

# *Zerubbable*

**Leads 43,360 people  
back to Jerusalem**



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## **ZERUBBABEL RULE WAS BY RIGHT AND RECOGNITION**

Sometimes Gods ownership of a project is only recognized after our best efforts have failed. It is dangerous to think of God as responsible for the insignificant details while we take charge of the larger aspects of a project. Instead, it is God who is in control, and we only play a part in his overall plan. When God gives us important jobs to do, it isn't because he needs our help. Zerubbabel learned this lesson.

God's people had been exiled in Babylon for many years. Many had settled into comfortable life-styles there and wanted to stay. There were, however, almost 60,000 who had not forgotten Judah. When Babylon was defeated in 539 B.C., the Persian ruler, Cyrus, allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. Zerubbabel led the first and largest group back to the Promised Land.

Zerubbabel's leadership was by right and recognition. Not only was he a descendant of David, he also had personal leadership qualities. When the people arrived in Judah, they were given time to establish living quarters, and then were called to begin the work.

They began not by laying the city walls or constructing government buildings, but by rebuilding the altar, worshiping God together, and celebrating a feast. Under Zerubbabel's leadership, they established a spiritual foundation for their building efforts.

The temple foundation was then quickly completed, and another round of celebration followed. But soon, two problems arose. A few old men remembered Solomon's glorious temple and were saddened at how much smaller and less glorious this one was. Also, some enemies of the Jews tried to infiltrate the work force and stop the building with political pressure. Fear caused the work to grind to a halt. The people went to their homes, and 16 years passed.

We do not know what Zerubbabel did during this time. His discouragement, following those first months of excitement and accomplishment, must have been deep. Those feelings eventually hardened into hopelessness. So God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to be Zerubbabel's encouraging companions. They confronted the people's reluctance and comforted their fears. The work began once

again with renewed energy and was completed in four years.

Zerubbabel, like many of us, knew how to start well but found it hard to keep going. His successes depended on the quality of encouragement he received. Zerubbabel let discouragement get the better of him. But when he let God take control, the work was finished. God is always in control. We must not let circumstances or lack of encouragement slow us from doing the tasks God has given us.

**He needed** constant encouragement, and allowed problems and resistance to stop the rebuilding work

## **Zerubbabel's story is told in the return of Judah to Jerusalem.**

### **Ezra 2:2-5:2.**

Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. This is the number of the men of Israel who returned from exile:

A total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, in addition to 7,337 servants and 200 singers, both men and women. They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

When they arrived at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders gave generously toward the rebuilding of God's Temple on its original site, and each leader gave as much as he could.

The total of their gifts came to 61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for the priests.

So the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the Temple servants, and some of the common people settled in villages near Jerusalem. The rest of the people returned to the other towns of Judah from which they had come.

Now in early autumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled together as one person in Jerusalem.

Then Jeshua son of Jehozadak with his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his family began to rebuild the altar of the God of Israel so they could sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed in the Law of Moses, the man of God.

Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its old site. Then they immediately began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to the Lord. They did this each morning and evening.

They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed in the Law of Moses, sacrificing the burnt offerings specified for each day of the festival. They also offered the regular burnt offerings and the offerings required for the new moon celebrations and the other annual festivals to the Lord.

Freewill offerings were also sacrificed to the Lord by the people. Fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began, the priests had begun to sacrifice burnt offerings to the Lord. This was also before they had started to lay the foundation of the Lord's Temple.

Then they hired masons and carpenters and bought cedar logs from the people of Tyre and Sidon, paying them with food, wine, and olive oil. The logs were brought down from the Lebanon Mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, for King Cyrus had given permission for this.

The construction of the Temple of God began in the second month, during the second year after they arrived in Jerusalem. The work force was made up of everyone who had returned from exile, including Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his fellow priests, and all the Levites.

The Levites who were twenty years old or older were put in charge of rebuilding the Lord's Temple. The workers at the Temple of God were supervised by Jeshua with his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons, all descendants of Hodaviah. They were helped in this task by the Levites of the family of Henadad.

When the builders completed the foundation of the Lord's Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise the Lord, just as King David had prescribed. With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the Lord:

**"He is so good!  
His faithful love for Israel endures forever!"**

Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the Lord because the foundation of the Lord's Temple had been laid.

Many of the older priests, Levites, and other leaders remembered the first Temple, and they wept aloud when they saw the new Temple's foundation. The others, however, were shouting for joy. The joyful shouting and weeping mingled together in a loud commotion that could be heard far in the distance.

### **The enemies of Israel wanted to help rebuild the temple.**

The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were rebuilding a Temple to the Lord, the God of Israel. So they approached Zerubbabel and the other leaders and said, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God just as you do. We have sacrificed to him ever since King Esarhaddon of Assyria brought us here."

But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel replied, "You may have no part in this work, for we have nothing in common. We alone will build the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us."

Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work.

They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their aims. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne.

### **The people of Judah are told to stop building.**

When a letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem and forced the Jews to stop building.

The work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem had stopped, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

At that time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied in the name of the God of Israel to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem.

Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jehozadak responded by beginning the task of rebuilding the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them and helped them.

## **Neh. 12:1**

Here is the list of the priests and Levites who had returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the high priest: Seraiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra

Integrity and fear of God were the key character traits that qualified these men to govern Jerusalem. People of integrity can be trusted to carry out their work; God-fearing people can be expected to do so in line with God's priorities. These men had both qualities. If you are in a position of selecting leaders, look for integrity and reverence as two of the most important qualifications. Although other qualities may seem more impressive, integrity and reverence pass the test of time.

## **Neh. 12:47**

So now, in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, the people brought a daily supply of food for the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Levites. The Levites, in turn, gave a portion of what they received to the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

The dedication of the city wall was characterized by joy, praise, and singing (Neh. 12:24, 27-29, 35-36, 40-43). Nehemiah repeatedly mentioned David, who began the custom of using choirs in worship. In David's day, Israel was a vigorous, God-fearing nation. These exiles who had returned wanted their rebuilt Jerusalem to be the hub of a renewed nation, strengthened by God; therefore, they dedicated themselves and their city to God.

## **Haggai 1:1**

On August 29 of the second year of King Darius's reign, the Lord gave a message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, were key leaders in rebuilding the temple. They had already reestablished the altar, but work on the temple had slowed. Haggai gave a message to these outstanding leaders and to the exiles who had returned from Babylon, encouraging them to complete the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

The Jews who had returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem were not able to finish their work because they were hindered by their enemies. After opposition put a halt to progress, no further work had been done on the temple for over 15 years. In August, 520 B.C., Haggai delivered a message to encourage the people to rebuild the temple! Haggai was probably born in captivity in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1-2). Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets who encouraged the temple rebuilding, are mentioned in Ezra 5:1.

### **Haggai 1:12**

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people obeyed the message from the Lord their God. It had been delivered by the prophet Haggai, whom the Lord their God had sent, and the people worshiped the Lord in earnest.

Because the people had not given God first place in their lives, their work was not fruitful or productive, and their material possessions did not satisfy. While they concentrated on building and beautifying their own homes, God's blessing was withheld because they no longer put him in first place. Moses had predicted that this would be the result if the people neglected God (Deut. 28:38-45).

Judah's problem was confused priorities. Like Judah, our priorities involving occupation, family, and God's work are often confused. Jobs, homes, vacations, and leisure activities may rank higher on our list of importance than God. What is most important to you? Where is God on your list of priorities?

Grain, grapes for wine, and olives for oil were Israel's major crops. The people depended on these for security while neglecting the worship of God. As a result, God would send a drought to destroy their livelihood and call them back to himself.

### **Haggai 1:14**

So the Lord sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people. They came and began their work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God.

The people began rebuilding the temple just 23 days after Haggai's first message. Rarely did a prophet's message produce such a quick response. How often we hear a sermon and respond, "That was an excellent point—I ought to do that," only to leave church and forget to act. These people put their words into action. When you hear a good sermon or lesson, ask what you should *do* about it, and then make plans to put it into practice.

### **Haggai 2:4**

But now take courage, Zerubbabel, says the Lord. Take courage, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Take courage, all you people still left in the land, says the Lord. Take courage and work, for I am with you, says the Lord Almighty.

"Be strong. . . and work. For I am with you." Judah's people had returned to worshipping God, and God had promised to bless their efforts. But it was time for them to *work*. We must be people of prayer, Bible study, and worship—but eventually we must get out and *do* what God has in mind for us. He wants to change the world through us. God has given you a job to do in the church, at your place of employment, and at home. The time has come to be strong and work because God is with you!

### **Haggai 2:21**

"Tell Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, that I am about to shake the heavens and the earth.

Haggai's final message acknowledged that he was merely the messenger who brings the word of the Lord. It is addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah

### **Haggai 2:23**

But when this happens, says the Lord Almighty, I will honor you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and my servant. I will treat you like a signet ring on my finger, says the Lord, for I have specially chosen you. I, the Lord Almighty, have spoken!"

A signet ring was used to guarantee the authority and authenticity of a letter. It served as a signature when pressed in soft wax on a written document. God was reaffirming and guaranteeing his promise of a Messiah through David's line (Matthew 1:12).

God closed his message to Zerubbabel with this tremendous affirmation: "I have chosen you." Such a proclamation is ours as well—each of us has been chosen by God (Ephes. 1:4). This truth should make us see our value in God's eyes and motivate us to work for him. When you feel down, remind yourself, "God has chosen me!"

Haggai's message to the people sought to get their priorities straight, help them quit worrying, and motivate them to rebuild the temple. Like them, we often place a higher priority on our personal comfort than on God's work and true worship. But God is pleased and promises strength and guidance when we give him first place in our lives.

#### **Zech. 4:6-10**

Then he said to me, "This is what the Lord says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty. [7] Nothing, not even a mighty mountain, will stand in Zerubbabel's way; it will flatten out before him! Then Zerubbabel will set the final stone of the Temple in place, and the people will shout: 'May God bless it! May God bless it!' "

Then another message came to me from the Lord: "Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me.

**Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand. For these seven lamps represent the eyes of the Lord that search all around the world."**

Zerubbabel was given the responsibility of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:2, 8; Haggai 1:1; Haggai 2:23). While the prophets Haggai and Zechariah gave the moral and spiritual encouragement to resume work on the temple, Zerubbabel saw that the task was carried out. As the work was being completed, the prophets encouraged Zerubbabel and told him of a time when spiritual apathy and foreign oppression would forever be abolished.

Many people believe that to survive in this world a person must be tough, strong, unbending, and harsh. But God says, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.” The key words are “by my Spirit.” It is *only* through God’s Spirit that anything of lasting value is accomplished. The returned exiles were indeed weak—harassed by their enemies, tired, discouraged, and poor. But actually they had God on their side! As you live for God, determine not to trust in your own strength or abilities. Instead, depend on God and work in the power of his Spirit! (See also Hosea 1:7.)

Many of the older Jews were disheartened when they realized this new temple would not match the size and splendor of the previous temple built during King Solomon’s reign. But bigger and more beautiful is not always better. What you do for God may seem small and insignificant at the time, but God rejoices in what is right, not necessarily in what is big. Be faithful in the small opportunities. Begin where you are and do what you can, and leave the results to God.

### **Lessons from his life:**

A leader needs to provide not only the initial motivation for a project, but the continued encouragement necessary to keep the project going. A leader must find his/her own dependable source of encouragement. God’s faithfulness is shown in the way he preserved David’s line.

### **Key verses:**

“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty. What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of “God bless it! God bless it!” (Zech. 4:67).

**To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:**

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References: