



“Rebuild: An Old Testament Study of Ezra and Nehemiah”

Session 3: Rebuilding Again & Resolution

June 27, 2024 6:30 PM

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that we each are a part of the Body of Christ, and that we are being built into a spiritual Temple for Your greater glory. Keep us from falling prey to discouragement and fear, for we realize that they are counter-productive to a fruitful Christian life. May we rejoice with all the saints and worship before Your throne, knowing that the joy of the Lord strengthens our inner selves and helps us to grow in grace and in a knowledge of Jesus. We pray that we may submit our lives to you and to be ready to resist the opposition we may face. May we finish the good work that You have prepared for us to do, for our eternal benefit and Your greater glory. This we ask in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Session 2 Recap

Two weeks ago in Session 2, we looked at the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. After the first returning group with Zerubbabel built their homes, they then turned towards the Temple and its foundation. They first built an altar for sacrifices, and then celebrated the Feast of Booths, commemorating the journey of the Israelite people in the wilderness and God's ever-present protection. Worship was going to be a central act for the returning people. Next, they built the foundation for the Temple. Following this completion, they worshipped God – some lifted praise, while others wept, remembering the Temple of old. Chapter 4 highlighted the opposition the Israelites faced in rebuilding the Temple, beginning with the foundation and covering the next centuries' worth. Despite opposition, the Jews moved forward with their rebuild – of the Temple, community, and worship.

Opening Question...

When was a time in your life that you celebrated something God had done for you?

Ezra Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 Overview

Chapter 4 ended with the Temple rebuilding stopped because of opposition, and for a time the adversaries seemed to have won. Chapters 5 and 6 show God's sovereign hand in the resumption and completion of the work – culminating in a joyful dedication of the rebuilt Temple and the celebration of ceremonial practices there. These passages complete the book's first half, resolving the story of the first group of returned exiles under Zerubbabel. In these chapters, we will also see God sending the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to resume the work.

Scripture Focus – Ezra Chapter 5 (verses 1 – 17)

Vs. 1 – 2 – The returned exiles to Judah had stopped their work on the Temple because of opposition. This stoppage continued until the second year of reign by King Darius of Persia. God then sends the prophets of Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the Jewish people to restart their work. (If you read these two prophetic books, you will see words of encouragement, all focuses on the goodness of God. I will be preaching from Haggai chapter 1 this Sunday!) God sent these two prophets to encourage and strengthen His people. These two prophets not only preached, but got involved in the labor. God still sends prophetic voices today to the church. These words can be for edification, exhortation, or consolation. Whatever their reason, they should be heeded. The Jewish exiles, now settled back in Jerusalem, heeded the words of the prophets.

Vs. 3 – 5 – The non-Jews who lived nearby attempted to hinder the construction of the Temple. But while the legal debate went on and the decision was under appeal, the Jews continued to rebuild. When we are doing God's work, others may try to delay, confuse, or ever frustrate us. However, we can proceed with confidence. God will accomplish his purposes in our world, no matter who attempts to block them. Just as He watched over the Jewish elders, so He watches over us. The key is to concentrate on God's purpose, and don't be sidetracked by intrigues or slander.

Vs. 6 – 17 – The opposition sent a plea to the Assyrian king, King Darius, to halt the rebuilding. The composition of the letter is quite intriguing. A few important things to note. First, while the Jewish people began rebuilding the Temple, the workers were confronted by the Persia-appointed governor of the region, demanding to know who gave permission for their construction project. This shows that communication across the Assyrian empire was not great. Second, in the letter written to King Darius, the opposition referred to the Temple being rebuilt as the “house of the great God”. When asked about “who” was rebuilding the Temple, the Jewish people responded, “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.” So even though it had been many years since the destruction of the Temple, the displacement of the people of Judah, and the overthrow of the kingdom, God still held extremely high influence within this region.

Third, we see that the Jewish people spoke up with extreme faith. It is not always easy to speak up for our faith in an unbelieving world. But we must. The way to deal with pressure and intimidation – similar to what the Jewish people were facing as they rebuild the Temple – is to recognize who we work for – GOD! Our allegiance is to Him first, people second. When we contemplate the reactions and criticisms of hostile people, we can become paralyzed with fear. If we try to offend no one to please everyone, we will not be effective. God is our leader, and His rewards are most important. So do not be intimidated. Let others know by your words and actions whom you really serve.

(One small note about names, countries, and dates. Cyrus is called King of Persia in Ezra 1:1 and King of Babylon in 5:13. Since Persia had just conquered Babylon, Cyrus was actually king of both nations. Babylon is more important to this story because it was the location of the Hebrews’ 70-year exile. The Babylon in 5:17 may refer to the city of Babylon, which was capital of the nation of Babylon.)

Follow Up Questions...

1. What does it say about God that He sent three leaders – Zerubbabel first, then Haggai and Zechariah – to lead the people in the rebuilding of the Temple?

2. What does it say to us as “workers for God” that we may or will face opposition when we do His work?

3. What does it say about our God that even the opposition recognized the Temple as “the house of the great God”?

Scripture Focus – Ezra Chapter 6 (verses 1 – 22)

Vs. 1 – 2 – King Darius issued a decree for the archives to be searched about the possible rebuilding project sanctioned by Cyrus. One interesting note – King Darius could have simply said, “Stop!” But he did not. God was working. Many clay and papyrus documents recording business transactions and historical data have been discovered in this area (which is present day Syria). A great library and archives with thousands of such records have been discovered at Ebla, Syria.

Vs. 3 – 5 – The text provided in scripture here is probably a short part of a longer document. The document in Ezra 6 makes no explicit reference to the return from the exile, but it sets aside funds from the royal treasury for the building project. One interesting note brought about by a biblical scholar: where was the money/supplies/other things being kept when the building project was placed on hold? Someone was either living in a life of luxury, or was living in fear that someone was going to rob them of all the Temple’s treasury!

Vs. 6 – 12 – King Darius tells the opposition to stay away, cut it out! King Darius even went further by making sure all the costs were covered for the Temple. Anything “lost” during the period of pause would be covered by the taxes of the people in that community. This would have hurt the opposition’s morale, since it would essentially be coming out of their pockets. King Darius also provided livestock for any animal sacrifice that would be needed by the Jewish people. The specifics of the sacrificial animals would suggest the King had a Jewish adviser, knowing specifically what the Jewish people needed. Anyone who violated the King’s decree – specifically the opposition – would be punished by death. The reason for King Darius’ generosity is his hope would that this would prevent any type of revolt from the Jewish people.

Vs. 13 – 15 – The book of Ezra carefully pointed out that rebuilding the Temple was commanded first by God and then by the kings, who were His instruments. How ironic and wonderful that God’s work was continued by the discovery of a lost paragraph in a pagan library! All the opposition of powerful forces was stopped by a clause in a legal document. God’s will is supreme over all rulers, all historical events, and all hostile forces. He can deliver us in ways we cannot imagine. If we trust in His power and love, no opposition can stop us. The Jewish people completed the rebuilt Temple in 516 BC.

Vs. 16 – 22 – Feasting and celebration were in order at the great Temple dedication. This celebration was similar to the one that Solomon had when he dedicated the Temple in 1 Kings 8:63, although Solomon offered more than 200 times as many cattle and sheep. This book of Moses mentioned was probably the book of Leviticus. The priests and Levites were organized into groups in order to do “the service of God...as it is written in the book of Moses.” There is a time to celebrate, but there is also a time to work. Both are proper and necessary when worshiping God, and both are pleasing to Him.

The Jewish people also observed Passover. This was especially important at this time because this piece of the Jewish people’s story – God providing freedom and establishing them as a people, community, and nation – was what was taking place in Jerusalem again. God had turned the King of Assyria’s heart towards them, and because of this, their Temple had been rebuilt to honor their God, the God of Israel.

Follow Up Questions...

1. King Darius refers to the “God who has caused his name to dwell there” – this “house of God that is in Jerusalem” in verse 12? In what ways does it show God is at work in the world when the king of a foreign nation acknowledges our God?
2. What did some of the Jewish people have to give up to help make the rebuilt Temple a success? What might we have to give up to make God’s plan or mission a success?

3. The Jewish people worshiped and celebrated once the Temple was completed. Why is it critical to gather with others and worship God? What does the example of the Jewish exiles reveal about celebrating even the small things that God has done for you?

4. What are some small victories that you can thank God for today?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for all of your many blessings – both great and small. We praise you today for all you have done and ask you to teach us each day what it means to truly worship you with our lives. Deepen our understanding and appreciation of what you have done so that we may continually give you the praise and adoration you deserve. Amen.

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Session 4 – A Second Return by God’s Good Hand

Tuesday, July 2 6:30 PM

Ezra Chapters 7 & 8

Facebook Live
