection—where the Holy Spirit came and filled them in a manifestation of power and thousands of gathered witnesses from different countries were converted as a result. This was the beginning of the New Testament Church—the *spiritual* temple of God as mentioned before—again providing a sense of continuity.

Indeed, the prophecy of the Desire of All Nations and the temple being filled with glory, while perhaps referring in part to events surrounding Christ’s first coming, would—given the apparent time frame of following the shaking of all nations—seem to have more direct reference to events surrounding Christ’s *second* coming. And the temple of God of that time referred to in the prophecy could well signify the spiritual one that continued right on beyond the destruction of the second temple and remains to this day—the New Testament Church of God.

Those elements of the first physical temple that were missing in the second have spiritual counterparts in the spiritual temple, the Church. Rather than the ark containing the Ten Commandments, the members of the Church of God have the law of God written on their hearts. Rather than the divinely ignited holy fire for sacrifices, those in the Church of God are offered up as living sacrifices, and their prayers as incense. The Shekinah (indwelling) glory of God abides within the members of His spiritual temple. The Church of God has the “prophetic word confirmed” (2 Peter 1:19). And rather than consult the Urim and Thummim, those in the Church are able to

consult the full written Word of God and His ministry and receive discernment through God's Spirit. It is the Church of God, the spiritual temple, that will obtain the greatest glory of all, when it is fully glorified—indeed, deified—at the time of Christ's return. The glorified Church will then dwell with Christ at the physical millennial temple, again providing further continuity of the temple theme—that of a dwelling place, a house, a home for God and His family.

Haggai 2:9 ends with God's promise, "And in this place I will give peace"—*shalom*, ultimate contentment and satisfaction, with all as it should be. That certainly has not described the history of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount of any age since Haggai wrote. And even the Church, while experiencing a measure of the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), has not received it in its fullness and perfection. That is something that lies yet in the future—the wonderful hope for which we wait.

### Introduction to Zechariah (Zechariah 1:1-6)

June 25-27

Ezra 4:24–5:2 says that in the second year of the Persian king Darius, the Judean governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua or Joshua recommenced the work on the second temple in response to the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai 1:14-15 tells us that the work was resumed on the 24th day of the sixth month (corresponding to September 22, 520 B.C.). Yet the first message of the book of Zechariah is dated to the *eighth* month of the same year (late October to late November)—one to two months after the work's resumption. Evidently Zechariah preached with Haggai prior to the 24th day of the sixth month but didn't receive the message from God that begins his book until the eighth month. In other words, Zechariah's ministry began prior to the writing of his book.

Zechariah is the 11th of the 12 Minor Prophets—the second of the three Postexilic Prophets. He refers to himself as "Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (Zechariah 1:1). Ezra refers to him as "Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1; 6:14)—"son" in this case meaning "grandson." "Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was not only a prophet but also a priest. He was born in Babylonia and was among those who returned to Palestine in 539-537 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. Iddo, Neh 12:4). At a later time, when Joiakim was high priest, Zechariah apparently succeeded his grandfather Iddo (Zech 1:1, 7) as head of that priestly family (Neh 12:10-16). Since it was the grandson (Zechariah) who in this instance succeeded the grandfather (Iddo), it has been conjectured that the father (Berechiah, Zech 1:1, 7) died at an early age, before he could succeed to family headship. Though a contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah continued his ministry long after him (cf. Zech 1:1 and 7:1 with Hag 1:1; see also Neh 12:10-16). Considering his young age in the early period of his ministry (Zech 2:4, 'young man'), it is possible that Zechariah continued into the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introduction to Zechariah). Chapters 1–8 of Zechariah are dated to the time of the temple's reconstruction. Chapters 9–14 are undated and believed by many to have been written much later.

The name Zechariah, a common one in the Old Testament, means "YHWH Remembers." *Expositor's* notes: "The three names in the complete patronymic formula (Zechariah, Berechiah, Iddo) mean 'the LORD remembers,' 'the LORD blesses,' and 'timely (?).' [Commentator Charles] Feinberg...combining the three names, believes they signify that 'the LORD remembers,' and 'the LORD will bless' at 'the set time,' which, in a sense, is the theme of the book" (note on 1:1). Zechariah's message is that God will not forget or forsake His people—He will remember and restore them. This was already evident through the restoration God was then accomplishing. And in due time God would send the Messiah to bring them eternal salvation and glory.

"Zechariah is frequently called the 'prophet of hope'.... [His] book is filled with references to Christ. Messianic references include mentions of Christ's lowliness and humanity (6:12). They describe His betrayal by Judas (11:12-13), His deity (3:4; 13:7), His priesthood (6:13), and His kingship (6:13; 9:9; 14:9, 16). Zechariah also speaks of the Messiah's being struck down by the Lord[']s command] (13:7), His second coming (14:4), His glorious reign (9:10; 14), and His establishment of world peace (9:9-10; cf. 3:10). In few Old Testament books do we find such constant attention given to the coming Saviour" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, introduction to Zechariah).

In his book *The Minor Prophets*, Charles Feinberg states: "The prophetic horizon of Zechariah is far broader than that of the other minor prophets. His book has been called an apocalypse because of the presence of a number of visions. He dwells on the Person and work of Christ more fully than all the other minor prophets together" (p. 273).

Zechariah's message was no doubt an encouraging one. Like Haggai, he experienced a positive response from the people of Judah. This leads to a question about what became of this particular prophet. Jesus later mentions the horrifying martyrdom of "Zechariah, son of Berechiah...murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matthew 23:35)—the location seeming to imply that the victim was a priest, as only priests were permitted in this area. Yet it would seem odd for the author of the book of Zechariah to have been meant considering that Ezra and Nehemiah make no mention of such a vile act—one that would have represented a drastic change in the orientation of the people. It is, however, possible that Zechariah lived beyond the completion of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and that his martyrdom came at that later time—perhaps by people who felt his messianic proclamations had failed. Alternatively, commentators typically conclude that Christ was referring to Zechariah "the son of Jehoiada" who was stoned to death in the temple court (2 Chronicles 24:19-22)—seeing Jehoiada as actually his grandfather and Berechiah as his father though not named in Scripture (or Berechiah as a second name for Jehoiada). Chronicles was the last book of the Bible in Jesus' day, and it is argued that His statement "the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah" was intended to signify martyrdom "from one end of Scripture to the other."

### **"Return to Me...and I Will Return to You" (Zechariah 1:1-6)**

**June 25-27 Cont'd**

The prophet Zechariah's book opens with a call to repentance (Zechariah 1:1-6). Though God had stirred the hearts and minds of the people to resume work on the temple, it is evident that they were not fully reformed. Working on the reconstruction was not enough. They needed to completely reorient their lives toward God, serving Him wholeheartedly with the right attitude. And they needed to stay the course—remaining consistent in obedience (a rather tall order for a people who did not have the indwelling strength of God through His Spirit). Haggai had already addressed the disappointment of many over the scope of the new temple as compared with Solomon's (Haggai 2:3). Discouragement could have led to neglect and giving up as it had some years before. So Haggai urged a steady strength. Through Zechariah God urges "return"—repentance.

It was imperative for the people to recognize their tendency to sin and the possibility that they could fall into their forefathers' pattern of rejecting God. (Indeed, as 1 John 1:7-8 makes clear, even true, converted Christians do not always succeed in their ongoing struggle against sin—and must regularly and constantly "return" to God and His ways.) Nevertheless, the admonition that the people not follow in their forefathers' footsteps should have served as an encouragement. The returned exiles had a choice in the matter—they did not *have* to go the way of their ancestors.

The great God was with them to help and guide those who would trust in and submit to Him—and to correct and chasten those who would not. "Note the title 'Lord of Hosts' [*YHWH Sabaoth*] throughout this passage and the entire prophecy as well. It is the characteristic name for God in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, occurring more than eighty times. The Greek translation of the Old Testament renders it 'the Almighty.' God is Lord of the stars, the powers of heaven, and all the forces of the universe—a most inclusive and comprehensive name for God" (Feinberg, p. 275).

Zechariah 1:5-6 offers an important perspective about the prophetic pronouncements of the Bible. Many earlier prophets had warned of future national destruction to come on Israel and Judah for their failure to obey God but died before the destruction came to pass. Many looked on their deaths as justification for viewing their warnings as false alarms. And yet their pronouncements came true. "Though the messengers may be gone, God's words live on to be fulfilled (cf. Isa 40:6-8)" (*Expositor's*, note on verses 4-6). Many today scoff at end-time prophecy, claiming that those who issued apocalyptic warnings are long since dead and gone—their pronouncements nothing to worry about. This kind of thinking is foolish. Almighty God is still alive. He's the one who actually made the pronouncements through His servants—and He will ensure their fulfillment.

In verse 6, the phrase "So they returned" or "'Then they repented' [NIV] ('came to themselves,' 'changed their minds') is apparently a reference to what happened to the preexilic forefathers and/or to their offspring during the Exile and immediately afterward.... They had to acknowledge that they had brought the divine discipline of the Exile on themselves because they had refused to 'listen,' or 'pay attention,' to the Lord and to his words of warning through his servants the prophets. They also had to acknowledge that the Lord was just and righteous in his judgment, for he had done to them what their ways and practices deserved, all in accord with what he had 'determined to do' (cf. Lam 2:17)" (*Expositor's*, note on Zechariah 1:4-6).

The Exile had vindicated the rejected former prophets—their words had come true. The people of Zechariah's day needed to learn the lessons and live their lives according to God's will. Of course, the message was not only for Zechariah's day. These words were written for us as well.

**“From This Day I Will Bless You” (Haggai 2:10-23)****June 28-30**

Haggai’s last two recorded messages came on the 24th day of the ninth month in Darius’ second year (verses 10, 20)—corresponding to December 18, 520 B.C.

Haggai’s first message on this day opens with a discussion of holiness and defilement. The previous month, Zechariah had issued a call to repentance, as we saw in our last reading (Zechariah 1:1-6). Though the people were once again engaged in the work of God, they still had personal sins, including wrong attitudes, to contend with. It was essential that they remain conformed to God’s will.

In Haggai 2:11-13, God directs His prophet to ask the priests about issues of holiness. It was their responsibility to teach God’s laws to the people, and it seems likely that this exchange took place before a gathering of the people. “There were two distinct questions: (1) If a man were carrying sacrificial (holy) flesh [that is, a dedicated meat offering] and happened to touch another object, would the object touched thereby become holy or set apart to the Lord? (2) If a man who was unclean by reason of contact with a corpse should touch any such object, would the object become unclean because of the man’s uncleanness? The answer to the first question is negative; to the second it is affirmative. The passages bearing on the subject should be read carefully. (Note Lev 22:4-6; Num 19:11; and Lev 6:18.) Moral cleanness [which ritual purity symbolized] cannot be transmitted, said the Mosaic law, but moral uncleanness can. Legal impurity is more easily transmitted than legal purity. A healthy man cannot communicate his health to his sick child, but the sick child can communicate its disease to the father” (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 245-246).

God explains that this is just how it had been with the Jewish nation (verse 14). When the returned exiles arrived in Judea, they had set up the altar of God and reinstated sacrifices (Ezra 3:1-6). Yet when the people gave up on their duty to reconstruct the temple, the ongoing sacrifices did not purify them even in a ritual sense. Instead, God considered these offerings unclean because the whole focus of the nation was wrong. Even the priests to whom Haggai spoke had been guilty—and it must have stung when they understood the point he was making.

Consider the imagery here further. Haggai’s example was of a person, an individual, carrying sacrificial meat in his garment and of another person, again an individual, who was unclean because of a dead body. If there were one or a few people with right standing before God through physical and spiritual sacrifices, these could not spread righteousness throughout the nation just by their presence. On the other hand, a person who had become defiled through contact with a dead body would spread defilement (physical uncleanness being symbolic of spiritual uncleanness). A little sin in a group will spread (see 1 Corinthians 5). Perhaps what started as the wrong attitudes of a few people spread throughout the nation, eventually leading to the disengagement of the people from the rebuilding project.

Since Zechariah had just issued a call to repentance, we may surmise that some still had wrong attitudes even after the recommitment of the nation. Again, all it took was a few bad apples and the whole Jewish nation was at risk of being corrupted once again. The current rebuilding effort had to be accompanied by the right attitudes and ongoing obedience or the result would be the same. Just having a temple would not shield them from this reality. “The existence of the temple itself guaranteed nothing. The hearts of the people had to be in harmony with the sacrifices being made” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Haggai 2:13-14).

In verse 15, the New King James Version has “consider from this day forward....” And yet what follows concerns past circumstances. The Hebrew word translated “forward” literally means “upward,” and its meaning here is disputed. Some translations have it as “backward”—as in the English idioms where “up the chain” denotes an earlier episode and “down the line” denotes a later one. If the meaning is “forward,” the sense here is “From now on you need to think about these past circumstances.” If the meaning is “backward,” the concept is “Think back from this day on these past circumstances.” (The same applies to verse 18).

But the time frame of the past circumstances is not immediately clear. When was “stone ... laid upon stone in the temple”? Some maintain that this refers to the laying of the foundation of the temple 16 years earlier (see Ezra 3:8-12). Others believe the reference is to the resumption of work on the temple just three months prior (see Haggai 1:14-15). Still others think the reference is to the day of Haggai’s present message, the 24th day of the ninth month—seeing verse 18 as saying that it was on this particular day “that the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid.”

To understand, we should consider the circumstances the people were to reflect on. God had cursed their efforts and their produce to humble them and provoke them to repentance (verses 16-17). Interestingly, verse 17 is a quote from one of the earlier Minor Prophets, Amos, who had

applied these words to the nation of Israel (see Amos 4:9). Nevertheless, the wording parallels the Lord's statements about the returned exiles in Haggai 1 (verses 6, 9-11). And it fits well with the point about their past defilement that He had just made in verses 10-14. Since their alienation from God and consequent punishment are said to have come *before* the laying of stone upon stone (verse 15), the stone-laying here would not seem to be the earlier laying of the foundation in Ezra 3—as the people were not then being punished for disobedience. (Unless the Exile as a whole is in view, but the blighted crops and hail seem to denote not the experience in Babylon but rather the punishment the people experienced in Judea after forsaking the temple reconstruction.)

How are we to reconcile the apparent contradiction of the temple foundation having been laid 16 years earlier (Ezra 3:8-12) and now again at the time of Haggai's preaching (Haggai 2:18)? There are a few possibilities. It may be that the foundation laid 16 years earlier was unfinished—and that work on it was resumed and completed during Haggai's ministry. It could also be that the foundation was earlier completed and even built upon but that, due to problems resultant from neglect, the structure had to be taken back down to the foundations and repairs made. It is also possible "that the first marked the subterranean foundation-laying and the second the first building at ground level as in ancient Mesopotamian practice" (*New Bible Commentary: Revised*, note on verse 18).

The laying of stone upon stone in verse 15, then, seems to refer to the resumption of the work on the temple three months prior. And the day of Haggai's current message being the date the foundation was laid (verse 18) would appear to mean that the foundation was finished on that day. We could perhaps loosely paraphrase verses 15-19 like this: "Think about how things were. Before you resumed work on the temple three months ago, I made things really hard for you when you would not repent. But now from this 24th day of the ninth month (on which the foundation has been completed), you may not see the results yet but I'm turning things around for you to bless you."

It is possible that there is a dual application to Haggai's message. A number of people have recognized the 24th day of the Hebrew ninth month, Kislev, as marking an important occasion in the modern history of the Jewish people. In 1917 the date corresponded to December 9, the day the Turks surrendered Palestine to the British during World War I. The British represent the leading nation of Israelite descent (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). And Britain is subject to the British monarchy—the Jewish dynasty of David (see our online publication *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*). As noted earlier, Haggai 2:17 was quoted from Amos 4:9, which referred initially to destruction to come on the northern kingdom of Israel. The words seem parallel to the national curses for disobedience in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. These passages seem to set forth a 2,520-year withholding of blessings—for the northern kingdom extending from their captivity and fall in the late 700s B.C. to the late 1700s and early 1800s A.D. (see "Birthright Blessings Delayed for 2,520 Years" at [www.ucg/brp/materials/index.htm](http://www.ucg/brp/materials/index.htm)). Yet what of Judah? Interestingly, 2,520 years prior to 1917 was 604 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar initially invaded ancient Judah in 605 B.C. but then quickly returned to Babylon to assume the throne of the Babylonian Empire upon the death of his father. As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 36, he returned in Kislev of the next year to secure his claim on Judah and its neighbors. It was at this time that a fast was called and Jeremiah's book was read to the people—and King Jehoiakim, having one last opportunity to repent, instead burned Jeremiah's book.

It certainly seems more than a mere coincidence that exactly 2,520 years elapsed from this confirmed subjugation of the Davidic dynasty in the Holy Land to Babylon until the restoration of the Davidic dynasty's sovereignty over the Holy Land—and that this restoration occurred on the 24th day of Kislev. This would later lead to the return of Jews to the Holy Land and the formation of the Jewish state of Israel. Thus, it may well be that God's statement that He will bless the Jews from the 24th day of Kislev concerns, on some level at least, the events of 1917. And there may yet be other applications, as the prophecy that follows in Haggai 2, still connected with the 24th of Kislev, concerns the end time.

### **Zerubbabel Chosen as a Signet (Haggai 2:10-23)**

**June 28-30 Cont'd**

The last four verses of Haggai 2 constitute a second message given through the prophet on the same 24th day of Kislev. This final message of the book is addressed to Judah's governor, Zerubbabel.

The shaking of heaven and earth (verse 21) is repeated from verse 6—when God said greater glory than Solomon's temple would fill the new temple. Unless Haggai in some unrecorded sermon disabused them of the notion, the reference to the throwing down of the "throne of kingdoms" and the destruction of the strength of the gentile kingdoms (verse 22) would likely have been seen by the

Jews of Judea as a reference to the fall of Persia—a concept to which the turmoil at the beginning of Darius’ reign, which was still going on at this time, may well have lent credence.

God’s reference to Zerubbabel as “My servant” and to His choosing him as a signet (verse 23) would have had quite an impact as well. Zerubbabel’s grandfather was Jeconiah or Jehoiachin, whose descendants God had banned from the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:30). In giving that ban God had declared, “As I live...though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off” (verse 24). Those considering Haggai’s prophecy might easily have wrongly concluded the following: the Persian Empire is now crumbling; God has overturned His ban on Jeconiah’s descendants; Zerubbabel will soon reign as king; Zerubbabel is the Messiah.

Time would soon reveal these conclusions as erroneous. Darius soon solidified his rule and strengthened and expanded the Persian Empire. God did not negate His own word in removing the dynastic ban He had placed on Jeconiah’s descendants. Zerubbabel never became king. And thus he was certainly not the prophesied Messiah. In fact, he mysteriously disappears from the storyline of Ezra shortly afterward, which we will later consider.

The book of Hebrews interprets the great shaking of Haggai 2:6 in an end-time sense. This is the reasonable interpretation of what is apparently the same shaking in verse 21. The overthrow of the “throne of kingdoms” (verse 22) will be accomplished in the same time frame. “Notice that it is ‘throne’ in the singular and not the plural. There is one supreme ruler over the earth, permitted by God and carried out by Satan, and it will be replaced by that of our Lord Jesus Christ. (See Rev 11:15)” (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 247). Enemy forces fighting among themselves (Haggai 2:22) is another characteristic of the time of Christ’s return (see Zechariah 14:13).

Then in verse 23 we have the exaltation of Zerubbabel, which occurs “in that day.” Clearly this did not refer to the time of Haggai’s preaching. “In that day” would here signify the day of the great future shaking just indicated—the time of Jesus Christ’s second coming. Moreover, the phrase “in that day” is a typical formulation in prophecy for the end-time Day of the Lord.

Given all this, how are we to understand this future exaltation of Zerubbabel? There are a few different prevalent ideas. On one hand, Zerubbabel is seen as the predecessor of the Messiah. That is, in addressing Zerubbabel but specifying the time as that of the great shaking the one really being addressed is the person who will hold Zerubbabel’s office at that later time—the Messiah. In another view, Zerubbabel is simply seen as a representative type or symbol of the coming Messiah—wherein the faithful Davidic leader of the Jews stands for the *ulimate* faithful Davidic leader of the Jews. Alternatively, the exaltation and choosing of Zerubbabel is viewed as a reference to the Messiah coming from his line of descent—and Jesus is legally reckoned as a descendant of Zerubbabel through His adoption by Joseph (see Matthew 1; we will consider the physical genealogy of Luke 3 when we come to the New Testament).

There is, however, another very real and even likely possibility. Near the beginning of Haggai’s short book, Zerubbabel had led the way in the nation’s repenting and returning to the work of God (see Haggai 1:12, 14). And here at the end, he is promised a sure reward. Zerubbabel would indeed reign as a king before God. But not through his physical descent from Jeconiah, as that was forbidden. Rather, at the end of this evil age, when the spiritual powers and governments that dominate this planet are shaken and overthrown, Zerubbabel will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Spiritually born in a new body in direct descent from Almighty God, his descent will no longer be reckoned according to the flesh. Like all the saints, He will be able to sit with Jesus Christ on the throne of David and reign.

Zerubbabel, whose name means “the Seed of Babel”—signifying his birth there—can thus be viewed as typical of all God’s servants. We have all been born in the Babylon of this world. But like Zerubbabel, we can be the “chosen” of God. We can function as God’s signet. God may well have intended Zerubbabel to begin functioning in that capacity while still in the flesh—from that same 24th day of Kislev. In its entry on “signet” in the context of Haggai 2:23, *A Dictionary of Bible Types* states: “This unusual compliment is probably the greatest given to a man by the living God. He informed Zerubbabel that He would touch his life in such a blessed way that he would leave on every other life he touched the imprint of God and the impress of heaven. His conversation with others and his manner of life with them would make an indelible impression upon their hearts and they would know that he was a man of God” (1999, p. 371). This should characterize all of our lives even now. And if we remain faithful, when glorified in the Kingdom of God, together with Zerubbabel and the rest of the saints, we will be able to serve as the *perfect* representatives of God the Father and Jesus Christ for all eternity.