

Ezra:

Working together in God's service



**Class 4: God will Provide
the Motivation to Finish!**



God does the impossible!

He raises up Darius to be King!

- **A few months after the temple work was forced to stop,** God opened a door by bringing Darius to the throne
- **Some of the Jews realized** this was their opportunity and began working on the temple again, but they needed more help

The angels were busy at work in the Persian Empire so that the work on the Temple could finish



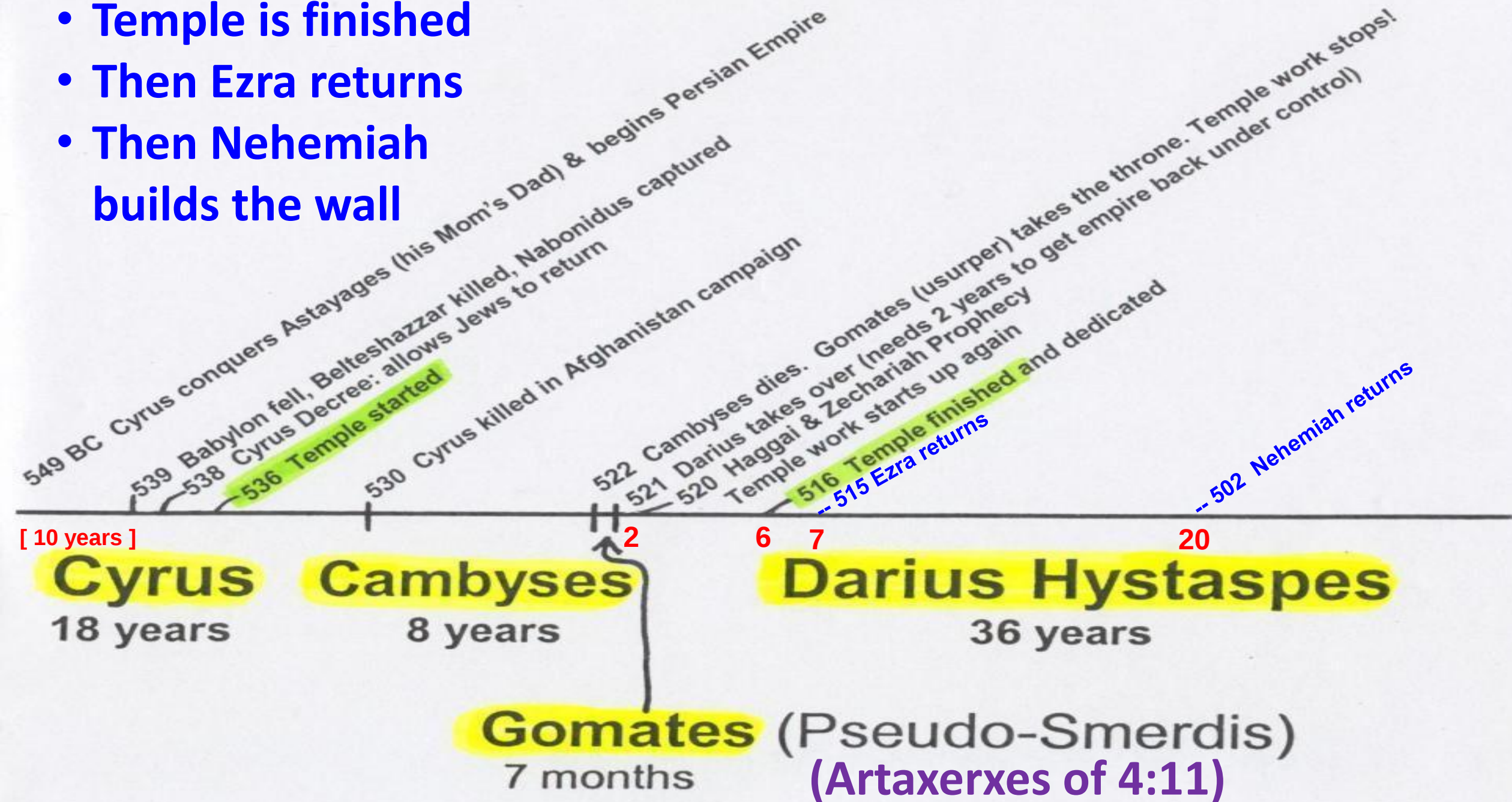
God Revives the Work

Ezra 5:1-2

Then the **prophet Haggai and Zechariah** the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 So **Zerubbabel** the son of Shealtiel and **Jeshua** the son of Jozadak **rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.**

God will get the job done!

- Temple is finished
- Then Ezra returns
- Then Nehemiah builds the wall



“The Prophets of God Helping them”

(Ezra 5:1-2)

Coordinated efforts of Haggai & Zechariah

Haggai (older ?): Exhorts and reprimands the people for their poor choices and lack of faith.

Zechariah (younger ?): Encourages the people that the angels are working behind the scenes and they will help finish the temple!

God gets the work going again!

- Used Haggai & Zechariah
- **Similar to today:** no angel visits, no spirit gifts
- **People needed faith** to see what God & His angels were doing for them behind the scenes
- **Only took 4 more years to finish**

It's amazing what can be accomplished in families & ecclesias when we have the faith to get involved in God's work!



Haggai's Motivational Message

Haggai 1:1-6

In the **second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month**, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2 "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: '**This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.**'"

3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "**Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?**" 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "**Consider your ways!** [*"consider how you have fared!" (RSV)*]

6 "You have **sown much**, and **bring in little**; **You eat**, but **do not have enough**; **You drink**, but **you are not filled with drink**; **You clothe yourselves**, but **no one is warm**; And **he who earns wages**, earns wages **to put into a bag with holes.**"

**Most people used the excuse "it's the wrong time!"
and turned to improving their own lives**

What had the People been doing the last 15 years? (see Haggai 1:1-6)



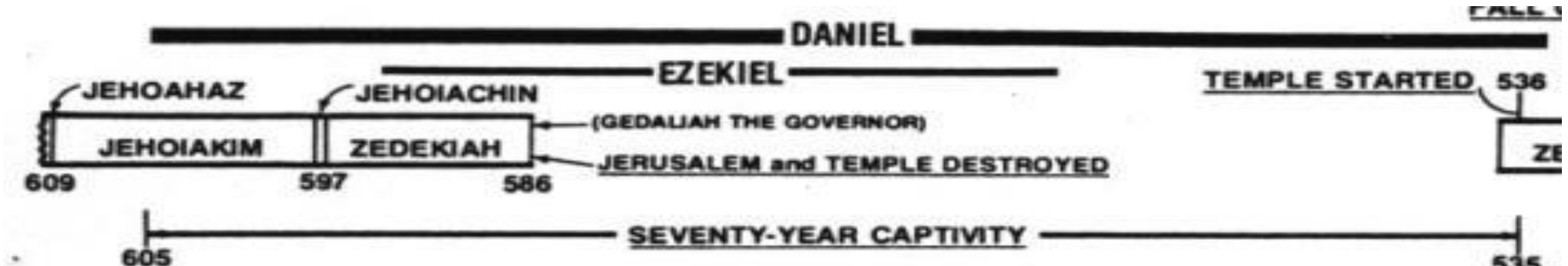
- 1) Claimed the time was not right (v. 2)
not yet the end of the 70 years
- 2) Paneled their own homes (v. 4)
- 3) Tried to improve their economic situation (v. 6)

When we aren't involved in God's work,
we tend to serve ourselves

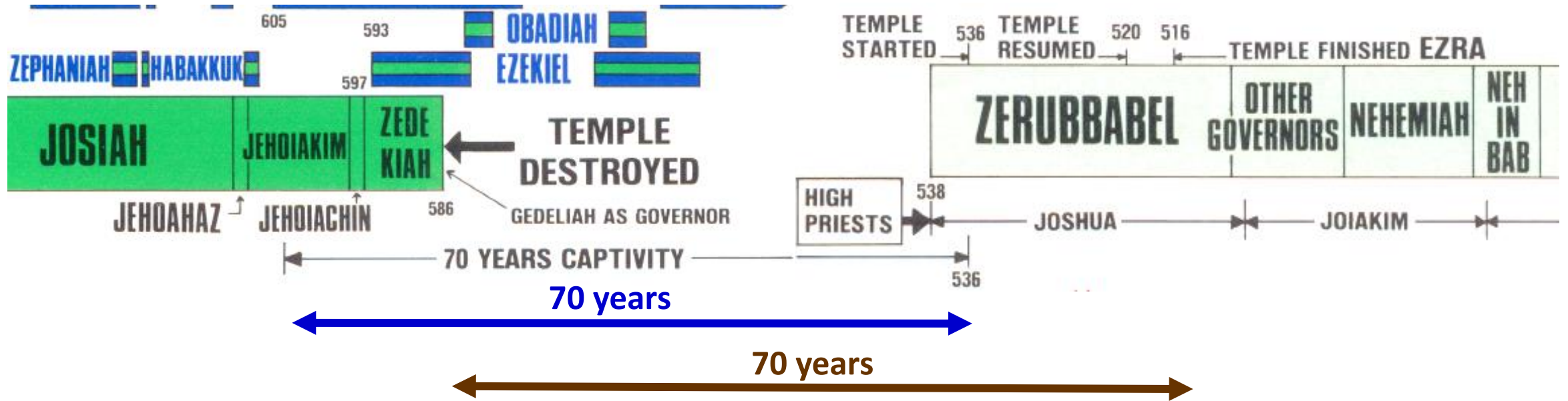
Jeremiah's Prophecies about the 70 years

Jer 25:11-14 *(during early years of Jehoiakim's reign)* after 70 years God will punish Babylon

Jer 29:10-14 *(during early years of Zedekiah)* after 70 years God will bring the Jews back and give them a future with peace and hope



When did the 70 years start?



People justified what they really wanted to do!

Warning for today:

Don't wait till the end to get involved!

God expects us to be working consistently until the end

God tried to talk to the people by influencing the conditions in the land (Hag 1:5)



- 1) Small harvests: blight, mildew & hail (2:17)
- 2) Droughts
- 3) Cold
- 4) Inflation



God talked to them
through economic &
environmental
events

We need to examine our own lives
and consider how we have fared

Haggai's Message: Consider how you have fared!

God had influenced their lives



1:6 Small harvest, not enough to eat or drink, cold temperatures, high inflation

1:11; 2:17 drought, blight, mildew on crops

1:9 God blew it away!

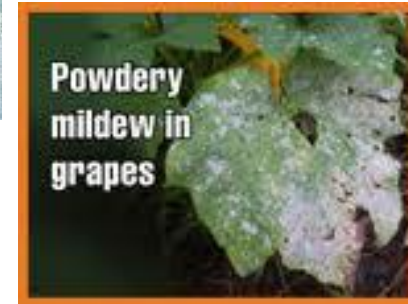
1:8 Solution: Get involved in building temple!

1:13 God's assurance: "I am with you".



He stirred up the spirit of the people

1:14 Response: they came and worked



2:1-9 Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, **is this not in your eyes as nothing?** **It's latter glory will be greater** *[when God's son is in the temple]*

2:10-14 Nation is unclean. Much easier to learn wickedness than righteousness

2:15-23 God will bless Israel from now on because they are involved again in God's work of building

Get priorities right: Spiritual issues first!



God talks to us through the experiences of life

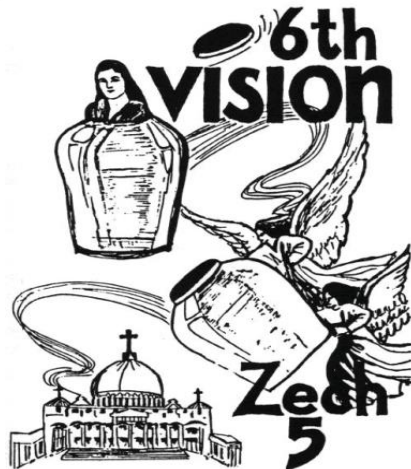
- **We need to meditate and consider** the events of our lives – they are not by chance!
- **God attempts to influence us through life events** – if we are listening
- **He uses health, family troubles, accidents, economics, ecclesial troubles, jobs, friends**



We need to meditate & consider how we have fared!
God is talking...are we listening?

A circular arrangement of hands of various skin tones, symbolizing unity and teamwork. The hands are stacked in a circle, with fingers interlaced, creating a sense of shared purpose and support. The background is plain white, making the hands the central focus.

**Unity requires God's
help to get it going
and preserve it**



Zechariah's 7 Night Visions (Zech. 1-6)

God promised to
help them finish
the temple



1st Vision

Zech 1:7-17

Persian empire is
back under
control & ready
for the temple to
be finished

I am
zealous for
Jerusalem

How long Lord
until you have
mercy on
Jerusalem?

All the earth
is resting
quietly now



The Long-Term fulfillment



- ▶ The Angels today are influencing the nations to bring about the events for Christ's return
- ▶ They are excited as ever for God to again have mercy on Jerusalem and send His Son, the king/priest, who will rebuild God's house.
- ▶ The Jews must return to God or be destroyed when 2/3 in the land will be cut off & only 1/3 refined (Zech 13:8-9)

Are you as excited as the Angels?



**This had immediate
meaning to
Zechariah's people**

The 2nd Vision

What Zechariah saw:

- 4 horns
- 4 craftsmen or carpenters

What happened?

- The horns scattered and humiliated Israel
- The carpenters will terrify and cast out the horns

4 Horns of Zech 1:18-10

Horns = Kings (Dan 7:24; 8:21)

4 Kings responsible for scattering Israel:

- ▶ **Shalmaneser** – 2 Kgs 18:9-12
- ▶ **Sennacherib** – 2 Kgs 18:13-16
- ▶ **Pharaoh Necho** – 2 Kgs 23:31-34
- ▶ **Nebuchadnezzar** – 2 Kgs 24:10–25:11



Or the 4 horns may refer to the adversaries (Ezra 4:9-10)
all around Israel that had bothered them until now

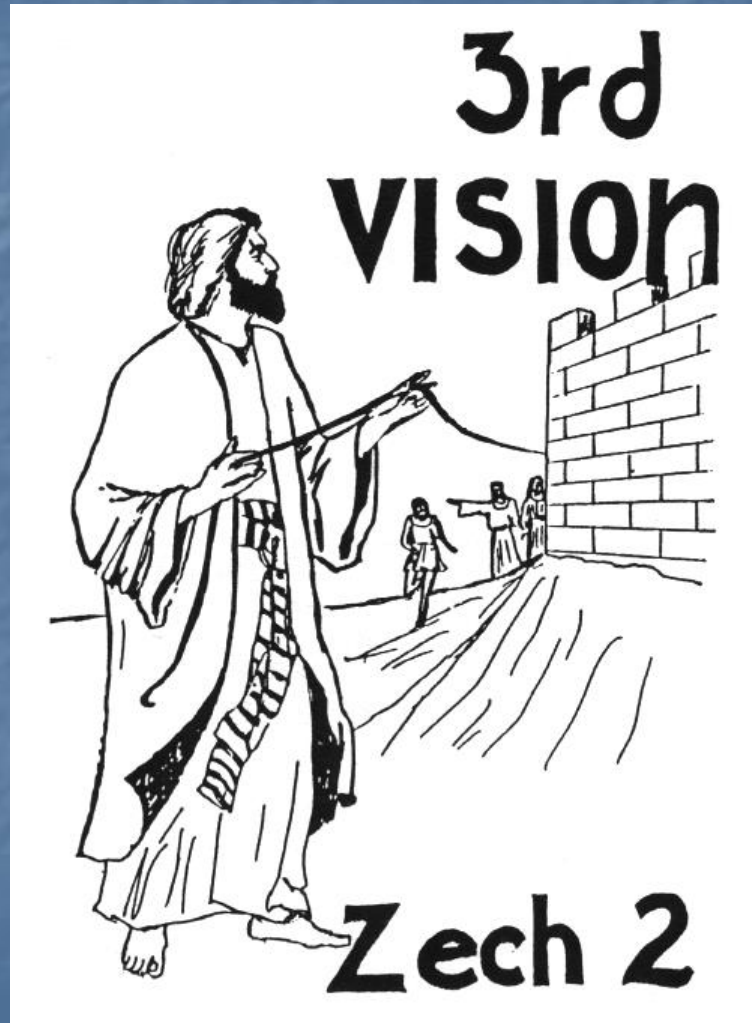
The Long-term Fulfillment

- Christ will again use the Jews as his battle axe to conquer the Gentile nations and establish his kingdom (Zech 9:13; Jer 51:19-24)



- The nations will fear & respect the Jews because Christ will be their king

The 3rd Vision



What Zechariah saw:

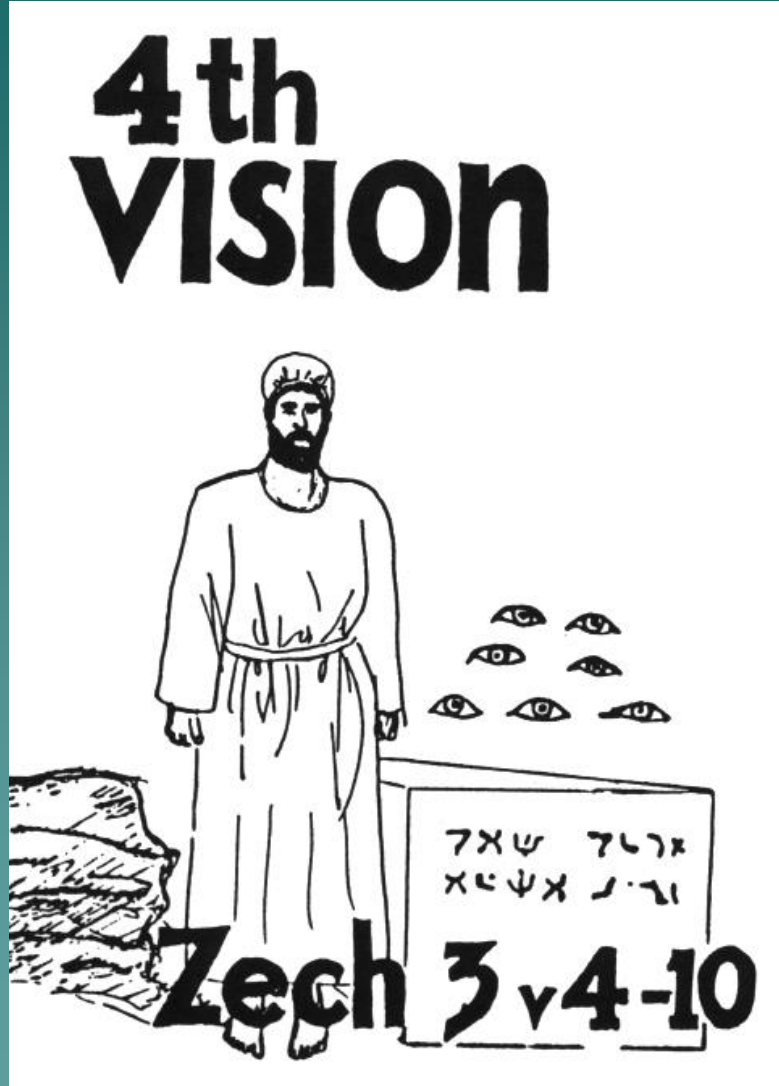
- A man with a measuring line
- Man intends to measure Jerusalem
- Another angel comes out
- This angel says to tell the young man Jerusalem will not need walls
- Jerusalem will be overflowing with people and livestock
- God will her wall of fire and glory

The Long-term Fulfillment

- Christ will again be a wall of fire around Jerusalem to protect it
- Jews will again be called to Israel from the four corners of the earth
- Jerusalem will be blessed with people and animals
- Gentile nations will be encouraged to submit to Christ their king because of what he has done for the Jews



The 4th Vision:



What Zechariah saw:

- Joshua & Satan standing before the Angel of the Lord
- Angel tells Satan “the Lord rebuke you”
- Angel tells other angels to change Joshua’s dirty clothes & put a clean turban on him
- Joshua and his companions are a wondrous sign
- God will bring forth His servant, the Branch
- Capstone: 7 eyes (angels) are looking at the stone
- God will remove the iniquity of the land



My Servant, the Branch



- ◆ Used again in 6:11-13 and clearly applies to Joshua
- ◆ The “Branch” prophecies ultimately predict a Messiah to come who will unite the offices of priest and king, as he will sit on his throne as priest and king (6:13)

Neither Joshua nor Zerubabbel could individually depict what Messiah would do, but together they predicted what God would do through His Son

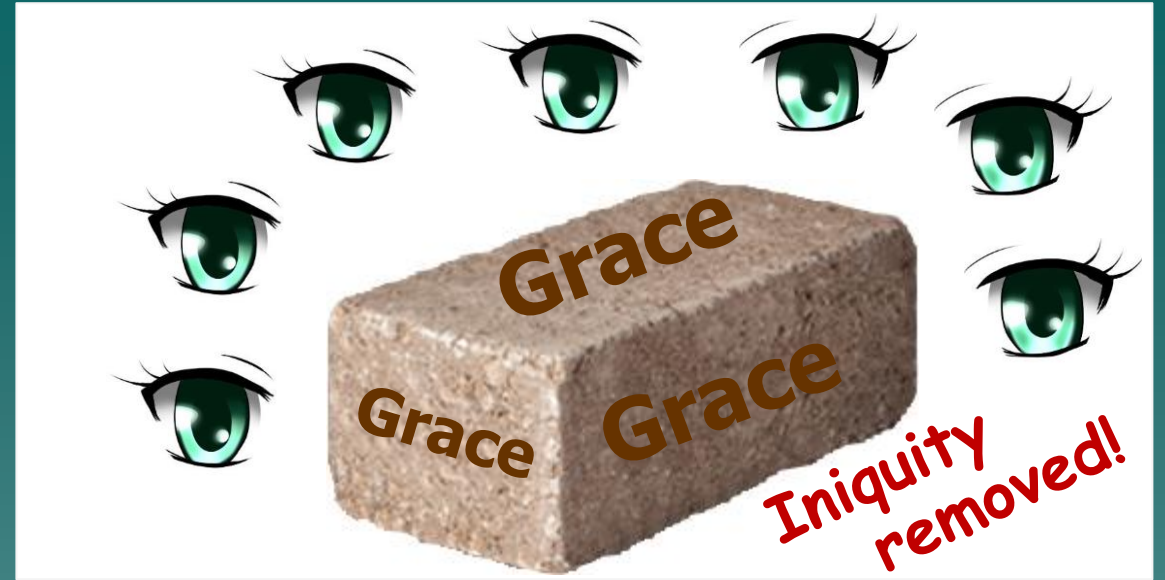
The Stone (3:9)

- ◆ Not the cornerstone of the temple foundation because it was laid 16 years earlier in Ezra 3:8-13
- ◆ This stone is the **capstone** (Zech 4:7), the final stone of the temple
- ◆ Inscription was probably "*Grace*" as this was shouted in 4:7





Upon the
stone are
7 eyes (v.9)



- ◆ "*upon the stone*" means the eyes are fixed, looking **upon** the stone. They are not **in** the stone, because the inscription is engraved in the stone
- ◆ "**7 eyes**" are the **angels** (4:10) who will make sure the last stone (capstone) is placed into the temple

The Long-term Fulfillment

- ◆ Jesus had to come in our nature & work in the filthy arena of sinful flesh to build God's house (*cross before the crown!*)
- ◆ Although Jesus' adversaries accused him, God ultimately rebuked them and raised Jesus from the dead
- ◆ God changed his clothes to immortality so as our immortal high priest he can save those who become part of God's house

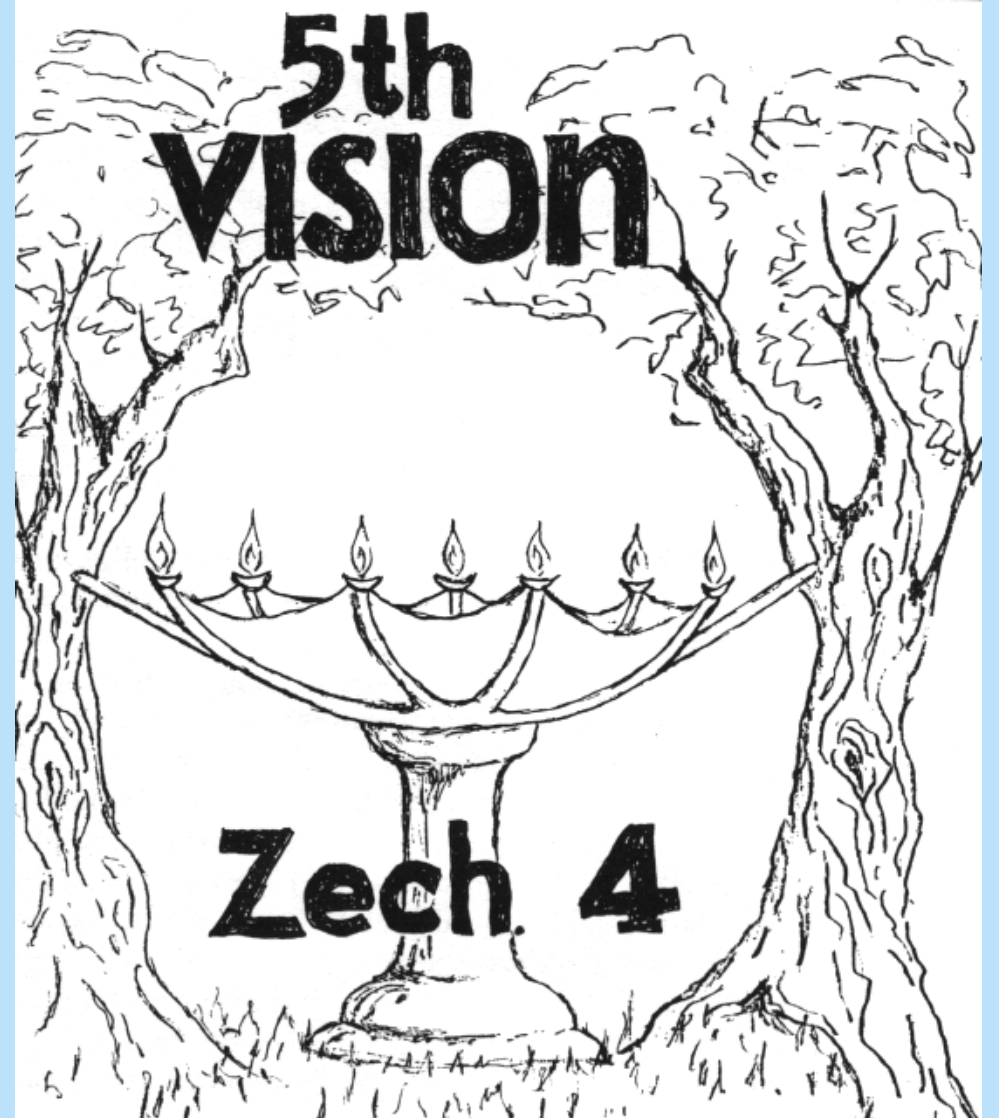




The 5th Vision

What Zechariah saw:

- Lampstand with a bowl on top
- 7 lamps and 7 pipes
- 2 olive trees dripping oil through 2 pipes into the bowl





The 2 Olive Trees?

Zerubbabel & Joshua

(like the 2 witnesses of Rev 11:3-4)

The 2 Olive Branches (v.12)?

The "*two anointed ones*" (*Sons of oil*)

Haggai & Zechariah

God's House will be Finished!

- Not by might, nor by power, but by **God's spirit** (v.6)
- Soon! **Zerubbabel's hands** will finish it (v.9)
- **The angels** (7 eyes) rejoice to see the work continuing (v.10)



**BEWARE LEST WE DESPISE
THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS!**



Zechariah's Message: the Angels are excited about finishing the temple!

1:7-11 Angels patrolling earth & bringing rest

1:12 Angels ask God: how long until you will have mercy on Jerusalem?

2:1-5 Angels declare Jerusalem will be inhabited without any need of walls – God will protect it

3:1-5 Joshua stands before angel. Angel rebukes Satan. Angel removes iniquity and clothes Joshua.

3:6-10 God will bring forth his servant “the Branch”.
7 eyes (angels) are watching over the capstone.

4:9-10 Angels rejoice to see plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand *“who has despised the day of small things?”*

Angels are active today too! They want to establish God's Kingdom & for us to be there! Cooperate with their work & don't frustrate them!



Here comes another challenge!

Ezra 5:3-5

3 At the same time **Tattenai the governor** of the region beyond the River and **Shethar-Boznai** and **their companions** came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" 4 Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. 5 **But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews** *[just like upon the stone]*, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter.

God was with them this time to succeed

People challenged again (vs 3-4)



- **Tatnai = Tattenai** (province governor)
- **It's been about 16 years** since Cyrus' decree
- **Work stopped** for about 2 years
- **These people are not as nasty** as Samaritans - they ask questions but don't push their view.
- **Elders individually challenged** – need to stand up personally for our beliefs

**God will continually challenge us too –
He's hoping we will grow and triumph!**

The Eye of God upon them

(but not visible to human eyes!)



2 Chron 16:9 Hanani to Asa: “the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him”

Zech 3:9 See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on (not “in”) that one stone (NIV)

Zech 4:10 “For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.” (angels will make sure the temple is finished!)

1 Pet 3:12 “for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers”

Angels are hidden, but always there to help!
We need to be aware of their presence & thank them.

Here comes another challenge!

Ezra 5:6-10

6 This is a copy of **the letter that Tattenai sent**: The governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who were in the region beyond the River, to Darius the king.

7 (They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus): **To Darius the king**: All peace. 8 Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, **to the temple** of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and **this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands**.

9 Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?"

10 **We also asked them their names** to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who were chief among them.

At least this was a truthful assessment

The Jews Response

Ezra 5:11-16

11 And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "**We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth**, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. 12 **But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath**, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. 13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, **King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God**. 14 Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon — those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named **Sheshbazzar**, whom he had made governor. 15 And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.' 16 Then the **same Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God** which is in Jerusalem; **but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished.**"

The Jewish Leaders take Responsibility!

The People Respond in Faith



- **Continued working this time** – endurance through persecution & pressure
- **Unbelievers noticed the commitment** of God's people (v.8)
- **Faithfully witnessed to God** (v.10) & gave God the credit (v.11)
- **Accepted the blame**: “our fathers angered God” (v.12)
- **Acknowledged God** brought the captivity
- **Referred to the political authority to build** – Cyrus' decree (v.13)

**Faith in God can motivate us to
move mountains & conquer giants**

A close-up photograph showing a circle of hands of various skin tones (light, medium, and dark brown) interlocking and supporting each other. The hands are arranged in a circular pattern, with each hand resting on the wrist or forearm of another, creating a sense of unity and teamwork. The background is plain white.

**Unity strengthens us to
stand strong together
against the challenges
of this world**

Evidence that Sheshbazzar of v.16 is Zerubbabel



	<u>Sheshbazzar</u>	<u>Zerubbabel</u>
Governor:	Ezra 5:14	Hag 1:1
Laid Temple Foundation	Ezra 5:16	Zech 4:9

According to Neh 7:5 Zerubbabel
led the first return of the exiles!

A search for Cyrus' Decree

Ezra 5:17 – 6:5

17 Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, **let a search be made** in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that **a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem**, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter.

Ezra 6

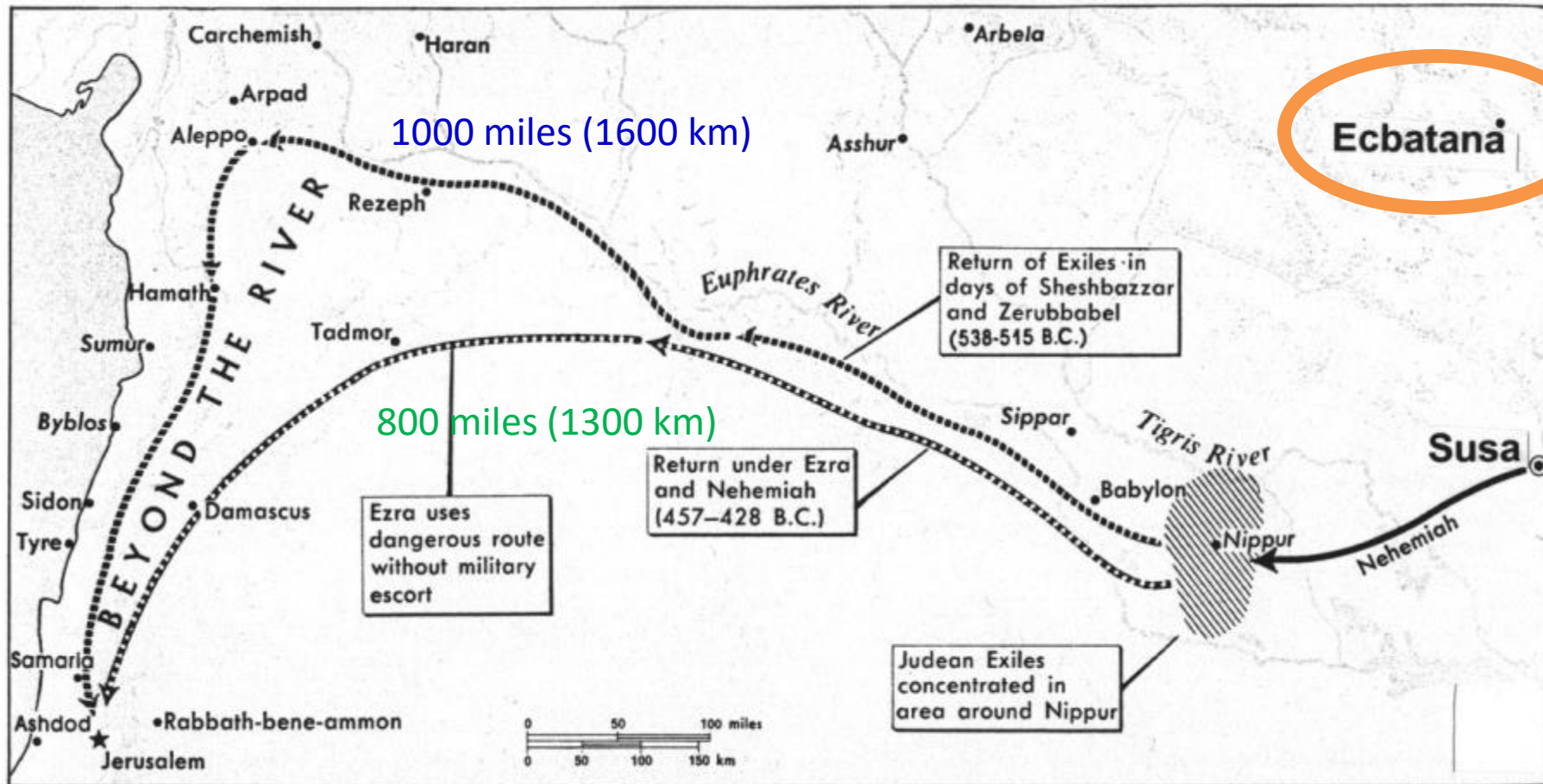
1 Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. 2 And at **Achmetha** *[Old Median name, later called Ecbatana]*, in the palace that is in the province of Media, **a scroll was found**, and in it a record was written thus:

3 **In the first year of King Cyrus**, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, 4 with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. **Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury.** 5 Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of God" —

God made sure it was recorded!

Achmetha (6:2) = Ecbatana

(capital city of Cyrus)



Ecbatana was the summer residence of Persian kings, Susa was used in winter

Comparison of the Decrees in Ezra 1 & Ezra 6

	Ezra 1 <u>(Hebrew)</u>	Ezra 6 <u>(Aramaic)</u>
Yahweh Name	Yes	No
Size Limits	No	Yes
Free Will Offerings	Yes	No
Pay from Treasury	No	Yes

Some differences may have developed when
being translated or changed over time

God Accomplished the Impossible!

Ezra 6:6-12

6 Now therefore, **Tattenai**, governor of the region beyond the River, and **Shethar-Boznai**, and **your companions the Persians** who are beyond the River, **keep yourselves far from there.** 7 **Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site.**

8 Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: **Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered.** 9 **And whatever they need — young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem — let it be given them day by day without fail,** 10 **that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.**

11 Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. 12 And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.

God blessed them beyond measure!

Look at what the Angels accomplished behind the scenes!



- v.6** Keep yourselves far from there
- v.7** Let the work of this house of God alone
- v.8** Let the cost be paid from the King's expense from taxes
(so the adversaries of Ezra 4 ended up paying to finish the temple!)
- v.9** And whatever else they need --- let it be given them
day by day without fail!

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far
more abundantly than all that we ask or think (Eph 3:20 RSV)

The Work Continues!

Ezra 6:13-18

13 Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. 14 **So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.** And **they built and finished it,** according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of **Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.** 15 Now **the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar (12th month), which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.** 16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, **celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.** 17 And **they offered sacrifices** at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, **according to the number of the tribes of Israel.** 18 They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, **as it is written in the Book of Moses.**

They finished & followed Moses' procedures

Temple is Finished!

- **Pray for King & Son** - Persians asked everyone in empire to pray to their god for the empire (v.10)
- **Cyrus & Darius & Artaxerxes** – we will look at this next class!
- **Adar = 12th month.** Ready for 1st month of new year for Passover & Feast of Unleavened Bread
- **Temple took about 20 yrs to build** –
Cyrus (6) + Cambyses (8) + Darius (6)
- **Celebrated with joy!** (v.16) – remember Zech 4 “whoever despises the day of small things will rejoice”

Never despise or discourage God's work today, no matter how small it is!



Temple of
Solomon



Temple of
Zerubbabel



Temple
of Herod



1,000

586

530

20

70

First Temple

Second Temple

BC

BC

AD

Successes are all of God

1 Corinthians 15:57-58

57 But *thanks be to God, who gives us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, *be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Let's determine to remain steadfast & immovable, even when under pressure - putting our faith & trust in our God

Spiritually Back on Track

Ezra 6:19-22

19 And the descendants of the captivity **kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.** 20 **For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean.** And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21 Then **the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel** *[these were Gentiles!]*. 22 And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Spiritual Unity of Jews and Gentiles

Temple service organized

- **Offerings** (v.17): small compared to Solomon's (1 Kings 8:63)
- **Sin offering:** Solomon didn't have these [maybe exiles were confessing their sins that had caused the exile]
- **12 Tribes:** implies some from all 12 tribes did return
- **Priests & Levites organized** (v.18): as per 1 Chr 23:6-24; 24:1-19
- **Ate together with all** (v.21) – included Gentiles! Worship Yahweh, the God of Israel
- **King of Assyria** (v.22): An Assyrian king began the exile, now the temple is finished during another



God wants us to rejoice in our service to Him -
it's time to celebrate what He has done for us!

A close-up photograph showing a circular arrangement of hands from people of various ethnicities and skin tones. The hands are interlocked in a supportive grip, with fingers resting on the wrists of others. The colors range from light pink to deep brown, creating a vibrant, inclusive visual. The background is a plain, bright white, which makes the hands stand out prominently. The overall composition conveys a strong sense of community, teamwork, and shared purpose.

**Unity is achieved
when believers work
and worship together**

And I am sure
that he who
began a good
work in you
*will bring it to
completion* at
the day of
Jesus Christ.
Philip 1:6 (RSV)

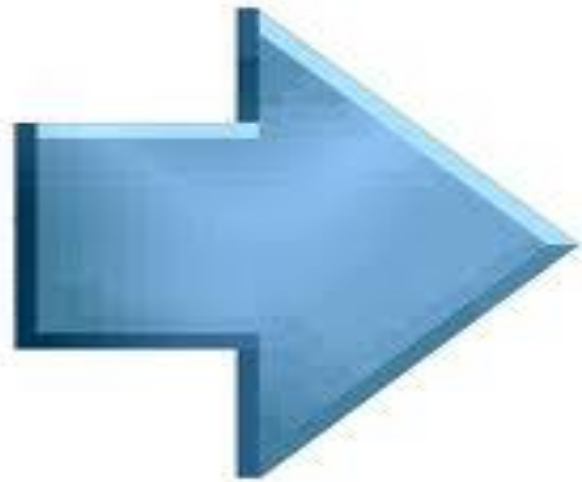


Whatever our current trials
& problems, never lose
Paul's confidence in God's
ability to finish His work!

Lessons from This Class

- Pray that God will send your ecclesia motivated and energetic workers to stir up your ecclesia to good works!
- Don't look for excuses to quit! There will always be some when working with people.
- God will do the impossible! He's just looking to see if we really want the work to prosper.
- Thank God for His angels who continuously guide our lives and prosper our way. They will get the job done!

Next



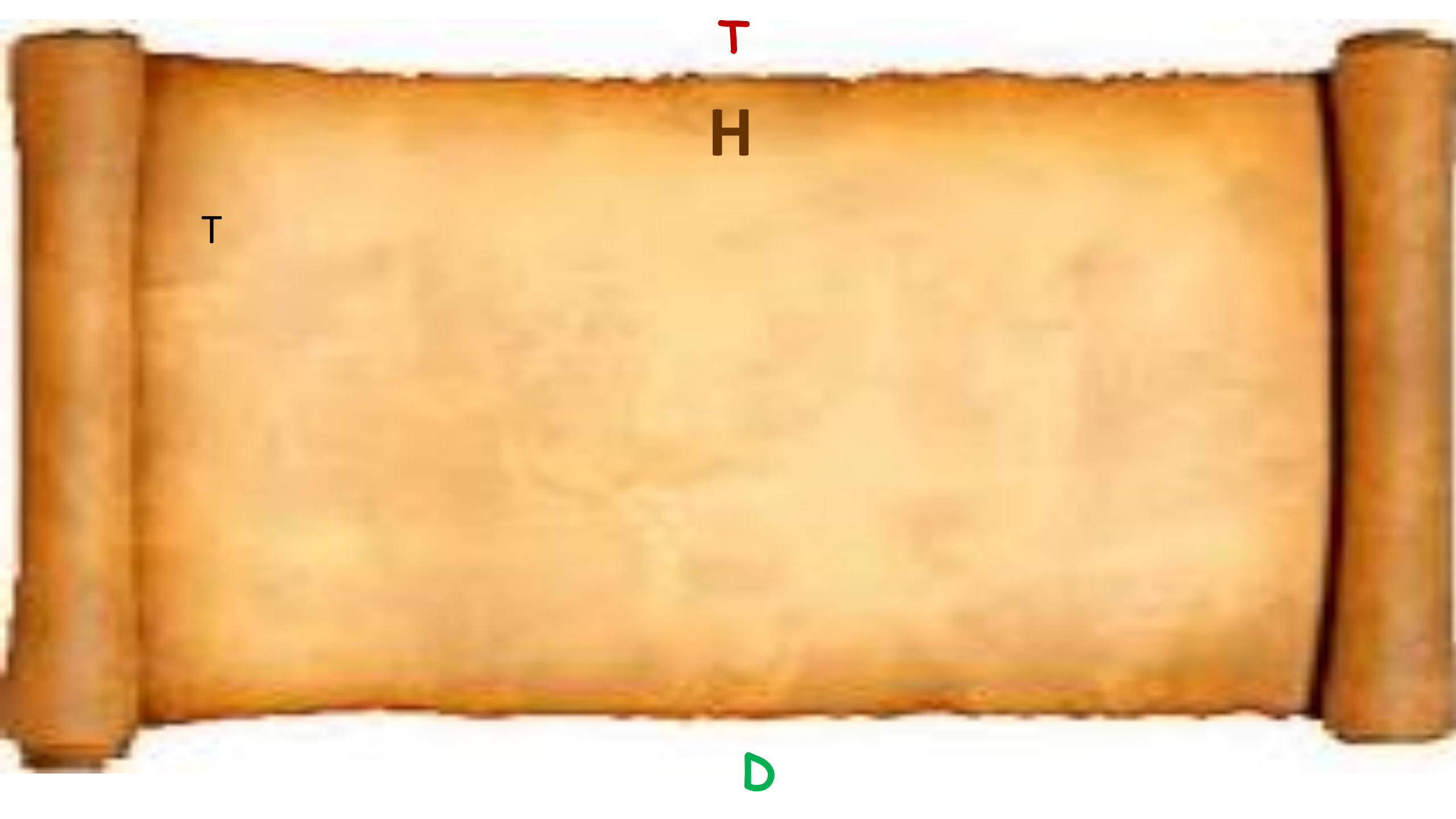
Class 5: Preparing to serve is Essential



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A sailboat is seen on the horizon of a dark blue ocean. The sky is filled with white, fluffy clouds, and numerous bright sunbeams radiate downwards from behind the clouds, creating a dramatic and hopeful atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image in a light blue, serif font.

To Have God in our life
doesn't mean sailing
on a boat with no storms,
it means having a boat
that no storm can sink!