

ZERUBBABEL'S WORK FOR GOD

Jon Macon

In 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, conquered Babylon and thus established the Persian Empire which would last for the next 200 years until the time of Alexander the Great. More than a century before his birth, Isaiah prophesied of this man *by name* and that he would be responsible for initiating the rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah 44:28 says, "*That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*" Thus, in his very first year as the Persian Emperor, Cyrus decreed exactly what Isaiah had foretold. In Ezra 1:3, Cyrus said, "*Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.*" God's righteous servant who would actually perform this work was Zerubbabel, a man who may not be appreciated as much as he should be as one of the excellent examples found in the Bible.

Zerubbabel's background and position

In Ezra 2:1-3, we learn that this Israelite named Zerubbabel led the captives back to Israel. Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2; Neh 12:1; Hag 1:1). Shealtiel was the son of Jechoniah (Matt 1:12), Jechoniah being the grandson of King Josiah, and next-to-last king of Judah (2 Kgs 25; 2 Chr 36). Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon carried Jechoniah into captivity in Babylon (2 Kgs 24:15), and he remained there for the rest of his life (2 Kgs 25:27-30; Jer 52:31-34). Since Jechoniah was only 18 years old when he went to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:8-12), Shealtiel his son would have only known Babylon as his earthly home. Zerubbabel was born into this captivity as were most of his brethren who accompanied him back to Israel. The grandson of one of Judah's last kings, Zerubbabel held the position of governor of Judah (Hag 1:1). Now that Israel was no longer ruled by kings, the position of "governor" was tantamount to what existed prior to the kings, the leaders of Israel who were known as the Judges. Isaiah had also foretold this restoration: "*And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city*" (Isa 1:26). The Judges were the men whom God personally selected as the best leaders for the nation of Israel from Moses to Samuel. *None* of them are described as being unrighteous. Israel later demanded to have a king "like all the nations" around them (1 Sam 8). God permitted this, but warned them of the consequences. The consequences included the ultimate spiritual decline and destruction of the nation (2 Kings 17). Only a remnant of Judah was preserved in captivity in Babylon, and now Zerubbabel was leading them back to their God-given land. God had once again chosen the best leader for the spiritual well-being of Israel. Incidentally, this man also was a paternal ancestor of Jesus Christ, as he descended from David through Judah's royal

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line (Matt 1:12-16). Thus, the throne of David goes through Zerubbabel.

God gave the increase to Zerubbabel's work

Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple in Ezra chapter 3. Yet God knew that Zerubbabel's work in rebuilding the temple would be a difficult task with persistent opposition and discouragement through the servant's of the Devil. And God used His prophets to help Zerubbabel and the people when persecution arose (Ezra 5:1-2). Through Zechariah the prophet, the Lord encouraged Zerubbabel with a great promise that he would prevail in his labor for God: "*Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you*" (Zech 4:7-9). God also emphasized the means by which Zerubbabel would lead the completion of the building of the temple, as it would be "*not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*" (Zech 4:6). At the time these words were spoken, the work on the temple was at a stop because of the Jews' adversaries, who wrote a letter to king Artaxerxes warning him that the Jews would rebel if the temple were built (Ezra 4:7-16). Artaxerxes wrote back and commanded that the work be stopped (Ezra 4:17-22), and it indeed came to a halt in the year 521 B.C. (Ezra 4:23-24). It was the world-dominant power of the Persian government that had brought about the stoppage of the work. It would not be by the might or power of men that such a formidable obstacle would be surmounted. The Jews would not be able to physically overcome the opposition of the Persian government. Only God, the ruler in the kingdoms of men (Dan 4; Rom 13:1-8), would be able to change these circumstances. And God is the one who opened the door for the temple to be able to be completed. He is the one who made this "great mountain" of a problem into a plain (Zech 4:7). King Darius found Cyrus' original decree that the temple should be built (Ezra 6:1-5) and then decreed that the work of the temple be completed without hindrance (Ezra 6:6-13). In fact, Darius also provided financial assistance to enable the completion of the temple (Ezra 6:8-10). This caused the work to be finished with great speed, and the temple was completed in 516 B.C., exactly according to God's word (Ezra 6:14-15). God, not man, rules in the kingdoms of men, and He turns the hearts of kings as He wills (Prov 21:1). With God's help, the work was done! That same God also promises to work all things together for our good if we do His will (Rom 8:28). Hebrews 13:5-6 says, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*"