

## Ezra Chapter 5

This portion of text relates that the work was resumed after 15 years of inactivity under the impetus of the powerful preaching of two great prophets of God. “Haggai’s ministry (began on August 29, 520 B.C.; Hag. 1:1), and “Zechariah” began his ministry (October – November of 520 B.C.). They “began to build the house of God” three weeks after Haggai began preaching, which was September 20, 520 B.C. “Zerubbabel” is honored (in Haggai 2:20-23 and in Zechariah chapter 4), while “Jeshua” is honored (in Zechariah chapters 3 and 6). “Tatnai” was the Persian governor responsible for the territory west of the “river (Euphrates), including the whole of Syria and Palestine. “Shethar-Boznai” seems to have been his assistant. Both were subject to Ushtani the satrap of the Trans-Euphrates.

Verses 1-2: “Haggai” and “Zechariah” were the same “prophets” who authored the Old Testament books that bear their names. They prophesied that work on the temple should resume (Hag. 2:3-5).

**Ezra 5:1 "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."**

“Haggai ... and Zechariah”: The book of Haggai is styled as a “royal administrative correspondence” (compare Haggai 1:13), sent from the Sovereign King of the Universe through the “messenger of the Lord,” Haggai (Hag. 1:13). Part of its message is addressed specifically to Zerubbabel, the political leader, and Joshua, the religious leader, telling them to “take courage ... and work” on the temple because God was with them (Hag. 2:4). These two prophets gave severe reproaches and threats if the people did not return to the building and promised national prosperity if they did. Not long after the exiles heard this message, the temple work began afresh after a 16 year hiatus (see notes on Haggai and Zechariah).

There had been a time of absolute complacency, since the foundation of the building of the temple until now. The people had decided not to do anymore work on the temple, and to spend their time building their own houses. Zechariah was actually the grand-son of Iddo. These prophets were sent of God to shake the people of Judah out of complacency. We might even say they preached to the people.

**Ezra 5:2 "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."**

“Prophets of God”: These would be in addition to Haggai and Zechariah.

The messages these two prophets of God brought to the people from God, showed Zerubbabel and Jeshua the error of stopping the work on the temple. Zerubbabel represented the civil law, and Jeshua was over the spiritual. The people were commanded to go up the mountain and bring wood for the building. There is a great deal more on this in our lessons on the book of Haggai.

Verses 3-5: As confirmation that the prophets had spoken the word of the Lord, He made a way for their work to continue while the Persian officials prepared a report to the king (2 Chron. 16:9; Psalm 33:18).

“The eye of ... God” is another way of expressing the Lord’s protection and oversight, similar to “the eyes of the Lord” or “the hand of the Lord” elsewhere (7:6, 28; 2 Chron. 16:9; Psalm 33:18).

**Ezra 5:3 "At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?"**

“Who hath commanded you?” In other words, “Who gave you royal permission to build?” (Compare Ezra 5:9).

The minute the building started up again, so did the opposition. Tatnai was governor on the other side of the river. Shethar-boznai was a Persian officer under Tatnai. Tatnai seemed to have the same rank as Zerubbabel, so it was alright to ask, but not to command the stoppage of the work.

**Ezra 5:4 "Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?"**

It is impossible that the existing text can be sound here. Ezra must have written, "Then said they to them." Tatnai and Shethar-boznai followed up their first question by a second, (compare verses 9-10).

"What were the names of the men that did make this building": Or employed them in it, namely, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the chief men of the Jews. They made no scruple of telling them who they were; neither ashamed of their masters nor of their work, nor afraid of any ill consequences following hereafter.

This had to be a statement made by Tatnai and the men with him. His inquiry was to set blame on the one who started the work.

**Ezra 5:5 "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]."**

“But the eye of their God was upon the elders”: God’s hand of protection which led this endeavor allowed the work to continue while official communication was going on with Darius, the Persian king (see note on 4:5).

The workers continued the work on the temple, even after the complaint by Tatnai. The LORD was watching over them, and they were not about to stop the work, unless Darius commanded it.

**Ezra 5:6 "The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which [were] on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king:"**

Which is thought by some to be one of the nations mentioned (Ezra 4:9), the name being pretty near alike to two of them. But perhaps might be a distinct colony in those parts Tatnai was governor of.

"These sent unto Darius the king" (and is as follows in verse 7).

The problem was the same as before. Those opposed to God did not want the temple to be built. They wrote a letter of complaint to Darius.

**Ezra 5:7 "They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace."**

Or this was the inscription of it.

"Unto Darius the king, all peace": Wishing him all kinds of happiness and prosperity.

**Ezra 5:8 "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."**

"Great stones, and timber": This technique of using beams and stone blocks was a well-known form of wall construction. The reason for mentioning it here was it seemed to be a preparation for conflict, or battle. Including this piece of information served as a threat to the Persian official who wanted no such conflict.

That the rebuilding of the temple required "great stones, and timber" shows the magnitude of the work involved. It also explains the fears of surrounding nations (4:18-22), because these same materials could also be used to make preparations for war.

They first spoke peace to the king. They continued by saying that they had gone to Judea and found a house being built to the great God. He was explaining that the temple was being built solid with stones and timber. He could easily see that for some reason, unknown to him, the work was prospering.

**Ezra 5:9 "Then asked we those elders, [and] said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?"**

The elders of the province of Judea; the chief men of it.

"Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?" (See Ezra 5:3).

**Ezra 5:10 "We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that [were] the chief of them."**

The names of the elders, those that set men about this work.

"To certify that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. Take the names of them in writing, that they might with certainty acquaint the king who they were, and that if it was necessary they might be called to an account for what they were doing.

This was a true statement, but actually this was out of his jurisdiction. Cyrus had put Zerubbabel in charge of this area.

**Ezra 5:11 "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."**

"They returned us answer, saying": They sent back a report (official document from the archives). "A great king of Israel": Solomon built the first temple (ca. 966 – 969 B.C.; 1 Kings Chapters 5 to 7).

Of course they were speaking of the temple that Solomon had built so many years before. They did not answer as individuals, but called themselves the servants of the Most High God.

**Ezra 5:12 "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."**

"He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar": The expression is used commonly in royal administrative correspondence when a more powerful administrator, such as a king, relinquishes some of his authority to an underling and yet keeps the lower administrative official completely under his command. The point here is that God, as king of the universe, satisfied His wrath by relinquishing the authority for this administrative action to Nebuchadnezzar. The greatest king the ancient Near East has ever known was merely a petty official in the administration of the sovereign Lord.

Darius would have been very familiar with this. They had been unfaithful to God by worshipping false gods, and God destroyed them by the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

**Ezra 5:13 "But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon [the same] king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God."**

That is, the first year he was king of Babylon, having taken it, otherwise he was king of Persia many years before.

"The same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God": The Jews were perfectly warranted according to the principles of the Persian government to proceed with the building in

virtue of Cyrus' edict. For everywhere a public decree is considered as remaining in force until it is revoked but the "laws of the Medes and Persians changed not" (Dan. 6:8, 12, 15).

"Cyrus ... decree" (compare Ezra 1:2-4).

Cyrus had preceded Darius by a few years. Cyrus had become the king of Babylon at the defeat of Babylon. Actually, Cyrus was king of Persia. He had commanded the building of the temple in Jerusalem, so these servants of God were not breaking any Persian laws.

Verses 14-16: "Sheshbazzar ... laid the foundation": This seems to contradict the statement (in Ezra 3:8-10), that Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the Jewish workmen laid the foundation, but it actually does not, since Sheshbazzar was the political appointee of the Persian king over the Jews and thus is given official credit for work actually done by them (see note on 1:8).

**Ezra 5:14 "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;"**

And the gold and silver vessels (see note Ezra 1:7-11).

"Into the temple of Babylon" (see note Ezra 1:7), 'the house of his gods', i.e. the great temple at Babylon, which Nebuchadnezzar had restored.

"Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor": Literally 'pekah'. (In Ezra 1:8), Sheshbazzar is called 'prince of Judah'. (In Haggai 1:1 etc.) Zerubbabel is called 'pekah' (meaning governor). For the identification (see note on Ezra 1:8). Of which, and of what is said concerning them, and particularly of the delivery of them to Sheshbazzar. Whom Cyrus made governor of Judah, and ordered him to carry them to Jerusalem, and build the temple there, and put them in it.

**Ezra 5:15 "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."**

The three imperatives in this verse, without a copula, followed by a fourth, vividly express the feeling of the suppliants in the remembrance of the decree. Thus, we have another note of historical truth.

"Let the house of God be builded in his place": I.e. upon the old holy site, the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac, in a figure (Heb. 11:17-19). Where the angel stood and stayed the pestilence in David's time (2 Sam. 24:16-18). And where "the glory of the Lord descended and filled the house" under Solomon (2 Chron. 7:1).

This would be something that would convince Darius that this was true. He knew that no Persian king would allow the Jews to run off with all of this gold and silver, unless he sent them with it.

**Ezra 5:16 "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."**

Which makes it clear, that by Sheshbazzar is meant Zerubbabel; for he it was that laid the foundation of the temple. Or at least by whose order it was laid (see Zech. 4:9).

"and since that time even until now": From the first of Cyrus to the second of Darius, a space of about eighteen years, and just seventy from the destruction of the temple.

"Hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished": The work going on slowly, not without interruption and intermission, through the enmity of the Samaritans unto them, who had made false representations of them. But these men, Tatnai and those with him, as the Jews gave them a very particular account of things, as above, so they fairly and fully related them in this their letter to the king.

This was an accurate statement of exactly what happened. If Tatnai sent these words of the Hebrews to king Darius, he was trying to get at the truth.

**Ezra 5:17 "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."**

Where were the archives of the kingdom, where the laws, decrees, edicts, and proclamations, and other things relating to the state, were laid up, that recourse might be had to them upon occasion.

"Whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem": Which the Jews affirmed was made by him, and upon which they proceeded.

"And let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter": Whether the Jews should be allowed to go on with the building of their temple, and finish it, or whether they should be restrained from it. Signifying they were ready to do his will and pleasure either way, as he thought fit.

The Persians kept accurate records of various decrees their kings had made. If Cyrus had made this decree, they could not change it. This captain of Persia wanted to know for sure what was to be done about all of this. Darius would search out the truth and get back to him.

## **Ezra Chapter 5 Questions**

1. Who were the two prophets who brought messages to the Jews from God?
2. There had been a time of absolute \_\_\_\_\_ about the temple.

3. Zechariah was actually the \_\_\_\_\_ of Iddo.
4. Who began to build the house of God, again, immediately?
5. Who represented the civil law?
6. Who represented the spiritual?
7. Where can we read more about this renewing of the building of the temple?
8. Who was governor on this side of the river?
9. Who was the officer under him?
10. What question did he ask about the work?
11. Whose names did he try to get?
12. Why did the elders not cease work on the temple?
13. Who did Tatnai send a letter to about this situation?
14. What province was Jerusalem in?
15. How did he explain the building of the temple?
16. What did he call God?
17. Who had Cyrus put in charge of this?
18. What were they speaking of in verse 11?
19. Why did God destroy the temple before?
20. When did Cyrus decide to build the temple?
21. Why would a Persian king allow these Jews to carry off the vessels of gold from Babylon?
22. Who had Cyrus sent of the Persians to oversee the building of the temple?
23. What were they to search for?
24. If the decree was made by Cyrus, they could not \_\_\_\_\_ it.