

Ezra 05 - Construction of Temple Resumed

I. Restoration of the Temple (Ezra 1:1—6:22)

(2) Rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:1—6:22)

(B) The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the rebuilding of the Temple that had been halted due to opposition from the people of the land (Ezra 4:1—6:22)

(b) Royal support and encouragement for Israel to rebuild resulting in the completion of the Temple (Ezra 5:1—6:22)

(i) Haggai and Zechariah encourage Zerubbabel and Jeshua to rebuild the Temple in 520 BC (5:1-2)

(ii) Governor Tattenai asked Darius to confirm the decree allowing Israel to rebuild their Temple (5:3-17)

(a) Tattenai questions the Jews (5:3-5)

(b) Tattenai questions Darius (5:6-17)

Ezra 5

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(i) Haggai and Zechariah encourage Zerubbabel and Jeshua to rebuild the Temple in 520 BC (5:1-2) (Cf. Haggai 1:1; Zech 1:1)

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1 At that time, the prophets Haggai and Iddo's son Zechariah prophesied specifically to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel.

1 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.

- The work on the temple had been stopped (4:1-5,24) in 536 BC and they did not resume construction until 520 BC

— Now, under the influence of two important prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, it was resumed. Haggai prophesied from August to December 520 BC, and Zechariah prophesied for two years beginning in October-November 520 BC.

Haggai 1:2: "This is what the LORD of armies says: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt.'"

The Jews should have persevered in construction of the temple because Cyrus had supported their efforts to rebuild it. The order of Artaxerxes to temporarily halt construction (Cf. 4:1-5,24) pertained to the city of Jerusalem and the walls, not the temple. Haggai and Zechariah addressed the Jews' lack of persistence by exhorting and encouraging them to continue (Cf. 6:14; Haggai 1:8; 2:4; Zech 4:7-9). The prophets were vitally concerned with the building of the temple because they realized that their nation could never fulfill the obligations of the Mosaic Covenant until temple worship was reinstated. Both of these prophets placed the blame for the hard times the nation experienced during this period on the people's lack of obedience in not rebuilding the temple.

2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

2 So Shealtiel's son Zerubbabel and Jozadak's son Jeshua restarted construction of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were there supporting them.

2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

- The building process itself was spearheaded by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the civil and religious leaders, respectively

The Book of Haggai contains four messages that Haggai delivered to the returned exiles in 520 BC. We know from what he said that the people had turned from their commitment to rebuild the temple to constructing comfortable houses for themselves (Haggai 1:2-11). The prophet Zechariah joined Haggai in encouraging the people to give God's interests priority over their own. In response to the ministries of these prophets, the people began to rebuild the temple again (Cf. v2; Haggai 1:12-14) in 520 B.C. (4:24).

(ii) Governor Tattenai asked Darius to confirm the decree allowing Israel to rebuild their Temple (5:3-17)

(a) Tattenai questions the Jews (5:3-5)

3 At that time Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the *Euphrates* River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them as follows: "Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?"

3 At that time Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?"

3 Right about then, Trans-Euphrates Governor Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and their colleagues approached and challenged them. They asked, "Who authorized you to build this Temple and to reconstruct this wall?"

3 At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

- As soon as the returnees resumed construction on the temple, another effort was made to stop it. The group of officials asked Zerubbabel and Jeshua for the names of those who authorized the project (Cf. v9-10).

- In a Babylonian record dated 502 BC, the name Tattenai and his office as governor of Trans-Euphrates are mentioned. Syria-Palestine was under him, an area including but much larger than Israel. It would have been Tattenai's responsibility, on hearing of this building activity in his territory, to investigate it.

Although there were plenty of political reasons to raise Tattenai's curiosity about permission to resume temple constructions, another reason may very well have been what Zechariah was prophesying. He said that the "Branch," the long-expected descendant of David's line, would soon appear and sit on David's throne (Zech 3:8; Cf. Is 11:1; Jer 23:5-6). What Zechariah predicted of Messiah seemed to fit Zerubbabel to a tee (Zech 6:9-15).

4 Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who were reconstructing this building.

4 Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who were reconstructing this building.

4 In answer, we responded with a list of the names of the men who were building the structure.

4 Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make 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 could reach Darius, and then the decree concerning it could be sent back.

5 But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it.

5 But God watched over the Jewish leaders, who could not be forced to stop working until Darius received a report and responded in reply.

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: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.

- Despite this challenge, the work did not stop because "the eye of their God" was watching over them

— Occurring frequently in Ezra and Nehemiah are the words "the hand of the LORD was on him" and similar expressions (Ezra 7:6,9,28; 8:18,22,31; Neh 2:8,18). God was providentially caring for them (by His "eye") and blessing them (by His "hand"). Clearly God was at work in spite of this opposition because through it the project was eventually given help.

(b) Tattenai questions Darius (5:6-17)

6 *This is* the copy of the letter that Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the *Euphrates* River, and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues the officials, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king.

6 *This is* the copy of the letter which Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues the officials, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king.

6 Here is a copy of the letter that Trans-Euphrates Governor Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and his colleagues the Trans-Euphrates Persians sent to King Darius.

6 The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king:

- Ezra recorded the letter that Tattenai sent to King Darius about the building activity going on in Jerusalem (v7-16)

7 They sent the report to him in which it was written as follows: "To Darius the king, all peace.

7 They sent a report to him in which it was written thus: "To Darius the king, all peace.

7 The letter sent to him was written like this: To: King Darius: Greetings!

7 They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace.

- In contrast to Rehum and Shimshai's letter to Artaxerxes (4:11-16), Tattenai's letter to Darius was fair and objective. He and his colleagues gave no indication of wanting to stop

the Jews' project, they only wanted to confirm that Cyrus had really given permission for the Jews to rebuild the temple, and if Darius wanted that edict to stand.

8 May it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God which is being built with large stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is being performed with great care and is succeeding in their hands.

8 Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands.

8 This is to inform the king that we traveled to the Temple of the great God in the Judean province, which is being built with large stones and reinforced with wooden beams in its walls. The work proceeds diligently and is in capable hands.

8 Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

- Tattenai began his letter by noting that work was being done on the "house of the great God" in Jerusalem

— This does not mean that Tattenai believed YHWH of Israel was the supreme God. Most likely he meant that the God to whom the Jews were building the temple was the major God of the area. The Ancient Near East had a highly developed belief in local deities.

— Tattenai noted that large stones and timbers (Cf. 6:4; 1 Kings 6:36) were being used in the work and that the Jews were working with diligence and were making rapid progress

9 Then we asked those elders and said to them as follows: 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?'

9 Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?'

9 We asked the elders, "Who authorized you to build this Temple and to reinforce these walls?"

9 Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

10 We also asked them their names so as to inform you, in order that we might write down the names of the men who were in charge.

10 We also asked them their names so as to inform you, and that we might write down the names of the men who were at their head.

10 We also asked them their names so that we could certify the identities of their leaders to you.

10 We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them.

- He added that he had asked who authorized the work (Cf. v3) and that he had asked for the names of those who were leading the building program (Cf. v4)

11 So they answered us as follows, saying, 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.

11 Thus they answered us, saying, 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.

11 In answer they responded, "We are servants of the God of heaven and earth, and are rebuilding the Temple that was built many years ago by a great king of Israel.

11 And thus they returned us answer, saying, 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.

- Tattenai's letter then included the Jews' answers to his questions (v11-16)

— Zerubbabel and Jeshua called themselves servants of the God of heaven and earth, not servants of Persia!

— The true God, YHWH, was superior to Darius' god, Ahura Mazda, whom Darius called "the god of beautiful temple"

12 But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.

12 But because our fathers had 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 deported the people to Babylon.

12 But because our predecessors provoked the God of Heaven to become angry, he handed them over to the control of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean who destroyed this Temple and transported the people to Babylon.

12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.

- But because of sin (our fathers angered the God of heaven), God handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar

— The Jews knew why the temple was destroyed and the people deported. In God's promise/threat (Deut 28:49-50) He said that the people would be taken into captivity if

they did not live according to the covenant He instituted with them as they were ready to enter the land of promise.

Not only was Nebuchadnezzar involved in the fall of Jerusalem, God Himself was responsible! Nebuchadnezzar was merely an agent of God's anger on His people (Cf. "My servant Nebuchadnezzar" in Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10)—an anger which was designed to purify the nation so that some would return to the Land as a believing remnant. The exile did not mean that YHWH was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar's gods.

13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God.

13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God.

13 "However, during King Cyrus' first year—that same King Cyrus of Babylon—issued a decree to reconstruct this Temple of God.

13 But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.

14 Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought them to the temple of Babylon, King Cyrus took them from the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor.

14 Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and brought them to the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor.

14 He delivered into the care of Sheshbazzar (whom he appointed governor) the gold and silver utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Jerusalem Temple and brought into the Babylonian temple.

14 And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;
- In response to Tattenai, Zerubbabel and Jeshua stated that Cyrus had allowed a remnant to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and even gave them articles which had been taken from Solomon's temple (Cf. 1:2-4,7-11)

15 And he said to him, "Take these utensils, go *and* deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and have the house of God rebuilt in its place."

15 He said to him, "Take these utensils, go *and* deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and let the house of God be rebuilt in its place."

15 "And Cyrus told him, 'Take these utensils, go to Jerusalem, and carry them to the Temple, after the Temple of God has been built in its appropriate place.'

15 And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.

16 Then that Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed.'

16 Then that Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed.'

16 "Then this very same Sheshbazzar arrived and laid the foundations for the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Since that time until now the Temple has been under construction and is not yet completed."

16 Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.

- The letter-writers also recounted the fact that Cyrus gave Sheshbazzar the task of carrying out the king's command to return the articles and to build another temple in the city

— Sheshbazzar was mentioned to show Tattenai that the building program was legal. Thus it seems likely that Sheshbazzar was a Persian official whose name carried some weight with Tattenai.

Many believe that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are the same person because Sheshbazzar laid the temple foundations, and so did Zerubbabel (3:8-10). However, this is not absolute proof that the two men were identical. Sheshbazzar could have been responsible, as the king's representative, to see that the work was begun, and Zerubbabel the Jewish leader who completed the task.

17 And now, if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, as to whether a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this *matter.*"

17 "Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this *matter.*"

17 Accordingly, with your approval we suggest that a search be conducted within the king's treasury at Babylon to verify whether or not King Cyrus ever issued such a decree to reconstruct this Temple of God in Jerusalem. Then please notify us concerning the king's pleasure in this matter.

17 Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

- Tattenai and the officials asked that the king research the records in Babylon (Cf. 6:1-2) to find out if what the Jews had said about a decree from Cyrus was true. That such records were carefully kept is attested by archeology.