

Ezra 5:1-17

The work of rebuilding the temple had been brought to a halt until the second year of the reign of Darius in 520BC (**4:24**).

Chapter 5 begins by recording an incident during the reign of Darius (**Ezra 4:4**).

The phrase “in the second year of Darius” (**520 B.C., Ezra 4:24**) suggests that sixteen years have passed since the foundation of the temple was laid (**3:8-13**).

The initial enthusiasm had waned, and work on the temple had halted completely.

Summary

In Ezra 5:1-17, we see how God in times of spiritual lethargy and decline sends his prophets to proclaim his Word and bring about repentance among the people of God.

1. Two Prophetic Ministries Revisited vv. 1-2

Ezra 5 begins with a summary statement of the contributions of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to the construction of the temple (**Ezra 5:1–2**). It is a clear example of how the preaching of the Word of God produces repentance among the people of God. In God’s sovereign providence, the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah were greatly significant in bringing about the restart of the work and its successful completion (**Ezra 5:2**). These two men conducted very different ministries; one was a straight-talker, the other a visionary. This shows that God uses different men and different ministries even alongside to accomplish His purposes.

2. Preventative Providence vv. 3-17

Darius established some twenty provincial governorships, or satrapies. A governor was appointed for each with powers to ensure efficient tax collection (**Ezra 5:6**). No sooner had the work begun again in the second year of Darius (520BC) (**Ezra 4:24**), than news of it reached the ears of the governor of the satrapy of “Beyond the River” (**Ezra 5:8**). This would be of concern to any governor, whose position was dependent on maintaining order and submission within his own territories.

We see here how God acted so that the people of God did not once again stop working on rebuilding the temple (**Ezra 5:3–5**). When Tattenai and his officials ask for a list of names of those engaged in the building project (**Ezra 5:4**), this sets up a tension in the narrative. The removal of a few Jews in Jerusalem was well within his scope of authority, if it prevented an embarrassing incident that might have looked like a Jewish revolt from Persian rule. The Jews responded by reminding the satrap that they were carrying out orders from the late King Cyrus. He had given them the confiscated temple treasure, then stored in the temple in Babylon (**Ezra 5:13–14**). Tattenai then had no option but to check this piece of information with his superiors; this he did by writing a formal letter to King Darius (**Ezra 5:6–17**).

Whilst this letter was en route to Susa, and during the time of a search in the royal records for Cyrus's decree, the work of rebuilding continued (**Ezra 5:5**).

This is an example of God's providence preventing something from happening that would otherwise happen.

Two things are specifically in view here: **First**, Tattenai was unable to stop the work of rebuilding, and **secondly**, the elders of the Jews were not tempted to cave in to the implied threats. God prevents as well as executes. The same sovereign power and wisdom is involved in each (cf. **Psalm 124; Gen. 20:6; Ps. 19:13**).

The eye of God was watching over the Jews.

God sees us, no matter where we are, no matter how dark things may get.

3. Denied Polytheism vs. 11

We capture something of the renewed vision of God that sustained those in Jerusalem in the language employed in the formal response they gave to Tattenai, the governor: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (**Ezra 5:11**).

He is the God of all the earth, including Persia. Despite the delicacy of their position, the faithful in Jerusalem were not about to yield to the pressures of polytheism in the interests of political correctness.

Yahweh is not a mere local tribal deity of the Trans-Euphrates. His governance covers the entire earth. More than that, he is the God of heaven and earth.

He is the self-existing, eternal God who upholds the universe moment by moment.

It is a robust confession on the part of the believers in Jerusalem.

In the ANE, the god of the subjected nation was considered to be inferior to the god or gods of the conquering nation. So these words are bristling with defiance.

The Jews had caught the vision of their great task. They saw themselves continuing in a work that had begun many centuries in the past (**Ezra 5:11**).

Yahweh had been their helping God from ages past. Now they were acknowledging his continuing help. They brought back with them from the exile some of the very things that the Babylonians had confiscated from the first temple.

Yahweh was the God of the past. He is also the God of the present and future.

This episode demonstrates the importance of a great view of God.

For the temple-builders, Yahweh was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses and David. Most significantly, he was their God.

It is invigorating to know that we are about the Lord's business.

No matter what the threats may amount to, fulfillment and peace can ultimately be found only in knowing that we are engaged in kingdom work.

What mattered most to these returned exiles now was not their homes or livelihood, but the worship of God.

The question that we must ask ourselves is this: Are we driven by a concern to worship God with a singular, determined resolve, no matter what the cost?