

Rebuilding the Temple

Cyrus of Persia authorized the initial return for God's people from Babylonian captivity shortly after taking Babylon. He specifically was allowing them to return home so that they could rebuild

their temple (Ezra 1:4). Under Zerubbabel, they did return and started by laying the foundation of the temple. However, due to problems involving those who were already there in the land, the construction came to a halt. This resulted in several years in which the building of the temple project was frozen. Nothing was happening.

Later, when they did start rebuilding again, more opposition came. By this time, Cyrus was gone and King Darius (not to be confused with the Darius mentioned in Daniel) had to reconfirm the order that Cyrus had given over a decade earlier. Darius issued his own decree, and work on the temple in Jerusalem started once again.

The work, however, was not just about what the Persians allowed. Ezra records, "the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (6:14). Note the credit



given to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Let's overview these prophets.

Haggai

Haggai began his work in the second year of Darius of

Persia, and his message was given to Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the high priest). His was a narrow, straightforward message: get up from your complacency and get to work on the temple! Haggai exposed their priorities as being more focused on themselves rather than on God.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'This people says, "The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt."' Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?' Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'" (Hag. 1:2-5)

Consider is an important term used at least four times in the book (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18). They needed to think seriously about what they were doing. God promised that He would still be with them (1:13), and the people listened: "they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God" (1:14).

Though the glory of new physical temple

would not match the old, the Lord was still with them. “My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!” (2:5) Then, God tells them, “‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the Lord of hosts” (2:9). The messianic message here rings loud and clear. By the end, Zerubbabel becomes a type of the coming Messiah.

Zechariah

Zechariah means, “Yahweh remembers.” His message begins with a strong appeal: “The Lord was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Return to Me,” declares the Lord of hosts, “that I may return to you,” says the Lord of hosts.’” (1:2-3) He pleads with them not to be like their forefathers who had refused to listen to the warnings of the prophets. God had dealt with the people exactly as promised, and now was the time for restoration.

Recall that the temple was supposed to be about the presence of God, so rebuilding the temple was important for reestablishing that idea. Zechariah encourages the people through a series of visions indicating that restoration and justice would be established once again. Judgment would be rendered against evil doers, and they would overcome to be able to finish the temple.

By the end of the first section, several important messages have surfaced:

First, there is the symbolic unifying of the priesthood with the kingship (6:9-

15). The “Branch” (the Messiah) is pictured as a priest sitting on His throne so that “the counsel of peace will be between the two offices” (vs. 13).

Second, justice and mercy were still major concerns. “Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother” (7:9) was the message, and the prior generation didn’t listen. Now they had an opportunity to change.

Third, there would be future restoration, a message again filled with messianic overtones. “Thus says the Lord, ‘I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain’” (8:3).

In the latter part of the book (chs. 9-14), there are many connections to the Messiah, and the gospels quote from these. For example, we should recognize this:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of
Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
(9:9)

Together, Haggai and Zechariah were successful in helping get the people back to work and get the temple finished.

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