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Ezra 5

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Ezra 5

Topics

- Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem.
- Zerubbabel is asked, "Who gave permission to finish the temple."
- The copy of the letter Tattenai and Shethar-bozenai sent to Darius.
- We are servants of God rebuilding the House built by a great king.
- God gave Israel's fathers into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.
- Cyrus the king made a decree that the House of God should be rebuilt.
- Let the king, search if a decree was Issued by Cyrus.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ended as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28) the Persian King Cyrus had sent exiles led by Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (Persia had defeated Babylon in 539 B.C.). Despite opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and after encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.). Then in 458 B.C., Ezra led the second of three waves of returning exiles. By the time Ezra arrived, the people had again fallen into sin, Ezra preached God's word and the people repented (10:9-17). Ezra succeeded because God's hand was upon him (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) (Ezra 8:18, 22, 31). This book (probably written by Ezra), shows that God uses pagan kings to accomplish His purposes and His faithfulness to His promises and His people.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: began with Israel's adversaries saying to the heads of Israel's, "let us build the temple." The heads of Israel refuse their offer, so they make the people of Judah afraid to build the temple and write a letter against the Jews to Artaxerxes king of Persia. After reading the letter he tells Israel to stop the work on the House of God in Jerusalem.

EZRA 5:1

Haggai and Zechariah Prophesied to Jews in Judah and Jerusalem.

- **Ezra 5:1:** Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

At this time there was such a state of apathy which Ezra does not allude to, that the entire building program of the temple was in danger of coming to a standstill had the prophets Haggai and Zechariah not intervened, for it was their prophecies that stirred up the heads of the families.

Zechariah: was the son of Berechiah, and grandson of Iddo (Zech. 1:1), he is thought to have been born at Babylon during the captivity. He encouraged the Jews to return to the work building the temple, with promise of God's favour and assistance.

Haggai: in Hebrew means festive, he is one of the twelve minor prophets and author of the Book of Haggai, which urges the exiles returning from Babylon to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, it is thought that he was born at Babylon during the captivity.

Haggai and Zechariah: both Haggai and Zechariah with united zeal prophesied to the Jews in the second year of Darius (Haggai 1:1), warning Zerubbabel and Jeshua (also called Joshua) the high priest and the people against neglecting the building of the temple and against giving themselves to the beautifying of their own houses, instead of completing the work on the House of the LORD.

- **Haggai 1:9:** You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.

After Haggai and Zechariah warned and encouraged Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the people came and worked on the House of the LORD. (Ezra 5:2) (Haggai 1:9, 14). The writings of Haggai and Zechariah, show that the difficulties and obstacles the Jews faced cooled their zeal in building the temple, and later led to an abandonment of the work, believing that the time for rebuilding it had not yet come.

- **Haggai 1:1-11:** “Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.”

Because the work was completely suspended for fifteen years these two prophets upbraided them with severe reproaches for their negligence and worldly self-centeredness (Hag 1:4),

- **Haggai 1:4:** “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins?”

They threatened them with severe judgments if they continued focusing upon themselves and their own comfort, while the House of God lay in ruin, and promised that they would be blessed with great national prosperity if they resumed and proceeded with the work with enthusiasm and promptly.

For greater information: concerning these two prophets, see the books which bear their names in: Commentary OT (ON WEBSITE MENU).

EZRA 5:2-5

Who Gave Permission to Finish the Temple.

- **Ezra 5:2-5:** Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them. ³ At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River (on this side the river in KJV), and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus: “Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?” ⁴ They also asked them this: “What are the names of the men who are building this building?” ⁵ But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel: (v2) returned to Jerusalem as the head of the returning Jewish exiles, influenced by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, he rebuilt the temple and became governor of Judaea under the Persians.

Jeshua the son of Jozadak: (v2) Jeshua means, a savior, or a deliverer. He is also called Joshua. He was the first person chosen to be the high priest for the reconstruction of the Jewish altar and temple after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity (Zech. 6:9–14) (Ezra 3).

Zerubbabel and Jeshua arose: (v2) and began to build the house, they had laid the foundation long before (Ezra 3:10) and by this time the walls may have been built to some height, before they ceased from the building work. The work had proceeded very slowly, and later stopped for around fifteen years, until the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them to make the building of the temple their first priority, rather than their own worldly comforts and assured them that God would be with them to protect them from their enemies, and give them success.

Tattenai the governor of the province and Shethar-boznai: (v3) Tattenai was probably a new governor whom Darius had appointed and sent for it was usual with new kings to change the governors of provinces, while Shethar-boznai was perhaps his prefect or secretary. The previous governors Rehum and Shimshai etc., may have been removed upon this new king coming to the throne or perhaps dead.

Tattenai and Shethar-boznai: had authority over the entire province of Syria and Phœnicia, and therefore had jurisdiction over Judaea and over Zerubbabel. It is certain they had been incited by the complaints and turbulent outrages of the Samaritans against the Jews, but rather than rely on what they said, he suspended his judgment, so that he along with Shethar-boznai could ascertain the real state of matters by personal inspection and enquiry.

Beyond the River (on this side the river in KJV): (v3) refers to the Persian empire west of the Euphrates which at this time included Syria, Arabia, Egypt, Phœnicia, and other, provinces subject to Darius. The empire was divided into twenty provinces, called satrapies. Syria formed one satrapy, encompassing Palestine, Phœnicia, and Cyprus. The Persian king never interfered with the Jews internal government except when there was a threatened disturbance of order and tranquility.

Who gave you a decree to build and finish this structure? (v3) soon after the Spirit of God stirred up the Jews to recommit themselves to building of the temple, the evil spirit stirred up their enemies against the work of the LORD. It is interesting to notice, while the people built their own houses (Haggai 1:4), their enemies gave them no trouble even though the following verse shows that the king's order was to put a stop to the building of the city.

- Therefore make a decree that these men be made to cease, and that this city be not rebuilt, until a decree is made by me. (Ezra 4:21).

But when they began the work again on the temple, the heads of their enemies rose up against them to hinder and stop the work. Tattenai, Shethar-boznai and their associates ask the Jews, "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" Meaning, who are the leaders promoting this work?

- We also asked them their names, for your information, that we might write down the names of their leaders. (Ezra 5:10).

No doubt they wanted the names of the leader and the chief promoters of the building work in order to make them responsible. There is no mention of the Jews answering the question here, but the letter Tattenai and his associates sent to Darius the king (v11-16), gives a detail review of what they did say to Tattenai and those with him. However, we are told here that God's eye was upon them, meaning His favour was toward them (v5), and in the book of Chronicles we are told that:

- **2 Chronicles 16:9:** For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

This favour was manifested by the fact that Tattenai, Shethar-boznai and their associates did not utter any word to discourage the spirit of the Jews or stop them from building, but allowed them to continue until a letter concerning the matter had been sent to Darius, and they received his

answer, which is given in the following chapters. In all respects Tattenai, appears far more favourable toward the Jews than his predecessor, Rehum and his associates. (Ezra 4:9). Tattenai, whole conduct as well as the general tone of his despatch, is marked by a sound discretion and sensible moderation, free from any party bias, which manifests a desire to do his duty as wisely and cautiously as possible.

THE LETTER SENT TO DARIUS THE KING

EZRA 5:2-5

The Letter Tattenai and Shethar-bozenai Sent to Darius.

- **Ezra 5:6-8:** This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and his associates, the governors who were in the province Beyond the River, sent to Darius the king. ⁷ They sent him a report, in which was written as follows: “To Darius the king, all peace. ⁸ Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built with huge stones (great stones in KJV), and timber is laid in the walls. This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.

After Tattenai the governor of the province and Shethar-bozenai finished talking to the Jews concerning the building work of the temple (v3-5) they sent a letter to Darius the king informing him of all that was happening concerning the Jews, Jerusalem and the temple.

To the house of the great God: (v8) many of the Babylonians, Samaritans. Syrian and Persians etc., believed in many gods, but considered the God of Israel to be the Great God, meaning the God above all other gods.

It is being built with huge stones (great stones in KJV): (v8) literally stones that were such extraordinary size they could not be carried, but had to be rolled along, some interpret it to be polished or marble stones.

Timber is laid in the walls: (v8) which shows that the structure or frame of the walls had been built at this time.

This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands: (v8), the work is proceeding fast and if not stopped will soon be finished.

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THE LETTER SENT TO DARIUS --- CONTINUED

EZRA 5:9-11

We are Servants of God Rebuilding the House Built by a Great King.

- **Ezra 5:9-11:** Then we asked those elders and spoke to them thus: ‘Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?’ ¹⁰ We also asked them their names, for your information, that we might write down the names of their leaders. ¹¹ And this was their reply to us: ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.

This question was previously asked (v3-4), no doubt they wanted to write down the names of the leaders so that they could notify the king who the main promoters of the building work were. However, they don’t give any names, but rather, tell them that they were servants of God rebuilding the house that a great king of Israel (i.e., king Solomon) built many years ago. It is most likely that they used the title, “the God of heaven and earth,” to highlight the truth that they worshipped the one God of all creation, in contrast to the Persians and Babylonians who worshipped many gods.

EZRA 5:12-5

God gave Israel's Fathers into the Hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

- **Ezra 5:12:** But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia.

This is a continuation of the Jews answer to question previously asked in (v3-4). They told Tattenai the governor of the province and Shetharbozenai and their associates that because their fathers had angered God, He used Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon as His servant as the following verses shows:

- Thus, says the LORD of hosts: Because you (Judah) have not obeyed my words, ⁹behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land (of Judah) and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. (Jer. 25:8-9).

The LORD used the armies of Babylon to destroy the city and the House of God to punish the Jewish nation for their rebellion and gross sins, for they turned from God to worship idols and pagan gods and set their hearts diamond hard against the LORD'S prophets.

- **2 Chronicles 36:19** ¹⁹ And they (the Babylonians) burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.

This answer from the Jewish people manifests the following two things:

1. The people regarded themselves as being solely punished by the hand of God.
2. The overthrowers of the Babylonian power are themselves also no more than instruments of the same Divine hand.

EZRA 5:13-5

Cyrus the King made a Decree that the Temple should be Rebuilt.

- **Ezra 5:13-16:** However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. ¹⁴ And the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem and brought into the temple of Babylon, these Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; ¹⁵ and he said to him, "Take these vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site." ¹⁶ Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been in building, and it is not yet finished. ⁷

Again, this is a continuation of the Jews answer to question previously asked in (v3-4). They told Tattenai and his associates, that in the first year after Cyrus had taken Babylon, he gave a royal written decree to the Jews to build the House of the LORD in the same place where it had stood before and commanded that the vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple be returned to the temple.

- In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ² "Thus

says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. (Ezra 1:1-2).

The Jews were perfectly warranted according to the principles of the Persian government to proceed with the building in virtue of Cyrus' edict. For everywhere a public decree is considered as remaining in force until it is revoked, but the following verses show that under the laws of the Medes and Persians an injunction (command) signed by the king cannot be changed.

- **Daniel 6:8:** Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.”
- **Daniel 6:12:** Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.”
- **Daniel 6:15:** Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

Then Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations: (v16) of the House of God in Jerusalem. Following are the two main thoughts amongst commentators concerning who Sheshbazzar was.

1. Sheshbazzar was another name for Zerubbabel, who, like Sheshbazzar, was also called a prince of Judah and governor after the exile (Haggai 1:1). Also, Zerubbabel, like Sheshbazzar, was recognized for restoring the temple's foundation.

- **Zechariah 4:9:** “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

Added to this it was common for Babylonian kings to rename their Hebrew captives.

- **Daniel 1:7:** And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

For these reasons it is possible that Sheshbazzar and Zerubabel were the same man.

2. Others believe they were different individuals, maintaining that Sheshbazzar came to Judah before Zerubbabel and was governor during the reign of Cyrus and later, under King Darius, Zerubbabel was appointed governor and continued the work of restoration that Sheshbazzar had begun. Following this line of thought, some have proposed that Shenazzar (1Chron. 3:18) is an alternate name for Sheshbazzar. Shenazzar was the son of King Jehoiachin, which would make him Zerubbabel's uncle, however, since Sheshbazzar's lineage is not clear, his exact identity remains uncertain.

From that time until now it has been in building: (v16), this does not mean it was continuously being built, but meaning it has been in building with long intermittent intervals during the years. It carries the idea that the building begun as soon as the exiles returned and they continued pursuing it from then until now, but because of opposition it is not finished. It is interesting to notice that in the Jews answer to Tattenai the governor, Shethar-bozenai and their associates questioning (v3-4), they do not mention the malice of the previous governors, nor do they make any complaint against them, though they would be justified in doing

so. This should teach us that the way to heal broken relationships, is not to return bitterness for bitterness, but to think it enough if we can obtain fair treatment for the future without repeating past injuries. To heal broken relationships the following words of Peter should be kept in mind.

- **1 Peter 3:15:** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

THE LETTER SENT TO DARIUS --- CONTINUED

EZRA 5:17

Let the King, Search for the Decree by Cyrus to build the Temple.

- **Ezra 5:17:** Therefore, if it seems good to the king, let search be made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus the king for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. And let the king send us his pleasure in this matter.”

The progress of the Temple depended on the original decree that Cyrus king of Persia had written for nothing could cancel a royal decree. They propose, that this royal degree would be found in the king treasure-house, where the archives of the kingdom containing the laws, decrees, edicts, and proclamations, and other things relating to the state, were laid up and preserved very carefully, as rich treasures were. Once the king gave the order for the search to be made, every official of his kingdom would have organized all those under them to search through every archive for the degree Cyrus had made. Eventually it was found in the provincial capital of Ecbatana:

- **Ezra 6:1-3:** Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored.² And in Ecbatana, the citadel that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: “A record.³ In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices were offered, and let its foundations be retained.

The fact such a massive search was made, show the integrity of the king to do what was right, for should they be found, he was bound to let the Jews continue in the building work of the temple and finish it, whether he desired them to or not. A corruptible king would not have made such a search or if he did, would have destroyed the degree to win the favour of the Samaritans and many other nations that were opposed to the Jews. This should encourage and give us hope when difficulties are discouraging, for no matter how our work with the Lord may seem to be hindered, yet the Lord Jesus Christ is carrying our salvation on and by his love, grace and righteousness the faithful are growing into a holy temple in the Lord, for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
