

### Work Resumes on the Temple and Opposition Continues

#### Ezra 5

**Ezra 5: 1-2** - *“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. <sup>2</sup> So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.”*

#### Background Notes

In Ezra 4 the foundation was laid for the new rebuilt Temple, the Second Temple - sometimes called Zerubbabel's Temple. In 538BC about 50,000 Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel. They laid the foundation for the new Temple in 535BC, but the work was halted for 15 years because of opposition from the surrounding foreign peoples. It didn't resume until 520BC. *“Thus the work of the house of God at Jerusalem ceased and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (Ezra 4:24).*

During Darius' reign God graciously raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, from among the returned captives. They were to motivate the people to get on with the work of rebuilding the house of the Lord. Haggai and Zechariah, along with Malachi who came a little later, wrote the last three books in our Old Testament.

As a result of the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, the rebuilt Temple was completed in 516BC, four years after the prophets had motivated the people to get back to rebuilding of the house of the Lord. We'll study the completion of the Temple in chapter 6, but in chapter 5 the people faced more opposition as they worked on the Temple.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. The teaching of the Word will motivate God's people.

After fifteen years of apathy, apprehension and fear, why were the people motivated once again to start rebuilding the Temple? It was because of the teaching of God's Word! Read the books of Haggai, and you will find **exhortation** based on God's Word. Read the book of Zechariah, you will find **encouragement** based on God's Word. Haggai is a series of fiery short sermons that exhort the people to do the work of the Lord. Zechariah is a series of visions to encourage the people to do the work of the Lord. Exhortation and encouragement from the Word are both needed to motivate God's people, then and today.

Listen to the exhortation in this sermon from Haggai 1:3-9 - *“Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, <sup>4</sup> “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” <sup>5</sup> Now therefore,*

*thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! <sup>8</sup> Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house."*

The people were spending more time working on their own houses than on the house of the Lord. Does that sound convicting? It should. It's exhortation! Notice - Haggai's exhortation was based on what God had said in His Word in Deuteronomy 28. If Israel would trust and obey, He would bless their land - but if they refused to trust and obey, He would allow disaster to overtake them. And indeed that took place. Haggai's exhortation was based on the Word of God. Zechariah's encouragement was rooted in what God had already declared in His Word about the glorious future He has planned for Israel. Notice the encouragement of one of Zechariah's visions: *"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the LORD. <sup>11</sup> "Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. <sup>12</sup> And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem"* (Zechariah 2:10-12). Zechariah's encouragement was based on the Word.

Exhortation and encouragement from God's Word motivated God's people in that day, and it will do the same today. A steady diet of expository ministry from God's Word is key to the best kind of personal growth and church growth. Teaching of the Word will motivate God's people.

## **2. The tactics of the enemy should challenge God's people!**

**Ezra 5:3-17** - *"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?" <sup>4</sup> Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. <sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.*

*<sup>7</sup> To Darius the king: All peace. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" <sup>10</sup> We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who were chief among them.*

*<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

*<sup>13</sup> However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. <sup>14</sup> Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God (that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon), King Cyrus took them from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. <sup>15</sup> 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.' <sup>16</sup> 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."*

*<sup>17</sup> 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."*

Ezra 4 gave an overview of the opposition that the people faced when they returned to the land, and Ezra 5 provides more details of that opposition. The Persian Empire was in power at this time. Tattenia was likely a high official under the Persian king, Darius, with responsibilities to govern a good portion of what we call the Middle East today. Shethar-Boznai was probably his assistant. These Persian officials challenged God's people, demanding to know where they had received authority to rebuild this Temple. Then these officials wrote a letter to Darius requesting an investigation of this matter. In the letter, the Persian name Sheshbazzar is used for the Israeli leader, Zerubbabel. Notice two very significant points about the content of this official letter.

**a. Israel used this challenge as an opportunity to witness for the Lord.** Pagan Persian officials wrote this letter to King Darius, but the entire letter is sprinkled with references to the one true God of Israel! Israel provided a great testimony about their God to these officials.

**b. The Persian officials couldn't deny that the God of Israel was blessing His people, and that the people were committed to the work.** Look at verse 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."* What a great testimony!

Let me ask you a question: Do our unsaved neighbors say good things about us? There's a lesson here for all of us. As God's people, we face opposition from the enemy. Satan uses many tactics to stop us from serving the Lord, and to hinder us from introducing others to Jesus. But in spite of the opposition, let's be sure to maintain our good testimony! Let's use these challenges as opportunities to witness for our Lord, as Israel did.

In 1 Corinthians 16:9 the apostle Paul wrote, *"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."* Remember how the apostle Paul used every opportunity - even his trials before Felix Festus and Caesar himself - to testify for the Lord?

We should do that too! Is your faith being challenged or opposed in your place of employment, or in your school or university? Use that opposition as an opportunity to share your faith! I know Christian high school and college students who have used the enemy's godless theory of evolution as a challenge, not only to refute the false claims, but also to actually witness to the God of Creation. The tactics of the enemy should challenge God's people!

## Practical Application

### Remember - God is in control of the opposition!

Some Christians have the idea that Satan is in control of the opposition, and he can do anything he wants. No! God is in control of **everything**. He is in control of the opposition. Remember the story of Job? Satan was limited – he could only do what God allowed him to do in Job's life.

Look once again at verse 5: *“But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they [the opposition] could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius.”* God so controlled the opposition that the work did not stop, even while it was being challenged. There was a limit to what the enemy could do to oppose them, because God's eye was on His people.

1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.”* What a promise! We will never be tempted or tested beyond what we can handle. God will not allow us to be tempted or tested beyond what we are able to bear. He is in control.

Aren't you glad that God has His eye on His people? Remember, God is in control of the opposition.