

## **Ezra 5:1-17 and 6:1-22**

### **The Temple Completed Despite Resistance by Adversaries**

Picking up the story in Ezra, Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest begin again to rebuild the Temple after being forced to stop working on it by the Samaritans and the surrounding peoples.

Zerubbabel had persuaded the new king Darius to rescind the decree that ordered the Jews to halt their project.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah are specifically mentioned as helping with their prophecies.

**Ezra 5:1-2** - "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them."

But now the new governor of the province of the whole area "Beyond the River" (of which the province of Judah was a part) distrusted the Jews' story about this reversal of policy.

**Ezra 5:3-4** - "At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?"

So Tatnai, the new governor appointed by Darius, and his companions then send their own letter to Darius asking for clarification, but work still continues on the Temple while they wait for Darius to answer.

There is a Babylonian record dated 502 B.C. which speaks of 'Ta-at[-tan-ni] governor of Ebernari' (i.e., of Beyond the River).

But their letter misrepresents the situation, charging that the Jews were also rebuilding the city's walls. That was not part of Cyrus' original decree. Rebuilding the walls might be understood as a sign that the city could rebel against the Persians.

(The rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls would take place decades later under Nehemiah, with permission from another Persian king).

**Ezra 5:5** - "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter."

This points to God's omniscience - He knows and sees, to protect His people throughout the world.

- **2 Chronicles 16:9** - "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

### **Ezra 6 - Darius Finds Cyrus' Decree**

**Ezra 6:1** - "Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon."

Darius, who had already given permission to Zerubbabel to continue rebuilding, ordered a search that found the original decree of Cyrus in order to satisfy the objections of Tatnai and the other officials.

Not only that, but Tatnai and the other Persian officials were commanded to give the Jews anything else they needed to finish the building.

This is a powerful example of **Proverbs 21:1** - "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes. "

The order came with a threat of punishment:

**Ezra 6:11-12** - "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed."

Although Darius was inclined by the Holy Spirit to help the Jews, he could be harsh to his enemies. According to Herodotus, Darius I impaled three thousand Babylonians after he took Babylon.

### **The Temple is Completed**

**Ezra 6:14-15** - "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. 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."

[Artaxerxes was a common title of Persian kings. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus says the name signifies "a mighty warrior." This Artaxerxes was probably the king who, in the seventh year of his reign, allowed Ezra to teach the Torah and in the 20th year of

his reign (445/444 BC), granted Nehemiah official letters and timber to rebuild the city walls and gates,]

With the formal dedication of the Temple, the sacrifices for sin and trespass as well as sweet savor offerings - the whole burnt offerings and Peace Offerings - could be completed according to the Torah instructions from God.

**Ezra 6:16-18** - "And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses."

As the priests and Levites begin their service in the Temple, the newly rebuilt building begins again to fulfill its purpose as an ongoing display of God's plan of redemption through His Messiah Jesus, despite missing some of its vital elements.

### **A Joyful Passover**

If the tradition is correct, this was the first Passover they had celebrated in over 50 years of captivity and almost 20 years more of rebuilding.

(Jeremiah had predicted 70 years of captivity, probably counting from Nebuchadnezzar's first siege and deportations in 606 B.C. to Zerubbabel's commission in 536 B.C., with almost 20 more years of rebuilding mixed with delays until the Temple's dedication in 516 B.C. Or it could also count from the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to the dedication of the rebuilt Temple.)

**Ezra 6:19-22** - "And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat, And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

"all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen" - these were Gentiles from Babylon who had renounced idolatry, become proselytes and been circumcised.

Even during the exile, God had been gathering other peoples and languages to the truth, bringing them to become joined to Israel. Pretty amazing!

“turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them” - this was an archaic form of address to describe Darius, who now ruled the former territories of the king of Assyria.

God had hardened the heart of Pharaoh to free his people from Egyptian bondage. Then he stirred the heart of Cyrus to release them from exile. Now he turned the heart of Darius to finish rebuilding the Temple.

**Bottom Line:** Viewing the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem and its Temple in 587 B.C., no one would have bet on its being rebuilt after 70 years of captivity,. Even the continuity of the Jews as a distinct people seemed to be in doubt..

Despite what circumstances look like, or how fervent the opposition, when we are involved in carrying out the will of God in our lives, "the eye of our God is upon us" to see it to completion.

- **Philippians 2:13** - “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”