

Lesson 4 – Ezra 5-6

Text: Ezra 5-6

Main Characters: God, Haggai, Zechariah, Tattenai, Darius, Zerubbabel, Jeshua

Key Passages:

- Ezra 5:1-2 – After the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the reconstruction effort resumed.
- Ezra 6:22 – God was responsible for all of the success that the Jews had enjoyed.

Main Storyline:

Once Haggai and Zechariah had come and rebuked the Jews, the people, under the leadership of Jeshua and Zerubbabel, restarted the temple reconstruction effort about 15 years after it had ceased. The prophets continued to encourage them as they worked.

After they had begun rebuilding, the local governor of the region, Tattenai, noticed their efforts. He questioned them about who had given them the authority to restart the construction on the temple. He also wanted to know the names of the men who were in charge of the project.

The Jews responded by explaining that they were servants of the God of heaven and earth, and that they were rebuilding the temple which had been built many years earlier by a great king of Israel (Solomon). However, they explained, since their fathers had sinned against God, God had allowed the Babylonians (Nebuchadnezzar) to come take them into captivity and destroy the temple. Finally, they reminded Tattenai that King Cyrus had issued a decree some years prior, instructing the Jews to rebuild God's temple and even providing materials for them.

Hearing all of this, Tattenai sent a letter to the king of Persia, Darius. Tattenai asked that a search be made of the records so that it could be determined if the Jews were telling the truth about Cyrus's decree. He also wanted to know what Darius wanted concerning the matter of the temple. While they waited for a response, the people continued to build (God was watching over the project and did not allow it to cease).

When Darius received the letter, he commanded that a search be done of the record archives. Eventually, they found Cyrus' decree, complete with very detailed instructions regarding the temple's reconstruction. They also found that Cyrus had commanded that the expenses for the reconstruction effort be paid from the king's treasuries. With this new information, Darius commanded that Tattenai and the other Persians keep away from the Jews and their work. He also commanded that the worship to God be provided for by the king's treasury, whether materials for the temple or animals for sacrifices. Finally, he decreed that anyone who altered his edict or attempted to destroy the temple should be killed (whether by the Persians or by God).

The Persians and Jews diligently obeyed the commandment of King Darius. The Jews prospered in their efforts because of the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah and because of God's influence. After about 4 additional years of reconstruction, the temple was finally completed.

Once the temple was complete, the people began to celebrate and dedicate the temple to God. They offered huge numbers of sacrifice, both burnt offerings to dedicate the temple and sin offerings on behalf of all Israel. The Jews had an enormous feast together with many of the land who had separated themselves from the sin of their home country. Everyone was joyful because of what God had done.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) We can trust that the Lord will work in our lives for our good, whether physically or spiritually.
- 2.) While we can be hesitant to take a difficult action, doing so often leads to a much better result.
- 3.) The goodness and wisdom of our obedience to God helps others to see Him (Deuteronomy 4:6).