

## **Synthetic Bible Studies**

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible  
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and  
Bible Expositions

By

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Fleming H. Revell Company

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### **LESSON THIRTY-FIVE**

#### **Ezra**

We have already seen that the Babylonian captivity did not bring the Jews to national repentance, and so lead to national restoration.

As the reading of Ezra will disclose, when Cyrus, king of Persia, gave permission to the captives to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, scarcely 50,000 availed themselves of the privilege, a considerable proportion of whom were priests and Levites and of the humbler and poorer class. And although the number and influence of these vastly increased in time, yet at no period, with a single brief exception, did they ever regain their political independence.

They were always thereafter a subject people, and under the government of heathen rulers of one kind or another. This accounts for the rising influence of the priesthood, the only possible office under the Mosaic institutions.

To quote Andrews, we are to remember that this restoration did not carry with it a reestablishment of the original theocratic relation. The Lord was no longer their King as of old, nor did He return to dwell among them. They had a continuation of national existence, but on a lower plane than before. By faithful obedience they might have hastened the return of the Lord and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, but this, as we know, was not true of them.

"Zerubbabel, who led up the first company of returning exiles from Persia, or Babylon, was the last prince of the house of David, and the royal family then sank into obscurity. The high

priesthood continued for a time in the line of Joshua, the contemporary of Zerubbabel, but afterwards passed into the hands of strangers; and the spirit of prophecy, as well, quenched by disobedience, was silent for centuries."

These remarks lead to the consideration of the book of Ezra which gives the account of the return and the events immediately following.

### **Word Outline of Ezra**

- The proclamation of Cyrus, chapter 1.
- The company of Zerubbabel, chapter 2.
- The rebuilding of the Temple, chapter 3.
- The opposition of the adversaries, chapter 4.
- The renewal of the work, chapters 5, 6.
- The company of Ezra, chapters 7, 8.
- The national reforms, chapters 9, 10.

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on this book, as it tells its story so very plainly. Let us notice, however, that the chief national purpose accomplished at this time was the rebuilding of the Temple, and this amid strong opposition from their heathen environment. It was because of this opposition, plus a coldness and selfishness on the part of the people themselves, that the cessation of the work lasted for fourteen years. This coldness and selfishness gave occasion to the pungent discourses of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, whose books are next to be considered in this course as contemporary with the period of Ezra.

It should be observed also in passing that the Jews on their first return showed that they were not so entirely cured of idolatry by their Babylonian experience, but that they again dallied with temptation in the form of inter-marriages. This was the motive of Ezra's reform movement. "Gradually, however, they became more and more strictly monotheistic, as in JESUS' day, looking with increasing abhorrence upon idols and idolatrous worship."

### **Haggai**

When the handful of Israelites returned from Babylon, or the land of Persia, as it might now be called because that people were now in power there, the great task set before them was the rebuilding of the Temple to restore the worship of the Lord.

We have seen the difficulties that confronted them, fewness of number, scantiness of means, boldness of opposition from external enemies, and above all perhaps, an inward conviction of sin concerning the past which robbed them of that "**joy of the Lord which is our strength**" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Under these conditions the work flagged. The people lost heart through lack of faith in GOD, and sin and selfishness began to creep over them. They gradually grew careless concerning the Lord's house, and correspondingly interested in their own houses. GOD's love for them could not permit this to continue, and hence chastisements followed. Finally, when repentance began to take hold of their hearts, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are sent to them, whose words of

instruction and cheer, accompanied by the power of the HOLY SPIRIT, awakened a revival that results in the happy accomplishment of the work.

It is evident, however, that these instructions and encouragements have ultimate reference and application, not to the period then present, but as in the case of the earlier prophets, to the period yet to come when GOD shall "**create Jerusalem a rejoicing and his people a joy**" (Isaiah 65:18).

This will appear as we proceed in the exposition of the books, more particularly Zechariah.

### **The Book of Haggai**

The book of Haggai consists of four discourses the time of whose delivery is stated in each case.

The first is coterminus with the first chapter.

- what was its date (1:1)?
- to whom, directly, was it addressed?
- what charge does it lay upon the people (v. 2)?
- while neglecting the Lord's house on the ground that a propitious time had not arrived for its completion, of what had they not been neglectful (v. 3)?
- what word in that verse indicates that they had been taking exceptionally good care of themselves?
- what solemn adjuration is used in verse 5?
- what chastisements had fallen on them (v. 6)?
- what simple and practical remedy for the situation is laid before them (v. 8)?
- how is their affliction shown to be a direct judgment from the Lord (vv. 9-11).
- what was the effect of the message upon the leaders and the people generally (v. 12)?
- how did the Lord respond to this repentance in blessing (v. 13)?
- what explanation of this ready obedience on the part of the people is given (v. 14)?
- how far did the repentance of the people extend (v. 14)?
- about how much time was covered by these incidents (vv. 1 and 15 compared)?

The second discourse is included in verses 1-9 of chapter 2.

- how long after the first discourse did it follow (v. 1)?
- to whom addressed (v. 2)?

For the historical point of contact in this discourse examine the record in Ezra 3:8-13.

When the foundation of the Temple was laid very painful emotions were excited in the breasts of the older men by the sad contrast between the prosperous circumstances in which the foundations of the first Temple had been laid under Solomon, and the desolate reduced condition of things at this time. How inferior the size and costliness of the stones in this instance, how much smaller the extent of the foundation itself, how limited their means! And then this second Temple would be destitute of those things which formed the great and distinguishing glory of the first, viz: the ark, the Shekinah, invisible glory of GOD, and the Urim and Thummim through

which communication was had with the high priest on the part of the Lord.

Not that this second Temple was not a very grand and beautiful structure, but only that howsoever great its material splendor, it was still inferior to that of Solomon.

In what language does the prophet refer to the emotions caused by this contrast (v. 3) In what language does he encourage the leaders and the people generally under the circumstances (vv. 4-9)? They hesitated about going on with the work through dread of the world-power of that period, Persia, influenced by the craft of Samaria. But it would not be long before that world-power, and for that matter, all other world-powers would fall before the might of GOD.

### **"The Desire of All Nations Shall Come."**

The expression at the head of this paragraph has usually been taken as a personal reference to the Messiah. He came subsequently into the house they were now building, and that fulfilled the prophecy, "**I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord,**" as well as the other words in verse 9.

This prophecy, however, takes on still more importance if we consider the reference to it in Hebrews 12:26. At that place the inspired writer is comparing the heavier punishment awaiting the disobedient under the New Testament with that of the Old Testament.

At the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant only the earth was shaken to introduce it, but now Heaven and earth and all things are to be shaken that stand in the way of the Messiah's kingdom that "**cannot be shaken.**"

In the judgment of some, the two parts of this chapter of Haggai are here brought together, verses 6 and 7 with verses 21 and 22, implying that it was one and the same shaking, of which the former verses denote the beginning, and the latter the end. The shaking began introductory to the first advent, and will be finished at the second. Concerning the former, see Matthew 3:17; 27:51; 28:2; Acts 2:2; 4:31, and concerning the latter Matthew 24:7; Revelation 16:20; 18:20; 20:11.

As Sir Isaac Newton said, "There is scarcely a prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament which does not, to some extent at least, refer to His second coming."

But we hasten to the third discourse, verses 10-19.

How long after the second was this revealed? What question is the prophet to ask, and to whom (vv. 11,12)? What was the answer received?

"**Holy flesh**" here refers to the flesh of sacrifices which, while it made ceremonially "holy" the "skirt" in which it was carried, could not impart that holiness to anything beyond. This is used to illustrate that the sacrifices which the nation was offering at this time, while "holy" in the sense that they had been appointed by GOD and represented divine truths, could not, nevertheless, make them who offered them holy while they were living in disobedience. There was no inherent grace that could be communicated by them through the mere act of their presentation. For these sacrifices to be the means of spiritual blessing to the people just now the latter must cease their

neglect with reference to the building of GOD's house.

What second question was the prophet to ask (v. 13)? And the answer in this case? The interpretation follows in verse 14.

"Legal sanctity is not so readily communicated as legal impurity. The paths to sin are many, the path to holiness, one. One drop of filth will defile a vase of water, but many drops will not purify a vase of filth."

The offerings of the people, being diligently presented on the altar erected in the open air before the Temple was built, could not make them acceptable to GOD, because of their disobedience in failing to complete that Temple. In fact, those offerings were themselves being made unclean through the uncleanness, disobedience, of the people. But how does verse 15 show that a change had taken place in their spirit and actions?

The people had now begun to build on the foundations previously reared and GOD had begun to bless them (v. 19, last clause). They could see no visible signs of the blessings as yet, but it was in operation in the earth in their fields, and vines, and trees, and when harvest-time came they would know that GOD had done it.

In days gone by, while living in disobedience, they had often, in harvest-time, expected to gather a heap of twenty measures in a field where they got no more than half of it; and fifty vessels of wine were looked for out of the press, and they only got two-fifths of the quantity. Everything was against them in those days, and yet they did not see the causes of it all to be their own sin (vv. 16, 17). But it would be different now.

Let them remember the date well (v. 18). It was the date when they really began to serve GOD in earnest, and showed their faith by their works.

Harvest-time had not yet come, the seed was in the ground and not in the barn, the trees and vines had not yet blossomed, nevertheless, "**From this day will I bless you**" (v. 19).

GOD begins when we begin. There is a great lesson here for ourselves and for the people we teach.

### **Zerubbabel's Resurrection**

The fourth discourse concludes the book, and seems to have been given on the same day as the preceding one (v. 20). To whom is it particularly addressed (v. 21)? What indicates that however the prophecy may have applied approximately to Zerubbabel's own time, its ultimate application is yet to come (v. 22)? Reference having already been made to these verses they need not be dwelt upon again. But what about Zerubbabel personally, "**in that day**" (v. 23)? That he will be raised from the dead we all know, but is he to stand in that day in some representative capacity before Israel literally as a witness and testimony to this promise? There are those who believe this, but I am inclined to think with another, that he is here alluded to as the representative of the Davidic family and type of the true David to come, i. e., JESUS CHRIST our Lord. He was chief of that family at this time, as we saw previously, and this promise was to assure him that GOD

remembered his covenant with his forefather, and that it would be fulfilled.

~ end of Lesson 35 ~

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