

1. Babylon was the Gentile world power that led Judah into captivity in three successive stages in 605, 597, and 587/586 B.C.
2. In 539 B.C. Persia conquers Babylon and Cyrus issues the decree that the Jews could return to their homeland.
3. As a result of Cyrus's policies many Jews returned to Judah and Jerusalem, and shortly thereafter some progress was made on restoring the temple in Jerusalem.
4. Those efforts, however, could not be sustained - because the attention of the people gradually turned to other more pressing concerns.
5. Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses, who ruled Persia from 530-522 B.C. He quickly focused his attention on gaining control of Egypt.
6. Darius came to power in 522 B.C. He was twenty-eight years old at the time.
7. This Darius is not to be confused with Darius the Mede of the Book of Daniel - a figure associated with Cyrus the Persian in the overthrow of the Neo-Babylonian empire in 539 B.C.
8. Darius continued the policies that Cyrus had previously initiated with regard to religious tolerance and liberation.
9. After the initial efforts under Cyrus to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem following the return to Judah of the first exiles - progress had ground to a halt. (Ezra 4:24)
10. Work later resumed and it was quickly met with resistance and opposition from neighboring groups.
11. Official complaints were registered with the local authorities. When Tattenai the Persian governor was informed of what the Jews were doing, he reported the activity to Darius. (Ezra 5:6-17).
12. An archival search confirmed that such was in fact the case. (Ezra 6:1)
13. Darius then sent word back authorizing continuation of the work and forbidding any interference or face a penalty of death.
14. He also authorized the use of royal funds for this purpose and instructed that the sacred vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had previously removed from the temple be returned. (Ezra 6:3-12)
15. Partly as a result of Darius's assistance - the temple was finally completed in March, 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:14-15)
16. Darius was succeeded by Artaxerxes or Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), who we find in the Book of Esther.
17. God called Haggai to prophesy to the people at a time when spiritual apathy - instead of political opposition - was hindering the work.

18. Haggai was the first prophet to preach to the returning exiles. The message from the Lord concerned the apathy of the people and also as an encouragement to continue the work of rebuilding the temple.
19. Haggai spoke not only about the present work but also God's future promise of a glorious temple.
20. The book contains four distinct messages:
 - A. The First Message: The Call to Rebuild the Temple (chap. 1)
 - B. The Second Message: The Promise of the Future Glory of the Temple (2:1-9)
 - C. The Third Message: The Illustration of the Present Blessings of Obedience (2:10-19)
 - D. The Fourth Message: A Messianic Prophecy concerning Zerubbabel (2:20-23)
21. In the message of verses 20-23 we see Zerubbabel as a representative figure.
22. This governor of Judah represented a renewal of divine pleasure in a people who had returned from the disciplinary experience of the exile—a people whom the Lord was once again pleased to acknowledge and for whom He had great plans.
23. Like many other Old Testament promises, these predictions had both a near dimension and a more distant one.
24. Haggai's promises given to Zerubbabel, while true of him in a limited way, find their ultimate expression in a greater Zerubbabel who was to come. (Jeremiah 22:44-45)
25. It is not surprising that in the genealogies of Jesus provided by Matthew and Luke, Zerubbabel is mentioned as part of the messianic line.
26. The prophets - at times - spoke of profound mysteries that were beyond their ability fully to comprehend.
27. Zerubbabel nonetheless played a crucial role in the historical events of sixth-century Judah.
28. Along with the high priest Joshua, he was influential in leading the returning exiles to make a positive response to the Lord's instructions concerning the temple.
29. The fame of Zerubbabel and Joshua continued well into the intertestamental period, providing hope and inspiration for later generations.