

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS [small beginnings," NLT]? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 1 of 33

INTRODUCTION

Beginnings are generally preceded by challenging circumstances – an environment that demands newness and freshness. The creation of the heavens and earth was preceded by darkness and chaos (Gen 1:1-2). Darkness, ignorance, chaos, and death are a summons for light, understanding, Divine order and spiritual life. Their existence reveals a need for a new beginning – a fresh start.

Before the creation "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen 1:2). Before the earth's new beginning in the days of Noah, "the earth was filled with violence," and a global flood destroyed all but eight souls (Gen 6:11; 7:21). Before the beginning of God's dealing with Abraham, God had disrupted the prideful building of Babel and "scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth" (Gen 11:8). Before Israel's new beginning, the Egyptians "made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor" (Ex 1:14). Prior to the beginning of Gideon's prominence, Israel was oppressed by the Midianites, and there were no miracles (Judges 6:13). Before Daniel rose to prominence in the Babylonian empire, Israel was ravished by Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel was taken captive as a young boy (Dan 1:3-6).

Beginnings are always preceded by challenging, and sometimes seemingly hopeless, circumstances. The people of God, by means of their faith and hope, have good reason to expect fresh beginnings.

Prior to the birth of the Lord Jesus, humanity "sat in darkness" and "in the region of the shadow of death" (Matt 4:16). Before Jesus entered into His ministry, He was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil" (Luke 4:1-2). Before He ascended into heaven, He "descended first into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph 4:9). Before the beginning of Pentecost, the disciples were faint and discouraged because of the death of their Master (John 21:3).

Before our new creation in Christ Jesus, we were "dead in trespasses and sins," and "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:1-2). Before we were "the people of God," we were "not a people," and before we obtained mercy we "had not obtained mercy" (1

Pet 2:10). Before the new beginning of the resurrection, "it is appointed unto man once to die" (Heb 9:27). Beginnings are always preceded by seemingly challenging circumstances.

In our time, there are some challenging circumstances that call for a new beginning. There are unprecedented natural and social disruptions. A social instability exists that is alarming. There is deadness in the professed church, and confusion and enmity among those who wear the name of Christ. Multitudes of saints are suffering from a lack of exposure to the truth of God. Their hearts are faint, and they lack the "full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:22).

We are ripe for a fresh move of God, a new outbreak of spiritual life. We have been inundated with the world's wisdom disguised as spiritual understanding. A compelling hunger and thirst for righteousness are not apparent on any significant scale. Professed Christians appear satisfied with shallow pulpit presentations, learned academic disquisitions, and frothy entertainment. In a day when Divine power is sorely needed, men choose to debate about its relevance and possibility. The Lord Jesus Christ has taken a back seat to imagined church government, family needs, and pleasure. It is time for something fresh and new – a new beginning.

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 2 of 33

THE RENEWING OF THE SPIRIT

Part of God's great salvation is the "renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). There is a freshness and vitality that accompanies life in the Son. This renewal begins with regeneration, and is carried forward by the Spirit in the continual change from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

There came a time in the life of Samuel when renewal was required. It began when they made Saul king, and was considered to be a time of fresh beginning. Of that occasion Samuel said, "Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and RENEW the kingdom there" (1 Sam 11:14). After he had plummeted from lofty heights, David fervently prayed, "RENEW a right spirit within me" (Psa 51:10). The prophet Isaiah affirmed those waiting upon the Lord would "RENEW their strength" (Isa 40:31). With a compassionate cry God said to Israel, "Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people RENEW their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment" (Isa 41:1). When Israel had been chastened of the Lord, Jeremiah cried out to God, "RENEW our days as of old" (Lam 5:21). Renewal and fresh beginnings have always played a key role in the lives of God's people.

Part of spiritual life is the renewal of the inner man "day by day" – "For which cause we faint

not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is RENEWED day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). In doing spiritual battle, it is imperative that we be "RENEWED in the spirit" of our mind (Eph 4:23; Rom 12:2).

The "NEWNESS of life," into which we have been raised (Rom 6:4), provides no place for deadness, dulness, or monotony. There is no call from God summoning His people to adjust to the times by settling back or lessening their pace. Our hearts are not to be weighed down by our surroundings, but rather challenged by them to seek NEW and fresh things from God. Squatting down in your troubles is like sinking down in the mire of a pit (Jer 38:6). RENEWAL is the manner of the Kingdom!

God has spoken concerning new things happening in stale times, and freshness breaking out in the midst of dry and thirsty times and places. "I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water" (Isa 41:18). And again, "Behold, I will do a NEW thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isa 43:19).

If the times are spiritually impoverished, and there seems to be little hope for vital renewal, let us remember the Israelites in the wilderness. "And they THIRSTED NOT when He led them through the deserts: He CAUSED the waters to flow out of the rock for them: He clave the rock also, and the waters GUSHED out" (Isa 48:21). Again it is written, "He opened the rock, and the waters GUSHED out; they ran in the dry places like a river" (Psa 105:41).

And will our Lord do less for those who are joined to His Son? Can He not bring water to us in a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Psa 63:1)? Indeed, He can! That is what this series of lessons is all about: assuring our hearts that NEW BEGINNINGS can take place in our time! We are joined to holy history, but we are not anchored to it! Our anchor is in the future, not in the past! It is firmly fixed in heaven, within the veil, where we are being led by Christ Himself (Heb 6:19). We are saved by "hope," not by past history (Rom 8:24-25).

The historical and mandatory accomplishments of the Lord Jesus – His atoning death and triumphant resurrection – have been presented in the heavenly realms. That is why they are effective. Jesus entered into "heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24). This is precisely why newness can be experienced again and again! It is because of the present activity of the Savior.

Our faith is not in a record, but in the God of the record! It is the One who made the history that sustains us, and not the history itself. Our faith takes hold of the accomplishments of Christ Jesus in history with one hand. With the other, it takes hold of the Savior Himself. Our face is set steadfastly toward heaven, where our citizenship resides (Phil 3:30). That is why we can speak confidently of NEW BEGINNINGS. That is why we do not need to adjust to the present, or allow circumstance to cast us down! We do not need to restore a particular time in history, but lay hold of the power possessed and distributed by the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 3 of 33

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Zerubbabel the builder, the subject of our text, was a fellow laborer with Haggai (Hag 1:1,12) and Zechariah (Zech 4:9). He also accomplished his work during the time of Ezra (Ezra 2:2; 3:2,8,; 4:2,3; 5:2). It is written, "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and WITH THEM WERE THE PROPHETS OF GOD HELPING THEM" (Ezra 5:2). The prophets mentioned are Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 6:14).

Zechariah's prophecy of reference (Zech 4:8-10) was also one of the closing ones given in the Old Covenant period. Malachi also prophesied during this time. It appears that these three men (Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi) were sent at the same time by God, largely to encourage one another, for they did live in decadent times. Although all three prophets delivered scathing rebukes to the regressing Israelites, they also sounded the trumpet of hope in their writings. Something was started in their day that was most remarkable – something from which we can learn and be encouraged.

The first chapter of Zechariah informs us the word of the Lord came to Zechariah in the eighth month of the second year of the reign of Darius (1:2). That also makes Zechariah a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was during the reign of Darius, in the second year of his reign, that the house of God was rebuilt in accord with his decree (Ezra 6:15). That decree was prompted by the uncovering of an edict of former king Cyrus, who commanded the house of God to be built in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:1-3). The Jewish builders "prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo: and they builded, 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). This occurred during the close of, and after, the Babylonian captivity. Daniel and Esther were also prominent during this period. What a holy cluster of saints, each one having something to do with the beginning of a new thing – with renewal – Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, Nehemiah, Daniel, Ezra, Malachi, etc.!

Jewish tradition says Zechariah died as a martyr. The Scriptures say nothing of his death. He is not the Zechariah of Jesus' reference, who "was killed between the altar and the sanctuary" (Lk 11:51, NIV). He was "the son of Jehoida the priest" (2 Chron 24:20-21), which was before the Babylonian captivity. The Zechariah who gave the prophesy of our text was "the son of Berechiah," and lived during the time of Darius (Zech 1:1), which was during and after the Babylonian captivity.

It is generally understood that Zechariah was a young man when he began to prophesy, and was

a priest as well as a prophet (Neh 12:12-16). His book is one containing several most unusual and poignant prophecies. It deals with everything from the rebuke of the lethargic Israelites (1:2-4) and the rebuilding of the temple (6:12-15; 8:9), to the atonement accomplished by the death of Christ (13:1) and the future prominence of Israel in the nation's quest to know God (8:3).

Several references are made to the book of Zechariah in the New Covenant writings. This not only confirms the authenticity of the book, but testifies to its relevance to New Covenant life.

1. Zechariah 8:16 in Ephesians 4:25: "These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates."
2. Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:14-15; "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."
3. Zechariah 11:12-13 in Matthew 27:9: "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was priced at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD."
4. Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."
5. Zechariah 13:7 in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones."

It has been God's manner to declare new things were coming, sending messengers to announce them, and then fulfilling them. Only the Mighty God can do such things, and we do well to become familiar with such announcements and fulfillment.

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 4 of 33

THE RAVAGES OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

Our text follows the conclusion of the Babylonian captivity. This period of seventy years is worthy of some consideration. Through the record of this time we learn some valuable lessons about God Himself, as well as those who refuse to honor and obey Him.

The Babylonian captivity was a judgment upon Israel for their neglect of honoring the sabbaths of the land. Every seventh year, the people were to let the land "keep a sabbath unto the Lord." Six years they could sow and reap, but the seventh was to be "a sabbath for the Lord." This was a test of the faith of the Israelites. God promised that in the sixth year, "I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years." That was sufficient for the year they planted, the sabbath year in which they did not plant, and the eighth year in which they would plant (Lev 25:3-5,20-22).

For four hundred and ninety years, from King Saul until the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites did not honor this law. The land was given no sabbath for nearly five centuries. Therefore, God took all of the sabbaths at one time, one year for every sabbath year that was not honored. That means seventy sabbaths were taken at once – the precise length of the Babylonian captivity, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah – a time when the people were not in the land. "And them that had escaped from the sword carried he [Nebuchadnezzar] away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." (2 Chron 36:20-21; Jer 25:11-12; 29:10).

More happened in this judgment than the release of the land for seventy years. The holy vessels were removed from the temple and taken to an idolatrous temple in Babylon: "Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon" (2 Chron 36:7). All the princes, mighty men of valor, craftsmen, and smiths were also removed from the land, together with the king, his mother, and all of his officers: "And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. "And he carried away ALL Jerusalem, and ALL the princes, and ALL the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and ALL the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon" (2 Kgs 24:13-15).

Eleven years after Nebuchadnezzar removed the vessels from the Temple, the Babylonian army completed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The Temple and its buildings were burned. "And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it: and they built forts against it round about. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the

month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about." (2 Kings 25:1-10)

Thus ended the four hundred year history of Solomon's Temple.

Our text is the record of a new "beginning" that took place after that remarkable period of devastation – a ravaging that was so thorough it did not appear that recovery was possible. Indeed, were it not for the Almighty God, it would not have been possible!

Forty-eight years after the destruction of the first Temple, the Babylonian empire came to an end, being replaced by the Persian empire. This was according to the prophecy of Daniel (Dan 2:38-39; 5:28-31). The new Persian king, Cyrus, was moved by God to make a decree sanctioning the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple (2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 1:1-4; Isa 44:28). THE COMMENCEMENT OF A NEW BEGINNING – a beginning after the city of Jerusalem and everything in it was reduced to shambles. Indeed, "with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 5 of 33

RESTRUCTURE INITIATED

There came a time in Jewish history, when the Temple that was destroyed, began to be rebuilt. It appeared there was little with which to begin the work, and it lacked leadership. However, then is when heaven began a new work – a valid beginning.

EZRA

Ezra was raised up by God to carry out the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. He was commissioned to:

- 1–Return the vessels that had been removed from the Temple.
- 2–Appoint judges for the people.
- 3–Ready the people for the good work of the Lord.
- 4–He also prepared the people who were returning to Jerusalem by restoring holiness among them, and beseeching the Lord to bless their work (Ezra 8:15-23).

Under Ezra's anointed leadership, the foundation for the Temple was completed. "And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid" (Ezra 3:11). There were also Older men who had seen the first Temple. It is said of them, "But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy" (Ezra 3:12). Their loud weeping mingled with shouts of joy, "'So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off" (Ezra 3:13).

However, under aggressive opposition, the work of the house of the Lord "ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" – "Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then CEASED the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it CEASED unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:23-24) – a period of about sixteen years.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah was also involved in this work of restoration. Having heard of the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem, and the general deterioration that existed, he was moved of God to begin work on the wall. His book is the account of the wall-building project, which was finished in spite of extensive opposition (Neh 6:1-15).

ZERUBBABEL

In the second year of the reign of Darius, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (Hag 1:14). This happened in the sixth month of the second year of Darius' reign (Hag 1:1).

Now, toward the end of that second year, about the eleventh month (1:1), discouragement had settled over the people. It did not look as though the work could be completed. There had been some small beginnings, but they had been interrupted. Perhaps, they may have thought, the people had misunderstood God's intention, and the Temple was not to be built at all. After all, it did not appear as though God was with them. Alas, the people needed to again be stirred to action, like they were in Ezra's day, as well as that of Nehemiah. Work had stopped, and all appeared to be lost.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The history of the church is much like the history of the Temple. There was a period when everything related to the visible church was reduced to shambles. The Scriptures were taken from the people, institutionalism was established, and a mortal man was made the head of the

church. Later, there was also a period when the foundations were laid again, and the pillars of Truth were again made prominent. However, spiritual deterioration set in again, and a spiritual renewal was required, for the work of “building” that God had ordained had largely ceased.

I have lived to see some fresh spiritual beginnings – genuine spiritual renewal – and I have seen it wane. The so-called spiritual renewal that is taking place on a large scale today, is more the work of Sanballot and Tobiah than of Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah. When compared to the sturdy spiritual Temple in which God resides (1 Cor 3:16-17), it appears as nothing more than a flimsy and frail tent, swayed by every gust of trial. It has produced weak and uninformed “Christians,” and is nearly totally void of spiritual power. Those who have seen the real thing are not impressed by this “beast” that has risen from the earth (Rev 13:11).

Heaven, however, has not been changed by these circumstances. Jesus is still exalted above all (Phil 2:9; 1 Pet 3:22). He is still “over all” (Rom 9:5), and the “only Potentate” (1 Tim 6:15). He is still bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). He is still a faithful High Priest (Heb 2:17). He can still empower His people (Eph 1:19-22; 3:20). A real and authentic renewal can again take place. It only requires a people who see the need for it.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 6 of 33

A MOUNTAINOUS OBSTACLE

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

In our text, the angel of the Lord has appeared to Zechariah, having been charged to encourage the building of the Temple. The people will not be left alone in this Divinely appointed project. In fact, he said, "the LORD shall inherit Judah His portion IN THE HOLY LAND, and shall choose Jerusalem AGAIN. Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation" (Zech 2:12-13). God had noted the stalled project, and the faintheartedness of the people, and had “raised up out of His holy habitation” to strengthen their hands.

There would be cleansing and renewal for the good work (Zech 3:1-5). The work would not be accomplished, however, in human strength, for “This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, NOT by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech 4:6). Divine assistance was on the way, and heaven wanted Zerubbabel and the builders to know it!

The obstacles before them appeared as a great mountain that could not be overcome. The people were discouraged. The heathens were against them. The work had been slow. But a heavenly shout is hurled against the inhibiting obstacles. "WHO ART THOU O MOUNTAIN? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with

shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (Zech 4:7). The finishing headstone, or capstone, would be put into place, and the work would be finalized – God declared this would be done, and it is not possible for God to lie.

Thus, preparation was made for the encouragement of the builders, and those in charge of the building. The project was initiated by God Himself, and it would be brought to completion. No hindering mountain would be able to thwart the work. God would be honored, not only by the beginning of the project, but by its completion.

The word of the Lord is not vague on this matter, but powerful and to the point. He is both the Beginning and the End. He finishes what He begins, fulfilling all of His purpose and doing all of His will. The work would be accomplished in His strength. The mountainous obstacles of men and circumstance would be challenged and cast down – depicted as a mountain becoming a plain. The Almighty God would pave the way for the work to be finished!

It only remains for the builders to be encouraged, for their spirits to be raised, and their faith strengthened. They must turn away from the consideration of hindrance, and contemplate Divine provision and support – and the Lord will assist them to do so. They had begun a good work, and God would strengthen them to complete it. The word of the Lord concerning obstacles and hindrances was this: "Who art thou, O GREAT MOUNTAIN? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (Zech 4:7). The obstruction would disappear before the very eyes of Zerubbabel. He would see the things devised against him dissipate, and his enemies would be scattered. The mighty angel talked with Zachariah, showing him a vision that the prophet did not understand. When the prophet asked the angel what the vision meant, the angel was so intent on fulfilling his mission that he said to Zechariah, "Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but BY MY SPIRIT, saith the LORD of hosts." (Zech 4:5-6). Encouragement was sent from heaven to the one personally involved in the work of the Lord.

In faithfulness, God will raise up such encouragers! When Moses was preparing to leave the world, and Joshua was about to take over, God said to His faithful servant Moses, "But charge Joshua, and ENCOURAGE HIM, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see" (Deut 3:28). David once told a messenger he was sending to Joab, "ENCOURAGE HIM" (2 Sam 11:25). When king Josiah restored the Passover in Jerusalem, and set the priests in their function, he "ENCOURAGED THEM in the service of the house of the Lord" (2 Chron 35:2).

The New Covenant word for "encourage" is "COMFORT," which is an important ministry in the body of Christ (Col 4:8; 1 Thess 3:2; 4:18; 5:11). Wherever a valid work for the Lord is being done, encouragement and comfort are required. Be a comforter of Kingdom laborers.

I must confess, O how I myself needed this message this morning.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 7 of 33

"Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house. . ." (Verse 4, Zechariah 4:8-10)

THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION

Our text is an example of Divine intervention in the midst of discouragement. It was the kind of discouragement, or being disheartened, when the intended work has not yet been finished. In this case, it was the building of the house of God – something that God Himself had initiated. It followed the long period of seventy years, when the people of God had been in captivity. That captivity was initiated with a wholesale and devastating military initiative – all taking place in Israel's homeland. Nebuchadnezzar "slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." (Jer 52:10-11). He "burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire:" (Jer 52:13). The majority of the people were carried away captive to Babylon, where they would be forced to remain for seventy long years.

Unlike the captivity of Israel in Egypt, the Jews were not killed in Babylon. There was a certain freedom allowed because of the Lord's mercy, and God instructed Jeremiah in what the people were to do during that period of judgment. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." (Jer 29:4-7). What a singular example of the mercy of God – of Him remembering mercy in the day of wrath (Hab 3:2).

Our text takes place AFTER that captivity of seventy long years. Among the Israelites at that time, everyone under seventy years of age had spent their entire lifetime in Babylon. None of them had ever visited their homeland. All they knew about it was what the older people told them. Except for those who were able to think and reason at that time, the totality of their life had been spent in a foreign land – which, apart from instruction from their fathers, was even a foreign concept.

In the first pilgrimage back to Israel, there was a call for those who would volunteer to return to Canaan. God raised up Cyrus, a heathen king, to initiate the project of rebuilding the house of God in Jerusalem. He called for volunteers for the project. "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. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place HELP HIM with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3-4). The number of people who volunteered to return is stated: "The

whole congregation together was FORTY AND TWO THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED AND FOURSCORE [42,360], Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women." (Ezra 2:64-65). A detailed listing of the people is provided in Ezra 2: 1-65. They included "priests" (Ezra 2:36), "the Levites" (Ezra 2:40), "singers" (Ezra 2:41), "the children of Solomon's servants" (Ezra 2:55), and "the children of the priests (Ezra 2:61). Now, in our text, considerable time had elapsed, and the work accomplished had only been the laying of the foundation (Zech 4:9). So far as the record is concerned, there had been no further words from heaven, and the spirits of the people were low. In the midst of this Zachariah testifies, "the word of the LORD came unto me!"

It is a marvelous thing when "the Word of the Lord" comes to anyone. Throughout history, God has expressed Himself in rational ways to men. Thus it is written, "the Word of the Lord came to Abram" (Gen 15:1), "the word of the Lord came unto Nathan" (2 Sam 7:4), and "the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad" (2 Sam 24:11). Also, "the word of the LORD came to Solomon" (1 Kgs 6:11), "the word of the LORD came to Jehu" (1 Kgs 16:1), and "the word of the LORD came to Elijah" (1 Kgs 18:1). Other notables to whom "the Word of the Lord came" include Shemaiah (2 Chron 11:2), Jeremiah (Jer 1:2), Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3), Jonah (Jon 1:1), and Haggai (Hag 2:20). Seven times Jeremiah said, "the word of the Lord came unto me" (1:4,11,13; 13:3,8; 24:4; 32:6). Ezekiel wrote "the word of the Lord came unto me" no less than thirty seven times (3:16; 6:1; 7:1; 11:14; 12:21; 13:1; 14:2; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1,11; 18:1; 20:45; 21:1,8,18; 22:1,17,23; 24:1,15,20; 26:1; 28:11,20; 29:1,17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1,17; 33:1,23; 34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 38:1)!

In our text, this word will bring what was need to finish the work. Many of my readers should be able to associate this with our own times.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 8 of 33

THE WORD IS NEEDED!

"Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me . . ." (Verse 8, Zechariah 4:8-10)

Wherever there is a work for God, there must be a word from God! God sustains His work and the workers through His Word. That is not only how the saved themselves live (Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4), it is how the work of the Lord is maintained. No work of God will flourish in the eyes of the Lord that is not sustained by His Word! On the eve of His betrayal, Jesus said to His disciples, which were His work, "Now ye are clean THROUGH THE WORD which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). Jesus sanctifies and cleanses His church "with the washing of water BY THE WORD" (Eph 5:26). Food is "sanctified BY THE WORD OF GOD" (1 Tim 4:5). Men are "born again . . . BY THE WORD OF GOD" (1 Pet 1:23).

These affirmations confirm and corroborate what the Spirit has said about the Word of God itself: "For THE WORD OF GOD is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged

sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb 4:12). Other versions read, "living and powerful" (NKJV), "living and active" (NASB). "The Word of God" and "the Scriptures" are not expressions that merely refer to literature. The Scriptures, for example, can "comfort" (Rom 15:4), and "are able to make" one "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15). Those are all descriptions of something that is alive, with Divine aptitude – something that works, achieves, empowers, and vivifies. God has, so to speak, breathed into Scripture like He did into Adam's nostrils, giving it life.

This is why "THE WORD OF GOD" came to Zechariah. It had a spiritual aptitude to comfort, encourage, lift up, and empower. That is precisely why those who feed the flock of God are commanded to "PREACH THE WORD" (2 Tim 4:2). Declare what "is written" (Rom 10:15; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 8:15; 1 Pet 1:15). Doing this is more than merely passing information to the people. It goes far beyond intellectuality. When men claiming to be preachers and teachers hawk their plans, give their suggestions for marriage, and give people "how-to" lessons, they are saying things that have no power. God does not underwrite such vain proclamations. They may make men famous, give them careers, and fill their coffers – but when they give an account for such speaking, all of these things shall have passed away.

If men doubt that the Word of God has power, it is through that means that the "worlds" were "framed," coming into being in their entirety, in perfect synch, and operating in perfect harmony. GOD'S WORD DID THAT! As the Psalmist wrote, "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa 33:9). The grievous plagues put upon Egypt are said to have been done when God "spake" (Psa 1-05:31-34).

Candidly, the brand of preaching that characterizes our day is powerless. That is why many religious leaders specialize in methodologies. What they say is powerless, because it has come from them, not God. It is well past time for the power and effectiveness of God's Word to be emphasized – and that is done by proclaiming it. Being more particular, this is not confined to telling people what God requires of them – although that is certainly necessary. It is the powerful affirmation of God's promises that enable us to be "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).

You may recall on the day of Pentecost, initially there were ONLY proclamations. 1–What was spoken by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16-21). 2–The ministry of Jesus (Acts 2:22). 3–The death of Jesus (Acts 2:23). 4–The resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:23-32). 5–The exaltation of Jesus (Acts 2:33-36). To that point, there were no instructions, no directives, no exhortations to do something – NONE AT ALL. What Peter declared were things that had already been done.

However, those words had power. The result – "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter then told them what to do, AND THEY DID IT, gladly receiving the Word (Acts 2:38-40). See, the Word had power! It still has power – but it has to be preached.

You can trace the Divinely recognized works of men, and they were always attended by a word from the Lord! The building of the ark followed a word from God (Gen 6:13). The raising up of a godly seed through Abraham was preceded by revelations from God (Gen 12:1-3; 17:9,15).

The work of Moses was inaugurated by a word from God (Ex 3:14-15). The sanctifying of the nation of Israel was attended by a word from God (Ex 19:19-22; 20:1-22). The effective leadership of Gideon was preceded by a word from God (Judges 6:12-16). The building of the first Temple followed a word from the Lord (2 Sam 7:12-13; 1 Kgs 5:5). **ACCEPTABLE WORK BEGINS WITH A WORD FROM GOD!**

Before Paul began His Apostolic labors, he had a word from God (Acts 22:12-15). The early church was directed by God's word (Acts 13:2).

AN OBSERVATION

For this reason, the preeminent offices in the church are those related to delivering and expounding the Word of God. "And God hath set some in the church, **FIRST** apostles, **SECONDARILY** prophets, **THIRDLY** teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28). The gifts which involve declaring the Word are the preeminent gifts – first, second, and third. Without them, the gifts that follow are meaningless. Again it is written, "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11) – all communicators of the Word of God.

In our day, men have vaunted what they call practical ministries. Those who have little acquaintance with, or understanding of, the word of God are, placed in prominent positions. They are selected for their social and leadership skills. But God has never placed such people in places of prominence in Christ's body, which is the church (Col 1:18). His leaders are always bearers of His word! That is how He works. No Word, no work!

Thus God articulates His Mind before He calls men into holy activity. Before ever a hand is laid to the work of the Lord, there must be some comprehension of His purpose – some understanding of His will. There is altogether too much religious activity that has neither been initiated nor maintained by the good word of the Lord. It was not so with the work assigned in the time of Zechariah.

BEGINNINGS

"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." (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 9 of 33

THE FOUNDATION

God honoring work is always recognized by Him. This is work He has ordained, and He will encourage and sustain it! Such an activity is referred to as "working good" (Rom 2:10). While salvation is "not of works" (Eph 2:9), it is "UNTO good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). The works that follow the salvation of the believer are like the works that followed after Zerubbabel was commissioned to rebuild the Temple on the

foundation (Ezra 5:1-2; Hag 1:12). They are mandatory, and Divine strength and encouragement are supplied to get them done.

FIRST, THE FOUNDATION

The first phase of the building project was laying the foundation for the Temple (Ezra 3:6,10-12; 4:9). The account of this foundation work is recorded in the third chapter of Ezra. In the second month of the second year after the people had arrived to rebuild the Temple, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, the remnant of the priests and Levites, and the remnant that came out of the captivity "began the work." They "appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD"(Ezra 3:8, NASB). As soon as the foundation was laid, "the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel. And they sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, saying, 'For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.' And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD because THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD WAS LAID"(Ezra 3:10-11, NASB).

The laying of the foundation, in a way, guaranteed that the rest of the building would be completed. That is why the priests donned their apparel, took their trumpets and cymbals, and "sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid" (Ezra 3:11).

Similarly, when what was required for the church to be built – the Foundation – was complete, the building of “the Temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16-17) began. The death of Christ effectively “took away the sin” (John 1:29), was the means through which sin was judged and cursed (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13), and the way of destroying the devil (Heb 2:14), and ending the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4). The burial of Christ was a means through which Jesus participated in every phase of human life (Acts 2:25-27). His resurrection was the means through which death itself was conquered, and He was declared to be “the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). His ascension into heaven (Eph 4:8-10; 1 Tim 3:16), exaltation (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Phil 2:9), and all powers and principalities being made subject to Him (1 Pet 3:22), completed the provision for both the laying of the foundation (1 Cor 3:10), and the building of a habitation for God (Eph 2:20-22).

No further BASIS for salvation is required, or can be added. Everything integral to salvation itself is based upon what has already been completed. That includes Christ's mediation of the New Covenant (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and His effective intercession (Rom 10:34; Heb 7:25). What men are required to do [believe (Mk 16:16; Acts 16:31), confess Christ (Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11), repent (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30), be baptized (Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38; 110:48), perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1), live by faith (Heb 10:38), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,26), etc.,] is NOT THE CAUSE of salvation, nor does it add to it. None of these matters are in the Foundation that has been laid. They are rather related to what is built upon it.

When it comes to the matter of salvation, with all of its requirements and implications, there must be a Foundation. Men are not required to build that foundation – it has already been built,

and put in place. Men must BUILD upon it, and upon it alone.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 10 of 33

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS?" (Verse 10, Zechariah 4:8-10)

ENEMIES ENCOUNTERED

As soon as it became obvious that the Temple was going to be restored, the enemies of the people surfaced. It is written, "Now when THE ENEMIES of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here' (Ezra 4:2). These people had been living in the land, but had not lifted their hand to do the good work of the Lord. Now, they offer their services, even though they are "enemies of Judah and Benjamin." How will Zerubbabel react to their offer?

Zerubbabel and Jeshua, together with the rest of the heads of the families of Israel did not hesitate to respond to the offer of these "enemies." They quickly answered, "You have NO PART with us in building a temple to our God. WE ALONE will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us" [NIV] (Ezra 4:3).

This was a holy work, and unholy hands would not be put to it! The fewness of workers and the magnitude of the work did not tempt the men of God to allow the ungodly to join with them in the work. Those who have lived in the land, satisfied to allow the house of God to lay in waste, will not be permitted to be a part of the work. Those who have not lamented at the devastation of the Temple will not be allowed to participate in its rebuilding.

The "enemies" did not take kindly to the rejection of their offer. It is written, "Then the people of the land TRIED TO DISCOURAGE the people of Judah. They TROUBLED THEM in building, and HIRED COUNSELORS against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." (Ezra 4:5, NKJV). During the reign of Ahasuerus (king who made Esther queen), these men wrote letters to him, accusing the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah: "And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 4:6). Later, in the days of Artaxerxes (whom Nehemiah served as cupbearer), the enemies again wrote letters of accusation against the Jews. The text of their letter is recorded in Ezra 4:12-16.

"Let it be known to the king, that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; THEY ARE REBUILDING THE REBELLIOUS AND EVIL CITY, and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, THEY WILL NOT PAY TRIBUTE, CUSTOM, OR TOLL, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, so that a

search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the record books, and learn that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste. We inform the king that, if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result YOU WILL HAVE NO POSSESSION in the province beyond the River." [NASB]

As a result of this wicked letter, representatives "went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and COMPELLED THEM BY FORCE TO STOP. Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem CAME TO A STANDSTILL" (Ezra 4:24, NIV).

Here, then, was a God-ordained work vigorously opposed by the enemies of God's people. The heart of the people became discouraged in the work. They were even forced to stop their work because of lies that had been spoken against them. The foundation of the Temple had been put in place, but the structure itself was not finished. This condition spanned several years. It might have appeared as though nothing more would be done. But this was not the case! A word is sent by the prophet Zechariah to assure the appointed builders that the work would be finished. It was a Divine word – a necessary word!

Those who have labored in the work of rebuilding know very well about this kind of opposition. They know how discouragement can set in, and the desired work stopped. However, wherever a valid work of the Lord has, under His direction, commenced, it shall be finished. You can believe that!

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 11 of 33

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ACCOUNT

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

OUR TIMES

The times in which we are living are remarkably like those of our text. So far as the work of the Lord is concerned, a massive departure from the faith has taken place that has lasted for centuries. Then, after more than a thousand years, men of God were raised up to make the people aware of the Foundation. The foundations were again identified and proclaimed, with redemptive truths again being established. A devastating blow was dealt to erroneous doctrines that were extant at the time. A religious potentate who was but a man was rejected, and overthrown in the minds of the faithful. The REASON for salvation was established, the IMPOTENCY of men to achieve it was clarified, and the ORDAINED MEANS of salvation were again uncovered.

Whatever opposition may be raised against the Reformation Movement, it did reestablish the centrality of Christ's atonement, the effectiveness of justification, the essentiality of faith, AND THE Sovereignty of God and Christ – all of which had been buried under a humanistic approach to salvation. The obtaining of salvation and the indispensability and sanctifying nature of faith was again established – which had been covered by religious tradition. To this day, the Reformation Movement, and ones similar to it, have NOT done well in building upon this foundation. For centuries now, the church has not been known for being holy, singularly devoted to the Lord, and sound in its doctrine. Institutionalism has again raised its hoary head, employing other methods, which have once again moved the professed church off the foundation.

This renewed foundational work was vigorously opposed, and the building was largely brought to a grinding halt. First the enemies of the cross sought to join in the work, offering their wisdom and ways to assist in the work of the Lord. Leaders, particularly those of our time, do not have the wisdom and courage of Zerubbabel and his colleagues. They have allowed the linguists, motivators, educators, organizers, and psychologists to bring their godless ways into the church. They have brought influences within the church that have neutralized its power, moving it closer to the earth than to heaven. They have, for the most part, halted progress in this area of God's revealed purpose.

God has revealed His intended purpose for the church, and what is to be achieved within it. This is found in Ephesians 4:11-16 (NKJV).

1– THE PREEMINENCE OF ITS MESSAGE: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" – all proclaimers of truth . . ." (Eph 4:11)

2 – THE PURPOSE FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING: “. . . for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. . ." (Eph 4:12)

3 – THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS MINISTRY – “. . . till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. . ." (Eph 4:13)

4 – WHAT IS INTENDED TO BE AVOIDED: “. . . that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting . . ." (Eph 4:14)

5 – WHAT IS TO BE ACHIEVED – “. . . but, speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ. . ." (Eph 4:15)

6 – WHAT JESUS DOES WITHIN THE CHURCH – “. . . from Whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what EVERY JOINT supplies, according to the effective working by which EVERY PART does its share, causes growth of the body for the EDIFYING OF ITSELF in love" (Eph 4:16).

For well over 1,500 years, the church has not been known for accomplishing these objectives to any significant degree. In our day, most professing “Christians” have never seen a solitary example of substantial advance in this revealed purpose. Even historically great and substantive preachers made little progress in these areas.

It all is quite innocent to the unlearned and ignorant, who are unduly impressed by appearance

and religious talk. But the historically and contemporary effects of ungodly alliances remain a source of discouragement to those who are living by faith. Their souls have been robbed by the presence of the worldly-wise. Their eyes have been dimmed by the dust of their fleshly words and manners. The saints of the Lord long for the work of the Lord to be brought to completion for the glory of their God. They long for the church to be presented to Christ "as a chaste virgin" (2 Cor 11:2) – an objective that is rarely mentioned in our time. They know it will not be done by forging alliances with the ungodly. Zerubbabel knew it. Ezra knew it. Nehemiah knew it. Paul knew it. Peter knew it. James knew it. Jude knew it. Now it is time for the men of this day to know it.

BEGINNINGS

"Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; HIS HANDS SHALL FINISH IT." (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 12 of 33

THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL SHALL FINISH IT

What a marvelous and encouraging word is this! The one who started the work would finish it! The foundation was laid, and the Temple would yet be completed. Zerubbabel started it, and he would "also finish it!" Many of the people had been driven to despair by their enemies. They gloried in the laying of the foundation, but felt the Temple would never be finished. Their opponents were too influential, and their enemies too numerous. Kings from afar had sent dignitaries to stop the work. Those kings had believed the lies that were raised against the Jews and Jerusalem. Those expert in registering complaints and looking at things from an earthly viewpoint could sight many reasons for giving up on the work. Years had passed, and the prospects appeared no better, but only seemed to grow worse.

It is ever true, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov 13:12). The heart can become "weary with crying," and eyes "fail while I wait for my God" (Psa 69:3). But God will not abandon His work, nor will He forsake His servants. He will send a word to them, that they may be healed, their hope revived, and their hands strengthened. Isaiah prophesied to Israel, whom God would judge, "For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." (Isa 62:1). Again He promised, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will NOT turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer 32:40). Those in Christ are admonished, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb 13:5).

This word did not reflect a change in heaven, but reaffirmed a purpose that had already been determined by God. God declares the word that goes forth from Him will not return to Him empty, "but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa 55:11). His Word will be fulfilled, and rivers that come against it will be dried up. If God said the work will be finished, it will!

As it is written of God, "Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, 'You SHALL BE inhabited,' To the cities of Judah, 'You SHALL BE built,' And I WILL raise up her waste places; Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I WILL dry up your rivers'; Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, 'You SHALL BE built'" NKJV (Isa 44:26-28). The laying of the foundation of the Temple was a confirmation of that truth: "And to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (Isa 44:28b).

Notice that the promise of God does not say the work of Zerubbabel would finally be finished, but by someone else. It does not declare that another generation will pass before it is completed. No, "THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL have laid the foundation of this house; HIS HANDS shall also finish it!"

Ezra records the fulfillment of this prophesy, declaring the builders prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah. "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, 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).

In Christ, God has not abandoned this manner. He has commenced the work of preparing a bride for His Son, and He will finish it! It may at times appear that the church is nearly destroyed – but the Lord will finish it. While spiritual deterioration is going on all about us, there is a people who are making themselves “ready” for their marriage to the Lamb (Rev 19:7). There is an aggregation of people that will be presented to Christ “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). There is a body of people who will “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). There is a vast and unnumerable company of people who will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt 25:23).

These are the people with whom you must identify yourself. God is going to finish the work that is being done in His Son. The only question is whether or not you will be a part of it.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 13 of 33

DECLARING THE WORK WILL BE COMPLETED!

"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." (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

God raised up Zechariah to declare to Zerubbabel that what he has begun would be finished. The prophet did not say it SHOULD be finished, but that it WOULD be finished.

How we need men and women of God to affirm to us the completion of the work that has been

begun in us! Often hearts grow faint because of the opposition of our enemies, and our hands and heads need to be lifted up with a good word from God. How marvelous are such affirmations.

1—"The LORD will PERFECT THAT WHICH CONCERNETH ME: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of Thine own hands" (Psa 138:8).

2—"Who shall also confirm you UNTO THE END, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:8).

3—"Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will PERFORM IT UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST" (Phil 1:6).

4—"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless UNTO THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST Faithful is He that calleth you, WHO WILL ALSO DO IT" (1 Thess 5:23-24).

5—"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and FULFIL ALL THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS GOODNESS, and the work of faith with power" (2 Thess 1:11).

6—"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, MAKE YOU PERFECT, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet 5:10).

7—"For HE WILL FINISH THE WORK, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Rom 9:28).

It is no wonder that Jesus speaks of Himself as the "Ending" (Rev 1:8) and "End" as well as "the Beginning" (Rev 1:8; 21:6); The Omega as well as the Alpha (Rev 1:11), the Last as well as the First (Rev 22:13). Beginnings are good, but they are not an end of themselves. It is the "end," or conclusion of the work that brings the greatest glory to God! He is not honored by a foundation that remains without a building. That is why the hands of Zerubbabel and his brethren had to be made strong. The work was too challenging to complete without that.

God will be glorified, and the Son of God will be appropriately honored by building that is complete – a work that is finished. Some theologs have adopted the phrase, "the finished work of Christ." That is not a Scriptural phrase. When Jesus cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He did not mean that the work of salvation had been finished, but that His work on the earth was finished. When He rose from the dead and returned to heaven to be exalted and enthroned, He commended His heavenly work – a work that was essential to the salvation of men. Here is a sampling of the work of Christ that is presently being accomplished.

1—His mediation (1 Tim 2:15; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

2—His intercession (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

3—Making the weak to stand (Rom 14:4).

4—Shepherding the sheep (Heb 13:20).

5—Him keeping His people from falling (Jude 1:24)

6—Perfecting the saints (1 Pet 5:10).

7—Bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).

8—Being the Captain of their salvation (Heb 2:10).

9—From His throne dispensing mercy, and grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:15-16).

10—Dispensing grace and peace (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3).

11—Enabling His people to "reign in life" (Rom 5:17).

12–Absolutely reigning until His enemies have openly been put under His feet (1 Cor 15:25).

Speaking candidly, the saints of God should be reminded of these realities regularly, ensuring them that the work God has “begun” in them will be finished (Phil 1:6). In my earlier years I was part of a movement that did not encourage preachers and teachers to affirm these things. Rarely were they ever mentioned, and I never did hear anyone develop them, showing their consistency and surety. Some of the needful proclamations that were rarely, if ever, heard, were who we are in Christ, what we have in Christ, and the declaration that God would finish His work.

Zerubbabel needed to know the work. He had started would be completed – that the word for power for it to be completed was something that God had pledged. Th saints of God need to know this today. It is something that must be proclaimed, and not allowed to fade into the background. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). HALLELUJAH!

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 14 of 33

WHAT DIVINE BEGINNINGS HAVE WE REALIZED?

"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." (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

In salvation, a work similar to that of Zerubbabel takes place – a beginning, encouragement, and a finish, or the completion of the work. In this salvational enterprise, the fundamental work is being done by God, through Jesus Christ, and the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. It is Their activity that accounts for any valid progress in the kingdom of God. It is the business of the saved to know what has been begun in them, for that is the work that will be finished – not the work they have started, but the work God has started. It is NOT as some today allege, that God is helping you fulfill your dreams, or plans. There was a time when, in Divine history, God assisted people in completing an observable work that was being done in the world – a work He had ordained: i.e.–The Tabernacle (Ex 25-26), the first Temple (1 Kgs 6), and the rebuilding of the Temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 4).

Now, however, a different kind of building is being done. Jesus said of this project, “I will BUILD My church” (Matt 16:18). The church Jesus is building is His own house, over which He presides (Heb 3:3-6). In this spiritual project, there are those described as “co-laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9). Paul, "a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (2 Tim 1:11), is described as a “wise master-builder” who knew the Foundation, and what was to be built upon it (1 Cor 3:10).

Every child of God, being placed on the Foundation, has Divine beginnings within – beginnings that will be brought to completion in all who live by faith (Heb 10:38) and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16).

- 1–There is the beginning of "NEW heart" and a "NEW spirit" (Ezek 36;26).
- 2–In our experience, there is the beginning of a "NEW song" (Rev 5:9).
- 3–There is a "NEW covenant" (Heb 12:24), which is a "better covenant" (Heb 8:6).
- 4–We have "NEWNESS of life," in which we begin walking when we are baptized into Christ (Rom 6:4).
- 5–In Christ we are made a "NEW creature, or a "creation" (2 Cor 5:17). This is a fresh and new beginning.
- 6–By God's grace, we have a "NEW man" within, "which after God is created in all righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24).
- 7–Believers are walking in a "NEW and living way," that will take them into the very presence of God (Heb 10:20).
- 8–We now serve God "in NEWNESS of spirit" (Rom 7:6).
- 9–This new life is described as "having BEGUN in the Spirit" (Gal 3:3).

These are beginnings that men cannot exploit for personal advantage. God simply will not allow them to be abused, used in a wrong way, or neglected. He has never suggested He will complete any work that is not directly related to what He is doing. Furthermore, what He is doing is "according to His good pleasure which he hath purposed in Himself" (Eph 1:9) – "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:" (Eph 3:11). That is the work He is pledged to finish! – the ONLY work He is committed to complete. It is good to know these good things will be brought to a God-honoring conclusion through our faith!

Some of us have also been privileged to be part of Divine beginnings that have moved us beyond stultifying religion. We have experienced a spiritual freshness that is invigorating to the soul and encouraging to the heart. We have discovered foundations that have been covered with the rubble of dead religion and man's wisdom.

Sometimes it seems as though the enemies have successfully blocked the completion of the temple of truth. But, we must be strong in faith, believing God shows us foundations that we might build upon them. If we put our hand to establishing strong foundations, the Lord will strengthen our hands to build upon them! Of that, you may be sure!

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 15 of 33

THEN YOU WILL KNOW

"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." (Verse 9, (Zechariah 4:8-10)

These are the words of the revealing angel who was making these things known to Zechariah: "And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep . . . Then THE ANGEL THAT TALKED WITH ME answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord" (4:1,4,5), and WITH WHOM HE

WAS TALKING (4:2,5,13). They were also words the prophet would no doubt relay to Zerubbabel and the people.

The idea is that the completion of the building of the Temple would confirm that the work itself had been ordained and commissioned by God. Although the work involved the labors of men, it was not originated by them. This was an appointed work – one that was initiated from heaven, and into which men were drawn by God.

The Lord had "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to commission that the temple be built: "'Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD STIRRED UP THE SPIRIT of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying" (2 Chron 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Isa 45:13). God Himself said of Cyrus, a heathen idol-worshipping king, "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts." (Isa 45:1,13).

God had also summoned kings Darius and Artaxerxes to the work, moving them to command the work to be done: "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, 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).

The spirits of the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, the Levites, and others, had been "raised," or stirred up, by God to "go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem" – "Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them WHOSE SPIRIT GOD HAD RAISED, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5).

Ezra had been moved to prepare the people for the building of the Temple by returning to holiness: (Ezra 7:25; 10:10-16). Nehemiah had been moved to rebuild the walls around the holy city. Nehemiah confessed, "Then I told them of THE HAND OF MY GOD which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (Neh 2:13-18). There was no question about it, this was the work of God!

There you have it – God Almighty orchestrating the building of the Temple, moving Cyrus the Persian king, Darius king of the Medes and Persians, Artaxerxes king of Persia, Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, men of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, the Levites, and others – all of them stirred up and directed by God to play a role in the rebuilding of the Temple. Who but God could assemble such a group to work together on a God-given project? And this is not the only time God did this. During the days of Jacob, God stirred up the king of Egypt to favor Joseph, and move him to be the chancellor of Egypt – doing so in a single day, in order to preserve Israel, a fledgling nation of seventy souls (Gen 46:26-27), with the rest of the world being blessed as well. Believe it or not, God is able to assemble a group of people to do a work of His by calling a business man, military men, a medical man, educators, etc. God has not ceased to work among

men in a manner previously demonstrated – as in the rebuilding of the Temple.

FINISHING THE WORK

The point, however, was the completion of the work – finishing what God had commissioned to be done. The angel apprizes the prophet that when the house of God was completed, THEN he and the people would "know the Lord of hosts" had sent him.

This same kind of confirmation takes place in Christ, when the saved "walk in newness of life." The Spirit has said, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). The truth of that will be confirmed to you when you actually do "walk in the Spirit." The Spirit has also said, "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). When you really do walk in the light, that truth will be substantiated to your heart. It is imperative to "know the truth" (John 8:32), but it will not be confirmed to you until you conform your life to that truth.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 16 of 33

TWICE HEARD

"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." (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

This is not initial knowledge, but confirming knowledge. It is when the truth comes home to the heart the second time. David referred to this kind of knowledge when he said, "God hath spoken once; TWICE HAVE I HEARD this; that power belongeth unto God" (Psa 62:11). This is the knowledge that confirms the soul – the inner witness that brings stability. It is a deeper knowledge that is more related to faith than the intellect.

The angel has already mentioned this kind of knowledge twice to Zechariah. "For, behold, I will shake Mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: AND YE SHALL KNOW that the LORD of hosts hath sent me" (Zech 2:9). And again, "And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and THOU SHALT KNOW that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (Zech 2:11). What a precious knowledge this is!

EZEKIEL

The Lord frequently speaks of this kind of knowledge – the knowledge that comes from seeing, or perceiving, the fulfillment of what He has promised. How poignantly it was revealed to Ezekiel. "And shall put My spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: THEN SHALL YE KNOW that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the

LORD" (Ezek 37:14). And again, "And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and YE SHALL KNOW that I am the LORD" (Ezek 20:38).

ISAIAH

Isaiah also spoke in this manner when he foretold the restoration of the Jews. "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and THOU SHALT KNOW that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me" (Isa 49:22-23).

JOEL

In his declaration of the era of the New Covenant, Joel also mentioned this kind of knowledge. "The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. SO SHALL YE KNOW that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17).

JESUS

Jesus also spoke in this manner. "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, THEN SHALL YE KNOW that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).

All of the promises of God can be known intellectually. However they are "most assuredly" known when they are perceived as coming to pass. For instance, consider the statement, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa 133:1-3). That is, "know" in the sense of our text, when it actually takes place. The promise of Ezekiel may also be viewed in this manner: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). When that actually is experienced, the individual will know.

Paul also used this reasoning to the Corinthian church. After pointing out that what men attempted to place on the foundation of Christ would dictate their eternal destiny (1 Cor 3:11-15), he wrote, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor 3:16). Those who put inferior materials (which are people) on the Foundation did not yet know this truth. Therefore, they were sloppy in the manner of, what men call, "winning

souls” or recruitment. However, when they see stable souls, maturing as they should (Eph 4:15-16), then they will “KNOW” the church is really “the temple of God.”

Without any further elaboration I will simply say, there is too much tenuous knowledge among the churches – too many people who have not heard the second time, and therefore do not “know” the truth which makes free (John 8:32).

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 17 of 33

THE CONFIRMING OF GOD'S WORD

"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." (Verses 8-9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

It is one thing to have an academic knowledge of the Word of God. It is quite another to hear it "twice" (Psa 62:11), and to have the truth of it register upon your spirit. For example, it is refreshing to read of being a "new creation" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17). But when this is experienced and discerned, it yields unparalleled joy and confidence. We read that God is “the God of all comfort” (2 Cor 1:8). But when that is actually experienced, the absolute truth of that statement is confirmed to our hearts. Those who are in Christ Jesus are told the Lord “is able to keep you from falling” (Jude 1:24). However, when you are actually kept from falling, that word is confirmed to your spirit. It has been revealed, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13). When you have actually escaped temptation without being overcome by it, that word is confirmed to your heart.

Many a precious soul has been born again, but the marvelous fulness of that birth has not yet registered upon their spirit. They are enjoying new life much like an infant, who does not realize the ramifications of life. Because they are not yet mature, their joy is not "FULL" (John 15:11). They do not yet have the "FULL assurance of faith" (Heb 10:22), the "FULL assurance of hope" (Heb 6:11), and "the FULL assurance of understanding" (Col 2:2). There is a very real state described as being “FULL of goodness, FILLED with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). There is “the FULNESS of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:29). Can you dare to think there is such a state as being “FILLED with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19)? There is such a thing as rejoicing with “joy unspeakable and FULL of glory" (1 Pet 1:8). But these are all to be possessed when the truth of God is heard the second time – when the truth of the Word of God is confirmed by our experience!

Fifty-seven times the phrase "shall know that I am the Lord" occur in Scripture (Ex 6:7; 7:5; 14:18; 16:12; 29:46; 1 Kgs 20:18; Ezek 6:7,10,14; 7:4,9,29; 11:10,12; 12:15,16,20; 13:9,14,21,23; 14:8; 15:7; 20:38,42,44; 23:49; 24:24,27; 25:5,11, 17; 26:6; 28:22,23,24,26; 29:6,9,16,21; 30:8,19,25,26; 34:27; 35:9,15; 36:11,23,38; 37:6,13; 38:23; 39:6,7,22). It always

has to do with the personal experience or observation of the fulfillment of God's word.

There is an approach to Scripture, preaching, and teaching, that is merely intellectual. It is lacking in faith, devoid of hope, and destitute of joy. I once was subjected to this approach, and it did not yield any benefit in the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12). It was, as some called it, a “propositional faith” – but it really had very little to do with faith. Cold and calculating theological views result from such an approach to the Word of God. It is read like a manual of jurisprudence – “The branch of philosophy concerned with the law and principles that lead courts to make the decisions they do: the collection of rules imposed by authority.” In such a suffocating system, the total objective is to find what is perceived to be right, with absolutely no thought of the Divine objectives of being “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), having fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), or being ready for the coming of the Lord (Matt 24:44).

Any confidence that is generated by such an approach to the Word of God is only “in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Such confidence does not reach forward in expectation to leaving this world and being forever with the Lord. It robs the soul of joy, delivering only lifeless form and empty profession.

However, for those who have really “tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet 2:3), and have experienced the confirmation of sound doctrine in their hearts and minds – well that is entirely another story! Such people can joyfully and confidently engage in the work of the Lord, looking forward to meeting the Lord “in the air” (1 Thess 4:17).

BEGINNINGS

“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.” (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 18 of 33

A NEW COVENANT EXPERIENCE

When what God commanded Zerubbabel was completed, then He would know that the message sent to him by God was true. The completed work validated, or confirmed, what was promised. The word delivered was true, whether it was believed at the time or not. Therefore Zerubbabel and the workers were challenged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to keep up the work and finish it (Haggai 1:1; Ezra 6:14). Then the Lord “stirred up Zerubbabel and the high priest to do the work (Hag 1:14). God promised that when the work was finished, Zerubbabel would know, and have no doubts, about the word delivered to him.

Haggai and Zechariah did not reason with Zerubbabel about the surety of the word, presenting various proofs that what God has said was actually true. The proof, so to speak, would be realized after the work was completed, not before it was done.

SOMETHING SIMILAR NOW

Something similar takes place during this time of the New Covenant. I question the efforts to try and prove the Word of God is true. Any inspired approach to establishing the validity of the Word was based upon the works of the past that were done by the Lord (Deut 8:2,15; 5:15; 7:18; 15:15; 24:9; 1 Chron 16:12; Psa 77:10-12; 105:5; Isa 46:9; Jer 51:50; Mic 6:5; Matt 16:9; Lk 17:32; 1 Cor 10:1-9; Heb 11:1-40).

There is such a consistency in the appeal to observe or remember what the Lord has done, that one wonders why supposedly informed men have sought other means of establishing the truth of God's word. Even believing the Gospel is, in fact, believing what God has done – "the wonderful works OF GOD" (Acts 2:11). The reason for the success of this approach is that God, Jesus, and the Spirit work within and through the reports of what They have done.

The Word of God is not effectively confirmed to men by scientific evidences, however valuable they may appear. Such evidences cannot impact upon the heart of men – only upon the mind or intellect. The thoughts presented in such proposed proofs cannot pierce into the spirits of men, searching out the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12). Such words are nowhere represented as being used by the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Whatever value they may have, they cannot produce spiritual boldness or confidence. They cannot enable the individual to lay hold of the promises of God, resist the devil, or fight the good fight of faith. In the Kingdom of God, in fact, such approaches are spiritually impotent.

Apologetics may appear very wonderful to men, but I do not think they are highly regarded in heaven. An approach developed by men can reach no further than men can reach. Apologetics do not themselves rely upon God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit – and They are presently active in heaven. Where is the man who can establish that apologetics will be backed by Divine power – and if they cannot, of what real use are they? I realize that this is a sensitive area for some, but I am challenging the value of apologetics anyway. Let me be clear about this. I am affirming that if men will do what God commands them to do, the truth and effectiveness of God's Word will be confirmed to their hearts. This confirmation is not the work of men, but of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit. They are the Ones who administer confidence and assurance. They are the ones who establish believers (Rom 16:25; 1 Thess 3:13; 2Thess 2:16-17; 3:3; 1 Pet 5:10). The Lord is the One who ministers the "full assurance of understanding" (Col 2:2). It is Divine power, not arguments, that causes the Gospel to come "in much assurance" (1 Thess 1:5). That is why it is declared, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for IT IS THE POWER OF GOD unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). The Gospel's effect is not traced to the reasoning of men, but to "the power of God." When it is preached, the mighty power of God is at work.

On the practical level, the most powerful witness to the truth of Scripture is the experience of what it promises! When what God declares occurs in us, and we perceive it by faith, then we know – and not until then!

This is a New Covenant experience, as proclaimed by Jeremiah and confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles: "for they shall all know Me" (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11) – and when you know God, you are able to recognize His work. While there are varying degrees of this glorious knowledge, it is always the result of personal involvement and perception.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 19 of 33

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS?" (Verse 10a, Zechariah 4:8-10)

The word "small" means "young, small, insignificant, unimportant" (Strong's) – something that on the face of it can make no real difference. It is something that looks inconsequential when compared to the larger work: like Nehemiah starting to build the walls in comparison to the whole city of Jerusalem. Or, like the foundation of the Temple being laid, in comparison to the whole Temple complex with all of its priestly activities and sacrifices.

Scripturally, a "small thing," or a "beginning," is not an end of itself – it is not an independent project, but the initial phase of a larger project. In this sense, "small things," or "beginnings," are not intended to be protracted, or remain in a beginning stage. With Zerubbabel, the project was an architectural one – to rebuild the house of God. The project was not to merely lay a foundation – but, according to appearance, it seemed that was all that was going to be accomplished. The rebuilding of the Temple did not consist of two projects, but of a single one, and God promised concerning Zerubbabel, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it" (Zech 4:9). God would not be glorified by an unfinished work.

IN CONVERSION

By "conversion," I mean "born again" (1 Pet 1:23), created anew (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10), being "added to the church" (Acts 2:47), being "baptized into Christ" (Gal 3:27), being "raised to walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4), etc. That is a BEGINNING, and, compared with the appointed outcome, it is a "small thing" – like laying a foundation. A static state is not a beginning, yet throughout Christendom, we see an inordinate number of people who started "small" and are still "small." The intention of salvation is to conclude with the person being conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom 8:29-30). It is to "grow up into Christ in all things" (Eph 4:15). It is to "perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord" (2 Cor 7:1). The Spirit once addressed a group of converted Hebrews who had been in Christ for some time – yet they had not grown. He said, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb 5:12). They were "unskillful in the word or righteousness" (Heb 5:13). This was not acceptable then, and it is not acceptable now. Unless that static state was overcome, the people would fall away (Heb 6:1-6). Simply put, a beginning is not enough for you to be with the Lord forever.

WHEN LEAVING UNACCEPTABLE SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENTS

For many, there has come a time when their eyes were enlightened, and they realized they were in an unproductive spiritual environment. There was simply too much they had not been taught,

too much truth to which they had not been exposed. They were not being edified, and were not given enough food to “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15). So, like myself, they left that environment.

But these people cannot despise small beginnings. They must not discard everything, but keep the things that were good and profitable, even though they may have been very few. Unlike the times of Zerubbabel, the foundation can be moved to another area, where the proper building can take place. We must never despise the day of small things, or beginnings. However, we must insist that the building be finished, as the Lord has ordained. If it cannot be finished where you are, then go some place where it can be properly completed.

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 20 of 33

DESPISING THE DAY

To "despise the day" is to look upon a work or a time as though it was of no significance – just a waste of time. It is to measure a person, time, or work, by worldly standards of greatness.

To "despise" something is to see no value in the matter – like Esau despising his birthright. Under the circumstances, he thought the birthright to be of little or no value, forfeiting it for some bread and stew. (Gen 25:34. Jesus was “despised” (Isa 53:3). The people of God were “despised” (Jer 33:24). Israel “despised the law of the Lord” (Amos 2:4). Jesus spoke with great sobriety to "certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9).

SANBALLOT AND TOBIAH

When Nehemiah was building the wall of Jerusalem, there arose an uncomely pair who despised what they were doing – Sanballot and Tobiah. They looked upon the wall-building of Nehemiah despising what their work. “What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? . . . Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh 4:2-3). To these two "blind guides," the work the Jews were doing was not significant. How wrong they were to despise the day of small beginnings!

GOLIATH

Despising small things is like Goliath looking upon David, disdainful because "he was but a

youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance" (1 Sam 17:42). Goliath looked at David and saw a young and handsome red-haired boy – anything but a mighty warrior. How wrong he was to despise the day of small beginnings!

CHRIST'S ENEMIES

When "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), He did not appear to be a King to His enemies. He was "despised and rejected of men" (Isa 53:3). Beholding His works and hearing His words they reasoned, "From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judah, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him" (Mark 6:2-3). How wrong they were to despise the day of small beginnings!

THE WORD TO THE PROPHET

The word of our text is the Lord's admonition to the Prophet and his people NOT to look down upon small beginnings as though they were no consequence. They were not to look upon the foundation and conclude no Temple would be built upon it. They were not to imagine the work had been frustrated and could not be completed. The fact that years had passed since the work began did not justify thinking their work had been in vain.

The people were discouraged, yet had no right to be! Their discouragement was the fruit of erroneous thought. It sprang from delusion, not faith. This is always the reason for discouragement and despising the day of small beginnings. We do well to learn from this text that such attitudes are nothing less than imaginations to be thrown down (2 Cor 10:4-5)!

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 21 of 33

SMALL THINGS

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Verse 10, Zechariah 4:8-10)

"Small things" are beginning things. They are not an end of themselves, but the start, or commencement, of something bigger. Thus, the New Living Translation reads, "Do not despise these small beginnings."

This also refers to a period of time during which only relatively "small things" were being accomplished. Thus, the Septuagint version reads, "or who has despised the small days?," and the New Jerusalem Bible reads "A day of little things, no doubt, but who would dare despise it?"

In a day when men glory in big things, we are called to NOT despise the day of small

beginnings. The Kingdom of God is depicted as a little stone, cut out of mountain without hands, that will eventually fill the whole earth (Dan 2:34-35). The day of Pentecost was preceded by one hundred and twenty disciples being gathered together (Acts 1:15). Before the day of Pentecost was over, three thousand were added to the number (Acts 2:41). A short time later, five thousand men were added (Acts 4:4). They did not despise the day of small beginnings.

THINGS THAT STARTED SMALL

THE HUMAN RACE. The human race started small – with a single man who was then joined to his wife, especially created for him (Gen 2:7,21-22). Adam is referred to as “the first man” (1 Cor 15:45), and Eve was called “the mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). That was the beginning of the race of mankind. The “Population Reference Bureau” estimates that at least 108 billion people have lived on the earth – and that is just a rough estimate. All of those people came from Adam and Eve – a small beginning.

THE SPREAD OF HUMANITY THROUGH NOAH. After the flood, only eight people existed on the face of the earth (1 Pet 3:20). A vast multitude of people grew from that small number, forming “families” and “nations” (Gen 10:5) – a small beginning.

THE JEWISH RACE AND THE ARABIANS. God started with one man, Abraham (who was “as good as dead” (Heb 11:12), and his wife Sarah, who was barren (Rom 4:19). Through Sarah, the Jewish nation developed, the number of which has been in the billions. From the six sons Abraham had through Keturah (Gen 25:1-2), all of the Arabian races were developed – even more numerous than the Jews. That multitude had a small beginning of three people: Abraham, Sarah,. And Keturah – a small beginning.

THE SAVED OF THE EARTH. The multitude of saved people began with “one Man – The Second man” (1 Cor 15:47), Jesus Christ the Lord. In the end, when all of the saved are gathered to the Lord, there will be a "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev 7:9) – all from a small beginning.

Men are fond of setting objectives, particularly ones that will yield something large and impressive. So, that is their target – to end up with something big. However, this is a fundamentally flawed way of thinking. Godly men and women desire to start with something that is despised by the world – something that will absolutely require the blessing of the Lord. Such a work will bring glory to God, and benefit to those who perceive the work.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 22 of 33

THE WORLD DESPISES SMALL BEGINNINGS

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS?" (Verse 10, Zechariah 4:8-10).

Other versions read, “little things” (GWN), “small days” (Septuagint), and “small beginnings”

(NLT).

The foundation that had been laid was being viewed as a “small thing” in comparison with the completed Temple which was scheduled by God. However, the “foundation” was NOT an independent project. Rather, it was the beginning phase of a much larger project. The commission was to “build THE HOUSE of the Lord” (Ezra 1:2-3).

It is the manner of the world to despise small beginnings. Such a view is nothing less than judgment "according to the appearance" (John 7:24). It is judging "after the flesh," or "according to human standards" (John 8:15, NIV). Inherent in those “human standards” is a total ignorance of GOD Himself. The fact is, that the will of the Lord has no place in the “human standard” view. Divine purpose or intent is not perceived, or has been forgotten. In such a case, the standard of measure that requires the language “small things” is what mere men consider to be great and impressive. In the Divine economy – and O that men could see it – the standard of measure is WHAT GOD INTENDS. It is the finished product, or what will be seen when the total work is completed.

GOD’S WORD THROUGH HAGGAI

The Word of God informs us that as the Jews built the temple "they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo," completing the work "according to the commandment of the God of Israel" (Ezra 6:14). It will be of benefit to read one of the encouraging words of Haggai, who lifted the hearts of the people. Through his word, the people enabled to shake loose from the world's view, and put their hands to the work.

"Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now BE STRONG, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. BE STRONG, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. BE STRONG, all you people of the land, declares the LORD, and work. For I AM with you, declares the LORD Almighty. This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And MY SPIRIT remains among you. Do not fear. This is what the LORD Almighty says: In a little while I WILL once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I WILL shake all nations, and the Desired [One] of all nations WILL come, and I WILL fill this house with glory, says the LORD Almighty. The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, declares the LORD Almighty. The glory of this present house WILL be greater than the glory of the former house, says the LORD Almighty. And in this place I WILL grant peace, declares the LORD Almighty" (Hag 2:3-9, NIV).

Embedded in that marvelous word is a prophesy of the Lord Jesus: "the Desired [One] of all nations will come." The final Temple would have a greater glory than the first, which Temple is part of "holy city" the "New Jerusalem," or glorified church (Rev 21:2,22). Not only, therefore, would the work of Zerubbabel be completed, it would be an introduction to a greater temple, greater glory, and a world without end.

Despise not the day of small beginnings! To do so is to be dominated by the spirit of this world. It is to be turned from beholding the wonderful works of God. The Lord's workings may begin small, but they do not remain that way. His Kingdom is one of "increase" (Isa 9:7). Divine

beginnings are never intended to remain small and inconsequential!

When we see a faint, faltering, and weakened church, we know we are facing the “small things” view. **HOW CAN YOU ENCOURAGE FAINT-HEARTED PEOPLE?** You tell them what God is doing – like Haggai did. Tell them that when the project is completed Jesus will present the church "to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). Tell them that the church is destined to “reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12). Tell them of the Divine schedule for the church: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and HE WILL dwell with them, and THEY SHALL be His people, and God Himself SHALL BE with them, and BE their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:3-4).

That dwarfs the word of Haggai, and is sufficient to keep the builders building!

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 23 of 33

WALKING BY FAITH, NOT SIGHT

"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." (Verses 8-9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

There was no **OUTWARD EVIDENCE** that the promise given to Zerubbabel was true. No imagined “**LAW OF AVERAGES**” could support it. There were no **STATISTICAL PROCEDURES** that could support it. The imagined **RULES OF LOGIC** could not back up what had been said. If one called **PHILOSOPHY** into the matter, it could provide no reason to hope. No **ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES** were able to assure the heart what was promised would actually take place. **APOLOGETICS** could offer no firm reason to expect the promise to come to pass. No **SYLLOGISTIC** approach could produce confidence that what God had promised would actually come to pass. This ought to be abundantly evident, and requiring no further explanation. Something God has promised simply cannot be confirmed by human reasoning – no matter how sophisticated and intricate it may appear to be. This is because the promises of God are above the domain of human reasoning.

Before I proceed further, I want to remind my readers that the above attempts are constantly being employed to supposedly buttress the Word of God, or prove that it is true. Whatever value any of the things mentioned supposedly have, it does not extend into the realm of revelation and salvation. When we talk about revelation and salvation, we are dealing with God, who has no peers; with Christ, who is another kind of Man; and of Divine purpose, which is outside the domain of human origins and accomplishments.

Right here we must see the relevance of walking by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). Despising or disdain the day of small beginnings is **WALKING BY SIGHT**, for which the revelation and

work of God make absolutely no provision. It is judging according to appearance, and without the promises of God in mind. Spiritual life cannot be sustained when such a view is entertained, no matter how scholastic it may appear.

The promises of God must be declared to the people of God! These are the appointed means through which we become “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). “All of the promises” are applicable to us – “For as many as are the promises of God, THEY ALL find their Yes [answer] in Him [Christ]. For this reason we also utter the Amen (so be it) to God through Him [in His Person and by His agency] to the glory of God” (2 Cor 1:20, Amplified Bible). The promises of God refer to an appointed and certain future which must be known if the people of God are to make it safely through “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).

Settle it in your mind that faith, which is itself “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), must be possessed, for “But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” (Heb 11:6). In the letters written to the churches, the phrases “by faith,” “through faith,” and “in faith” occur fifty-nine times. Believing, which is the verb form of faith, is mentioned fifty-seven times. Faith, or believing, must be a prevalent reality, not a subsidiary one.

Faith looks forward, not backward. It nurtures hope for the future, not a carnal assessment of the present. True beginnings must be viewed as precisely that: "BEGINNINGS." They are the initiation of a larger work that will be brought to completion by Divine power. Faith considers the work's completion, and moves the individual to faithfulness.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 24 of 33

THESE SEVEN REJOICE TO SEE

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

The NIV reads differently: "Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel." An even different view is represented by the New Living translation. "For the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." The KJV represents men rejoicing WITH the "seven eyes." "for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel WITH those seven." The NRSV adds yet another perspective. "For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel."

THE MEANING

There is a sense in which all of these views are true. Men would rejoice at the completion of the Temple. The Lord Himself would also rejoice, joying over the work with joy (Zeph 3:17). Those

who were at first discouraged with the small beginnings, would finally rejoice at the completion of the work.

The meaning of the text, however, is found in the Divine explanation of “the seven” given to the prophet: "They are the eyes of the LORD." Both the NASB and NIV accentuate this perspective, i.e., that the seven eyes are the rejoicing ones. "But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel – these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth" (NASB), "These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth" (NIV).

It is because of DIVINE REJOICING that men would be glad, whether Zerubbabel, the builders or those who are beholding their work. This is joy that brings honor and glory to God, because it reveals a recognition of "the Lord's doing," which is “marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23). God once said to Israel, “Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art SHALL SEE the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible [awesome, NKJV] thing that I will do with thee" (Ex 34:10).

The thought of God Himself rejoicing – the seven eyes rejoicing – is stimulating to consider. Through Jeremiah God said of Israel, “Yea, I WILL REJOICE OVER THEM to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul" (Jer 32:41). Again, the prophet Zechariah said of Israel, "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, HE WILL REJOICE over thee with joy; He will rest in his love, HE WILL JOY over thee with singing" (Zeph 3:17). In accounting for the blessing of the nation of Israel, Moses said, "Only the LORD HAD A DELIGHT in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day" (Deut 10:15). When the twelve spies came back from spying out the land of Canaan, ten of them gave a morose and discouraging report. Joshua and Caleb said, "IF THE LORD DELIGHT IN US, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey" (Num 14:8). David said of his deliverance, "He brought me forth also into a large place: He delivered me, because HE DELIGHTED IN ME" (2 Sam 22:20). The QUEEN OF Sheba said to Solomon, "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which DELIGHTED IN THEE, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice." (1 Kgs 10:9).

Today consider the Lord joying over His people, rejoicing over them, and determined to do them good. This is a time when such a blessing is sorely needed. It is my persuasion that the Lord is not pleased with the church of our day – fractured, dilatory, having the manners of the world, and shrinking in numbers. However, if the church will please the Lord, do His will, cut its connection with the world, and seek His face, He will be pleased with her, rejoice over her, and do her good. This is also true of the individual professing Christian.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 25 of 33

THE PLUMB LINE

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall SEE THE PLUMMET in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Verse 10, Zechariah 4:8-10)

The plummet, or "plumb line" (NKJV), is held by the master builder. The "plumb line" is the means of measuring the acceptance of the structure. It is the final test of its approval. By definition, the "plumb-line" is "a line (as of cord) that has at one end a weight (as a plumb bob) and is used especially to determine verticality" (Merriam-Webster). If a building or wall is not perfectly vertical, the build will lean toward the earth, and eventually fall.

Zerubbabel will have the "plummet," or "plume-line" in his hand to ensure that the Temple is built correctly – even while it is being built on the foundation. When the Temple was completed, it would be given the "plume-line" test to confirm that the structure was built according to Divine directions, to stand, and not fall. The test of the eye was not enough. It had to be measured by the "plume-line."

The approval of men would not be the final test of Zerubbabel's Temple. How it looked to the masses was not sufficient. Its outward beauty was not a sufficient confirmation. It had to pass the test of the plumb line! The idea of our text is that the structure, though small in its beginning, would pass the final test of Divine scrutiny! The work God had appointed would be completed with His approval and blessing. It would not be in any way deficient, or come short of Divine expectation. The charge of ensuring that would be carried out was given to Zerubbabel.

In our text, the use of the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel was the Divinely appointed means of confirming the work meant God's approval. It was another way of affirming what had already been declared: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it" (Zech 4:8).

THE WORK MUST BE MEASURED. It is a principle in the Kingdom of God that every work purporting to be of God, or for Him, must be measured, or evaluated, by the Lord. Thus, John the Revelator was instructed by a holy angel, "Rise, and MEASURE the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein" (Rev 11:1). This "temple" was the church, expressly called "the temple of God" in First Corinthians 3:16-17, and Second Corinthians 6:16. This was nothing less than putting the professed church to the Divine test; laying the Divine plumb line next to its impressive walls – "the temple of God." Notice what John was commanded to measure, and what he was NOT to measure.

"THE TEMPLE OF GOD" was THE CHURCH ITSELF, and it was to be measured as a corporate body. What were the materials, or people, built upon it: "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble" (1 Cor 3:12)? What was the church doing? Was it "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). Was it a "chaste virgin," prepared to be married to the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:2). What were its characteristics, emphasis, and work?

"THE ALTAR" was to be measured – the means of atonement and justification. What was the

declared means of being made acceptable to God (Eph 1:6)? Who took away sin (John 1:29)? Was the means of acceptance faith in Christ (Acts 15:9; Eph 2:8), “faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25), and “justification by faith (Rom 5:1)? Or was it a plan or routine developed by men? What made them “acceptable” to God (Eph 1:6).

THE WORSHIPERS, or “them that worship.” What kind of people were they? Were they “born again” (1 Pet 1:23)? Did they love the brethren (John 13:35; 1 Jon 3:14)? Were they “true worshipers” (John 4:23)? Had they presented their bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). Had they separated from the defiling influences of the world (2 Cor 6:14-18)? Were they perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1)? How were the worshipers identified?

LEAVE OUT AND DO NOT MEASURE. “But the court which is without the temple LEAVE OUT, and MEASURE IT NOT; for it is given unto the Gentiles” (Rev 11:2). This was the area of approach, and was the only place that could be defiled, for it was given over to the Gentiles, or those who ‘know not God” (1 Thess 4:5). This is an area which, by Divine intention, can be corrupted – the matter of coming to God, or what to do to be saved. This has proved to be an area of staggering corruption. Significantly differing “plans of salvation” have been developed, ranging from baptizing infants, to saying a special prayer, to going through a special outward routine. Now, make no mistake about this, there IS an appointed way of entrance, and no person can enter by another way – but that is not a proper emphasis, for it has been corrupted. However, no one has corrupted the holy place and the holy of holies, so to speak. There are some approaches to God that ARE “unlawful.” Such approaches cannot possibly conclude with the person being saved – regardless of the claims of men. But when it comes to actual participation, as compared to talk, it is revealed of the things in which the saved participate, “against such, there is no law” (Gal 5:23). They cannot be corrupted!

John was commanded to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshipers. In the end, Jesus Himself will measure everything associated with His name.

Now, I come from a background in which the outer court, or approach to God, was actually the point of emphasis. But no one ever commented on the godliness, commitment, and holiness of those known for being identified with that movement. If the people are truly lacking these traits, they have not gone past the outer court – and you have to leave the outer court in order to experience contact with, and service to, the Living God. Something else must be noted. If a person backslides, or returns to the life from which they were once delivered, they have to backpedal into the “outer court,” and eventually they will even leave that area, retreating into the world.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 26 of 33

THE SCANNING EYES OF THE LORD

"For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Verse 10,

Zechariah 4:8-10

These "eyes" have already been mentioned in Zechariah, and our verse refers back to that initial revelation. "For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; UPON ONE STONE SHALL BE SEVEN EYES: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (Zech 3:9). The "seven eyes" denote Divine scrutiny, the surveying of the Lord, before Whom all things are "naked and opened" (Heb 4:13). The removal of iniquity "in one day" signifies the conclusion of Israel's punishment, carried out in the Babylonian captivity. That would remove any obstacle to the completion of the Temple.

It is vain to attempt to build while the judgment of God is upon the people – while they are being chastened. The time of chastening is not the time to build, but a time to recover so one can again build. The engraving of the stone is a vivid picture of Divine approval, placing His signature and blessing upon the completion of the work.

The idea that is here expressed is remarkable. The "one stone" put before Joshua the priest was a capstone, or finishing stone. It was the final stone put into place, and confirmed the completion of the work. It is referred to again in the fourth chapter of Zechariah: "he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (Zech 4:7). Other versions read, "and He will bring forth the top stone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" (NASB); "Then He will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'" (NIV).

SCANNING THE WHOLE EARTH

Why does the Spirit say of these eyes, "They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth?" This is not just an academic point – like saying, "the Lord sees and knows everything." While that is certainly true, the text goes much deeper than that. "The eyes of the Lord" are mentioned twenty-two times in Scripture (Gen 6:8; Deut 11:12; 13:18; 1 Sam 26:24; 2 Sam 15:25; 1 Kgs 15:5,11; 16:25; 22:43; 2 Chron 14:2; 16:9; 21:6; 29:6; Psa 34:15; Prov 5:21; 15:3; 22:12; Isa 49:5; 52:2; Amos 9:8; Zech 4:10; 1 Pet 3:12). God sees everything, and overlooks nothing, except for what He has removed. The righteous are told "THE EYES OF THE LORD" are upon them (Psa 34:15). Those in Christ are told, "For THE EYES OF THE LORD are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Pet 3:12).

Pertinent to our text, it is written, "For THE EYES OF THE LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, TO SHOW HIMSELF STRONG in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron 16:9). Or, "strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (NIV). Zerubbabel was such a man, and the Lord found him. He would strengthen him, encourage him, and enable him to finish the work he had been appointed to do.

Similar findings are recorded elsewhere in Scripture. Once, when the eyes of the Lord were scanning the earth, looking for someone to whom His strength would be given, He found Noah, of whom it is written, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen 6:8). God would show Himself strong through Noah, saving him and his family through the building of a custom ark.

Another time, the eyes of the Lord found Moses, watching sheep on the backside of a desert. He called out to him, Moses, Moses!" He told him, "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I WILL SEND THEE unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Ex 3:10). He found a man, and would show Himself strong through Moses.

On still another occasion, the "eyes of the Lord" found Gideon, faithfully threshing wheat at night, to keep it from the enemy. Through an angel God said to him, "Go in this thy might, and THOU SHALT SAVE ISRAEL from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" (Judges 6:14). God had found a man through whom He could work.

On yet another occasion, when the eyes of the Lord were scanning the earth, they lighted upon a man named Saul of Tarsus. He struck him down to the earth, as he was on a mission to punish believers in Christ. He later told him through one of His workers, "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee FOR THIS PURPOSE, to MAKE THEE a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I SEND THEE, to OPEN THEIR EYES, and to TURN THEM from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, THAT HEY MAY RECEIVE forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me" (Acts 26:16-18). The Lord had found someone through whom He could show Himself strong!

Dear reader, if you will present your body a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2), seek the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), and "perfect holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1), the eyes of the Lord will find you, and He will show Himself strong in your behalf. Of that, you may be sure.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 27 of 33

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

"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." (Verse 8, Zechariah 4:8-10)

This is nothing less than a depiction of the providence of God. Because this is a theological word, used to depict Divine activity, it is necessary to define how I am using it. By "providence" I mean the twofold sense in which God's will is carried out, particularly regarding a specific, or ordained, work of God.

First, opposing influences and obstacles are removed. The magnitude of the opposing influences will be of no ultimate consequence. God's will is the superior will, and there is no opposing will that can possibly overturn His purpose. It is true that when God says He is going to do something, Satan is aroused to oppose it – and he has, as men would consider it, significant power and resources. However, the devil will have no success in fighting what God has

determined. In our text, the determination has been made in heaven, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.”

Second, needed resources are ministered. Those who have been selected to do the work of the Lord will never lack for supplies. God will raise up those who will supply the resources to do the work He has ordained and commissioned. In our text, supplies were furnished by some of the chief Jewish fathers – “They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments” (Ezra 2:68-69). Nehemiah testified that Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, supplied “timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I [Nehemiah] shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me” (Neh 2:8).

Third, encouragement to do the work will be ministered to the ones doing it. Concerning the building of the temple, it is written, “And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered THROUGH THE PROPHECYING OF Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, 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).

The New International, New American Bible, Tanakh [Jewish], Leeser Jewish Bible, and Amplified Bible versions use the word “providence” in this sense in Job 10:12. “You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in YOUR PROVIDENCE watched over my spirit.” Other versions use the words “visitation” (KJV/ASV), “care” (NKJV), “your grace” (Basic Bible English), “faithful love” (Holman Christian Standard), “careful attention” (Complete Jewish Bible) “watchfulness” (God’s Word Trans), “intervention” (The Net Bible), “in your care watched over” (New Jerusalem), “inspection” (Young’s Literal Translation), “oversaw and preserved” (Common English Bible), “Thy protection” (Noyes Translation).

The word translated “providence,” or “visitation” has the following lexical meaning: “oversight, care, custody” (Strong’s). The ideas of Divine watch care, interest, and support are included in this word. God oversees the work He has ordained, seeing to that what He has ordained comes to pass. Jesus referred to this process when He said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17).

The English word “providence” means “The guardian and control exercised by Deity; a manifestation of God’s foresightful care for His creatures” (Talking Dictionary); “The care and control of God” (Cambridge); “Divine care and guardianship” (American Heritage Dictionary); “Divine guidance or care; God conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny” (Merriam-Webster).

Technically, “providence” is the means used to provide needed resources. It also includes the ideas of foresight and supervision. An early example of Divine provision occurred when Abraham was commanded to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. When asked by Isaac concerning a lamb, the patriarch replied, “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:8). God would see it that what He commanded would be carried out – and He did provide a substitutionary sacrifice (Gen 22:13).

Declarations of this aspect of Divine care are as follows. "He PROVIDES food for those who fear Him; He remembers His covenant forever"(Psa 111:5, NIV). "He PROVIDES food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call" (Psa 147:9, NIV). "Yet He has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he PROVIDES you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17, NIV). "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly PROVIDES us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17, NIV).

One of the names ascribed to the Lord emphasizes this aspect of His Person – providing, and doing so in strict accordance with His ordained purpose. In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, the angel of the Lord kept Abraham from offering up Isaac. At that moment, the Lord provided Himself an offering, just as Abraham had said. In honor of that singular event, "Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh" (Gen 22:14). The meaning of that term (Jehovahjireh) is "THE LORD WILL PROVIDE." Later versions of the Scripture use those precise words in the place of "Jehovahjireh" (NKJV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NLT).

Think of God's "providence" as God exercising His free and dominant will, having the oversight of everything He has purposed. If you are living by faith in Jesus Christ, your believing is the work of God, as Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John 6:29) – and God is supervising that entire work, just as surely as He oversaw the building of the Temple. Of that, you may be sure.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 28 of 33

SCANNING THE EARTH

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, WHICH RUN TO AND FRO THROUGH THE WHOLE EARTH." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

The meaning of the "seven eyes of the Lord" that are "scanning the whole earth," is this: In the rebuilding of the Temple, the Lord was looking throughout the earth for resources and helpers. He will marshal all of the influences required to ensure the building is initiated and completed. He will leave no stone unturned. Allow me to confirm this with a brief review of the Temple project.

1. In the kingdom of Persia, He raised up Cyrus to declare the Temple should be rebuilt, and to lead in the initiation of that project (Ezra 5:13-14).
2. Cyrus was moved by God to return the vessels taken from the temple when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land (Ezra 1:7-11; 5:13-14).
3. God granted the heathen king Cyrus the power and influence necessary to implement the command to rebuild the Temple (Isa 45:1-6).
4. The heathen king Artaxerxes put his hand to the work also (Ezra 6:14; Neh 13:6).

5. God prepared king Darius to have an interest in the Jews by touching his father, Ahasuerus, through Esther (Esther 10:1-3; Dan 9:1).
6. The heathen king Darius was stirred up to see to it the work was continued (Ezra 6:12-14).
7. Haggai and Zechariah were prophets God raised up to encourage the work (Ezra 6:14).
8. Ezra was employed to prepare the people and get the foundation put into place (Ezra 10:1-16).
9. God stirred up the priests and people to want to do the work (Ezra 1:5).
10. The heathen king Artaxerxes was moved to support his cupbearer, Nehemiah, and fully supported the wall-building project assigned to Nehemiah (Neh 2:5-8).
11. Nehemiah was stirred up and used to rebuild the walls of the city (Neh 1:3-11; 4:6).
12. The Lord raised up people who gave gold, silver, goods, beasts of burden, and a freewill offering for the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:4-6).

Israel was in a weakened state, after being chastened by the Lord for not honoring the land-sabbaths (2 Chron 36:20-21; Jer 25:11). However, this did not hamper the God of heaven. He raised up heathen kings to see to it that the project was initiated with all of the supplies needed. There is an example of the scanning eyes of the Lord. They ensure His work will be accomplished in strict accord with His revealed will. In using the words "They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth," the Lord is telling Zerubbabel that He will see to it that the work is finished! If necessary, the expenses for "great stones" and "new timber" will be taken from the treasury of king Cyrus (which they were – Ezra 6:4). The Lord is a God of providence! He provides what is need to complete His work.

Today, the church is in a weakened spiritual state. However, God can, and will, raised up unlikely people to get certain works started. Then godly men like the prophets Haggai and Zechariah will see to it that the work is continued. His eyes still scan the whole earth in search of someone whose work He can undergird.

Now, the only question is whether or not we ourselves have a heart for the work of the Lord. Why should this not be the consistent trait of believers?

1. Through Christ Jesus, God has saved them (Eph 2:8).
2. He has delivered them from "this present evil world" (Gal 1:4).
3. He has justified them "from all things," from which they could not be justified by the Law (Acts 13:30).
4. In their baptism, Jesus circumcised their heart (Col 2:11-12).
5. In their baptism, God raised them up to walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).
6. He has given them His Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4:8).
7. He has given them access to Himself (Eph 2:18; 3:12).
8. He has supplied them with "all spiritual blessings" (Eph 1:4), and "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:4).
9. He has "raised" them up and made them "to sit together in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 2:6).
10. He has opened up a "new and living way" through which we can enter into His presence (Heb 10:22).

Know this, that those who have availed themselves of what God has provided in Christ Jesus,

will not be overlooked by the Lord. He has revealed that His eyes “run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chron 16:9). In the place of “show Himself strong,” other versions read “strongly support” (NASB), “to strengthen” (NIV), “show His might in behalf of” (RSV), “letting it be seen that He is the strong support of” (BBE). If you have willingly involved yourself in what God is doing through Christ Jesus, God will find you, and use you in the execution of His “eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). Now, there is something to think about!

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 29 of 33

OTHER SMALL BEGINNINGS

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Verse 10, Zechariah 4:8-10)

The pattern of "small things," or "small beginnings" is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture. These affirmations are intended to do more than provide historical accuracy – although they surely do that. They are "written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom 15:4). It is said of the experiences of Israel of old, “Now all these things HAPPENED UNTO THEM FOR ENSAMPLES: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor 10:11). Other versions read, “were done as an example” (BBE), “came unto them for ensamples (GENEVA). The word translated happens means, “circumstances coming together to form an event come about, turn out, happen” (FRIBERG). In other words, those “things” were not simply random events. There was a Divine purpose that drove them, or caused them to take place – it was “for our admonition,” or “to admonish us for right action by good instruction” (Amplified Bible). The records of God’s involvements with people reveal the character of God, the nature of His Kingdom, and the means through which His will is consistently implemented. If we will carefully examine and believe these accounts, having faith in God, He will deliver us from small and minuscule ways of thinking. Such thinking is like a blight upon the mind. The Lord will also strengthen our hearts to labor in His vineyard with a sense of expectancy.

The record of things God started – BEGINNINGS – are especially filled with teaching that make for a godly perspective. A few examples of "small beginnings" will suffice to establish this truth to our hearts.

ADAM and EVE

You cannot have a smaller numeric beginning than this: ONE. Of Adam it is said, "He has made from ONE blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). Every race and every nation on "all the face of the earth," all from "ONE blood," or man! Billions of people have come from that “ONE man.” Eve, whom God created for Adam, is also called “THE

mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). That could certainly be called unparalleled exponential growth. Small beginnings, indeed, but behold what a multitude has come from our ancient parents!

NOAH'S FAMILY

Here is another "small beginning." Following the flood, there were only eight people (1 Pet 3:20). Yet, from that small beginning, the earth was again populated. It is written, "And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was THE WHOLE EARTH WAS OVERSPREAD" (Gen 9:18-19).

ABRAHAM'S OFFSPRING

Here is one man with a barren wife – and at the time of promise, he himself was “as good as dead” (Heb 11:12), or, as it is written, “he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.” (Rom 4:19). No sociologist would ever look to Abraham to produce a great nation, and multitudes of kings and people. The beginning was too small. Yet, God said to Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen 15:5). And again, "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen 22:17). He was truly "a father of many nations" (Rom 4:18), and "kings" came forth from him (Gen 17:6) – and that was from a small beginning.

Consider the ultimate “small beginning” – the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There was only ONE of Him, and He had no natural offspring. The prophet shouted out, “who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people was He stricken" (Isa 53:8). Adam had children in the flesh, but Jesus did not. Noah had children in the flesh, but Jesus did not. Abraham had children in the flesh, but Jesus did not. He was “cut off” from the earth without any progeny in the flesh. Yet, in the very next chapter it is said of Him, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD" (Isa 54:1). Now He is referred to as “the Firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). When all of “his brethren” (Heb 2:17). The tally will be described as “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Rev 7:9). A small beginning, but NOT a small conclusion. Despise not the day of small beginnings!”

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 30 of 33

SMALL BEGINNINGS, #1

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST (DANIEL)

"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." (Verse 9, Zechariah 4:8-10)

The most significant of all "small beginnings" is the Kingdom of God in the earth. Daniel likened it to "a stone [that] was cut out without hands" that rolled until it "smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces" – which image represented the only four world empires in history (Dan 2:34). Because of this, I want to comment on the kingdom of Christ, which was also made known to Daniel.

One of the most significant prophecies of Daniel relates to the establishment and dominance of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Isaiah specifically associated the coming Messiah with power and authority: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isa 32:1). "The government," he declared, "shall be upon His shoulder." That Kingdom would not be noted simply for splendor and magnificence, but for longevity and effectiveness. "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever" (Isa 9:6-7). Daniel went into even more detail concerning that Kingdom.

During the second year of king Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he had dreams. His spirit was troubled over this matter, and he could not sleep (Dan 2:1). Surrounded with magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and the Chaldean wise men, the king summoned them to show the significance of his dreams (Dan 2:2).

In the process of the meeting, "the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream" (Dan 2:3). When asked to tell the dream, Nebuchadnezzar said THEY were required to tell him the dream, then give its interpretation. If they were not able to do this, he would have them cut into pieces, and their houses would become a dunghill (Dan 2:4-5). They finally acknowledged they were unable to fulfill the word of the king. He became furious, and "commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:6-12).

It was at this time that Daniel surfaced. He petitioned the king to give him some time to obtain the interpretation. After being granted the time, he went to his house and revealed the whole matter to "Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions" (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). Together they sought mercies from the Lord that the meaning of the dream would be revealed, and that they perish not with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Their prayer was answered, and the meaning of the dream was revealed to Daniel in a night vision (2:17-19).

Daniel responded with an insightful prayer of praise. He then informed Arioch, who had been commissioned to destroy all the wise men, not to do so, for he now knew the meaning of the dream. Immediately, Daniel was brought before Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:23-24).

First, Daniel revealed the dream. The king had seen a great statue, large and extraordinary in splendor. Standing before him, its appearance was awesome. It was made of a mixture of materials, with the most valuable being at the top, and the least valuable and most vulnerable at the bottom. "The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its

belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Dan 2:31-32).

In his dream, as the king continued looking at the impressive statute, "a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces." Listing the materials from the bottom up, Daniel said "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found." The unassuming little stone which struck the statute, however, "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan 2:35). Something small eventually decimated something large, and outgrew everything else!

Daniel then revealed the statute stood for four impressive kingdoms. The greatest kingdom would be the head. Then the kingdoms would deteriorate, with each succeeding one being inferior to the one it replaced. These kingdoms started with Nebuchadnezzar, whom Daniel said was "this head of gold" (Dan 2:38).

Each kingdom would be global, ruling over "all the earth" (2:39). The fourth kingdom would be strong as iron, breaking in pieces and running roughshod over other kingdoms. However, that very kingdom would be neutralized by division, as pictured by feet that were "were part of iron, and part of clay" (2:40-42). The Kingdoms, it was later confirmed, were the Babylonian Empire, the Medio-Persian Empire (Dan 5:29), the Grecian Empire (Dan 10:20), and the Roman Empire, which ultimately succeeded the Grecian Empire of Alexander the Great, which suffered demise during the reign of his four successors (Dan 8:22). That Roman kingdom was in power when the Lord Jesus came into the world.

Daniel further declared that during the seemingly invincible reign of these global powers, "the God of heaven [would] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." That kingdom, the prophet revealed, was depicted by the little stone, cut out without hands, which rolled and enlarged until it filled the whole earth (2:44-45). This was nothing less than the Kingdom announced by both John the Baptist and Jesus, and preached by the Apostles (Matt 3:1-2; 4:17; Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:31).

What a small beginning that kingdom had! Ignorant of what was happening, some spoke of it as a mere "sect," everywhere "spoken against" (Acts 28:22). Others referred to it as "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5). They thought it too insignificant – nothing but a "small beginning."

But where are all of those opponents now? Where are the kingdoms they represented? They have all been "ground to powder," and scattered by the wind of heaven to the threshing floor of history! And, the Stone is still rolling. The Kingdom of God will eventually do precisely what was revealed to the prophet: "fill the whole earth." In prophetic words, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14).

DESPISE NOT THE DAY OF SMALL BEGINNINGS!

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 31 of

SMALL BEGINNINGS, #3

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

The birth of our Lord was another "small beginning." He was born in the "city of David," but not during the splendor of David's kingdom! Nor, indeed, was He born in Jerusalem, "the city of the great King" (Matt 5:35). His birth was not a public birth. When it occurred, it was only known by his mother Mary, and her husband Joseph. After He was born, it was revealed to a select few: certain shepherds who were watching over their sheep that night (Lk 2:8). At an early point in time, some wise men from the East saw "His star," and traveled to Bethlehem to see He who as born "King of the Jews" (Matt 2:1-2). After a little more than a month had passed, his birth was revealed to Simeon, to whom God had made known He would see the salvation of God before he died (Lk 2:25-27), and to Anna, a prophetess who was in the Temple at the time Simeon saw the Holy Babe (Lk 2:36-38).

This is not the kind of kingly birth that would take place among natural men. The birth of a known heir, or designated potentate would be chronicled far and wide. Even the prophetic announcement of Christ's imminent birth at that time was known by only a few people: Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth (Lk 1:36-41), and possibly Zecharias, Elizabeth's husband. From the standpoint of knowledge, or awareness, it was a "small beginning!"

The perception of the greatness of Christ would not be owing to His birth, but to His ministry, His vicarious death, resurrection, ascension into glory, and enthronement at the right hand of God. He had a small beginning – like "a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa 53:2).

The prophet Micah spoke of the place of Christ's birth, with an emphasis on its insignificance among men. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic 5:2). Indeed, a "small beginning."

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the entrance of the Savior into the world, declaring what He would be AFTER He was born: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to

establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa 9:6-7). All of this did not happen at the birth of Jesus – that was a “small beginning.” His ministry did not begin in the manger (Lk 2:7), or when He was dedicated by Simeon (Lk 2:23-24), or in Bethlehem when He was two years of age (Matt 2:16), or in Jerusalem when He was twelve years old (Lk 2:42-50), or when He was “the Carpenter” until He was thirty years of age (Mk 6:3). His beginning was a “small beginning.”

But Jesus did not remain associated with smallness. When He began His ministry, His fame began to spread (Matt 4:24; 9:26,31; 14:1). Still, however, that was a “small beginning” compared to His present reign in the glory. He has now been exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph 1:21). Now, He "is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." (1 Pet 3:22). Now He “is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15).

But He will yet be greater still before the assembled universe, when every person who has ever lived will not only stand before Him, but “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). At that time He will be “admired in all them that believe” (2 Thess 1:10), who, beside the staggering masses who did not believe, will themselves be “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Rev 7:9).

All of that had a “small beginning.

BEGINNINGS

Lesson 32 of 33

SMALL BEGINNINGS, #3

"For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Verse 10, Zechariah 4:8-10)

JESUS' DISCIPLES

And what of the lowly beginning of Jesus' disciples! He chose a nucleus of only twelve. The Holy Spirit provides their names. "The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him" (Matt 10:2-4). Ultimately, Judas was replaced with Matthias, according to Divine revelation (Acts 1:23-26). Later, Paul was added as "the Apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13).

Was this not a "small beginning?" And yet, they did not remain small! Church history records the remarkable extent of the ministries of these thirteen men. All were martyred with the exception of John the beloved. I have added the modern equivalents of the names of the ancient nations they impacted. The following information was gleaned from Christianity.com, Rose Publishing. It is provided for perspective only, as it detailed accuracy is difficult to obtain.

Simon Peter - Britain, Gaul (France and Germany), Rome
Andrew - Armenia (Turkey, Russia), Scythia (Central Asia), Asia Minor
James - Martyred early after impacting Jerusalem
John - Asia (Including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh, India, China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Mongolia)
Philip - Britain, Greece
Bartholomew - Armenia (Turkey, Russia), India, Africa
Thomas - Babylon, Persia, India
Matthew - Persia, Ethiopia, Greece
James the son of Alphaeus - Syria, Jerusalem
Lebbaeus - Armenia (Turkey, Russia)
Simon the Canaanite - Armenia (Turkey, Russia), Britain, Egypt, Cyrene, Africa, Lybia
Matthias - Armenia (Turkey, Russia)
Paul - Britain, Greece, Asia, Italy, Spain

Let no man despise the day of "small beginning!" Taking the nature of Daniel's stone, that was taken out of a mountain "without hands," these chosen men impacted a world for Christ. Political empires and bastions of erroneous thought have fallen in their wake. The truth they proclaimed shook Satan's empire to its foundation, discovering its weaknesses, and delivering a devastating blow to its domain.

BEGINNINGS

"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. For who hath despised THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:8-10)

Lesson 33 of 33

CONCLUSION OF SERIES

THE NEED FOR BEGINNINGS

We are living in a time that cries out for an outbreak of spiritual newness and freshness. Here and there awakenings are occurring, but we need one in our area, and among the people with whom we have been identified. A spirit of mediocrity has settled over the professed church, and a cloak of casualness and indifference is suffocating the lives of many. This is a time when some

are longing for another fulfillment of the promise, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isa 43:19).

There is a wilderness in the Christian world that can be turned into "a pool of water," and dry land that can receive "springs of water" (Isa 41:18). It is still possible for the desert to "blossom as the rose" (Isa 35:1), waters to break out in the wilderness, and "streams in the desert" (Isa 35:6).

HOW WILL IT HAPPEN?

How can such refreshment and renewal occur? It will begin like all Divine workings, with a "small beginning." It will start with a seed, and grow into a tree. It will not be initiated with the wisdom of men. That is not how God works. He will begin with something that is "foolish" and "weak" in the eyes of the world (1 Cor 1:27).

The work will begin where there are faith and hope – where men are calling upon the name of the Lord. It will be preceded by a longing – a "looking for "the good working of the Lord (Lk 2:38). Valid beginnings include a hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:6), and a determination to seek, ask, and knock (Matt 7:7-8). The "love of the truth" will be prominent (2 Thess 2:10), and a disdain will be held for lifeless religion (2 Tim 3:5).

The eyes of the Lord continue to "run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him"(2 Chron 16:9, NKJV). He is looking for someone He can use, someone with a cause He can undergird. He is looking for stewards who will be "faithful," handling the truth to His glory (1 Cor 4:2). Such individuals will be faithful custodians of that truth.

We must make it our aim to embrace the cause of Christ and the purpose of God. Our hearts are to be set on being laborers in His vineyard, with no competing interests. There is a Divine work to be done, and we can be part of it!

Where such souls are found, a Divine beginning is being revealed. That is precisely how God begins His works. He starts with an Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees who will do what He says. He finds a Moses in the wilderness who will investigate a burning bush, and obey the voice of the Lord. He will start with a Gideon who is faithfully threshing wheat at night, or a holy quartet (Peter, Andrew, James, and John) who will leave earthly interests to follow Jesus. He also stirs up the spirits of people to do His work.

Before a work can spread for God's glory, it must be worthy of spreading. The seeds of Divinity must be in it, and the life of God must be in the people. If this is the case, look not on the appearance. The work may be small now, but it will not stay small! The Word of God can grow, increase, be multiplied, and prevail (Acts 12:24; 19:20).

The matters with which we have become familiar in these, and other, postings are from God. We ourselves have been changed by them, and our views of God and His work expanded. We may

presently be involved in a "small beginning," but we must not despise it as others. If God has given us a foundation to put in place, He will help us to finish the building that is to be placed upon it.

Small beginnings need Haggais and Zechariahs to encourage the workers. They need laborers whose heart have been stirred up to put their hand to the work. Where such encouragements and devotion are found, the Lord will make men strong to finish the work!

It only remains for us to be sure we have embraced the Lord's will – that we are working on His building. If we are, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). The work He has ordained will be completed! You can believe that!

– Given O. Blakely