

## **Bibles???**

### **The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority**

Good evening church –

This evening we continue our study through the book of Ezra.

We are going to be covering chapters 5 and 6

#### **Review**

In our last midweek study, the remnant that returned to Jerusalem from the exile, they come together and they built the altar.

For the first time in seventy years, sacrifices were made to the Lord.

We saw the restoration of all of the different feasts that the Jews were required to observe.

They also came together and laid the foundation for the temple.

However, once the work began on the temple, they started to get resistance.

The Samaritans wanted to help – but they were turned down because they worshipped other gods - so Zerubbabel and the leaders did not want to compromise – after 70 years in exile, the last thing they wanted to do was to reintroduce idolatry.

**[2 Corinthians 6:14 NKJV] 14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?**

So the Samaritans began to discourage the Jews and started a letter writing campaign to the king of Persia (chapter 4) and the building of the temple came to a complete stop.

**Let's pray...**

For 16 years, the work on the temple ceased.

The Jews sat on their hands until – God raised two prophets...

**[Ezr 5:1-17 NKJV] 1 Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who [were] in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, [who was] over them.**

Turn with me to the book of Haggai – I want to show you a sample of the message that was given to the Jews.

**[Hag 1:1-7 NKJV] 1 In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2 "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house**

should be built." ' ' 3 Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "[Is it] time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple [to lie] in ruins?" 5 Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! 6 "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages [to put] into a bag with holes." 7 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!

One of the reasons that the Jews stopped building the temple was that they figured that the time was not right.

And during this time where the temple lay unbuilt – they spent all their time at Home Depot fixing up their homes while the Temple of God sat incomplete.

And as a result of their self-centeredness, they encountered an economic recession.

Things were tough.

They were barely making ends meet – and God hints that the reason that they are struggling is because they were putting their own priorities ahead of God's priorities.

Back to Ezra 5,

**2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which [is] in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God [were] with them, helping them.**

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that, he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

In other words, the purpose of prophesy is to build up, get moving and bring comfort – and that is exactly what Haggai and Zechariah are doing here as they help in the rebuilding of the temple.

**3 At the same time Tattenai the governor of [the region] beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" 4 Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. 5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this [matter].**

Once again, as they commence building the temple, they began to face opposition. However, this time they were not discouraged and the work on the temple continued.

I had you make a note where it says that – we told them the names, this was recorded by Ezra to demonstrate that there was no hint of rebellion among the returned Jews. In no way were they trying to rebel against the authority of the Persian King.

**6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent: The governor of [the region] beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who**

[were in the region] beyond the River, to Darius the king. 7 (They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus) To Darius the king: All peace. 8 Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. 9 Then we asked those elders, [and] spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" 10 We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who [were] chief among them. 11 And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "**We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth**, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed.

The governor wanted to know who had commanded them to build the Temple.

The implied answer is that God commanded them.

They are God's servants.

Church, a Christian is a follower of God.

He is our "Lord".

He is our "Master".

We are simply His servants.

That means that we obey what He commands.

**12 "But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, [who] destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. 13 "However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. 14 "Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that [was] in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon--those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. 15 "And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple [site] that [is] in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.' 16 "Then the same Sheshbazzar came [and] laid the foundation of the house of God which [is] in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished." 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].**

The leaders of the region – the ones that were discouraging the Jews, they write a letter to the king of Persia and they ask that they do a search to see whether or not a decree had been issued that allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple.

Why is this significant???

Because the laws of the Medes and Persians were considered unchangeable

How do we know?

The bible tells us –

**[Dan 6:12 NKJV] 12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing [is] true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."**

If the Persian King Cyrus did indeed command that the Temple be built, then it must happen.

**[Ezr 6:1-22 NKJV] 1 Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. 2 And at Achmetha, in the palace that [is] in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record [was] written thus:**

The specific scroll with the decree from Cyrus was not found in Babylon – it was found 300 miles away in Achmetha.

This indicates that there must have been some diligence required in the search.

This in itself was an evidence of God's hand in the matter; otherwise, they might have easily given up the search.

**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, 4 [with] three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's 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"-- 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. 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.**

Here in chapter six, we have details of Cyrus' decree that are not listed in Ezra 1:2-4.



In his decree, Cyrus provides the size of the temple as well as specific details on how to construct the temple.

Not only did Cyrus give permission for the temple to be rebuilt, he commanded the funding of the work from the royal treasury.

**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. 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, 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.**

Here we see another example of something that was meant for evil – (the Samaritans and the others in the region that attempted to stop the construction of the temple by writing these letters to the kings of Persia) God used it for the good.

The taxes that the enemies of the Jews are going to pay to the King of Persia – they are going to be used to fund the same temple that they have been discouraging the Jews from rebuilding.

**[Rom 8:28 NKJV] 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.**

I had you make a note of where Darius asks the Jews to pray for him and his sons.

This explains part of the motivation of King Darius. Not only did he based his decision on the precedent of King Cyrus, but he also wanted the prayers of the Jewish people for the king and his sons.

**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.**

Anyone who attempted to hinder the building of the temple - was to be impaled using wood from their own house.

Execution by impaling was practiced in the Assyrian and Persian Empires.

As I read this, I was reminded of another individual who sought to do in the people of God.

In the book of Esther, Haman thought he had come up with the perfect plan to destroy the entire Jewish population, only to see it backfire as he was hung on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. (Esther 7:10)

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. 13 Then Tattenai, governor of [the region] beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. 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 Temple was completed on March 12, 515 BC.

It took twenty years to complete the Temple, of which most of that time things had simply stopped.

Turn with me to Zechariah 4,

God had promised Zerubbabel through Zechariah:

[Zec 4:6-7 NKJV] 6 So he answered and said to me: "This [is] the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts. 7 'Who [are] you, **O great mountain**? Before Zerubbabel [you

shall become] a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of **"Grace, grace to it!" ' "**

The work of rebuilding the temple was so massive it seemed like a great mountain. Here God promised that by His Spirit, that great mountain would be leveled into a plain.

**"Grace, grace to it!"** - This was God assurance to Zerubbabel that not only would the work be finished, but Zerubbabel – he – shall finish it, setting the capstone and declaring that it was all a work of grace.

**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.**

The nation had gone through a time of rebuke for their sin. Now they're back in the land, but not like it was before.

Sometimes we can fall into a trap of thinking that we can just go ahead and give in to a temptation because we can just confess our sin, receive God's forgiveness, and be back at the same place we were before giving in.

Sin carries a price tag. Yes you will be forgiven, but don't forget the cost involved.

In the Old Testament, a goat died in your place.

For us, Jesus has died in our place.

**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. 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.**

Two types of people participated in the Passover.

1. Those who had come from Babylon.

2. Those who had actually remained in the land, but had not gotten mixed up with the idolatrous ways of the Samaritans – these were converts – those that did not defile themselves. And they were celebrating the Passover with the Jews.

Passover to the Jew is like Communion for the Christian.

It is when we remember how we got here.

For the Jews – Passover was when God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and made them a nation, His nation.

For us – Communion reminds us of how Jesus brought us out of slavery by dying on a cross, and coincidentally doing it on the Passover.

**Let's pray...**



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