

Ezra 6-7

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to Ezra chapter 6?

It's been a couple of weeks, so let's remind ourselves of the setting and situation we're reading about.

The Jews have been allowed to return to their homeland after 70 years of Babylonian captivity. A group of about 50k Jews returned to Jerusalem and had begun to rebuild the temple. They laid the temple foundation, when the enemies of God rose up and notified the king of Persia of what was happening. They sent a false letter to Persia, so the Jews were then forced to stop building the temple.

Then in chapter 5 after about 12-14 years, temple construction resumes after God sends Haggai and Zachariah to rebuke the Jews—they were focused on their own houses and didn't consider the house of God.

So temple construction continues, and suddenly, the enemies rise up again, saying who is saying you can rebuild the temple. Chapter 5 ends with Persian leader sending a letter to King Darius—look at **5:17 Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter**

So now, the fate of the temple rests in a discovery of an old decree that authorized the rebuilding of the temple.

The title of tonight's message is TRUST GOD!!

Let's pray

1-2

1 Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives,^[fn] where the treasures were stored in Babylon. 2

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

It is interesting to think how easily the scroll might not have been found. Ladies, you know how it is when we men search for stuff—we look for 10 seconds, don't move anything, say we can't find it!

But immediately we notice that God's hand is upon this entire situation. The scroll was found in what was essentially a vacation palace—not the place they thought it would be found. God was guiding this whole thing.

And now we're about to see what the scroll had to say...

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,"

There is some debate among historians here about the size of the temple that's mentioned here because these dimensions are greater than even Solomon's temple. Here the dimensions of the 2nd temple were to be twice as high and three times as wide as Solomon's temple. But remember, the older

people when they saw the foundation wailed saying this temple wasn't as good as Solomons. So what gives?

Well some theologians think that these dimensions that Cyrus gave were the limits of what the Jews could build, instead of the actual dimensions of the new structure. Others believe that Cyrus intended to sponsor a temple that would exceed Solomon's and thereby bring greater glory to himself.

Verse 4 adds an interesting detail

4 with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. This construction technique seems to have been a precaution against earthquakes. Not only did Cyrus give permission for the temple to be rebuilt, he commanded the funding of the work from the royal 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"—In the original edict, King Cyrus ordered that the spoils taken from the house of God some two generations before when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem be returned to the Jerusalem temple.

It was a remarkable example of God's providence that so many of these gold and silver articles of the house of God still existed intact and that King Cyrus commanded them to be returned. It reminds us that God pays attention to even the smallest of details.

So that was the letter of the original instruction to build the temple from King Cyrus.

Now, King Darius addresses the governor Tattenai in verse 6,

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. I love this. Darius says get out of the peoples way, and stop bothering them

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. Darius commanded the Persians to allow the work on the temple and the city of Jerusalem to continue without interruption. But that's not all...

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. So remember, Israel is not it's own nation, it's merely a province of Persia. And Darius decrees that the province will pay for the cost of the temple! And not only that...

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, Wow! Look how God turns the tables on His enemies. The men who try to stop

construction are ordered to pay for its completion and be at the Jews beck and call for whatever they need!

We see the wonderful hand of God at work against the objections raised by Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai recorded back in Ezra 5. See the end result of the objections by these guys was God using it to further His work instead of hindering it. This is an example of **Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

It reminds me of **Isaiah 54:17, No weapon formed against you shall prosper,
And every tongue which rises against you in judgment
You shall condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
And their righteousness is from Me,"
Says the LORD."**

And Darius doesn't stop there...

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.

Notice Darius' faith in God. He hopes the Jews will pray for him and Persia's royal family. Remember, Darius just witnessed a miracle. He was the king who was tricked by Daniel's rivals to throw Daniel to the lions. Perhaps Darus thought he owed Daniel, and part of this decree was in response to that experience?

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.

Impaling was a common method of execution in the Persian Empire and Darius practiced it. History tells us after Darius subdued a rebellion in Babylon, he ordered the impalement of 3,000 rebels there

One side of a beam was sharpened and the other side planted in the ground. The sharp point was inserted... On top of that, to make a person's house a "refuse heap" meant turning it into a public toilet.

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. So remember, the enemies of the Jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to stop the Jews from working. But instead of that, they got an order to supply them. And on top of that Darius issues a decree that nobody, no citizen or ruler or king was to alter the temple that the Jews were building.

13 Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. I wonder what went through their mind as they read this letter from Darius

14-15

14 So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. The date was February, 515 BC. This was about four and one-half years after Haggai and Zechariah had gotten the builders moving again (in 520 B.C.). It was about 21 years after the Jews had laid the foundation (in 536 B.C.)

Solomon's temple had stood for almost 400 years, but the second temple lasted longer, about 585 years, until Titus destroyed it in A.D. 70

16-17

16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses. As the prophet Zechariah had promised, a project that earlier looked like a mountain to Zerubbabel, became a plain through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19-22

19 And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21 Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel. Isn't this what's needed today in our nation? That men and women would stand up and separate ourselves from the filth? Remember we're never called to fit into this world, we're called to stand out.

22 And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. Compared with the dedication of Solomon's temple, this dedication was very modest. Solomon had offered more than 200 times as many animals.

Here the Jews offered one sin offering, which involved killing a goat, for each of the 12 tribes. The reference to the number of Israel's tribes being 12 shows that none of the tribes were "lost" during the captivity, as some modern cults claim

As chapter 7 begins a period of 58 years separates Ezra 6 from Ezra 7 (515-458 B.C.).

During this time the events in the Book of Esther took place.

In Judah, the Jews did not continue to fortify and build up Jerusalem. They were content simply to worship at the temple. Their earlier zeal to return to the law of Moses, which included separation from non-Jews, waned over time.

Over this 58- year period many of the Jews intermarried with unbelieving Gentiles. Evidently the Levites neglected the teaching of the law and temple worship became more formal than sincere. And God raises up a new man named Ezra to bring the nation back to their first love

1-5

1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—In 458 B.C., God moved Ezra, a Jewish priest and scribe who was living in Babylon, to lead another group of exiles back to the Promised Land. The name Ezra is a short form of Azariah, which means "Yahweh Has Helped."

Now we'll see that in Jerusalem, Ezra's ministry was primarily leading the people to return to observance of the Law. Since his time the Jews have regarded Ezra as a second Moses, because Ezra re-established Israel on the Mosaic Law.

"The emphasis in this chapter is on the character of Ezra, which sets the scene for chapters 9 and 10 where sin is uncovered.

Ezra's genealogy (vv. 1-5) shows that he was a man of importance whom his fellow Jews would have respected. He was a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel

6 this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. The favor of God towards Jerusalem and the Jewish people is again evident. The great generosity of the king was because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him.

Ezra was a ready, or skilled, scribe. But notice when did he get ready? When he was in captivity in Babylon.

Ezra could have pouted. He could have been angry he was not in a greater position of importance. But instead of pouting, he prepared.

Even if you're in a place of captivity, even if you feel like you're boxed in, don't quit. Prepare. Study. Pray. Seek the Lord. In due time, at the right time, the Lord will release you for those tasks He has prepared for you

So often our problem is we think we're ready for something when God knows we're not ready, and we try to rush ahead.

BTW Six times we'll hear Ezra say that the hand of God was upon him. Ezra was definitely one who was in constant touch with the Lord.

7 Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. Remember many Jews chose to remain in Babylon, but that wasn't God's intent. Zechariah 2 6 "Up, up! Flee from the land of the north," says the LORD; "for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven," says the LORD. 7 "Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." The journey was over 500 miles, and some people refused to take the step of faith 9-10

9 On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. V 10 tells us Ezra did 3 things that allowed him to be used mightily by God.

First, he prepared his heart to seek the word of God. It wasn't a check the box exercise.

Second, **and to do it**. See it doesn't do much good for those who just hear the word of God, but to live it out. **James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

Third, he was willing to teach or share with others. He didn't just keep it all to himself. Folks we have to be willing to share God's word with others.

11 This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel: The king appointed Ezra as the person responsible to him for the affairs conducted in the Jewish community in Judah. Ezra held a position in the Persian court equivalent to Secretary of State for Jewish Affairs.

12-23

12 Artaxerxes, [fn] king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven:

Perfect peace, and so forth. [fn]

13 I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; 15 and whereas you are to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; 16 and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem— 17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and

lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem.

18 And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. 19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king's treasury.

21 And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, 22 up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

Now we see that Ezra is given legal power to enforce God's law

24 Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. To promote the work of the temple in Jerusalem, Artaxerxes commanded that priests and other workers at the temple be given tax-exempt status.

25-26

25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment. What a letter!!

What would prompt a king to do such a thing? And chapter 7 ends with Ezra giving thanks

27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. This reminds us 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.**

So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me. This is interesting, because in the coming weeks we're going to see an incredible challenge that Ezra faced.