

Background of the Zerubbabel Temple

Commentary for June 1, 2022 — and the Construction of the Second Temple

This month's article is "The Rebuilding of the Temple" (first read the "[June 2022 Newsletter](#)" for other introductory information).

After the destruction of the Solomonic Temple of YHWH, and after 70 years of exile, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Some historians refer to this second structure as the Zerubbabel Temple. Like Solomon's Temple, it was built above the Gihon Spring. It did not contain the Ark of the Covenant which was likely hidden by Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 3:16; 2 Maccabees 2:4-5). Who was Zerubbabel and who were those helping to rebuild the Temple?

After Cyrus, King of Persia, captured Babylon, he gave a decree allowing the Jews to return to Judah and Jerusalem. A precise number of Jews returning to Judah is given: 42,360 (Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66). This was the first group to return from Babylon. Many others stayed behind in captivity though they were no longer required to do so.

Zerubbabel¹ was appointed political leader and governor of the returning Jews after King Cyrus allowed them to return. His name means "seed of Babel" (Babel refers to Babylon); others say his name means "dispersed to Babel." God prophesied that Zerubbabel would perform a task:

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and you shall know that YHWH of hosts has sent me unto you."

• **Zechariah 4:9**

Read this month's article to learn how things deteriorated after the foundation of the Temple was laid.

The End of the Story

The third Persian King of the Achaemenid Empire, Darius I, was challenged by enemies who claimed the Jews were a dangerous and rebellious people, and that King Cyrus never permitted the Jews to rebuild their Temple. Darius ordered a search to be made for the document.

¹ See the article "[Zerubbabel](#)" in *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*. Zerubbabel was of royal blood, but the kingship had ended. Here is a separate listing about him. He also had a Persian name:

"Sheshbazzar." ZERUBBABEL'S (which see) Persian or Babylonian name (Ezra 1:8, 11; 5:14, 16). Prince (*ha-nasi*, the Jewish term for head of the tribe) and governor (*pechah*, the Persian Cyrus appointing him) of Judah. 'Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the house of God in Jerusalem' as Zechariah (Zec. 4:9) foretold that Zerubbabel should do (compare Ezra 1:11 with Ezra 2:1,2)."

Ezra 5:16 says that Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel) did lay the foundation as God commanded and completed the construction of the Temple despite the hesitation by the people.

The edict was found and brought to Darius. The Cyrus edict was for the Jews only.² It permitted them to return to Judea and rebuild their Temple. It also commanded funds from the royal treasury be given to assist the Temple construction. Darius agreed and fulfilled the Cyrus edict.

Another problem was the Jews themselves. They thought God was not keeping His prophetic promises. The fault was theirs as the prophet Haggai explained. Finally, the Temple was completed on a precise date:

“And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.”

• **Ezra 6:15**

This statement announces that the Zerubbabel Temple **“was finished.”** Then Zerubbabel organized the priests and Levites, the Temple was dedicated, and the first Passover and feast of unleavened bread were celebrated as told in Ezra 6:13–22. Ezra the priest said the prophets Haggai and Zechariah motivated the leaders and people to build and finish the Temple:

“Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.”

• **Ezra 5:1**

“And 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 commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.”

• **Ezra 6:14**

Prosperity for the People of Judah

After the second Temple of Zerubbabel was built, prosperity slowly came to the people of Judah. After Alexander the Great’s conquest of the Persian Empire, Greek successor kings in Egypt and Syria struggled to rule the battleground of Palestine. Control changed five times over many decades. When the Ptolemies prevailed, they allowed the Jews religious freedom and self-rule under their sovereignty. When Seleucids prevailed, they oppressed the Jews.

Around 185 BC a traveler from Egypt named Aristeas wrote about the expanded and massive structure of the Temple. The area around the Holy Place had been enlarged with massive water reservoirs in the hillsides to the west and north of the Temple holding water to flush the blood and gore from the animal sacrifices. (See [Aristeas](#), paragraphs #83–99, Charles translation).

Later, when Judah gained independence from Seleucid rule that caused severe ritual pollution, the Temple was cut down, the area cleansed, and expanded again during the rule of Simon the Hasmonean with approval of the people. The final expansion came later by King Herod who again enlarged the courts of the Temple significantly. All this information is in Dr. Martin’s book [The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot](#).

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² This document was specific to the Jews and was different than the [Cyrus Cylinder](#), a general declaration to **all** exiled **peoples and nations**, permitting them to return to their native lands.