



HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH: WEEK 12

PROPHETS OF ENCOURAGEMENT 02.19.17

FOCUS VERSE

Zechariah 4:6

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

LESSON TEXT

Zechariah 8:2-15

2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.

3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country;

8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

9 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.

10 For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour.

11 But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not:

15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.



FOCUS THOUGHT

The voice of the preacher is a source of constant encouragement in maintaining a passion for keeping God's temple holy.



CULTURE CONNECTION

In Memory of Jenny Glaser

Everyone needs a hero or a heroine. As a youth, my wife's heroine was Jenny Glaser. Middle aged and single, Jenny invested her life in the young girls of First Church. She was always there with a wide smile and an encouraging word. Her planned activities kept the girls busy and Christ-centered. They always knew Jenny would listen to their problems and rejoice in their triumphs.

Some years ago, my wife asked the youth pastor of our church if any girls in the youth group needed a "Jenny." He pointed her to a new convert whose family background was beyond deplorable. Thankfully a family in the church had given her refuge in their home. Other than that, she had no one who cared

for her. My wife began to make it a point to speak to the young lady and to show interest in her activities. It did not take a lot of effort on her part to encourage the young lady to excel in school and to grow in Christ.

After her high school graduation, the young lady moved away to attend college. She is now established in her career and engaged to marry a young pastor. She still keeps in touch with my wife and has been our houseguest on occasion.

It does not take a lot to change a life. It simply requires a desire to encourage someone to become the best he or she can be and some time to show you really care.

OUTLINE

I. THE CALL TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

- A. Initial Temple Work Ceased
- B. The Building Resumed

II. THE CALL TO FINISH BUILDING THE TEMPLE

- A. The Encourager's Voice
- B. The Strength to Finish
- C. The Promise of Blessing

III. THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

- A. The Promise to Zerubbabel
- B. The Rejected King
- C. The Coming King

IV. THE LORD'S TEMPLE

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

A burden for souls will always manifest itself. Dr. Keith Mathison, professor of systematic theology, stated: "The exile was a major turning point in the history of Israel. Judah and Jerusalem had fallen to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Many of the people of the land had been taken captive to Babylon, while others had fled to Egypt

and parts unknown. . . . After centuries of prophetic warnings, the death penalty had been carried out on Israel. The land was in ruins, and the people were in exile. In 539 BC, however, Babylon fell to the Persians, and in 538, Cyrus issued a decree permitting the exiled Jews to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple. Were the prophecies of restoration now to be fulfilled? Would the messianic kingdom of God now be established? These are the questions faced by the post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi" (www.ligonier.org/blog/post-exilic-prophets-unfolding-biblical-eschatology/, accessed February 18, 2015).

Perhaps some history will help to set the stage for the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. (Malachi was also a post-exilic prophet, but he ministered about a hundred years after Zechariah.)

As Jeremiah and others had prophesied, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 597 BC after a three-month siege. Nebuchadnezzar pillaged Jerusalem and its Temple and took King Jeconiah, his court, and other prominent citizens, including the prophet Ezekiel, back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's death

in 562 BC precipitated a rapid decline of his empire. He was followed in quick succession by Evil-Merodach (562-560 BC), Neriglissar (560-556 BC), and Labisi-Marduk (556 BC). Nabonidus (555-539 BC) brought some stability to the kingdom. However, due to unrest because of religious controversies, he was away from the capital for long periods of time, and his son Belshazzar was the effective ruler. Belshazzar was in command when writing appeared on the wall, and Cyrus the Persian entered Babylon.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE CALL TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. . . .

“Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. . . . All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1-4, 7-8, 11).

Contrary to the standard treatment of prisoners of war, Cyrus was a benevolent ruler and allowed the captives to return to their homelands. In 538 BC he issued an edict

allowing the exiled Jews to return to Judah. Zerubbabel led thousands of Jews back to the Promised Land, but most of them chose to remain in Babylon in order to retain the comfortable life they had established over several decades. (See Ezra 2.)

A. Initial Temple Work Ceased

After getting settled in their various cities, the people came together in Jerusalem to worship.

“Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening” (Ezra 3:2-3).

The people kept the Feast of Tabernacles and offered daily burnt offerings. “From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid” (Ezra 3:6).

The people gave money to purchase supplies, and the work began on the Temple foundation. (See Ezra 3:7-8.) Great joy filled the hearts of the people when the foundation was completed. “And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid” (Ezra 3:11).

But it was not long before opposition came against them. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah indicate the former captives faced extreme difficulties:

- Tension escalated between the returnees and the locals living in Judea, Samaria, and Benjamin. After seventy years, lands once

belonging to the families of the Jews from Babylon were occupied by local residents claiming them as their own.

- Religious tension escalated between the returnees and the Samaritans. The Samaritans thought of themselves as Jews while the Jews considered them Gentiles, who had no part in the worship of Jehovah.

- Judah's neighbors hindered the rebuilding of the Temple and reconstruction of the city's walls.

- Years of drought had made the land hard to farm, greatly reducing the food supply.

The people of the land who opposed the rebuilding wrote a letter to the Persian king in an attempt to get a royal edict against the rebuilding of Jerusalem. (See Ezra 4:6–16.) Swayed by the accusatory letter, the king replied with a letter giving the accusers authority to force the cessation of the Jews' rebuilding. Wasting no time, the accusers "went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:23–24).

B. The Building Resumed

Cyrus died in 530 BC. He was followed by Cambyses II (530–522 BC), Gaumata (522 BC), and Darius Hystaspes (522–486 BC). Near the beginning of Darius's reign, Haggai and Zechariah began their ministries of encouraging the Jews to complete the rebuilding of the Temple.

Earlier prophets such as Amos (Amos 9:11, 14–15) and Micah (Micah 4:6–7) had foretold a glorious restoration following the Exile. How did these prophecies mesh with Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks and Cyrus's permission to rebuild Jerusalem? Would the Jewish kingdom be restored now? The hostility and the conditions the Jews faced certainly did not feel like a glorious restoration. Recognizing the Gentiles' resentment and the Jews' frustration and despair, Haggai and Zechariah knew they faced a daunting task.

The word of the Lord came to Haggai on the first day of the sixth month of Darius's second year. According to the *New Living*

Translation, this would be August 29, 520 BC, since Darius began to reign in 522 BC. The message was addressed to "Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest" (Haggai 1:1).

The apathy. The message dealt with the apathy of the Jews who had become disillusioned by the opposition and difficulties they encountered and by being forced to discontinue the rebuilding of the Temple. Some who returned from Babylon had faint memories of Solomon's Temple or had heard stories of its magnificence. They knew that whatever they were able to build with their limited supplies in the face of mounting antagonism would fall short of the grandeur of the first Temple. The reality they faced squashed the excitement they felt earlier.

The rebuke. The Lord gave Haggai a message for the people:

"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? . . . Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

". . . Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? . . . Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands" (Haggai 1:4–11).

The people obeyed the call. The message made it clear that the Lord had caused the drought and other calamities because the people had stopped rebuilding the Temple. They were more concerned with their own comfort than honoring God. His strong rebuke stirred the people to respond because they feared the Lord.

The Lord was with them. As a result of the people's obedience, the Lord told Haggai to tell the people He was with them. The psalmist said, "Except the LORD build the house, thy labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). They were guaranteed success if they continued building, for God was with them.

The Lord stirred them. The Lord stirred the governor first, then the priest, and then the people. "The LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (Haggai 1:14).

The Lord promised to fill the house with glory and the land with peace. On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the Lord gave Haggai a word for Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people: "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3). The new Temple paled in comparison to Solomon's Temple.

However, the Lord promised, "It is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory. . . . The silver is mine, and the gold is mine. . . . The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former . . . and in this place will I give peace" (Haggai 2:6-9).

How could the new Temple be greater than Solomon's? How could it surpass the golden splendor of the former house of worship? The short answer is the promise of greater glory was realized as Simeon took the Infant from Mary and Joseph in the Temple and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast

prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). It was realized as Jesus Christ, the greatest manifestation of God's presence and glory, astonished the doctors of the Law as a lad. It was realized as Jesus drove the corrupt moneychangers from the Temple. The presence of God-in-flesh made the glory of the second Temple superior to that of the first.

Malachi 3:1 states, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." John said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

A second part of the prophecy said the Lord would fill the land with peace. According to the *Reformation Study Bible*, "This peace (Hebrew *shalom*) means more than the absence of conflict. It implies prosperity and a sense of total well-being. Christ gives peace to believers now (John 14:27), but ultimate fulfillment awaits the time when the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22)."

II. THE CALL TO FINISH BUILDING THE TEMPLE

A. The Encourager's Voice

Zechariah's ministry began between Haggai's second and third messages. Zechariah was the grandson of Iddo, head of the priestly families who returned from exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 12:4, 16), making Zechariah both a priest and prophet. His name means "Jehovah remembers." (*Iddo* means "at the appointed time," and *Berechiah*, the name of Zechariah's father, means "God will bless.") Putting the three names together gives this encouraging statement: "God remembers, and at the appointed time He will bless." God would remember His covenant with Israel. (See Deuteronomy 28-30.)

The call for repentance. Zechariah had a message from the Lord for the Jews:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, . . . and I will turn unto you. . . . Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us” (Zechariah 1:3–6).

The Book of Zechariah begins with a call to repentance. The Lord was angry because the previous generations had not obeyed and followed after Him. He reminded the people their fathers had ignored the prophets of old. If this generation would repent and draw close to Him, then He would draw close to them and remember His covenant. Consequently, the Lord gave Zechariah a series of eight night visions to encourage the people.

According to the *Apostolic Study Bible*, the eight night visions represented the following:

1. Horses among the myrtle trees (1:8–11): “The horses moving throughout the earth represents the omniscience of God. God looked throughout the world and saw peace. This setting would give the people of Judah confidence to rebuild the temple since they had no need to fear new invaders.”

2. Four horns and four carpenters (1:18–21): “The four horns are the Babylonians, and the four carpenters (also translated craftsmen or blacksmiths) are the Persians. The Babylonians destroyed the Temple and scattered the people in exile (Zech. 7:14), but the Persians would allow them to return home to rebuild the Temple.”

3. Man with measuring line (2:1–5): “Because the returnees were few in number, God encouraged them by promising their ranks would soon swell with people to the extent

the city would not be able to contain them. God would protect His people as a wall of fire, and God’s glory would be seen in the restored Temple.”

4. Joshua (3:1–10): “Amazingly, Joshua’s family made it through the exile, allowing him to return to assume the position of high priest.”

5. Lampstand (4:1–14): “The two olive trees [verses 3, 14] are the anointed ones . . . namely Joshua and Zerubbabel. The Persians had nothing to fear from Zerubbabel because he did not intend to overthrow them. He would not govern with might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.”

6. Flying scroll (5:1–4): “The flying roll (or scroll) may be symbolic of the Law going throughout the land. . . . Failure to adhere to God’s covenant would bring about the curse spoken of in Deut. 29:9–20.”

7. Ephah (5:5–11): “The woman may be a Babylonian idol since the object is described as wickedness. . . . this passage may refer to ridding Zion of idols as well as returning foreign wives back to Babylon because they corrupt the city with their idolatry.”

8. Four chariots (6:1–8): “The horse imagery from Zech. 1:8–11 representing God’s omniscience returns. This time, however, chariots are added to show God’s omnipotence. God is not only aware of everything going on in the world, but God exercises His power over all of the events taking place. The north country is Persia. God’s Spirit rests there, showing Persian rule over Judah is sanctioned.”

Zechariah’s mission was to comfort and encourage the former exiles to repent of their wicked ways, return to the Lord, and rebuild the Temple. The returnees felt as if their efforts were insignificant and their future uncertain. Discouragement and opposition dashed their hopes of a glorious restoration. However, God gave Zechariah words of encouragement to speak to the people.

The charge to be strong. Zechariah’s message to the Jews from the Lord focused on a bright future.

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with

great fury. . . . I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. . . . There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. . . . If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? . . . Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness” (Zechariah 8:2–8).

Zechariah’s message was clear. God would return to Zion; He would restore Jerusalem and populate it with the young and the old who would come from both the east and the west. Then he continued, “Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. . . . so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong” (Zechariah 8:9, 13).

Because God had promised to restore Jerusalem, Zechariah charged the Jews to be strong. This is similar to Joshua’s commandment to Israel in Joshua 1:6: “Be strong and of a good courage.”

B. The Strength to Finish

By the word of the Lord. Zechariah was emphatic in his instructions to the Jews because he knew he had heard from the Lord. Some variations of the phrase “the word of the LORD came unto me” are repeated throughout the book. The Word is an enduring source of strength.

By the Spirit. Zechariah 4:6 is one of the most-quoted verses of the book: “This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying,

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” This was a reminder that the Jews would only succeed in rebuilding the Temple with divine empowerment.

Neither can we accomplish anything without the Spirit of God. Jesus told His disciples they would receive power when the Holy Ghost came upon them (Acts 1:8). Anything we attempt only by our own abilities will fail. We must have the Spirit of God.

The Temple finished. Because of the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, Temple construction resumed in the second year of Darius’s reign, and the Temple was completed in 516 BC, more than twenty years after the return from captivity. (See Ezra 6:15–18 for an account of the dedication of the rebuilt Temple.)

C. The Promise of Blessing

Zechariah 8 is one of the most encouraging chapters of this prophecy. The first seventeen verses foretell the restoration of Israel in God’s favor. The remaining verses prophesy of the joy of the kingdom and its Jewish favor.

III. THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Although the books of Haggai and Zechariah primarily call for the Jews to arise and finish building the Temple, they are also prophecies concerning Israel’s future.

A. The Promise to Zerubbabel

Haggai 2:20–22 announced the pending destruction of the heathen nations. Verse 23 promised that Zerubbabel would be as a signet ring. This was a seal or guarantee that someday the Messiah, a descendant from David, would come.

B. The Rejected King

Unfortunately, not all the prophecies were positive. Zechariah 9–10 tells about the Jews rejecting their Messiah. This was fulfilled through the earthly ministry of Jesus and His crucifixion on the cross.

C. The Coming King

Nevertheless, the last chapter of Zechariah looks to the distant future when the Messiah shall return to establish His kingdom of holiness forever. Could His coming be today?

IV. THE LORD'S TEMPLE

This lesson has focused on the second Temple in Jerusalem. We must not overlook that Jesus' body was also a temple. (See Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19, 21.) The church, the body of Christ, is now His temple. (See I Corinthians 3:16–17; Ephesians 2:21.)

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Haggai and Zechariah were given the daunting task of rallying the depressed and despondent Jews to finish rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Through the Spirit of the Lord, they were successful and the building was completed in 516 BC.

Earlier prophets had predicted the seventy years of captivity and foretold of a glorious restoration of Israel. As prophesied, the captivity lasted seventy years, and then the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. If this part of the prophecy was true, they must have had limitless expectations of the coming restored kingdom. However, they did not understand the gaps in the prophetic visions. They had received a promise from God. They had faith. They acted on that faith. But they were disappointed.

No doubt some of us have been disappointed. Perhaps some felt they received the

promise of healing for a loved one, praying and hoping the person would be healed, yet witnessed death take control. Others may have felt the assurance that a friend or relative would be saved but then stood at the graveside without having seen any fruit of salvation. Maybe even now individuals are desperately clinging to promises from God, wondering when He will honor His word.

Anyone in those situations can begin to understand the disappointment of the exiles who returned with such high hopes and expectations. The messages of Haggai and Zechariah apply to those who have experienced deep disappointment.

If we fail to understand God's promises—how much greater healing can one receive than a new and glorious body?—sitting down and throwing a spiritual temper tantrum is not the thing to do. Jesus said, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended [disappointed] in me" (Matthew 11:6; Luke 7:23). We need to arise, shake off our frustration, realize that God knows all things and does all things well, and let His glory be revealed in us, His earthly temple.

We cannot do this within ourselves by our might or power. Only by the Spirit of the Lord can we overcome such feelings of disappointment and continue on in faith in God. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Why did the Jews quit building the Temple?
- How did Haggai and Zechariah prod the Jews into rebuilding the Temple?
- Why did the Jews misunderstand the prophecies about Israel's restoration?
- Can you identify with the disappointment and discouragement the Jews felt when they realized they would not be experiencing the glorious restoration Micah had foretold?
 - Have you had a similar experience? Has God not honored His promise to you as you expected? How did you respond?
 - What can you do to overcome disappointment and discouragement?