



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**EZRA, NEHEMIAH, HAGGAI,
ZECHARIAH & MALACHI**

Week 3

Nehemiah 7-8

When the people of Israel heard the law of God read to them, it had a powerful effect on them. How do we, heirs of the kingdom of God by his grace, respond to the “ministry that brings righteousness” (2Co 3:9)?

- 1.** What were Hananiah’s qualifications for sharing leadership with Nehemiah’s brother in Jerusalem (v. 2)?
 - 2.** What did Nehemiah feel was missing from the city (v. 4)?
 - 3.** What response did the reading of the law provoke among the people (v. 9)? Why do you think the law produced such a response?
 - 4.** The people learned that they had been neglecting something (vs. 14-18). What were they neglecting, and what was their reaction?
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- 1.** Can you think of a time when the gospel of Jesus Christ brought you to tears?
- 2.** Does news of the release and redemption of slaves to religious legalism bring joy to your life?

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

Put It in Writing

Nehemiah 9

OPENING
up to the Word

When we want to make our promises binding, we put them in writing, so that we can be reminded of what we promised. What promises have you put in writing; what contracts have you signed?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. When the Israelites gathered together and wore sackcloth and ashes and fasted, were they (v. 1)
(a) expressing discouragement with their lives,
(b) expressing anger at God for all their problems,
(c) expressing humiliation and repentance before God?
 2. What four activities did the Israelites engage in at this time (vs. 2-3)?
 3. Certain attitudes developed in Israel's people over the years. What were they, and why were they so inappropriate (v. 17)?
 4. How did the people express their commitment to God (v. 38)?
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LIVING
out the Word

1. Have you ever considered that the old covenant was more like a contract, whereas the new covenant is God's promise to love us and extend his grace to us, even though he knows we are imperfect and will inevitably fail to honor and love him?

Nehemiah 10–11

Have you failed to keep a promise or be faithful to a commitment? Can anyone condemn you for your shortcomings, if you are in Christ (Ro 8:1)?

1. Who signed this contract with God (10:1-27)? Can you think of any practical reason why all the people didn't sign it?
2. The people promised to bind themselves to keeping this agreement with God in two ways. What were they (v. 29)?
3. What specific promises did Israel make to God (vs. 30-39) and why do you think they made these so prominent?
4. While there are many specific promises made to God by the people, how are they summed up in the last line of chapter 10?
5. Since most of the people lived outside the city walls, what arrangement did the people make for repopulating the newly rebuilt city of Jerusalem (11:1)?

1. The book of Hebrews is a wonderful study and contrast of the superiority of Jesus and the new covenant over the "obsolete" (Heb 8:13) old covenant. Review this staggering book as a way of comparing Moses and Mount Sinai to "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 12:24).

OPENING

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How Soon We Forget

Nehemiah 12–13

OPENING
up to the Word

Despite our best intentions, the motivation for keeping our promises can slowly leak out of our lives. What are the hardest promises for you to keep?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How did the Israelites choose to commemorate the building of the wall around Jerusalem (12:27-42)?

2. While Eliashib had worked faithfully on the wall, Tobiah, his associate, (possibly related by marriage) had been an opponent of the rebuilding (2:10). In allowing Tobiah to use a room in the Temple as a place of residence (13:5, 8), he gave the enemy a position to continue his evil. What can we learn about the importance of our commitment to God over our friendship with others?

3. If Nehemiah had not left Israel to return to his service of Artaxerxes (v. 6), do you think the people would have broken their promises?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Is there someone in your life whose example reminds you of the grace of God?

2. How might we, as God's own children, "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2Co 1:4)?

WINDOW
on the Word

"On that day" (13:1) appears to refer to the day when Nehemiah returned from his service to Artaxerxes to check on the situation in Israel. Nehemiah had ruled as governor of Judah for 12 years (444 B.C. to 432 B.C.). It is conjectured he was away for several years, perhaps returning in 430 B.C. The people's commitment to the law had failed and he had to institute reform again.

Introduction to Haggai

Authorship: The background of Haggai is obscure. He was the first prophet to speak on behalf of God to the post-exilic Judean community. Haggai's name means "festive" or "festival." He refers to himself only as "the prophet ." There are some who believe his references to the Temple of Solomon in Haggai 2:3 demonstrate that he was one of the exiles who saw it destroyed, which would make him an old man. This is only conjecture.

Date: All four of Haggai's messages were given in 520 B.C., during the second year of the reign of Darius I. Haggai was soon joined by Zechariah, who also prophesied during this time.

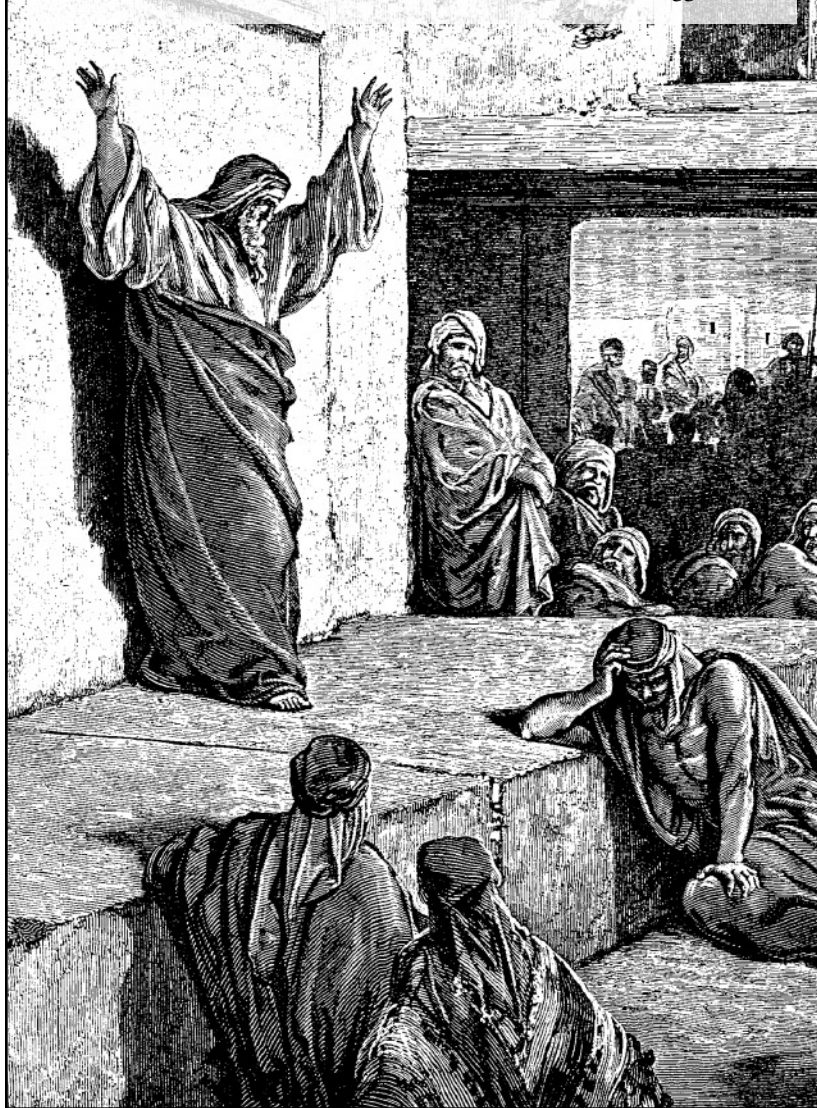
Setting and purpose: Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, longer only than the book of Obadiah. The book of Haggai consists mainly of four short messages. It appears that his ministry, at least his public one, was as short as his book.

The background to Haggai's ministry was the return from exile of the Jews to rebuild the Temple. Samaritan harassment and Persian investigations had halted the rebuilding of the Temple for a time. After that a spiritual apathy set in among the people, and for about 16 years, until the rule of King Darius Hystaspes, the construction of the Temple was discontinued. God raised up Haggai to get the work going again.

He was commissioned by God to arouse the leaders and people of Judah to resume the work they had begun.

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the Lord.”

Haggai 1:7-8



Artwork by Gustav Doré

The Longer You Wait, the Worse It Will Get

DAY 19

Haggai 1-2

There are things we know we should be doing for God, but the busyness of life distracts us from them. What service to God have you been putting off?

1. What excuse had the people been giving for not working on the Temple (1:2)?

2. Through the prophet Haggai, God makes the people consider something they had overlooked in neglecting God's service (vs. 5-11). How had their lack of service affected their lives?

3. There were some who remembered the glory of the original Temple, and the new Temple was a disappointment. What message did God bring to them (2:2-9)?

4. Although God considered all their previous offerings unclean and defiled (vs. 10-14) because of their disobedience in not building God's Temple, what message did he have for them now that the foundation was laid and the work had begun (vs. 18-19)?

1. Do you think that God deals with Christians in the same way he did with the people of Haggai's day—i.e., withholding blessings because of disobedience?

"A purse with holes" (1:6). What little they could eke out, God made sure came to nothing (vs. 9-11). This was an act of divine discipline for their disobedience—it was a direct result of their unfaithfulness. "My signet ring" (2:23). This highly exalted description was not given to Zerubbabel for his own sake, but as a representative of the line of David.

OPENING

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Introduction to Zechariah

Authorship: Zechariah was born a Levite in Babylon. He was the son of Berekiah and the grandson of Iddo the priest. Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel before him, Zechariah wore both the mantle of priest and prophet. His name, which is common (30 other men in the Old Testament share it) means “Yahweh remembers.” Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai the prophet, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. He returned to Jerusalem from Babylon with 50,000 other exiles, and was probably a relatively young man when his prophetic ministry began.

Date: Zechariah began his public ministry about 520 B.C., and prophesied during the time of the rebuilding of the Temple.

Setting and purpose: The work of rebuilding the Temple had halted due to local opposition and Persian investigations. The people became spiritually apathetic. In the second year of King Darius Hystaspes (522-486 B.C.), God raised up the prophet Haggai. His ministry lasted four months. Two months later, Zechariah began his ministry, encouraging the people to spiritual renewal and motivating them to rebuild the Temple.

This book has been called “the most messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament.” There are over 41 New Testament citations or allusions to the book of Zechariah.

Outline:

I. REBUILDING THE TEMPLE, 1-8

- A. From Exiled to Exalted, 1-2
- B. Behind the Scenes, 3-5
- C. Facing the Future, Understanding the Past, 6-7
- D. Good Times are Comin'! 8

II. AFTER THE TEMPLE IS BUILT, 9-14

- A. Vengeance and Victory, 9
- B. Shepherds: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, 10-11
- C. Triumph and Tears, 12-13
- D. What a Day of Rejoicing That Will Be! 14

From Exiled to Exalted

DAY 20

Zechariah 1-2

Zechariah writes using symbols and metaphor—he uses an apocalyptic style of writing which defies literal interpretation (though that has not stopped zealous literal interpreters of this book). How can we appropriately read and understand this book—and how can we avoid distorting and twisting its message?

1. Zechariah brought the message that if the people would return to God, then he would do what (1:3)? (a) give them wealth, (b) bring them health, (c) return to them, (d) send them more prophets.
2. In Zechariah's first vision (vs. 7-17), what did the angels report back to the angel on the red horse (v. 11)? How might we understand this vision? How can it be distorted?
3. Builders used measuring lines in construction (2:1-2). From a Christ-centered perspective, is there teaching here for Christ-followers?
4. What do verses 10-13 seem to refer to?

1. Would you say your life today more closely resembles exaltation or humiliation? What is your exaltation related to, and what is your humiliation related to?

2. What do you feel is the spiritual cause of your present condition? (a) God's grace, (b) God's discipline, (c) your own efforts, (d) your own failures.

*The **Angel of the Lord** (1:11) may be an Old Testament appearance of Christ. This is shown in chapter 3 where he is not only called the Lord, but forgives sins and speaks of the Temple as his house (3:1-6).*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

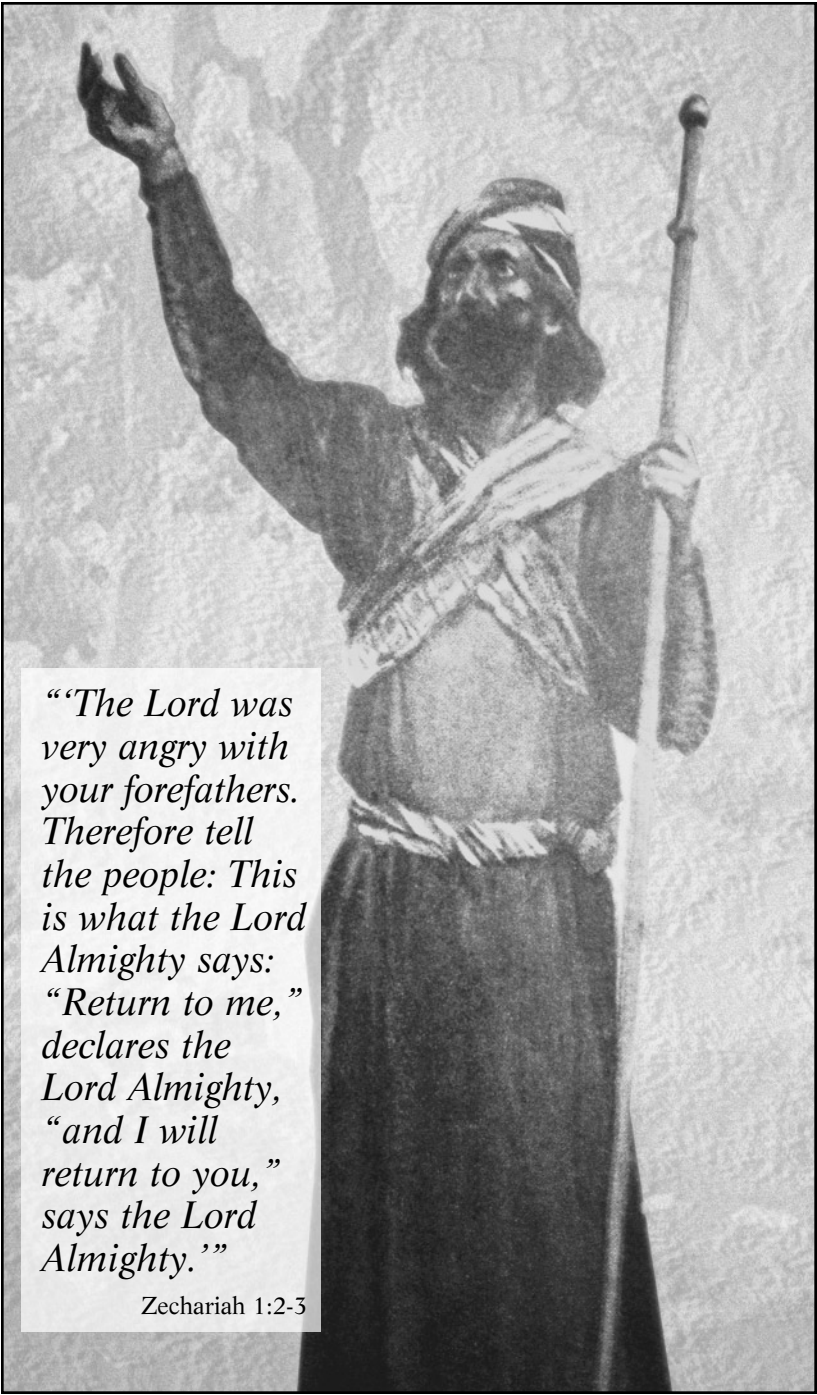
into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word



“The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Return to me,” declares the Lord Almighty, “and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty.’”

Zechariah 1:2-3

Behind the Scenes

DAY 21

Zechariah 3–5

Very few people ever get to go behind the scenes at a movie lot or theatrical production to see who's calling the shots. Have you ever had that experience?

1. Joshua was high priest in the new community at Jerusalem. Why do you think he is pictured in filthy clothes standing before the Angel of the Lord (3:3)?

2. What did removing Joshua's filthy garments symbolize (v. 4)? Who has done this for every child of God (1Jn 1:7)?

3. The golden lampstand (Zec 4:2) was part of the priestly Temple ministry, and it needed constant fuel to stay lit. In this vision, however, the fuel supply was unlimited and came from God. In light of all the human obstacles Zerubbabel faced in building the Temple, what do you think these pictures, plus the words of verses 6-9, were meant to convey?

4. What did the flying scroll contain (5:3-4)? Why was the scroll so large?

5. Where did God plan to place this basket of trouble (v. 11), and why do you think God wanted it placed precisely there?

1. Have you ever imagined what it is like behind the scenes in heaven? What do you think you would be most amazed at if you were allowed to comprehend the workings of God in heaven?

2. Would you be able to adequately explain it, in words? Was Zechariah?

Seven eyes (3:9). *Some feel this refers to the Holy Spirit, others to God's omniscience—that God knows all things (see 4:10).*

Two olive trees (4:3). *It is possible, in the context of Israel, that these two trees refer to Joshua (religious leader) and Zerubbabel (civil ruler), the two leaders of Israel. The lampstand would then represent Israel as a light to the nations.*

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