

IV. Historical Background of Haggai (Ezra 1:1-6:18)

A. Decree of Cyrus, King of Persia (died 529 B.C.)

Cyrus decreed that:

1. The Jews should be allowed to return to Jerusalem 1:1-3.
2. The neighbors of the Jews who decided to return to Jerusalem should help them by giving them gifts (silver and gold for their journey, goods for their new homes, and animals for the transportation of their belongings), and a free-will offering for the Temple whether they were Jews or Gentiles 1:4.
3. The temple should be rebuilt and sacrifices offered to God 1:2,3; 6:3,4a
4. The expenses for the rebuilding of the Temple were to be paid out of the King's treasury 6:4b
5. The golden and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought to the house of his gods in Babylon were to be returned to the temple in Jerusalem(1:7-11; 6:5)

B. Appointment of Zerubbabel to be Governor of Judah

Cyrus, the King of Persia, appointed Zerubbabel to be the governor of Judah(5:14)

Note: Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar are the same person (1:8,11;5:14,16 cf. 2:2; 3:2,8; 5:2.) Sheshbazzar was his Chaldean name.

C. Return of the Jews to Jerusalem and Judah

49,897 Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem and Judah (2:1,64,65)  
These Jews consisted of 42,360 free people, 7337 menservants and maid-servants, and 200 men and women singers(2:64,65)

Note: Zerubbabel was the civil leader of these Jews -the governor of Judah - and Joshua was their religious leader -the high priest.

D. Offering for the rebuilding of the temple.

Some of the heads of the fathers gave an offering for the rebuilding of the temple (2:68). They gave according to their ability (2:69). They gave 61,000 drachmas of gold (1,100 pounds or 13,200 ounces - troy weight - for a value in excess of five million dollars), 5000 minas of silver (3 tons worth more than half a million dollars at our current rates of exchange), and 100 priestly garments (2:69).