

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

EZRA 1-6

Have you ever renovated an old house? Renovations are never easy. You run into all kinds of snags and setbacks. If you ever tackle a remodeling project here are four truths to keep in mind... **First, it'll take longer than you planned.**

Second, it'll cost more than you figured.

Third, it'll be messier than you anticipated.

Fourth, it'll require greater determination than you expected.

This was the experience of the Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple. The year was 536 BC. Dramatic events had occurred on the Euphrates.

In a miraculous turn of circumstances the impregnable bastion of Babylon fell to a coalition of Medes and Persians... The walls of the city were impenetrable.

In a shrewd maneuver, rather than go over the walls, the Persian general, Cyrus, went under them. He dammed up the Euphrates that flowed under the walls, and his troops entered Babylon through the dried-up riverbed.

His move surprised the Babylonians! *The city fell without firing a shot.*

Overnight, the world's mightiest kingdom crumbled, and a new empire was born. King Cyrus took the throne, and ushered in the Medo-Persian Empire.

And the overnight rise of the Persians had a profound impact on the Jews.

Verse 1 “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom...” *What a provocative start to a book.*

Ezra says God manipulated the fall of a world empire - and the replacement of its ruler – to fulfill the words of an obscure Hebrew prophet named Jeremiah.

We attribute history-shaping events to sociological, or economical, or political, or demographical, or military factors. But the first verse in Ezra teaches that God is behind the scenes of world events. He orchestrates the rise and fall of nations.

How many times have you quoted this verse, Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” This verse gets printed in more Christian greeting cards than any other. I know believers who’ve made this passage their “*life verse.*”

Hey, some of you can probably quote this verse from memory...

But I doubt if any of you know what the verse before it tells us. Verse 10 reads, “For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.”

The promise of “a future and a hope” was first made to the

exile Jews living in far-a-way Babylon. God would bring them back to the land of their fathers – and He arranged the fall of one empire, and the rise of another to fulfill His promise.

Who knows what strings God will pull to fulfill His specific promise to you!

Babylonian policy was to deport the people they conquered back to Babylon. As a result, the city and its suburbs were filled with foreigners. But this was not Persian policy... The Persians figured their subjects would be happier living in native lands. Cyrus sent the dispossessed people home – including the Jews.

Thus Cyrus sends out a proclamation, “and... put it in writing, saying, 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.” It’s debated, but Cyrus sounds like a true believer.

He calls Persia’s dominion over the nations a gift from God. He also makes God’s cause his own. He agrees to reconstruct God’s Temple in Jerusalem.

Here’s his written proclamation, verse 2, “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.

Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he

dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.” Likely, King Cyrus was heavily influenced by Daniel.

At the very moment Cyrus’ troops were flooding into the city through the dried-up riverbed, Daniel was before the Babylonian king, Belshazzar, predicting God’s judgment. Afterward, Cyrus appointed Dan to a high level post in his new cabinet.

I’m sure the first thing Daniel did was show King Cyrus the scroll of Isaiah. Isaiah 44 and 45 predict Cyrus’ rise to power 100 years before he was born.

Isaiah mentions Cyrus by name, and describes in detail some of the events surrounding his takeover. God referred to Cyrus as a deliverer of the Jews.

Cyrus took it serious. He now wants to live up to his prophetic portrait.

Verse 5, “Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.” Notice, while God is working in the *heart of Cyrus*, He’s also working in the *hearts of the Jews*.

Remember, some of the exiles had been in Babylon 70 years... a lifetime.

In addition, the prophet Jeremiah had counseled them to get jobs, build homes, settle in – they’ll be in Babylon for a while. Many Jews had become successful.

They'd risen to positions of prominence. Daniel was a good example.

As a result, few Jews wanted to return. Jerusalem was nothing but rubble.

Rebuilding would be hard. Why bother, when life was comfortable on the banks of the Euphrates? This is why it took the Holy Spirit to move on their hearts – to stir up a desire to obey. God moved on them to convict and reveal His will.

Verse 6 records how the Jews who didn't go obeyed the decree by bankrolling their brother who did. "And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered." Their support was encouragement.

"King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah."

Cyrus empties Babylon's coffers, and returns to the Jews the treasures from Solomon's Temple that were plundered by the Babylonians 70 years earlier.

And he returns each one. In fact, he provides a count – an itemized list.

Here's the manifest, "This is the number of them: 30 gold platters, 1,000 silver platters, 29 knives, 30 gold basins, 410

silver basins of a similar kind, and 1,000 other articles. All the articles of gold and silver were 5,400. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

And this whole story is a wonderful picture of what God wants to do in us.

Hey, God has a big eraser. He's the dispenser of *second chances*, and the God of new beginnings. He forgives us. He wipes our slate clean. Despite the ruin we've caused, and our years in bondage – whenever we humble ourselves and repent of our sin, He's ready to help us start over.

Jesus is our Cyrus. He died, and rose, and now sits on the throne of God.

In the process He overthrew spiritual Babylon - or the kingdom of Satan. Jesus makes deliverance possible for everyone formerly under Satan's dominion.

And His decree is the Gospel. It's the proclamation that allows us to rebuild and start over. Our new life and restoration was paid for and bankrolled on the cross.

Even our former treasures – valuables that Satan stole - have been returned.

Talents are redeemed, integrity is recovered, relationships are mended, joy is rejuvenated, purpose is restored, and clarity is renewed. All that's left for us to do is to respond to the Holy Spirit's stirring - and rise up in faith to rebuild.

But understand **Christianity is the willingness to start**

over!

Jesus doesn't tinker. Slight alterations and minor modifications are not His goal. His intentions are not to help us attain our current goals, or reinforce our present lifestyle. Jesus brings a new direction. He insists on a new lifestyle.

Jesus is not an accessory you add to an already crowded life. When Jesus becomes Lord, His goal is to completely remodel. He guts us and starts over.

The Jews were uprooted, and replanted – and that's God's plan for us. Jesus uproots our worldly thinking and priorities. He replants us in a new mindset. Hey, to be a Christian means leaving Babylon behind, and moving to a holy land...

As I said earlier about remodeling, **“it costs more than you figured.”**

So the decree has been issued. The Jews are ready to return. Chapter 1 closes with a *packing list* of treasures. Chapter 2 is the *passengers list*.

It records the Jews who returned to the land at Cyrus' urging. **“Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city.**

Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.”

Notice in 1:11 the leader in charge of the Jews' return is

named “**Sheshbazzar**”. While in 2:2 his name is “**Zerubbabel**”. Who was it – *Sheshbazzar* or *Zerubbabel*?

It could be the same man. “*Sheshbazzar*” was a Babylonian name, while his Hebrew name was, “*Zerubbabel*”. Or, Zerubbabel might’ve been Sheshbazzar’s nephew – the possibility is implied in 1 Chronicles 3:18. When Uncle Sheshbazzar died shortly after arriving in Judah he passed on his authority to Zerubbabel.

The remainder of verse 2 tells us, “**The number of the men of the people of Israel:...**” Ezra lists those Jews who returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem.

The various families, and priests, and Levites, and singers, and gatekeepers, and the “**Nethinim**” (verse 43). The Nethinim were Temple servants – sort of like water boys who cut firewood for the altar and brought water for the laver. He also numbers those who had lost their pedigree and couldn’t prove their Jewishness.

Verse 64 provides the totals. “**The whole assembly together was 42,360.**” This doesn’t include their servants, horses, mules, and camels which he numbers next.

Add up the totals from Zerubbabel’s passenger list and you end up with 29,818. He may’ve counted the women in the total number, but not in the itemized list.

And understand this *count* was cause for *sadness*. Over a million Jews lived in Babylon – yet only 43,000 cared enough about God’s desires to return.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, comments, “**Many**

remained in Babylon, being unwilling to leave their possessions.” Prosperity lulled them into a spiritual slumber.

The Jews became too attached to their pagan surroundings. *They were frozen to the familiar - glued to the guaranteed - chained to the comfortable.* Why give up a cushy, cozy existence for the rigors, and dangers, and uncertainty of **Aliyah?**

“*Aliyah*” means “*going up.*” it’s a modern day term for immigration to Israel. Today’s Israelis recognize the *right of Aliyah.* It’s called “**the Law of Return.**”

Today, every Jew has the right to return - *yet many do not* - and for the same reason they didn’t in Ezra’s day. It’s too safe and prosperous in the land of exile.

It reminds me of the prospective employer interviewing a young engineer fresh out of Georgia Tech. “**What starting salary are you looking for?**” The young man answered, “**Well, somewhere around \$125,000 a year, depending on benefits.**”

The employer said, “**What would you say to 5-weeks vacation, 14 paid holidays, full medical and dental, matching retirement funds, and a car leased every 2 years, say, a red Corvette?**” The young engineer sat up straight, *Wow! Are you kidding?*

The employer replied, “**Yeah, but you started it.**”

The young graduate was like most people - **he wanted it all handed to him.**

Hey, God wanted His people back in the land. He opened the door to bring them back, but it would not be easy. They’d

have to rise up and move in faith!

The choice was obedience or comfort? God's way or the easy way?

At times we have to make the same choice – follow God, or stay in Babylon? Remember, remodeling **“requires greater determination than you expected.”**

When the exiles arrive in Jerusalem they go to the Temple Mount. The sight must've broken their hearts, and brought tears to their eyes. What was once a magnificent Temple – a reflection of God's glory - was now just a pile of rubble.

Verse 68 tells us how the sight of the ruins *turned some heads*. **“Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priestly garments. So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.”** They gave generously toward a new Temple.

Notice the two characteristics of their giving... which should also be true of our giving. They gave **“freely”** – or from their hearts. **“God loves a cheerful giver.”**

And it was **“according to their ability”** – those who were *blessed much gave much*. This is why the tithe is a good guideline. **Those with more, give more.**

Chapter 3 tells us, “And when the 7th month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.”

The month was Tishri – the festive or holy month. The Feast of Trumpets, and Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles all occur in the month of Tishri.

“Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.”

This was the first step in the rebuilding of the Temple – they built a brazen altar on which to offer sacrifices to God. Without sacrifice Judaism is a hollow religion.

“Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening burnt offerings.” The next few verses describe how they kept the Feast of Tabernacles, the New Moons, all the appointed Feasts...

And this all happened... verse 6, “although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.” They also paid the craftsmen and collected materials.

Verse 8, “Now in the 2nd month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who

had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from 20 years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.”

In the Tabernacle the age requirements for priests were from 30 to 50 years old. In Zerubbabel’s Temple it was moved up to 20. They had fewer priests.

“Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.

And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel."

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

Seven months after the Jews arrive home the foundation of the temple was laid. The priests and people respond with a shout of praise! “He is good... His mercy endures forever toward Israel.” It was a glorious day and it should’ve been...

The most important phase of construction is the laying of the foundation. Without a solid foundation the rest of the structure is in jeopardy.

The same is true in the Christian life.

In Matthew 7:24 Jesus said, “Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock...” A wise man builds his life on a good foundation. This is the house that withstands the storms.

And here’s how you lay a solid spiritual foundation – by hearing God’s Word, then applying it to your life. There is no other short cut. You build on Scripture.

The fool builds on the sands of emotion, or opinion, or what’s faddish.

This is also how the church – the NT Temple – lays a sturdy foundation. We exalt God’s Word. We take it seriously – *we teach all the Word - apply it to all of life - and seek to obey it all the time.* It’s said, “A pastor is like an electrician - he takes a room full of live wires and sees that they’re properly grounded.”

Verses 12-13 give us an interesting insight, “But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard a far off.”

There were old men in the crowd – 80-90 years old. They’d seen Solomon’s Temple with their own eyes, and knew this rebuilt temple paled in comparison...

For one it was smaller. It lacked the lavishness, ornamentation, craftsmanship of the first Temple. It was also lacking spiritually. According to the Babylonian Talmud there were 5 items missing from second temple present in the first...

First, the Ark of the Covenant. **Second**, the holy fire on the bronze altar. **Third**, the Shekinnah glory in the Holy of Holies. **Fourth**, the Spirit of prophecy, or Holy Spirit. **Fifth**, the Urim and Thummin – tools the priest used to discern God's will.

This lack caused the old men to weep. They realized afresh the consequences of their sin. Compared to Solomon's Temple, Zerubbabel's was a shanty-shack.

Whereas the young men shouted for joy! Their eyes were on the future. This was a significant step toward the reconstruction of their temple and their nation.

We're told the weeping and rejoicing blended together to form a single sound.

Here's a picture of our praise – it should be *a blend of weeping and rejoicing*.

Real praise is a mixture of a *broken heart over the past* and a *blessed hope for the future* – repentance and rejoicing. Sorrow over sin and joy in Jesus!

Chapter 4, "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do;

and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." A work for God – Temple building - would be easy if it were not for what happens in chapter 4... Opposition raises its ugly head.

You can be sure whenever God's people rise up to do God's work – God's enemies will rise up to stop them. Warren Wiersbe writes, "As soon as God starts to bless, the enemy starts to battle!" I love how Samuel Rutherford put it, "If we were not strangers on the earth, the hounds of the world would not bark at us."

There were a group of people living in the land - a mixed race of Israelites and foreigners - later called the *Samaritans*. For 70 years they'd enjoyed having the land to themselves. They weren't happy when the Jews returned home.

A Jewish resurgence would throw a damper on their party.

In Ezra 4, Zerubbabel's enemies try 3 tactics to hinder the work of rebuilding the Temple – **infiltration**, **irritation**, and **intimidation**. The devil uses the same 3 tools against us. This is what makes remodeling "**messier than you anticipated.**"

First, notice their attempt to **infiltrate**. Verse 2, "they came to Zerubbabel... and said... "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do..."

No they didn't. They may've acknowledged Jehovah of the Hebrews, but they also worshipped other gods. They were idolaters.

And they get their answer in verse 3, “**But Zerubbabel and Jeshua (the priest) and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."**

They almost sound rude, but they're acutely aware of the danger of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. Often Satan poses as an angel of light. He approaches us from a friendly posture, with kind words, with good intentions...

But don't believe him. He infiltrates to contaminate. Jesus warns us in John 10:10, “**the thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.**”

When it becomes apparent Satan can't wipe out a church the next best move he can make is to join it. Most of the time he can do far more damage from *within* than from *without*. Beware when the world appears to be our friend. It's not!

The world and the church are headed in totally opposite directions.

When the enemies of Zerubbabel realize they won't be able to *infiltrate* the ranks of the Jews they tried to **irritate** their efforts. Verse 4 “**Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building...**”

The enemies of God flood Zerubbabel with hindrances and irritations – *zoning ordinances, special use permits, building code compliances* – anything just to irritate the Jews and cause them to conclude it isn't worth the hassle.

Irritation is one of Satan's most effective tools. The Song of Solomon 2:15 says it's "**the little foxes that spoil the vines...**" In other words, the daily distractions take the highest toll. The constant friction does the most damage to our resolve.

Did you know the earth's termite population outweighs the earth's human population two to one? Imagine! There're a lot of termites out there trying to eat away the wood in your house, and there're a lot of little irritations trying to eat away at your God-given joy, and contentment, and peace of mind.

And notice the third way they attack the work, **intimidation**. They "**hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.**"

They tried to get a restraining order to stop work on the Temple.

In chapter 4 they write two inflammatory letters to the kings of Persia.

Verse 6 "**In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.**"

This was not the Ahasuerus of Esther's day. It was probably the son of Cyrus, Cambyses II. He died in 522 BC. He shared

his father's love for the Jews – that's why their evil letter failed. But when a new king takes the throne they try again...

“In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language.” Again, this was not Artaxerxes Longimanus – the king under which Ezra and Nehemiah returned.

When Cyrus' son, Cambyses, died, a foreigner - a magician named Gaumata - pretended to be Cyrus' other son, Smerdis. Amazingly, he took the Persian throne for 7 months. It was a short time, but long enough for Zerubbabel's enemies to bring their appeal to a man unsympathetic to Cyrus' policies and to the Jews.

Verses 8-10 gives you a very long return address. The meat of their malicious letter starts in verse 11, “To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.

Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished.”

Not much has changed – follow the money. If these upstarts succeed in building a Temple they'll want tax exempt status. It'll cut into revenues.

“Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.” Rebel Jews will undermine Persia’s western provinces.

Verse 17 “The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth.

The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.

And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it.” I mentioned earlier, *God has a big eraser* - but man doesn't. The world records sin in ink. Man has a memory, and is quick to hold a grudge.

“There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. Take heed now that

you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?” On their second try their letter falls on sympathetic ears and they get the work stoppage order they sought.

“Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.

Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”

Construction of the Temple ends up shut down for 15 years. The foundation was laid in 535 BC. The work ceased shortly thereafter, and was not resumed until 520 BC. As with most remodeling projects **“it takes longer than you planned.”**

Chapter 5, “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.” Though work on the Temple had ceased, God went to work on His people. He sent two prophets to encourage them and keep the flame of hope alive. Zechariah and Haggai ministered during this time.

This setback must've deflated Zerubbabel. The letter was a punch in the gut.

In Zechariah 4:7 the prophet compares Zerubbabel's job of rebuilding the Temple to leveling a mighty mountain, “Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become

a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’ Zerubbabel will succeed. The Jewish leader will climb the mountain, and put the capstone on a finished Temple.

And verse 6 of the same chapter tells him how. Zechariah says, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit...”

He needs faith and patience. God’s work is spiritual work. It won’t be done His way relying on human brains or brawn. Let’s rely on the power of the Spirit.

The prophecy of Haggai also fueled Zerubbabel’s fire!

Once work on the Temple stopped the Jews went to work on their own homes.

But Haggai 1:4 issued a challenge, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” The Jews built nice houses for themselves, but neglected the house of God. It was time to get back to work.

“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.” Zerubbabel was the civil leader, Jeshua was the priest, the religious leader. Both joined forces to resume work on the Temple.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua were the two olive trees of the vision in Zechariah 4.

“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?"

Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. 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.” By now the imposter, Smerdis, was deposed. A true Mede now ruled, King Darius.

Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter. “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. They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus - To Darius the king: All peace...”

The letter presents a brief history. How Nebuchadnezzar toppled the Temple, the Jews were exiled in Babylon, until Cyrus issued the command to return and rebuild. The governor asks Darius to either validate or invalidate Cyrus’ decree...

Verse 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.” We need an answer.

In chapter 6 an answer arrives. “Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon.”

It wasn't found in Babel, but it was found at the king's summer residence.

“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: ”In the first year of King Cyrus...”

The decree not only authorized the building of the Temple, but it laid out its dimension (60 cubits by 60 cubits) – and it gave orders for the work to be paid from the king's treasury. As well as, the Temple treasures returned to the Jews.

King Darius addresses the governor in verse 6, “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.” Get out of their hair...

Stop hindering them. “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.

“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.” Wow, God turns the tables on His enemies. The men who try to stop construction are ordered to pay for its completion.

It reminds me of Isaiah 54:17, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn.”

And Darius doesn't stop there... “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, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.” Notice Darius' faith in God.

He hopes the Jews will pray to their God for him and Persia's royal family.

Remember, Darius just witnessed a miracle. He was the king who was tricked by Daniel's rivals to throw him to the lions. I'm sure he thought he owed Daniel. What better way to repay his debt than this decree on behalf of the Jews.

“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 (or a trash dump) because of this. 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.” I'm sure an official Persian seal sat right next to his signature.

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

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.

Now the temple was finished on the 3rd day of the month of Adar, which was in the 6th year of the reign of King Darius.”
The date was February, 515 BC.

“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 they offered sacrifices... and “assigned the priests to their divisions...”

As the prophet Zechariah had promised, a project that earlier looked like a mountain to Zerubbabel, became a plain through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 19, “And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month.” Adar was the last month. Passover is in the first month.

What a celebration it must’ve been... *a new year in a new Temple.*

“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. 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. And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread 7 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.”