

# Free to Worship

Ezra 6:1-12

SS Lesson for 03/13/2022

**Devotional Scripture:** Ps 21:8-13

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Ezra 6:12*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### FREEDOM THROUGH PAST PROMISES (EZRA 6:1-5)

##### *Promises from the past (1-2)*

- From the past that teaches us hope (Rom 15:4)
- From the past that help us run a race with perseverance (Heb 12:1)
- From the past that should be followed (Acts 3:22-24)
- From the past that teach us to follow the correct Way (Acts 24:14-15)
- From the past that reveals the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4-6)
- From the past that teach us patience (James 5:10)

##### *Promises of provisions (3-5)*

- Provisions for both physical and spiritual needs (Psalm 104:15)
- Provisions for when we are weak (1 Kings 19:5-8)
- Provisions for when we are needy (2 Kings 4:2-6)
- Provisions that are supernatural (Matthew 14:17-21)
- Provisions for good works (2 Cor. 9:8)

#### FREEDOM THROUGH PROTECTION (EZRA 6:6-12)

##### *Protection of leadership (6-7)*

- Protection of having God with them wherever they go (Josh 1:6-9)
- Protection of God strengthening and helping them (Isa 41:10)
- Protection of having God for them (Rom 8:31)
- Protection of God's deliverance (2 Thess 3:1-4)
- Protection of God's rescue (Jer 1:17-19)

##### *Protection of finances and possessions (8-9)*

- By trusting God and being content (1 Tim 6:6-10)
- By knowing God never will forsake (Heb 13:5)
- By knowing life does not consist of abundance (Luke 12:15)
- By knowing God's promises to bless beyond our capacity (Mal 3:10)
- By knowing God will supply our physical needs (2 Cor 9:10)
- By knowing God is more than able to provide all things at all times (2 Cor 9:8)

##### *Protection of worship (10)*

- Protected because all will worship before God (Ps 22:27-28)
- Protected because God will be the eternal King over all the earth (Zech 14:8-9)
- Protected because God's kingdom will be glorious for all nations (Rev 21:24-27)
- Protected because it is commanded (Matt 4:10)
- Protected because we are to serve Him only (Deut 6:13)
- Protected because we are to have no other gods (Exodus 20:3)
- Protected because God is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14)

##### *Protection through punishments of offenders (11-12)*

- Punishment for doing evil (John 5:28-29)
- Punishment because of not being obedient to God (2 Thess 1:7-8)
- Punishment for being a hypocrite (Matt 23:13)
- Punishment of being shut out from the presence of God (2 Thess 1:9)
- Punishment filled with God's wrath (Rev 14:10-11)
- Punishment of being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15)
- Punishment named the second death (Rev 21:8)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

This lesson contains the text of a decree of Persian King Darius I (reigned 522–486 BC). He came to power after several years of internal strife. Darius strengthened the Persian government, established a new method of taxation, and further organized the empire. The decree continued a policy established by Cyrus (reigned 539–530 BC). His policy allowed for the return of Jewish exiles to Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Jewish temple (Ezra 1:2–5). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the exiles returned to Jerusalem and Judah (Ezra 2:1–2; see Zechariah 4:9). Two years after the exiles returned, reconstruction began on the temple in Jerusalem, in 535 BC (Ezra 3:8–9). However, the reconstruction was delayed several times by local opposition and regional authorities (4:1–5, 24). Today’s Scripture text comes as a response to questioning from Persian officials Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai. After seeing the efforts at reconstruction, they questioned Zerubbabel and the local leaders concerning whose authority granted them rebuilding rights (Ezra 5:3, 9). The builders noted that their authority came from God and Cyrus. A letter was sent to Darius to inquire on the nature and authority of Cyrus’s decree (5:5–17). Today’s lesson concerns Cyrus’s decree and Darius’s response to the Persian officials. While Darius was concerned with following Cyrus’s decree, he also had a pragmatic reason to support the temple’s reconstruction. By allowing agreeable Israelites to return to their homeland, Darius would have loyal subjects located in a geographically expedient place near Egypt, a region known for its rebellions and insurrections. Additionally, Darius would be able to institute a new tax system among the repatriated Jews in the regions of Judah, thus increasing his coffers. Ezra 4:8–6:18 is written in the Aramaic language (unlike the Hebrew of Ezra 1; compare 4:7). Aramaic was used for business and government dealings of the Persian Empire. As our lesson text records official government documentation, the use of Aramaic is understandable.

### Key Verse: Ezra 6:12

*And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**5:1-2.** The work on the temple had been stopped (4:1-5, 24), from 535 to 520 B.C. Now under the influence of two important prophets, **Haggai** and **Zechariah**, it was resumed. The preaching of these two men is recorded in the biblical books bearing their respective names. Haggai prophesied from August to December 520 B.C., and Zechariah prophesied for two years beginning in October-November 520. They were **helping** by exhorting and encouraging (cf. 6:14; Hag. 1:8; 2:4; Zech. 4:7-9). They were vitally concerned with the building of the temple because they realized that their nation could never fulfill the obligations of the Mosaic Covenant till the temple worship was reinstated. Both of these **prophets** placed the blame for the hard times the nation experienced during this period on the people’s lack of obedience in not rebuilding the temple. However, Ezra did not deal with that question in his book. He stressed the outside opposition which was also a factor in slowing the work. The building process itself was spearheaded by **Zerubbabel** and **Jeshua**, the civil and religious leaders, respectively.

**5:3-5.** But as soon as the work was resumed, another effort (cf. 4:1-5) was made to stop it. Israel’s leaders came into direct conflict with the duly established local authorities who were responsible to the Persian crown. In a Babylonian record dated 502 B.C. the name **Tattenai** and his office as **governor of Trans-Euphrates** are mentioned. Syria-Palestine was under him, an area including but much larger than Israel. **Shethar-Bozenai** was probably an assistant to Tattenai. It would have been Tattenai’s responsibility, on hearing of this building activity in his territory, to investigate it. Major political unrest was seething at the beginning of Darius’ reign. Possibly Tattenai thought the temple-**building** project in Jerusalem would grow into a full-scale rebellion against the empire. The group of officials **asked** Zerubbabel and Jeshua **who authorized** the project (the word **structure** is lit., “wooden structure”), and asked for **the names of the people** responsible for it (cf. 5:9-10). But despite this challenge, the work did not stop because **the eye of their God was watching over** them (cf. “God... was over them,” v. 1). Occurring frequently in Ezra and Nehemiah are the words “the *hand* of the LORD was on him” and similar expressions (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18,

22, 31; Neh. 2:8, 18). God was providentially caring for them (by His “eye”) and blessing them (by His “hand”). Clearly God was at work in spite of this opposition because through it the project was eventually given help.

**5:6-10.** Ezra recorded **the letter** (cf. **This is a copy** of the letter; 4:11, 23; 7:11) **Tattenai... sent to King Darius** about the building activity going on in Jerusalem (5:7-16). Tattenai began his letter by noting that **work** was being done on **the temple of the great God** in Jerusalem. This does not mean that Tattenai believed Yahweh of Israel was the supreme God. Most likely he meant that the God to whom the Jews were building the **temple** was the major God of the area. In the ancient Near East there was a highly developed belief in local deities. Tattenai noted that **large stones** and **timbers** (cf. 6:4; 1 Kings 6:36) were being used in the work and that the Jews were working **with diligence** and were **making rapid progress**. He added that he had asked **who authorized** the work (cf. Ezra 5:3) and that he had asked for **the names** of those who were leading the building program (cf. v. 4).

**5:11-12.** Tattenai’s letter then included the Jews’ answers to his questions (vv. 11-16). Zerubbabel and Jeshua called themselves **servants of the God of heaven and earth**, not servants of Persia! The true God, Yahweh, was superior to Darius’ god, Ahura Mazda, whom Darius called “the god of heaven.” **Years** earlier **Israel had a great king**, Solomon, and had had a beautiful **temple**. It was a prominent structure in the ancient world. **But because** of sin (**our fathers angered the God of heaven**), God **handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar**. The Jews knew why the **temple** was **destroyed** and the people **deported**. In God’s promise/threat (Deut. 28) He said that the people would be taken into captivity if they did not live according to the covenant He instituted with them as they were ready to enter the land of promise. Not only was Nebuchadnezzar involved in the fall of Jerusalem; God Himself was responsible! Nebuchadnezzar was merely an agent of God’s anger on His people (cf. “My servant Nebuchadnezzar” in Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10)—an anger which was designed to purify the nation so that some would return to the land as a believing remnant. The Exile did not mean that Yahweh was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar’s gods.

**5:13-17.** In response to Tattenai Zerubbabel and Jeshua stated that **Cyrus** had allowed a remnant to return to **Jerusalem** to **rebuild** the temple and even gave them **articles** which had been taken from Solomon’s **temple** (cf. 1:2-4, 7-11). The letter-writers also recounted the fact that **Cyrus** gave **Sheshbazzar** the task of carrying out the king’s command—to return the **articles** and to build another **temple** in the city. Sheshbazzar was mentioned to show Tattenai that the building program was legal. Thus it seems likely that Sheshbazzar was a Persian official whose name carried some weight with Tattenai. Are **Sheshbazzar** and Zerubbabel the same person? Many think so because Sheshbazzar **laid the temple foundations**, and so did Zerubbabel (3:8-10). However, this is not absolute proof that the two men were identical. Sheshbazzar could have been responsible, as the king’s representative, to see that the work was begun, and Zerubbabel the Jewish leader who completed the task. Tattenai and the officials asked that the king research the records in Babylon (cf. 6:1-2) to find out if what the Jews had said about **a decree** from **Cyrus** was true. That such records were carefully kept is attested by archeology.

**6:1-5.** Tattenai had requested that Babylon’s **archives** be **searched** for the document (5:17) but it was not found there. Instead the **scroll** (of papyrus or leather) **was found in... Ecbatana** (modern Hamadan), 300 miles northeast of Babylon and capital of **Media** (6:1-2). The scroll was in Ecbatana, because that is where **Cyrus** had spent the summer of 538, when he issued the **decree**. This Ecbatana record was an official “minute” with three details that the verbal and written proclamation (1:1-4) apparently did not contain: (1) **The temple was to be 90 feet high and 90 feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers** (cf. 5:8; 1 Kings 6:36). (2) The project was to be financed by funds from **the royal treasury**. This shows the earnestness of Cyrus’ repatriation program. (3) The returned **gold and silver articles** were to be put in **their places in the temple**.

**6:6-12.** King **Darius** then gave three instructions to **Tattenai** and his associates: (1) He told them to leave the Jews alone and **not interfere** with the building of the **temple** (vv. 6-7). The words **stay away from there** were a common Aramaic legal statement. This was to be in accord with the edict of the great King Cyrus. (2) Tax money was to be used to help finance the project and animals were to be supplied **daily** so that **sacrifices** could be made at the altar of the new temple along with food items for the **offerings** (vv. 8-10). Flour (from **wheat**), **salt**, and **oil** were to be used in the grain offerings (Lev. 2:1-2, 7, 13), and **wine** for drink offerings (Lev. 23:13) on feast days. (3) **Anyone** who disobeyed the edict was to suffer a horrible fate (Ezra 6:11-12). He was to be **impaled on a beam** taken from **his own house**, and **his house** was to be demolished. Execution by impaling was practiced in the Assyrian and Persian Empires. Darius wanted no disturbance in this part of his vast kingdom. The pagan king acknowledged that **God had caused His name to dwell at Jerusalem**. Darius probably thought of Yahweh as a local deity (cf. 5:6-10), whereas Ezra, in

recording that statement, knew of the covenantal significance in Yahweh's name dwelling in Jerusalem. So Tattenai's inquiry backfired. Instead of stopping the temple work, he had to let it proceed and even had to help pay for it out of his **revenues!** Darius' curse on anyone who would **destroy the temple** was fulfilled in: (a) Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated it in 167 B.C., and died insane three years later; (b) Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.), who added extensively to the temple to glorify himself, and who had domestic trouble and died of disease; and (c) the Romans, who destroyed the temple in A.D. 70, and later had their empire destroyed.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Freedom through Past Promises (Ezra 6:1-5)**

1 Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon.

2 And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus:

3 In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits,

4 with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury.

5 Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of God" —

### **Promises from the past (1-2)**

*From the past that teaches us hope (Rom 15:4)*

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

*From the past that help us run a race with perseverance (Heb 12:1)*

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

*From the past that should be followed (Acts 3:22-24)*

22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' 24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.

*From the past that teach us to follow the correct Way (Acts 24:14-15)*

14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

*From the past that reveals the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4-6)*

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

*From the past that teach us patience (James 5:10)*

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

### **Promises of provisions (3-5)**

*Provisions for both physical and spiritual needs (Psalm 104:15)*

15 wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.

*Provisions for when we are weak (1 Kings 19:5-8)*

5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

*Provisions for when we are needy (2 Kings 4:2-6)*

2 Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil." 3 Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." 5 She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.

*Provisions that are supernatural (Matthew 14:17-21)*

17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. 18 "Bring them here to me," he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

*Provisions for good works (2 Cor. 9:8)*

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

### **Freedom through Protection (Ezra 6:6-12)**

6 Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who are beyond the River, keep yourselves far from there.

7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site.

8 Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered.

9 And whatever they need — young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem — let it be given them day by day without fail,

10 that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

11 Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this.

12 And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.

## **Protection of leadership (6-7)**

*Protection of having God with them wherever they go (Josh 1:6-9)*

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

*Protection of God strengthening and helping them (Isa 41:10)*

10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

*Protection of having God for them (Rom 8:31)*

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

*Protection of God's deliverance (2 Thess 3:1-4)*

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

*Protection of God's rescue (Jer 1:17-19)*

17 "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. 18 Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. 19 They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord.

## **Protection of finances and possessions (8-9)**

*By trusting God and being content (1 Tim 6:6-10)*

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

*By knowing God never will forsake (Heb 13:5)*

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

*By knowing life does not consist of abundance (Luke 12:15)*

15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

*By knowing God's promises to bless beyond our capacity (Mal 3:10)*

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

*By knowing God will supply our physical needs (2 Cor 9:10)*

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

*By knowing God is more than able to provide all things at all times (2 Cor 9:8)*

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

### **Protection of worship (10)**

*Protected because all will worship before God (Ps 22:27-28)*

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

*Protected because God will be the eternal King over all the earth (Zech 14:8-9)*

8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. 9 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

*Protected because God's kingdom will be glorious for all nations (Rev 21:24-27)*

24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

*Protected because it is commanded (Matt 4:10)*

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

*Protected because we are to serve Him only (Deut 6:13)*

13 Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

*Protected because we are to have no other gods (Exodus 20:3)*

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

*Protected because God is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14)*

14 Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

### **Protection through punishments of offenders (11-12)**

*Punishment for doing evil (John 5:28-29)*

28 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

*Punishment because of not being obedient to God (2 Thess 1:7-8)*

7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

*Punishment for being a hypocrite (Matt 23:13)*

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

*Punishment of being shut out from the presence of God (2 Thess 1:9)*

9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

*Punishment filled with God's wrath (Rev 14:10-11)*

10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

*Punishment of being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15)*

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

*Punishment named the second death (Rev 21:8)*

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### *Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh*

#### **Temple Construction Resumed and Completed (Ezra 5-6)**

The prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah did the job. The rebuilding of the temple resumed, with the encouragement and support of the prophets. The peoples of the land were greatly disturbed to see that the temple construction had resumed. Tattenai, the governor of the Trans-Euphrates area, along with others, challenged Zerubbabel. They wished to know who authorized the temple construction and the completion of the walls. They also wanted to have the names of those who were in charge of the project. In contemporary legal terms, the enemies of the Jews were seeking an injunction against them. They hoped that an order would be given to cease and desist from this construction project until a hearing could be held and a verdict pronounced.

Had an injunction been granted, construction could easily have been delayed for a year or more, even if the king of Persia ruled in favor of the Jews. But God was looking after His people. No order was given to stop the construction until the king had reached a decision. I find the letter that was sent to Darius most interesting. The Jews' case was presented with amazing accuracy:

11 They responded to us in the following way: 'We are servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the temple which was previously built many years ago. A great king of Israel built it and completed it. 12 But after our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he delivered them into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and exiled the people to Babylon. 13 But in the first year of King Cyrus of Babylon, King Cyrus enacted a decree to rebuild this temple of God. 14 Even the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and had brought to the palace of Babylon—even those things King Cyrus brought from the palace of Babylon and presented to a man by the name of Sheshbazzar whom he had appointed as governor. 15 He said to him, "Take these vessels and go deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt in its proper location" (Ezra 5:11-15).

When Darius ordered the archives to be searched, he learned that the Jews had spoken correctly. Cyrus had given the Jews authority to rebuild Jerusalem, and the temple in particular. Darius gave very specific orders, permitting the Jews to continue, while prohibiting the peoples of the land from interfering:

6 "Now Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their colleagues, the officials of the Trans-Euphrates—all of you stay far away from there! 7 Leave the work on this temple of God alone. Let the governor of Judah and the elders of Judah rebuild this temple of God in its proper place. 8 "I also hereby issue orders as to what you are to do with those elders of the Jews in order to rebuild this temple of God. From the royal treasury, from the taxes of Trans-Euphrates the complete costs will be given to these men, so that there may be no halt. 9 Whatever is needed—whether oxen or rams or lambs or burnt offerings for the God of heaven or wheat or salt or wine or oil, as required by the priests who are in Jerusalem—must be given to them daily without any neglect, 10 so that they may be offering incense to the God of heaven and praying for the good fortune of the king and his family. 11 I hereby give orders that if anyone changes this directive a beam is to be pulled out from his house and he is to be raised up and impaled on it, and his house is to be reduced to a rubbish heap for this indiscretion. 12 May God who makes his name to reside there overthrow any king or people who



reaches out to cause such change or to destroy this temple of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have given orders. Let them be carried out with precision!" (Ezra 6:6-12)

I have to chuckle as I read the words of Ezra 6:13:

Then Tattenai governor of the Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their colleagues acted accordingly—with precision, just as Darius the king had given instructions (Ezra 6:13).

The words of warning contained in the decree of Darius took the wind out of the sails of the people of the land. They no longer opposed the rebuilding of the temple, and indeed assisted in whatever ways the Jews requested (which were probably few).

As a result, the temple was soon completed (Ezra 6:13-15). There was a great celebration as the temple was joyfully dedicated, and as they observed Passover.

19 The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 20 The priests and the Levites had purified themselves, and they all were ceremonially clean. They sacrificed the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their colleagues the priests, and for themselves. 21 The Israelites who were returning from the exile ate it, along with all those who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the nations of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel. 22 They observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, for the Lord had given them joy and had changed the opinion of the king of Assyria toward them, so that he assisted them in the work on the temple of God, the God of Israel (Ezra 6:19-22). This time there was no weeping.

*(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/22-return-promised-land-ezra>)*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The sovereignty the Jews gained under Cyrus and maintained under Darius was short-lived. In the centuries that followed, the Jewish people experienced many years of occupation. However, in that specific season under the reign of and support from Darius, the Jews survived and even flourished as they resettled their homeland. Especially in difficult circumstances and trying situations, God calls his people to be faithful to his purpose for their lives. That Cyrus and Darius, two Gentile leaders, allowed for the resettlement of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the temple showed the surprising ways God provides for his people. How has God called you to obey him? Through what unexpected circumstances is he calling you to obey?

### **Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary**

The Work Restarted - The exiles returned to Judah from Babylon with the intention of rebuilding the Jewish temple. The people neglected their assignment for about 16 years. The families concerned themselves with reestablishing their properties. And they also were constantly harassed by surrounding enemy neighbors. God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to preach to the congregation and get them to finish the temple. God specifically spoke to Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, encouraging them to be brave and restart the work. The prophets assured the people of God's backing of their efforts. God's Word proved to be a fresh wind of energy and enthusiasm to get the people to return to the building—in anticipation of a place to worship.

Confidence in God - Tatnai, the Persian governor over the province of Judah, became concerned. He saw large stones used for the building and thought it might be a coming revolt. He asked who gave the Jews the authority to work on the temple, and who was doing the work? The construction workers answered without hesitation—we are God's servants continuing to build His house. They knew God supported their efforts.

Provisions for the Temple - King Darius, the Persian monarch in charge at this time, authorized a search for the documentation permitting the Jewish people to rebuild. The former king, Cyrus, had signed off on their work, permitting the people to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Cyrus ordered a return of the temple valuables and ordered funds from the royal treasury to be used for the rebuilding project. The king even requested animals be given to the Jews for sacrifices. King Darius realized the previous king had blessed the labor by the Jewish nation. He told Tatnai and other officials to allow the work to continue. Anyone who hindered the progress of the temple was subject to punishment under the Persian government.

God Is Able - The lesson for us today is simple: never underestimate the power of God's Spirit to renew His people and reestablish praise and glory to His name.