

Restoration of Exiles: The Book of Ezra The Book of Zechariah

Here are the dates and key events of three kings of the Persian Empire:

Cyrus (550-529). The return from exile happened under him, around 538 BC. The altar and foundation of the Temple were rebuilt, but opposition stops the work from around 536-520.

Cambyses II (529-522). No work on the Temple during his reign.

Darius I (522-486). Haggai and Zechariah prophesy fairly early in the reign of Darius to urge the people to begin rebuilding the Temple. They start rebuilding again about 520 BC and finish in 516 BC.

There are two main parts to the book of Zechariah

Part 1 symbolic visions from early in Darius' reign, intended to help the people start rebuilding (ch 1-8). The point is God has everything in place for the rebuilding project (these chapters can and should be read in the context of rebuilding the Temple)

Part 2 poetic oracles, possibly later in Zechariah's ministry, about judgments, good and bad shepherds, the Messiah, and blessings. (these chapters point to a time beyond the rebuilding of the Temple)

1:1 That is, around 521 BC

1. Read 1:2-6. What happens when God tells people to repent and they don't?
2. Read 1:12-17. The "seventy years" (v. 12) is the time when the people were in captivity. Verse 15 means the nations that he used to punish his people went too far, and so God isn't pleased with them. But vv. 16-17 tell what is coming next. What is it? How would that sound to the exiles who were supposed to be rebuilding the Temple?
3. Read 3:1-6. These are words of encouragement to Joshua the High Priest. Notice Satan is an adversary (see footnote) who is accusing him, apparently to hinder him from his work. What does Satan accuse you of? What does God want of Joshua and what will be the result? (vv. 6-7). How would you apply this to yourself?

4. Read 4:6-10. How would the Temple be rebuilt, according to v. 6? How would you apply this to building NorthWest as a church? What "mountains" may get in our way (v. 7). What do you think the "day of small things" is (v. 10; cf. Haggai 2:3ff.; Matthew 13:31-32). What can you learn from v. 10?
5. Read 7:4-10. Did they have the right motive and attitude about their fasts, mourning, and feasts? Why were they doing those things? How would you apply this to our worship today? What did God want even more than these actual expressions of worship? (vv. 8-9; also 8:16-17).
6. Read 8:9-11. What do you think about the second sentence in v. 10. Do you think God would still do this?
7. Read 9:9. Sound familiar? It may have had reference originally to a physical king, but it is fulfilled by Jesus in John 12:14-15.
8. Read 14:9. The prior verses seem to refer to some events in the history of the Jews, but v. 9 seems to lie in the future (see Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10). God will ultimately be the unrivalled King, but he wants us to submit to him even now. What will you do differently over the next 24 hours if you really have submitted to God as King?