

Rebuilding What Was Lost
The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah



Rebuilding What Was Lost

- *A Little Bit of Background*
- *The Return*
- *Laying the Foundation*
- *Letters to Kings (part 4)*



Letters to Kings

- The people of God have returned home
 - But they have stopped building the Temple
 - So how did Zerubbabel and Joshua respond to the prophets in Ezra 5:1-2?
 - Given what we read in Christ's parable about the sower and the seeds, what should we expect next?
 - And yet, what's the safer bet—to trust in the most comfortable-seeming stuff and circumstances or to trust in God's unchanging character?
 - Be careful in answering that too quickly—
 - How can we live that Truth out in our own lives today?



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 - So what happened next in Ezra 5:3-4?
 - Is it usually a good thing when the boss comes up and demands to know what you think you're doing?
 - What does it usually indicate when he starts taking down names?



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 - So what happened next in Ezra 5:3-4?
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 - And yet, please read Ezra 5:5...
 - Who exactly is sovereign here—even over the mail?



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 - So how did Zerubbabel and Joshua respond to the prophets in Ezra 5:1-2?
 - So what happened next in Ezra 5:3-5?
 - Ezra 5:6-16 gives us the text of the letter that they wrote to King Darius, summarizing everything that we've read up to this point in Ezra—but saying that it all sounds a bit fishy to them
 - Please read 5:17
 - Back in Ezra 4, even *threats* of doing this sort of thing had shut down the work on the Temple—so why were Zerubbabel and Joshua so committed to keep going, even while they waited for Darius to respond?



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 - What did Darius do in Ezra 6:1, and what does that tell you about Darius?
 - Let's read Ezra 6:2-4—
 - “A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:
Memorandum: In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers.”
(NOTE: That's a little less than ½ a football field— plenty of room for God's priests to use for worship—and yet the ark that Noah built had more than 12 times the floor space...)



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The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.”
 - That's what Darius found out when he did the research that Judah's opponents *specifically requested* that he do
 - I love how Darius replied to the request for an official, documented decision—



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 - Let's read Ezra 6:2-4
 - Read his official, document decision in Ezra 6:6-12
 - “Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you, their fellow officials of that province, stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.
(basically, “You want official orders from the King? The King says *back off, Tattenai...*”)



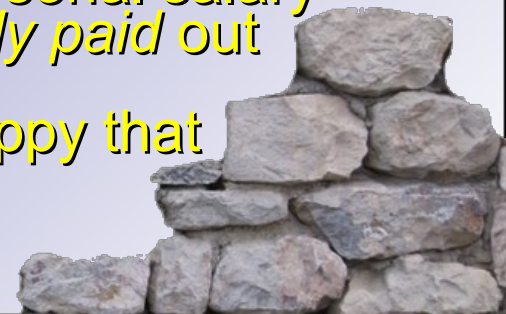
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Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates

(i.e.; from the taxes that you yourselves get from your people that pay your own, personal salary —*their* expenses are now to be *fully paid out* of *your* pockets...)

(hey, Tattenai—are you still happy that you wrote that letter now?)



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Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them *daily without fail*, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.”

- How cool is this?



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Quick theological review—
 - What was it that Haggai 2:4-5 had said?
“But now be strong... Be strong... Be strong... Do not fear.”
 - And what was it that Zechariah 4:6 had said?
“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says YAHWEH Almighty.”
 - We can be so afraid of what kings and national leaders may do, but *our* God is the *King* of kings—the sovereign over sovereigns
 - Do you trust in the promises God has given you?
 - Then don't be so afraid of everything else that your faith withers—and don't be so comfortable with resignation that your faith chokes
 - How would that look in your own everyday life?



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 - “Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.
 - “Am I making myself clear here, guys?”
 - When God's people sought to *bypass* Him, they found only emptiness and loss
 - When God's people dug in and trusted Him, while His *opponents* sought to bypass Him, the bad guys only dug themselves in deeper (in fact, *because* they tried to stand against him, their *own* fortunes paid for *His* worship)
 - Just how do *you* decide how sovereign God is in *your* life?



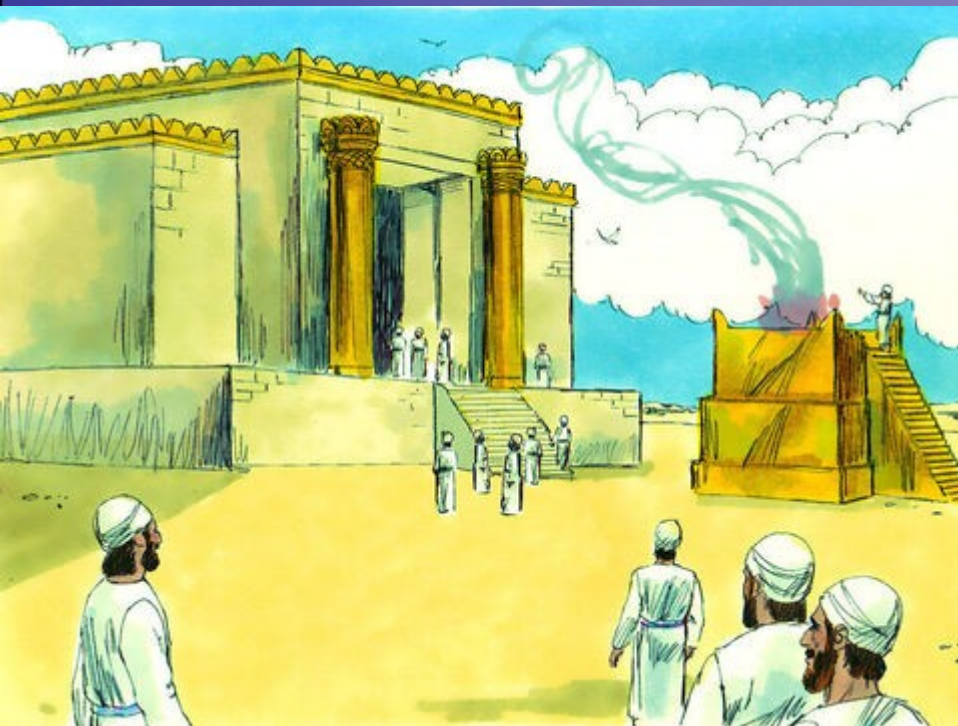
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I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.”
 (“Hop to it!”)
 - And what was their response in Ezra 6:13?



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 - Please read Ezra 6:14-15
(March 12, 516 BC—four years after they'd re-started building on the foundation)



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 - And *where* did they get all of those animals for so many sacrifices?



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 - Please read Ezra 6:18-22
 - The End.



- Seriously, how is this a tremendously satisfying ending to the story so far?
- Where you see yourself within the scope of this story?
 - Are you excited to follow God?
 - Great, but have you really counted the cost—or will you wither when it hurts?



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 - Are you withering right now?
(crumpling under the weight of stress or fear)



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 - Are you withering right now?
 - Are you being distracted by your own quest for comfort or stability or answers?
(yet strangely empty inside as you choke on those thorns)



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 - Are you excited to follow God?
 - Are you withering right now?
 - Are you being distracted by your own quest for comfort or stability or answers?
 - Are you coming through all of it with a renewed sense of God's power and sovereignty?



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 - How can we apply all of this to our own personal contexts today?

