

# From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Ezra) ch.5 & 6

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prophetic ministry and unity in leadership in building the church, as seen in the example of Haggai and Zechariah's ministry in Ezra.*

**Duration:** 1:00:34

**Scripture:** Ezra 4:4-5, Ezra 4:23-24, Matthew 11:12, Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 18:18, Matthew 18:20

**Topics:** "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being spiritually violent in pursuing God's purposes. He references Matthew 11:12, where Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force. The preacher highlights that believers often fight for their own rights and privileges, but fail to be spiritually violent in advancing God's kingdom and building His church. He uses the example of the Jews in the book of Ezra, who faced opposition in building the temple and allowed the enemy to triumph for 16 years. The preacher encourages believers to not be passive, but to actively pursue God's purposes and not settle for just the foundational aspects of the faith.

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## Transcript

Welcome now to the book of Ezra. In chapter 4, we have been considering how the Jews who were wholehearted left Babylon and moved towards Jerusalem and came there and had begun to build a temple. They had laid the foundation, and as long as the foundation was being laid, there was no problem, no opposition from the enemies.

We see it's exactly the same today. As long as people speak only about the foundations, everyone is happy. But when you get on to building the superstructure, leading people to discipleship, to perfection, to building the body of Christ, then there is opposition.

And we saw the five ways in which the devil sought to hinder the work of God here in Ezra 4, hinder the building of the temple, first by ecumenical cooperation, which the Jews were wise enough to reject, discouragement, fear and harassment, turning people against us, and finally by governmental obstruction, where these people who were the enemies wrote to the king. In verse 8 of Ezra 4, we saw that the king Artaxerxes. Now we read the word Artaxerxes a number of times in the Bible.

It's not always referring to the same person. Artaxerxes was a title like pharaoh in Egypt. There were many pharaohs and there were many Artaxerxes in Persia.

There were many Caesars in Rome. And the same way, these Artaxerxes that are mentioned in the scriptures are not always the same. However, they wrote and asked the king, they said that if this city is built, it will rebel against you.

And the king sent a reply, saying that, yes, we've studied the past history and found that there is rebellion associated with this city in the past, verse 19, and there have been mighty kings that have ruled there, so now, verse the king actually forbade that the city may not be rebuilt. He never said a word about the temple. He only said the city should not be rebuilt until a decree is issued from me and beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter.

But we read that the enemies took this document and they read it before Shimshai described it to their colleagues. They went in haste to Jerusalem, to the Jews, and stopped them from what? From building the temple by force of arms. Even though the king had not forbidden it, yet they stopped these people.

Now, as I said in our last study, God permits opposition. There is a purpose. The very first time that Jesus spoke about the church in Matthew 16, verse 18, he said, I will build my church, and the very next thing he said was, the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

In other words, the very first time that Jesus spoke about the church, he spoke about the opposition that the church was going to face from the powers of spiritual death and the powers of hell. But he said, the church which I built, the powers of spiritual death will not be able to overpower it. The second time Jesus spoke about the church was in Matthew 18, verse 18, he spoke about speaking to the local church, and immediately thereafter he again speaks about opposition.

What you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, what you lose on earth will be lost in heaven. It's very interesting to see that there are only two times that Jesus spoke about the church in those two references in Matthew 16 and 18. And it's very, very significant that in both the occasions, the only two occasions that Jesus spoke about the church, he spoke about the opposition from satanic forces.

So when we seek to build the church as the body of Christ, the number one thing we can expect is opposition from satanic forces working through men or without men. Sometimes working from people who try to come and sit in the midst of the assembly. Many ways in which the devil works.

And that's why those who seek to build the body of Christ need to have great discernment about the schemes of the devil, and need to humble themselves before God, asking God for light on how the devil is seeking to oppose. And also they must not be people who take things lying down. There's a phrase, a very wonderful phrase in English called taking things lying down.

That means the enemy comes and does something, and you just lie down and accept it. Well, that's what these people did. These enemies came and stopped the work of the building of the temple, and the sad thing is that the Jews just lay down and accepted that for 16 years.

They did nothing. That's a sad thing, that the enemy could triumph over God's purposes for 16 years. You mean God brought them all the way from Babylon to Jerusalem just to sit and watch this temple in a half-built state? For 16 years they looked at the foundations.

That's how it is in many assemblies today. Only the foundations. Repentance, faith, water, baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the second coming of Christ, and the gifts of the Spirit.

They sit and watch that for years. That's exactly what the enemy wants. That's what we see in the book of Ezra.

These things are written for our instruction, so that we can have light. Jesus said in Matthew 11, verse 12, The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. We are not to be violent men in a physical sense, when people take away our rights, but spiritually we have to be men of violence.

The trouble with most believers is that they are exactly the other way around. When it comes to their own rights and their own privileges, they are violent to fight for their rights. But when it comes to the purposes of God and the building of His church, they are not spiritually men of violence.

They just lie down and accept whatever the devil does. Now that's not the will of God. We read here finally in verse 24, Then the work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped, until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Arpatia, and history tells us that was a period of sixteen years.

God in His sovereignty allowed another king to come, who history tells us killed the previous king, who was a sort of a usurper, and took over. And then, notice now, it's very important to see this, how did the work of God begin again? This building on the foundation, this pressing on to perfection, this building the superstructure, how did it commence again after sixteen years? It was not just because a particular king came upon the throne, that's just a fact of history, but that king could have come upon the throne and nothing would have happened still if it were not for one fact, that in Jerusalem, God raised up two prophets. And it was through the ministry of prophecy, it was through the prophetic word, that the temple building commenced again.

Chapter 5 verse 1, When Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Ido prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them, then, only then, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua the son of Josedach arose and began to rebuild the house of God. Now, the king had not passed any new decree. The same old decree was there, which was sixteen years ago, by which those enemies had stopped the building.

How did they suddenly start building? How did they have the boldness, like Peter to say, we ought to obey God rather than men? How did they have the boldness to stand against civil authority and say, what God has told us to do, we have to do? One factor gave them boldness, and that was the ministry of prophecy. And it is my firm conviction from the teaching of the New Testament, that the most important ministry to build the body of Christ in these days is the ministry of prophecy. Where the prophetic word is not there, where prophets are not there, where fearless prophets who do not fear the face of men are not found, it will be impossible to build the body of Christ.

You just sit with the foundations and watch that. But when God raised up Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets, then things changed. You know, towards the end of the Old Testament, we have the prophecies that these two men gave, and we'll study that in a later study.

This is why we needed to look at Ezra first before going into Haggai and Zechariah, because we see the background in the situation into which they prophesied. They prophesied to a group of people who for 16 years sat on the foundations of the Lord's house. If you turn for a moment to the book of Haggai towards the end of the Old Testament, you get a glimpse there, a sample of their prophecy.

We'll look at it in detail later on, but I just want to point out one or two things right now. First of all, Haggai chapter 1, verse 3 and 4. Here's a sample of Haggai's prophecy. Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, and you know, these prophets, when you read the Old Testament, you see they were pretty straightforward.

They didn't say, well dear brothers, you know, why don't we just sit down and discuss this matter? No, it wasn't like that. They just got up and said, is it time for you people to dwell in your paneled houses, to seek your own gain and to seek your own profit, and the house of God lies desolate? Therefore, thus says the Lord, consider your ways. That was rebuke.

Imagine Haggai getting up and speaking like that to these people. That's the type of thing that produced the building of the body of Christ, and unless you have that type of ministry, it's impossible to build the superstructure. But that was not the only aspect of Haggai's ministry.

There was rebuke in his prophecy, but also, turn to chapter 2 and verse 4. The same man saying, the same man Haggai, now says, take courage, Zerubbabel, take courage, Joshua, the high priest, and all you people of the land, be bold, work, for I am with you, says the Lord God. What an encouragement that was. And that teaches us that in a true prophetic ministry, there is rebuke and there is encouragement.

There is rebuke and there is encouragement. That's how the body of Christ is built, by rebuke and by encouragement. Now look at Zechariah, Zechariah chapter 1. Now Zechariah was a young man, we read that in Zechariah chapter 2, but here we see in Zechariah 1, thus says the Lord, verse 2, the Lord was very angry with your fathers, thus says the Lord, return to me, Zechariah chapter 1, verse 3, that I may return to you.

Don't be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets prophesied saying, thus says the Lord, your fathers, verse 5, where are they? That was rebuke. And you turn to chapter 4 and verse 9, verse 8 and 9, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands will also finish it, then you will know the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. That was encouragement.

And so we see, Haggai and Zechariah prophesied rebuke and encouragement and the people began to build. That's what we see in Ezra chapter 5 and verse 1, when the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Haggai, then verse 2, Zerubbabel and Joshua began to build because of this dual ministry of rebuke and encouragement. They were stirred up, they were challenged by the rebuke, they were encouraged by the words of encouragement and they began to build the house of God.

Now the thing I want to point out is that in the beginning, the first 4 chapters of Ezra, we find there was no need of a prophetic ministry to lay the foundation. You can lay a foundation without a prophetic ministry. The foundations in Hebrews 6, 1 and 2 of repentance, faith, water, baptism, baptism, the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Spirit and the second coming, we can lay that without a prophetic ministry.

But when it comes to the superstructure, it is impossible without a prophetic ministry. And we find that Haggai and Zechariah did not speak about the foundation. They were not speaking about the foundation.

They were not patting people on the back for laying a foundation. They were prophesying about building the superstructure. And this is the essence of prophetic ministry, building the superstructure, pressing on the perfection on top of the foundation.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 4, Ephesians 4, we read there in verses 11 and 12, Ephesians 4 verses 11 and 12, we read there that the Lord Jesus Christ, when He ascended up into heaven, He gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some shepherds and teachers. What for? For the equipping of the saints. That's exactly what Haggai and Zechariah did.

They did not do the building themselves. They stirred up the people. And everybody worked.

And this is what the true apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher does. Stir up everybody so that everyone engages in the work of service. To do what? Not to lay the foundation, but it says here in verse 12, to build up the superstructure, to build up the body of Christ.

And so we see that that word prophecy is so misunderstood today. The main purpose of prophecy is to build up the superstructure of the body of Christ wherever only a foundation has been laid. And that is the mark of true prophetic ministry.

I want you to turn back now to Ezra. We'll see one or two things more there. We see here that there was a dual ministry.

Usually in the Old Testament we find one prophet. Very rare in the Old Testament to find two prophets spoken of together prophesying in the same verse. It's a Moses or Elijah or a David.

But here we see a foretaste of what was going to come in the New Covenant. Two brothers being one in their prophecy. And that's very important.

Not only Haggai and Zechariah in their ministry, but also Zerubbabel and Joshua in their leadership. There are gifts of prophecy and gifts of administration in the body of Christ. And those who prophesy have to be one, and those who are in administration also have to be one.

And that's not easy. Those who live under the Old Covenant can never become one. It's only those who have gone through the New and Living Way, through the veil of the flesh, who can become one.

And you see how God is teaching all this in symbolic form right there in that movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. Two prophets. And there was no competition.

Haggai was not trying to show that he's a greater prophet than Zechariah. Zechariah was not trying to show that he was better. In fact, Haggai was the older brother and Zechariah was the younger brother.

When you look at their prophecies, Haggai is just two chapters and Zechariah is fourteen chapters. And Haggai never felt jealous about that. They were one.

So this younger brother got fourteen chapters of prophecy. Well, so what? If God's given him that much, he's got to say that much. God's given me only two chapters of prophecy.

I speak those two chapters and sit down. There's so many things we can learn from these two brothers working together, not seeking their own. And that's why the devil was overcome.

Let God find today, anywhere, two brothers who can work together and the devil will be overcome. That's how the gates of hell don't prevail against the church. That's the church Jesus is building.

Where two brothers can work together and the devil just cannot come between them. He's always trying to come between God's servants. And so we see here that they began to rebuild, verse 2, the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

Now there's something I want to mention here, that the house of God in the Old Testament could be built only in one place. They could not build the house of God in Babylon. They could not build the house of God in any other place except Jerusalem.

And this has all got spiritual meaning for us. If you turn to the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy chapter 16, we find in verse 6, verse 5 and 6, Deuteronomy chapter 16 verses 5 and 6, Moses said to the Israelites, you are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any town you like. But, verse 6, only in the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name.

The place where the Lord establishes His name. That is the place where the house of God is to be built. That's the place where you've got to offer the Passover.

And they never forgot that. You cannot build it in Nazareth, you cannot build it in Bethlehem, you cannot build it in Babylon. You've got to build it in the place where the Lord has established His name.

And in the Old Testament it was Jerusalem. But, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, He said, now you're going to be scattered to the outermost parts of the earth as My witnesses. And He had told them, now, where does the Lord put His name? Not in Jerusalem.

That's very important for us to see. Matthew chapter 18. Jesus, as I said, spoke only twice about the church.

In Matthew 16, He spoke about the worldwide church. In Matthew 18, He spoke about the local church. In Matthew 18, in verse 17, is the second time Jesus spoke about the church.

If He refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And then He explains about the battle the church is going to be in, in verse 18, about binding and losing. And here is the church.

Here is Jesus' definition of the church, verses 19 and 20. I say to you, if two of you, Haggai and Zechariah, Joshua and Zerubbabel, or any two, anywhere in the world, agree, that means they are one. Not just agree in a particular request.

The Greek word for agree here is symphony, from which we get the English word symphony. And you're listening to music, two instruments playing together, and you know whether there's a symphony or not. One note that's wrong in one instrument, and you can make it up.

That's symphony. When two brothers are playing two different instruments, and you can't make out a single discord between them. That is what's spoken of here.

Then, they have such power, they can ask the Father for anything. Well, many people will ask for material things. But here, the Lord is speaking about these two people agreeing and saying, Lord, build your church, the body of Christ, in this locality.

God will do it. They can ask for anything. Because, here's the reason, the place where the Lord has established His name in the New Covenant, where two or three are gathered like this.

Like what? Without any discord. Two people, three people. It's a church if there is no discord in the musical instruments.

In my name. That is where the Lord has placed His name, which we saw in Deuteronomy 16.6. In the New Covenant, it is where two or three people are united. There, the Lord places His name.

And He Himself is in their midst. Now, we can't just come together, a bunch of Christians, and say, Lord, You're in our midst. Do you know that there was one church where the Lord was not in the midst? He was outside the door, knocking at the door, trying to get in.

Do you remember which church that was? The church in Laodicea. You read about it in Revelation 3.20, I stand at the door and knock. The Lord said that to a church.

They gathered inside that church and said, Lord, You're here in our midst because we're gathered in Your name. But they didn't realize He was outside the door. Because they were not united.

There was strife. There was jealousy. There was competition.

And particularly in the leadership. If the devil can bring division in the leadership, the Lord moves outside the door. But in the leadership, if the two or three whom God brings into the core of the assembly leadership can remain one, the gates of hell will never, never, never prevail against it.

The little children who are coming into the assembly will always fight. Children fight all over the world. But the devil must not be able to get into that central core.

So there's a spiritual lesson there. That is the place where the Lord establishes His name under the New Covenant. Ezra 5, verse 2. They began to rebuild the house of God in the place where the Lord had established His name, which is Jerusalem.

And what was the fundamental difference between Jerusalem and Babylon? We can say one thing. Babylon was taken up with greatness. King Nebuchadnezzar built such a fantastic place.

Jerusalem was taken up with holiness. Babylon was a place of business. Jerusalem was a place of sacrifice.

In the Old Testament, when things were going according to God's order, in the days of Solomon and thereafter, when any time you went to the temple, you would see sacrifice every day. It was a city of sacrifice. Babylon was a city of commerce.

You can't mix the two. And when making money enters into the realm of religion, what you build is Babylon. When people say they are serving the Lord, but they have a salary scale to serve the Lord, and an increment scale to serve the Lord, it's a mixture of Jerusalem and Babylon.

And such mixtures cannot be anything but pure Babylon. That's why when Jesus came into the temple and He saw people making money in the name of religion, He took a whip and He chased them out. And He said, don't make My Father's house a den of robbers.

They were not stealing, but in one sense they were. They were making money in the name of religion, and those who make money in the name of religion, Jesus called them robbers. Robbers.

And where Jesus sees anybody today making money in the name of religion, He's got the same name for that person. Robber. Thief.

Get out of God's house. That's Babylon. And that's what Zechariah prophesied against.

You see in the last verse of the book of Zechariah. Zechariah chapter 14 verse 21. The last verse of the book of Zechariah.

He said, in that day, verse 21, every cooking pot in Jerusalem, Judah, will be holy, and all who sacrifice will come to Jerusalem. Sacrifice is the principle of Jerusalem. And in that day, there will no longer be, it says in the margin, a merchant man.

A man who is doing business in the house of the Lord. In that day. That's how Jerusalem is built.

When the merchants are driven out. The people who make money in the name of religion are exposed. The people who sell the Lord for a salary are exposed as robbers and humbugs.

And driven out. Then, the house of God is built. Just for your information.

Do you know what happened to Zechariah in his later years? It says in Matthew 23 verse 35. He was slain between the temple and the altar. I can imagine that he got slain when he prophesied things like this.

And there were people around there who didn't appreciate all this. They finally got him somewhere and slew him. Between the temple and the altar.

These money makers. But, as long as God gave him opportunity, he prophesied and he fulfilled his ministry. Now, there's a price to be paid for a prophetic ministry and Zechariah paid it.

But he succeeded in fulfilling God's purpose in his lifetime. So, remember this dear brothers and sisters. You cannot build the house of God on the principle of money.

It's on the principle of sacrifice. That a person knows how to give himself in sacrifice that the house of God is built. Now, we turn back to Ezra chapter 5. The enemies are all stirred up again.

Just like in chapter 4. 16 years they kept quiet because only the foundations were there. But once again, somebody started to build a superstructure. And again, the enemies are all stirred up.

Verse 3. At that time, Thad and I, the governor of the province, and Shethar Bose and I and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus. Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish the structure? And we told them accordingly the names of the men who were reconstructing this building. But listen to this.

This is the result of prophecy. The eye of God was on the elders of the Jews. And these enemies could not stop them.

Until the matter should come to Darius and then a written reply be returned concerning it. You see, it was because Haggai and Zachariah were there at this time. In the previous occasion, the prophets were not there.

Here, when these enemies came, they tried to stop them. Who told you to rebuild this? You got no business. Haggai and Zachariah prophesied to these Jews and must have encouraged them.

Said, don't worry about these enemies. God will take care of them. Let's get on with the job.

I want you to notice just one thing in verse 2. That Haggai and Zachariah not only prophesied. Says in verse 1, they prophesied. And verse 2, it says that when Zerubbabel and Joshua began to rebuild the house of God, the prophets of God were supporting them.

And the Living Bible makes it very clear, they were actually helping them. They were taking the stones and the mortar and putting it together. These were not prophets who just prophesied and went to lie down in their easy chairs after that while the others were doing the dirty job.

No. These were prophets who prophesied, got the people stirred up and then got their own hands dirty and their knees dirty and their clothes dirty doing God's work along with the others. These were the prophets of the New Covenant.

We turn now to Ezra 5 verse 5. The eye of their God was upon them. And this is a very wonderful phrase that occurs in a few places. I just want to show you two or three verses in the New Testament about the eye of God.

In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 11 first of all. It says here in Deuteronomy 11 that the land of Canaan into which the Israelites were entering was the land over which the eyes of God were always on it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. That's a wonderful thing to live in the place where God's eyes are upon us from the beginning of the year 1st of January to the 31st of December.

God's eyes. And in every one of us should be a tremendous desire. Lord I want to live in this land.

I want to live in this place where your eye is upon me. That has two aspects to it. One is that God is watching everything I'm doing.

I've got to live before God's face in purity. The other is that the eye of God watches to see where my enemies are going to hurt me or hinder me in some way and is working out things for my good. The other place is Psalm 33.

Psalm 33 and verse 18 it says the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him. This is the land where the eye of God is upon us from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. If I fear him then I don't fear man.

If we fear God we don't fear anyone else. If I fear him according to Psalm 33 verse 18 his eye will be upon me. If I fear him on January the 1st his eye will be upon me.

And if I fear him right through the year every day through to December 31st his eye will be upon me from the beginning of the year till the end of the year. And I will fear no man. That's how it was.

That's how it was with Haggai and Zechariah. The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews. Those elders lived in the fear of God.

That's why the eye of God was upon them. And that's why the house of God could be built. One more verse.

2 Chronicles 16. We know this verse most of us. Verse 9. The eyes of the Lord are moving to and fro throughout the earth to strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

If my heart is completely His and I fear Him His eye will not only be upon me His eye will be moving up to King Darius sitting in the throne of Persia to move in His heart to support my work. Wonderful. The eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews.

Ezra 5.5. And they did not stop them. They could not stop them. We could read it like that as well.

They did not stop them. Wonderful. Until the matter came to Darius.

And this is the copy again. These people wrote a letter to Darius. And they sent a report to him saying Darius King all peace.

Let it be known that we have gone to the province of Judah and we have seen this house of the great God which is being built with great stones. Beams are being laid and work is going on with great care. And we ask the elders who give you a decree.

Verse 10. We ask them their names. And you know what they answered.

Verse 11. We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. Wonderful.

That is why we are building. We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. And they are rebuilding the temple that was built by great king that was Solomon many years ago.

But because our fathers provoked God He gave us into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 12. But now in the first year of Cyrus he issued a decree.

And they explained that decree in verse 14 and 15. And Shezbar that is Zerubbabel came and laid the foundations of the house of God. And from then till now 16 years.

It has been under construction. It is not yet completed. That is what they wrote to the king.

And it is something we need to keep in mind. It says in 1 Peter 3.15 that whenever people ask us a question concerning the hope that is in us. The hope of building Christ's body in the church.

We are to give them an answer with meekness and reverence. We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. And we are building the house which has been in ruins for centuries in Christendom.

But now according to the word of God we are seeking to build it again. Not on the basis of some denominational name. Jesus is not there where people gather in the name of Methodism or as Baptists or as Pentecostals or as Catholics or as Protestants.

Jesus is in the midst where people gather in His name. Jesus Christ. No other name.

The name of Jesus Christ. We want to build that. And so they sent this message to the king.

Verse chapter 6 verse 1. It says King Darius issued a decree. And search was made in the archives where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And in Ecbatana in the fortress which is in the province of Media.

And a scroll was found. And there was written in it that in the first year verse 3 of King Cyrus. The king issued a decree concerning the house of God of Jerusalem saying let it be built.

The place for sacrifice is offered. And all the details about the length and height and the stones and about the vessels. Verse 5. And therefore Chattani verse 6 the king says keep away from there.

Leave this work on the house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. And I just want you to notice the sovereignty of God in allowing this ancient scroll to be found.

It was 16-18 years at least before which the scroll was written. And it could have been lost. They searched for it in Babylon.

Verse 1. They couldn't find it. And they searched in some other place. Ecbatana in the fortress.

And they found it. The sovereignty of God in allowing the scroll to be found. You see God is in charge of all the files that are stacked away in any office.

And it's very easy for him to get the right file to be found at the right time in the interest of his people. It's very relevant to the times in which we live. If we trust God he can do wonderful things.

Wonderful things. And this was a file that was missing. And they found it.

God wanted it to be found. And he made sure that it was found. And they opened it and that made King Darius send out this order in favor of God's people.

Then we read further. He told them to leave them alone. Verse 8. This is how I say even the opposition of the enemy works together for our good.

Because now the king said, now I'm giving you a further order concerning what you must do for these elders. The full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury. Now that was not something that these elders had expected.

But because all these enemies wrote this letter to the king, they got a bonus from that reply. That the king said, not only you must not stop this work, you got to pay for it. All these taxes that you governors are collecting there, you better give some of that to the building of God's house.

Wonderful how God turns the tables on Satan. The Old Testament is full of the stories of how the devil tries to oppose God's people and God turns it around so that it becomes for the benefit of God's people. The history of Joseph is an amazing example of that.

Daniel and his three friends that we studied. And even here. The opposition only ensured that they got more funds for building the temple.

And of course they needed funds. And God made sure that opposition would come up. A letter would go to Darius and Darius would say, and the scroll would be found, the file would be discovered.

And Darius would say, alright give them some money now as well. And out of all the taxes of the provinces, and verse 8, do it immediately without any delay. No hanky panky about it.

Just get on with the job of giving these people the money that they need. And whatever is needed, not only money, but young bulls, rams, lambs. I think these fellows must have really regretted the day they sent a letter to the king.

Wonderful. Now they had to dish out all their money and the bulls and rams and lambs and wheat and salt and wine. And as the priest requests, it is to be given them every day.

Without fail. Really tremendous. It says in Revelation 12.16 that when the dragon chased the woman, the earth helped the woman and opened out its mouth to swallow the water.

Well here is the picture of the earth. That is the earthly powers helping the woman, the Jews, to build God's house. God can use the earth day by day just like God provided the manna day by day in the wilderness.

God's got various ways. He can provide it direct from heaven or through king Darius and these opposing governors. He's got no problem.

It says day by day, without fail, you've got to provide it for them so that they can offer sacrifices to the God of heaven and also pray for me and my son. And he says if anybody violates this decree, a timber will be taken down from his house and he will be crucified on it and his house will be made a refuse heap. I'm sure that they never tried to disobey that order after reading that line.

And may the God who caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change it so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued this decree. Let it be carried out wholeheartedly.

Wonderful. It's wonderful how God works on behalf. Well, it says then that Tate and I, the governor, and Shether, Boaz and I, the colleagues, carried out the decree with all diligence, scared lest the timber from their house be pulled down and they be impaled on it, just like king Darius had said.

And the elders of the Jews were successful in building, not because of king Darius' orders, but through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah. You see, Darius' orders are just petty little things. That's not how you build God's house.

Those are just things out there in the world that God takes care of. God's house is built by the prophesying of his prophets. And they finished the building.

The prophesying was going on right through till the superstructure, till the roof was laid. They prophesied. They didn't just get them started and go away.

I want you to notice here that Haggai is called the prophet, and Zechariah is also a prophet, but he's just called the son of Ido. The same thing we see in chapter 5, verse 1. Haggai is called the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Ido. Now that's just a small point I want to make there, that if you have read the book of Haggai, the two chapters, you find that Haggai does not speak one word about the future.

Not one word. All the two chapters are dealing with stirring them up to build the temple. But when you read the prophecy of Zechariah, the 14 chapters, you find a lot of that is about the future.

A lot of Zechariah's prophecy goes on right up to the second coming of Christ. Speaks even about the antichrist in the book of Zechariah. And yet, it's Haggai who's called the prophet.

Now most people's understanding of a prophet is one who speaks about the future. And the amazing thing is Haggai never spoke about the future, and he's called the prophet. And Zechariah, who spoke about the future, is not called a prophet, even though he was.

That's just to point out one thing. That to be a prophet is not necessarily to speak about the future. John the Baptist never spoke about the future.

Elijah, Elisha never spoke about the future. But they were some of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. So when we think about prophecy and prophets, let's not have this wrong idea of just speaking about the future.

Haggai the prophet never spoke a word about the future. That's just in passing. And they finished the building.

And we read further, according to the command of God. And, just by the way, the decree of Cyrus Darius and Artaxerxes. But essentially, because a sovereign God commanded the building of that temple.

And then we read, this temple was completed. It took about four years to build this temple. Four years these prophets were prophesying, encouraging the people, working with their hands as well.

And then the temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar. It was the sixth year. We saw earlier that they started work in the second year and they finished in the sixth year.

Four years. The reign of King Darius and the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered for the dedication of this temple 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, the sin offering, 12 male goats, etc.

That looks like a lot of animals being sacrificed. But when you compare it with 2 Chronicles 7 verse 5, when Solomon, if you keep a finger here and just compare it, you find that 100 bulls and 200 rams and 400 lambs and 12 male goats are nothing. Compared to the way Solomon dedicated his temple in 2 Chronicles 7 verse 5 where it says King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.

And here were these people offering 400 sheep and 100 bulls. It was a day of small beginnings. But that's what Zechariah had told them in Zechariah 4.10. Who has despised the day of small beginnings? Don't despise it.

Just because you're beginning to build the body of Christ and it's just a small group, don't despise it. Don't compare it with something big that was there somewhere else. It's the quality that matters.

And even though the bullocks and the male goats and the rams were much less than in Solomon's day, the quality of the offering was the same. And that's the thing that mattered. And it says here, they offered this corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Of all Israel. Even though it was only two tribes that went into Babylon. Now this is where something very wonderful that we see many times in the book of Ezra.

About 125 years before Nebuchadnezzar captured the southern kingdom of Israel, the king of Assyria had come and captured the northern kingdom. Ten tribes. But then the king of Babylon had overpowered the king of Assyria and captured these two tribes.

But when they came back to Jerusalem, it was not two tribes, but twelve tribes that came back. Before they went into Babylon, they were divided. Two kingdoms.

Israel and Judah. They went to Assyria and Babylon in captivity. They were chastened.

They suffered for a number of years. The ten tribes for nearly 200 years. The two tribes for 70 years.

And they came back, no longer as two kingdoms, but as one kingdom. And that's how they built God's house. All were one.

Something, a picture of how in the body of Christ today, the Jews and the non-Jews, the Gentiles are made into one body. The Tamilians, the Malayalis, the Anglo-Indians, the North Indians, the Westerners, the Easterners are made into one. They don't come into Jerusalem as so many different groups, as one.

In one body they build. And then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem as it is written in the book of Moses. Notice that phrase, as it is written.

Now, that's something which we saw earlier, but a principle that's repeated many times in the building of God's house in Jerusalem and that we need to bear in mind even in these last days. It must be exactly as it is written in the word of God. There are many people nowadays who modify God's word saying, well that was for those days.

In Western countries particularly, we find with the women's liberation movement, they modified some of the commands given in God's word for women. Women have started cutting their hair, they stopped covering their heads, they started preaching, teaching, even becoming pastors. It's not as it is written.

And you can never build a body of Christ where people are not strict about what is written in the book, in the word of God, exactly as it is written. The other thing I want you to notice here is, they appointed the priests, verse 18, to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God. They knew that the Lord had said that only the Levites could do God's work.

That was a law God gave in the Old Testament. He chose the Levites because they were the only tribe that stood by Moses in the day when everybody worshipped the golden calf. In Exodus 32, Moses said, who is on the Lord's side? And the tribe of Levi came out to him and stood and Moses said, go out and slay the people who don't obey God's word.

And the Levites did it and God saw it and said, alright, I'm choosing this tribe to be the priests. That was not partiality. God didn't put twelve names into a bag and take out one and say, this one's going to be the priestly tribe.

It's because they took a stand for God in a day of compromise that God chose them to be priests and leaders. And God had said, nobody else can do my work except this tribe of Levi. And they must do it exactly the way God has laid it down.

I want to give you an example from the Old Testament which has got great relevance in this connection. If you turn to 1 Samuel to give you something of this background for this example that I'm trying to show you from the Old Testament. 1 Samuel chapter 6. This is a time when the Israelites were in a backslidden condition and they were being defeated by their enemies, the Philistines.

And the Philistines had really thrashed the Israelites and the worst thing of all was that they had captured the Ark. The Ark was the most sacred part of the furniture in the tabernacle. And the Philistines had taken it and the Israelites were depressed.

The Ark has gone. It was a symbol of God's presence and it had gone. But God troubled the Philistines for playing the fool with His Ark and so the Philistines decided we are having too much trouble, sought of sickness, came into their midst and they sent the Ark back to Israel.

Because the wise men of the Philistines, the Philistines it says, in 1 Samuel 6.2, called the priests and said, what shall we do about the Ark? How shall we send it away? And then the priest said, this is what you must do. Verse 7, take a new cart and put two cows and send the cows and take away their calves and send it, let the cows keep going, it's from the Lord. And so they did that.

Verse 10, the men, the Philistines took two milch cows, pitched them to the cart, shut up their calves at home and they put the Ark of the Lord on the cart and they let it out. And the cows took the straight way in the direction of Bethshemesh and went to Israel. That's how the Philistines, that is, the people of the world in those days, sent the Ark back.

Many years later, this was in the reign of King Saul, just before the reign of King Saul, King Saul became king in chapter 9 and chapter 10. But that was around the period. But 40 years later, David became king of Israel.

And David said, well, we haven't brought up the Ark to Jerusalem, so let's bring the Ark to Jerusalem. You turn to 2 Samuel now, chapter 6. 2 Samuel chapter 6 and verse 1. David had defeated the Philistines now and he said, let's bring the Ark. So David gathered, 2 Samuel 6 verse 1, gathered 30,000 Israelites and went with all the people to Belegadah to bring up the Ark of God.

And what did they do? God had said, the Ark must be carried only by Levites. Do you know what they did? They thought, hey, what the Philistines did is a pretty good idea, we hadn't thought of that, these Levites, their shoulders pain carrying all this Ark a long distance. But the Philistines had a good idea.

You know, people in the world have some bright ideas, and when the church begins to copy the world in their ideas, this is what happens. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart. Of course, they wouldn't put it on an old second-hand cart.

They got a brand new cart, but it was not God's way. And they brought it from the house of Abinadab. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart.

And they brought it with the Ark of God, and they were celebrating before the Lord, not realizing they were 100% disobedient to God's word in the way they were carrying the Ark, but they were celebrating, clapping their hands and singing all types of choruses and all types of instruments and everything. It was quite a charismatic group there in verse 5, with lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals, but they were not doing God's way. Praising and instruments, no shortage, but it wasn't God's way.

It wasn't as it is written in the Law of Moses. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nakhon, Uzzah reached out toward the Ark of God, took hold on it, because the oxen nearly upset it. You see, that's the trouble with oxen.

When they go over a bumpy road, they nearly upset the Ark. And then some man who is not a Levite, Uzzah, he was not a Levite, he touched the Ark, and God had said, nobody other than a Levite must ever touch that Ark. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there.

He died. It was like getting an electric shock. As soon as he touched the Ark, he died on the spot.

And David was upset. He was angry. Lord, here we are praising you and all these wonderful instruments and everything going on.

Do your praise and you come and judge us. And he named that place Perez Uzzah. The Lord broke through.

And David was afraid of the Lord that day. He said, how can the Ark of the Lord come to me? And David was unwilling to move the Ark of the Lord. And the Ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom for many months.

And then David went, verse 12, brought up the Ark of God, and this time it was carried, verse 13, the bearers had gone six spaces. They carried it, the Levites carried it, and they brought it into Jerusalem. This time there was no problem.

That's a very significant Old Testament passage that teaches us that you may say it's a small thing. Oh, what does it matter if it's not a Levite? It's a long journey. The Levites will be tired, let's put it on a cart.

You use your human reason when the word of God says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding if it's written like that. Do it like that, brother. Why do you want to change it? Why do you want to modify it? And so these people were wise.

In Ezra 6, they appointed the priests. Ezra 6, 18, to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem as it is written in the book of Moses. They didn't want to make the mistake that David made.

They didn't want any of these bright worldly ideas that the Philistines had, or other worldly people had. They'd say, we'd rather do it the old-fashioned way, the apostles, the way the apostles said in his word. We'd do it like that, and then God will bless us.

And then the exiles observed the Passover on the 14th of the first month. But the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together. Wonderful.

Before they came to the Passover, they purified themselves. All of them were pure, the way it should be when we build God's house, the way it should be when we come together to break bread, the way it should be every day of our life. They judged themselves.

It says in the New Testament, 1 John 3, 3, those who have a hope purify themselves, as He is pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover, both for their brothers and the priests and themselves and the sons of Israel who returned from the exile. All those, listen to this phrase, who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the Lord God of Israel at the Passover.

Not anybody and everybody. There was a strictness about who could eat the Passover, just like there is a strictness about who can break bread today. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, tell that man who is living in sin not to break bread.

Put him out of the assembly. That's how it was here. That's how the body of Christ is built.

And then they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread, seven days of joy for the Lord that caused them to rejoice. And it turned the heart of the king of Assyria, that is the king of Persia now, toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. And so we see there, there God was

working sovereignly in the heart of the king.

And the people through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, through that picture of a body ministry, through the administration body ministry of Joshua and Zerubbabel, they came forward and they built and they purified themselves. They did it exactly according to the word. Those who had separated themselves from the impure ways of the nations, from the impure ways of Babylon, came together and they celebrated the Passover.

We are told today that we partake of Christ the Passover, who is sacrificed for us. Let's do that, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And where prophets can stand to keep it exactly as it's written, and stand for purity and separation from the impure ways of the people of the world, there God's blessing can be found even today in the building of God's house, in the place where He has established His name.

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