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Ezra 4 - 6



Ezra - Steve Gregg

In this segment by Steve Gregg, the discussion centers around Ezra 4-6 and the challenges faced in rebuilding Jerusalem. Gregg highlights the fear many older men had of undoing the work done by Jews during the daytime and the challenges posed by opposition brought against Zerubbabel Jeshua's day. While some Jews discontinued building the temple to embellish their own new homes, others responded to the prophets of God and continued the restoration of the house of God in Jerusalem. Despite these challenges, the people hoped for something that would disprove or challenge the story of the Jews.

Transcript

So now we come to Ezra chapter 4 where all that has been accomplished by the people who have returned from Babylon and come back to Jerusalem to do the rebuilding, all that has happened is they've established the altar and the beginning of the sacrifices again at the Feast of Tabernacle. And then they have secondarily they built the foundation of the temple and the foundation apparently was already obviously inferior to the foundation that Solomon had built. Solomon's temple was of course one of the wonders of the world.

Solomon seemingly had no end to his resources, his finances and all that and so he spared no expense. But the people of Judah had no doubt a good amount of resources but nothing like Solomon had and they had to work with a smaller budget and they made a much less elaborate temple and that was already obvious apparently when the foundation was laid that this was not going to be exactly like Solomon's was. And so the older men, there couldn't have been very many old enough to remember but some of the men there had been old enough to remember the old temple and they wept and others simply shouted and rejoiced to see the foundation laid.

Now chapter 4, now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers houses and said to them, let us build with you for we seek your God as you do. And we have sacrificed him since the days of

Esarhaddon the king of Assyria who brought us here. Now these were the people called the Samaritans because Samaria had been the capital of the northern kingdom and when it fell most of the survivors of the northern kingdom were holed up there holding out against the Assyrians.

And so they were taken away from that city and the Assyrians brought in new people from other nations to inhabit the land. And we are told that they feared the Lord but served other gods. These were not Israeli people, these were not people of Jewish background.

They were people who were just of various pagan nations but they had been taught some of the ways of Yahweh whom they feared because they were afraid that if they didn't offer sacrifices to Yahweh then lions would come and eat them. And so they feared the Lord and served the other gods. And so they say we have been serving your God, we have been offering sacrifices to your God, the same God as you all this time.

That we have been in the land. These were people who offered to help build the temple and Zerubbabel was not favorable because he knew they weren't Israelites and they weren't really true worshippers of Yahweh. They were worshippers of many gods and he didn't want them getting their hands into the project.

And there is reason to believe that they were only offering this in order to be on the inside of the project so they could sabotage it. Because they are referred to as the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin. And they were people who did not approve of what was going on here.

And so they offered to help perhaps so that they could just from the inside do harm to the project. But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers houses of Israel said to them you may do nothing with us to build the house of our God. But we alone will build to the Lord our God of Israel as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.

So of course they are doing it not because of Cyrus but because of God that they can appeal to Cyrus as one who gave them permission to do it. And they say if you disagree with us about this you will have to take that up with Cyrus the king of Persia. Because he has commanded us to do it and we are going to do it ourselves.

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building. Now we don't know what this looks like troubled them in building.

They may have come at night and undone work that had been done by the Jews during the daytime. Or they may have distracted them or they may have staged terrorist attacks and whatever. It discouraged the people of Judah as they were trying to work that these people were harassing them.

And keeping them from getting the job done. So they hired counselors against them. They would be lawyers to represent the Samaritan's interest against the Jews in the Persian courts apparently.

To frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. Now, or Darius sometimes pronounced. This harassment is not detailed for us.

It looks like it is because the next verses contain letters that were written to the kings of Persia. To get them to stop the Jews from building Jerusalem. But the letters that are given to us in verses 6. Especially through the rest of this chapter almost.

Through verse 22. Are not written at this time. These letters are from another time.

And they are from a later time. And apparently Ezra in putting this book together didn't have copies of any of the letters that were written to Cyrus. To get him to try to change his mind.

And apparently those letters are lost or are not available to us. But Ezra did have access to similar letters written at later times. By these people written to later kings of Persia.

And though they do not belong to the chronological time we are looking at. They apparently are of the same sort. And so Ezra has stuck them in here.

And he points out that these letters are not in the present context. In verse 6 he says now in the reign of Ahasuerus. In the beginning of his reign they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Now this of course was long after the temple had been built. The reign of Ahasuerus is Xerxes the husband of Esther. This would be after the temple had been built.

But of course this city and this country were still being restored. And building projects were still going on. And the Samaritans apparently had during that period of time.

This is just about the only information we have in Ezra about that season. That 60 years that divides the two portions of Ezra. Was during the reign of Ahasuerus.

All we know about that period from this is that they wrote some letters. We do not have those letters either. But we are told that they not only hired counselors against the Jews in the days of Cyrus.

But they also wrote letters in the time of Ahasuerus. These letters may have amounted to nothing. It is possible that the intercession of Mordecai and Esther.

Prevented Ahasuerus from acting upon these complaints. But then later still in Ezra's own time. In the reign of Artaxerxes.

We do have a sample letter of something they sent. Now Ezra was living at the time of Artaxerxes. So this letter was contemporary with himself.

But much later than the time he is talking about. The time of Zerubbabel and Joshua in the building of the temple. But it is given here no doubt as a sample of the kind of thing they did incessantly.

They kept sending letters like these to the kings of Persia. And while he did not have any examples of the ones of the earlier sort. He had a more recent one in his own time that he could lay out.

To give us an idea of the kind of opposition that was coming. So verse 7. In the days of Artaxerxes also. Bishlem, Mithridath, Tabeal and the rest of their companions.

Wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia. And the letter was written in Aramaic script. And translated into Aramaic language.

Rehum the commander of and Shimshai the scribe. Wrote a letter against Jerusalem. To king Artaxerxes in this fashion.

And it begins with all kinds of flowery stuff. It says from Rehum the commander. Shimshai the scribe.

And the rest of their companions. Representatives of the Dainites. The Arthasethites.

The Tarpalites. The people of Persia and Erech. And Babylon and Shushan.

The Nehavites and Elamites. And the rest of the nations. Whom the great and noble Osnepper took captive.

And settled in the cities of Samaria. And the rest of the region beyond the river. And so forth.

There's apparently more verbiage than this. But Ezra abbreviates it first. And just puts in and so forth.

He says this is a copy of the letter that they sent. Now this letter was from all these guys. And all these ethnic groups.

They're all mentioned because they're obviously trying to impress. Artaxerxes that this is not simply a little. Feud between the Jews and one of their neighboring tribes.

But that all these other nations. Have the same concerns about the Jews. And are warning Artaxerxes about them.

It says this is a copy of the letter they sent. To King Artaxerxes from your servants. The men of the region beyond the river.

And so forth. Let it be known to the king. That the Jews who came up from you.

Have come to us at Jerusalem. And are building the rebellious and evil city. And are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.

Now this could have been written during the time of Nehemiah. Who was sent by Artaxerxes. To Jerusalem to repair the walls and so forth.

And so this could have been written while he was doing that. A later time even than Ezra. Although Ezra was contemporary with Nehemiah.

Ezra was older. And had come earlier. Or it could be at an earlier time.

When they were building walls. I'm sure they were doing these buildings repeatedly. Especially as their enemies were troubling them in their building.

Interfering with their building. Perhaps breaking down walls that had just been broken and so forth. So the building of walls.

Would be going on. Over a lengthy period of time. The reason Nehemiah went in the first place.

Is because he heard a report. That the walls of Jerusalem had been burned down again. And fallen down again.

And so he asked Artaxerxes. For permission. To go back.

And to help the captives who had returned to Jerusalem. To build those walls. Completely and finally.

And he got that permission. So Artaxerxes is the same king actually who sent Ezra back. And who sent Nehemiah back.

But at some point in his reign. He received this letter of complaint. About the people of Jerusalem.

It says. They are finishing its walls. And repairing its foundations.

Verse 13. Let it now be known to the king. That if this city is built.

And the walls completed. They will not pay tax tribute or custom. And the king's treasury will be diminished.

Now unfortunately there was some truth to this. In their history. It's not probable.

That this generation of Jews would rebel. Against the king of Persia. But earlier.

Kings there had rebelled. Against Babylon and Assyria. And had gotten themselves in

trouble.

Because they had been vassals. Of those earlier empires. And had withheld tribute.

And gotten themselves attacked for it. So there was some history to this. And they say.

If they get their walls up. They'll feel they can defend themselves. Against any attack.

And they will just rebel. And they won't pay tribute anymore to you. And you'll lose out on their finances.

Now because we received support from the palace. It was not proper for us. To see the king's dishonor.

Therefore we have sent and informed the king. That search may be made. In the book of the records of your fathers.

And you will find. In the book of the records. And know that this is.

This city is a rebellious city. Harmful to kings and provinces. And that they have incited sedition.

Within the city in former times. For which cause this city was destroyed. We informed the king.

That if this city is rebuilt. And it's walls are completed. It will be a new dominion.

Over the region beyond the river. Now unfortunately. These accusations had some.

Merit. Because Jerusalem's history. Had been that of a rebellious city.

And it had had very bad kings. As well as some a few good ones. Had very bad ones.

And all the accusations were true. It's unfortunate that sometimes. Your history.

Is that which determines your reputation. Even after you've had a change. And it's inhabitants probably.

Had undergone a change. But they couldn't easily live down. The reputation of their history.

And that's of course how life is. For us as individuals in many cases too. But this was Jerusalem's.

Burden. To bear. That their ancestors had been rebellious.

Had given trouble to their conquerors. And it was not. Easy for a modern.

Conqueror a modern. Overlord to trust that they wouldn't do it again. And it was not easy.

To trust and answer. To rehum the commander. To shimshai the scribe.

To the rest of their companions. Who dwell in Samaria. And to the rest of the region beyond the river.

Peace and so forth. The letter which you sent to us. Has been clearly read before me.

And I gave the command. And a search has been made. And it was found.

That this city in former times. Has made insurrection against kings. From all the provinces beyond the river.

And tax tribute and custom were paid to them. This is mentioned because that means. That they might hope to.

Restore the glory of their former kingdom. They have in previous times. Had great kings who ruled over other nations around them.

They might have these ambitions today as well. After all when you've had that in your history. You always kind of reminisce and think.

Well it could happen again right. He says now give the command. To make these men cease.

That this city may not be built. Until the command is given by me. Now the decrees made by the Persian kings.

Unlike those made by the Babylonians. Could not be repealed. The Babylonian kings could make a decree.

And then they could just reverse it. For example Nebuchadnezzar could make a decree. That everyone has to bow down to his gold statue.

But then when he sees Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Delivering the flames. He can change that and say no.

You can worship. Everyone should worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The Babylonian kings had that authority.

But the laws of the Medes and Persians. Could not be changed. Even by the kings who made them.

And that's why when Darius. Made the decree that Daniel. That no one should worship any God but himself.

Or pray to any God but himself for 30 days. And he found that Daniel. Had broken that law.

That though the king wished. The Persian king really wished he could change it. He couldn't.

Because the laws of the Medes and Persians. Could not be changed. Now Artaxerxes.

Is a Persian king. And fortunately he made this provision. Until the command is given by me.

Because if he left that out. And he said give the command. That these men cease and the city may not be built.

That would have been an unchangeable law. Of the Medes and Persians. And even the Persian emperor could not change it.

But fortunately he gave this caveat. Until the command is given by me. So he left himself an out.

That he could allow them to build it. In the future if he chose. Take heed now that you do not fail to do this.

Why should damage increase to hurt. Of the kings. The hurt of the kings.

Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes. Letter was read before. Rheum Shemshai and the scribe.

And their companions. They went up in haste to Jerusalem. Against the Jews.

And by force of arms made them cease. Now all of that happened much later. Than the story we're talking about now.

Much later. But as I said the inclusion of this story. Is seen to be of a similar sort.

To what was going on. In the opposition that was brought against. Zerubbabel and Jeshua in their day.

And then verse 24 picks up again. And in the days of. Zerubbabel and Jeshua.

So we've had this little inter. This little parenthesis. In verses 6 through 22.

Talking about later occasions. Of this kind of opposition. But in chapter 5. I mean verse 5. It says they hired counselors.

Against them to frustrate their purpose. All the days of Cyrus. The King of Persia.

Now that's the present time. That Zerubbabel and Jeshua are living and working in. But

says.

Even until the reign of Darius. King of Persia. And that's what introduced these later.

Instances. In the time of Ahasuerus. And Artaxerxes.

We come back to our story. Then in verse 24. Because of the opposition of these local Samaritans.

It says in verse 24. Thus the work of the house of God. Which is at Jerusalem ceased.

And it was discontinued until the second year. Of the reign of Darius. King of Persia.

Now the ceasing of the work. We are not told why it ceased specifically. We do not read that Cyrus.

Sent them. A letter to cease and desist. As Artaxerxes later would do.

Decades later. We do not know if they got official opposition. From Cyrus at any point.

But they were getting. Harassment. From their neighbors.

And they were finding it. It was more difficult than they thought it would be. To build.

And so they just stopped working. And it may be that they gave up too easily. Because actually Cyrus had authorized him.

To finish the building. And the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Cannot change.

So Cyrus really could not. Very easily. If at all.

Issue a cease and desist order. They had authorization. From Cyrus to go ahead and build.

And can finish the building. So no matter what the locals around. Said in opposition.

These people had official. Sanction. To do what they did.

So they did not have to quit. They apparently stopped. Because they were tired of being harassed.

And being attacked. Or at least just maligned. Or harassed as they worked.

Or slandered to the courts. And things like that. But they just stopped.

And their stopping was not okay with God. And it is because. It was not okay with God.

That God sent two prophets. To rebuke them for stopping. And those were Haggai and Zechariah.

And we have the books of Haggai and Zechariah. Containing the messages that they gave. At least some of the messages they gave.

But they came. About 16 years after the work had stopped. They laid the foundation.

Apparently in 586 B.C. But they did not resume building again. Until 520 B.C. And that was 16 years later. So chapter 5 says.

Then the prophet Haggai. And Zechariah the son of Edo. Prophesied to the Jews.

Who were in Judah. And Jerusalem in the name of God of Israel. Who was over them.

So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel. And Jeshua the son of Jehoshadack. Rose up and began to build the house of God.

Which is in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them. Helping them.

Now we can't of course look at. The entire books of Haggai and Zechariah. At this point.

We will have when we cover the prophets. We will have an occasion to do that in detail. But we could look at a few verses here.

Like Haggai. Chapter 1. And verse 2. We have the first oracle of Haggai. Haggai 1.2 says.

Thus speaks Yahweh of hosts. Saying. Thus.

This people says. The time has not come. The time.

That the Lord's house should be built. Then the word of the Lord came to Haggai. Is it time for you yourselves.

To dwell in your paneled houses. And this temple to lie in ruins. Now therefore.

Thus says the Lord of hosts. Consider your ways. You have so much and bring in little.

You eat but do not have enough. You drink. But you are not filled with drink.

You clothe yourselves but you are not warm. And he who earns wages. Earns wages to put into a bag with holes.

Now what he is saying is. They have suffered economic hardship. And they have taken what resources they had.

To improve their own domiciles. Their own homes. They are not getting the same kind of opposition.

From their neighbors. About building their own homes. As they got from them for building the temple.

So they discontinued building the temple. And they just began to embellish their own homes. And panel their homes.

And make them fancy and so forth. And yet their crops have not been abundant. Even when they are earning wages.

It seems like the money just slips through their fingers. It is like a needle. It is like they put it into a bag with holes in it.

And it is not there anymore. In other words you are suffering some economic judgments from God. And the reason is because your priorities have been wrong.

You have been building your own lives. And your own estates. Your own little kingdoms.

And you are letting God's house remain unbuilt. This is the rebuke that Haggai brought them. And thus he says in verse 7. Thus says the Lord of hosts.

Consider your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring wood. And build the temple.

That I may take pleasure in it. And be glorified says the Lord. And then he goes on.

And of course there is the rest of the book. Likewise Zechariah. Begins with the prophet saying.

In verse 2. The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them. Thus says the Lord of hosts.

Return to me says the Lord of hosts. And I will return to you says the Lord of hosts. Do not be like your fathers.

To whom the former prophets preached saying. Thus says the Lord of hosts. Turn now from your evil ways.

And your evil deeds. That they did not hear nor heed me says the Lord. Your fathers where are they? And the prophets do they live forever? Yet surely my words and my statutes.

Which I command my servants the prophets. Did they not overtake your fathers? So they returned and said. Just as Yahweh of hosts determined to do to us.

According to our ways. And according to our deeds. So has he dealt with us.

Now. Haggai then. And Zechariah began prophesying.

In Ezra chapter 5 verse 1. And they are rebuking the people. For their neglect of the temple. For their being discouraged.

When God actually. Even Cyrus the Persian king. Knew that God.

Had ordained that these people should go back. And build the temple. But the Jews themselves because of local opposition.

Have been discouraged. Begun to work on their own bank accounts. Their own houses.

Their own wealth. Their own whatever. And as a result apparently the recent years.

Have been times of economic collapse. And crop failures and such. And the prophets say.

This is because God is upset with you. For your wrong priorities. Shouldn't your resources be used.

To build the house of God. Of course in our day. The house of God is the body of Christ.

The church. And it's a priority in God's mind. And it's important for us.

To make sure that we're not. Using God's resources to. Do more for ourselves.

Than what we're doing. For the kingdom of God. The support of missions for example.

Or the help of the poor. Or whatever else. May be consistent with the expansion.

Of the kingdom of God. Is where our priority. And the use of our resources is to be.

So these people actually responded. Unlike the people of former generations. Before the exile.

Who all tended to. Ignore or persecute or kill the prophets. These ones actually responded.

Zechariah and Haggai are fortunate. To be prophets in this period. Rather than an earlier period.

Because they would have gotten themselves killed. If they'd been prophesied 70 years earlier. Says at the time.

At the same time. Tetani the governor of the region. Beyond the river.

And Shether Bosni. And their companions came to them. And spoke thus to them.

Who has commanded you to build this temple. And finish this wall. Then accordingly we told them.

The names of the men who were constructing the building. Apparently they wanted to take down names. And check on them.

So we gave them the names. Of the men who were working on the building. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews.

So that they could not make them cease. Till a report could go. To Darius.

Then a written answer was returned. Concerning this matter. And this is a copy of the letter.

That Tetani sent. This man who was opposing the project. Sent this letter to Darius.

The governor of the region. Beyond the river. And Shether Bosni and his companions.

The Persians who were in the region. Beyond the river to Darius the king. They sent a letter to him.

Which was written thus. This is part of the Aramaic section of the book. To Darius the king.

All peace. Let it be known to the king. That we went into the province of Judea.

Now here it is called Judea. Probably. It has been called Judah until now.

But Judea may be. The term that the Aramaic speaking peoples. Were using of it.

It was called Judea in the days of Christ also. Of course they spoke Aramaic. In the days of Christ.

We went to the province of Judea. To the temple of the great God. Which is being built with heavy stones.

And timber is being laid in the walls. And it's work goes on diligently. And prospers in their hands.

And is moving along quite well. Then we asked those elders. And spoke thus to them.

Who commanded you to build this temple. And to finish these walls. We also asked them their names.

To inform you. That we might write their names. Of the men who were the chief among them.

And they returned us an answer saying. We are of the servants of the God. Of heaven and earth.

And we are rebuilding the temple. That was built many years ago. Which a great king of Israel built.

And completed. But because our fathers provoked. The God of heaven to wrath.

He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. The king of Babylon the Chaldean. Who destroyed this temple.

And carried the people away to Babylon. However in the first year of Cyrus. King of Babylon.

He gave them to the house of God. Also the gold and silver articles. Of the house of God.

Which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. That was in Jerusalem. And carried into the temple of Babylon.

Those king Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon. And they were given to one named Sheshbazer. Whom he had made governor.

And he said to him. Take these articles. Go carry them to the temple site.

That is in Jerusalem. And let the house of God be built. On its former site.

of the house of God, which is in Jerusalem. And from that time, even until now, it has been under construction, and it is not yet finished. Now, therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so, that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God in Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter." Now, these people were definitely taking the Jews to task, but they were not really accusing them of anything.

They're just saying, we're checking on this. This letter is actually quite even-handed, quite objective. It's just saying, we asked them who had authorized them, and they gave us this whole story.

We don't know if the story is true. Would you please allow us to know whether it is or not? Because we want to know what you would like us to do. Obviously, they're kind of hoping that there might be something come back that will disprove, or challenge, or discredit the story the Jews have given.

But they're not raising any accusations of them being a rebellious city or anything like that. They're just saying, we looked into this. We weren't sure if the facts were as they said.

Here's what they told us. What do you say? Check it out and see if it's true. Then, chapter 6, King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives where the treasures were stored in Babylon.

And at Acmetha, in the palace, that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found. And in it, a record was written thus. In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem.

Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices. And let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height 60 cubits and its width 60 cubits, 90 feet by 90 feet, which I think was the same as Solomon's temple. At least the face of the temple would be the same dimension.

With three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple, which is in Jerusalem, and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple, which is in Jerusalem, each to its place and deposit them in the house of God.

Now, therefore, Tetani--" that's the end of the quotation of the document they found. And now King Darius is addressing the men who wrote the letter. Now, therefore, Tetani, governor of the region beyond the river, and Shether-Bozni, and your companions, the Persians who are beyond the river, keep yourselves far from there.

Let the work of this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build the house of God on its site. Moreover, I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews.

For the building of this house of God, let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the river. This is to be given immediately to these men so that they are not hindered. And whatever they need, young bulls, rams, and lambs, for burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons, meaning himself.

Also, I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let the timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it. Now, hanged, in this case, would mean impaled. We think of a hang and being with a rope from the limb of a tree.

The Persians didn't hang people that way. They impaled them on a sharp pole, like a shish kebab. And that is the normal punishment that they gave to criminal offenders who were worthy of death.

So if somebody would interfere with these people or change this edict, then they should be impaled on a beam taken from their own house, as it's dismantled. And let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. And may the God who causes his name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it or to destroy this house of God, which is in Jerusalem.

I, Darius, issue the decree. Let it be done diligently. Well, this kind of backfired on Tatnai and Shethreboznai, these guys who are hoping, perhaps, to find occasion against the

Jews, ended up being told that they should take the taxation that they collect in their region and give it to the Jews to help them build and to supply regular animals for sacrifice, whatever the priest asked for.

And then the king definitely was not willing to alter what Cyrus had said. In fact, he seemed to actually have, like Cyrus did, some respect for Yahweh. He wanted these people to finish the temple so they could pray there regularly for him and for his well-being.

This is probably one of the reasons that Cyrus took the approach he did when he became king over the domains that had been Babylon's kingdom. That is, not only the Jews, but all the captive peoples, he allowed them to go back to their lands, rebuild their temples, and so forth. And the idea was no doubt that he believed there was some validity to their gods.

And he thought if he encouraged their worship that he'd be prayed for to all the gods, that all the worshippers of different gods would be praying for him. It's at least a positive thing, even though he may not have been fully monotheistic. It's interesting that he at least saw the need to be prayed for.

And he hoped that his reign would be blessed by the prayers of his subjects. And so, of course, Jerusalem would be one of those places. Now, Cyrus had gone so far as to recognize Yahweh as the real god.

Whether he believed other gods were real as well, we don't know. But he said he is God. And it was Yahweh who had raised him up and given him the kingdoms.

And that was Cyrus's opinion. And that was actually written into Cyrus's decree. So when Darius read the decree, he may well have seen this as well and been impressed to take the side of the Jews and their god.

Verse 13, then Tatenai, the governor of the region beyond the river, Shether-Baznai and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and the prophet Zechariah, the son of Edo. And they built and finished it according to the commandment of the god of Israel and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, the king of Persia.

Now, we don't have any command or letter from Artaxerxes in this book, or at least in this portion. But we do later on because both Ezra and Nehemiah were sent with assistance to the Jews by Artaxerxes. So he is mentioned here too.

We haven't yet really encountered any information favorable toward him. In fact, he was the one who seemingly halted the project, according to the letter in chapter 4. But he also was one who supported the project, apparently at different times in his reign. Now,

the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which is in the sixth year of King Darius.

Then the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the descendants of the captivity celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of the house of God, 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, 12 male goats. Notice they still were recognizing 12 tribes, although most of the tribes in the north were sent away.

Yet there was still the conviction that the true Israel is made up of 12 tribes, the 12 sons of Jacob, of which some of those tribes only had very small representation now on the planet. But they included them, 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions over the service of God in Jerusalem as it is written in the book of Moses.

And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month. So we have had them celebrating the tabernacle's feast at the very beginning when they first erected the altar. And now at the time that the temple is completed, they are going to celebrate the Passover, another of their major festivals.

For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves. All of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity from their brethren, the priests, and for themselves.

Then the children of Israel, who had returned from the captivity, ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek Yahweh, God of Israel. And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy, for the Lord made them joyful and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. It is true that God had turned the heart of Darius and Cyrus toward them.

And therefore, their opponents were not able to stop them. However, as we saw in chapter 4, there were times later than this that the enemies of Israel were a little more successful. But still, the nation returned to its place, continued to survive.

Their history after this was definitely not peaceful. They were alternately conquered by the Greeks, subservient to the Egyptians for about 100 years under the Ptolemies, then very much afflicted under the Syrians, including Antiochus Epiphanes. Then the Romans came in and held them captive.

But they stayed in the land. They stayed there. The temple remained standing.

It was desecrated once by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC. But the point here is the temple is now up again. And it stays up until AD 70, when it's destroyed again finally.

Between this time and AD 70, however, Herod, who ruled over the Jews, spent a lot of money improving it. This was the temple we would call Zerubbabel's temple, because Zerubbabel was the leader under whose oversight it was built. But Zerubbabel's temple is still a rather apparently inexpensive building without a lot of frills.

And Herod spent decades spending a lot of money to improve the temple, so that in the time of Jesus, it was an incredible, impressive building. And it was something to praise, though it was mainly Herod's input and his projects that made the temple a great temple. It was not such an impressive temple at this particular time, but it was functional.

And they were able to restore the sacrificial system again for another 500 years or so. So we'll just stop there. This is the natural division in the book, also the natural ending time of our session.