

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: The Prophets and the Temple Completed

Ezra 5:1–6:22

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The aim of this lesson is to help the class see two truths held together. First, that God completes the work He begins, and He does it through the power of His word and the providence of His unseen hand. The builders did not finish the temple by clever politics or by raising their own funds. They finished it because two prophets preached the word and God turned the heart of a pagan king to fund His house. Lead your class to marvel at this, and then to trust it personally. The God who completed the temple in Ezra is the same God who, Paul says, will perform the good work He has begun in us until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

Second, and most important, the aim is to lift the class's eyes from the stone temple to the greater temple it foreshadowed. This is a rebuilt-temple lesson, and the temptation in our day is to read it as a roadmap for a future physical temple in Jerusalem. Gently and clearly steer the class away from that. The New Testament tells us plainly what this house was pointing toward. The true temple is Christ Himself (John 2:19–21) and His body the church, a spiritual house of living stones with Christ as the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4–5; Ephesians 2:19–22). The completed temple in Ezra is covenant faithfulness on display, God keeping His word so that, in the fullness of time, the Son of David would reign over a kingdom that is His church, established at Pentecost and standing now.

Practically, press the class toward two responses that match Ezra 6, joy and separation. The exiles dedicated the house with gladness and kept the Passover, and they separated themselves from the uncleanness of the nations to seek the Lord. Help every student name a place to rejoice in God's finished and faithful work, and a place to step away from what is unclean in order to draw near. Worship and holiness belong together. A people whom God has built must be a people set apart to seek Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Ezra 5:1–2, the work resumes only after Haggai and Zechariah prophesy. What does this teach us about how God moves His people from discouragement to obedience, and what does it say about the place of the preached word of God in His work (Romans 10:17; Romans 15:4)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 5:1–2 opens with a burst of fresh life after a long silence. 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. Notice the order of events carefully. The preaching comes first, and the building comes second. Zerubbabel and Jeshua do not rise up and lay the first new stone until the word of God has been preached to them in the name of the God of Israel. This is the engine of the whole chapter. God restarts His stalled work not with new resources or new leaders but with His word freshly proclaimed.

We know from the books of Haggai and Zechariah exactly what these men preached. Haggai pressed the people on their misplaced priorities, they had paneled their own houses while God's house lay waste, and he called them to consider their ways and build (Haggai 1:4-8). Zechariah lifted their eyes with visions of God's purpose and the great promise that it is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). One preacher rebuked, the other encouraged, and together their word lit a fire under a discouraged remnant. The verse even tells us the prophets were with them, helping them. The men who preached the word also rolled up their sleeves.

Verse 2 is wonderfully concrete. Then rose up Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem. There is no long deliberation, no committee, no fresh permit sought first. The word lands, and obedient hearts simply get up and go to work. This is the pattern of all genuine response to God. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17), and true faith does not stay seated. James would later put it bluntly, be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only (James 1:22).

For us the lesson is searching and immediate. When the work of God stalls in a congregation or in a single life, the remedy God reaches for is His word preached and obeyed. We are quick to look for new programs, new energy, new personalities. God sends a preacher with an old message and waits to see who will rise up and build. Romans 15:4 reminds us that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, and this stretch of history was written so that we would trust the reviving power of God's word in our own dry seasons.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The preached word of God, not human ingenuity, is God's chosen instrument to revive His stalled work (Romans 10:17; Romans 15:4).
- Haggai and Zechariah are genuine Old Testament prophets whose authenticating word moved God's people; this is not a model for claiming new revelations today, since the faith was once for all delivered (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- True hearing produces immediate doing; faith that does not rise up and build is dead (James 1:22-25; James 2:17).
- Discouragement and delay are real even among God's faithful people, and God meets them with His word rather than condemnation.
- Those who preach the word should also be ready to labor alongside the people, as the prophets were with them.

Discussion Prompts

- What was the last sermon or Scripture that actually changed something you did? If you cannot remember one, what does that suggest about how you are listening?
- Why do we so often reach for new methods when a work stalls, instead of returning to the plain preaching and obeying of God's word?
- Who in your life functions like a Haggai (a loving rebuke) or a Zechariah (an encouraging vision), and are you letting them speak?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest with yourself. When God's word convicts you about something you have been neglecting, how quickly do you respond? Name one area where you have been hearing but not yet doing, and what it would cost you to start.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Ezra 5:3–5 the opposition reappears, but now it cannot stop the work. At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? These are Persian officials with real authority, and their question is pointed and potentially dangerous. Who gave you permission? It is the kind of inquiry that had shut the work down before. But this time the response is different.

The hinge of the passage is the magnificent statement in verse 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. The builders do not stop. They keep working while the letter goes up to the king. And the reason given is not their courage or their cleverness but the watchful, protecting eye of their God. Heaven was looking after this work, and no provincial governor could overrule the gaze of the Almighty. Proverbs 15:3 says the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, and here that truth becomes a shield.

There is a beautiful balance in how the builders carry themselves. They keep working, but they do not defy the authorities. They let the inquiry proceed, they answer honestly, they trust God to handle the outcome through the proper channels. This is faith that is neither passive nor reckless. It does not drop tools at the first hard question, and it does not pick a needless fight either. It keeps doing the next right thing under the eye of God and leaves the verdict to Him.

We work under that same eye. Hebrews 4:13 says all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. For the disobedient that is a terror, but for the faithful servant it is a deep comfort. When you do right and someone challenges your right to do it, you can keep building. The same eye that searches you also guards you. You answer to a Judge no governor can outrank, and He is watching over the work He gave you to do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's protecting providence, His eye upon His people, enables faithful work to continue under pressure (Proverbs 15:3; Psalm 33:18).
- Living before the eye of God produces a steadiness that working merely to please people never can (Hebrews 4:13; Galatians 1:10).
- Faithful courage keeps working while still respecting lawful authority and answering honestly, neither cowering nor needlessly provoking (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13–17).
- Opposition to God's work is normal and recurring, but it cannot finally thwart what God is determined to complete.
- We sometimes stop good work too quickly at the first hard question; the elders show a better way.

Discussion Prompts

- Is the thought that God's eye is always upon you mostly a comfort or mostly a discomfort right now? What does your honest answer reveal?
- Where are you tempted to stop doing right simply because someone questioned your right to do it?
- How do you tell the difference between courageous perseverance and needless picking of fights?

Question 3

Student Question:

When Tattenai questions the builders in Ezra 5:3–5, the elders keep working because the eye of their God was upon them. How does living under the watchful eye of God strengthen us to keep doing right under pressure, and how is that different from working merely to be seen by people (Proverbs 15:3; Hebrews 4:13)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 5:6–17 records Tattenai's letter to King Darius, and it is worth slowing down to notice its tone. The governor reports accurately. He passes along exactly what the elders told him, including their bold confession of who they are and what they are doing. We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up (Ezra 5:11). The builders did not hide their faith or fudge their story. They told the truth plainly, even to a hostile official, and that truth went up to the throne intact.

Their answer is striking for its theological depth. They confess the God of heaven and earth, they acknowledge that the previous temple was destroyed because their fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath (Ezra 5:12), and they appeal to the decree of Cyrus that had authorized the rebuilding (Ezra 5:13–15). They take ownership of their nation's past sin, they give God the

glory, and they rest their case on the king's own prior decree. There is no spin here, only honest testimony given with dignity.

Notice that their honesty becomes the very means God uses. Tattenai, perhaps trying to trip them up, instead writes down their accurate account and asks the king to search the records and confirm it (Ezra 5:17). A question meant to threaten the work becomes the occasion for the work to be vindicated. The straightforward truth, respectfully spoken, opens the door that intimidation tried to close.

Peter would later urge believers to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15). These elders model it. When the hard question came, they did not panic, they did not deceive, and they did not boast. They gave an honest account of their God and their hope, and they let the chips fall. Often our most fruitful witness is simply the truth told plainly to someone who expected us to flinch.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest, respectful testimony, even to hostile authorities, is a powerful instrument in God's hand (1 Peter 3:15–16).
- The builders confessed both God's glory and their nation's sin without spin (Ezra 5:11–12), modeling humble truthfulness.
- God can turn a question meant to threaten His work into the very means of vindicating it.
- We should rest our case on what is true and lawful rather than on manipulation or fear (Ephesians 4:25).
- A clear account of our hope is more persuasive than any clever evasion.

Discussion Prompts

- When pressed about your faith, are you more tempted to deceive, to boast, or to give an honest, humble answer? Why?
- Recall a time your plain honesty opened a door you expected to be slammed. What did that teach you about God?
- How can a Christian own past failures honestly without falling into either excuse-making or despair?

Question 4

Student Question:

Tattenai's letter to Darius (Ezra 5:6–17) reports exactly what the builders told him. When was the last time your honest, respectful answer to a hostile or skeptical question actually opened a door rather than closing one? What did you learn?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 6:1–5 swings the camera to the imperial archives. 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. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record. After years of delay, the whole project now hinges on a single dusty scroll. Would the original decree of Cyrus still exist? Could it be found? God had seen to it that the record was preserved, filed away in the summer palace at Ecbatana, waiting for this exact moment.

The scroll confirms everything. Cyrus had indeed decreed that the house be built, even specifying its dimensions and ordering that the gold and silver vessels Nebuchadnezzar had carried off be restored to their place (Ezra 6:3–5). The builders had told the truth, and the archive proved it. What looked like a fragile claim resting on an old memory turns out to be backed by the official, written record of the empire. The honest testimony of Ezra 5 is now vindicated by an undeniable document.

There is a quiet sermon in this scroll. God's providence often works through ordinary, unglamorous things, a clerk who filed a record, a palace where it was stored, an official who thought to search. None of these people knew they were serving the purposes of the God of heaven. Yet every one of them was a thread in the web God was weaving to keep His promise. The God who declares the end from the beginning had His servants in place long before they were needed.

This should reframe how we think about the slow, hidden seasons of God's work. When a good thing stalls and you cannot see the way forward, remember the scroll at Ecbatana. God may be preserving, in some archive you know nothing about, the very thing that will move your situation forward at the appointed time. Our task is to keep building under His eye and trust that He has filed away what we will need. The same Lord who said in Isaiah that His word shall not return void is fully able to keep His own records.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's providence operates through ordinary, hidden means, a preserved record, a routine search, to accomplish His purposes (Esther 6:1–2 offers a parallel).
- The found scroll vindicates the builders' honest testimony; truth held up under scrutiny.
- God preserves what His work will need long before the need arises, so we may trust His timing in stalled seasons.
- This is providence, not fatalism; real human choices and labors are woven into God's faithful purpose.
- We are called to keep working faithfully even when the decisive provision is still out of sight.

Discussion Prompts

- Where might God already be preparing, behind the scenes, the very thing you are anxiously waiting on?

- How does the dusty scroll at Ecbatana speak to a season in your life that feels stalled and uncertain?
- What ordinary, unglamorous faithfulness might God be using you to perform for purposes you cannot yet see?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Ezra 6:1–12, God moves Darius to decree that the work continue and be paid for out of the royal treasury. How does this account display the providence of God ruling over the hearts of kings, and how should that shape the way we pray about powers and circumstances far beyond our control (Proverbs 21:1; 1 Timothy 2:1–2)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Ezra 6:6–7 Darius issues his ruling, and it is the opposite of what the opposition hoped for. Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far hence. 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 in his place. The very officials who came to investigate are now told to keep their distance and let the work proceed. The threat has become a guarantee. The king has taken the builders' side.

This is the heart of the providence theme in the lesson. Proverbs 21:1 declares that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will. Darius had no personal stake in the God of Israel, yet God turned his heart to defend and advance His house. The same hand that had moved Cyrus to send the exiles home now moves Darius to protect their work. Earthly power, which so often opposes God's people, is here bent to serve God's purpose without the king ever intending it.

What makes this so encouraging is how far above the builders' reach the whole drama unfolds. They did not have the ear of the king. They could not lobby the Persian court or sway imperial policy. They could only keep building under God's eye and let the matter come to Darius. And while they worked, God was at work in places they could never go, turning the heart of the most powerful man in their world to say, let the work of this house of God alone.

Paul tells us to pray for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Ezra 6 shows us why such prayer is never wasted. The God who hears us holds the hearts of presidents and kings as easily as a farmer directs water into his field. We do not have to control the powers above us. We have to trust the God who controls them, and keep doing the work He has put in front of us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God rules the hearts of kings and turns earthly power to serve His purposes (Proverbs 21:1; Daniel 2:21).
- Providence often works far above the reach of God's people, in places they could never influence themselves.
- Prayer for those in authority is grounded in confidence that God governs them (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
- The same God who moved Cyrus moves Darius; His covenant faithfulness spans changing kings and empires.
- We are freed from anxiety over powers we cannot control because the God we trust controls them.

Discussion Prompts

- What power or authority over your life feels beyond your reach right now? How does Proverbs 21:1 speak to it?
- How honestly and consistently do you pray for those in authority, and what would change if you really believed God holds their hearts?
- Where do you tend to trust your own lobbying and maneuvering more than God's providence?

Question 6

Student Question:

Darius funded a work he did not fully understand because of a record he had to dig for. Where might God be using people, resources, or circumstances outside the church to advance His purposes today, and how does seeing that change your attitude toward worry?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 6:8-10 takes the providence one astonishing step further. Darius does not merely permit the work; he funds it. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. The opposition had hoped to stop the temple. Instead the king commands that it be paid for out of the royal treasury, so that the builders would not be slowed for lack of resources.

Darius goes on to specify a steady supply of whatever the priests need for sacrifice, young bullocks, rams, lambs, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, day by day without fail (Ezra 6:9). And he gives his reason, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. The pagan king wanted the prayers of God's people on his behalf. God used even that mixed motive to pour resources into the building and worship of His house. The treasury of Persia became a means of grace to the people of God.

There is a deep truth here about how God provides for His work. He is not limited to the offerings of His own people. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the silver and the gold (Psalm 50:10; Haggai 2:8), and He can move resources from any quarter to accomplish His will. The exiles were a small, poor remnant, but their God commanded the wealth of the empire. When God determines that His house shall be built, He is never short of funds.

We should be careful here to read this rightly. This is God's faithfulness keeping a covenant promise to rebuild His house, not a prosperity formula promising that God will hand us riches if we ask. The point is not that God will make us wealthy; it is that God will surely provide for His own work in His own way. Jesus taught us to seek first the kingdom of God and trust the Father to supply what we need (Matthew 6:33). Darius's decree is one more proof that our God is abundantly able to provide for everything He calls us to do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God can provide for His work from any source, even a pagan treasury; He owns it all (Psalm 50:10; Haggai 2:8).
- God uses even mixed and self-interested human motives to accomplish His good purposes.
- This is covenant faithfulness and providence, not a prosperity-gospel promise of personal riches.
- When God is determined that His house be built, He is never short of resources (Philippians 4:19).
- Seek first the kingdom and trust the Father to supply the need (Matthew 6:33).

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most doubt that God can provide for what He has called you or your congregation to do?
- How do we hold together God's promise to supply our needs without slipping into a prosperity gospel?
- Have you seen God provide for His work from an unexpected source? What did it stir in you?

Question 7

Student Question:

The temple is finished, and in Ezra 6:16–18 the people dedicate it with joy and set the priests and Levites in their courses according to the book of Moses. Why does God tie their joyful worship so closely to ordering things according to what is written, and what does that teach us about worshiping by His pattern rather than our preference (Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 6:11–12 closes the decree with a solemn warning that shows how seriously Darius backed the work. 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. The penalty is severe and unmistakable. Anyone who interferes with the building of God's house will face ruin. The same king who funded the temple now hedges it about with the full force of imperial law.

Then Darius adds a remarkable sentence. 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. The pagan king invokes the very God of Israel as the guarantor of his decree. He recognizes that this house belongs to a God whose name dwells there, and he calls down that God's judgment on any who would oppose it. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed. The matter is settled, and settled with urgency.

Stand back and take in the full reversal. The work that had been stopped for sixteen years is now not only permitted and funded but protected by the harshest penalties the empire could impose. The enemies who came to investigate must now help, lest they themselves be ruined. God has not merely cleared the obstacles from the path; He has turned the obstacles into guardians. This is the kind of complete turnaround that only the providence of God can accomplish.

The believer takes courage from this. The work God has determined to complete cannot finally be undone by its enemies. Jesus said of His church, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). What men mean to tear down, God can establish so firmly that the very ones who opposed it become its protectors. Our confidence is not in decrees of Persian kings but in the unchanging purpose of the God who keeps every promise He makes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God can so establish His work that even its former enemies are bound to protect it.
- Darius acknowledges the God whose name dwells in the temple, recognizing God's claim over His own house.
- The complete reversal from stoppage to protection displays the thoroughness of God's providence.
- What God determines to complete cannot finally be thwarted by its opponents (Matthew 16:18; Acts 5:38–39).
- Our confidence rests in God's unchanging purpose, not in human decrees, however favorable.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you need the assurance that the work God is doing cannot finally be torn down by its enemies?
- Have you ever seen God turn an opponent of His work into a help to it? What happened?
- How does Jesus' promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail steady you when the church seems under threat?

Question 8

Student Question:

The exiles kept the Passover with gladness because the Lord had made them joyful (Ezra 6:22). Think back over the last month. What has stolen your joy in the Lord, and what would it look like to let a fresh sense of God's faithfulness restore it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 6:13–15 brings us to the moment the whole book has been building toward. With Darius behind them, Tattenai and his companions did speedily as the king had commanded, and the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And here the writer ties the whole thing together. The work prospered through the preaching of the prophets and the decrees of three kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, but above all according to the commandment of the God of Israel. Human means and the divine will run on the same track.

Then comes the long-awaited line in verse 15. 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. After the discouragement, the delay, the opposition, and the inquiry, the temple is done. About twenty years after the foundation was first laid, the house of God in Jerusalem stands complete. The God who stirred Cyrus to begin it has carried it through to the end. What He started, He finished.

This completion is covenant faithfulness made visible. God had promised through Jeremiah that after seventy years He would bring His people back and that His house would be rebuilt. Now the promise stands fulfilled in stone and timber. The exiles can walk into a finished sanctuary as living proof that the God of Israel keeps His word across decades, kings, and obstacles. He is not slack concerning His promises. He completes what He begins.

And this is exactly the confidence Paul presses on us. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). The completed temple in Ezra is a standing pledge to every weary saint that God finishes His work. If He carried a poor remnant of exiles through twenty years of opposition to a finished house, He will surely carry to completion the good work He has begun in you. Keep building. The God who started will finish.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God completes the work He begins; the finished temple is covenant faithfulness made visible (Jeremiah 29:10; Philippians 1:6).
- Human means (preaching, kings' decrees) and the divine will work together according to the commandment of God (Ezra 6:14).

- God's promises hold across decades, changing kings, and sustained opposition; He is not slack (2 Peter 3:9).
- The completion encourages every weary believer that God will finish the good work He has begun in us.
- Perseverance in God's work is grounded in confidence about God's faithfulness, not our own strength.

Discussion Prompts

- What good work has God begun in you that you fear will never be finished? How does Philippians 1:6 speak to that fear?
- Looking back, where can you point to a promise God has kept over a long stretch of years?
- How does seeing God finish the temple help you keep building in a season when you are tempted to quit?

Question 9

Student Question:

This rebuilt temple was God keeping His covenant promise, a real stone house that also pointed forward to something far greater. How does the completed temple foreshadow the true and final dwelling of God, namely Christ and His church, the spiritual house of living stones (John 2:19–21; Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4–5)? Why does it matter that we read this completion as fulfilled in Christ and His kingdom now, rather than as a blueprint for some future rebuilt physical temple?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezra 6:16–18 gives us the dedication, and the dominant note is joy ordered by the word of God. 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. They offered sacrifices, and then 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. The joy is real and exuberant, and it is also disciplined. Their worship is not improvised; it is shaped by what is written.

This pairing is the doctrinal heart of the chapter's worship, and it deserves careful teaching. The returned exiles do not invent new ways to celebrate. They restore the order God had revealed through Moses, setting the priests and Levites in their appointed roles. Their gladness flows within the channels of God's revealed pattern. They rejoice greatly, and they rejoice obediently, doing the worship of God His way rather than their own. Joy and reverent submission to the word are not enemies; here they embrace.

Now we must read this rightly for our own day. The Mosaic priesthood, the animal sacrifices, and the temple courses were shadows that have been fulfilled and set aside in Christ, our great High Priest who offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 7:26–27; Hebrews 10:1–14). We do not

return to that pattern. But the abiding principle stands and presses on us. God still cares deeply how He is worshiped, and acceptable worship is worship offered according to His revealed will, not according to our preferences. Whatsoever we do in word or deed, we are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

So the dedication teaches the New Testament church a vital lesson. We are to worship God with overflowing joy and with careful submission to His pattern, holding both at once. Some are tempted to be orderly but cold, and some to be enthusiastic but careless about what God has authorized. Ezra 6 will not let us choose. The exiles dedicated the house with joy, and as it is written in the book of Moses. God is honored when His people delight in Him and obey Him in the same breath.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Acceptable worship is joyful and ordered by God's revealed word, not improvised by human preference (Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- The Mosaic priesthood and sacrifices were shadows fulfilled and set aside in Christ; we do not return to them (Hebrews 10:1–14).
- The abiding principle is that God cares how He is worshiped and authorizes worship by His word.
- Joy and reverent submission to Scripture belong together, against both cold formalism and careless enthusiasm.
- We worship by the authority of the Lord Jesus, doing all in His name (Colossians 3:17).

Discussion Prompts

- Is your own worship more tempted toward cold order or careless enthusiasm? How does Ezra 6:16–18 correct you?
- What does it mean practically to worship by God's pattern rather than by personal preference?
- Where do joy and obedience to God's word feel like they are pulling against each other in your worship, and how can they be reconciled?

Question 10

Student Question:

In Ezra 6:21 the returned exiles separated themselves from the filthiness of the nations to seek the Lord God of Israel. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is presently calling you to separate from something unclean and draw nearer to Him, and what is your first concrete step toward obeying that call this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The book of Ezra has shown us a stone temple completed, and the New Testament tells us what that completion was pointing toward all along. The physical house in Jerusalem was real and was God keeping His covenant, but it was never the final dwelling of God. It was a shadow cast forward by a greater reality. Jesus stood in that very temple's successor and said, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. But, John tells us, he spake of the temple of his body (John 2:19–21). Christ Himself is the true temple, the real meeting place of God and man.

And in Christ, God is building a temple not of cut stones but of redeemed people. Peter writes, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Paul says the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:20–21). The completed temple in Ezra foreshadowed this living temple, the church of Christ, where God now dwells by His Spirit.

This is why we must read Ezra 6 with New Testament eyes. The temptation in our day is to treat the rebuilt temple as a blueprint for some future physical temple in Jerusalem, complete with restored sacrifices, as if God's program had stalled and must someday be resumed in stone. But the New Testament forbids this reading. The temple has been fulfilled, not deferred. The Son of David already reigns, not over a future earthly throne in Jerusalem, but from the right hand of God over His kingdom, the church, established when the gospel was first preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:30–36). Christ reigns now, and His temple is His people.

See, then, the glory of what Ezra was recording. A discouraged remnant rebuilt a house of stone, and God used it to keep His covenant alive until the fullness of time, when the Son would come and build the true and eternal temple. We who are in Christ are part of that final house. Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22). The sovereign providence that completed the stone temple was completing something far greater, the spiritual house in which God now dwells, the body of Christ, the church for which He died.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The completed stone temple foreshadowed the true temple, Christ Himself and His body the church (John 2:19–21; Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4–5).
- God now dwells in His people by the Spirit; the church is the living temple of redeemed stones with Christ as cornerstone.
- This is fulfilled in Christ and His kingdom now, NOT a blueprint for a future rebuilt physical temple or restored sacrifices.
- The Son of David already reigns from God's right hand over His kingdom the church, established at Pentecost (Acts 2:30–36).
- God's sovereign providence in completing the temple was advancing His one great purpose, the building of the church (Hebrews 12:22–24).

Discussion Prompts

- What changes in how you read the Old Testament when you see the temple fulfilled in Christ and His church rather than in a future stone building?
- If you are in Christ, you are a living stone in God's temple. How should that shape the way you live this week?
- How does seeing God's providence completing not just a temple but His whole redemptive purpose deepen your worship of Him?