



Ezra: Chapter 6

Background

In our previous study we looked at Chapters 4 & 5 of Ezra. We read about how the efforts of the Jewish people to rebuild the Temple of the Lord were initially thwarted due to serious opposition from the “*enemies of Judah and Benjamin*” during the reigns of king Xerxes and king Artaxerxes. These enemies wrote a libellous letter to king Artaxerxes playing on the his insecurities as a result of which the king ordered the work on the Temple to cease. “*Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of Darius king of Persia*”. (Ezra 4:24).

The Message

In looking at the book of Ezra alone we do not see a reason for the work on the Temple of the Lord coming to a stop. Why possible reasons could God have had for allowing the work on His Temple to cease? For the answer we must turn to the books of Haggai and Zecariah. Here we read how the prophets rebuked the Jewish nation for falling into complacency and sin so much like their forefathers - turning away from the Lord (Read Haggai 1:1-15, Zecariah 1:14,15). The exiles were preoccupied with the their own homes. In reading the first chapter of Haggai, we should reflect on our own lives and ask ourselves what priority does the Lord have in our own lives? Are we more concerned with our own selfish needs, or is servanthood in our heart, and Jesus enthroned in our lives?

By declaring God’s message the prophets catalysed the Jewish people back into action in a right relationship with God. The visions of Zecariah encouraged both Joshua and Zerubbabel in their work, and Zecariah 4:6-10 promises that the mountain of opposition (that we read about in Ezra 5) will be removed, and Zerubbabel will complete the work. We so need prophets in our lives today...people who are prepared to stand up and be counted, people who are prepared to challenge us and catalyse us back into ‘right living’ with God.

The response of Darius is remarkable. The work of the temple may proceed (Ezra 6:7), the Persian governors are to assist (Ezra 6:8-10), penalties are to follow interference (Ezra 6:11-12), and henceforth the turbulent Samaritans had better take care! The work is ended (Ezra 15). And so the rebuilding of the ‘*temple was completed*’ on 12th March 516 BC, nearly 70 years after its destruction. Despite all of this, the temple was in some respects a shadow of its former state (Haggai 2:3).



Questions

1. Once again the prophets had to deliver a strong message to bring the people back into a right relationship with God. What message are we hearing from our prophets today? What are we doing about it?
2. How does the first chapter of Haggai challenge us in our own walk with the Lord?
3. What was so fundamentally different about the second Temple compared to the first Temple that meant Temple practices would never quite be the same again?
4. Why did the Israelites allow certain other people to join in the Passover feast? (Verse 21).
5. What was the crowning act upon completion of the Temple?
6. Why is it so important that we remain a 'Holy' people?
7. What challenges does this present to us today?