

## DIFFICULTIES, DELAYS AND DISCOURAGEMENT

Ezra 1-6

4/17/16

After Moses lead Israel out of Egypt in the exodus, Israel lived in the promised-land for about 800 years. Over time they became more and more corrupt until finally God sent the Assyrians to conquer the 10 northern tribes in 722 BC. In 586 BC God sent the Babylonians to conquer the remaining southern tribes and take them captive back to Babylon (Iraq).

In Ezra we will see 50,000 Jews returning to the promised-land to rebuild God's temple.

In Ezra we will learn a lot about God and how He works in the lives of people both then and now.

### 1. The Rebuilding Of The Temple Was God's Plan. 1:1-4 cf Isaiah 44:28

#### a. God had prophesied the time of their return to the land. 1:1a cf Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10

**Jeremiah 29:10** "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'

#### b. God sovereignly raised up Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians and decree that the Jewish temple be rebuilt. Cf Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-6,12-13

**Isaiah 44:28** "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the **temple**, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

This was prophesied more than 100 years before Cyrus was born.

#### c. God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to let the Jews return to their land. 1:1b-4

- God is sovereign over the hearts of kings and rulers.

**Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

- God is likewise in control of our future.

Not only do we see that the rebuilding of the temple was God's plan. We also see that . . .

### 2. Those Who Returned Were God's Chosen People.

#### a. God stirred up their spirits to return. 1:5 cf 2:1-67

Fifty thousand Jews were willing to face danger and sacrifice when most stayed with the comforts and conveniences of Persia.

#### b. The worship of God was their top priority. 2:68-69;3:1-5

2:68-69 They contributed freewill offerings

- ♦ They gave 17,540 lbs of gold (2,806,000 oz.)
  - ◇ Over \$3 billion at today's rate of \$1200 per oz.
- ♦ They gave 6250 lbs of silver (100,000 oz.)

◇ \$1.5 million at today's rate of \$15 per oz.

◆ They could have used the money on other things.

◇ But they gave it as an act of worship and trusted God for their futures.

3:1-5 They set up an altar.

◆ They celebrated the Feast of Booths and offered various burnt offerings.

**c. They laid the foundation of the temple. 3:10-11**

**3. They Encountered Opposition And Discouragement. 3:12-4:24**

**a. Discouraging Comparisons 3:12-13 cf Haggai 2:3-4; Zechariah 4:10**

Those who were weeping were not weeping for joy.

They were weeping from discouragement.

Those weeping were the older people who had seen the size and glory of Solomon's temple.

They were weeping because the new temple they were building would be nothing compared to the size and grandeur of Solomon's temple.

Their negative response was a discouragement to those who were trying to build the new temple.

Their negativism was still a problem 15 years later. Cf Haggai 2:3-4; Zechariah 4:10

Negative comparisons often discourage others.

Comparisons with the past

Comparison with what others have done or are doing

Their building, music program, youth activities, etc

**b. Tempting Alliances 4:1-3 Cf 2 Corinthians 6:14; 2 John 7-11**

**4:2** "Let us build with you, we worship the same God."

In reality they had their own form of worship which included Yahweh along with a lot of strange beliefs.

**3** The leaders wisely turned them down

They were in reality enemies. **4:1**

Religious syncretism is never God's plan.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Cf 2 John 7-11

**c. Terrifying Enemies 4:4**

They were discouragement and feared for their lives. cf 3:3

*It is doubtful that any significant work has ever been attempted for God without arousing opposition.*

**d. Legal Opposition 4:5-23**

5 They hired counselors and wrote letter to Cyrus and his successors legal representatives

Their enemies wrote letters that maligned the Jews intentions.

6-23 These verses form a parenthesis, giving examples of later ongoing legal opposition

During the reign of Ahasuerus (486-465 BC) and Artaxerxes (464-424 BC)

This legal maneuvering continued until after Nehemiah returned 90 years later, in 445 BC.

**4. The Jews Stopped Their Work On The Temple. 4:24**

They didn't originally stop because of a decree, but because of discouragement and opposition.

There was no work on the temple for 15 years (535-520)

They gave up!!! They lost hope.

They focused was on their problems rather than on God.

*God's people doing God's work on God's timetable often encounter difficulties, delays, and discouragement.*

- Not because of sin
- Not because what they are doing is not God's will
- But because God is building His people in the process of building His temple
  - ◆ Sometimes God is teaching us patience, faith, forgiveness, humility, or perseverance.
  - ◆ Sometimes God uses difficulties to get us to draw near to Him.
  - ◆ Problems help us to recognize our inadequacy and force us to look to God.

*God's work done by God's people on God's timetable will often encounter difficulties.*

**5. God Used The Preaching Of Haggai And Zechariah To Re-ignite His People. 5:1-2**

Haggai gave 4 messages between August 29<sup>th</sup>, and December 18<sup>th</sup> 520 BC

The people had stopped rebuilding the temple for 15 years.

When they stopped building the opposition stopped

Now their problem now wasn't opposition, but money.

Haggai 1:2-11 tells them that the reason they didn't have money to rebuild the temple was because:

1. They had their spent money building themselves nice homes rather than on build the temple of God.

2. God's blessings were being withheld because the rebuilding of His temple was being neglected.

◇ God's remedy, you rebuild then I will bless.

### **Zechariah 4:6-10**

God assures them that it was not by their strength and resources but by His Spirit that the temple would be rebuilt.

God also encourages them to not despise small things.

God asks them to trust Him and obey.

And they did. They began the work on 9/22/520 BC

### **6. They Again Face Opposition. 5:3-17**

When they returned to doing God's work, the opposition again raised its ugly head.

*If you don't want opposition and criticism do nothing, say nothing and be nothing.*

**3-4** Their enemies wanted to know, "Who issued a decree for you to rebuild the temple, and Who is involved." cf v. 10

**6-17** They sent a letter to King Darius

### **7. God Provided For Them In A Way They Could Never Have Imagined. 6:1-22**

**1-5** King found the decree that had been issued by Cyrus 18 years earlier

**6-12** A new decree is issued by Darius

**6-7** Leave the Jew's alone

**8** Pay for the rebuilding of the temple out of the royal treasury

**9-10** Provide for their offerings and sacrifices

**11** Execute those who would interfere

**12** A call for God to overthrow anyone who attempts to change the decree or destroy God's temple.

**13-15** The temple is completed.

**16-18** The temple is dedicated.

**19-22** The Passover is observed.

### **8. Truths That Matter**

**a. Do not fear because God is in control of all things. cf 1:1, 5; 5:5; 6:22**

All we have to do is to trust and obey.

**b. God's people doing God's work on God's timetable often encounter difficulties, delays, and discouragement.**

- In 1986, John Piper nearly quit as pastor of a large church in Minneapolis. At the time he wrote in his journal:
  - ♦ “I am so discouraged. I am so blank. I feel like there are opponents on every hand.”
- But Piper didn’t walk away and God used him to lead a thriving ministry.

**c. God uses difficulties to help you grow in your faith and Christian walk.**

The temple was completed on God’s timetable.

From the destruction of the temple to the completion of the temple was 70 years as God had prophesied. (586-70=516)

God planned in an extra 20 years with its problems to help develop build His people.

Spiritual maturity takes time and troubles.

THE PROCESS IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE PRODUCT

**We need to trust and obey God in the process!!**

**d. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Ephesians 3:20**

In 2000, we began planning and preparing to build a new facility that would help us to more effectively minister.

A lot of time and hard work went into this effort. Many sacrificed financially.

However, in June of 2006 we were forced to confront the fact that we didn’t have the resources to meet the ever-increasing cost of building.

The cost of building had nearly doubled in the 6 years since the time we started planning to build.

We kept praying.

Then the recession of 2008 came along and building prices plummeted. We were able to build this building for far less than even our original estimate.

God chose to have this building constructed on His timeline in a way that we were tested and we were able to recognize that it was of God.

## TIMELINE

**606 BC** Jeremiah’s prophecy of 70 year captivity (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10)

**606 BC** First Babylonian invasion (Daniel taken captive)

**597 BC** Second Babylonian invasion (Ezekiel taken captive)

**586 BC** Third Babylonian invasion (Temple and city destroyed)

**538-515 BC Zerubbabel** Rebuilds the Temple (Ezra 1-6)

538 BC Decree of Cyrus

536 BC Altar built

535 BC Temple begun but stopped

520 BC **Haggai** prophesies

**Zechariah** prophesies (520-515 BC)

515 BC The temple is completed

**479 BC Esther** becomes Queen in Persia (Esther 1-10)

**458 BC Ezra** Leads A Second Return To Israel. (Ezra 7-10)

**445-425 BC Nehemiah** returns, rebuilds walls, and rules  
(Nehemiah 1-13)

444 BC City walls rebuilt

433 BC **Malachi** prophesies

### **PERSIAN KINGS**

|            |                         |  |
|------------|-------------------------|--|
| 559-530 BC | Cyrus                   | Decree to rebuild temple (Jews return)                         |
| 530-522 BC | Cambyses                | Not mentioned in Bible   |
| 522 BC     | Smerdis                 | Not mentioned in Bible   |
| 521-486 BC | Darius I                | Temple rebuilt (Zerubbabel, Haggai,<br>Zechariah)              |
| 486-465 BC | Xerxes I<br>(Ahasuerus) | Esther becomes queen (479 BC)                                  |
| 464-424 BC | Artaxerxes I            | Ezra returns (458 BC)<br>Nehemiah rebuilds city walls (445 BC) |
| 423-404 BC | Darius II               |  |