

Week of October 24-30

Haggai 2

A month later, God sent an encouraging word to the tiny group of returned exiles. They were discouraged because they had no chance of duplicating the splendor of Solomon's temple. But God called them to be strong and to work hard because He was with them. God's intended use for the new temple included earthshaking events. The "desired of all nations will come" to the Temple, and He will fill it with His presence. God's people did not need to be overly concerned with how they could finance the temple because God said, "The silver and the gold is mine."

Two months later, the Lord announced a turning point when the first stones were laid for the temple's foundation. His message begins with a parable related to meat offered for sacrifice. It had no power to make holy what it touched and could become defiled by touching something impure. So long as the people had no temple, so long as they were under God's judgment, they were like that. Nothing prospered. Nothing worked for them. But now, from the day the temple began to be a reality, that would change. God would bless them.

The Lord again speaks of earthshaking events in which He would use violence and war and elevate Zerubbabel. He called him "my servant" and promised to make him like God's signet ring.

Though Zerubbabel's temple was leveled to the foundations by Herod when he renovated it, his temple is still considered the second temple. Nothing happened during the history of Zerubbabel's Temple to answer the full meaning of this prophecy about the future. The Temple was the center point of the kingdom of God on earth, the meeting place between God and men, the place of sacrifice. The fulfillment of the prophecy is in the true Temple which is Jesus Christ.

Zerubbabel passed off the scene. History is silent about what became of him or under what conditions his life ended.

Zechariah Introduction

Zechariah returned from Babylon with the 42,360 exiles to rebuild the Temple in 520 B.C. More is spoken about the Messiah here than in any other prophet except Isaiah. He came under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the High Priest. He, too, encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple. His ministry began two months after Haggai gave his first message. His name means "Yahweh remembers" and was a common name among Jews, used by some thirty different persons in the Old Testament.

Zechariah 1 God's Ways Are Just

Zechariah 1 is a call for repentance with a reminder that God had been very angry with their ancestors. The people acknowledged their parents' sins, and God's carrying out the judgment He promised. Four months later Zechariah received the first "word of the Lord" in the form of eight visions that extend through Zechariah 6.

In the first vision, the angel of the Lord interpreted the appearance of four horsemen who reported to the Lord that they had found "the whole earth at rest." So, the angel asked the Lord how long He would wait to restore Jerusalem and its neighboring towns. The period of God's judgment had ended.

The second vision showed four animal horns that had scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem and four blacksmiths that would demolish the horns.

Zechariah 2 God's Glorious Presence

The third vision picks up the theme of a measuring line stretched over Jerusalem. The building had begun. The angel was concerned that the builder would plan too small a city to take care of the scattered exiles. God promised to dwell among those who returned from exile. Many nations would join in Israel's worship. Jehovah's presence will make walls unnecessary, and so vast as to make walls impossible. Zechariah calls the scattered people to return and tells them to rejoice that the Lord will dwell in their midst.

Zechariah 3 God Wants to Forgive

The fourth vision has a different form: no interpreting angel and no questions from Zechariah. Instead, he saw a scene like those of the heavenly council in which the high priest Joshua was being tried on accusation brought by Satan. But the Lord refused to hear the accusation, reminding the Satan that He had already chosen Joshua. Joshua was then cleansed, given new clothes for his priestly office, and charged to do God's will and to walk in His ways.

Joshua clothed in filthy garments represented the people as he stood before the presence of God. Satan stood there to resist him. God's will was to save them, guilty and polluted as they were. The defilement existed and was unbearable to God. But God was acting in grace and put away the sin of the people.

God then announces "His servant, the Branch." This usually refers to a king or messiah. Here it appears to mean Zerubbabel but could refer to the Messiah Who would come into the world to do His Father's will, including redeeming, cleansing, and restoring Israel to God's intended place for her.

Lastly, He showed a stone with seven facets promising blessings for the people. It closes with the promise of a peaceful life.

Zechariah 4 Two Messiahs

The fifth vision pictures an elaborate golden lampstand fed by two olive trees. These as the two messiahs (or anointed ones), apparently referring to Zerubbabel and Joshua. In the middle of the vision are four words of encouragement to Zerubbabel. "Not by might nor by power" would remind him that he did not need royal authority to succeed. God's Spirit would work through him. The mighty mountain was the obstacle Zerubbabel had to overcome. He would succeed. He was given an assurance that his hands, which had begun the temple, would complete it. God's seven eyes constantly watch over all that happens everywhere around the world.