

Rebuilding the House of God: Obedience, Decree, and Joy

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References: **Ezra 5-6**, Ezra 1:2; Ezra 4:4; Ezra 4:8; Haggai 1:1; Haggai 1:12-15; Psalm 126:1-2; Revelation 21

Resuming the Work Under Opposition

So let's turn to the Word. It'll be the book of Ezra, chapter 5, I believe. I think last week we got up to the end of verse number 2. So we'll pick up the story from here.

In verse 2, through the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they resume building the house of God. And so in verse 3, at the same time came to them Tattenai, governor on this side of the river, and Shethar-Boznai, and their companions, and said thus to them, "Who commanded you to build this house and to make up this wall?"

So they again ran into the opposition of the governor on this side of the river. Tattenai was probably sort of over the whole land. It's true that Zerubbabel and Shealtiel, they had some power, but Tattenai also had power. He was questioning whether they should go ahead and rebuild. And so then said we unto them after this manner, "What are the names of the men that make this building?" 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.

So opposition again coming—this time strong opposition, questioning opposition, and they applied apparently a little force to cause them to cease. But that force was insufficient; they kept on going. It says they could not cause them to cease at the end of verse 5 until the matter came to Darius. So they felt that somehow they should go back to Darius to get instruction as to what could or could not be done. And so they decided on the basis of that to send a letter. Tattenai, the governor, sent the letter along with his companions, and they sent the letter to Darius to get clarification.

My thoughts on this are very simple, and that is that very often the work of God continues, but it continues with opposition—not necessarily 100% opposition, but back-and-forth kind of opposition. And you think things are going well until they don't, and then you think things are going bad until the Lord helps, and it's up and down and up and down. And in the work

of God, I think we've got to learn to be faithful to do the work of God, whether the winds are blowing for us or against us.

So they ultimately decided to send the letter, to send the issue back to Darius. Any other comments on that before we get into the letter that they sent to Darius?

The Ministry of Haggai and Zechariah

Just a comment on that verse, too. In verse 1, we read that then the prophet 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.

[Ezra 5:1 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.

We looked last week a little bit at their prophecies, Zechariah and Haggai, and we saw Haggai in Haggai chapter 1. His first sermon was in the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month.

[Haggai 1:1 NKJV]

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,

The work had stopped. The attempts by Satan, no doubt, had hindered the work of God, and they were so demoralized because it went on continually. The opposition was continual, and in every little detail, it was like rowing against a current until finally they just gave up, and they went back to their own self-interests. And their rationalization was, "I guess it's not time to build the Lord's house." So they turned to their own self-interests rather than pursuing on, going on.

So this is when the Lord raises up Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai prophesies basically just for a few months. We have four of his messages, and he prophesied from the sixth to the

ninth month. So we just have three months of his messages, four messages. No doubt there were more, but these are recorded. And his message to the Jews was very simple: "When you are interested in your own things, how much profit did you have?" And of course, during the time that they had let the work of God slip, God had put a famine on the land. They weren't making any progress at all. The blessings of God were withheld. And so he said, "Consider your ways." Why are you going through these problems? That's because the Lord's house is desolate while you're spending all your time on your own things.

So he prophesied to them. Now, the result was that the people—Zerubbabel and Joshua, the priest, and all the people—they were convicted. They laid down their own self-interest, and they picked up the Lord's work. We read in Haggai chapter 1—we get details that cover verse 2 there in Ezra chapter 5. So we get these details in Haggai chapter 1, reading from verse 12 to the end of the chapter, which is just a few verses. It says:

[Haggai 1:12 NKJV]

¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the LORD.

The Lord made His presence known when the prophet Haggai began to speak. They knew it was from the Lord, obviously. And then it says in verse 13:

[Haggai 1:13 NKJV]

¹³ Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD."

Here's another little addendum to his message. The Lord says, "I'm with you."

[Haggai 1:14-15 NKJV]

¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.

So he began prophesying on the first day, and in three weeks they had put down everything. They had got things organized again, getting the necessary supplies, organizing the labor distribution, and they began their work again. It is wonderful what happens.

And then, of course, the further instructions given by Haggai, encouragement, and Zechariah. He is the prophet that prophesied for a number of months and years, and it gives added encouragement as well, though we won't go much into that and some of his visions, which are encouragement to them, to the remnant, as they build right to the end. It would take them another four years after the decree of Darius to finish the work, but in the meantime, the prophets continued their ministry encouraging the people to build.

So we read there in verse 2 again, back in Ezra chapter 5:

[Ezra 5:2 NKJV]

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.

Through the ministry of the prophets encouraging the people, they continued to work.

A Fair and Just Administration

Now, then we're introduced to this Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the river. Now, Zerubbabel was governor of Judah. He was appointed as governor and seemed to keep that governorship through the different administrations of the successive Persian kings. Whereas we find now this Tattenai—it's a different name from those who had opposed the work earlier on, where we read of some of those men. They were in chapter 4. There was Rehum, the commander, and Shimshai, the scribe, who wrote this letter of accusation—false accusations actually, misrepresenting the situation completely.

Now, when you get a new king, usually you get a new administration—same as when a president or a prime minister, when a new government comes into Ottawa or into Washington, you get new ministers. I worked for the province for a number of years, and practically every four years we got a new minister—Minister of Education, Minister of Health, and so on. There was a complete turnover. The deputy ministers, they were full-time workers; they stayed the same, pretty much the same, unless they were politically appointed.

So this Darius now, he comes in, and he appoints—and by the way, this Darius is the Darius who is the Ahasuerus of Esther. So he's got a different name. And we explained something about the titles that these various kings took upon themselves, that these were not their proper names. Darius Hystaspes—Hystaspes was his personal name, but he was known as Darius. This one was known as Darius.

So we read that Tattenai now—it sounds like he had been recently appointed by Darius, two years into his administration. Tattenai now is a new governor of the whole region beyond the river, not just Judah, but over there. And it sounds, as we go through this passage, it sounds like he's a very fair and just man. And Darius' administration seemed to be just that; historical fact, as history records, is that his administration was fair so that he appointed better men.

This Tattenai, obviously, the work had been stopped. Perhaps he'd gotten word from Rehum, the former governor, that that work should not be going on, and so he asked them a reason for why they were building. He didn't try to stop them. I don't see a lot of opposition there, although they could have used that as an excuse, perhaps, to stop the work. But they did have Cyrus's decree. And before they became discouraged with Rehum and the false representation, those Jews said, "Look, we have a command from Cyrus, who was a Persian king, whose law cannot be revoked." Even the king can't revoke the law; it has to be, it has to be. So why don't you search? Well, they were so discouraged, I don't think they even wanted to use that excuse for some reason.

But this now, we'll read that Zerubbabel must have said to Tattenai, "Look, we've got a command from Cyrus." And so I believe that this Tattenai and Shethar-Boznai, and the rest of them, were a very fair, a fair and just administration, because they do not misrepresent the Jews' answer. They record it exactly, so that when Darius gets the letter, it's a factual letter. The facts are there that the Jews had told him, and he records them in a factual manner, so that the king does make, as we'll find later on, search for that decree of Cyrus to see if, in fact, they should continue building that temple. So those are just my remarks to bring us into this, I think, a fair written letter, a factual letter, which reflects on, I think, a fairly just administrator, this Mr. Tattenai.

All right, well, that's a good introduction to the letter. The letter is surprisingly a lengthy letter. It starts in verse 6 and finishes at the end of the chapter, and I'm going to get someone else to read it for us. But as you do, follow Eric's remarks to see whether you think it's a fair letter, and any comments that you might have on it, you let us know after we've read the letter. So if someone would please read from verse 6 to the end of the chapter.

[Ezra 5:6-17 NKJV]

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. 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.

Amen. Thank you, Roy. That's a long letter. If you look at the letter in detail, you'll find that it's actually a letter, or an explanation, within the letter. Tattenai explains to the king what's going on, and then at the end of verse 10, he says, "We asked their names to certify thee that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying..." And from there on, until the end of verse number 16, we get the answer that was given by Shealtiel or Zerubbabel, who are doing the building.

So, as Eric says, it's a relatively fair letter, and in fact, it probably states very clearly the answer that Tattenai was given when he spoke to the men who were doing the building. And they simply said, "This is what we're doing and why we're doing it." And Tattenai then, having heard that and recorded it for them, says in verse 17, "Therefore, go and search to see if there is any record that Cyrus the king made concerning this particular building." So there's a great fairness there.

It's also true that the theme of this letter is the house of the Lord. We pointed out last week that the theme of the former letters was "rebuild Jerusalem." But that's not the theme here. The honest focus is the house of the Lord, as it should have been. So we give credit to this man, Tattenai. The letter seems to be a good and a valid letter.

The other thing that impresses me is verse 12. It says, "But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar." In the former letter, the reason that there was a problem was that the people of Jerusalem were a rebellious people against kings. That's why they shut them down. But here, the honest reason is—and the men of God whose fathers had disobeyed, they were the ones who said—the problem was not that we were disobedient to the king of Persia or the king of Babylon. The problem was we were disobedient to our God, and we deserved what we got. So, frankly, I just... I like the letter. I think it's a good letter.

I marvel that the politicians would be so concerned about this. But the fact is that politicians are concerned about the work of God. If you were a politician, what would you do regarding the Church of Jesus Christ? Well, you would promote it because the Christians made the best citizens that you're going to get. And if the truth of God is proclaimed, the evil in the world is going to be subdued. So you would be in favor of the church. On the other hand, if you were a wicked man, you would delight to get rid of the church because they are going to oppose you at every turn—in practice, in verbal, or by prayer, they're going to be fighting against you. So politics is important.

It's interesting again, and I think I pointed it out last time, that the people of God were not actively lobbying the king. The issues developed around them, they cooperated, but they didn't have a peace march. They didn't get flags. They didn't organize a rebellion. They responded gracefully and peacefully and in a commendable way to the situations around them. So I guess I'm encouraged by the people of God here. I think they did a good thing. Maybe not surprising—they had left much of their circumstances that they'd been involved in for 50 or 70 years. They turned around, came back to a defeated land, to a broken-down land. They did it because they loved the Lord. And you're not surprised that the Lord supported them in that and encouraged them in that, both through His prophets but also through the governors. So those are my comments on that very good letter that was written.

I'm impressed by the humility of the Jews now. Having been chastised by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they answered truthfully and to their shame, in a sense. So before these Gentiles who had dominion over them, they are very humble, and they trace very accurately why they are in the condition that they are in. "Our fathers sinned." And where does it say this? Verse 12?

Yes, verse 12.

Our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath. And so, I thought it interesting, you comparing that, Harold, to the previous letter where it talks about when they misrepresent—the former governors, when they misrepresent the Jews, they say that these are a rebellious people, and they were. But the humility of Zerubbabel and Jeshua now in saying that God, the God of heaven, we provoked to wrath, and that's why we're in the condition we are. But we are under a command from Cyrus, which is a direct command through Cyrus from God Himself to build this temple. Because Cyrus himself says in chapter 1 and verse 2 of Ezra, we read:

[Ezra 1:2 NKJV]

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.

So, it was a direct command through Cyrus from God Himself to build that temple. So I was impressed with their humility and their honesty in the answer. And I think it's true. Now God is going to work. They were properly chastised and disciplined. Their selfish motives for looking after their own business and neglecting the Lord's—now it was turned around and

they were working for the Lord. And the Lord gave them grace in the eyes of the administrator, this Tattenai, who seemed to be a fairly honest and fair man. At least his letter is anyway. We don't know what his motives were. It could have been anything.

It's interesting that because of the sin of the children of Israel, they were carried into Babylon. And as Eric points out, because of the humility of the people willing to go back and rebuild the work, the Lord uses the same governmental authority that had opposed them to support them. That's very encouraging.

Sometimes you get a little upset with the government and you say, "You're not fair. I don't owe you all this tax. You shouldn't have done this," and everything is against you. Other times you find the government's for you; you say, "Hallelujah!" I'm not sure all that goes on. I do know that God is over the government, and sometimes He sends someone to work with you who is opposed and other times is a great help. What is our position to be? Don't cause God to raise government enemies against you. Be humble before the Lord and let Him use governmental authority to bless you. That's the way it should be in the assembly. That's the way it should be in our individual lives. And some of us have got some pleasant and not-so-pleasant experiences there, and we probably learn from them as we do from Scripture.

The Decree of Darius

All right, what else have we got here then? We've got the response of Darius. Chapter 6, verse 1: "Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls where the treasures were laid up in Babylon." When Darius got the letter, he did something with it. He didn't just file it away in the back of his desk. He did something about it, and we praise the Lord for that.

So maybe we now can get someone to read and give Roy a bit of a break as well. But someone could read chapter 6 down to the end of verse number 12. Down to the end of verse 12 is the response of Darius.

[Ezra 6:1-12 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:

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. 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. 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. 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.

Hallelujah! And all the people said, "Amen."

Amen.

Amen.

So I guess I'm going to turn you to Psalm 126. Psalm 126, and it simply says:

[Psalm 126:1-2 NKJV]

¹ When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion,

We were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,

And our tongue with singing.

Then they said among the nations,

"The LORD has done great things for them."

You can imagine when this letter comes back, these men saying, "Wow, this is absolutely marvelous." Have you ever opened a letter from the government? You made application for this, that, or the other thing. Maybe it was a tax matter. Maybe it was another matter. You open the letter, and before you open it, you say, "This is going to be good news or bad." And when you open it, and the letter says, "We've heard what you say. We agree with you 100%. This matter is closed. You don't owe anything." You say, "Thank you, Lord."

And in this case, I just think they were laughing, as Psalm 126 says. I think they were laughing for joy. What are we going to do when we get to heaven? I think we're going to be laughing for joy, and we're going to say to one another, "Do you remember that situation? Remember how we were so concerned? And the Lord turned it all around for good."

Hallelujah. So back then to Ezra chapter 6. It's interesting, we've got this letter from Cyrus again. We've read it in several places. I like this one. It's got more detail of more good things that Cyrus sent them. The first letters were rather short, but this letter talks in detail about all the good things that he intended be done.

One of the things I find interesting is in verse number 3: "Let the foundations thereof be strongly laid, let the height thereof be threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits." Go ahead and build the temple. How? How high would it be? How high is that? Well, it's the equivalent of a nine-story building, isn't it? Ten feet to the floor and nine floors. That's a pretty high building for those days. Did you know that it was 90 feet high and 90 feet broad? How deep do you think it was? Well, probably 90 feet. It was built in the shape of a cube, wasn't it?

What do you know about the New Jerusalem? It's going to be a cube—a little bit bigger. It'll be 1,500 miles high and broad and wide. But it's not that big. It's going to be a cube as well, a huge cube. I think this is a picture of that marvelous New Jerusalem that's going to come down out of heaven as a bride we read about in Revelation chapter 21 and so on. I find the descriptions here interesting. So much of what happens in the Old Testament is a picture of

what's going to happen in the New. I think if you were looking at that building, you'd say, "It's a cube." It's enormous, an enormous cube. The Lord says, "Okay, just remember, I'm going to build a city like that for you. It's going to be called the New Jerusalem. It'll be an enormous cube, but just a little bit higher, a little bit bigger." So anyway, I praise the Lord for all this.

It's interesting that King Darius says at the end of verse 10, "and pray for the life of the king and his sons." Why was he so enthusiastic about this? Well, in part because he said, "I think if I am good to God and to His people, God might be good to me." And so he's basically saying, "You do all this, and make sure you do it, and remember in the middle of it, keep on praying for me." Do you think that the men of God as they were building the temple ever—as they were building, do you think they would stop for a minute and say, "Thank you, Lord, for this king. Blessing, would You save his sons?" I think they prayed that often.

Darius, was he a believer or not? I don't know, but he had enough common sense to realize that the God about whom he says many good things here, that God would maybe have an influence over him and his sons. And I'm sure the Lord blessed him accordingly. So I think that was a good letter. And I marvel that it ends with the emphasis, "Don't you mess with this decree. You mess with the decree of Cyrus, you said shut him down. And if that happens again, what do you do? Tear the man's house down, take the timber, make a scaffold of it, hang him on it, and then turn the rest of his house into a garbage dump."

Did you note the other thing? All the expenses. This is an expense-paid project. All the expenses are paid. And I think a lot of the volunteer labor said, "I wasn't expecting to get paid for this. I was just going to... I volunteered my time to the work of God, and I'm going to get paid for it." You ever notice that, the way the Lord treats you in life? You often do a few things, and all of a sudden, for some reason, often totally unexpected, the Lord says, "How would you like a paycheck, Harold?" And you say, "Thank you, Lord." So I guess... I guess you can reread and reread and reread and reread. This is chapter 6. Again, it's a good chapter. It shows that God cares. After lots of problems, He keeps on caring.

A Sovereign Turnaround

Yeah, it's interesting. The decree of Cyrus wasn't found in the main archives. It was found way up in—what's it called? Yes, in verse 2 of chapter 6, Achmetha, which we've got in the margins as Ecbatana, which was the ancient capital of the Medes in the north, in the mountains. And later, after it was captured by Cyrus, it became the summer residence of the Persian kings. And so it was found there in that. It's not far away from the capital of Persia, in the summer residence.

So, but it shows that Darius, when he issued another decree, and that decree was, "Let a search be made in all the archives. Don't miss anything." And, of course, he didn't have a computer to punch in a search. He didn't have artificial intelligence. He had scribes sent hither and thither. "Have you searched everywhere? Have you searched up in the summer residence? There's a library up there. Have you gone there?" "Well, yes, we're going to go there tomorrow, sir." And there they found it, the decree of Cyrus. Maybe Cyrus had issued that decree from that palace, I'm not sure. But at any rate, there it was found in that summer residence of the Persian kings.

Another thing, too, is that the letter that Tattenai had sent to Darius records accurately who the Jews served. They call twice—the Jews say, "We are the servants of the God of heaven." And then he says again in the next verse, "Our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath." Now it's interesting that that was recorded by Tattenai, sent to Darius. And when Darius sends the letter back, his decree back, once he'd found that decree of Cyrus, he calls the God of the Jews "the God of heaven," there in verse 9 and verse 10, when providing for burnt offerings, whatever they need—young bulls, rams, lambs, and so on—offerings of the God of heaven, and then that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king. So he uses the same phrase, "the God of heaven."

And it's interesting, too, that in verse 12, where Darius is referring to Jerusalem, he calls it "the God who causes His name to dwell there," which is interesting as well.

Amen.

Amen.

So.

The other thing I'll point out here is that now, Harold has referred to the earlier administration that had opposed the Jews, the adversaries. It says in chapter 4, verse 4:

[Ezra 4:4 NKJV]

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,

And that little phrase is "troubled them in building." In other words, they put a block in everything they wanted. They wanted to purchase something, some goods, some iron nails for the doors—who knows? Whatever they did, they would put every obstacle in front of them, close up the supply chains, delay anything, any help whatsoever to discourage them, which they were successful in doing. Yeah. And then they hired these counselors who would,

of course, tell them, "Your work isn't of any value. You guys won't be able to finish this. This is too big a job for you," and so forth and so forth, these counselors hammering away at them.

But the turnaround here is that now, rather than being frustrated in getting supplies and moving the equipment and so on, now, in actual fact, the king says, "Look, the taxes on that side of the river, now I want you to pay for all that stuff. The timber that's going to come down from Lebanon and float it down, the stones that will be required to be quarried—that's all going to be paid for, and look to it that you don't hinder this work anymore."

So the total change from one administration to another. What caused that change? I believe it was the **repentance** of the people. That was the difference. The word of God came by the prophets themselves. They humbled themselves before God, they repented, and then confessed, and then they took up the word of God, the promises—they obeyed the word of God, and nothing but success from there on in. They were able to complete that very large building.

It wasn't the same as Solomon. Solomon took seven years to build it, but he had a lot greater resources than these people did—a lot more manpower, thousands of workers he had, and it took him seven years. But this is a little bit more modest building, but still, it was a big, big undertaking.

One other thing. Rather than a cube, the New Jerusalem could be a pyramid. There are two figures that would satisfy those dimensions of the New Jerusalem. It could be a pyramid as well. Others have pointed that out. Either a cube or a pyramid. Either way, it would be impossible to say exactly.

I have no further input, no. I don't know. I don't know myself, so I'm not saying. I haven't seen it yet. And this isn't described as a perfect cube; it's just 60 cubits high, so I'm not sure of the precise shape of it either. I presume it's a cube. We know it's got three rows of heavy stones and a row of new timber.

Yeah.

Sebastian knows why they put the timber in there, right?

Yeah, earthquake-proof. Earthquake. They lock the stones in the timbers, and it becomes earthquake-proof.

I've never done that, so I wasn't aware of that.

Otherwise, if it was just unsupported masonry, it could easily tumble over, even those big stones, with a big enough earthquake.

Old-fashioned rebar.

Old-fashioned rebar, yeah. And that's why when they burned the city, they burned all those logs, those supporting beams as well. That's how they could throw the stones down.

Well, back to the end of verse 8, it says, "that they be not hindered." Verse 9: "And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, rams, lambs, for the burnt offering, the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail."

How did he know what was required for the daily offering? I don't know the answer to that question. That is a valid question. How did he know? Did somebody tell him what they were doing? Did somebody accompany this letter to speak to him and explain to him what was going on? We don't know. But it is amazing to me that the king would say, "We'll supply the sheep and the cattle. We'll supply the oil. We'll supply the wine that's necessary for the sacrifices." That, to me, is absolutely amazing. Someone may have an answer as to how he got that knowledge.

Yeah, it says in that same verse, it says, "according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem." So someone must have been... He must have either made inquiry as to their needs, or it was made known to them that they would need this somehow. So he understood, I think, as well as those ancient times, in those temples there were sacrifices that were made of animals as well. So it wasn't as though there was something foreign to them, perhaps. And many of the Persian kings were not polygamists; they were worshipping one god. They were monotheistic, not polytheistic. So...

One thing we do know for certain, and that is that the Lord made sure that the people were provided with all that was necessary. I guess the principle for us is simple. We say, "I don't know how to worship God." The answer is: you ask the Lord, He'll tell you how to worship. If you're willing, He'll supply. And that's for worship as well as for service. Very encouraging.

The Dedication of the House

Anything else on those two letters? Well, verse 12 says—sorry, verse 13 says:

[Ezra 6:13 NKJV]

¹³ Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent.

These servants were zealous to fulfill the command of Darius. Praise the Lord. They didn't want to get their houses pulled down and hung up on them. That probably was a good incentive, wasn't it? That would be quite a good incentive, I agree.

And the elders of the Jews built it, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet:

[Ezra 6:14 NKJV]

¹⁴ So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

The prophets didn't stop prophesying. They probably praised the Lord, and they carried on, kept on prophesying.

[Ezra 6:14 NKJV]

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.

And so I ask myself the question: all right, we've just heard from Cyrus, and we've heard from Darius. The next line is Artaxerxes. Is that the input of Artaxerxes in the letters that are going to follow, or is it the letter of Artaxerxes which was an opposition letter that we had earlier? I'm not sure. But anyway, they build it and finish it according to the commandment of God and according to the commandment of these kings.

[Ezra 6:15 NKJV]

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.

So Eric is giving us the chronology on all of this, and it took a while to build, but they finished it. Hallelujah! What did they do when they finished?

[Ezra 6:16 NKJV]

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.

And I'm going to underline again these simple words: **with joy**. You can imagine that they started out when they left Babylon—the 50,000 of them—did they think that they were going to get to this point? Some of them said yes. Some of them probably said, "We're going because the Lord told us to, but I don't think it's going to work." We keep on doing the work of God. Some days we're filled with enthusiasm; some days we're very disappointed. And we say, "Lord, I don't know if You're going to be able to pull this one off. It doesn't look very good." But the Lord did it. And when they got there, they celebrated the dedication **with joy**.

[Ezra 6:17-18 NKJV]

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.

So the question is, what did they do for a dedication? Well, they got together and they had a dedication of joy and they offered sacrifices. But in their dedication, they were certain and made certain that they did it according to what was written in the book of Moses.

Doesn't matter if there's a problem, doesn't matter if there's great rejoicing—in both circumstances and all others, we are to do it according to the will of the Lord. Don't let your discouragement turn you away from obedience, and don't let your euphoria and the greatness and blessing of God turn you away from obedience. Sometimes the latter is harder than the former, but we've got to follow the Lord and follow the Lord. Don't let down our standard.

In verse 14, we read... I've been studying the book of Haggai and Zechariah. And some of those visions—there are eight visions. The first few chapters of Zechariah are taken up with eight visions. And some of these visions seem to be very obscure when you first begin to read them. But in the light of what we have been studying here, the Lord opens it up. And those visions really were an encouragement as this young Zechariah began to prophesy. Maybe we have time to go over a couple of those visions; they're very short, they're fairly simple.

But his visions take them not only in this time, encouraging them here, but go far beyond to the Messiah, the coming. His visions take us right to the very end, to the millennial time when the Lord comes from heaven. And it isn't just the restoration of the temple, it's the restoration of all things that Zechariah takes. And he's encouraging the people to open up their vision beyond what they're doing here, to actually see the fact—because they're still under the dominion of the Gentiles. It's still the time of the Gentiles. But there's going to come a time when they are going to be the head of the nations, and his visions go beyond the present time and look right beyond to when the Lord comes in power and glory. So his visions speak about the Lord's judgment on those nations that have treated the Jews the way they had, and so on.

So they prospered during their time. They had the advantage as they were building. That four years, man, there was a revival going on the whole time.

Amen.

They were listening to what the prophets—Zechariah had said, and maybe Haggai too, but we don't have any record of his sermons beyond those few months.

But Zechariah did, and so they must have been... it must have been a wonderful time of building. No shortage of materials, whatever they needed. Everything was... it was a great time of revival in Israel. The temple was being built, and so when you come there now, the people talk about great joy. It says there in that verse—you pointed it out.

Yes, in verse 16.

They celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. The great fellowship and companionship in their struggles and what they had overcome, and then the revival being brought back to the Word of God, because it says there that all the priests, they were doing everything now, the sacrifices—everything was done. The Levites had purified themselves. Everything in the house of God was working perfectly because it was just as it was written in the law of Moses, according to the will of God.

That's why I think any real revival in history has always begun by a return to the obedience of the Word of God itself. We don't need a prophet to show up to stir us up; we have the whole Word of God—not only the word of Haggai and Zechariah and the history behind all that to encourage us, but we have the apostles' doctrine, we have the whole Word of God. Everything that God wants us to know for our life and service is found here in the Scriptures. We just have to do it just as it is written, as they did.

Amen.

Preparing for Worship

Well, verse 19 says:

[Ezra 6:19 NKJV]

¹⁹ And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

And you can understand that. The temple is there. What are you going to do with it? And the answer is, we're going back to temple sacrifice. We're going to get the Feast of Jehovah going here, and so the first one is the Passover on the 14th day of the first month.

Verse 20:

[Ezra 6:20 NKJV]

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.

It's interesting that the time for the Passover was approaching, and you can imagine them saying, "The building is finished, and we say hallelujah! We're going to have the dedication. Let's put the dedication on at the time of the Passover." And it gives, if you like, a new vision for the Passover. It would have been a very exciting time. What about the priests and the Levites? They said, "On the 14th day of the first month, there's going to be a Passover. We have got to be prepared for that. We have got to be purified for that."

So you ask yourself the question. All right, we're going to have to rise and worship the Lord on Sunday morning. We're going to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread. When do you start getting prepared for that? And I can remember as a younger man, as a teenager, listening to Brother So-and-So or another brother get up, and their words would be, "I was reading this morning before we came to this meeting," and they gave some very good worship from their reading in the morning. I said to myself, "Harold, what were you doing before you came to the meeting this morning?" And I said, "Well, I was sleeping." They didn't sleep! They got up, read their Bible before they came to the worship meeting on Sunday morning. And I said, "Harold, you'd better start smartening up."

When did the priests and the Levites start getting prepared for the Passover? Well, they probably did not just a few minutes before, but probably a few days before, or a few weeks before, or a few months before. They would have to go back, would they not, and read all the instructions regarding the Passover from the books of Moses, Leviticus in particular. They would have to read them, they would have to understand them, they would have to memorize them, and they would have to make sure that they didn't just know the facts, but that they had the character, the purity, the moral purity to fulfill those facts.

So, that's the first thing. I think the priests and the Levites spent a long time getting ready for the Passover. And I think, brethren, we should be spending a lot of time getting ready to worship the Lord, getting ready to serve the Lord. This isn't something that you say, "Okay, I'll go and do it now." You've got to make sure that you're ready to go and do it.

I know nothing about military service, but I have been beginning to wonder about being a Marine in the U.S. Army. And I'm saying to myself, "Harold, what would you have done if, when you were living in the United States, the U.S. military had caught up to me and said, 'So sorry, son, but you're a resident of the United States; you are subject to the draft. You are going to report on Monday morning to such and such a place, and you are going to have to be a soldier'?" And I would say to myself, "Harold, you'd never make a soldier." I couldn't run the way they did, I couldn't lift the way they did, I couldn't fight the way they did, I couldn't wrestle the way they did—I would have made the world's worst soldier!

But if I had known three years in advance that I had to be a soldier in three years, what would I have done? I would have entered into a physical exercise program, and I would have begun to structure my body in such a way as to be able to handle that. And I think that the priests and the Levites did the same thing. I think it's wonderful. By the time that building was completed, the priests and the Levites were completed to serve. Hallelujah for them! By the grace of God, we'll be the same.

Verse 21, and the children of Israel... our time is gone. We'll get to verse 21 next week, and Eric will have an opportunity to speak on other things that we've covered and didn't give time for, but our time is gone now. Maybe one of you brethren would close in prayer and say, "Hallelujah, the Lord provided for the needs of the people in Israel way back then; He's going to provide for our needs as well." Hallelujah.

Lord, we thank You again for Your grace to us. We thank You, Lord, that You're building a far greater house today.

Amen. Amen.

The Son over His own house. Lord, we thank You that You have given us all the gifts that we

need to build. As Paul was a wise master builder, so will we build too. So, Father, we thank You that You've given us every blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. You've given us every resource. So, Lord, we pray that we might, as we build Your house—the house of God, living stones built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, Lord—that we may, as builders as well as priests in the house, glorify Your name, we pray. We ask this and give You thanks in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Amen.