

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***

*107 East Austin*

*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*

*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**C1322 – July 3, 2013 – Ezra 6:1-22**

**The Temple Completed**

Tonight we're going to conclude the first section of Ezra, chapters 1-6, the Return and Rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem which covers a period of 23 years from 538BC -515BC. In 538BC the Jews were issued the right of return by King Cyrus and the right to rebuild the Temple and reinstate worship of YHWH. This was in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy that one named Cyrus would be YHWH's instrument for returning the people to the land and giving them the right to rebuild. It was also in accordance with Jeremiah's prophecy that the Jews would remain in captivity to Babylon for seventy years, during which the land would enjoy its Sabbath rests, after which they would return with all the Temple vessels and rebuild the house of YHWH. In 537BC about 50,000 Jews returned in response to Cyrus' decree. It was plainly evident that God was still at work among the nation Israel despite their lack of any legal right to His protection since they had failed to uphold their Mosaic covenant obligations. However, God had obligations of His own as verbally revealed in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants and His integrity was at stake. Therefore He was the one who stirred up the people to return and desire to rebuild. The rebuilding began in 536BC with the successful construction of the bronze altar and the repair work to the foundation. However, when work began on the formal Temple in 535BC they were immediately opposed by enemies in the land. This opposition to rebuilding characterized the period of constructing both the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. The opposition revealed that Satan well-understood these construction attempts as threats to his kingdom building activities since they were in line with God's kingdom program. The people, discouraged by the opposition, halted rebuilding the Temple, justifying it by erroneously concluding that if it was the will of God for them to rebuild they would face no opposition. After 15 years of rebellion God raised up the prophets of Haggai and Zechariah to confront the nation with their sin so they would

confess and be restored to fellowship and start walking in obedience to God by completing the Temple. In 520BC, encouraged by the prophets, they restarted the work of rebuilding the Temple. Once more they were immediately confronted by opposition. Tattenai, the governor of the province, whose concerns were for protecting King Darius' kingdom from revolts, challenged their right to rebuild based on the absence of any written document proving their right to rebuild. In response the Jewish leadership appealed to the original decree of Cyrus issued 18 years before. Tattenai, exercising excellent leadership, allowed them to continue rebuilding for the time being but wrote a letter to King Darius concerning the matter and requesting a decision. It was evident that the eye of God was upon the elders of the Jews and they continued the construction. Tonight in Ezra 6 we discover the decision of King Darius.

In Ezra 6:1 we read, **Then King Darius issued a decree, and search was made in the archives.** Since verse 17 of the prior chapter suggests that the king search “the...treasure house...which is in Babylon,” then initially the search in verse 1 was through the royal archives kept with the **treasury...stored in Babylon.** Babylon was the capital city that Cyrus had conquered without the shedding of blood on the night of Belshazzar's feast in Daniel 5 when the famous handwriting had mysteriously appeared on the wall warning him just minutes before that he had been weighed and found wanting and thus his kingdom was being divided, it would go to the Medes and the Persians. Subsequently Cyrus entered the city and stayed for some time. Thus it was thought that the decree of Cyrus would be found in the royal archives of Babylon. However, nothing was found.

In verse 2 the search continued at **Ecbatana.** **Ecbatana** was one of three annual residences of Cyrus. Xenophon says that Cyrus lived in Babylon during the winter, in Susa during the spring, and in Ecbatana in the summer (8:6:22).<sup>i</sup> Ecbatana was apparently Cyrus' preferred court. And at **Ecbatana in the fortress** or fortified palace they found **a scroll...and there was written in it as follows: “Memorandum—the Hebrew translated Memorandum** refers to official minutes of a governmental meeting. So the original decree was not found but the minutes of the meeting that resulted in the decree were found and these minutes were sufficient to validate the Jews claim that Cyrus gave them the right to rebuild. The substance of the decree is revealed in Ezra 1:2-4. Basically the Jews were given 1) the right to return

to Jerusalem, 2) the right to rebuild the Temple, 3) the vessels of the Temple and 4) financial help from people throughout the kingdom. The minutes recorded in vv 3-5 reveal two additional elements not revealed in the decree.

Let's read the minutes starting in verse 3, **In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus the king issued a decree: 'Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered, be rebuilt and let its foundations be retained, its height being 60 cubits and its width 60 cubits; 4)with three layers of huge stones and one layer of timbers. And let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. 5)Also let the gold and silver utensils of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be returned and brought to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; and you shall put them in the house of God.'** Now, a lot of this is repeated in what we already knew of the decree but there are a few additional things that are very interesting. The first thing, at the end of verse 3 is the intended size of the Temple. Cyrus intended the Temple height to be **60 cubits** or 103.35 feet according to the royal cubit. What was the height of Solomon's temple by comparison? Only half this height, 30 cubits, 51.675 feet. So obviously Cyrus had great ambitions for this temple to exceed even that built by Solomon. As far as the Temple width is concerned, Cyrus also intended it to be **60 cubits** or 103.35. What was the width of Solomon's temple? Only 20 cubits, 34.45feet. Cyrus' temple would be twice as high and three times as wide as Solomon's. We're not told the length so we assume it was to be the same as Solomon's temple, also 60 cubits. If so, Cyrus' temple would be a perfect square rather than Solomon's rectangle and of course was an attempt to surpass it in glory. However, what did we find at the end of Ezra 3 when the foundations were laid? There was an ambivalent response among the people. The younger generation who did not see Solomon's temple were overjoyed, the older generation who did see Solomon's temple wept because it was inferior in glory to Solomon's. In the end while Cyrus wanted his temple to surpass that of Solomon's the actual temple did not surpass. So the first additional information is Cyrus' intended size of the Temple but this apparently failed. The second addition, at the end of verse 4, is the sponsor, the benefactor of the building project. **And let the cost be paid from the royal treasury.** Cyrus intended to fund the entire building project out of the Persian treasury. This shows that to Cyrus the rebuilding of the Temple was in the essential interest of the Persian kingdom. And we know that according

to his beliefs as an Iranian polytheist, that he believed each province had a supreme god or goddess and that proper worship of this god or goddess was essential to the prosperity and well-being of the province. Therefore to ensure kingdom-wide prosperity Cyrus returned all the deported peoples in his kingdom to their native homelands and encouraged them to rebuild Temples and reinstate worship of their gods or goddesses. Cyrus himself believed that he was raised up to conquer Babylon for the very purpose of reinstating proper worship of Marduk, his chief god, and that Marduk was the one who gave him success. In any case, it therefore makes sense that Cyrus would consider the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem to be in the essential interest of the Persian kingdom. Therefore he's going to finance it out the wazoo. But apparently, for whatever reason, the Jews did not make good use of all these funds since the construction was not superior to Solomon's temple but inferior. One of the lessons we can learn from this is that sometimes we don't make the best or most efficient use of our resources to glorify God. We should exercise responsibility in the funds that we receive and put them to the best use for the glory of God.

Now, having discovered Cyrus' minutes in the fortified palace at Ecbatana, Darius gives his decision in verse 6. **“Now *therefore*, Tattenai, governor of *the province* beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and your colleagues, the officials of *the provinces* beyond the River, keep away from there. <sup>7</sup>“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. <sup>8</sup>“Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of *the provinces* beyond the River, and that without delay. <sup>9</sup>“Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, *it* is to be given to them daily without fail, <sup>10</sup>that they may offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. <sup>11</sup>“And I issued a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house and he shall be impaled on it and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this. <sup>12</sup>“May the God who has 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 with all diligence!”** As far as this decree based on Cyrus’ minutes is concerned there is one negative aspect of the decree in verses 6 and 7a and four positives in verses 7b-12. Let’s look at the negative first. Verse 6-7 he forbids the governing authorities of the province from interfering with the work. **Tattenai and all your colleagues, keep away from there;<sup>ii</sup> Leave this work on the house of God alone.** That is, don’t interfere with the building activity; the activity was officially re-authorized by King Darius of Persia showing that Darius supports and upholds the prior governmental policy of Cyrus. So first, do not interfere. Four positives begin in verse 7b. First, a positive to rebuild. **Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site.** This is the opposite side of the coin of not interfering, it is a positive to let them rebuild on the designated location. “Both Cyrus’s original decree (Ezra 6:7) and Darius’s renewal of the permission to rebuild the Temple specify that it should be refounded “on its site.” This was a matter of special concern in the restoration or rebuilding of ancient temples.”<sup>iii</sup> Second, verse 8, the Persian government would sponsor the rebuilding. **Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders in the rebuilding of this house of God; the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the River, and that without delay.** The full costs of the rebuilding are authorized to come out of the taxes collected from the **provinces** west of the Euphrates River. These taxes would normally go into the royal treasury and be authorized for various kingdom expenses. So to direct it to those rebuilding the Temple would indicate that Darius, like Cyrus, considered the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem to be an essential interest to the Persian kingdom. The reason, of course, is because of their religious beliefs. Cyrus we know was an Iranian polytheist. He believed each region had its local god or goddess and that for that region to prosper and have success the god or goddess had to be worshipped properly. As far as Cyrus was concerned that was the reason he invented the governmental policy of repatriation and restored people to their native homelands. However, Darius was a slightly different breed, at some point in his career he had begun to worship Aura Mazda, the monotheistic god of Zoroastrianism which will come to dominate Persia by the time of Esther. However, apparently Darius was not a full blown monotheist at this early stage in his career; he evidently still accepted the validity of polytheism as evidenced by his continuation of Cyrus’ policy to rebuilding of this house of God in

Jerusalem. This decree was to be executed **without delay**, not after the next provincial budget meeting but immediately. Third, in verse 9 the Persian government authorizes whatever is needed to properly worship once the Temple is rebuilt. **Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, it is to be given to them daily without fail.** Obviously from this we can gather that Darius was concerned that local worship practices and traditions be maintained. This he considered essential to the well-being of his kingdom, as had Cyrus before him. This very purpose is given in verse 10, **that they may offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.** Darius, as we said, was in religious transition. Eventually he came to only worship Ahura Mazda but this did not mean that he was religiously intolerant of other religions. “Although Darius revered Ahuramazda especially, it is understandable that in a world of polytheism he would want to make sure that he was in the favor of every god in his empire.”<sup>iv</sup> In other words, Darius took the diversified portfolio approach to religion. How can you go wrong when you’ve covered all your bases? Take a little of this religion and a little of that religion and blend it all together. That way if one god fails you have a hundred other gods to fall back on. It sounds good and it appears to work in the fallen economics department but can that philosophy be transferred to the religion department? Darius believed it could and so do most people today; just blend, we’re told, borrow and unite elements of various religions, put it all together in a big melting pot and the sum total is religious pluralism and syncretism. One of the problems with this approach is that these religions all contradict one another, if you put them all together you have internal inconsistencies throughout the system and then how are you going to make your decisions. Ultimately the individual is enthroned as the ultimate authority and then when I do what is right in my eyes and you do what is right in yours and we conflict there’s no standard by which to resolve the conflict. Whose opinion is ultimate, yours or mine? In the end it’s a power struggle and he with the most power and resources wins. It’s war, it’s chaos, it’s oppression because they’ve rejected any ultimate standard that comes from outside of the creation. He who has the biggest stick wins. That’s where religious pluralism and syncretism ends, in chaos. So the diversified portfolio approach to religion that is so prominent in fallen economics isn’t valid. It sounds good, on the surface, until there’s a conflict. The only solution is that there is but one God who is a unity and diversity

who answers to the universals and the particulars and who is the source of all morals, absolutes and values. But Darius rejected that approach; he wanted to diversify, so he didn't have a problem with the Jews worshipping their God in Jerusalem, he in fact endorsed it and insisted it be done appropriately. He also, at the end of verse 10, asked them to **pray for the life of the king and his sons**. Now it's interesting because as far as Darius is concerned it fits with his religious beliefs, if we were polytheists we'd ask Muslims and Mormons and Buddhists and Jainists and everybody else to pray for us. But unwittingly since the Jews were monotheists he stumbled upon a scriptural principle when he asked them to pray. They were told to pray for their leaders so they could enjoy some stability and peace among pagan nations. And we as the Church, whatever nation we reside in, should pray for kings and those in authority. 1 Tim 2, "I urge that entreaties and prayers, and petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God wants us to pray for the governing authorities since God Himself is the one who instituted human government in the post-Flood world and who thus gives them their authority. What's the purpose of human government, the fourth DI? The purpose of human government is to provide a peaceful and orderly society. Fittingly, we should pray calculatingly for our governing authorities to make decisions that will make for peace and order. The current administration is not making decisions that result in peace and order; they are making decisions that are causing people in America to desire a second revolution. We should be praying for them to stop trampling the people. King Darius at least requested such prayers, prayers that would benefit him, his sons and his kingdom. Fourth, verse 11, the death penalty for anyone who dared to act contrary to the decree. **And I issued a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house and he shall be impaled on it and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this**. Needless to say the king was quite serious about this decree. The penalty of impalement was the well-known instrument of capital punishment used by the Persians. They took a beam from the criminals own home, sharpened one end like a pencil, stuck the dull end in the ground and then inserted the sharp point under the chest pushing up through the esophagus and lungs where the criminal was left to hang and die. This was the way Haman was hung in the Book of Esther,

death by impalement on a stake 75 feet high towering over the city. Further, the person's house would be made a **refuse heap** for failure to comply; it's typical tyrannical rule of Middle Eastern tyrants, something akin to Nebuchadnezzar policy, I'll tear you from limb to limb which meant to hitch a team of horses up to your arms and another team to your legs and then slap the hind quarters. Lovely picture. That's how things work in the Arab world.

Now verse 12 the end of the decree, **May the God who has 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 with all diligence.** Now this final entreaty toward **the God** in Jerusalem shows that Darius thinks he has some claim on this God. I take it that he claims some protection from this God because he is the one authorizing and financing the rebuilding of this God's house. So he had a vested interest in the Temple and therefore he is petitioning that the God who dwells in this Temple conquer anyone who tries to come and destroy it. Darius rightfully wanted peace and order in his kingdom and he would have petitioned this of all the gods in all the temples throughout his empire.

In summary of Darius decree, the opposition to rebuilding led by Tattenai backfired against the opponents, rather than stopping the Temple work they were now required to fund the project with their own tax dollars and even provide for its proper operation. The significance of this decision is just this; during the times of the Gentiles God works on behalf of the Jewish remnant when they are living in obedience to Him. They were already rebuilding under the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah; when opposition arose God turned the opposition into cooperation. As such we see that God's sovereignty extends even over Gentile kings and turns their hearts wherever He wishes so that they deal favorably with the Jewish remnant who seeks to please Him.

Verse 13, **Then Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues carried out the decree with all diligence, just as King Darius had sent. Tattenai** and the other government employees were good employees; genuinely interested in fulfilling their king's commands. They did it with all **diligence**, to the T.



In verses 14-15 Ezra puts together several factors that led to the Jews success at completing the building. Verse 14 is the general building projects, verse 15 is specifically the building of the Temple, **And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.** The point is God has many means of carrying out His plans and purposes and He uses all of them. He used prophets that He raised up to convict the people of their sin so they would confess and be restored and continue rebuilding, He also used the **decrees** of Gentile kings like **Cyrus, Darius** and **Artaxerxes** who were acting in accordance with their own religion's beliefs. **Artaxerxes** of course did not decree the rebuilding of the Temple but the city of Jerusalem. Verse 14 is a statement encompassing how God worked through Gentile kings through all their building projects. "The most powerful word on earth at that time was the decree of a Persian king, but silently and mysteriously the king was being directed by an even more powerful divine word."<sup>v</sup> Ezra's point is simply that God uses prophets and kings as instruments to accomplish His purposes. God does not usually work in a direct fashion, instantly zapping us to make us well or solve our problems. Usually God works indirectly through created channels, involving created beings in the process of fulfilling His grand design. Clearly this would be an encouragement to the Jews of Ezra's day who could look back and see God at work for them through these various channels. God's people were not left alone and Gentile kings were not all powerful.

Verse 15, **This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.** Since the first regal year of **King Darius** was 521BC then the sixth year was 516BC. If we backtrack to the day the temple was destroyed we come to 586BC and the length of time between 586 and 516 is exactly 70 years. Jeremiah prophesied the temple would lay desolate 70 years so Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled **on the third day of the month Adar in the sixth year of...Darius. Adar** is the twelfth month of the year so the Temple was completed in the last calendar month of 516BC. God had fulfilled His good word perfectly.

At the completion they dedicated the temple, verses 16-18 explain. **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.** Now they could worship God strictly according to the Mosaic Covenant and expect the blessings described in Lev 26. This dedication and sacrifice, however, was far inferior to the dedication and sacrifice of the Solomonic Temple 450 years before. In verse 17, **They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel.** The offering at the dedication of Solomon's Temple was 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, more than 200 times the number of animals slain in this dedication. This shows how magnificently rich Solomon's culture was compared to the post-exilic culture. Solomon's dedication also records a great dedicatory prayer which is absent here. However, it was a time of great joy to finally complete the Temple after the altar had first been built 21 years earlier. Significantly, they offered **12 male goats as a sin offering** to correspond **to the number of the tribes of Israel.** Despite the fact that the ten northern tribes had gone into Exile more than 200 years before and the fact that many today consider these ten tribes to be lost tribes, their mention here shows that they were not lost and that they were still around and considered to be a part of **all Israel.** None of the 12 tribes has been lost or can be lost; all twelve tribes are still represented on earth today even though since AD70 all genealogical records were destroyed with the Temple and we cannot identify them. But even though we cannot identify them God can identify them.

Verse 18, **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.** The emphasis here is that they followed the Law exactly; the worship service was determined by God. Since He is the object of worship He declares how and where He is to be worshipped. The Israelites did not have the right to worship Him however or wherever they wanted. Worship is not a matter of sincerity or emotions; it is a matter of obedience and appreciation of the Lord who is the object of our worship. If we want to please Him with our worship we will worship Him how He has revealed. This the Israelites did as the reinstated worship of God in verse 18.

Appropriately, as verse 19 mentions, the first Passover in 70 years the language changes from Aramaic to Hebrew. **The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month,** the year was 515BC. The

seventy years of non-Temple functioning was perfectly had now come to a close as predicted by Jeremiah. The new year began with an **observance of Passover**. Note that they are still referred to **exiles** even though they live in the land. They are considered exiles because they were not an independent nation under a Davidic king but a dependent province under a Persian kingdom. Israel is in Exile until her Davidic king comes and destroys all Gentile powers and establishes His kingdom on the earth. But they nonetheless had religious freedom to celebrate the **Passover in exile**. Verse 20, **For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover Lamb for all the exiles, both their brothers the priests and for themselves.** 21**The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate the Passover.** Probably the people who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land are those from the ten tribes who were left behind in the Assyrian invasion and the two tribes who were left behind in the Babylonian invasion and had mingled with unclean Gentiles. Therefore they separated and **ate the Passover**, the first **Passover** held in seventy years.

The first six chapters end on this climactic note of celebration. God had fulfilled His promises to bring them back and re-instate the Mosaic system in preparation for the coming King. It was evident that God was still working on their behalf and they should be encouraged.

**Passover** was held on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt when God set them free from bondage to Egypt; through great judgments they were spared through substitutionary blood atonement. In verse 22, following on the heels of Passover **they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.** The mention of Darius as **the king of Assyria** rather than Persia is not a mistake any more than referring to him as the king of Babylon would have been a mistake since the territory of Assyria was conquered by Babylon and then Persia. He was indeed **the king of Assyria** in ancient oriental thinking because he ruled that territory. The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** begins the day after Passover, the 15<sup>th</sup> and ends on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The

overwhelming climax is one of joy. Finally, after seventy years their Temple was restored and operational so they could worship God appropriately.

The final note is one that gives credit where credit is due. It was not Israel that had accomplished all this, though they were involved; it was God who stirred them up initially to return and rebuild and it was God who **had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.** God was providentially working to bring about their success. It is an important theological point to understand that God can command us to do things and yet we do not have it in us to follow His command. Pelagius, Erasmus and Arminius all argued that God will not command what we are not able in ourselves to obey. Yet the Scriptures teach the opposite. God does command us to do things we are not able in ourselves to obey. God has to do a work up front in order for us to obey His commands. These Jews never would have returned to rebuild if God had not stirred their hearts in that direction. The Jews never would have been encouraged to complete the rebuilding if God had not turned the heart of the king toward them. Accordingly, just because God commands us to obey something does not mean that we can obey it. The presence of a command does not imply the ability to obey it. God must do a work up front to enable us to obey. For instance, Jesus says, "The one who comes to Me I will not cast out," to come to Him is to believe in Him. That is the human condition for salvation. But the NT also says, "no one can come to Me unless the Father draws him." How can God put a condition on us that we cannot meet? Very simple, God has to do a work up front for us to come to Him and yet it's still true that if we come to Him He will not cast us out. Both statements are true but He must do an up front, hidden work of turning and inclining our hearts to Him if we are to ever come to Him. As evidenced in this chapter He stirred up the Jews hearts to return and rebuild and He turned Darius' heart to them to encourage them to rebuild. The Jews were responsible to obey God and return to rebuild but only because God had done a hidden work for them to be inclined in that direction, otherwise they never would have obeyed. At heart we are at enmity with God. Yet if God works He can turn our hearts away from enmity and incline them to Himself. He is the one who ultimately gets the credit. All good things come down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variance or shifting of shadow.

In summary, when Tattenai's letter reached Darius he had the royal archives searched at Babylon, nothing was found so the search continued in other royal palaces of the Persian Empire. At Ecbatana, Cyrus' minutes were found which recorded that indeed he had issued a decree for the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Additionally the Temple was to supersede the grandeur of Solomon's Temple and be funded completely from the royal treasury. In accordance with this earlier decree Darius decreed that no one interfere with the work and that tax dollars from the provinces should fully cover the necessary costs so that Darius' house and kingdom could prosper. Anyone in non-compliance was to be executed by impalement on a stake. The decree was enacted immediately and the Jews completed the Temple exactly 70 years after it was destroyed. They dedicated the Temple and observed the first Passover with great joy because the Lord had gone before them to raise up prophets and turn the hearts of pagan kings toward them.

Alright, what lessons can we learn from this chapter? There are three. First, God was still at work on behalf of the remnant of Israel to bless them even though they had no legal rights to His protection since they were in violation of the Mosaic Law. God is very gracious and He has covenant obligations of His own that necessitate that He preserves the culture of the nation Israel so that when His Messiah comes He can fulfill all righteousness. God therefore took measures to ensure His covenant purposes were not thwarted. Second, to overcome obstacles to His covenant purposes God uses created means. He raises up prophets like Haggai and Zechariah as well as decrees of kings like Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes. God does not accomplish all of His purposes directly. In fact, the normal way God accomplishes things is through created means like prayer, preaching the word, etc...He does not normally use the stunning and miraculous, otherwise it wouldn't be considered miraculous but normal. Third, God may issue commands but that does not imply we are able to obey the commands. Men are sinners and not inclined to obey God. Therefore God must do a secret, hidden work in our lives to incline us toward Him. He does this in such a way that His plan comes to pass even though at the same time we are doing exactly what we want to do. In hindsight we recognize this and give Him the glory for the great things He has done in our lives.

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<sup>i</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software.

ii The words “stay away from there” are official Aramaic legal statements (cf BKC, Ezra 6:6-12).

iii *Vol. 137: Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 137*. 1980 (547) (204). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary.

iv Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ezr 6:6). Galaxie Software.

v Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ezr 6:13). Galaxie Software.

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