



PREPARING FOR THE YEAR FOR 2001



SMALL BEGINNINGS = NEWNESS

4:8 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ⁹ "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. ¹⁰ For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."
– Zechariah 4:8-10 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

Beginnings are generally preceded by challenging circumstances—an environment that demands newness and freshness. 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.

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"* (Eph 2:1). 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

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT.
- II. THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION.
- III. THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL SHALL FINISH IT.
- IV. THEN YOU WILL KNOW.
- V. THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.
- VI. THESE SEVEN REJOICE TO SEE.
- VII. THE SCANNING EYES OF THE LORD.
- VIII. OTHER SMALL BEGINNINGS.
- IX. THE NEED FOR BEGINNINGS.

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 church government, family needs, and pleasure.

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" (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. It 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

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 lesson 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 accomplishments of our Lord 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

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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 there is 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

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!

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Zechariah was a fellow laborer with Haggai and Malachi. His prophecy was also one of the closing ones giving in the

The Beginning of a New Year Can Be Significant – the Beginning of a New Work for God. --by Given O. Blakely

Old Covenant period. It appears that these three men 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!

Jewish tradition says Zechariah died as a martyr. The Scriptures say nothing of his death. It is generally understood that he was a young man when he began to preach, and was a priest as well as a prophet (Neh 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.

- ❑ Zechariah 8:16 in Ephesians 4:25.
- ❑ Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:14-15.
- ❑ Zechariah 11:12-13 in Matthew 27:9.
- ❑ Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7.
- ❑ Zechariah 13:7 in Matthew 26:31 and

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Mark 14:27.

THE RAVAGES OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

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 (2 Chron 36:21; 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 (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 (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 (2 Kings 25:1-9). Thus ended the four hundred year history of Solomon’s Temple.

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 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).

**RESTRUCTURE INITIATED
Ezra**

Ezra was raised up by God to initiate the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. He was commissioned to return the vessels that had been removed from the Temple, appoint judges for the people, and ready the people for the good work of the Lord. 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. Older men who had seen the first Temple, saw the foundation completed and wept aloud. Their loud weeping mingled with shouts of joy, the noise of which 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” (Ezra 4:24).

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 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.

A MOUNTAINOUS OBSTACLE

The angel of the Lord has appeared to Zechariah, charging him to encourage the building of the Temple. The people will

against the inhibiting obstacles. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it” (4:7). The finishing headstone, or capstone, would be put into place, and the work would be finalized.

Thus, preparation has been made for

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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” (2:12-13). There would be cleansing and renewal for the good work (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” (4:6). Divine assistance was on the way!

The obstacles before them appeared as a great mountain that could not be overcome. But a heavenly shout is hurled

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.

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It only remains for the builders to be encouraged, for their spirits to be raised. In faithfulness, God will raise up such encouragers!

THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION

^{4:8} **Moreover the Word of the LORD came to 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)!

THE WORD IS NEEDED!

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!

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). Again it is written, *"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"* (Eph 4:11).

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. 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.

THE FOUNDATION

" . . . saying: ^{9a} 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple . . .'" God honoring work is always recognized by Him. This is work

He has ordained, and He will encourage and sustain it!

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"* ^{NASB} (Ezra 3:8). 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*

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shout when they praised the LORD because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid" ^{NASB} (Ezra 3:10-11).

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'"* (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 responded, *"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} (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.

The *"enemies"* did not take kindly to the rejection to 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"* ^{NKJV} (4:4-5). During the reign of Ahasuerus (king who made Esther queen), these men wrote letters to him, accusing the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah (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 4:11-16.

"Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River; and now 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.”^{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!

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ACCOUNT

The times in which we are living are remarkably like those of our text. In the past, the foundations have been laid, with

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redemptive truths again being established. Whatever opposition may be raised against the Reformation Movement, it did reestablish the centrality of Christ’s atonement, the effectiveness of justification, and the superiority of faith to works.

This 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.

It all is quite innocent to the unlearned and ignorant, but the effects of these alliances are 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. They long for the work of the Lord to be brought to completion for the glory of their God. They know it will not be done by forging alliances with the ungodly.

THE HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL SHALL FINISH IT

“^{9b} **His hands shall also finish it.**”^{9b} 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. They 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.

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.

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’*”

^{NKJV} (v 28b).

Notice, 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).

DECLARING THE WORK WILL BE COMPLETED!

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.

- ❑ *“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).*
- ❑ *“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).*
- ❑ *“Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you **will perform it** until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).*
- ❑ *“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 also will do it**” (1 Thess 5:23-24).*
- ❑ *“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).

- ❑ *“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).*
- ❑ *“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” and “End” as well as “the Beginning” (Rev 1:8; 21:6). 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.

WHAT DIVINE BEGINNINGS HAVE WE REALIZED?

Every child of God has Divine

beginnings within. There is a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezek 36:26). He has given a “new song” (Rev 5:9), and placed us within a “new covenant” (Heb 12:24). We have “newness of life” (Rom 6:4), and have been made a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). By God’s grace, we have a “new man” within (Col 3:10), and are walking in a “new and living way” (Heb 10:20). 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!

THEN YOU WILL KNOW

“^{9c} Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.” These are the words of the revealing angel who was making these things known to Zechariah (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

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 (2

command the work to be done (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*” (Ezra 1:5). Ezra had been moved to prepare the people for the Temple by returning to holiness (Ezra 10:10-16). Nehemiah had been moved to rebuild the walls around the holy city (Neh 2:13-18). **There was no question about it, this was the work of God!**

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”

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.

TWICE HEARD

This is not initial knowledge, but

that the completion of the building of the Temple would confirm that the work itself had been ordained and commissioned by

Chron 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Isa 45:13). He had also summoned kings Darius and Artaxerses to the work, moving them to

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”* (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”* (2:11). What a precious knowledge this is!

Ezekiel

The Lord frequently speaks of this kind of knowledge—the knowledge that comes from seeing 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).

THE CONFIRMING OF GOD'S WORD

It is one thing to have an academic knowledge of the Word of God. It is quite another to hear it *“twice,”* 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.

Many a precious soul has been born again, but the 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). But these are all to be possessed when the truth of God is heard the second time!

Fifty-seven times the phrase *“shall know that I am the Lord”* occurs 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.**

A New Covenant Experience

The Word of God is not effectually confirmed to us by scientific evidences, however valuable they may appear. Such evidences cannot impact upon the heart of men—only upon the mind or intellect. 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.

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!**

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). While there are varying degrees of this glorious knowledge, it is always the result of personal involvement and perception.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

¹⁰ For who has despised the day of small things? The word *“small”* means little or youngest, as in a small child who is immature and in the beginning stages of life. It also means

insignificant, and apparently unimportant—something that seemingly 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.

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. Thus it is written, “*Esau despised his birthright*” (Gen 25:34).

Sanballot and Tobiah

It is to look upon the wall-building of Nehemiah and his workers like Sanballot and Tobiah did. “*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, disdainingly 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 Juda, 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

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 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!

SMALL THINGS

“*Small things*” are **beginning things**. They are not an end of themselves, but the start 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?*”

THE WORLD DESPISES SMALL BEGINNINGS

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*”^{NIV} (John 8:15). The will of the Lord has no place in this view. Divine purpose or intent is not perceived. The standard of measure is what mere men consider to be great and impressive.

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 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”^{NIV} (Hag 2:3-9).*

Embedded in that marvelous word is a prophesy of the Lord Jesus: “*the Desired of all nations.*” 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 working 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!

WALKING BY FAITH, NOT SIGHT

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. 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. **The promises of God must be declared to the people of God!**

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.

THESE SEVEN REJOICE TO SEE

^{10b} **For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.** 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 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 are glad**, whether the builders or those who beholding their work. This is joy that brings honor and glory to God, because it reveals a recognition of “*the Lord’s doing*” (Psa 118:23).

THE PLUMB LINE

The plumb line is held by the master builder. The “*plumb line,*” or “*plummet*” ^{KJV} is the means of measuring the acceptance of the structure. It is the final test of its approval.

The approval of men would not be the final test of Zerubbabel’s Temple. **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 has appointed would be completed with His approval and blessing. It would not be in any way deficient, or come short of Divine expectation.

It is a principle in the Kingdom of God that every work purporting to be of God 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 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.*” The means of justification that were being declared were measured—“*the altar.*” Those who professed identity with God were also measured—“*them that worship.*”

In our text, however, the use of the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel was the Divinely appointed means of confirming the work meant His 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*” (4:8).

THE SCANNING EYES OF THE LORD

^{10c} **They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.** 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” (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. 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

ministered.

The NIV uses 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.” The ideas of Divine watch care, interest, and support are included in this concept.

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).

Declarations of this aspect of Divine care are as follows. “He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever”^{NIV} (Psa 111:5). “He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call”^{NIV} (Psa 147:9). “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”^{NIV} (Acts 14:17). “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”^{NIV} (1 Tim 6:17).

One of the names ascribed to the Lord emphasizes this aspect of His Person—**providing**. 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 name (*Jehovahjireh*) is “**THE LORD WILL PROVIDE.**” Later versions of the Scripture use those precise words in the place of “*Jehovahjireh.*”

Scanning the Earth

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

- ❑ In the kingdom of Persia, He raised up Cyrus to declare the Temple should be rebuilt (Ezra 5:13-14).
- ❑ 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).
- ❑ God granted Cyrus the power and influence necessary to implement the command to rebuild the Temple (Isa 45:1-6).
- ❑ King Artaxerses put his hand to the work also (Ezra 6:14; Neh 13:6).
- ❑ God prepared Darius to have an interest in the Jews by touching his father, Ahasueus, through Esther (Esther 10:1-3; Dan 9:1).
- ❑ Darius was stirred up to see to it the work was continued (Ezra 6:12-14).
- ❑ Haggai and Zechariah were prophets God raised up to encourage the work (Ezra 6:14).
- ❑ Ezra was employed to prepare the people and get the foundation put into place (Ezra 10:1-16).
- ❑ God stirred up the priests and people to want to do the work (Ezra 1:5).
- ❑ Nehemiah was used to rebuild the walls of the city (Neh 1:3-11; 4:6).
- ❑ 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).

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 **the Lord 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 needed to complete His work.

In the rebuilding of the Temple, the Lord is looking throughout the earth for resources and helpers. He will marshal all of the influences required to ensure the building is completed. He will leave no stone unturned. Allow me to confirm this with a brief review of the Temple project.

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.*”^{verse 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.

Divine Providence

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 work. **First**, opposing influences and obstacles are removed. **Second**, needed resources and encouragement are

OTHER SMALL BEGINNINGS

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). They reveal the character of God, the nature of His Kingdom, and the means through which His will is consistently implemented. If we will believe these accounts, having faith in God, He will deliver us from small and minuscule ways of thinking. He will also strengthen our hearts to labor in His vineyard with a sense of expectancy. 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!

Eve herself is called “*the mother of all living*” (Gen 3:20). 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. Yet, from the 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 overspread*” (Gen 9:18-19).

ABRAHAM’S OFFSPRING

Here is one man with a barren wife. 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).

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST (DANIEL)

One of the most significant prophecies

If we will believe these accounts, having faith in God, He will deliver us from small and minuscule ways of thinking. He will also strengthen our hearts to labor in His vineyard with a sense of expectancy.

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 for ever*” (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 (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” (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 (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*” (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, Meschach, 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 (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*” (2:31-32).

In his dream, as the king continued looking at the impressive statue, “*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 statue, however, *“became a great mountain and filled the whole earth”* (2:35). Something small decimated something large!

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”* (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).

Daniel further declared that during the seemingly invincible reign of these global powers, *“the God of heaven 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 for ever.”* 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 has! 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!

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”

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).

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.”* But Jesus did not remain associated with smallness. 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).

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.

- 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** – 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.

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

The work will begin where there is 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

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

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The matters with which we have become familiar in these Hungry Saints meetings 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!

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).

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*”^{NKJV} (2 Chron 16:9). 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

CONCLUSION

As we embark on a new millennium, it is possible for spiritual newness to be experienced by all of us. It will not be something that can be put into the lifeless

molds of religious tradition. It is ever true, “*Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish:*

but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved” (Matt 9:17). The freshness of Divine life cannot be contained in old “*church ways*” and

manners. Just as eight hour work days were abandoned in the building of the Temple, so "religion as usual" must be abandoned when fresh things from God are being received.

Our Hungry Saints meetings are longer than most religious gatherings. Some have objected to their length, and chosen to go where meetings are more brief and less thought is required. We have chosen to avoid such concessions

because we know that is not how God works. He does not adapt His truth and ways to a generation, but brings that generation into conformity with His truth and ways. We acknowledge we have a "small beginning," but we have chosen not to despise it, for we have seen God in it. We believe this is something God has started, and we are anticipating Him bringing it to completion.

I admonish you to put your hand on

the plow, and live with a sense of holy expectancy. Do not be caught up in the spirit of the times, or give yourselves to lifeless religious forms and worldly analyses of the Scriptures. Get involved in the work of the Lord, like the builders of Zerubbabel's time. Work with both the sword and the trowel, warding off enemies and building the walls like those of Nehemiah's day. Capitalize on the truth you have seen, and believe God is going to do something with it!

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 1/12/2001—our first meeting for the year 2001. We will continue in our overview of the book of Romans. The lesson will be, **"SUFFERING IS THE PRELUDE TO GLORY."** It is common knowledge that life in this world is attended by a variety of sufferings. The ones that pertain to living by faith will be our focus. We have already been introduced to one category of sufferings in Romans seven—inner conflict. There are, however, additional sufferings that include the groaning of all creation. We join with the creation in travail, and are assisted in these sufferings by the Holy Spirit. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship.

WE WILL ALSO BE HAVING A SPECIAL NEW YEAR'S EVE FELLOWSHIP AND WATCH SERVICE ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, 12/31/2000. Following our regular service, we will have a fellowship meal, then enter into a time of praise, testimony, exhortation, and prayer. We will dedicate the new year to our Lord, and pray blessings upon all. It is our prayer you will be able to be with us.

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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>