

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

Lesson 4: The Prophets and the Temple Completed -- Ezra 5:1–6:22

Picture a job site that has gone quiet. The scaffolding still stands, but the ropes hang slack. Stones lie stacked where they were dropped, half-buried now under weeds and blown sand. For roughly sixteen years the work on the house of God in Jerusalem had simply stopped. The returned exiles had laid the foundation with shouts and tears, and then the discouragement set in, the neighbors complained, the official letters flew, and the hammers fell silent. If you have ever started something for God and then watched it stall, you know the feeling exactly. The dream is still there, but the energy is gone. And into a moment like that, God sends two preachers.

Their names are Haggai and Zechariah, and they show up in Ezra 5:1 like a sudden gust of wind through a stuffy room. They do not bring a construction crew. They bring a word. They preach, and something stirs. Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest get up off the ground, dust off the old tools, and start building again. That is the quiet miracle at the heart of this lesson. Before the temple rises, the word of God goes to work on tired hearts, and tired hearts get up and obey. We are about to watch what happens when the preached word lands on people who are willing to listen.

What follows is one of the most encouraging stretches in the whole Old Testament. A Persian official named Tattenai comes poking around with hard questions. A search is ordered through the dusty royal archives. And the very king who could have shut the project down instead signs a decree that the work continue, funded out of his own treasury, with anyone who interferes facing a terrifying penalty. You could not script a more unlikely rescue. The God who once moved Cyrus to send His people home now moves Darius to pay for His house. That is not luck. That is providence, the quiet hand of God turning the wheels of empire to keep His promise.

And so the temple is finished. The exiles dedicate it with joy, they keep the Passover, and they separate themselves from the uncleanness of the surrounding nations to seek the Lord their God. As we walk verse by verse through Ezra 5 and 6, keep one big question in front of you. What does it look like when God completes what He starts, and what does that completed house tell us about the greater house He is building today, the church of His Son, a temple of living stones with Christ Himself as the cornerstone? Let us open the Book and find out.

Group Discussion: Have you ever been part of a good work for the Lord, a class, a building project, a benevolence effort, an evangelistic push, that started strong and then stalled? What killed the momentum, and what finally got it moving again (or what would it have taken)? As you share, listen for the place where someone's word of encouragement made the difference, because that is exactly how God restarts His work in Ezra 5.

Personal Reflection: Haggai and Zechariah preached, and people who had quit started building again. Where in your own life right now has the work of God stalled, a habit of prayer, a ministry, a relationship you are meant to repair, a step of obedience you keep putting off? What is the one word from God that you already know you need to obey this week, and what has been your excuse for the silence?

Read Ezra 5:1–6:22

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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.
3. 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)?
4. 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?

5. 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)?
6. 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?
7. 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)?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Haggai 1:1–15, the very sermon that got the builders back to work in Ezra 5; Zechariah 4:6–10, not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, and the promise that the hands which laid the foundation shall finish it; Ephesians 2:19–22, you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ the chief corner stone; 1 Peter 2:4–9, living stones built up a spiritual house; Hebrews 12:22–24, you are come unto mount Zion and the city of the living God

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com