

Ezra 5:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.

Analysis

Sheshbazzar "laid the foundation" (yahab ushsaya) upon returning to Jerusalem, fulfilling Cyrus's commission. This initial foundation work occurred around 536 BC. The statement "since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished" summarized approximately 16 years of interrupted progress.

The admission that the temple remained incomplete after years of work implicitly explained why officials might question the project's legitimacy. Construction had halted during opposition from local adversaries (Ezra 4:4-5, 24), only resuming when Haggai and Zechariah prophesied (Ezra 5:1-2). Yet the elders' response emphasized continuous authorization, not continuous construction—the decree remained valid regardless of work interruptions.

Historical Context

The foundation laying (536 BC) preceded the completion (516 BC) by twenty years, though active construction occurred in shorter periods. Samaritan opposition, economic hardship, and community discouragement contributed to delays. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah addressed these problems in 520 BC, rebuking the people for building their own houses while God's house lay unfinished (Haggai 1:2-4). The 520 BC resumption triggered Tatnai's investigation.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What lessons can we learn from the 16-year delay between laying the foundation and resuming construction?
2. How does prophetic encouragement (through Haggai and Zechariah) demonstrate the church's ongoing need for biblical preaching to sustain kingdom work?

Interlinear Text

אָד יִן	שֶׁשְׁבַצַּר	יֵד הַ	אָתָּה א	יָהּ ב	אֲשֵׁי א	דִּי
Then	Sheshbazzar	the same	came	and laid	the foundation	H1768
H116	H8340	H1791	H858	H3052	H787	
בֵּית	אֱלֹהִים	דִּי	בִּירוּשָׁלַם	וּמִן	אָד יִן	וְעַד
of the house	of God	H1768	which is in Jerusalem	and since	Then	even until
H1005	H426		H3390	H4481	H116	H5705
כֵּעַ	מִתְבִּיֵּן	וְלֹא	שָׁלֵם:			
now	hath it been in building	and yet it is not	finished			
H3705	H1124	H3809	H8000			

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 3:10 (Parallel theme): And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

Ezra 6:15 (Parallel theme): And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Ezra 3:8 (References God): Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

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