



"If Christians were afraid of worldliness as much as they are of holiness, they would set the world on fire for Christ."

—Anonymous

19-Dec-08

A Blessing in Winter?

Within the pages of the Bible, relatively few dates are mentioned. Because of this, and because [God](#) works in similar patterns and many of the prophecies have a dual fulfillment, when prophetic dates *are* mentioned, they take on a special significance.

The book of Haggai is one that is noted for its exactly dated prophecies. Specifically, its last two prophecies are given on, and revolve around, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, a day known simply as Kislev (or Chislev) 24. Kislev falls during the months of November and December on the Gregorian calendar, near the beginning of winter. This date—Kislev 24—is easy to calculate because it is always the day before the Jews celebrate Hanukkah (Kislev 25).

Historically, this date has been highly significant on a number of occasions. It was on Kislev 24 that the Temple was freed from the grasp of Antiochus Epiphanes. The cleansing of the Temple, desecrated by Antiochus, began that evening, which, since it was after sunset, was technically Kislev 25. This historical event constitutes the origin of Hanukkah.

A lesser-known fact is that it was also on Kislev 24 in 1917, during World War I, that British troops liberated Jerusalem from the Ottoman Empire. Just as the Temple was destroyed on the same date—Av 9—on two different occasions, hundreds of years apart, so also the Temple has been liberated from foreign hands on the same

date—Kislev 24. Because Kislev 24 has been highly momentous in the history of Jerusalem and the Temple, the appearance of the date in Haggai, may be significant again, especially considering the dualities of these prophecies.

The first Kislev 24 prophecy, found in [Haggai 2:10-19](#), concerns the uncleanness of the covenant people, and God's response to it. Through a series of questions that Haggai asks the priests, God makes the point that *uncleanness* is transferable, but [holiness](#) is not. Defilement or impurity can spread from an object to a person to another object, but purity and holiness cannot.

This is especially relevant in light of what was happening at the time. The people and the leaders were finally in the process of building the dwelling place of the *Holy* God. It contained a number of objects that were also holy, as well as the Most Holy Place. Yet, even the presence of God could not, by itself, make the people clean. In order to make the nation clean, it would take something more than just having the Temple nearby, with all of its holy objects and even the glory of God. Something else was required to cleanse the people.

This prophecy has a curious ending. It does not contain a call to [repentance](#), except perhaps by implication. God says that His people are unclean, that the presence of something holy cannot make them clean, and that their hearts were not turned to Him—then He suddenly announces that from this day forward, He would *bless*. In this first prophecy, God does not specify exactly what the blessing will be, though there is a hint in verse 19: "Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you." This hint will become clearer after examining the next prophecy.

The second Kislev 24 prophecy, recorded in [Haggai 2:20-23](#), spells out a readily identifiable blessing: righteous leadership. Verse 23 singles out Zerubbabel, and though there may be a number of lesser fulfillments of this, it is important to recognize that the ultimate fulfillment of Zerubbabel's role is [Jesus Christ](#). Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah after the Babylonian captivity. A member of the Davidic line, he was also part of Jesus Christ's lineage on Joseph's side ([Matthew 1:12-13](#)). Zerubbabel typifies Christ, the perfect governor and ruler.

Zerubbabel is called God's servant, but so is Jesus Christ ([Matthew 12:18](#); [John 13:16](#); [Acts 3:13](#), 26; 4:27, 30; [Romans 15:8](#)). Zerubbabel was chosen, but so was Jesus Christ ([Matthew 12:18](#); [Luke 23:35](#); [1 Peter 2:4](#)). Zerubbabel received God's seal, but so did Jesus Christ ([John 6:27](#)). God chose Zerubbabel and his Descendant—his most important Descendent—to be His signature ring. God set His seal on Zerubbabel, but

more importantly, He set His seal on Zerubbabel's descendant, the Messiah.

When we understand this, we can better understand the imagery of [Haggai 2:19](#). Remember that Kislev 24 is in the winter, a time of short days and long nights. The harvesting has been done, and everyone hopes that enough has been stored to last until the vines, trees, and crops begin producing fruit again. Even in a good year, winter is not usually a time of blessing. Yet, God chose this bleakest of times to start His blessing—a blessing whose highest fulfillment would be found in the perfect leadership, work, and cleansing sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This sets up an interesting possibility. Jesus Christ was most likely born sometime in the fall, likely around—if not on—the Feast of Trumpets (see "[When Was Jesus Born?](#)"). If we count back nine months, we arrive at a date in the winter. It is possible, then, that Kislev 24 is the date when the power of the Most High God overshadowed Mary and caused her to conceive the Messiah ([Luke 1:35](#)).

A play on words in verse 19 seems to support this. The question is asked, "Is the seed still in the barn?" The word translated as "seed" is elsewhere translated as "child" or "posterity." *Zerubbabel* means "seed of Babylon" or "planted in Babylon." More importantly, when God told Abraham, "In your *seed* all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" ([Genesis 22:18](#); [28:14](#)), the Seed that God was referring to was Jesus Christ—42 generations later!

[Haggai 2:19](#) is describing a time when the seeds from the previous harvest are not in the barn because they have been planted, but it is before any fruit was produced. It could also, then, describe a Child who has been conceived, but not yet born—and through that Child the blessing of cleansing and leadership would come for Judah, Israel, the church, and eventually the entire world. If Jesus Christ were conceived on this date, it would be a remarkably apt application of what God means when He says, "From this day I will bless."

As significant as Kislev 24 is—and it is significant, if for no other reason than that it is mentioned, directly or indirectly, five times in one chapter—and as significant as it may be again in the future, we do not have to wait for winter for God's blessing. God is already blessing us. However, He is not just blessing us for our own sakes. He is blessing those whom He has called so that through the cleansing that we have, the High Priest that we have, the [Holy Spirit](#) that we have, and the pure and clean hearts that we are developing, our lives may be a testimony of what God is willing to do for His covenant people.

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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