

WEEK 49. Ezra 1–6, Psalm 137, Haggai 1-2, Zechariah 1–14 (Cyrus, Promised return from exile, Darius)

Sunday ([Ezra 1-6](#))

The Decree of Cyrus

1:1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order to fulfill the Lord's message spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord stirred the mind of King Cyrus of Persia. He disseminated a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom, announcing in a written edict the following:

1:2 "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia:

"The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has instructed me to build a temple for him in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 1:3 Anyone from his people among you (may his God be with him!) may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and may build the temple of the Lord God of Israel – he is the God who is in Jerusalem. 1:4 Anyone who survives in any of those places where he is a resident foreigner must be helped by his neighbors with silver, gold, equipment, and animals, along with voluntary offerings for the temple of God which is in Jerusalem."

The Exiles Prepare to Return to Jerusalem

1:5 Then the leaders of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and the Levites – all those whose mind God had stirred – got ready to go up in order to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. 1:6 All their neighbors assisted them with silver utensils, gold, equipment, animals, and expensive gifts, not to mention all the voluntary offerings.

1:7 Then King Cyrus brought out the vessels of the Lord's temple which Nebuchadnezzar had brought from Jerusalem and had displayed in the temple of his gods. 1:8 King Cyrus of Persia entrusted them to Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the leader of the Judahite exiles.

1:9 The inventory of these items was as follows:

30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 silver utensils,

1:10 30 gold bowls, 410 other silver bowls, and 1,000 other vessels.

1:11 All these gold and silver vessels totaled 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all along when the captives were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

2:1 The Names of the Returning Exiles

These are the people of the province who were going up, from the captives of the exile whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had forced into exile in Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own city. 2:2 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

The number of Israelites was as follows:

2:3 the descendants of Parosh: 2,172;

2:4 the descendants of Shephatiah: 372;

2:5 the descendants of Arah: 775;

2:6 the descendants of Pahath-Moab (from the line of Jeshua and Joab): 2,812;

2:7 the descendants of Elam: 1,254;

2:8 the descendants of Zattu: 945;

2:9 the descendants of Zaccai: 760;

2:10 the descendants of Bani: 642;

2:11 the descendants of Bebai: 623;

2:12 the descendants of Azgad: 1,222;

2:13 the descendants of Adonikam: 666;

2:14 the descendants of Bigvai: 2,056;

2:15 the descendants of Adin: 454;

2:16 the descendants of Ater (through Hezekiah): 98;

2:17 the descendants of Bezai: 323;

2:18 the descendants of Jorah: 112;

2:19 the descendants of Hashum: 223;

2:20 the descendants of Gibbar: 95.

2:21 The men of Bethlehem: 123;

2:22 the men of Netophah: 56;

2:23 the men of Anathoth: 128;

2:24 the men of the family of Azmaveth: 42;

2:25 the men of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth: 743;

2:26 the men of Ramah and Geba: 621;

2:27 the men of Micmash: 122;

2:28 the men of Bethel and Ai: 223;

2:29 the descendants of Nebo: 52;

2:30 the descendants of Magbish: 156;

2:31 the descendants of the other Elam: 1,254;

2:32 the descendants of Harim: 320;

2:33 the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono: 725;

2:34 the men of Jericho: 345;

2:35 the descendants of Senaah: 3,630.

2:36 The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua): 973;

2:37 the descendants of Immer: 1,052;

2:38 the descendants of Pashhur: 1,247;

2:39 the descendants of Harim: 1,017.

2:40 The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel (through the line of Hodaviah): 74.

2:41 The singers: the descendants of Asaph: 128.

2:42 The gatekeepers: the descendants of Shallum, the descendants of Ater, the descendants of Talmon, the descendants of Akkub, the descendants of Hatita, and the descendants of Shobai: 139.

2:43 The temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha, the descendants of Tabbaoth, 2:44 the descendants of Keros, the descendants of Siaha, the descendants of Padon, 2:45 the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah, the descendants of Akkub, 2:46 the descendants of Hagab, the descendants of Shalmi, the descendants of Hanan, 2:47 the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar, the descendants of Reaiah, 2:48 the descendants of Rezin, the descendants of Nekoda, the descendants of Gazzam, 2:49 the descendants of Uzzah, the descendants of Paseah, the descendants of Besai, 2:50 the descendants of Asnah, the descendants of Meunim, the descendants of Nephussim, 2:51 the descendants of Bakbuk, the descendants of Hakupha, the descendants of Harhur, 2:52 the descendants of Bazluth, the descendants of Mehida, the descendants of Harsha, 2:53 the descendants of Barkos, the descendants of Sisera, the descendants of Temah, 2:54 the descendants of Neziah, and the descendants of Hatipha.

2:55 The descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, the descendants of Hassophereth, the descendants of Peruda, 2:56 the descendants of Jaala, the descendants of Darkon, the descendants of Giddel, 2:57 the descendants of Shephatiah, the descendants of Hattil, the descendants of Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and the descendants of Ami.

2:58 All the temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon: 392.

2:59 These are the ones that came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer (although they were unable to certify their family connection or their ancestry, as to whether they really were from Israel):

2:60 the descendants of Delaiah, the descendants of Tobiah, and the descendants of Nekoda: 652.

2:61 And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, and the descendants of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name). 2:62 They searched for their records in the genealogical materials, but did not find them. They were therefore excluded from the priesthood. 2:63 The governor instructed them not to eat any of the sacred food until there was a priest who could consult the Urim and Thummim.

2:64 The entire group numbered 42,360, 2:65 not counting their male and female servants, who numbered 7,337. They also had 200 male and female singers 2:66 and 736 horses, 245 mules, 2:67 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys. 2:68 When they came to the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders offered voluntary offerings for the temple of God in order to rebuild it on its site. 2:69 As they were able, they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 drachmas of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priestly robes.

2:70 The priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel lived in their towns.

The Altar is Rebuilt

3:1 When the seventh month arrived and the Israelites were living in their towns, the people assembled in Jerusalem. 3:2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his priestly colleagues and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his colleagues started to build the altar of the God of Israel so they could offer burnt offerings on it as required by the law of Moses the man of God. 3:3 They established the altar on its foundations, even though they were in terror of the local peoples, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and the evening offerings. 3:4 They observed the Festival of Temporary Shelters as required and offered the proper number of daily burnt offerings according to the requirement for each day. 3:5 Afterward they offered the continual burnt offerings and those for the new moons and those for all the holy assemblies of the Lord and all those that were being voluntarily offered to the Lord. 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. However, the Lord's temple was not at that time established.

Preparations for Rebuilding the Temple

3:7 So they provided money for the masons and carpenters, and food, beverages, and olive oil for the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar timber from Lebanon to the seaport at Joppa, in accord with the edict of King Cyrus of Persia. 3:8 In the second year after they had come to the temple of God in Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak initiated the work, along with the rest of their associates, the priests and the Levites, and all those who were coming to Jerusalem from the exile. They appointed the Levites who were at least twenty years old to take charge of the work on the Lord's temple. 3:9 So Jeshua appointed both his sons and his relatives, Kadmiel and his sons (the sons of Yehudah), to take charge of the workers in the temple of God, along with the sons of Henadad, their sons, and their relatives the Levites. 3:10 When the builders established the Lord's temple, the priests, ceremonially attired and with their clarions, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with their cymbals, stood to praise the Lord according to the instructions left by King David of Israel. 3:11 With antiphonal response they sang, praising and glorifying the Lord:

“For he is good;

his loyal love toward Israel is forever.”

All the people gave a loud shout as they praised the Lord when the temple of the Lord was established. 3:12 Many of the priests, the Levites, and the leaders – older people who had seen with their own eyes the former temple while it was still established – were weeping loudly, and many others raised their voice in a joyous shout. 3:13 People were unable to tell the difference between the sound of joyous

shouting and the sound of the people's weeping, for the people were shouting so loudly that the sound was heard a long way off.

Opposition to the Building Efforts

4:1 When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin learned that the former exiles were building a temple for the Lord God of Israel, 4:2 they came to Zerubbabel and the leaders and said to them, "Let us help you build, for like you we seek your God and we have been sacrificing to him from the time of King Esarhaddon of Assyria, who brought us here." 4:3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the leaders of Israel said to them, "You have no right to help us build the temple of our God. We will build it by ourselves for the Lord God of Israel, just as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us." 4:4 Then the local people began to discourage the people of Judah and to dishearten them from building. 4:5 They were hiring advisers to oppose them, so as to frustrate their plans, throughout the time of King Cyrus of Persia until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

Official Complaints Are Lodged Against the Jews

4:6 At the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus they filed an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 4:7 And during the reign of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their colleagues wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia. This letter was first written in Aramaic but then translated.

[Aramaic:]

4:8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter concerning Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows: 4:9 From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues – the judges, the rulers, the officials, the secretaries, the Erechites, the Babylonians, the people of Susa (that is, the Elamites), 4:10 and the rest of nations whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and other places in Trans-Euphrates. 4:11 (This is a copy of the letter they sent to him:)

"To King Artaxerxes, from your servants in Trans-Euphrates: 4:12 Now let the king be aware that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and odious city. They are completing its walls and repairing its foundations. 4:13 Let the king also be aware that if this city is built and its walls are completed, no more tax, custom, or toll will be paid, and the royal treasury will suffer loss. 4:14 In light of the fact that we are loyal to the king, and since it does not seem appropriate to us that the king should sustain damage, we are sending the king this information 4:15 so that he may initiate a search of the records of his predecessors and discover in those records that this city is rebellious and injurious to both kings and provinces, producing internal revolts from long ago. It is for this very reason that this city was destroyed. 4:16 We therefore are informing the king

that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, you will not retain control of this portion of Trans-Euphrates.”

4:17 The king sent the following response:

“To Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and other parts of Trans-Euphrates: Greetings! 4:18 The letter you sent to us has been translated and read in my presence. 4:19 So I gave orders, and it was determined that this city from long ago has been engaging in insurrection against kings. It has continually engaged in rebellion and revolt. 4:20 Powerful kings have been over Jerusalem who ruled throughout the entire Trans-Euphrates and who were the beneficiaries of tribute, custom, and toll. 4:21 Now give orders that these men cease their work and that this city not be rebuilt until such time as I so instruct. 4:22 Exercise appropriate caution so that there is no negligence in this matter. Why should danger increase to the point that kings sustain damage?”

4:23 Then, as soon as the copy of the letter from King Artaxerxes was read in the presence of Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their colleagues, they proceeded promptly to the Jews in Jerusalem and stopped them with threat of armed force.

4:24 So the work on the temple of God in Jerusalem came to a halt. It remained halted until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

Tattenai Appeals to Darius

5:1 Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied concerning the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. 5:2 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak began to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem. The prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

5:3 At that time Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their colleagues came to them and asked, “Who gave you authority to rebuild this temple and to complete this structure?” 5:4 They also asked them, “What are the names of the men who are building this edifice?” 5:5 But God was watching over the elders of Judah, and they were not stopped until a report could be dispatched to Darius and a letter could be sent back concerning this.

5:6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and his colleagues who were the officials of Trans-Euphrates sent to King Darius. 5:7 The report they sent to him was written as follows:

“To King Darius: All greetings! 5:8 Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the temple of the great God. It is being built with large stones, and timbers are being placed in the walls. This work is being done with all diligence and is prospering in their hands. 5:9 We inquired of

those elders, asking them, 'Who gave you the authority to rebuild this temple and to complete this structure?' 5:10 We also inquired of their names in order to inform you, so that we might write the names of the men who were their leaders. 5:11 They responded to us in the following way: 'We are servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the temple which was previously built many years ago. A great king of Israel built it and completed it. 5:12 But after our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he delivered them into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and exiled the people to Babylon. 5:13 But in the first year of King Cyrus of Babylon, King Cyrus enacted a decree to rebuild this temple of God. 5:14 Even the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and had brought to the palace of Babylon – even those things King Cyrus brought from the palace of Babylon and presented to a man by the name of Sheshbazzar whom he had appointed as governor. 5:15 He said to him, "Take these vessels and go deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt in its proper location." 5:16 Then this Sheshbazzar went and laid the foundations of the temple of God in Jerusalem. From that time to the present moment it has been in the process of being rebuilt, although it is not yet finished.'

5:17 "Now if the king is so inclined, let a search be conducted in the royal archives there in Babylon in order to determine whether King Cyrus did in fact issue orders for this temple of God to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us a decision concerning this matter."

Darius Issues a Decree

6:1 So Darius the king issued orders, and they searched in the archives of the treasury which were deposited there in Babylon. 6:2 A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana which is in the province of Media, and it was inscribed as follows:

"Memorandum: 6:3 In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus gave orders concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: 'Let the temple be rebuilt as a place where sacrifices are offered. Let its foundations be set in place. Its height is to be ninety feet and its width ninety feet, 6:4 with three layers of large stones and one layer of timber. The expense is to be subsidized by the royal treasury. 6:5 Furthermore let the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God, which Nebuchadnezzar brought from the temple in Jerusalem and carried to Babylon, be returned and brought to their proper place in the temple in Jerusalem. Let them be deposited in the temple of God.'

6:6 "Now Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their colleagues, the officials of Trans-Euphrates – all of you stay far away from there! 6:7 Leave the work on this temple of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this temple of God in its proper place.

6:8 "I also hereby issue orders as to what you are to do with those elders of the Jews in order to rebuild this temple of God. From the royal treasury, from the taxes of Trans-Euphrates the complete costs are to be given to these men, so that there may be no interruption of the work. 6:9 Whatever is needed –

whether oxen or rams or lambs or burnt offerings for the God of heaven or wheat or salt or wine or oil, as required by the priests who are in Jerusalem – must be given to them daily without any neglect, 6:10 so that they may be offering incense to the God of heaven and may be praying for the good fortune of the king and his family.

6:11 “I hereby give orders that if anyone changes this directive a beam is to be pulled out from his house and he is to be raised up and impaled on it, and his house is to be reduced to a rubbish heap for this indiscretion. 6:12 May God who makes his name to reside there overthrow any king or nation who reaches out to cause such change so as to destroy this temple of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have given orders. Let them be carried out with precision!”

The Temple Is Finally Dedicated

6:13 Then Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their colleagues acted accordingly – with precision, just as Darius the king had given instructions. 6:14 The elders of the Jews continued building and prospering, while at the same time Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo continued prophesying. They built and brought it to completion by the command of the God of Israel and by the command of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 6:15 They finished this temple on the third day of the month Adar, which is the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

6:16 The people of Israel – the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles – observed the dedication of this temple of God with joy. 6:17 For the dedication of this temple of God they offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve male goats for the sin of all Israel, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 6:18 They appointed the priests by their divisions and the Levites by their divisions over the worship of God at Jerusalem, in accord with the book of Moses. 6:19 The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6:20 The priests and the Levites had purified themselves, every last one, and they all were ceremonially pure. They sacrificed the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their colleagues the priests, and for themselves. 6:21 The Israelites who were returning from the exile ate it, along with all those who had joined them in separating themselves from the uncleanness of the nations of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel. 6:22 They observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, for the Lord had given them joy and had changed the opinion of the king of Assyria toward them, so that he assisted them in the work on the temple of God, the God of Israel.

PRAYER

Lord, You decide when to revive drifted and stale believers, and when to bring spiritual awakening to the lost. May I never presume upon Your sovereign plan but rather invest myself in faithful obedience day by day, ready to celebrate Your miracles of revival and spiritual awakening when You bring them. You allow those who are Yours to choose obedience or disobedience, and those who do not know You to cooperate or to refuse to cooperate – and although You are patient Your sovereign will is always

fulfilled. May I choose to be obedience and not become frustrated when others are disobedient and the lost temporarily interfere., Your temple was built because You declared that it would be so, and those who tried to resist were swept aside. May I never have a moment's doubt as to Your sovereign power to cause the continued unfolding of Your great plan.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

King Cyrus of Persia obediently followed the prompting of the Lord God and granted permission to the Israelites to return and to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.

Cyrus also instructed their neighbors to provide for the Israelites the resources of food, water, transportation, animals for food and work, silver, gold, and tools.

The valuables from the former temple that Nebuchanezzar had displayed among the other artifacts of his multiple false gods were entrusted to the Israelite treasurer.

The text recorded the families of the various cities and of the Levite priest who returned home.

The Israelites started the reconstruction of the temple with an altar constructed according to the instructions of Moses. Then, despite fears of attack from the non-Israelite population, they offered many traditional sacrifices.

Zerubbabel led the reconstruction of the temple in the second year of the edict of Cyrus and the Levites celebrated with praises as described by King David.

Enemies of Judah and Benjamin, brought to Jerusalem by the Assyrians, reported that they had been sacrificing to the Lord God since their arrival and asked to assist with the construction of the temple.

Zerubbabel refused to allow them to participate and so they began to harass the project in a variety of ways, finally filing a complaint that accused the Israelites of a plan to declare independence with the new king of Persia, King Artaxerxes, who called for a halt to the construction.

Although the reconstruction of the temple had been halted during the time of the Persian king Artaxerxes the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had, at the prompting of the Lord God, motivated the Israelites to begin again once Darius had assumed the throne.

The locals challenged their authority to engage in the reconstruction and Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates petitioned Darius for the truth of the Israelite's assertion that Cyrus had granted them authority and provided the resources.

Darius discovered the record from the time of Cyrus and not only did he forbid any interference he ordered that the tax collections of the Trans-Euphrates region be used to provide for every need of

those doing the reconstruction. He made the seriousness of his orders exceptionally clear, writing *“I hereby give orders that if anyone changes this directive a beam is to be pulled out from his house and he is to be raised up and impaled on it, and his house is to be reduced to a rubbish heap for this indiscretion. May God who makes his name to reside there overthrow any king or nation who reaches out to cause such change so as to destroy this temple of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have given orders. Let them be carried out with precision!”*

The temple was completed in the sixth year of the reign of the Persian king Darius and the Israelites celebrated with many sacrifices and joyful praise and worship, including the celebration of the Passover.

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

The rebellious Israelites, who refused the first opportunity to enter the promised land, spent forty years wandering in the wilderness until all of the adults had died. The rebellious Israelites who were kicked out of the promised land spent seventy years in Babylonian captivity, purging all but the youngest children, before they were allowed to return. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and the region worshiped many false gods and had been taught to include token worship of the Israelite God among them. They did not understand that He was the only true God. The Lord God is patient and flexible, the flow of created time seems like a big deal to mere humans but is nothing in His reality, so across the time of human kings and the span of human generations He guides His great plan of redemption.

DISCUSS

Would the Israelites, in captivity to a Persian king who listened to the Lord God, have learned to be themselves keen to listen and obey – unlike their previous generations under Israelite kings – prone to refuse to listen or to obey? Might it have seemed very odd to the people of that region for the Israelites to be permitted to return and to rebuild their temple?

REFLECT

Just as when they left Egypt the host people gave to them many resources. The local inhabitants were being spiteful when they lied about the intentions of the Israelites but Artaxerses was ignoring the Lord God and was listening only to his fear of threats to his power. Since there was little to gain and considerable potential risk to Darius to allow the historically troublesome Israelites to rebuild Jerusalem it seems clear that it was the prompting of the Lord God that would have caused him to endorse, to fund, and to protect their enterprise.

SHARE

When have you experienced or observed a second chance after a time in discipline? When have you experienced or observed a new leader completely ignoring the commitments of a prior leader, and for apparently selfish reasons? When have you experienced or observed the support of a faith-based work from a highly unexpected source?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you and opportunity He is providing to rebuild His temple in your life, and a task which He has assigned to you – one which includes some risk of criticism from unbelievers (perhaps even immature believers).

ACT

Today I will praise the Lord God for His prompting to rebuild his temple in my life. His expression of care and of love is exciting. His Word says that my body, perhaps my soul/spirit is the temple of His Holy Spirit. Rebuilding His temple means to cleanse myself of things that offend Him, fill myself with things that give Him joy, and taking care of my physical body supports those other activities. I will boldly obey the instructions of the Holy Spirit for the ministry to which I have been called and not fear the criticism of unbelievers (or immature believers). I will pause and give praise to the One true and sovereign God Whose great plan is being constantly worked-out and Who has chosen to include me as one small instrument in His work.

Be Specific _____

Monday ([Ezra 7-10](#), [Psalm 137](#))

Ezra

The Arrival of Ezra

7:1 Now after these things had happened, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra came up from Babylon. Ezra was the son of Seraiah, who was the son of Azariah, who was the son of Hilkiah, 7:2 who was the son of Shallum, who was the son of Zadok, who was the son of Ahitub, 7:3 who was the son of Amariah, who was the son of Azariah, who was the son of Meraioth, 7:4 who was the son of Zerariah, who was the son of Uzzi, who was the son of Bukki, 7:5 who was the son of Abishua, who was the son of Phinehas, who was the son of Eleazar, who was the son of Aaron the chief priest. 7:6 This Ezra is the one who came up from Babylon. He was a scribe who was skilled in the law of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king supplied him with everything he requested, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. 7:7 In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, Ezra brought up to Jerusalem some of the Israelites and some of the priests, the Levites, the attendants, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants. 7:8 He entered Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. 7:9 On the first day of the

first month he had determined to make the ascent from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he arrived at Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. 7:10 Now Ezra had dedicated himself to the study of the law of the Lord, to its observance, and to teaching its statutes and judgments in Israel.

Artaxerxes Gives Official Endorsement to Ezra's Mission

7:11 What follows is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priestly scribe. Ezra was a scribe in matters pertaining to the commandments of the Lord and his statutes over Israel:

7:12 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a scribe of the perfect law of the God of heaven: 7:13 I have now issued a decree that anyone in my kingdom from the people of Israel – even the priests and Levites – who wishes to do so may go up with you to Jerusalem. 7:14 You are authorized by the king and his seven advisers to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your possession, 7:15 and to bring silver and gold which the king and his advisers have freely contributed to the God of Israel, who resides in Jerusalem, 7:16 along with all the silver and gold that you may collect throughout all the province of Babylon and the contributions of the people and the priests for the temple of their God which is in Jerusalem. 7:17 With this money you should be sure to purchase bulls, rams, and lambs, along with the appropriate meal offerings and libations. You should bring them to the altar of the temple of your God which is in Jerusalem. 7:18 You may do whatever seems appropriate to you and your colleagues with the rest of the silver and the gold, in keeping with the will of your God. 7:19 Deliver to the God of Jerusalem the vessels that are given to you for the service of the temple of your God. 7:20 The rest of the needs for the temple of your God that you may have to supply, you may do so from the royal treasury.

7:21 "I, King Artaxerxes, hereby issue orders to all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates, that you precisely execute all that Ezra the priestly scribe of the law of the God of heaven may request of you – 7:22 up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of olive oil, and unlimited salt. 7:23 Everything that the God of heaven has required should be precisely done for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should there be wrath against the empire of the king and his sons? 7:24 Furthermore, be aware of the fact that you have no authority to impose tax, tribute, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the musicians, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or the attendants at the temple of this God.

7:25 "Now you, Ezra, in keeping with the wisdom of your God which you possess, appoint judges and court officials who can arbitrate cases on behalf of all the people who are in Trans-Euphrates who know the laws of your God. Those who do not know this law should be taught. 7:26 Everyone who does not observe both the law of your God and the law of the king will be completely liable to the appropriate penalty, whether it is death or banishment or confiscation of property or detainment in prison."

7:27 Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who so moved in the heart of the king to so honor the temple of the Lord which is in Jerusalem! 7:28 He has also conferred his favor on me before the king, his

advisers, and all the influential leaders of the king. I gained strength as the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

The Leaders Who Returned with Ezra

8:1 These are the leaders and those enrolled with them by genealogy who were coming up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

8:2 from the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom;

from the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel;

from the descendants of David, Hattush 8:3 the son of Shecaniah;

from the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him were enrolled by genealogy 150 men;

8:4 from the descendants of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men;

8:5 from the descendants of Zattu, Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men;

8:6 from the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men;

8:7 from the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men;

8:8 from the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men;

8:9 from the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men;

8:10 from the descendants of Bani, Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men;

8:11 from the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men;

8:12 from the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men;

8:13 from the descendants of Adonikam there were the latter ones. Their names were Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men;

8:14 from the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai, and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

The Exiles Travel to Jerusalem

8:15 I had them assemble at the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there for three days. I observed that the people and the priests were present, but I found no Levites there. 8:16 So I sent for

Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and Joiarib and Elnathan, who were teachers. 8:17 I sent them to Iddo, who was the leader in the place called Casiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and his relatives, who were the temple servants in Casiphia, so they would bring us attendants for the temple of our God.

8:18 Due to the fact that the good hand of our God was on us, they brought us a skilled man, from the descendants of Mahli the son of Levi son of Israel. This man was Sherebiah, who was accompanied by his sons and brothers, 18 men, 8:19 and Hashabiah, along with Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, with his brothers and their sons, 20 men, 8:20 and some of the temple servants that David and his officials had established for the work of the Levites – 220 of them. They were all designated by name.

8:21 I called for a fast there by the Ahava Canal, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and seek from him a safe journey for us, our children, and all our property. 8:22 I was embarrassed to request soldiers and horsemen from the king to protect us from the enemy along the way, because we had said to the king, “The good hand of our God is on everyone who is seeking him, but his great anger is against everyone who forsakes him.” 8:23 So we fasted and prayed to our God about this, and he answered us.

8:24 Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, together with Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers, 8:25 and I weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels intended for the temple of our God – items that the king, his advisers, his officials, and all Israel who were present had contributed. 8:26 I weighed out to them 650 talents of silver, silver vessels worth 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, 8:27 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 darics, and two exquisite vessels of gleaming bronze, as valuable as gold. 8:28 Then I said to them, “You are holy to the Lord, just as these vessels are holy. The silver and the gold are a voluntary offering to the Lord, the God of your fathers. 8:29 Be careful with them and protect them, until you weigh them out before the leading priests and the Levites and the family leaders of Israel in Jerusalem, in the storerooms of the temple of the Lord.”

8:30 Then the priests and the Levites took charge of the silver, the gold, and the vessels that had been weighed out, to transport them to Jerusalem to the temple of our God.

8:31 On the twelfth day of the first month we began traveling from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from our enemy and from bandits along the way.

8:32 So we came to Jerusalem, and we stayed there for three days. 8:33 On the fourth day we weighed out the silver, the gold, and the vessels in the house of our God into the care of Meremoth son of Uriah, the priest, and Eleazar son of Phinehas, who were accompanied by Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui, who were Levites. 8:34 Everything was verified by number and by weight, and the total weight was written down at that time.

8:35 The exiles who were returning from the captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel – twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs, along with twelve male goats as a

sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. 8:36 Then they presented the decrees of the king to the king's satraps and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, who gave help to the people and to the temple of God.

A Prayer of Ezra

9:1 Now when these things had been completed, the leaders approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the local residents who practice detestable things similar to those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 9:2 Indeed, they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has become intermingled with the local residents. Worse still, the leaders and the officials have been at the forefront of all of this!"

9:3 When I heard this report, I tore my tunic and my robe and ripped out some of the hair from my head and beard. Then I sat down, quite devastated. 9:4 Everyone who held the words of the God of Israel in awe gathered around me because of the unfaithful acts of the people of the exile. Devastated, I continued to sit there until the evening offering.

9:5 At the time of the evening offering I got up from my self-abasement, with my tunic and robe torn, and then dropped to my knees and spread my hands to the Lord my God. 9:6 I prayed,

"O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God! For our iniquities have climbed higher than our heads, and our guilt extends to the heavens. 9:7 From the days of our fathers until this very day our guilt has been great. Because of our iniquities we, along with our kings and priests, have been delivered over by the local kings to sword, captivity, plunder, and embarrassment – right up to the present time.

9:8 "But now briefly we have received mercy from the Lord our God, in that he has left us a remnant and has given us a secure position in his holy place. Thus our God has enlightened our eyes and has given us a little relief in our time of servitude. 9:9 Although we are slaves, our God has not abandoned us in our servitude. He has extended kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, in that he has revived us to restore the temple of our God and to raise up its ruins and to give us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

9:10 "And now what are we able to say after this, our God? For we have forsaken your commandments 9:11 which you commanded us through your servants the prophets with these words: 'The land that you are entering to possess is a land defiled by the impurities of the local residents! With their abominations they have filled it from one end to the other with their filthiness. 9:12 Therefore do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, and do not take their daughters in marriage for your sons. Do not ever seek their peace or welfare, so that you may be strong and may eat the good of the land and may leave it as an inheritance for your children forever.'

9:13 “Everything that has happened to us has come about because of our wicked actions and our great guilt. Even so, our God, you have exercised restraint toward our iniquities and have given us a remnant such as this. 9:14 Shall we once again break your commandments and intermarry with these abominable peoples? Would you not be so angered by us that you would wipe us out, with no survivor or remnant? 9:15 O Lord God of Israel, you are righteous, for we are left as a remnant this day. Indeed, we stand before you in our guilt. However, because of this guilt no one can really stand before you.”

The People Confess Their Sins

10:1 While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself to the ground before the temple of God, a very large crowd of Israelites – men, women, and children alike – gathered around him. The people wept loudly. 10:2 Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, from the descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra:

“We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the local peoples. Nonetheless, there is still hope for Israel in this regard. 10:3 Therefore let us enact a covenant with our God to send away all these women and their offspring, in keeping with your counsel, my lord, and that of those who respect the commandments of our God. And let it be done according to the law. 10:4 Get up, for this matter concerns you. We are with you, so be strong and act decisively!”

10:5 So Ezra got up and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath to carry out this plan. And they all took a solemn oath. 10:6 Then Ezra got up from in front of the temple of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he stayed there, he did not eat food or drink water, for he was in mourning over the infidelity of the exiles.

10:7 A proclamation was circulated throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all the exiles were to be assembled in Jerusalem. 10:8 Everyone who did not come within three days would thereby forfeit all his property, in keeping with the counsel of the officials and the elders. Furthermore, he himself would be excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

10:9 All the men of Judah and Benjamin were gathered in Jerusalem within the three days. (It was in the ninth month, on the twentieth day of that month.) All the people sat in the square at the temple of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the rains.

10:10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have behaved in an unfaithful manner by taking foreign wives! This has contributed to the guilt of Israel. 10:11 Now give praise to the Lord God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the local residents and from these foreign wives.”

10:12 All the assembly replied in a loud voice: “We will do just as you have said! 10:13 However, the people are numerous and it is the rainy season. We are unable to stand here outside. Furthermore, this business cannot be resolved in a day or two, for we have sinned greatly in this matter. 10:14 Let our

leaders take steps on behalf of all the assembly. Let all those in our towns who have married foreign women come at an appointed time, and with them the elders of each town and its judges, until the hot anger of our God is turned away from us in this matter.”

10:15 Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah were against this, assisted by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite. 10:16 So the exiles proceeded accordingly. Ezra the priest separated out by name men who were leaders in their family groups. They sat down to consider this matter on the first day of the tenth month, 10:17 and on the first day of the first month they finished considering all the men who had married foreign wives.

Those Who Had Taken Foreign Wives

10:18 It was determined that from the descendants of the priests, the following had taken foreign wives: from the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.

10:19 (They gave their word to send away their wives; their guilt offering was a ram from the flock for their guilt.)

10:20 From the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

10:21 From the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah.

10:22 From the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

10:23 From the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also known as Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

10:24 From the singers: Eliashib. From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

10:25 From the Israelites: from the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah.

10:26 From the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

10:27 From the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

10:28 From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

10:29 From the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

10:30 From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

10:31 From the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

10:33 From the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

10:34 From the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

10:38 From the descendants of Binnui: Shimei, 10:39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiiah, 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 10:41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

10:43 From the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

10:44 All these had taken foreign wives, and some of them also had children by these women.

Psalm 137

137:1 By the rivers of Babylon we sit down and weep when we remember Zion.

137:2 On the poplars in her midst we hang our harps,

137:3 for there our captors ask us to compose songs; those who mock us demand that we be happy, saying:

“Sing for us a song about Zion!”

137:4 How can we sing a song to the Lord in a foreign land?

137:5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand be crippled!

137:6 May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, and do not give Jerusalem priority over whatever gives me the most joy.

137:7 Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell.

They said, “Tear it down, tear it down, right to its very foundation!”

137:8 O daughter Babylon, soon to be devastated!

How blessed will be the one who repays you for what you dished out to us!

137:9 How blessed will be the one who grabs your babies and smashes them on a rock!

PRAYER

Lord, You bring blessing to the hopeless and the powerless as mercy is one of Your many attributes, and Your great plan includes keeping Your people connected to You through praise and worship no matter their worldly circumstances. May I recognize Your blessings in my life and never fail to respond with praise and worship and service. You chose to gather a remnant to rebuild Your temple, because You determined that a remnant was to be preserved. You also forgave them for yet another offense against You, committed even as You had gathered them, and You provided a way of redemption. May I never fear that there is no way back to You from sin – You are the way and You make a way. There seems to be no end to Your mercy, though we know it ends at the Final Judgment – where Justice takes it's final and full measure. May I never presume upon Your mercy but rather live in obedience to Your perfect loving will for my life.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

While the Persian king, Artaxerxes, had earlier suspended construction in Jerusalem he was not entirely resistant to the prompting of the Lord God.

The prophet Ezra was called out of Babylon to Jerusalem to promote worship in Jerusalem and to draw other Israelites there.

Artaxerxes issued a decree permitting the travel of Israelites to Jerusalem and the exchange of funds to support the worship. The text does not mention new or renewed construction.

Ezra gathered many of the families of Israel to travel to Jerusalem. When they were gathered he discovered that there were no Levites to serve as priests among them.

When the Levites were located the Lord God blessed them with a family of Levite musicians.

Ezra had assured the king that they would be protected in their travels by the Lord God, so they stopped to fast and pray and ask His protection, rather than solicit the protection of Persian horsemen/soldiers.

The gold and silver was delivered to the priests already there in Jerusalem, weighed-out and distributed in the precise amounts with which they had begun.

The people stopped and gave thanks and presented sacrifices.

Ezra delivered the papers from the king to his local officials who then provided assistance to the Israelites in the reconstruction of the temple.

Ezra was informed by some of the leaders that many of their fellow leaders, and the general population of Israelites, had both intermarried with the local peoples and mixed their pagan religions in with their

right-worship of the Lord God. He was shocked and tore his clothes, hair, and beard and then sat silent the rest of the day.

At the time for the evening offering Ezra cried-out to the Lord God his remembrance of all that He had done for Israel, the many offenses of Israel, His recent restoration of Israel to rebuild the temple, and now the latest offense of Israel against Him.

The high priest confessed the sin of the people to Ezra and proposed that they separate from their foreign spouses. All of those of Judah and Benjamin were required to gather within three days or lose fellowship and property. They gathered, trembling in a cold rain, and with an even greater trembling before an offended God.

Their leaders asked for time to make arrangements for their foreign wives and three months later the process had been completed.

[Psalm 137](#) was an imprecatory prayer “O daughter Babylon, soon to be devastated! How blessed will be the one who repays you for what you dished out to us! How blessed will be the one who grabs your babies and smashes them on a rock!” The author was not identified in the text. It was a symbolic cry for vengeance.

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

The residents in the region surrounding Jerusalem had included the worship of the God of the Israelites in addition to their many false gods, so this would have been an amplification of that worship, rather than something entirely new. Ezra was assembling a representative population from among the dispersed people of Israel. While the Biblical text records that many donated resources in support of the ministry – it was the faithful obedience of Ezra and others which resulted in the work really getting done.

DISCUSS

Might Artaxerxes have responded to the prompting of God from a fear-based motivation? Local history would have reported that the early non-Israelite re-settlers of the region surrounding Jerusalem had suffered calamity until they added worship of the God of the Israelites to the worship of their pagan false gods. Artaxerxes had stopped the reconstruction because the locals had appealed to his fear of conflict. Given all that they had experienced why would the Israelites have been so foolish as to mingle with the pagan locals, both with their false religion, and to marry them?

REFLECT

The captive Israelites received favorable treatment from the Persians despite their own powerlessness – due to the irresistible prompting of the Lord God. The text still makes no reference to rebuilding gates or walls or any part of the city of Jerusalem; the emphasis of Ezra at this point was entirely on the temple. The text does not discuss what happened to the spouses, nor the children. It is left to one to presume that the request for more time was to make provision for them.

SHARE

When have you observed an apparently powerless person or group of persons receiving favor from an unexpected source? When have you sensed that the Lord God was calling you, or a fellowship with which you are/were associated, and you stepped-out with confidence as he provided along the way? When have you experienced or observed someone getting a second chance and still making the same old bad choices? When have you experienced or observed a very difficult choice being mandated to resolve a sin that was discovered in the fellowship of believers?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a place and time in your life where He blessed you – when you were feeling hopeless and powerless, a place where you have been given a second chance but where you are repeating some of the errors of the past, and/or something that you need to deal with in your life which will require a painful choice.

ACT

Today I will step out in faith, trusting in the Lord's provision, to serve in the ministry to which He has called me. I will give thanks for a second chance and I will confess and repent and receive the Lord God's forgiveness for repeating errors of the past. It may be financial assistance but I am still being careless financially, relationship restoration but I am still being careless relationally, it may be extra-credit to make up missing school work but I am not giving it my best effort, it may be a job when I had been fired or laid-off but I am being late or lazy or otherwise less-than-grateful and responsible to a Biblical standard. Whatever it is I will step-up to a Biblical standard, doing my best and giving my best, to bring glory to God. I will courageously and humbly confront the circumstance in my life where a sinful choice has created an environment which is unacceptable to the Lord God. Within the boundaries of Your Word and the limits of my capacity to do so I will make things right. As is appropriate I will consult one who meets the Biblical qualification of “elder” for prayer and counsel and accountability.

Be Specific _____

Tuesday (Haggai)

Introduction

1:1 On the first day of the sixth month of King Darius' second year, the Lord spoke this message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak:

The Indifference of the People

1:2 The Lord who rules over all says this: "These people have said, 'The time for rebuilding the Lord's temple has not yet come.'" 1:3 So the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai as follows: 1:4 "Is it right for you to live in richly paneled houses while my temple is in ruins? 1:5 Here then is what the Lord who rules over all says: 'Think carefully about what you are doing. 1:6 You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but are never filled. You drink, but are still thirsty. You put on clothes, but are not warm. Those who earn wages end up with holes in their money bags.'"

The Instruction of the People

1:7 "Moreover, the Lord who rules over all says: 'Pay close attention to these things also. 1:8 Go up to the hill country and bring back timber to build the temple. Then I will be pleased and honored,' says the Lord. 1:9 'You expected a large harvest, but instead there was little, and when you brought it home it disappeared right away. Why?' asks the Lord who rules over all. 'Because my temple remains in ruins, thanks to each of you favoring his own house! 1:10 This is why the sky has held back its dew and the earth its produce. 1:11 Moreover, I have called for a drought that will affect the fields, the hill country, the grain, new wine, fresh olive oil, and everything that grows from the ground; it also will harm people, animals, and everything they produce.'"

The Response of the People

1:12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak, along with the whole remnant of the people, obeyed the Lord their God. They responded favorably to the message of the prophet Haggai, who spoke just as the Lord their God had instructed him, and the people began to respect the Lord. 1:13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's word to the people: "I am with you!" says the Lord. 1:14 So the Lord energized and encouraged Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak, and the whole remnant of the people. They came and worked on the temple of their God, the Lord who rules over all. 1:15 This took place on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month of King Darius' second year.

The Glory to Come

2:1 On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the Lord spoke again through the prophet Haggai: 2:2 "Ask the following questions to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, the high priest Joshua

son of Jehozadak, and the remnant of the people: 2:3 'Who among you survivors saw the former splendor of this temple? How does it look to you now? Isn't it nothing by comparison? 2:4 Even so, take heart, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord. 'Take heart, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you citizens of the land,' says the Lord, 'and begin to work. For I am with you,' says the Lord who rules over all. 2:5 'Do not fear, because I made a promise to your ancestors when they left Egypt, and my spirit even now testifies to you.' 2:6 Moreover, the Lord who rules over all says: 'In just a little while I will once again shake the sky and the earth, the sea and the dry ground. 2:7 I will also shake up all the nations, and they will offer their treasures; then I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord who rules over all. 2:8 'The silver and gold will be mine,' says the Lord who rules over all. 2:9 'The future splendor of this temple will be greater than that of former times,' the Lord who rules over all declares, 'and in this place I will give peace.'"

The Promised Blessing

2:10 On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of Darius' second year, the Lord spoke again to the prophet Haggai: 2:11 "The Lord who rules over all says, 'Ask the priests about the law. 2:12 If someone carries holy meat in a fold of his garment and that fold touches bread, a boiled dish, wine, olive oil, or any other food, will that item become holy?'" The priests answered, "It will not." 2:13 Then Haggai asked, "If a person who is ritually unclean because of touching a dead body comes in contact with one of these items, will it become unclean?" The priests answered, "It will be unclean."

2:14 Then Haggai responded, "'The people of this nation are unclean in my sight,' says the Lord. 'And so is all their effort; everything they offer is also unclean. 2:15 Now therefore reflect carefully on the recent past, before one stone was laid on another in the Lord's temple. 2:16 From that time when one came expecting a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty measures from it, there were only twenty. 2:17 I struck all the products of your labor with blight, disease, and hail, and yet you brought nothing to me,' says the Lord. 2:18 'Think carefully about the past: from today, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, to the day work on the temple of the Lord was resumed, think about it. 2:19 The seed is still in the storehouse, isn't it? And the vine, fig tree, pomegranate, and olive tree have not produced. Nevertheless, from today on I will bless you.'"

Zerubbabel the Chosen One

2:20 Then the Lord spoke again to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: 2:21 Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah: 'I am ready to shake the sky and the earth. 2:22 I will overthrow royal thrones and shatter the might of earthly kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and those who ride them, and horses and their riders will fall as people kill one another. 2:23 On that day,' says the Lord who rules over all, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant,' says the Lord, 'and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,' says the Lord who rules over all."

PRAYER

Lord, we easily lose perspective, getting ourselves so focused on the day-to-day struggles that we forget the One who gives it any purpose and us any hope. May we lift our eyes to You frequently so as to never lose sight of Your presence and Your priorities.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

The Lord, through the prophet Haggai, challenged the people to recognize that their efforts would be thwarted as long as they refused to honor His priorities for their lives.

Haggai was allowed to bring the message of chastising for their obsession with making their homes look nice while the temple lay in ruins, but to then also deliver the message of hope-in-immediate-obedience, and more hope in the future.

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

The Lord had repeated the message over and over and here it was again; one's worldly possessions are meaningless and temporary unless one is right with Him, and that includes not allowing the things of the world to interfere with our relationship with Him.

DISCUSS

As much as the temple was a symbol of faith and of national pride why would the people have thought it OK to make their homes more luxurious while allowing the temple to remain a mess?

REFLECT

Zerubbabel was as culpable as anyone for the neglect of the temple but because he was repentant and responded rightly and actively was chosen by the Lord to lead in His new plan.

SHARE

When has it been apparent that the less-important was consuming your life and the more-important was being ignored?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a place in your life where priorities are out of balance, especially where something worldly has displaced the priorities of the Lord God.

ACT

Today I will humbly confess, seek and receive forgiveness from the Lord, and repent, then act to restore balance – the Lord God first in all things.

Be Specific _____

Wednesday ([Zechariah 1-6](#))

Introduction

1:1 In the eighth month of Darius' second year, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah son of Iddo, as follows:

1:2 The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. 1:3 Therefore say to the people: The Lord who rules over all says, "Turn to me," says the Lord who rules over all, "and I will turn to you," says the Lord who rules over all. 1:4 "Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets called out, saying, "The Lord who rules over all says, "Turn now from your evil wickedness," but they would by no means obey me," says the Lord. 1:5 "As for your ancestors, where are they? And did the prophets live forever? 1:6 But have my words and statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, not outlived your fathers? Then they paid attention and confessed, "The Lord who rules over all has indeed done what he said he would do to us, because of our sinful ways."

The Introduction to the Visions

1:7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month *Shebat*, in Darius' second year, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, as follows:

The Content of the First Vision

1:8 I was attentive that night and saw a man seated on a red horse that stood among some myrtle trees in the ravine. Behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.

The Interpretation of the First Vision

1:9 Then I asked one nearby, "What are these, sir?" The angelic messenger who replied to me said, "I will show you what these are." 1:10 Then the man standing among the myrtle trees spoke up and said, "These are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk about on the earth." 1:11 The riders then agreed with the angel of the Lord, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have been walking about on the earth, and now everything is at rest and quiet." 1:12 The angel of the Lord then asked, "Lord who rules over all, how long before you have compassion on Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah which you have been so angry with for these seventy years?" 1:13 The Lord then addressed good, comforting words to the angelic messenger who was speaking to me. 1:14 Turning to me, the messenger then said, "Cry out that the Lord who rules over all says, 'I am very much moved for Jerusalem and for Zion. 1:15

But I am greatly displeased with the nations that take my grace for granted. I was a little displeased with them, but they have only made things worse for themselves.

The Oracle of Response

1:16 “‘Therefore,’ says the Lord, ‘I have become compassionate toward Jerusalem and will rebuild my temple in it,’ says the Lord who rules over all. ‘Once more a surveyor’s measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem.’ 1:17 Speak up again with the message of the Lord who rules over all: ‘My cities will once more overflow with prosperity, and once more the Lord will comfort Zion and validate his choice of Jerusalem.’”

Vision Two: The Four Horns

1:18 Once again I looked and this time I saw four horns. 1:19 So I asked the angelic messenger who spoke with me, “What are these?” He replied, “These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” 1:20 Next the Lord showed me four blacksmiths. 1:21 I asked, “What are these going to do?” He answered, “These horns are the ones that have scattered Judah so that there is no one to be seen. But the blacksmiths have come to terrify Judah’s enemies and cut off the horns of the nations that have thrust themselves against the land of Judah in order to scatter its people.”

Vision Three: The Surveyor

2:1 I looked again, and there was a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2:2 I asked, “Where are you going?” He replied, “To measure Jerusalem in order to determine its width and its length.” 2:3 At this point the angelic messenger who spoke to me went out, and another messenger came to meet him 2:4 and said to him, “Hurry, speak to this young man as follows: ‘Jerusalem will no longer be enclosed by walls because of the multitude of people and animals there. 2:5 But I (the Lord says) will be a wall of fire surrounding Jerusalem and the source of glory in her midst.’”

2:6 “You there! Flee from the northland!” says the Lord, “for like the four winds of heaven I have scattered you,” says the Lord. 2:7 “Escape, Zion, you who live among the Babylonians!” 2:8 For the Lord who rules over all says to me that for his own glory he has sent me to the nations that plundered you – for anyone who touches you touches the pupil of his eye. 2:9 “I am about to punish them in such a way,” he says, “that they will be looted by their own slaves.” Then you will know that the Lord who rules over all has sent me.

2:10 “Sing out and be happy, Zion my daughter! For look, I have come; I will settle in your midst,” says the Lord. 2:11 “Many nations will join themselves to the Lord on the day of salvation, and they will also be my people. Indeed, I will settle in the midst of you all.” Then you will know that the Lord who rules over all has sent me to you. 2:12 The Lord will take possession of Judah as his portion in the holy land

and he will choose Jerusalem once again. 2:13 Be silent in the Lord's presence, all people everywhere, for he is being moved to action in his holy dwelling place.

Vision Four: The Priest

3:1 Next I saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, with Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 3:2 The Lord said to Satan, "May the Lord rebuke you, Satan! May the Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn't this man like a burning stick snatched from the fire?" 3:3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood there before the angel. 3:4 The angel spoke up to those standing all around, "Remove his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "I have freely forgiven your iniquity and will dress you in fine clothing." 3:5 Then I spoke up, "Let a clean turban be put on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood nearby. 3:6 Then the angel of the Lord exhorted Joshua solemnly: 3:7 "The Lord who rules over all says, 'If you live and work according to my requirements, you will be able to preside over my temple and attend to my courtyards, and I will allow you to come and go among these others who are standing by you. 3:8 Listen now, Joshua the high priest, both you and your colleagues who are sitting before you, all of you are a symbol that I am about to introduce my servant, the Branch. 3:9 As for the stone I have set before Joshua - on the one stone there are seven eyes. I am about to engrave an inscription on it,' says the Lord who rules over all, 'to the effect that I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. 3:10 In that day,' says the Lord who rules over all, 'everyone will invite his friend to fellowship under his vine and under his fig tree.'"

Vision Five: The Menorah

4:1 The angelic messenger who had been speaking with me then returned and woke me, as a person is wakened from sleep. 4:2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I replied, "I see a menorah of pure gold with a receptacle at the top and seven lamps, with fourteen pipes going to the lamps. 4:3 There are also two olive trees beside it, one on the right of the receptacle and the other on the left." 4:4 Then I asked the messenger who spoke with me, "What are these, sir?" 4:5 He replied, "Don't you know what these are?" So I responded, "No, sir." 4:6 Therefore he told me, "These signify the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord who rules over all."

Oracle of Response

4:7 "What are you, you great mountain? Because of Zerubbabel you will become a level plain! And he will bring forth the temple capstone with shoutings of 'Grace! Grace!' because of this." 4:8 Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me as follows: 4:9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this temple, and his hands will complete it." Then you will know that the Lord who rules over all has sent me to you. 4:10 For who dares make light of small beginnings? These seven eyes will joyfully look on the tin tablet in Zerubbabel's hand. (These are the eyes of the Lord, which constantly range across the whole earth.)

4:11 Next I asked the messenger, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the menorah?" 4:12 Before he could reply I asked again, "What are these two extensions of the olive trees, which are emptying out the golden oil through the two golden pipes?" 4:13 He replied, "Don't you know what these are?" And I said, "No, sir." 4:14 So he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

Vision Six: The Flying Scroll

5:1 Then I turned to look, and there was a flying scroll! 5:2 Someone asked me, "What do you see?" I replied, "I see a flying scroll thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide." 5:3 The speaker went on to say, "This is a curse traveling across the whole earth. For example, according to the curse whoever steals will be removed from the community; or on the other hand (according to the curse) whoever swears falsely will suffer the same fate." 5:4 "I will send it out," says the Lord who rules over all, "and it will enter the house of the thief and of the person who swears falsely in my name. It will land in the middle of his house and destroy both timber and stones."

Vision Seven: The Ephah

5:5 After this the angelic messenger who had been speaking to me went out and said, "Look, see what is leaving." 5:6 I asked, "What is it?" And he replied, "It is a basket for measuring grain that is moving away from here." Moreover, he said, "This is their 'eye' throughout all the earth." 5:7 Then a round lead cover was raised up, revealing a woman sitting inside the basket. 5:8 He then said, "This woman represents wickedness," and he pushed her down into the basket and placed the lead cover on top. 5:9 Then I looked again and saw two women going forth with the wind in their wings (they had wings like those of a stork) and they lifted up the basket between the earth and the sky. 5:10 I asked the messenger who was speaking to me, "Where are they taking the basket?" 5:11 He replied, "To build a temple for her in the land of Babylonia. When it is finished, she will be placed there in her own residence."

Vision Eight: The Chariots

6:1 Once more I looked, and this time I saw four chariots emerging from between two mountains of bronze. 6:2 Harnessed to the first chariot were red horses, to the second black horses, 6:3 to the third white horses, and to the fourth spotted horses, all of them strong. 6:4 Then I asked the angelic messenger who was speaking with me, "What are these, sir?" 6:5 The messenger replied, "These are the four spirits of heaven that have been presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. 6:6 The chariot with the black horses is going to the north country and the white ones are going after them, but the spotted ones are going to the south country. 6:7 All these strong ones are scattering; they have sought permission to go and walk about over the earth." The Lord had said, "Go! Walk about over the earth!" So they are doing so. 6:8 Then he cried out to me, "Look! The ones going to the northland have brought me peace about the northland."

A Concluding Oracle

6:9 The word of the Lord came to me as follows: 6:10 “Choose some people from among the exiles, namely, Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, all of whom have come from Babylon, and when you have done so go to the house of Josiah son of [Zephaniah. 6:11](#) Then take some silver and gold to make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. 6:12 Then say to him, ‘The Lord who rules over all says, “Look – here is the man whose name is Branch, who will sprout up from his place and build the temple of the Lord. 6:13 Indeed, he will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed in splendor, sitting as king on his throne. Moreover, there will be a priest with him on his throne and they will see eye to eye on everything. 6:14 The crown will then be turned over to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. 6:15 Then those who are far away will come and build the temple of the Lord so that you may know that the Lord who rules over all has sent me to you. This will all come to pass if you completely obey the voice of the Lord your God.’”

PRAYER

Lord, Your great plan is a unique new “Jerusalem”, one without physical borders and one which has as its foundation Your truth. May I celebrate with a life dedicated to You what You have promised to those who are Yours. You control the ultimate fate of all, and You will purge Your creation of evil, and of the evil one. May I never doubt that victory belongs to the Lord.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

Zechariah was a peer of Haggai, he prophesied about 520 BC, during the reign of Darius in Persia.

He was told to tell the rebellious people “Therefore say to the people: The Lord who rules over all says, “Turn to me,” says the Lord who rules over all, “and I will turn to you,” says the Lord who rules over all.”

Zechariah received several visions, the first was to explain that the prophesied time of seventy years of exile was about to end and Jerusalem was to be restored.

The second vision was to explain that the four nations who had been allowed to serve as the instruments of the Lord God's judgment would now themselves be punished.

The third vision was of the restoration of Jerusalem without walls due to the large numbers of the returning people, and a clarion call for the people to flee Babylon ahead of the Lord's judgment of it – taking with them great resources.

The fourth vision was of a high priest, Joshua [Jehozadak, identified in [Haggai 1:1](#) and Ezra], who would lead the people in righteous living and worship, he would have a major responsibility, but was to recognize that he was a place-holder for “the Branch” [the Messiah] Who was to come.

The fifth vision was of the Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel that he would be His instrument to build the new Jerusalem: ‘Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord who rules over all.”

[The NET Translator's Notes explain that the "two anointed ones" would have been Joshua and Zerubbabel as they were descended from king David and the high priest Aaron.]

Zechariah was shown a sixth vision where the law of the Lord God was rhetorically traveling across the earth to destroy all that was in violation; the laws against stealing and swearing falsely in His name were specifically mentioned.

The seventh vision was [from the NET Translator's Notes] of wickedness epitomized by a demonic counterfeit of divine omniscience and power, it was shown as symbolically-contained and relocated to a symbolic Babylon by two agents of the Lord God. The symbolic woman was to be placed in her own home there. A symbolic woman of Babylon appears in last days of end times prophesy.

[From the NET Translator's Notes] the eighth vision was of chariots and horses which at that historic time represented Persia conquering Babylonia bringing a sort of peace to the region and therefore to the exiled Jews there. The "peace" has a parallel imagery in last days of the end times when the Lord God conquers all.

Zechariah was told to create a crown and to temporarily place it on the head of Joshua the high priest as a symbolic representation of the coming "Branch" or Messiah. It was to be given to the four representatives of the people from among the exiles in Babylonia who would place it in the temple. People would come from many places to rebuild the temple, at the behest of Zerubbabel (and later Ezra and Nehemiah) in fulfillment of the prophesy.

The fulfillment of this was conditional "This will all come to pass if you completely obey the voice of the Lord your God."

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

The Lord God again calls to the people to choose to turn to Him and then He will bless them. He was defining His omnipotence over all of creation, escalating the confrontation between the law and the law-breakers, isolating the powers of deception, and creating a pathway for redemption.

DISCUSS

Why would the religious leaders of the time of Jesus have missed Him given the clear evidence of the path to His identity and purpose?

REFLECT

The religious leaders, who were supposed to serve the people for the Lord, to teach them of the coming messiah (the Branch), and to stand ready to step-aside when He arrived – chose to instead monstrously

cling to power and to cause Him to be crucified. As with every prior covenant the fulfillment of this was conditional “This will all come to pass if you completely obey the voice of the Lord your God.”

SHARE

When have you experienced a success that was clearly ‘Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit,’? When have you become profoundly aware of the hard boundaries of the law and that only Jesus saves?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a moment in your life where He blessed you and it was ‘Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit’, and a place where you were deceived and now see clearly.

ACT

Today I will give praise and thanks to the Lord God for His blessings and I will give Him praise for setting me free from the deception of the world.

Be Specific _____

Thursday ([Zechariah 7-10](#))

The Hypocrisy of False Fasting

7:1 In King Darius’ fourth year, on the fourth day of *Kislev*, the ninth month, the word of the Lord came to [Zechariah. 7:2](#) Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech and their companions to seek the Lord’s favor 7:3 by asking both the priests of the temple of the Lord who rules over all and the prophets, “Should we weep in the fifth month, fasting as we have done over the years?” 7:4 The word of the Lord who rules over all then came to me, 7:5 “Speak to all the people and priests of the land as follows: ‘When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months through all these seventy years, did you truly fast for me – for me, indeed? 7:6 And now when you eat and drink, are you not doing so for yourselves?’” 7:7 Should you not have obeyed the words that the Lord cried out through the former prophets when Jerusalem was peacefully inhabited and her surrounding cities, the Negev, and the Shephelah were also populated?

7:8 Again the word of the Lord came to Zechariah: 7:9 “The Lord who rules over all said, ‘Exercise true judgment and show brotherhood and compassion to each other. 7:10 You must not oppress the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, or the poor, nor should anyone secretly plot evil against his fellow human being.’”

7:11 “But they refused to pay attention, turning away stubbornly and stopping their ears so they could not hear. 7:12 Indeed, they made their heart as hard as diamond, so that they could not obey the Torah and the other words the Lord who rules over all had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore, the Lord who rules over all had poured out great wrath.

7:13 “‘It then came about that just as I cried out, but they would not obey, so they will cry out, but I will not listen,’ the Lord Lord who rules over all had said. 7:14 ‘Rather, I will sweep them away in a storm into all the nations they are not familiar with.’ Thus the land had become desolate because of them, with no one crossing through or returning, for they had made the fruitful land a waste.”

The Blessing of True Fasting

8:1 Then the word of the Lord who rules over all came to me as follows: 8:2 “The Lord who rules over all says, ‘I am very much concerned for Zion; indeed, I am so concerned for her that my rage will fall on those who hurt her.’ 8:3 The Lord says, ‘I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem will be called “truthful city,” “mountain of the Lord who rules over all,” “holy mountain.”’ 8:4 Moreover, the Lord who rules over all says, ‘Old men and women will once more live in the plazas of Jerusalem, each one leaning on a cane because of advanced age. 8:5 And the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing. 8:6 And,’ says the Lord who rules over all, ‘though such a thing may seem to be difficult in the opinion of the small community of those days, will it also appear difficult to me?’ asks the Lord who rules over all.

8:7 “The Lord who rules over all asserts, ‘I am about to save my people from the lands of the east and the west. 8:8 And I will bring them to settle within Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.’

8:9 “The Lord who rules over all also says, ‘Gather strength, you who are listening to these words today from the mouths of the prophets who were there at the founding of the house of the Lord who rules over all, so that the temple might be built. 8:10 Before that time there was no compensation for man or animal, nor was there any relief from adversity for those who came and went, because I had pitted everybody – each one – against everyone else. 8:11 But I will be different now to this remnant of my people from the way I was in those days,’ says the Lord who rules over all, 8:12 ‘for there will be a peaceful time of sowing, the vine will produce its fruit and the ground its yield, and the skies will rain down dew. Then I will allow the remnant of my people to possess all these things. 8:13 And it will come about that just as you (both Judah and Israel) were a curse to the nations, so I will save you and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid! Instead, be strong!’

8:14 “For the Lord who rules over all says, ‘As I had planned to hurt you when your fathers made me angry,’ says the Lord who rules over all, ‘and I was not sorry, 8:15 so, to the contrary, I have planned in these days to do good to Jerusalem and Judah – do not fear! 8:16 These are the things you must do: Speak the truth, each of you, to one another. Practice true and righteous judgment in your courts. 8:17

Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another. Do not favor a false oath – these are all things that I hate,’ says the Lord.”

8:18 The word of the Lord who rules over all came to me as follows: 8:19 “The Lord who rules over all says, ‘The fast of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will become joyful and happy, pleasant feasts for the house of Judah, so love truth and peace.’ 8:20 The Lord who rules over all says, ‘It will someday come to pass that people – residents of many cities – will come. 8:21 The inhabitants of one will go to another and say, “Let’s go up at once to ask the favor of the Lord, to seek the Lord who rules over all. Indeed, I’ll go with you.” 8:22 Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord who rules over all and to ask his favor. 8:23 The Lord who rules over all says, ‘In those days ten people from all languages and nations will grasp hold of – indeed, grab – the robe of one Jew and say, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.””

The Coming of the True King

9:1 An oracle of the word of the Lord concerning the land of Hadrach, with its focus on Damascus:

The eyes of all humanity, especially of the tribes of Israel, are toward the Lord, 9:2 as are those of Hamath also, which adjoins Damascus, and Tyre and Sidon, though they consider themselves to be very wise. 9:3 Tyre built herself a fortification and piled up silver like dust and gold like the mud of the streets! 9:4 Nevertheless the Lord will evict her and shove her fortifications into the sea – she will be consumed by fire. 9:5 Ashkelon will see and be afraid; Gaza will be in great anguish, as will Ekron, for her hope will have been dried up. Gaza will lose her king, and Ashkelon will no longer be inhabited. 9:6 A mongrel people will live in Ashdod, for I will greatly humiliate the Philistines. 9:7 I will take away their abominable religious practices; then those who survive will become a community of believers in our God, like a clan in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites. 9:8 Then I will surround my temple to protect it like a guard from anyone crossing back and forth; so no one will cross over against them anymore as an oppressor, for now I myself have seen it.

9:9 Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your king is coming to you: he is legitimate and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey – on a young donkey, the foal of a female donkey.

9:10 I will remove the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be removed. Then he will announce peace to the nations. His dominion will be from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

9:11 Moreover, as for you, because of our covenant relationship secured with blood, I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit. 9:12 Return to the stronghold, you prisoners, with hope; today I declare that I will return double what was taken from you. 9:13 I will bend Judah as my bow; I will load

the bow with Ephraim, my arrow! I will stir up your sons, Zion, against yours, Greece, and I will make you, Zion, like a warrior's sword.

9:14 Then the Lord will appear above them, and his arrow will shoot forth like lightning; the Lord God will blow the trumpet and will sally forth on the southern storm winds. 9:15 The Lord who rules over all will guard them, and they will prevail and overcome with sling stones. Then they will drink, and will become noisy like drunkards, full like the sacrificial basin or like the corners of the altar. 9:16 On that day the Lord their God will deliver them as the flock of his people, for they are the precious stones of a crown sparkling over his land. 9:17 How precious and fair! Grain will make the young men flourish and new wine the young women.

The Restoration of the True People

10:1 Ask the Lord for rain in the season of the late spring rains – the Lord who causes thunderstorms – and he will give everyone showers of rain and green growth in the field. 10:2 For the household gods have spoken wickedness, the soothsayers have seen a lie, and as for the dreamers, they have disclosed emptiness and give comfort in vain. Therefore the people set out like sheep and become scattered because they have no shepherd. 10:3 I am enraged at the shepherds and will punish the lead-goats.

For the Lord who rules over all has brought blessing to his flock, the house of Judah, and will transform them into his majestic warhorse. 10:4 From him will come the cornerstone, the wall peg, the battle bow, and every ruler. 10:5 And they will be like warriors trampling the mud of the streets in battle. They will fight, for the Lord will be with them, and will defeat the enemy cavalry.

10:6 "I (says the Lord) will strengthen the kingdom of Judah and deliver the people of Joseph and will bring them back because of my compassion for them. They will be as though I had never rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and therefore I will hear them. 10:7 The Ephraimites will be like warriors and will rejoice as if they had drunk wine. Their children will see it and rejoice; they will celebrate in the things of the Lord. 10:8 I will signal for them and gather them, for I have already redeemed them; then they will become as numerous as they were before. 10:9 Though I scatter them among the nations, they will remember in far-off places – they and their children will sprout forth and return. 10:10 I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to the lands of Gilead and Lebanon, for there will not be enough room for them in their own land. 10:11 The Lord will cross the sea of storms and will calm its turbulence. The depths of the Nile will dry up, the pride of Assyria will be humbled, and the domination of Egypt will be no more. 10:12 Thus I will strengthen them by my power, and they will walk about in my name," says the Lord.

PRAYER

Lord, the faithlessness and hypocrisy of the people continued, but You sought-out the faithful remnant for Your blessing and for the restoration of Your creation. May I grow in the direction of faithfulness

rather than empty ritual and double-minded hypocrisy. You punish those who reject You and those who abuse Your people while they worship false gods. The “New Jerusalem” is where there will be no more sin – only perfection in Your presence. May I live with hope and joy in the future of Your promise, serving You today so that more may join me there.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

Zechariah responded to the leaders of the people who requested a word from the Lord God as to their religious tradition of weeping and fasting on the fifth month, he challenged their integrity in so-doing for the prior seventy years [since the destruction of Solomon's temple], asking if they had ever truly done so with Him first in their hearts. They had not.

He shared the Lord's challenge to demonstrate their repentance “The Lord who rules over all said, ‘Exercise true judgment and show brotherhood and compassion to each other. You must not oppress the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, or the poor, nor should anyone secretly plot evil against his fellow human being.’” They refused, even covering their ears so that they could not hear His message.

Zechariah was blessed to share in prophesy the encouraging words of the Lord “I am about to save my people from the lands of the east and the west. And I will bring them to settle within Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.”

He then prophesied “As I had planned to hurt you when your fathers made me angry,’ says the Lord who rules over all, ‘and I was not sorry, so, to the contrary, I have planned in these days to do good to Jerusalem and Judah – do not fear! These are the things you must do: Speak the truth, each of you, to one another. Practice true and righteous judgment in your courts. Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another. Do not favor a false oath – these are all things that I hate,’ says the Lord.”

Zechariah continued his prophesy of the Lord's plans for the future of His people “‘It will someday come to pass that people – residents of many cities – will come. The inhabitants of one will go to another and say, ‘Let’s go up at once to ask the favor of the Lord, to seek the Lord who rules over all. Indeed, I’ll go with you.’”

Zechariah declared the prophesy of the Lord God, first that the enemies of His people would be swept from their lands as they had exiled the Israelites, even Ashkelon would be populated by “a mongrel people” - those whom the Babylonians would re-locate there - and later in history Greeks, Romans, and Muslims. [The Muslims destroyed the city when the Crusaders arrived.]

He then spoke again of the promise of a distant time when the Lord God would restore peace and righteousness to the land through a king who would arrive on a donkey – the Messiah.

Zechariah continued his prophesy of promise “I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to the lands of Gilead and Lebanon, for there will not be enough room for them in their own land. The Lord will cross the sea of storms and will calm its turbulence. The depths of the Nile will dry up, the pride of Assyria will be humbled, and the domination of Egypt will be no more. Thus I will strengthen them by my power, and they will walk about in my name,” says the Lord.”

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

For seventy years the people had practiced their empty religious rituals and for all of that time their hearts were not committed to the Lord – so they had suffered exile. Those whose hatred of the Jews, and whose selfish desire for conquest, served as instruments of punishment and sifting were themselves not free from the Lord God's justice.

DISCUSS

Were the people asking if they should again practice the ritual because they were hoping to hear that they no longer needed to, or were they really seeking affirmation that it was of value? Isn't it amazing that the Lord God would implant a detail in the ancient prophesy of Zechariah, like that of the Messiah “Your king is coming to you: he is legitimate and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey – on a young donkey, the foal of a female donkey.”?

REFLECT

Once again, consistent with His history, the Lord God required a proper response of the people “These are the things you must do ...” How interesting to note the specific history of Askelon where “a mongrel people” did indeed inhabit their precious city, in fact – to them – many different “mongrel” peoples.

SHARE

When have you experienced or observed a situation where a religious practice has become a tired and empty ritual and the lives of those engaged in it a terrible hypocrisy? When have you imagined the “New Jerusalem” and your heart was lifted in joy?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you something in your life that has become more of an empty ritual than a meaningful celebration to the Lord.

ACT

Today I will prayerfully reassess all that I do, evaluating through a Biblical filter, why I do what I do when I do it the way that I do it – is it from my heart and to the Lord God? I will pause to praise the Lord God for His endless patience and for His powerful action to redeem and to restore His people. I will invite a fellow believer to join me in that.

Be Specific _____

Friday ([Zechariah 11-13](#))

The History and Future of Judah's Wicked Kings

11:1 Open your gates, Lebanon, so that the fire may consume your cedars.

11:2 Howl, fir tree, because the cedar has fallen; the majestic trees have been destroyed. Howl, oaks of Bashan, because the impenetrable forest has fallen.

11:3 Listen to the howling of shepherds, because their magnificence has been destroyed. Listen to the roaring of young lions, because the thickets of the Jordan have been devastated.

11:4 The Lord my God says this: "Shepherd the flock set aside for slaughter. 11:5 Those who buy them slaughter them and are not held guilty; those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich.' Their own shepherds have no compassion for them. 11:6 Indeed, I will no longer have compassion on the people of the land," says the Lord, "but instead I will turn every last person over to his neighbor and his king. They will devastate the land, and I will not deliver it from them."

11:7 So I began to shepherd the flock destined for slaughter, the most afflicted of all the flock. Then I took two staves, calling one "Pleasantness" and the other "Binders," and I tended the flock. 11:8 Next I eradicated the three shepherds in one month, for I ran out of patience with them and, indeed, they detested me as well. 11:9 I then said, "I will not shepherd you. What is to die, let it die, and what is to be eradicated, let it be eradicated. As for those who survive, let them eat each other's flesh!"

11:10 Then I took my staff "Pleasantness" and cut it in two to annul my covenant that I had made with all the people. 11:11 So it was annulled that very day, and then the most afflicted of the flock who kept faith with me knew that that was the word of the Lord.

11:12 Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, pay me my wages, but if not, forget it." So they weighed out my payment – thirty pieces of silver. 11:13 The Lord then said to me, "Throw to the potter that exorbitant sum at which they valued me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the temple of the Lord. 11:14 Then I cut the second staff "Binders" in two in order to annul the covenant of brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

11:15 Again the Lord said to me, "Take up once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. 11:16 Indeed, I am about to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not take heed to the sheep headed to slaughter, will not seek the scattered, and will not heal the injured. Moreover, he will not nourish the one that is healthy but instead will eat the meat of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves.

11:17 Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons the flock! May a sword fall on his arm and his right eye! May his arm wither completely away, and his right eye become completely blind!"

The Repentance of Judah

12:1 The revelation of the word of the Lord concerning Israel: The Lord – he who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, who forms the human spirit within a person – says, 12:2 "I am about to make Jerusalem a cup that brings dizziness to all the surrounding nations; indeed, Judah will also be included when Jerusalem is besieged. 12:3 Moreover, on that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy burden for all the nations, and all who try to carry it will be seriously injured; yet all the peoples of the earth will be assembled against it. 12:4 In that day," says the Lord, "I will strike every horse with confusion and its rider with madness. I will pay close attention to the house of Judah, but will strike all the horses of the nations with blindness. 12:5 Then the leaders of Judah will say to themselves, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem are a means of strength to us through their God, the Lord who rules over all.' 12:6 On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like an igniter among sticks and a burning torch among sheaves, and they will burn up all the surrounding nations right and left. Then the people of Jerusalem will settle once more in their place, the city of Jerusalem. 12:7 The Lord also will deliver the homes of Judah first, so that the splendor of the kingship of David and of the people of Jerusalem may not exceed that of Judah. 12:8 On that day the Lord himself will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the weakest among them will be like mighty David, and the dynasty of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord before them. 12:9 So on that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem."

12:10 "I will pour out on the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn. 12:11 On that day the lamentation in Jerusalem will be as great as the lamentation at Hadad-Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12:12 The land will mourn, clan by clan – the clan of the royal household of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the clan of the family of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; 12:13 the clan of the descendants of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; and the clan of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves – 12:14 all the clans that remain, each separately with their wives."

The Refinement of Judah

13:1 “In that day there will be a fountain opened up for the dynasty of David and the people of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity. 13:2 And also on that day,” says the Lord who rules over all, “I will remove the names of the idols from the land and they will never again be remembered. Moreover, I will remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. 13:3 Then, if anyone prophesies in spite of this, his father and mother to whom he was born will say to him, ‘You cannot live, for you lie in the name of the Lord.’ Then his father and mother to whom he was born will run him through with a sword when he prophesies.

13:4 “Therefore, on that day each prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies and will no longer wear the hairy garment of a prophet to deceive the people. 13:5 Instead he will say, ‘I am no prophet – indeed, I am a farmer, for a man has made me his indentured servant since my youth.’ 13:6 Then someone will ask him, ‘What are these wounds on your chest?’ and he will answer, ‘Some that I received in the house of my friends.’

13:7 “Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate,” says the Lord who rules over all. Strike the shepherd that the flock may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the insignificant ones.

13:8 It will happen in all the land, says the Lord, that two-thirds of the people in it will be cut off and die, but one-third will be left in it.

13:9 Then I will bring the remaining third into the fire; I will refine them like silver is refined and will test them like gold is tested. They will call on my name and I will answer; I will say, “These are my people,” and they will say, “The Lord is my God.”

PRAYER

Lord, You choose for Yourself a remnant of the people who will respond to Your cleansing so that You may restore the planned kingdom of relationship between You and Your creation. May I daily respond to the cleansing work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

Zechariah recorded “The Lord my God says this: “Shepherd the flock set aside for slaughter.”, then he described the step by step process of His symbolic termination of covenants which the people had nullified through their disobedience and rebellion, leading to their punishment.

He then shared the word “The Lord – he who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, who forms the human spirit within a person – says, “I am about to make Jerusalem a cup that brings dizziness to all the surrounding nations ...”, which referred to the terrible judgment from the God of creation upon His rebellious people.

Zechariah then prophesied the last days of the end times when the newly re-assembled people of God would have a leader, in royal lineage from David through Solomon and in physical lineage through Nathan, who would rule with righteousness and without all of the sins of selfishness that He had warned would come when they had demanded a human king “like the nations around us”.

He prophesied further “I will pour out ... a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn ...”

Zechariah continued “In that day there will be a fountain opened up for the dynasty of David and the people of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity. And also on that day,” says the Lord who rules over all, “I will remove the names of the idols from the land and they will never again be remembered. Moreover, I will remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.”

He concluded “It will happen in all the land, says the Lord, that two-thirds of the people in it will be cut off and die, but one-third will be left in it. Then I will bring the remaining third into the fire; I will refine them like silver is refined and will test them like gold is tested. They will call on my name and I will answer; I will say, ‘These are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

The Lord God never failed in His part of any covenant, it was always the people.

DISCUSS

Isn't it amazing how the Lord God inserted clear descriptions of the coming Messiah – and also clear evidences that they were One and the same “... so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced.”

REFLECT

“They will call on my name and I will answer; I will say, ‘These are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”

SHARE

When have you experienced the purifying of the Lord God?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a place in your life where He is beginning a purifying work.

ACT

Today I will humbly submit to the purifying of the Lord, surrendering the things of the world which interfere with His discipleship of me, clinging to the things that move me toward righteousness.

Be Specific _____

Saturday ([Zechariah 14](#))

The Sovereignty of the Lord

14:1 A day of the Lord is about to come when your possessions will be divided as plunder in your midst.

14:2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to wage war; the city will be taken, its houses plundered, and the women raped. Then half of the city will go into exile, but the remainder of the people will not be taken away.

14:3 Then the Lord will go to battle and fight against those nations, just as he fought battles in ancient days. 14:4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which lies to the east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, leaving a great valley. Half the mountain will move northward and the other half southward. 14:5 Then you will escape through my mountain valley, for the mountains will extend to Azal. Indeed, you will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come with all his holy ones with him. 14:6 On that day there will be no light – the sources of light in the heavens will congeal. 14:7 It will happen in one day (a day known to the Lord); not in the day or the night, but in the evening there will be light. 14:8 Moreover, on that day living waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it will happen both in summer and in winter.

14:9 The Lord will then be king over all the earth. In that day the Lord will be seen as one with a single name. 14:10 All the land will change and become like the Arabah from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem will be raised up and will stay in its own place from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate and on to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. 14:11 And people will settle there, and there will no longer be the threat of divine extermination – Jerusalem will dwell in security.

14:12 But this will be the nature of the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that have fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will decay while they stand on their feet, their eyes will rot away in their sockets, and their tongues will dissolve in their mouths. 14:13 On that day there will be great confusion from the Lord among them; they will seize each other and attack one another violently. 14:14 Moreover, Judah will fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered up – gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance. 14:15 This is the kind of plague that will devastate horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all the other animals in those camps.

14:16 Then all who survive from all the nations that came to attack Jerusalem will go up annually to worship the King, the Lord who rules over all, and to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. 14:17 But if any of the nations anywhere on earth refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord who rules over all, they will get no rain. 14:18 If the Egyptians will not do so, they will get no rain – instead there will be the kind of plague which the Lord inflicts on any nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt and of all nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

14:20 On that day the bells of the horses will bear the inscription “Holy to the Lord.” The cooking pots in the Lord’s temple will be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar. 14:21 Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will become holy in the sight of the Lord who rules over all, so that all who offer sacrifices may come and use some of them to boil their sacrifices in them. On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord who rules over all.

PRAYER

Lord, the end will come as You have determined and a battle will be joined to begin the final cleansing of humankind, concluding at that stage with Your earthly kingdom in power and all others required to pay homage. May I recognize that now is my time to pay homage, now is my time to recognize that You are already on Your throne, and now is my time to tell Your story that many others will choose rightly for You.

SCRIPTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

Zechariah prophesied the coming of the last days of the end times battle of Armageddon.

He detailed the purging of Jerusalem and Judah, the subjugation of those nations who had been enemies of them, and the period of domination of the Lord's earthly kingdom.

All will be require to pay homage to the Lord God and any and all will be welcome to come to submit to Him in worship, to surrender to Him in faith, and there will no longer be [as Jesus the Christ would later refine it] “Jew nor Gentile”.

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

CONSIDER

An end is surely coming when the Lord's patience has run out, when His time for the end has arrived, and that is when His final sifting of humankind will begin.

DISCUSS

Is it interesting to you that the Lord God would provide a time when unbelievers will be required to pay homage, that those who refuse will be punished with no rain, and that all will be welcome to come as surrendered-believers – regardless of nationality?

REFLECT

The Lord God's covenant shifted from “the chosen people” to “the people who choose”.

SHARE

When did you experienced the change in yourself from that person who chose rebellion against the Lord God's gift of salvation to the person who then chose to receive His gift?

FAITH IN ACTION

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the moment of your surrender, to stir-up in you a more-profound sense of His presence, and to stimulate in you a desire to share your story about Him.

ACT

Today I will joyfully recall my absolute surrender to the Lordship of Christ, I will celebrate anew His presence within me, and I will respectfully but resolutely share His story in my life with the one (or ones) to whom He directs me.

Be Specific _____

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Note 1: These Studies often rely upon the guidance of the NET Translators from their associated notes. Careful attention has been given to cite that source where it has been quoted directly or closely paraphrased. Feedback is encouraged where credit has not been sufficiently assigned.

Note 2: When NET text is quoted in commentary and discussion all pronouns referring to God are capitalized, though they are lower-case in the original NET text.

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