

The Opposition's Strategy Backfires and the Temple is Completed

Ezra 6

Ezra 6:1-12 - *"Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. ² And at Ecbatana 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."

Background Notes

It would be hard to stop reading the book of Ezra at the end of chapter 5! Some Persian officials were hoping to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the Temple of the one true God, and they had sent an official letter of complaint to King Darius. When King Darius received the letter, he ordered that the royal archives be searched for the Edict of Cyrus - the decree that gave the Jews official authority to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

The cylinder on which the Edict of Cyrus was inscribed was not lost, and no doubt many people remembered the decree since it had been issued only 20 years earlier, but what were the exact details of the decree? These details would have been inscribed in an official document. The document was not found in the royal archives at Babylon, but it was found on a scroll in the royal archives at Ecbatana. (Ecbatana was located about half way between current-day Baghdad, Iraq, and Tehran, Iran.)

And guess what? The document proved that the Jews were telling the truth! They did indeed have authority, right from King Cyrus, to rebuild their Temple – and the document even specified the authorized dimensions for the Temple! It also stated that the royal treasury would cover all expenses. Not only that, but the Temple treasures that had been taken by the Babylonians in 586BC were to be returned so the Temple rituals could be performed.

So King Darius issued another decree backing up the original edict of Cyrus. In fact, anyone who tried to change this decree would be executed: *“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” (v11)*. This was not figurative language, nor was it an empty threat. Edicts of Persian kings were serious business. In fact, that’s how we got the expression, “the law of the Medes and Persians.” The law could not be altered.

Don’t get the idea that these Persian kings had become believers in the one true God of Israel, just because these edicts favored Israel. Sadly, no. The Persians were polytheists, but the kings wanted to “appease the gods” of all the nations. They recognized that the God of Israel was a strong God, so they thought that prayers to this God would be helpful to the king and his sons (v10). Well, the God of Israel is not only a strong God - He’s the **only** God! And He works through all kinds of circumstances to care for His people, as we see in this chapter.

Doctrinal Points

1. God can cause the enemy’s strategy to backfire.

The Persian officials thought that they would certainly win their case and that work on the Jewish temple would be shut down, but surprise! The authorization document was found. God has a way of not letting certain important papers get lost.

I love the answer King Darius sent back to the governor Tattenia and his boys: *“I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:*

Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop” (v8). This decree meant that Tattania had to take money out of his official treasury, and maybe out of his own pocket, to fund the work of the Lord! What an amazing reversal! God can cause the enemy’s strategy to backfire.

Have you ever seen God work like this? Think of the apostle Paul, and how his imprisonment at Philippi led to the salvation of the jailer, and the founding of the first church in Europe. Many of us can trace back our salvation to Paul's missionary journey to Europe. God can cause the enemy's strategy to backfire. Probably the greatest example of this is the cross of Christ. Satan thought he had triumphed by planning the death of the Son of God. But Satan didn't count on the resurrection! It was through Christ's death that Satan himself was conquered, and a way of salvation was provided for anyone who would believe. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He died for your sins. All you have to do is believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Your salvation will prove that, once again, God can cause the enemy's strategy to backfire.

Ezra 6:13-22 - *"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. 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. 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."*

2. God can cause His people's projects to surefire.

"Surefire" is an actual word, in case you're wondering. It means "certain to get results," and that truth is certainly taught here. The Temple was finished in 516BC, the sixth year of King Darius' reign (v15). God can cause His people's projects to surefire! The enemy had tried different tactics but God overruled and even caused the enemy's strategy to backfire as we've seen.

There was great joy as the Temple was dedicated. The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were celebrated in Jerusalem for the first time in 70 years. What a great time of celebration as the result of the completed Temple project! And God is still in the business of causing His people's ministry plans to surefire. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, *"Therefore,*

my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” What a promise!

Do you think your plans for various ministries will surefire? You'd better believe it! If your good plans are in God's will, they are certain to get good results. Even if you don't see immediate results, your work is not in vain. It's a promise in God's Word! If our plans and projects are in the will of the Lord, they will prosper, because the Lord can cause His people's projects to surefire.

Practical Application

Don't determine God's blessing only by numbers.

Verse 17 - *“For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel: twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel.”*

That's a lot of sacrifices for this one occasion! While it seems like a large number of sacrifices, it was nothing in comparison to the number of sacrifices that were made at the dedication of Solomon's Temple: *“King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God” (2 Chronicles 7:5)*. That's about two hundred times as many sacrifices as here in Ezra 6! But don't determine God's blessing only by numbers. God was just as pleased with the number of sacrifices in Zerubbabel's day as He was with the sacrifices in Solomon's day, because God looks at the **heart attitudes** of His people, rather than at external appearances, like numbers. We always tend to determine whether God is blessing by numbers. How many people were at the Sunday service? How big was the collection? What is the growth rate of the church? Now don't get me wrong – I don't mean that numbers aren't important, but there are other much more important factors to consider! So don't determine God's blessing only by numbers.