Ezra 5-6

Review…

- King Cyrus issued the decree - all Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of Yahweh!
  - 50,000 Jews left the only home most had ever known – to travel 900 miles to Jerusalem…
  - They arrived 7 months later – in the 7th month – and rebuilt the altar to God!
  - When they laid the foundation of the Temple there was great celebration – and weeping…
  - For those who had seen the splendor of the 1st Temple – this was a sad sight…
  - Not only was the glory of the 1st Temple lost – the gold / silver / bronze…
  - But this Temple lacked the most important things of all – the Ark of the Covenant!
- The Samaritans came to Zerubbabel and offered to help build the Temple…
  - But the Samaritans were a compromised faith – a mixture of different beliefs…
  - Because of that Zerubbabel wisely refused to let them help – let their influence in!
  - Scorned – the Samaritans made it their goal to frustrate the work of building the Temple…
  - They did all they could to discourage the Jews – putting obstacles in their way…
  - They wrote letters to 2 kings of Persia – making accusations – forcing the Jews to stop their work!

God is on our side… (*4 things*)

- **1st – Restarting the work… vs. 1-2**
  - 1st - The work on the Temple had stopped – but for how long… vs. 1
    - Some say that it could have been up to 15 years that no work was done on the Temple…
      - Assuming that work on the Temple was stopped shortly after it began in 536 BC
      - And the work on the temple was not restarted until 521 BC – in the 2nd year of Darius
    - But more likely it was a much shorter amount of time – as little as 2 years…
      - The Samaritans had harassed the Jews effort almost from the beginning…
      - Making work on the Temple very slow – keeping it from being completed…
      - But it was not until the letter to Artaxerxes (*Smerdis*) – that the work stopped – 522 BC
      - The work was then restarted only a short time later in the 2nd year of King Darius…
      - Yet when the work stopped – the prophets of God had words for Israel!
  - 2nd - The rebuke of Haggai…
    - Israel was focusing on their own needs – and were ignoring the Lord…
      - They lived in beautiful houses – while the Temple of God was lying in ruins!
      - As a result they were not receiving the blessing from God…
      - They planted a lot – but harvested little / they made money – but had holes in their pockets!
      - All because the people were not putting the Lord first in their lives!
      - *** Haggai 1:1-11** – "The time has not come that the LORD'S house should be built…"
    - If we do not put the Lord first – then everything we try in life will fail…
      - It is as if we are cursed – all of our best efforts are doomed come to nothing…
      - It is only when we seek Jesus before ANYTHING else – that we find success!
      - Prosperity is not about how hard we work / or even getting lucky…
      - Prosperity comes from having right priorities – putting Jesus first above all else!
  - 3rd – The encouragement of Zechariah…
    - The dilemma of Zerubbabel…
      - Zerubbabel was discouraged the Temple was not done – only the foundation was laid…
      - He was weary of all the battles – fighting against the schemes of the Samaritans…

- He was disheartened – perhaps he was not capable of finishing what he had started!
- So Zechariah had a word from the Lord…
  - *** Zechariah 4:9-10** – "The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish *it*. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."
  - God rejoiced to see Zerubbabel working – God looks for those who are willing to work…
  - Those who are humble and diligent – who are not afraid of the 'day of small things'!
  - A lot of people step up and say they want to be used by God…
  - Only to be handed a broom / or asked to wash the dishes…
  - And they walk away – because they think they are better than menial work…
  - Or they start serving – but do not continue because it is not important to them…
  - They just cannot see how 'busy work' has any relevance for the Kingdom of God!
  - I have noted two traits on the people God uses…
  - They have humility – no task it beneath them – they do it for the glory of Jesus…
  - They do not give up – they persevere – and do not quit stepping out to serve Jesus!
- 3rd – Getting back to work… vs. 2
  - Zerubbabel and Joshua had a choice to make – just listen / or listen and obey…
  - They wisely choose to obey – so they rose up and began to build again!
  - **James 1:22-25** – "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who sees his face in a mirror… goes away, and immediately forgets what he saw."
  - Many who attend Bible studies – agree with everything that is said...
  - Then go home and inexplicably forget everything they just heard!
  - The Bible is not a textbook you must learn - it is an instruction manual to follow...
  - You can know all words - but if it does not change your actions - it means nothing!

- **2ND – BY WHOSE AUTHORITY… VS. 3-17**
  - 1st – The protection of God… vs. 3-5
    - The Persian Empire was divided into 20 provinces – each ruled by a governor (*satrap*)…
      - The governor of Syria / Judea / Samaria / and Phoenicia was Tattenai (*gift*)…
      - Word reached him (*Samaritans?*) that the Jews had resumed their work on the Temple…
      - He no doubt was aware of the edict of Smerdis – **Ezra 4:7** - to cease all work…
      - So he came to Jerusalem and asked a very simple question – 'who commanded you…'
      - The Jews gave them the names of everyone involved in the construction…
      - But the 'eye of God' was on the elders of the Jews – so the governor could not stop them!
    - Being obedient to the commands of God is no guarantee of an easy life…
      - When the Lord tells us to do something – it is easy to say yes Lord
      - But how about when things get tough – Jesus does not say it will be easy – **John 16:33**
      - Do we give up then – turn the car around and head back home...
      - Following Jesus is no guarantee of an easy life – it guarantees eternal life!
      - But the good news is – when God is for us – nothing can stand against us – **Romans 8:31**
  - 2nd – The letter to Darius… vs. 6-17
    - In response - Tattenai sent a letter to King Darius of Persia…
      - Tattenai opened his letter by informing Darius of the progress on the Temple…
      - The Jews were working diligently – moving massive stones / laying timber beams…
      - And when they were asked who had given them permission to build…
      - They first answered that they were the servants of the God of Heaven and Earth!

- And they were rebuilding the Temple of Solomon – destroyed because of the sin of Israel!

- Before we are citizens of any country – we are ultimately citizens / servants of heaven!
- So our primary authority comes from our King – we obey His commands first and foremost!
- And when the commands of men contradict the Word of God – we obey God!

- The Jews also were following the command of Cyrus…
  - Who had commanded the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple…
  - And even returned the gold articles from the 1st Temple with Zerubbabel (*Sheshbazzar*)…
  - And Zerubbabel had laid the foundation – but until now the Temple was not completed!
  - So Tattenai suggested Darius search the Archives to see if this was true!
- After 2 Persian Kings had stood against the Jews – Cambyses / Smerdis…
  - No doubt the Jews did not have a lot of confidence in Darius – but…
  - While God was working to build His Temple – He also was preparing the heart of the King!
  - **Romans 13:1** - "There is no authority except from God..."
  - We have a hard time with this – we might think – not our government
  - We look at the corruption – poor policies – the injustice all around us…
  - And what about evil governments – muslim / communist / Iran / North Korea…
  - Surely God cannot approve of these governments – much less be responsible!
  - If you want all men to have a rich and easy life – all governments should be perfect…
  - But it is in the imperfections of our governments we see our need for the Lord!
  - It is not that all the governments are good – God just uses them all for our good!
  - **Proverbs 21:1** – "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

- **3RD – THE COMMAND OF DARIUS… VS. 1-12**
  - 1st – The search of the archives… vs. 1-5
    - Darius issued a decree to search the Archives in Babylon…
      - The scroll was found in the city of Achmetha - the summer palace of the Persian Kings…
      - The modern day city of Hamadan in northeastern Iran – cool weather – 6000ft elevation…
      - The city is also the traditional burial place of both Esther and Mordecai
    - The command from Cyrus was just as the Jews had stated…
      - The temple was to be 90' wide by 90' high - larger than Solomon's 20'x45' – **I Kings 6:2**
      - The expenses for the temple were to all come out of the treasury of the King…
      - And all the gold and silver articles Nebuchadnezzar took were to be given back!
      - When we are falsely accused we can try and defend ourselves…
      - God will let us – but better to let God be our defense – He will do a much better job!
  - 2nd – The command to the governors… vs. 6-10
    - Darius commanded Tattenai to 'stay far away' from the Jews – let them finish the Temple…
      - More than that – he was take the taxes paid in the province – including the Samarians…
      - And use that money to help the Jews build the Temple!
      - The very people who had stood opposed to building the Temple – were now funding it!
    - The governor was also to provide for the daily sacrifices – bulls / rams/ lambs…
      - So they were not only to provide for the initial costs of building the Temple…
      - They were to also provide for the daily function of the Temple!
      - So that the Jews could pray for the life of the King and his sons!
      - I could not help but think again of the current situation – building a new church…
      - The wine growers (*Samaritans*) have fought us to keep the church from being built…
      - But as it stands now it looks like we may win the lawsuit against the county…

        - And in the end it will be (*to some degree*) the same wine growers who help fund the church!
    - 3rd – The penalty for interfering… vs. 11-12
        - Darius decreed that anyone who alters his command – would die…
            - A support beam would be pulled out of his house and stood up on end…
            - The man would be impaled (*hanged*) on the beam / his house turned into public bathroom!
            - No doubt this was directed at the Samaritans who had been so troublesome to the Jews!
        - There was also a warning to future Kings / nations…
            - God would destroy anyone who tried to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem!
            - History teaches us a very interesting lesson about Israel…
            - Every nation who has ever come against Israel – has been humbled!
            - Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 AD – and has never been a world power since…
            - Spain was a world power in the 1500s – till the inquisition – then crumbled afterwards…
            - Germany was a world power in the early 20th century
                - At the height of WW2 they controlled all of Europe!
                - Then came the Holocaust – 6,000,000 Jews slaughtered...
                - The empire crumbled and has never been a world power again
            - England was the empire the sun never set on
                - They sided with the Arabs in the Israeli war of Independence
                - Shortly afterwards they slipped from the world stage as a major power
            - The Untied States is a blessed nation – who supports Israel
                - If they ever stop supporting Israel – the blessing may become curses
                - God blesses those who bless Israel (Abraham) – Genesis 12:3
                - He also curses those who curse Israel – to this very day!

- **4th – The completion of the Temple… vs. 13-22**
    - 1st – The dedication of the Temple… vs. 13-18
        - Tattenai was understandably quick to obey the command of Darius…
            - So the Jews prospered because of the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah…
            - And because of the command of God! …*and* of Cyrus / Darius / and Artaxerxes…
            - And the Temple was finished in the 6th year of the reign of Darius – 516 B.C.
            - 70 years after the first Temple was destroyed in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar!
        - With great joy the Children of Israel then dedicated the Temple…
            - They offered 200 bulls / rams / lambs – along with 12 male goats…
            - The 12 goats were a sin offering for each of the 12 tribes of Israel – **Numbers 7:87**
            - At which point the book of Ezra changes – switching from Aramaic back to Hebrew…
            - Practically it changed because there were no more letters written to Persian Kings…
            - But it was also the final piece of restoration – Land / Sacrifices / Temple / and Language!
            - One of the hardest parts of being in the Philippines at first – not speaking the language…
            - I would be in a room full of people – buzzing with conversation – but understand nothing!
            - When we first come out of the world – when we first get saved…
            - It can seem like Christians are speaking in a different language – different vocabulary…
            - It can also be very hard to pray – we have a hard time figuring out how to talk to God…
            - But as the Lord gets ahold of us – and we become the Temple of God…
            - We begin to learn how to talk with God – and understand His will for our lives!
    - 2nd – Celebrating the Passover… vs. 19-22
        - The descendants of the captivity – kept the first Passover with the new Temple…
            - The priests and the Levites slaughtered the Passover Lambs…
            - All who had returned ate together – celebrating the Feast of Unleavened bread with Joy!

- Those who had separated themselves from the filth of the world – to seek the God of Israel!

- Israel was to be a holy nation - they were not to dwell in the filth of the world...
  - **Leviticus 19:2** - "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."
  - Israel was to be set apart - they were not to look or act like the world...
  - Instead they were to be a representative of God to a lost and dying generation!
- God calls us to be Holy - we are called to be saints...
  - The NT word saints – *hagios* – means to be holy – set apart from the filth of the world...
  - We are called saints – it means we are to be set apart from the world – and to seek God!
  - The NT word for church - *ekklesia* - mean to be called out - of the world...
  - If we as Christians look and act just like those who do not know Jesus...
  - Why would anyone want to hear about Jesus - come to church...
  - It is only as we are HOLY - that we are able to shine and point others to Christ!