

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the surviving Jews were carried off into exile. (The “cream of the crop,” such as Ezekiel, Daniel and his friends, had been taken earlier). When the Persians conquered the Babylonians in 539 B.C., Cyrus authorized the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple (**2 Chronicles 36:11-23**).

God had given a message to Ezekiel about the judgment on Judah and other nations. At the end of his book, Ezekiel receives a special prophecy about the rebuilding of the temple.

Ezekiel 40-48 is a passage almost like the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers combined in summary form. Like **Exodus 25-40**, it contains detailed instructions for building the place of worship (rebuilding the temple instead of the tabernacle). Like **Leviticus 1-7**, it gives instructions concerning the sacrificial system of the priests for the people. Like Numbers, it explains the borders and inheritance guidelines Israel must respect.

Restoration of Israel was physical: reestablishing the borders, rebuilding the walls and houses, replanting the fields, groves, and vineyards. The restoration was also spiritual: rebuilding the temple, consecrating the priests, following the same instructions as were given to Moses for worship, teaching faithfulness in daily living. The restoration was social: allotments by families, moral behavior taught and practiced.

The restoration began in 539 B.C., with Zerubbabel leading 50,000 Jews back to Judah. The foundation for the temple had been laid with great rejoicing in 536 B.C. (**Ezra 3:8-11**), but surrounding peoples opposed the rebuilding and wrote slanderous letters to persuade the Persian kings to order the Jews to stop their building (**Ezra 4**).

When the Jews were to build the temple, some had the idea that the prophecy of Jeremiah (**2 Chron. 36:21**) meant that they were not to build it until 516 B.C. (**Haggai 1:2**). However, Jeremiah’s prophecy didn’t stop them from building their own houses! Haggai rebukes the Jews for putting their own interest ahead of God’s will and encourages them to obey (**Haggai 1:3-11**).

When the Jews heard this message from God by Haggai (and Zechariah), they start building again. They finished four years later (**Ezra 6:15**). God was pleased, and He was glorified (**Haggai 1:8**).

We should be diligent to follow the Lord’s instructions as faithfully as we can. We should not let opposition or circumstances prevent us from doing His will. It requires great courage and effort, but we glorify God when we serve Him according to His will.