

Ezra 5:1-17**Tattenai's Letter to Darius**

¹ Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. ² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

³ At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?" ⁴ They also asked, "What are the names of those who are constructing this building?" ⁵ But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

⁶ This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to King Darius. ⁷ The report they sent him read as follows:

To King Darius:

Cordial greetings.

⁸ The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God. The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction.

⁹ We questioned the elders and asked them, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?" ¹⁰ We also asked them their names, so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information.

¹¹ This is the answer they gave us:

"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. ¹² But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.

¹³ “However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. ¹⁴ He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon. Then King Cyrus gave them to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor, ¹⁵ and he told him, ‘Take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem. And rebuild the house of God on its site.’

¹⁶ “So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem. From that day to the present it has been under construction but is not yet finished.”

¹⁷ Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter.

Ezra 6:1-22

The Decree of Darius

6 King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon. ² A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:

Memorandum:

³ 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 sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide, ⁴ with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. ⁵ 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.

⁶ Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you other officials of that province, stay away from there. ⁷ 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.

⁸ Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:

Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop. ⁹ Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them daily without fail, ¹⁰ so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

¹¹ Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. And for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble. ¹² 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.

I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.

Completion and Dedication of the Temple

¹³ Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. ¹⁴ So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. ¹⁵ The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

¹⁶ Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. ¹⁷ For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸ And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

The Passover

¹⁹ On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover. ²⁰ The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for

their relatives the priests and for themselves. ²¹ So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel. ²² For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

Please have your **Bibles opened** to **Ezra chapter 5 – starting at verse 1 and we'll be going through to Ezra chapter 6 – verse 22.**

There's an **outline** for you to take **notes**. Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Intro

As we mentioned at the **beginning of the service** – one of the **preliminary hymns** we sang this morning was called “**The First Hymn**”.

Back in **1918** some **fragments** of a **Christian Greek Hymn** were **found** in **ruins** in **Oxyrhyncus** – an **Ancient Egyptian City**.

This **long-lost hymn** was **revived** – with music and some extra lyrics – **by Chris Tomlin and Ben Fielding**.

God restarts what we thought was over!

Last week in Ezra **chapter 4** – we left the **Israelites** of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah – **the Jews - in a quandary**.

They've been **allowed to return from exile** in Babylon – **back to their homeland** – **to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple** – in **538BC**.

But the **local Samaritan people** had **written to the King** of Persia, **Artaxerxes** and the **Jews** were **compelled to stop the rebuild** (Ezra 4:23) and the **work on the Temple** (House of God) **came to a standstill** (Ezra 4:24)

And the **temple remained half-built for 16 years** [From around **536 BC** (foundation laid) to **520 BC** when work resumes = **16 years**]

The **Jews have given up!**

But remember - **God restarts what we thought was over!**

And we **pick up the story** in **Ezra chapter 5**.

My first point this morning – **God sends His Word when we think it's over** – that's Ezra 5:1-5

[Slide-1st point]

God's sends His Word when we think it's over (Ezra 5:1-5)

Look at verse 1

God sends **two prophets** **Haggai and Zechariah**

We are NOT told here, **what these prophets say** to the Jews

But we ARE told in the book of **Haggai**...

In **Haggai 1:2** – the **Jews** had **resigned** themselves to the fact that **building had stopped** and they say "***The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house***"

But the prophet Haggai doesn't beat around the bush – he tells them “*Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while [God's] house remains a ruin?*” (Haggai 1:4)

God sends the right words to the people through Haggai and Zechariah

And verse 2 of Ezra 5 – immediately the leaders of the Jews – Zerubbabel and Joshua ‘*set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem*’

God's Word demands obedience

Even if the world says it's over.

Even if the world is against it – God's Word prevails.

Application

For us – God can send His Word to us – **to keep going when we feel like giving up**
- **to restart something we thought was over!**

This happened to me last year

We had **two teenage girls attending church** for several months

And the Lord spoke to me and challenged me to **restart our High School Youth Group – Xcelerate**

Of course, I could have ignored that.

It's **more work** – it requires **extra planning and resources**

But – we're **meant to be obedient** to God's Word

So, we **restarted Xcelerate in Term 3 last year**

Even though those two teenage girls – **don't attend anymore** (one has moved to Taree) - We now have a **core group of 5-6 High School children attending**.

God restarts what we thought was over!

God can use - a **quiet whisper** – an **inner prompting from the Holy Spirit** – even a non-believer - **to give us His Word**.

For example – let's say your neighbour is not a Christian – but they notice the last few Sunday – you haven't left home to go to church – they might say ***"I haven't seen you leave for church for the last few weeks"*** – that might be all that's needed **to prompt you to get your act together and be obedient to God again!**

Application:

God can - **reignite dreams and revive ministries** that feel buried by opposition or discouragement.

Back to Ezra 5 – and of course the **rebuilding work** was **bound to meet with opposition**

Look at **verse 3** – the **governor** of the Trans-Euphrates region which includes Israel, called **Tattenai** and another guy called **Shethar-Bozenai** with his offsiders – ask the Jews ***"Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?"***

And their **follow up question** in verse 4 – ***"What are the names of those who are constructing this building?"***

But notice – the **Jews are not put off**

Verse 5 says “*But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews*”

And **they didn't stop work** – whilst these objectors Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai **make inquiries with King Darius**

The **Jews have learnt to obey God – not people!**

Application

Surely that's **something we need to remember.**

If other people – even our government – **try to make us do something that is**
contrary to God's Word or **try to stop us doing God's work** – **we obey God – not**
humans!

(pause)

Which brings us to my second point – **God moves people to achieve His plans and**
purposes – that's Ezra 5 verse 6 to Ezra 6 verse 12

[Slide-2nd Point]

God moves people to achieve His plans and purposes (Ezra 5:6-17 and 6:1-12)

What we have in the rest of chapter 5 (verses 6 to 17) is **a letter from Tattenai and**
Shethar-Bozenai to King Darius

The **gist** of the **letter** is:

- The **Jews** are **building a temple** with **large stones and timber** in the walls
 [which could be seen as them building a fortress ready for rebellion against
 Persian Rule]

- The work is **making rapid progress** (verse 8)
- When asked who authorised them to do this rebuild and who their leaders are (verses 9 and 10)
- The Jews said to them they are **rebuilding the temple** that was **built a long time ago by** a great **King** of Israel [namely **Solomon**] (verse 11)
- But the Jews explained **their ancestors had angered God** [because of their disobedience] and **God punished them** by sending King **Nebuchadnezzar** – who **destroyed the temple** – and **took the Jews into exile in Babylon** (verse 12)
- The Jews also explained that some time later [70 years] **King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God** and they were **allowed to return to Jerusalem** with all the gold and silver articles taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar – and **Cyrus said they were to rebuild the temple** on the **original site** (verses 13 to 15)
- And so **that is why the temple is under construction** (verse 16)
- They conclude their letter by asking King Darius to do a **search in the royal archives** of Babylon to **see if it's actually true – what the Jews said - that King Cyrus issued such a decree to rebuild the temple** in Jerusalem.
- And they ask King **Darius** to **make a decision on this matter!**

Can we see that **God moved these two Persian officials** – Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai - to **check if Cyrus did make this decree.**

These Persian officials don't believe in Israel's God – **they could have just simply closed down the work by force** – couldn't they?

But **God moved their hearts** – to be reasonable – to give the Jews a fair hearing – and to follow due process – like good Presbyterians do!

God moves people to achieve His plans and purposes

As we hit chapter 6 – it **gets even better...**

We have **another letter** – in chapter 6 – verses 1 to 13

This **letter** is from King Darius back to Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai

The **gist** of this **letter** is that:

- The **scroll with King Cyrus' decree** – was **found** – not in the royal treasury at Babylon – but in a remote city called Ectbatana which is **in Media** (verses 1 and 2)
- The letter confirms that King Cyrus' edict did say the **temple should be rebuilt** so the **Jews can offer sacrifices** and it even specified the measurements of the temple – and they should use three courses of large stones and **one course of timber** for the building work (verse 4)
- King Cyrus' edict also said the **cost of the rebuild** must be **funded from** the **Persian Royal treasury** – and that the **gold and silver articles which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple** when it was destroyed must also be returned and placed in the rebuilt temple (verses 5)

- Further to King Cyrus' edict – King Darius told Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai - **to keep way from the rebuilding** and to **not interfere with the work on the temple**
- Not only that but King Darius also told Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai to **pay all the Jews expenses for their sacrifices** (of bulls, rams, male lambs) **and pay for wheat, salt, wine and olive oil used daily by the Jewish priests** – and this was to be funded from the royal treasury of the Trans-Euphrates region that governed Judah (verses 8 to 10)
- And in case Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai have the idea to ignore King Darius' instructions – King Darius says – *'**anyone who defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it – and their house is to be made a pile of rubble!**'* (verse 11)
- King Darius finishes his letter – with **an appeal to the God of Israel** – that God will overthrow anyone who lifts a hand to change the King's decree or who tries to destroy the temple!

Wow!

This is truly amazing – Darius could simply have said to the Jews – **go ahead – keep building.**

But Darius (**moved by God**) goes way beyond that!

God did immeasurable more than the Jews could have ever expected!

That's because - **God moves people to achieve His plans and purposes**

Application

For us then –

Notice - The **Jews relied on two things** - a) **God's Word to rebuild** - b) **God's authority** given to Cyrus to issue a decree

We too can be confident – when we have God's Word and Authority on our side

For example – I can give my view on politics and government policies – and people can shoot me down in flames and disagree. After all, they are just my opinion!

But when I say something like "Jesus is the only way to be saved for Heaven" – people can argue all they like with me – but I can back it up with God's Word and authority – because Jesus says in John 14:6 - "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me***" and I can back it up with Acts 4:12 – which says "***Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name [but Jesus] under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved***"

I pray we can see – **that we can be bold and courageous when people oppose our faith** – because we have God's authority and God's Word and God's Son as our foundation. That's a **rock-solid foundation!**

I pray we can also see here, that

God can move non-believers (like King Cyrus – like King Darius) **to achieve His purposes.**

I had a great example of this from one of our local scripture teachers – **Anna Davis** – she sent me this email last week:

The new principal of Morisset Public School, who is not a Christian, is so impressed with our SCRIPTURE lessons, and the engagement from the students, that he commented to the SCRIPTURE Coordinator, "It is so good, I am really impressed. If I had it my way ALL the kids would be doing SCRIPTURE!".

This is not the first time, a non-Christian, has **been a great advocate and supported SCRIPTURE in our schools. Praise God!**

We must trust God is in control even when we face what seems like a closed door.

God can open doors that we can't!

His power overrides earthly powers.

Which brings us to the 3rd point – **God completes what He restarts** – that's Ezra 6 – verses 13 to 22

God completes what He restarts (Ezra 6:13-22)

Here we see that **King Darius' decree and instructions are carried out to the letter** – with great diligence

The **temple rebuild was completed** (verse 15)

The Jews celebrated the **dedication of the house of God with joy** (verse 16) and they **made offerings to the Lord God** (verse 17) – and **followed** all the **requirements of the Law** that God gave to Moses!

What was halted was now completed with joy and dedication (verse 18)

The Jews **even celebrated the Passover Festival**

Remember the Passover Festival was a **yearly reminder of how God rescued the Jews from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land of Israel.**

On that first Passover – the Jews living in Egypt painted the blood of a lamb over their doorframes – so that - the plague of death passed over their house and they were unharmed

They were then **allowed to leave Egypt**

And God told the Jews to **celebrate His rescue of them each year**

Now – here in Ezra – God has rescued the Jews again – and brought them out of Babylon – and back to their Promised Land of Israel

It seems so appropriate and fitting – the **Jews in Ezra’s time should celebrate Passover in Jerusalem – something they’ve missed out on for 70 years!**

Application

And it’s also a **reminder to us**

That we **have a Passover Lamb**

His Name is **Jesus**

And **His blood – shed on the cross**

Means that the **plague of sin and death can “pass over” us** – and instead we can **gain forgiveness of our sins and eternal life – as long as we believe Jesus died for our sins!**

What we need to remember – is **God always finishes what He starts** (Philippians 1:6)

God’s Work cannot be stop

We just need to stand on His promises – remain faithful to Him – knowing that His promises WILL come to pass.

Conclusion

To finish up then – **back to where we began, this morning**

[Slide-Conclusion]

God restarts what we thought was over

- In Ezra - the temple looked like a lost cause—but - **God restarted the work.**
- If we fast forward to Jesus' time – in John chapter 11 - the people in Bethany at Lazarus' tomb – they **thought it was all over when Lazarus died** – Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha were beside themselves with grief – if only Jesus had come – but then 4 days later – **Jesus came – and - He restarted what they thought was over!**
- When Jesus was arrested and crucified - **Jesus' death on the cross looked like defeat**
- **The disciples thought Jesus' death was the end** (In Luke 24:17 - two of Jesus' disciples: "*stood still, their faces downcast.*"), but
- When the women went to Jesus' tomb – the angels asked them
- "*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!*"
Luke 24:5-6 (NIV)
- **God had a restart no one expected—Jesus' resurrection.**

- When it's our turn to die – and our family and friends think it's all over – God will restart what they thought was over – we have the certain hope of Heaven and eternal life to look forward to – it's actually only the beginning - not the end!
- When the Early church faced threats and persecutions and were told to stop talking about Jesus - and various authorities tried to close down the churches — God encouraged Jesus' followers and the church expanded into Asia Minor and into Europe – and to the ends of the Earth!
God completes what He starts and restarts
- That tells me - Jesus' church at Toukley is not over – God is in the restart business!

Let's pray...

Benediction (Ephesians 3:20-21)

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.