

**Main Idea: God causes those who keep His Word to prosper in whatever they do. (Ps. 1:1-3)**

Context: In Ezra 1 a new exodus is narrated  
 in Ezra 2 the people are numbered and they march on the land.  
 In Ezra 3 the altar is rebuilt and the Festival of Booths is celebrated.  
 In Ezra 4 opposition from the outside world in Ezra's day is summarized  
 In Ezra 5-6 he tells us more about the first generation of returnees who rebuilt the temple.

Ezra is telling us of the opposition from his own day in chapter 5 of rebuilding the temple and reassures us that their success was because they heeded God's Word and obeyed.

The question we need to ask ourselves as we go through this chapter is, "**How do you respond when everything you stand for - the gospel, the truth of the Scriptures, Christian morality, all of it - is challenged, mocked, opposed, and scorned?**" We need encouragement to stand through such challenges as our world changes.

Christians, by the world's standards, are not worthy of much. But we know those who are faithful to the true and living God, who believe and tell the truth about the world as it really is, and who have the only saving gospel available **will face scorn and mockery**, just as Jesus did. How have those who believe in the one, true God in the past dealt with it and thrived?

#### **Verses 1-5: A recount of the opposition to rebuilding the temple.**

The end of chapter 4 is recognized as "the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia", the year 520 b.c. When Ezra came around in 450 b.c., he knew of the ministry the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah had and that God inspired them to encourage the returnees to rebuild the temple. This is important because **if we are certain of God's providence** in what He asks us to do, **we can then be sure of His faithfulness** to see us through no matter the opposition as we are about to read.

#### **Verse 1**

Ezra starts off reminding the returnees of the reason the first generation of returnees were successful in rebuilding the temple by reminding them of the two prophets' prophecies. These prophecies come from the book of Haggai & Zechariah. (Hg. 1:1, Zech. 1:1)

- Haggai's prophecy was more of a **rebuke and direct encouragement** to get busy on rebuilding the temple they neglected because of opposition. (*loving chastisement*)
- Zechariah's prophecy was more **directed to the spiritual condition of the returned exiles and focused on the future**, the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. (*the why*) Zechariah's name even means, "**The Lord remembers**" - very fitting for a prophet God is using for restoration between Himself and His people.

**Both of these prophecies are crucial** in the returnees view of God because it not only let them know what God wanted them to do but also how He was going to encourage them as they do it. We have to remember this as we serve the Lord in whatever capacity He calls us too. God asks us to simply *obey* His calling & when we do, we can *be confident* He will provide *everything* we need to accomplish it.

*"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9*

Through these two prophets, the people and us, can **be encouraged that God is not only interested in buildings but in our lives**. For them, the temple was of utmost importance because that is where God dwelled then in the midst of His people. For us, to know God cares about our lives should influence how we treat ourselves and others because our bodies are where God dwells among His people now.

### **Verse 2**

Notice the **obedience** to the prophetic word (Haggai 1:2-10). Zerubbabel and Jeshua hear the prophetic word and in spite of the risk to their comfort and safety, they obey it. This begs the question, **how do we respond to the prophetic word?** Do we obey? Do we ignore it? Do we make excuses? Do we wait for someone else to respond first?

The people, along with their leaders, had the prophets with them helping them when they repented of their laziness, and trusted God's Word through the prophets obeying His commands.

*Do we want the Word of God denouncing and condemning us or do we want it with us, supporting us?*

We may not have the prophets with us but we have something better, the Holy Spirit. Tap into that power by putting yourself aside and being obedient; you will need it because **it takes courage to obey the Bible**. There will always be attempts to bully Bible-believing people into political correctness and if we don't want to end up compromising God's Word with the world's "wisdom" **we will need discernment** from the Holy Spirit to see through the 'muck' in this world.

### **Verses 3-4**

Here we see an example of this when Tattenai, the governor of the region west of the Euphrates River, when he and his colleagues came to the Jews rebuilding the temple and attempt to intimidate them. They ask two questions:

- 1) Who authorized you to do this?
- 2) What are your names?

At first these seem like innocent questions but you have to remember that **God's people do not fight against flesh and blood**. It may look like that on the outside but **they fight against the powers and principalities of the earth**.

*"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual*

So if these were meant to be just "checking in" questions they wouldn't have needed to send a letter of concern to Darius, which we will examine next time. But the builders continue along trusting that the Lord their God has already defeated the opposition, as Colossians says,

*"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." - Colossians 2:15*

For now, let's examine the two questions. The first, **questions the authority of God** who stirred Cyrus' heart to allow the Jews back to their home and rebuild the temple and city. Tattenai and his officials would have known that the Jews worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as we can see from verse 8.

*"Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built with huge stones, and timber is laid in the walls. This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands." - Ezra 5:8*

Worldly people, used by Satan, always seem to get God's people to question His authority and doubt that God actually said what He did. But why? **Doubt creates room for seeds of unbelief to be planted** and we become spineless people instead of a people, chosen before time began who are confident in THE **omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God.** Which is why the Bible constantly tells us to *remember* God's faithfulness and provision.

Zerubbabel and Joshua, prompted by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, have much to remind the people of God's faithfulness to them, including:

- He stirred the heart of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the temple in 1:1-2
- He inspired the prophets to speak in His name in 5:1
- Who He is as their Creator in Zechariah 12:1

Tattenai and his officials only have intimidation and posturing to get the builders to stop; the builders have the Creator of the universe backing them up. **Where God leads, His grace will be sufficient.** The leaders knew this and continued to build.

It could be tempting to think that the important things are only recorded in the Bible, and what happens now, in our day, doesn't matter as much as when Jesus returns. While it is a moment of absolute glory we are waiting for; **His glory is at stake no less now than it will be then.** What happens in our day matters for God's glory. It matters for the souls who will either hear and believe or rebel and face judgement.

**The second question**, can be taken as a harmless one or merely a matter of "dotting their I's and crossing their T's", but why would they need them if they didn't intend to make sure the king knew who was responsible for this supposedly "threatening" building. I see this as **an excuse to get them to question their identity.** But Tattenai underestimated the returnees' confidence in their identity. They knew who they were: God's agents to carry out His plan.

*God didn't authorize the world to carry forward His program.  
That backing belongs to us as the church of which Christ is the head.  
That authorization is ours.  
That commission is ours.*

Remember, the world doesn't understand the mission God has given us because the **Word of God doesn't inform and authorize them.** The King of Kings **has not announced to the world** that He will be with them always.

**Our purpose** is to spread the Gospel wherever we go. **Our mission** comes from the Creator who goes before us fighting our battles for His glory.

In verse 5, it is clear that **God is protecting them** as they finish HIS WORK. For 2,000 years the church has faced opposition and persecution, but the gates of hell have not prevailed against the church. **God will accomplish His purposes.**