



## Studies from the Book of Ezra – Part 1

### **Please Note the following:**

1. It is not necessary to look up all the Bible cross references listed in a particular question; your Growth Group Leader will summarize these Bible cross references for you.
2. Just a reminder that sometimes in our Growth Groups, people feel comfortable sharing very personal and sensitive things about their lives. This information **MUST BE CONFIDENTIAL** and **NEVER LEAVE THE GROUP**

## Introduction to the Book of Ezra

### 1. Title and Authorship

The book is named after Ezra, a priest and scribe skilled in the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:6). Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of both **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** to Ezra himself, though the final composition likely includes editorial shaping, possibly during or shortly after Ezra's lifetime. The narrative voice shifts from third-person to first-person in Ezra 7–10, suggesting autobiographical input.

### 2. Historical Background

Ezra takes place during the Persian period, after the Babylonian exile. Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in 539 BC and issued a decree allowing exiles to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The book records two major returns:

- **First return (Ezra 1–6)** under **Zerubbabel** (~538 BC), focused on rebuilding the **temple**.
- **Second return (Ezra 7–10)** led by **Ezra** (~458 BC), centered on **spiritual reform** and teaching the **Law**.

The events span roughly a century, and there's a gap of about 60 years between chapters 6 and 7 (during which Esther's story likely takes place).

### 3. Structure and Outline Ezra can be divided as follows:

- a. **Ch. 1–6: Rebuilding the Temple**
  - Return under Zerubbabel
  - Opposition from enemies
  - Completion and dedication of the Temple
- b. **Ch. 7–10: Spiritual Reformation**
  - Arrival of Ezra
  - Ezra's prayer and confession
  - Addressing intermarriage and covenant renewal

### 4. Theological Themes

- **God's Sovereignty:** God moves the heart of kings (Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes) to fulfill His promises (see Ezra 1:1).

- **Restoration and Renewal:** The return from exile is portrayed as a new Exodus. It's a partial fulfillment of God's promises but also a reminder that full restoration awaits.
- **Importance of Worship and the Law:** The temple is central as a place of worship, and obedience to the Law is essential for the community's identity.
- **Holiness and Separation:** Ezra's reforms (especially concerning intermarriage) emphasize the need for purity in worship and covenant loyalty.

**5. Literary Features** Ezra includes **narrative, genealogies, royal decrees, and prayers**. It also switches between Hebrew and Aramaic (chapters 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26 are in Aramaic), reflecting the administrative language of the Persian empire.

**6. Ezra and Nehemiah Together** Originally, Ezra and Nehemiah were one book in the Hebrew Bible. Together, they portray the restoration of the **temple, law, and walls** — key elements of a renewed covenant community.

**7. Message for Today** Ezra reminds readers that God is faithful to His promises and sovereign over history. True renewal involves both external restoration (like rebuilding) and internal reformation (obedience and holiness). Leadership, prayer, and a heart for God's Word are vital for spiritual revival.

## Study 1 – Return from Exile

Ezra 1:1-2:70

(Sermon on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025)

### Read Ezra 1:1-11

1. What do you notice about how God is at work in verses 1 and 2?

a. *That God's Word spoken by **Jeremiah** has been fulfilled.*

*Jeremiah 25:11-12 says: <sup>11</sup> This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*

*<sup>12</sup> "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever.*

*And Jeremiah 29:10-14 says: <sup>10</sup> This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

b. *Also, God's Word to **Zechariah** was fulfilled see Zechariah 1:12-16: <sup>12</sup> Then the angel of the Lord said, "Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, **which you have been angry with these seventy years?**" <sup>13</sup> So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. <sup>14</sup> Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, <sup>15</sup> and I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they went too far with the punishment. <sup>16</sup> "Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,' declares the Lord Almighty.*

c. *And God even mentioned **Cyrus**, by name, in Isaiah 45:13: I will raise up **Cyrus** in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and*

*set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty.”*

*According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Daniel played a part in influencing Cyrus to declare the exiles could return to Jerusalem, by reading this prophecy from Isaiah!*

- d. *God moves the heart of Kings, even pagan Kings, like Cyrus (just like he did with Pharaoh’s heart in the Exodus period and plagues)*
- e. *God made a way for His people to return and rebuild Jerusalem – as Cyrus says in verse 2: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and **he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah**”*
- f. *Note: This happened in 538BC. There are two ways to calculate the 70-year period:*
  - i. *605BC first wave of exiles taken to Babylon (including Daniel) and 538BC – this 67-70 years (depending on Hebrew numbering/rounding of part years)*
  - ii. *586BC the Temple was destroyed and 516 when Second Temple was built (Ezra 6:15)*

## 2. What details are there in Cyrus’ proclamation in verses 2 to 4?

- a. *Cyrus recognizes **God’s sovereignty** ““The Lord, the God of heaven, has **given me** all the kingdoms of the earth and he has **appointed me** to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah”*
- b. *Cyrus has a mandate from God to rebuild the Temple (v2)*
- c. *There is an invitation to God’s people to return to Jerusalem (v3)*
- d. *There is finance, resources and offerings for the temple (v4)*

## 3. How are the exiles hearts moved in verses 5 and 6?

*Just like God moved the heart of Cyrus, God moved the hearts of the family heads of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites. Not all of them, but the ones whose hearts God had moved, prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord of Jerusalem.*

*Also, they had support from their neighbours who assisted with articles of silver and gold, goods and livestock, as well as valuable gifts and freewill offerings.*

*We can see this as a remnant. **God always promised a remnant!** (Isaiah 10:22)*

4. **Ponder:** How might your heart be moved towards your family, church family and the church itself?
5. What do you make of the return of the temple articles which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken at the time of the Exile to Babylon? Why would they be important?

*There are a number of reasons why the return of the temple articles which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken is important:*

- a. ***It is the restoration of what was lost:** These were holy objects in worship, sacrifice and the daily life of the Temple. Their return is a symbol of restoration – God is not just bringing His people back but also restoring their worship and identity!*
- b. ***It is a reversal of defeat and shame:** When King Nebuchadnezzar took the temple articles it was a sign of defeat, shame and God's judgment on Judah's rebellion against Him. Now that Cyrus is allowing them to return, it is a reversal of their shame. Just like Jesus is a reversal of defeat and shame that sin brings!*
- c. ***It shows God's sovereignty:** the temple articles, though taken 70 years earlier, have been persevered by God (not destroyed or melted down which was quite common when booty was taken). This shows God's preserving purposes. He has everything perfectly planned.*
- d. ***It shows worship matters to God:** The temple articles were not just silver and gold objects – they were set apart for worship (as bowls, basins, censers, candleholders etc.) God is not only restoring the physical temple but the means/instruments used for proper prescribed worship*

6. How might the following New Testament passages relate to **Ezra 1**?

### **John 2:13-22**

- a. *Both Ezra 1 and John 2:13-22 focus on **worship and the presence of God**. In Ezra, God is restoring the physical temple where His people can worship. In John, Jesus reveals He is the true temple – the meeting place between God and humanity. Here we have **a movement - from a building to a person – from***

**temple worship to worship in Spirit and truth** which is not tied to a geographical location.

- b. Both Ezra 1 and John 2:13-22 call for **restoration**. In Ezra, God stirs hearts to rebuild what is broken. In John, Jesus challenges a corrupt temple system and points to His own body as the new and perfect temple – which would be destroyed and rebuilt in 3 days ( His resurrection)
- c. Both Ezra 1 and John 2:13-22 show the **importance of the temple and the Old Testament temple is always a signpost to Jesus, the ultimate temple!** In Ezra, the **temple is the centre of Jewish identity, worship and God's presence**. In John, **Jesus redefines the temple as Himself** – He is now the true dwelling place of God – so we must come to Him!

### **1 Corinthians 3:16**

In Ezra, the temple was where God's presence dwelled among His people and where they worshipped and offered sacrifices. It represented **God's covenant, presence, and purpose** with His people.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16 - Paul is speaking to the **church community**, not just individuals. He's saying: you (plural)—**the gathered people of God**—are now the temple. God's **Spirit dwells not in a building, but in His people**.

There is a shift between physical to spiritual!

### **1 Peter 2:4-5**

In **Ezra 1**, God stirs the hearts of His people to **rebuild the physical temple** in Jerusalem. In **1 Peter 2**, God is building a **spiritual temple**, made not of stone, but of people—**you and me**—as **living stones**.

God is the architect in both passages.

### **Luke 15:11-32**

Both passages talk about **home-coming**. In **Ezra**, it's the **nation of Israel** returning to Jerusalem. In **Luke**, it's the **individual son** returning to the father. Both show that **God's heart is always to welcome His people back**.



*Both passages talk about **restoration**. In Ezra, the temple once destroyed is to be rebuilt. In Luke, the relationship, once broken, is being restored. In both passages, what was lost is being made whole again!*

*Israel returning from exile is like the prodigal son returning from his wayward journey!*

## **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**

*God initiates the reconciliation: In Ezra, God stirs Cyrus' heart and in 2 Corinthians, God reconciles us through Jesus.*

*In Ezra, the people are freed exiles. In 2 Corinthians we are freed from sin and forgiven sinners, sent out to continue that reconciliation by sharing Jesus with others*

*Both Ezra and 2 Corinthians initiate the beginning of a new life!*

## **Acts 4:27-28**

***God Is Sovereign Over Rulers and Nations:** In Ezra, God **stirs Cyrus' heart**, using a foreign king to fulfill prophecy (see Isaiah 45:1). In Acts, God **works through Herod, Pilate, and others**, using their actions to fulfill salvation history.*

***Human plans serve God's bigger plan:** Cyrus thought he was acting in his own interest or showing generosity—but he was **unknowingly fulfilling God's word** (Jeremiah 29:10). Herod and Pilate thought they were dealing with a political problem—but they were **fulfilling the plan of redemption**.*

## **Read Ezra 2:1-63**

7. Why do you think God preserved this long list of names? What does it say about His character?

*God preserved this long list of names in Ezra 2 to show that **each person mattered** to Him. It highlights His **faithfulness, personal care, and commitment to community and legacy**. These names represent real people who responded to God's call to return and rebuild—and God honored their faith by recording them. It reveals a God who*



*sees, remembers, and values every individual* in His redemptive story. God cares about the detail as well as the big picture!

*God also, preserves the names to show there is **continuity** from those who were exiled to those who returned from exile; God preserves a **remnant**!*

8. Do you recognize any of the names in verses 1 to 63?

***Zerubbabel** (verse 2) – He was the leader of the returning exiles and would oversee the rebuilding of the temple (see also Haggai and Zechariah). Zerubbabel is a descendant of King David and in Jesus’ family line (Matthew 1:12)*

*Although we might recognize the names: Joshua (Jeshua in some Bible versions), Nehemiah and Mordecai – they are NOT the Joshua (from book of Joshua), Nehemiah (from the book of Nehemiah) nor Mordecai (from book of Esther)*

9. What are Urim and Thummim and what would they be used for?

*The Urim and Thummim were sacred objects used by the high priest in the Old Testament to discern God's will. They were kept in the breastplate of judgment worn by the high priest (see Exodus 28:30). The exact method of how they worked is unclear, but they were likely used to receive yes/no or clear directional answers from God.*

*Why were the Urim and Thummim mentioned in Ezra 2?*

*Some returning exiles claimed to be priests, but their genealogies couldn’t be verified (Ezra 2:61–62). Until a clear decision could be made, they were excluded from priestly duties. The governor v63 (probably Zerubbabel) said they should wait “until a priest could consult the Urim and Thummim”—in other words, until God’s will could be clearly known.*

*It reminds us that God is holy, gracious and desires order, truth and discernment in how His people serve Him.*

**Read Ezra 2:64-70**

10. What do these people's offerings show about their hearts? How might that relate to us?

*The people give freely, generously in a devoted and unified manner. It shows that they had a heart for worship and devotion of the Lord. They showed their priority was to worship and serve the Lord.*

11. How might the following New Testament passages relate to **Ezra 2**?

### **Matthew 1:12-16**

*God preserved the Messianic line to Jesus, despite the exile. The names listed in Ezra 2 include Zerubbabel who is also included in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 2. There is a direct line from the exiles to Jesus!*

### **Luke 3:21-38**

*Luke 3:21-38 traces Jesus' lineage **all the way back to Adam**, emphasizing that Jesus is the **Savior for all humanity**. It includes **Shealtiel and Zerubbabel** (v.27)—key figures also mentioned in **Ezra 2** and other post-exilic books (like Haggai and Zechariah). It reminds us that **God's plan for salvation didn't skip the exile**—He worked through it.*

*Zerubbabel is a key link.*

*These genealogies remind us that **God works through real people with real stories**, not nameless masses.*

### **1 Peter 2:4-5**

*In Ezra, those who returned are named and have a clear identity as part of God's people and a clear purpose in rebuilding the temple.*

*In 1 Peter, Christians as living stones— have a new identity in Christ and a purpose in offering spiritual sacrifices to God, worshiping Him through their lives.*

*The people in **Ezra 2** brought offerings to help fund the temple's rebuilding. In **1 Peter 2**, people (we) offer **spiritual sacrifices** through their (our) lives, aligning their (our) hearts and actions with God's purposes. 💞 Both speak of the importance of offering something to God—a tangible gift in Ezra, and our hearts and lives in 1 Peter.*

## Luke 10:20

**God Values Our Names.** In *Ezra 2*, every name is listed because **God cares about each person** and their role in His redemptive plan. In **Luke 10:20**, Jesus encourages the disciples to rejoice that their **names are written in heaven**—indicating that **God knows** each believer, and they are **secure in His eternal kingdom**. Both passages highlight that **God knows and values each of His people**—their identities and their place in His story.

## Revelation 20:15

**Names Recorded by God.** In *Ezra 2*, the people's names are **carefully recorded** to show that they have a **place** in God's **physical restoration** plan for Jerusalem. In **Revelation 20:15**, the **names in the Book of Life** signify those who have a place in **God's eternal kingdom** and salvation. Both passages emphasize the **importance of being included in God's plan**, whether for temporal restoration or eternal life.

12. Recall a situation in your life when you felt helpless. How did your situation change, what did you learn about God and His promises?

*At a dark moment in my life; when I did feel helpless; I was reading Romans chapter 8 and was encouraged by Romans 8:31 - What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? . This gave me renewed hope, knowing that as one of God's children and trusting in Jesus; God was on my side and it did not matter who was on the other side or who was against me. I trusted in God's promise and it was a major turning point in my life.*

13. God mentioned Cyrus by name before he was born (Isaiah 44:28-45:5) and used him (a pagan king) to return God's people from exile; what confidence does this give you? How can you apply such knowledge of God to your life?

*The fact that God **named Cyrus before he was born** and used him to fulfill His plan, even though Cyrus was a **pagan king**, reveals a profound truth about **God's sovereignty and control over all events**, even those involving people who don't necessarily acknowledge Him. **Isaiah 44:28-45:5** shows God's ability to work through*

*anyone and anything to accomplish His purposes, regardless of human understanding or expectations.*

*We can apply this to our lives in several ways:*

- i) God's sovereignty is absolute and we can trust in it*
- ii) God works through unexpected channels – His ways are not our ways!*
- iii) God's timing is always perfect – we can trust Him to act at just the right moment*
- iv) We should seek and rely on God's wisdom and not human wisdom*
- v) We should be open to unexpected opportunities*
- vi) Remember that God is in the "miracle business"*

14. Where might God be calling you to return, rebuild, or re-center your life on worship?

*God might be calling us to:*

- i) **Return to a place of intimacy with Him:** In prayer, Bible study, quiet times, devotions etc.*
- ii) **Rebuild our commitment to worship God.** Either reconnect with our church family in worship or engage more actively in worship*
- iii) **Recenter our lives on God's purposes, not ours.** In a world full of distractions, it is easy to get our priorities wrong and push God to one side. Maybe it's time to reprioritize our time, talents and resources for His Kingdom alone*
- iv) **Rebuild a healthy and strong faith community.** Commit to being part of a small group or a church ministry. Surround yourself with fellow believers who can encourage us, hold us accountable, and pray for us.*
- v) **Return to active service in God's Kingdom.** Seek out ways to serve—whether inside the church or in the community. Use our gifts and talents for God's purposes. Ask God where He's calling us to be a light in the world.*

15. In what ways can we, like the exiles, give sacrificially to support the work of God today?

*Ways we can give sacrificially to support the work of God today:*

- i) Give our **time** – to serve in ministry, visit the lonely/sick, or help with church events/services
- ii) Give our **talents/skills** - God has gifted each of us with **unique talents**. Whether it's music, hospitality, teaching, administration, or tech—offering these in service to God's work is a beautiful sacrifice.
- iii) Give **hospitality and resources** - Sharing our home, food, or possessions with others in the church family or wider community reflects the **generosity of God**. Hospitality opens the door for **fellowship and discipleship**. Other examples – hosting a Bible study, providing meals to those who are sick...
- iv) Offer up our **prayers and intercession** - Faithfully praying for others, the church, and God's mission is often unseen but powerful. It's a sacrifice of time, focus, and heart. Examples: Committing to a prayer group or prayer buddy, interceding for our church leaders, or adopting a missionary to pray for regularly. Pray through the church directory!
- v) **Financial Giving**. Just as the exiles gave **gold and silver**, we can support the church, mission work, and those in need with our **finances**. **Sacrificial giving** isn't about the amount but about **trusting God** with what we have and giving generously, even when it stretches us. Examples: Tithing, supporting missionaries, contributing to church building funds or ministries.

16. Do you think there is something you or your church have lost in worship? If so, how can it be restored?

*Areas of improvement:*

- Prayers
- Bible Reading
- Bible Study
- Evangelism

What's the **BIG IDEA** of Ezra 1 & 2?

**God is faithful to His promises and moves both hearts and history to restore His people for worship and witness.**

**OR**

**God remembers His people**

OR

*God moves hearts!*



What light globe moment did you have?

God moves hearts (not just of believers!)

The return of the exiles is like a **SECOND EXODUS!**

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the **verse** that had a special meaning to you in this study?

V1 – “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation...”

V5 – “Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.”

V7 - “Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.”

**Finish in prayer:** Ask God to help us to offer ourselves willingly and generously for His Work. Ask God to help us be living stones in the Temple He is building with Christ as our foundation.



## Study 2 – Rebuilding in the Face of Resistance

Ezra 3:1-4:5

*(Sermon on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2025)*

### Read Ezra 3:1-6

1. Why do you think the people rebuild the altar first before the temple?

*There were several reasons for rebuilding the altar first before the temple:*

- i) **Restoring worship was a priority.** The altar was essential for offering sacrifices, particularly burnt offerings required by the Law of Moses. By rebuilding the altar first, the people could immediately resume daily worship, feasts, and atonement rituals—restoring their relationship with God as a community. **Note: the altar was where sin was dealt with!**
- ii) **Prioritization of spiritual reconnection before building.** The altar symbolized their connection with God. Before building the temple, they wanted to reconnect to God and ask for God's wisdom, help and protection.
- iii) **Obedience to the Law of Moses.** Verse 2 says that Joshua and Zerubbabel and associates began to build the altar "in accordance with what was written in the Law of Moses, the man of God". They have learnt the hard way what disobedience brings (i.e. curses as per Deuteronomy 28:15-65 – and in their case disobedience brought Exile!)
- iv) **Practical reason.** It was simpler and quicker to rebuild the altar than the whole temple! This allowed worship to commence and continue whilst the temple building project was in progress.
- v) **Abram had done the same thing** – long ago (Genesis 12:7) Abram had set up an altar when he arrived in the Land, showing his faith in God's promises!

2. Verse 3 says they built the altar "**despite their fear of the peoples around them.**"

What does this reveal about courage and faith in worship?

- i) **Genuine faith acts even when afraid.** It's choosing to be obedient even in dangerous situations. The Israelites knew they were surrounded by hostile nations, yet they chose/prioritized obedience and trust in God, over personal safety. Isn't that what Missionaries do all the time? Isn't that what Bible deliveries and sharing our faith is; obeying/prioritizing the Great Commission over personal safety and stepping out of our comfort zone.



- ii) **Trusting in God's protection.** The Israelites knew they faced opposition but they trusted in God's armour (Ephesians 6) for protection.
- iii) **Worship is a source of strength.** Have you ever noticed how stronger and secure and at peace you feel after worshipping together?
- iv) **Public faith can be costly!** Stepping out in faith and being courageous in worship, despite opposition, sets us up as a target. But it is also a blessing!

**Note:** the altar was built on 'it's foundation' – that is the site of the original altar which had been destroyed!

3. What is the significance of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles again (verse 4)?  
How might Jesus fulfil the meaning of this Feast (cf. John 1:14)

*The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths, Sukkot) commemorated Israel's 40-year journey in the wilderness during the Exodus from slavery from Egypt. During this journey, the Israelites built temporary tabernacles (booths/shelters). This festival was introduced as a reminder of that and celebrated annually. The Exiles have just made like a "Second Exodus" from Babylon to Jerusalem; therefore, it is very appropriate to celebrate it. The festival reminded the Exiles of their dependence on God, just like their ancestors did in the wilderness.*

**Note: the seventh month was an important month for festivals: Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Tabernacles (Booths)**

*In John 1:14 – 'The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us' – the Greek word for 'dwelling' is literally tabernacled. In doing this, Jesus fulfilled this festival in a much deeper way. He became the ultimate presence of God with His people. Just like God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness with manna (bread), Jesus is 'the Bread of Life' (John 6:35, 37) and "Living Water" (John 4:10).*

4. What are the purpose of the offerings made?

- *Burnt offerings (as in Leviticus 1) were **made to atone for sin and seek forgiveness.** By offering these, the people were **acknowledging their sinfulness and relying on God's mercy***
- *Burnt offerings showed a **desire to be in a right-relationship with God***

- *Burnt offerings were a way to honour, worship and express love to God*
- *Burnt offerings showed obedience to the Law of Moses (verses 2 & 4)*
- *The offerings made during the Feast of the Tabernacles expressed heartfelt gratitude for God's provision, protection and presence with them!*
- *According to Deuteronomy 16:10, offerings ought to be "in proportion to the blessings the Lord God has given you" – an important point for us too!*

### Read Ezra 3:7-13

5. What contributions are made by the people? How might that relate to our church at Toukley?

*Verse 7 – they gave money to the masons and carpenters*

*Verse 7 – they gave food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that cedar logs could be brought from Lebanon (same logs used in Solomon's Temple!)*

*Verses 8 and 9 – Skilled labor and leadership from Zerubbabel and Joshua – and God-given roles in construction and coordination*

*Verse 9 -Unity, willing participation and teamwork*

*Verses 10-13 – emotional and spiritual engagement – some shouted for joy, celebrating God's faithfulness – older generation, wept – as they remembering the former temple – there was deep emotional investment reflecting both grief and hope!*

*Notice the teamwork in verse 10 – the builders lay the foundation and the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, praised the Lord! And note: they followed the prescribed worship of King David! (verse 11)*

*How it might relate to our Church at Toukley:*

- *Appointing godly, capable leaders—elders, ministry leaders, team coordinators—is vital for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13).*
- *Leadership isn't about power—it's about **serving, guiding, and equipping others** to join in God's mission.*

6. Why are the appointments mentioned in verses 8 and 9 important?

*The Levites, set apart by God (Numbers 8:5-22) were given responsibility for overseeing the temple work. It is extremely important because God is a God of order*

– and He appoints the right people for the right tasks, ensuring the rebuilding followed God’s pattern, not just human plans. “Unless God builds the House, the laborers labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1)

By appointing capable leaders like Joshua and Zerubbabel and their families ensured the projects have structure, accountability and momentum!

There was also accountability and quality control as per verse 9 they “joined together in supervising those working on the House of God”

## 7. Why is the foundation being laid important?

*The foundation being laid is important because:*

- *It signifies a new beginning – and marked the start of the rebuilding of God’s house. It symbolizes hope, restoration and a fresh start*
- *It fulfils the prophecy of Jeremah (29:10) that the Exiles would return after 70 years*
- *It establishes the centre of worship again!*
- *It brings unity and corporate celebration*
- *It points to Jesus as the cornerstone and foundation of our faith!*

## 8. What can we learn from verse 11?

- *God’s faithfulness always deserves our praise and thankfulness*
- *Gratitude to God should be expressed openly and publicly*
- *There is great unity in public worship together*

## 9. Why were some people rejoicing and others weeping when the foundation was laid?

- i) *Those who had seen Solomon’s temple (before it was destroyed) wept because they remembered its former glory (v.12). The new foundation may have seemed small or unimpressive in comparison (cf. Haggai 2:3). Their weeping was likely filled with grief, nostalgia, and perhaps even a tinge of disappointment.*
- ii) *The younger generation saw new hope, which they never had in exile.*
- iii) *It shows the mixed emotions there can be from God’s people, even, when they experience the same event. For example, some may weep at the Cross*

*of Jesus on Good Friday and others rejoice that Jesus has purchased our freedom!*

### **Read Ezra 4:1-5**

10. What was the strategy of the adversaries in verses 1 and 2?

*Their strategy was infiltration through the pretense of offering to help. They pretended to be allies, claiming to worship the same God, hoping to gain influence **from the inside**. Their goal wasn't to help—but to **undermine** the work once they were involved.*

11. Why did Zerubbabel and Joshua reject their offer?

*Zerubbabel and Joshua rejected the offer because they discerned that their adversaries were not truly part of God's people and had no rightful place in building the temple. As they say in Ezra 4:3 – “You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God...”*

*The reasons they rejected the help were:*

- **To maintain spiritual purity** – only those who were faithful to the God of Israel should be part of the building work
- **They had a divine mandate** – the exiles had a clear commission from King Cyrus to rebuild – God had chosen them (through Cyrus) to be the ones to rebuild – and not any outsiders
- **Discernment** – Zerubbabel and Joshua saw through the ‘kind’ offer and realize their adversaries intentions

12. **Ponder:** How do we discern when unity is godly versus when compromise is dangerous?

*We have unity in Christ and having the same mindset as Him. Therefore, if we ask in every situation, what would Jesus say or do? And we also ask ourselves do the people who want us to compromise have the mindset of Christ? We can also pray for wisdom and discernment; and we can also ensure that people's actions, motives and intentions line up with God's Word. We can also seek counsel for Godly men and women that we know!*

13. How does this early resistance foreshadow the challenges we face in following Jesus today?

*We might face similar challenges today:*

- *We might face opposition disguised as help – this might come in the form of tempting partnerships, cultural pressures (like woke, cancel culture or government reforms which don't line up with God's Word) or God's truth is diluted to say that things which God forbids are allowed.*
- *We might face pressure to compromise when we should stand firm, remain silent when we should speak up; or even just give up instead of persevering.*

14. How did Jesus face opposition in His ministry (John 1:11; Luke 4:28–30)?

John 1:11 – He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. *Jesus was rejected by His own people! We might be rejected by some family and friends because of our faith in Jesus!*

Luke 4:28-30 - <sup>28</sup>All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup>They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. *Jesus preached the truth that His own people would reject Him. His listeners in the synagogue got so angry, they were ready to kill Him!*

15. How can we remain faithful in our rebuilding when resistance comes—whether internal discouragement or external pressure?

*We can remain faithful in our rebuilding when resistance comes by:*

- *Anchoring ourselves in God's Word – We can let God's Word remind us of His character and faithfulness – “Your Word is a lamp to my feet” (Psalm 119:105)*
- *Pray with honesty and boldness – Ask God for wisdom, strength and courage. “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7)*
- *Continue to meet together for encouragement – “Let us not give up meeting together...but encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25)*
- *Remember who is in control – “Unless the Lord builds the House, the laborers labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1)*

- *Keep doing good and don't give up – “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9)*

**16. How might the following New Testament passages relate to Ezra 3:1-4:5**

**Hebrews 10:10-14**

- *The sin offerings in Ezra pointed to a greater and once and for all sin offering by Jesus. The sin offerings offered in Ezra were temporary and covered over sin whereas Jesus' sin offering is permanent.*
- *The resistance the people in Ezra's day endured points to the resistance we endure today but we can remain confident in Jesus' once and for all sacrifice despite any resistance/persecution*
- *What the priests in Ezra did daily, Jesus completed perfectly and permanently, giving us assurance and direct access to God*

**John 4:23-24**

*In Ezra, the Israelites rebuild the altar and resume sacrifices according to the Law of Moses. Their worship is focused on the **temple, rituals, and location**—as God commanded under the old covenant. In John 4, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that **true worship is no longer tied to a physical location (like Jerusalem or a temple)**, but comes from the **heart**, through the **Spirit**, and based on **truth**—ultimately fulfilled in **Christ**.*

**1 Corinthians 3:11**

- *In Ezra, the physical foundation of the temple symbolized returning to God's presence and covenant. In the New Testament, Paul explains that the true and lasting **spiritual foundation is Jesus Christ**.*
- *Just as the Israelites faced opposition and needed strength to continue building, Paul reminds believers that **our spiritual lives, churches, and ministries** must be built on Jesus—or **they won't last**.*
- *Ezra's temple was a physical structure. Paul teaches that believers are now **God's temple** (1 Cor 3:16), built on Christ as the cornerstone.*



## Matthew 10:22

- In Ezra, as soon as the people committed to rebuilding the altar and temple, **adversaries arose** (Ezra 4:1–5). Jesus teaches in Matthew that **following Him will also bring hatred and resistance**—not because of wrongdoing, but because of righteousness. Obedience to God often triggers spiritual and human opposition.
- The opposition in Ezra’s time involved **discouragement, fear, and political pressure** (Ezra 4:4–5). Similarly, Jesus teaches that **perseverance in the face of hatred or hardship** is part of following Him. “The one who stands firm to the end will be saved” echoes the **call to endurance** seen in Ezra.
- Just as the work in Ezra was delayed but not defeated, Jesus promises that those who **remain faithful to Him** will be vindicated and saved in the end.

## Acts 4:1-21

**Acts 4:1–21** and **Ezra 3:1–4:5** share striking parallels in showing how **faithful obedience to God often brings opposition—but also boldness and perseverance**. In Acts 4, Peter and John heal a man in Jesus’ name and boldly preach the resurrection. As a result, they are arrested, questioned, and **commanded to stop speaking about Jesus**—but they **refuse**, saying: **“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”** (v.20).

- In Ezra, rebuilding the temple provoked resistance from surrounding people. In Acts, preaching the gospel brought persecution from religious leaders.
- The leaders in Ezra refused to compromise with those who didn’t truly serve God (Ezra 4:3). Peter and John refused to stay silent when ordered to stop preaching (Acts 4:19–20).
- In Ezra, the work of rebuilding continued despite efforts to stop it. In Acts, the gospel spread with power despite threats.

## Romans 12:1

- In Ezra 3, worship involved **animal sacrifices** on the altar, in accordance with the Law of Moses. In Romans 12:1, Paul teaches that under the new covenant, worship is now expressed by offering **ourselves**—our whole lives—as **a living sacrifice** to God.



- The people in Ezra's day **risked danger and opposition** to offer sacrifices and rebuild. Paul urges believers to respond to God's mercy **with total dedication**—even when it's costly.
- Ezra's worship was centered on the restored temple and ritual acts. Romans teaches that true worship is now centered on **relationship with God** through Jesus, expressed in how we **live daily**.

## 2 Timothy 3:12

*Just as the Israelites in Ezra faced opposition when they began to faithfully worship and rebuild the temple, Paul reminds us that godly living always brings resistance.*

## 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

*In Ezra 4:1–3, the returned exiles refused to partner with the surrounding peoples in rebuilding the temple because they did not truly worship God. Ezra: God's people guarded the purity of their worship by rejecting compromise.*

*In 2 Corinthians: Paul teaches believers to separate from spiritual partnerships that threaten holiness.*

## Galatians 1:6-9

*In Ezra 4:2–3, the adversaries claimed to worship the same God, but the leaders rightly **rejected their offer**, recognizing it was **not true faith**.*

- **Ezra:** The people protected the purity of God's work from those with mixed or false motives.
- **Galatians:** Paul warns against accepting any version of the gospel that **distorts the truth**. Paul also encourages them to keep on doing good, and they will reap a harvest.

## Hebrews 13:15-16

*In Ezra 3:3–6, the people resumed **sacrifices and worship** to God as an expression of renewed devotion. In Hebrews, the writer teaches that under the new covenant, believers now offer **spiritual sacrifices—praise, generosity, and service**—through Jesus. Both Ezra and Hebrews highlight that **true worship involves regular,***

*heartfelt offerings to God—whether through burnt offerings then or praise and good deeds now.*

What's the **BIG IDEA** of Ezra 3:1-4:5?

*Faithful worship and obedience to God will face opposition, but God's people must stand firm and stay devoted.*

**OR**

*True worship requires persistence despite resistance.*

**OR**

*Standing firm in our faith, despite opposition*



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

*V3 - "Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices."*

**Finish in prayer:** Thanking God for calling us back to worship Him with all our hearts. Ask God to help us put Him first and build our lives on Jesus, the true cornerstone. Ask God to give us courage when opposition comes our way.

## Study 3 – Trusting God when the Building Stops

Ezra 4:6-24

*(Sermon on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2025)*

### Read Ezra 4:6-16

1. What tactics did the enemies of God's people use to stop the work? (verses 6 to 16)?

*They used several tactics:*

- i. **Accusation and political manipulation** (verse 6) – they lodged an accusation against the tribes of Judah and Benjamin*
  - ii. **Persistent opposition** (verse 7) – during the reign of Artaxerxes they wrote a letter of opposition*
  - iii. They **gathered further support** (verses 8 and 9) The commanding officer Rehum and secretary Shimshai wrote a letter to Artaxerxes as well. This letter was supported by their associates, judges, officials and administrators from Persia, Uruk and Babylon, as well as the Elamites from Susa; plus, people that had been sent to Samaria by Ashurbanipal.*
  - iv. They use **scaremongering** (verses 11 to 16). They butter up the King saying they don't want to see the King dishonoured (verse 14). They accuse the Jews of rebellion and that they have a long history of sedition which is why the city was destroyed in the past. They claim the Jews will stop paying taxes and tribute if the city is rebuilt and that the King's revenue stream will suffer and he will be left with nothing in the Trans-Euphrates region!*
  - v. **Misinformation** – they tell the King to search the archives to see how rebellious this city was in the past (verse 15) when in fact, the city was rebellious towards God, not other nations, like Babylon and Persia!*
2. What do these verses show about how persistent and manipulative opposition can be?

*These verses show that opposition can be very persistent—the enemies kept trying through different reigns and officials—and they were highly manipulative, using fear, half-truths, and political pressure to twist facts and influence powerful people to stop God's work.*

3. How do similar tactics (discouragement, slander, legal pressure) show up in spiritual life today?

***Discouragement:** People may feel overwhelmed, criticized, or alone when trying to serve God, leading them to lose motivation or confidence.*

***Slander:** Believers may face false accusations or be misrepresented, especially when standing for truth or making hard moral choices. This can cause people to give up!*

***Legal Pressure:** In some places, laws or policies are used to restrict religious expression, worship, or the ability to speak about faith openly.*

4. How did Jesus respond to slander and resistance in His ministry? (Luke 23:1–5; John 8:48–59)?

*In Luke 23:1-5 – Jesus was falsely accused of undermining the nation, and that He was opposed to paying taxes to Caesar. He was also accused of claiming to be the Messiah and King.*

*He responded to Pilate by simply saying “You have said so!” – quietly acknowledging His Kingship without arguing.*

*He didn’t react with anger or self-defense, showing **quiet strength** and **trust in God’s plan**, even when the accusations were politically motivated.*

*In John 8:48-59*

*Jesus was slandered as being demon-possessed and a Samaritan (verse 48), which were harsh insults.*

*He **didn’t return insult for insult** but responded with **truth and clarity**, saying, “I honor my Father” (verse 49).*

*When challenged about His identity, Jesus boldly declared, “**Before Abraham was, I AM**” (verse 58), the “**I AM**” statement revealed His divine nature.*

*Though they tried to stone Him, Jesus **stood firm** in truth and then withdrew miraculously, showing **wisdom and courage** and His divine nature.*

### Read Ezra 4:17-24

5. How do you think the people felt when the king's decree halted the rebuilding?

*The people likely felt **deeply discouraged, disappointed, and frustrated** when the king's decree halted the rebuilding.*

*They had been working hard to obey God and rebuild what had been previously destroyed. This royal decree would have felt like a major setback.*

*The people may have felt confused or helpless, wondering why God had allowed the work to be stopped!*

*Some people might have felt afraid, knowing the power their enemies seem to have!*

6. Have you experienced a season where God's work in your life felt paused or opposed?

*A couple of seasons spring to mind:*

- i) When COVID was in full-swing; we had to stop worship at church and I felt really disconnected from our church family. It took a couple of weeks to establish a way of worshipping online. Even worshipping online felt like a huge disconnect. Even when we returned to worship; there were restrictions like masks, temperature test, no singing, social distancing. All felt like we were paused from worshipping properly.*
- ii) Post COVID – so ministries didn't restart and still haven't.*
- iii) Our Xcelerate ministry was stopped for a couple of years as we lost all our teenage children; who all moved interstate at the same time!*

7. How does Jesus give us endurance when God's promises seem delayed? (Hebrews 12:1–3)?

*Jesus gives us endurance in three key ways:*

- i) He is our example (verse 2). Jesus endured the cross because of the joy (of Heaven) set before Him! He didn't give up, even though He suffered greatly. We can endure if we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can follow His example and keep going and not give up. If the master suffered and endured; so, can we, His servants.*

- ii) *Jesus is our strength (verse 3). When we see what Jesus endured – the opposition, the pain and the shame – it helps us NOT ‘to grow weary and lose heart’*
- iii) *Jesus surrounds us with witness (verse 1). We are reminded we are not alone. Many others have run this race of faith before us and they are cheering us on!*

8. Why do you think God allowed the work to be stopped for so long? (verse 24)  
What might God teach His people in the waiting? How does Jesus help with us having to wait? (cf. John 7:6; Galatians 4:4)

*Verse 24 says the work on the temple stopped until the second year of King Darius. That was about **15 years**—a long time of waiting and frustration. But God often works through waiting to **shape His people’s hearts and trust**.*

**Why the long delay?** *Waiting tests whether God’s people will trust Him even when things don’t go as planned. The delay may have exposed fear, apathy, or distraction in the people’s hearts that needed addressing (see Haggai 1:2–4). God’s plans often involve timing we can’t see. He may delay things to prepare people, leaders, or circumstances.*

**What might God teach His people in the waiting?** *Patience and perseverance; dependence on Him and not just dependence on human plans; a deeper hunger for His presence and purposes.*

**How does Jesus help with us having to wait?**

*In John 7:6, Jesus said: “**My time is not yet here; for you any time will do.**” Jesus relied on the Father’s perfect timing for everything He did in His ministry. He would not buckle under the pressure, from others! **Jesus models perfect peaceful patience!** Galatians 4:4 say: ‘But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law’. There is a term in manufacturing called J.I.T. manufacturing where the raw materials for manufacturing a product are not held in stock for long periods but purchased “just in time”. This is the way God operates – just in [His perfect] time. Not too late, not too soon! Jesus is the absolute proof that*

*God keeps His promises perfectly, even when we have to wait; even when we think it's too late!*

9. What helps us stay faithful even when progress seems impossible? (cf. Philippians 1:6; Matthew 16:18)

*When progress seems impossible, we stay faithful by holding on to **God's promises** and **Jesus' power** to complete His work in and through us.*

*Philippians 1:6 is a great promise: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." This promise reminds us that God always finishes what He starts! Our progress doesn't depend on us and our strength; but on God's strength and power alone.*

*In Matthew 16:18, Jesus makes a promise that **NOTHING** can bring His Church down, not even the gates of Hades (Hell) can overcome His Church.*

10. **Ponder:** How should God's people relate to governing authorities, especially if the law of the land affects Christian worship and/or mission?

*We have to take a balanced view when relating to governing authorities*

*On the one hand, Romans 13:1-2 says "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities... The authorities that exist have been established by God." As we learnt in Daniel last year, God installs and uninstalls leaders of nations!*

*But on the other hand, when governing authorities contradict God's Word, Acts 5:29 says "We must obey God rather than human beings!". When human laws oppose God's commands, we must remain faithful to God, even if it costs us!*

*We must also pray for our leaders as 1 Timothy 2:1-2: "Pray for kings and all in authority... that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness"*

11. How might the following New Testament passages relate to **Ezra 4:6-24**?

**Luke 23:1-5**



- In both Ezra 4 and Luke 23:1-5 mention enemies bringing **false accusations** to the ruling authorities
- In both Ezra 4 and Luke 23:1-5, the enemies **used government power to stop God's Work** – although in Jesus' case the work wasn't really stopped, they just thought killing Jesus, would stop it, but it didn't!
- In both Ezra 4 and Luke 23:1-5, the accusers **twisted the truth** and made God's people and God's Son **sound dangerous and a huge threat** to the governing authorities!

### **John 15:18–20**

**Both have hostility towards God people:** In *Ezra*, opposition arose precisely because the Jews were obeying God and rebuilding what He had commanded. In *John 15*, Jesus teaches that **faithfulness to God will provoke resistance** from the world, just as He experienced.

Rejection is nothing new: Jesus reminds His disciples that rejection and hatred are not surprising—they're part of a long history of resisting God's ways.

The **Jews in Ezra's time experienced the same pattern**, showing that opposition to God's mission is not just political, but spiritual.

**Opposition is an encouragement:** Jesus' words help us see that when we face resistance for doing what's right, it's not a sign of failure—but of **sharing in His mission**. Just like the people in *Ezra*, we may face setbacks and opposition, but we are part of a bigger story, and **God is still in control**.

### **Acts 5:17-40**

In *Ezra 4*, opposition came through accusations and political pressure to halt the rebuilding of God's temple. In *Acts 5*, the apostles were arrested and threatened for preaching about Jesus—**another form of trying to stop God's mission**.

In both cases, the opposition used authority, fear, and threats to block obedience to God. In *Acts*, God intervened (through an angel and wise counsel), and the apostles kept preaching boldly—just as, eventually, the work resumed in *Ezra's* time.

### **Acts 6:8-14**

*In Ezra 4, the enemies of the Jews **falsely accused** them of rebellion to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem. In Acts 6, Stephen is **falsely accused** of speaking against the temple and the law to silence his witness about Jesus.*

*Both cases show how opposition often uses **twisting the truths, lies, and legal channels** to attack God's people.*

*But in both cases, God's purposes **continue beyond the opposition**—the temple was eventually rebuilt in Ezra's time, and Stephen's witness helped spread the gospel of Jesus!*

### **Acts 24:1-9**

*In Ezra 4, the opponents wrote to the Persian **king** accusing the Jews of rebellion so that the temple work was stopped.*

*In Acts 24, Paul is brought before **Governor Felix**, accused of being a troublemaker and leading a dangerous sect.*

*Both cases use **legal systems and slander** to try to shut down the work of God.*

*The accusations in both are **exaggerated or false**, aimed at stirring fear in those in power.*

### **Romans 8:28, 31**

*In Ezra 4, opposition and delays made it seem like God's plan was blocked.*

***Romans 8:28** reminds us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him”—even setbacks, delays and opposition can be used by God to fulfill His purpose. Nothing is too difficult for Him!*

***Romans 8:31** says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”—though enemies opposed the Jews, God's plan to rebuild His temple **could not be stopped**.*

### **2 Corinthians 4:8–9**

*In Ezra 4, the people faced strong opposition that halted the temple work—they were “hard pressed” and “persecuted.” 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 says, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed... struck down, but not destroyed.”*

*Both passages capture the same truth: God's people may be discouraged or delayed, but they are never abandoned or ultimately defeated.*

### **1 Peter 4:12–14**

*Opposition should **not** be a surprise!*

*In Ezra 4, the Jews faced fierce resistance while doing God's will in rebuilding the temple. 1 Peter 4:12 says, "Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal... as though something strange were happening."*

*Verse 14 adds, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed." Like in Ezra, opposition is a sign of sharing in God's work, and God's Spirit rests on those who endure faithfully.*

What's the **BIG IDEA** of Ezra 4:6-24?

**Opposition to God's work**

**OR**

**Obstructed Obedience**



**What light globe moment did you have?**

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

**Share the verse** that had a special meaning to you in this study?

**Romans 8:31 - What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?**

**Finish in prayer:** Ask God to help us not to lose heart when things don't go as planned. Ask God to give us patience to wait, courage to stand firm, and faith to trust that God's purposes will never fail.

## Study 4 – God restarts what we thought was over

Ezra 5:1-6:22

*(Sermon on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2025)*

### Read Ezra 5:1-2

1. Why was the prophetic voice necessary to restart the temple rebuilding? What does this show us about God's role in reawakening obedience?

*The prophetic voice of Haggai and Zechariah was necessary to restart the temple building because the people had become discouraged because their neighbours had set out to discourage them (Ezra 4:4) and because the work had come to a standstill (Ezra 4:24). We also know from Haggai 1 – which parallels this time of Ezra – that the people had given up on rebuilding the temple which remained in ruins whilst the people themselves were living in paneled houses (Haggai 1:3-4).*

*The words from the prophets would have reminded the people of God's ever presence and His authority (see verse 1 – 'the God of Israel, who was over them'. The prophets also reawakened the people's hope, reminded them of God's promises and addressed both their fear and apathy.*

*Isn't good when we are reminded of God's character and His promises!*

*It also shows that:*

- *God actively intervenes when His people drift into discouragement or neglect*
- *God raises up voices (from prophets, leaders, scripture and circumstances) to stir people's hearts towards obedience*
- *Revival and obedience are initiated by God's Word and Spirit, not just human determination!*
- *God is faithful and patient with His people – and calls them to fulfil His purposes*

2. What encourages you about the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua?

*The following things are encouraging about Zerubbabel and Joshua's leadership:*

- *They responded immediately to God's prophetic Word*
- *They led by example in difficult circumstances*
- *They did not lead alone; they welcomed the support of prophets*
- *They took personal responsibility for God's mission*

*We can learn from their leadership!*

3. Recall occasions in the past when God sent a special word to encourage you to continue doing something that you had stopped out of discouragement or fear.

*God regularly keeps me going and removes thoughts of discouragement, doubt and fear with three verses which encourage me to continue*

- *Romans 8:31 - If God is for us, who can be against us?*
- *Luke 9:62 - Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*
- *Galatians 6:9 - Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

*During COVID – We had to stop our High School Youth Group, Xcelerate, when every single youth member's families moved interstate, so when I had no children attending. In Term 3, last year, we had 2 teenage girls attending Church, and God gave me the encouraging word to restart Xcelerate, so that the 2 girls could attend. Even though, these girls don't attend now, by restarting we have 4-6 children attending each week; praise God!*

4. **Ponder:** God can intervene strongly changing the minds of people, even rulers. Is God sending you to help with someone's spiritual walk?

*God constantly sends people for me to help in their spiritual walk, through prayer, studying the Bible, pastoral care and counselling.*

*I also have the privilege of walking spiritually with the children doing SRE at school, and the children at Jaffa and Xcelerate.*

### **Read Ezra 5:3-17**

5. How do the officials try to stop the work this time? What's different from chapter 4? What can we learn about persistence in the face of bureaucracy or other forms of difficulty?

*Q. How do the officials try to stop the work this time?*

*A. In this passage, the officials (Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and others) question the Jews about **who gave them permission to rebuild the temple** and demand to know the names of those leading the project.*

*In verse 8, the officials may have been concerned that 'The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls' which could be construed as*

building a fortress so that they planned conflict/rebellion against the occupying forces of Persia

However, **they do not use threats or immediate force** but instead send a report to King Darius seeking clarification.

In this chapter:

- The officials **challenge the authority behind the work** by asking, "**Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?**" (verse 3).
- They **conduct an investigation**, carefully documenting names and details (verse 4).
- Rather than using direct opposition or intimidation, they **send a formal letter to King Darius**, seeking a ruling (verses 6 to 17).
- They **present the Jews' explanation fairly**, including the Jews' claim that King Cyrus had authorized the work (verses 11 to 16).

Q. What's different from chapter 4?

The opponents used <b>deception, manipulation, and scaremongering</b> (Ezra 4:4-5, 4:11-16).	Officials used <b>formal, legal processes and investigation</b> , without immediate threats or hostility.
Work was <b>stopped by fear and pressure</b> (Ezra 4:24).	Work <b>continued despite the investigation</b> (Ezra 5:5).
Letters to the king were <b>accusatory, misleading, exaggerating and framed the Jews as a rebellious threat</b> (Ezra 4:12-16).	The letter to King Darius was <b>more neutral, including the Jews' explanation, and left the decision to the king</b> (Ezra 5:6-17).

Q. What can we learn about persistence in the face of bureaucracy or other forms of difficulty?

A. It requires persistence and courage to continue the work even while under investigation

God was working in the whole matter, and the bureaucratic delays ensured the process was not rushed into, so that there was no injustice.



*Sometimes persistence is quiet and patient, working within the system without compromising obedience. The Jews balanced respect authorities with faithfulness to God's commands.*

*Persistence when facing bureaucracy often means waiting, trusting God's timing, and not giving up when faced with obstacles.*

6. How did Jesus endure continual questioning and investigation? (Mark 11:27–33)

- ***Jesus used wisdom and discernment.*** *Jesus consistently used wise, probing questions to shift the focus to the hearts and motives of His questioners.*
- ***Jesus was without fear or compromise.*** *Jesus never backed down or avoided confrontation, and did not allow the authorities to control the conversation. He stood in confidence in God the Father's authority.*
- ***Jesus was able to disarm their traps.*** *Jesus recognized their traps and answered in such a way to disarm them without ever compromising on the truth*
- ***Jesus always remained focus on His mission*** *and didn't let anything distract Him from His mission*

7. Why do the Jewish leaders respond so confidently in verses 11–16? What gives them boldness, and how do they acknowledge both God's call and the king's permission?

*In their response to the officials, the Jewish leaders clearly state **who they are** ("**servants of the God of heaven and earth**") and explain the history of the temple, the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, and **the decree of King Cyrus permitting them to rebuild.***

- *They **knew their identity** as "servants of the God of Heaven and Earth"*
- *They **admitted their sin** and explained the reason that God was angry with them and sent them into exile under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon*
- *They **acknowledged God's hand in their history** and God's hand in moving King Cyrus to issue the decree to return from exile*
- *They **knew they had tangible evidence** – because they could point to the royal decree of Cyrus, which they were confident was recorded*
- *Meanwhile, they **remained focus** (like Jesus) on their mission to rebuild*



8. Why is it important to remember our identity in Christ and our calling? What would you say to someone who asks why you have hope in Jesus? (cf. 1 Peter 3:15)

*Whatever profession (CEO, office worker, accountant..) or status (married, single, widowed, employed, unemployed or retired...) we are first and foremost a Christian and our identity is in Jesus, not in our profession or status.*

*The reason it's important to remember our identity is in Christ because:*

- *It gives us courage and boldness when we face opposition (like the Jews did)*
- *It keeps us focused on what God's purpose for us is; i.e., to proclaim the Gospel*
- *It reminds us that our hope is not in this world (in which we are just merely passing through); but our hope is in Heaven*

*1 Peter 3:15 says: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect". Like a good boy scout or girl guide we must "be prepared". It is really important that we have a good understanding of 'why' we believe in Jesus.*

*The reason I believe in Jesus is because He fixes two major problems all human's face – namely we all **sin** (break God's rules) and must face the punishment of sin, which is **death** (we all must die one day). Jesus is God's Son, and God sent Him on a rescue mission to take the punishment for sin (death) off of me and grant me forgiveness for my sins. But that's not all, Jesus rose from death; to show He has power, even over death itself. Therefore, anyone who believes in Jesus, as I do, does not have to perish under the weight of sin, but can have eternal life in Heaven with Jesus, where there is everlasting peace and joy. That's the hope I have and pray every person I come across would come to believe in Jesus and have that same hope!*

**Read Ezra 6:1-22**

9. How is God at work behind the scenes in Darius' discovery of the decree? (verses 1 to 5)?

*In summary, **Ezra 6:1-5**, King Darius orders a search in the royal archives to verify the Jews' claim that King Cyrus had issued a decree allowing them to rebuild the temple. Remarkably, **the decree is found in a place called Ecbatana [capital of Ancient***

**Media]**, a completely different location from Babylon, where such documents would not be expected to be stored.

Here's how God worked behind the scenes:

- He guided the search of the decree to the correct place – Ecbatana
- He ensured the decree was both preserved and found
- He ensured political favour from Darius who was more than fair
- He ensured His promise to King Cyrus was fulfilled

10. Have you ever seen God provide unexpected help through secular means? One example is a general one, where Sky News presenter Andrew Bolt, who does not profess to be a Christian, yet he often advocates for Christians and says that Christians are the most-maligned group in Australia. Praise God, that He works through secular means also. As we saw in Ezra chapter 1, when He worked through the pagan King, Cyrus.

Another example, I received an email from a fellow Scripture (SRE) teacher last week as follows: *The new principal of Morisset Public School, who is not a Christian, is so impressed with our SRE lessons, and the engagement from the students, that he commented to the SRE Coordinator, "It is so good, I am really impressed. If I had it my way ALL the kids would be doing SRE!". This is not the first time, a non-Christian, has been a great advocate and supported SRE in our schools.*

11. What is striking about Darius' decree in verses 6 to 12? How does God not only protect His people but **provide abundantly** for His work?

- **Darius' decree goes beyond permission – it offers protection and provision.** Darius not only allows the Jews to continue to rebuild the temple but he tells the local officials who complained, to stay away, altogether! God protected His people!
- **There is abundant provision from the Royal Treasury.** Darius orders the full cost of the rebuild to be paid from the royal treasury, and specifically from the taxes collected in the local region where the temple is! God not only protects but provides in abundance!

- **Severe warnings and punishments were issued against any interference.** Darius warns that anyone who interferes in the rebuild will be impaled and their house will end up in a pile of rubble.
  - **Wanted favour from Israel's God.** In return for giving the Jews the go ahead to continue building, Darius wanted to placate Israel's God and wanted them to pray for his well-being and the well being of his sons.
  - **God even softens Darius heart towards the Jews and their God.** He refers to the 'God of Heaven' twice and refers to the Temple as the 'House of God'.
  - **Darius ordered the his decree to be carried out in diligence.** Ultimately, Darius' decree ensured:
    - Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai carried out Darius' decree diligently (verse 13)
    - The Jews were able to complete the Temple, as God had planned and promised through Cyrus (verse 14)
    - The Temple was dedicated with joy (verse 16)
    - The Temple dedication was accompanied with offerings of a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs; and sin offerings of twelve male goats for each of the twelve tribes of Israel; signifying the temple is for all of Israel! (verse 17) This was reminiscent of the dedication of Solomon's Temple, when the whole nation was still united (1 Kings 8)
    - The priests were installed and the Levites put in groups to serve in the temple, as per the Law of Moses (verse 18)
12. What is the significance of the Passover celebration in verses 19–22?
- **A sign of restored worship and covenant faithfulness** (verse 19). Celebrating Passover was a central act of obedience to God, remembering how God rescued them from Egypt. This shows that the temple was not just a building project—it was about restoring a right relationship with God through worship and obedience to His Word.
  - **A reminder of God's past deliverance and faithfulness to His people.** By remembering the Passover, the people were reminded of God's power to save them from bondage, as He rescued them from slavery in Egypt and as He now was doing rescuing them from exile in Babylon. It's like this is a Second Exodus.

- ***It was a sign of spiritual unity and renewal.** The exiles and ‘those who separated themselves from unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours in order to seek God’ joined together to celebrate the Passover for seven days.*
- ***The sharing of unleavened bread** – reminds us that leaven is a sign of sin, and that God had forgiven their sins, which is why they were allowed to return from Exile*
- ***And of course, any mention of Passover** – should remind us of Jesus, our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7)*

13. How might the following New Testament passages relate to **Ezra 5:1-6:22**?

### **Matthew 5:10-12**

- *The Jews faced opposition, questioning, and political threats (Ezra 5:3-5). Yet, just like in Matthew 5, they were doing God's work despite resistance, which is a form of being '**persecuted for righteousness' sake.**'*
- *Despite the opposition, God turned the Jews' situation for their good, providing protection, provision, and joy (Ezra 6:8-22). Which echoes Jesus' words: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."*
- *In the end, the Jews celebrated with joy because God had turned the king's heart toward them. This is like Jesus' command to "**rejoice and be glad**" even when persecuted, because God is working behind the scenes to reward and bless His people.*
- *Prophets like **Haggai and Zechariah** were part of this period of rebuild, encouraging the people in the face of resistance. Jesus reminds His followers that **facing opposition for God's work puts them in the same line as the prophets**, giving them courage and perspective and encouragement to keep going!*

### **Luke 22:14-20**

*In Ezra 5–6, the people celebrated Passover (Ezra 6:19-22) to remember God's past deliverance and as a sign of restored worship after the exile. In Luke 22:14-20,*

*Jesus transforms the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper, pointing to **a greater deliverance through His death and resurrection.***

### **Luke 24:52-53**

*In Ezra 5–6, after facing opposition, the people complete the temple, dedicate it, and celebrate with joy and worship (Ezra 6:16, 22). In Luke 24:52-53, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the disciples return to Jerusalem with great joy and continue worshiping God in the temple. We also have the added connection that Jesus (who is the Temple) has just been restored (after 3 days) and brings the disciples great joy, to know, Jesus is still alive!*

### **Acts 2:46-47**

*Both passages show God's people united in joyful worship and daily devotion, celebrating His faithfulness and experiencing His blessing, whether in the restored temple (Ezra) or in the Spirit-filled community of the church (Acts) after the glorious day of Pentecost when three thousand believers were added to their number!*

### **Acts 4:1-31**

*In Ezra 5–6, the Jewish leaders faced opposition from authorities, but they boldly continued the temple work, trusting in God's call and the king's decree. In Acts 4:1-31, Peter and John faced opposition from religious authorities, but they boldly continued preaching about Jesus, praying for boldness and trusting in God's power.*

### **Romans 8:28**

*In Ezra 5–6, despite opposition and delays, God worked through unexpected means (like King Darius' decree) to bring about His purposes, ensuring the temple is completed and His people rejoice. In Romans 8:28, the Apostle Paul teaches that God works all things together for good for those who love Him, even through challenges and opposition.*

### **1 Corinthians 5:7-8**

*In Ezra 6:19-22, the returned exiles celebrated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, committing themselves to purity and obedience as God's restored people. In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, Paul calls believers to celebrate the new Passover—Jesus Christ our Passover Lamb—by living lives of sincerity and truth, removing the "old leaven" of sin.*

### **Ephesians 3:20**

*In Ezra 5–6, despite opposition and challenges, God works ‘immeasurably more’ than the people could ever have imagined, bringing about the completion of the temple and the restoration of His worship, using unexpected means like King Darius’ decree. Remarkably Darius’ decree even stated that the cost of the rebuild would be paid from royal treasury! In Ephesians 3:20, Paul reminds us that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power at work within us.*

### **Philippians 4:19**

*Both passages show that God is faithful to provide for His people, meeting their needs in unexpected and generous ways, especially when they are fulfilling His purposes.*

### **Hebrews 12:1-2**

*Both passages emphasize perseverance in the face of difficulty and the importance of keeping God's mission in focus, whether in rebuilding the temple (Ezra) or in living out the Christian faith (Hebrews), trusting in God's faithfulness to bring His purposes to completion.*

What’s the **BIG IDEA** of Ezra 5:1-6:22?

***God faithfully provides and empowers His people to fulfill His purposes, despite opposition***

**OR**

***Perseverance in God's mission leads to His provision and the completion of His work***





**What light globe moment did you have?**

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

**Share the verse** that had a special meaning to you in this study?

*Ezra 5:1-2 – “Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.”*

*Ezra 5:5 – “But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.”*

**Finish in prayer:** Thanking God for reviving His work in our lives as He did in Ezra’s day—calling us back by His voice, giving us boldness amid opposition, and turning our setbacks into His provision. Ask God to help us to trust His timing and sovereignty when challenges arise.

**Studies prepared by Paul O'Rourke**  
**Toukley Presbyterian Church**  
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**Resources:**

The MacArthur Study Bible  
New Bible Commentary (Carson, France, Moyter & Wenham)  
Journey Through Ezra (Robert M. Solomon)  
The Message of Ezra and Haggai (Robert Fyall)  
The New Century Bible Commentary (D J Clines)  
Matthew Henry's Commentary