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C1321 – June 26, 2013 – Ezra 5:1-17
The Temple Resumed

We're studying the book of Ezra which is one of the more difficult books because we're Gentiles and we're not familiar with the post-exilic period and what the concerns are and why there is such an interest in rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem. We've been trying to familiarize ourselves with some of these issues as they relate to necessary preparations for the coming of the Messiah and the development of the socio-political-cultural background we find when He comes.

One of the apparent paradoxes of the OT becomes dreadfully apparent at the Exile. On the one hand you had the Davidic Covenant that promised blessing through a descendant who would sit on an eternal throne and rule an eternal kingdom. On the other hand you had the Mosaic Covenant that promised blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. The problem was how do you get these two together because at the Exile it was quite apparent that nobody could obey the Mosaic Covenant perfectly, there is none righteous, no not one, all fall short of the glory of God. So how can you get to the ultimate blessing promised in the Davidic Covenant if the means of reaching that blessing is unattainable? The short answer is that God Himself would sovereignly provide the righteousness necessary to bless Israel. Ezra is one of the post-Exilic books that starts to reveal the preparations that had to be made for a descendant of David to come that could perform all the Law and provide the righteousness imputed through faith. The Temple was in ruins and the Law required there be a Temple in the city of Jerusalem and a Jewish presence in the land so the descendant could come and fulfill all righteousness. In other words, for the Davidic Covenant to be fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant system had to be re-instituted as a preparatory measure. So Ezra shows us God's sovereign preparation through Gentile kings and Jewish people to restore the Mosaic system so the descendant of David, who we know

as the Messiah, could come and fulfill the Mosaic system, thus providing a righteousness that could be imputed to those who have faith. Put another way, the stage had to be set so that the Messiah could come into history and fulfill the will of God. Ezra reveals the stage-setting measures that God took during the times of the Gentiles to secure the stage. It didn't occur overnight, it took time and there was opposition so we're studying the opposition that arose to hinder the stage being set for the Messiah's coming and how God overcame the opposition.

The first period of opposition is 535-520BC. We're studying it in Ezra 4-6. God had already partially restored the kingdom of Judah to the land by way of Cyrus' decree for the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple. In the midst of this rebuilding they faced opposition. The ultimate reason behind the opposition was the fact that God's covenant plan was moving forward to set the stage for the promised Davidic descendant who is the primary threat to Satan's kingdom building program. Last week in Ezra 4 we found three oppositions to God's covenant program, one to halt the rebuilding of the Temple, a second to put them at legal odds with the Persian Empireⁱ and a third to halt the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. These three oppositions all occurred during the first 100 years of the Jews return. The first one, and the one elaborated on in Ezra 5 was the attempt by the forerunners of the Samaritans, half-breeds racially and religiously, to clandestinely infiltrate the ranks of Israel by kindly offering to help rebuild the Temple. Zerubbabel and Jeshua immediately recognized these were enemies trying to make an alliance that would result in syncretism among the Israelites and consequent divine discipline. Therefore they exercised strong leadership and very matter of factly rejected the offer. However, subsequently these enemies discouraged them, frightened them and hired counselors against them to frustrate the work. As a result the Israelites lost heart and gave up rebuilding contrary to God's command for them to rebuild the Temple. The question at the end of Ezra 4 is, "How are the people going to get back in fellowship with God?" God has a covenant program that He is going to fulfill but He's not going to drop down out of heaven and rebuild the Temple for them, they have to rebuild the Temple so the Mosaic system can be restored in preparation for the Messiah. But the people are down, discouraged and out of fellowship. So how do you get down and discouraged people to get back in fellowship with God and start living in obedience?

In 5:1 you see that God did it by raising up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and if you turn to Haggai 1 you'll see the timing and more of the background of this prophet and his message. Verse 1, "In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai..." Now this is the reign of Darius, the second year of Darius to be exact. He was the fourth king of Persia. Cyrus was the first and we know a lot about Cyrus, he reigned over all Persia from 539-530BC, second was Cambyses II and he reigned from 530-522BC, third was Guamata, also known as Pseudo-Smerdis and he was assassinated the year he came to reign in 522, fourth we said was Darius and so his accession year was 522 making his first regal year 521 and his second 520. So verse 1 is in 520BC, the Jews had stopped rebuilding in 535, so it had been 15 years and what was going on for those 15 years? Notice verse 2, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'This people says, 'The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt.' They stopped rebuilding because they interpreted the presence of their enemies and the frustrations to rebuild as an indication it was not time to rebuild. They wanted smooth sailing, like a lot of Christians; and if they don't get smooth sailing then they think God doesn't want them to go through the storm because the way God is supposed to work so we are comfortable is to calm the storm down so we can enjoy smooth sailing. And that's just anti-biblical thinking! God doesn't promise us smooth sailing, He promises to get us through the storm safely as we trust Him, but smooth sailing, no. So these people weren't trusting Him to overcome their enemies who were causing adversity and so they set aside the command of God to rebuild. 15 years later God is sending them Haggai the prophet and in verse 3 he starts to accuse them. The prophets were like prosecuting attorneys who brought attention back to the word of God and covenant violations. "Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" In other words, they were working on their houses, getting them all fancied up, that's what they'd been doing for 15 years, working on their own homes. And all the while God's home is sitting there in ruins. That's putting self before God.ⁱⁱ Verse 5, "Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Consider your ways! 6You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes.'" They were having agricultural problems due to drought and consequent economic

problems, inflationary and otherwise. And what do those problems signal in verse 6? How are they to be interpreted? As divine discipline. They were coming under divine discipline because they were in disobedience to the Mosaic Law. And the stages of divine discipline are all marked out in Lev 26, five stages, the nation had gone through all of them before the Exile and here they go again down the same path, so boom, boom, boom, they're marching right down the path to destruction. But if that happens of course they'll be kicked out of the land again and then God's covenant program will be derailed so God, like a master chess player, raised up Haggai to point out their violation of the law and say "Consider your ways!" Go think about it because if you're under divine discipline and you want the discipline to stop you're going to have to change your ways. That's the way discipline works. Verse 8 explains how they can change their ways, "Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified, says the LORD 9 "*You* look for much, but behold, *it comes* to little; when you bring *it* home, I blow it *away*. Why?" declares the LORD of hosts, "Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.

10 "Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 "I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands." They were experiencing divine discipline and that's the way the nation Israel was to interpret their experience, it was all external things; agriculture, economy, security, and if those things were threatened that meant they were doing something wrong and God would graciously send the prophet to point out what needed correcting. So verse 12, "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people showed reverence for the LORD." That gives you the historical background of Ezra 5 and how God kicked them back into gear. He sent the prophet Haggai. It was the sixth month of Darius' second year, 520BC.

But that's not the only prophet God sent. He also sent Zechariah. Turn to Zechariah 1, all this is background or amplification of Ezra 5:1-2. "In the eighth month of the second year of Darius," so he came in the same year as Haggai, 520BC, but two months after Haggai, so they were contemporaries, and notice the first message each had to the nation was along the same lines.

Haggai was more explicit - you're being disciplined because you're not rebuilding the Temple as the Lord commanded. Zechariah says you're being disciplined because you're not following the Lord but acting evil. Notice verse 1, "the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying, ²"The LORD was very angry with your fathers. ³"Therefore say to them, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return to Me," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I may return to you," says the LORD of hosts. ⁴"Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.'" ' But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the LORD. ⁵"Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶"But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers?" In other words, learn your history and don't repeat the idiot mistakes your fathers made, otherwise you're going to get the same rod to your hiney, learn to trust and obey your God. Then it says, "they repented and said, 'As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.' " ' " They admit they were getting what was justly due them for their failure to trust and obey. For 15 years they'd been out of it spiritually, discouraged by their enemies, frustrated and therefore downtrodden and we'd say, living by the flesh, trying to do it all on their own and get by but it wasn't working out too well for them. They sowed much but harvested little because God didn't send the rain, they were in disobedience, they needed to get up and finish rebuilding the Temple and stop worrying about the furniture in their houses.

So here we come to Ezra 5:1 and it all makes sense now. **When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.** So they responded to the word of God through the two prophets, they repented, and got back to work and what do they need from the **prophets** but **support**. People that are downcast and defeated need support, they don't need someone sticking them in the rear with a prod, they need encouragement and that's what the two prophets were giving them; support, encouragement, reassurance and inspiration.

So things are getting back on track toward God's covenant program and what immediately do we find in verse 3? Opposition. Always opposition. Why? On an ultimate level why? Because if God's covenant program is marching forward then Satan's kingdom building program is threatened and so he goes on red alert to halt God's program. Let's see how it happens in verse 3, "**At that time Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?"**" Now we don't know who alerted **Tattenai, the governor of the province** to this rebuilding activity, it may have been the enemy Samaritans from fifteen years before and it likely was, but through whatever avenue it did come to his attention. So he and a few other lesser officials came and questioned them regarding the building permit. Do you guys have a building permit? Who issued you a building permit? Government regulation. And they apparently asked a very thorough set of questions as we can see from the letter, including verse 4, **the names of the men who were reconstructing the building.** And they told them. In other words, we want to know who the chief men heading up the work and overseeing the construction are.

Now **Tattenai**, you need to understand, he had two good reasons to question this building activity, regardless of whether the Samaritans brought it to his attention or not. First, the Persian political field had been in tumult. If you remember earlier I took you through the first four kings of Persia, all prophesied by the way in Daniel 11, but in any case, when Cyrus died in 530BC his son Cambyses came to rule but he had to put down several rebellions in order to secure his rule, even executing his own brother Smerdis. In the wake, a man named Guamata claimed to be the true Smerdis and so he led a revolt against Cambyses which was successful in swinging the popular opinion behind him and eventually Cambyses committed suicide in 522BC. This Guamata then took the throne but the Persian army sided with a distant cousin of Cambyses named Darius I (Hystaspes). Consequently Guamata was deposed by Darius and he eventually put down several other claimants to the throne and rebellions throughout the empire. It had been political chaos for several years, typical Iranian politics; these people are unstable, bloodthirsty people. So in that context Tattenai's questioning of the

building activity is logical and proper. He'd be looking out for the interests of the king by trying to quell a revolt of some sort.

Second, he had good reason to think the Jews might revolt in light of Zech 3:8. Take a look at this verse. "Now listen, Joshua, the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch." That's a title for the Messiah, a deliverer, a ruler, and turn to Zech 6:11 because there's more about the Branch. "Take silver and gold, make an ornate crown and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

12Then say to him, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD. 13"Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne." You can see if Tattenai caught wind of this kind of talk coming out of the province of Judah he had good reason to be suspicious of a Jewish revolt. So on the basis of these two facts, one recent political upheaval in Persia and two, the mention of a coming Jewish Messiah who would reign in a temple, Tattenai had every reason for questioning their building activity. He was just doing his job and looking out for the interests of the Persian king.

Returning to Ezra 5:3-4 **Tattenai** is leading what appears to be opposition; its opposition in the sense that there's the possibility that he has the authority to stop this building. But notice verse 5, the construction did not stop. Why? **But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it.** So they were granted the right to continue building until the king replied. And the reason put forth for continuing is significant; because **the eye of their God was on** them, an important expression. Another expression used commonly in the post-Exilic writings is "the hand of their God was on them" (and the like, cf Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 2:8, 18). They are both expressions of God's providential work on behalf of His own. When it says the hand of God was on them it refers to His attribute of omnipotence because the hand is the source of power and God's hand is His power to accomplish His will and so we get omnipotence out of it, the fact that God can do anything compatible with His character. The other expression **the eye of God** refers to His attribute of omniscience because the eyes are the source of visual acuity and God's eyes

in the Scripture is His ability to penetrate all things and that's how we get to omniscience, the fact that God knows all things actual and possible. So knowing in this case that the Jews were responding to the prophet's words to repent and start to rebuild the Temple God did not allow Tattenai and his officials to stop them from rebuilding at this time. In other words, God was blessing them by taking them through with safe passage, however the passage was not smooth passage, there was resistance, stormy waters, but in the end it was sure passage. God was blessing them.

Now the letter in verse 6, and recall last week that this entire section is in Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the day in which official governmental communication would be written. **“This is the copy of the letter which Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues the officials, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king.** The mention that this province was **beyond the River** makes the possible danger all the greater to **the king** since a great river like this one, the River Euphrates, forms a natural barrier against military advance. These provinces were therefore watched closely in order to curtail any rebellions. Verse 7, **They sent a report to him in which it was written thus: “To Darius the king, all peace. 8“Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands.”** Now we're not sure what stage of rebuilding they were in but from the timing and the description I'm inclined to think it was early on. For one the opposition arose rather quickly according to verse 3. If the work began in 520BC and they didn't finish until 515BC then the construction was in the early stages. Second, the movement of materials like **huge stones** and **beams** into place indicates an early stage of construction. So the opposition and the letter probably came in 520-519 but the work was going well, the craftsmanship was excellent and the work was succeeding. Also take note of the construction materials. First, they were utilizing **huge stones**, these are in the Hebrew “rolling stones,” stones that were so large they had to be rolled on timbers in order to move them into the proper position on the wall. Second, they were using **beams**, these were large timbers and the way they are described as **being laid in the walls** may indicate a construction technique similar to wainscoting where the wood was inlaid in the walls so that an aesthetically pleasing design would result. A

final word on these first words, Tattenai refers to the house being built as **the house of the great God** but don't interpret that to mean that Tattenai was a worshipper of Israel's God or that he believed Israel's God was the supreme God of the universe. The people in the ancient near east believed strongly that each area had its own deities; these deities were supreme in those areas and those areas only. So Tattenai, like most other Persians, were firmly committed Iranian polytheists, an expression like **the house of the great God** would simply mean in his mind the God who was supreme in the local **province of Judah**.

Verse 9, "Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?' 10'We also asked them their names so as to inform you, and that we might write down the names of the men who were at their head. 11'Thus they answered us, saying, 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. 12'But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon. 13'However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. 14'Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and brought them to the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor. 15'He said to him, "Take these utensils, go *and* deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and let the house of God be rebuilt in its place." 16'Then that Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not *yet* completed.' 17'Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this *matter*.'" Now, there's a lot in this response of the elders and we want to go through it because it's honest and therefore useable by God to continue His covenant program. We already know the questions they asked them concerning the

building permit and the names of the men overseeing the construction so starting in verse 11. As far as their identity, this is their response, **We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.** The title **God of heaven** is a title used of God nine times in the book of Ezra, more than any other book of the Bible, it is used ten times in other exilic and post-exilic books for a total of 19 uses in exilic and post-exilic times whereas it's used only four other times in the pre-exilic period. The significance of the title for the Jews was to say that God was sovereign over all the cosmos. However, Persians like Tattenai used the title to refer to the sovereignty of their gods over a local region; they did not accept the cosmic significance of the term. Darius, for example, worshipped chiefly Ahura Mazda, the Iranian "sky god" and he called him "the god of heaven." So in these Jews mind when they identify themselves as **servants of the God of heaven and earth** they attach cosmic significance to their **God** while in the Persian's mind it only identified them as servants of a local god.

Verse 11, as far as what they were rebuilding, **we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.** What great king of Israel? Solomon. David had laid out the plans for the temple and acquired all the materials to build the temple but David was a bloody man and so God designated his son Solomon to be the one who **built** it. In 1 Kgs 8 he finished it and dedicated it and the Shekinah Glory came to indwell it. It was remarkable, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And of course it was destroyed

Verse 12 describes the reason it was destroyed, **But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.** God had warned them in Lev 26 that if they disobeyed Him he would be provoked to wrath and He would discipline them. The fifth degree of divine discipline was military defeat and deportation. So these Jews obviously know their history and their covenant obligations and they know all too well how their father's broke the covenant obligations and that God had justly punished them. The military that defeated and deported them was **Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.**

Verse 13, **‘However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God.** This is recorded in Ezra 1 and we learned there that Cyrus was an Iranian polytheist, he believed that each province had a local god or goddess and that worship of this god or goddess was essential to the well-being of the province and thus the well-being of his entire kingdom. So in accordance with his beliefs he issued a decree for the Jews to return and rebuild. While his decree on a human level was consistent with what he believed would prosper his kingdom, ultimately it was the plan of God revealed through Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah had prophesied the exact name of the ruler who would come and issue the decree as Cyrus over 150 years in advance saying “Cyrus, He is my shepherd! And he will perform all My desire. And he declares of Jerusalem, She will be built, and of the temple Your foundation will be laid....So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me.” Cyrus was personally chosen and named by God to issue this decree. Jeremiah prophesied the exact timing of the decree issued by Cyrus to be seventy years saying of the land of Israel, “This whole land will be a desolation and a horror and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” “When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.” So the exact timing of the decree was stated to be when the seventy years of exile to Babylon was completed and thus the decree of verse 13 issued by Cyrus was on a human level in accordance with his polytheistic beliefs but on a divine level the subject of revealed prophecy to stage set for the covenant plan of God.

Verse 14, **‘Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and brought them to the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor.** The taking of the vessels was a military custom in the ancient near east that signified the victory of one nation’s god or gods over the god of another nation. Most nations had images of their gods or goddesses and the conquering king would take the image and set it in the temple of his god or goddess to signify superiority. However, when Nebuchadnezzar entered the Temple in

Jerusalem there were no images of YHWH because you cannot make an image of YHWH. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar took the various utensils and furniture and put it in the **temple of Babylon** to signify the superiority of his god Marduk over YHWH although the real reason Nebuchadnezzar defeated Israel was because God gave Israel over to the Babylonians as the fifth degree of divine discipline (Dan 1:2). But when **King Cyrus** defeated Babylon and came to power, being a polytheist, he sought to restore people to their native homelands and restore proper worship of the gods in those homelands in order to ensure the prospering of his newly acquired empire. Therefore he sought to restore any vessels used for the worship of those gods in their homelands. This he did in accordance with his beliefs counting out and giving the vessels to **Sheshbazzar** who brought them back for the Temple in Jerusalem. However, that's merely the human level; on a divine level the restoration of the Temple vessels was prophesied by Jeremiah to occur when Babylon was judged (Jer 27:22) which occurred in conjunction with Cyrus.ⁱⁱⁱ

In summary, both the vessels and the Temple would be restored by Cyrus as they said in the letter in verse 15, **'He said to him, "Take these utensils, go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and let the house of God be rebuilt in its place."** The exact place was important to maintain a connection with the prior temple; so it was built along the same 500-cubit square lines of Solomon's temple.

Verse 16, **'Then that Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed.'** It sounds like a continuous building project but actually we know construction was stopped 15-16 years before because 4:24 says it stopped before. So the meaning of a building being **under construction** refers to the entire time from the beginning of the building until the completion. In that sense it was **under construction** from **then until now**, a period of 15 years.

And verse 17, the letter closes, **"Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this matter."** The important point is that they were allowed to

continue the rebuilding efforts until the king could research the issue and make a decision. God was blessing them.

In summary, Ezra 4 ends in 535BC with the Jews halting their rebuilding of the Temple in disobedience to God's covenant program due to discouragement and fear induced by their enemies. 15 years later, in 520BC, Ezra 5 records that they were still living in disobedience to God's covenant program and consequently struggling agriculturally and economically. In response God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to convict them of their disobedience and to reveal the fact that their agricultural and economic problems were God's discipline for their failure to complete the Temple. In response the people re-aligned themselves with God's covenant program and began rebuilding the house of God with the prophet's support and encouragement. Immediately they were faced with more opposition when Tattenai, the governor in the region came to inquire if they had the proper building permits. God had his eye on them because they had re-aligned themselves with His covenant program and therefore the work continued while Tattenai inquired of the king about the building, the result of which we will discover next week

What can we conclude from the chapter this week? Several important lessons. First, we should not allow stormy waters to cause us to be discouraged and fearful when we are attempting to be obedient to God. The Israelites faced opposition to obedience to God by rebuilding the Temple and concluded wrongly that it was not time to rebuild. Their decision was sheer disobedience. They should have kept on trusting and obeying and God would have given them safe passage through the stormy waters. God will also give us safe passage as we seek to be obedient to Him but we should not expect him to give us smooth passage. Often there are people and circumstances that try to get in our way and make it a stormy path, but God will give us sure and safe passage if we continue to trust in Him. Second, disobedience knocks us out of fellowship and into God's discipline. The nation was disobedient when they stopped work on the temple that God had authorized them to rebuild through Cyrus' decree. Consequently they were facing God's discipline in order to stimulate confession and restoration to fellowship with its accompanying blessing. Individually when we disobey the Lord we are knocked out of fellowship and God disciplines us in order to stimulate confession and restoration to fellowship. Third, when we are out of fellowship

God will send people into our lives to confront us with the word of God so that we understand we are under divine discipline and will confess and be restored to fellowship. God sent the nation two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to confront the nation with the word of God so that they knew they were under divine discipline and would confess and be restored. We need to pay attention when people confront us with our sin because God is sending that person to confront us. Rather than getting angry and lashing out we should take what they say to heart, confess our sin and be restored. Following this those who pointed it out should immediately begin to encourage and support their new obedience as Haggai and Zechariah supported the Jews obedience. Fourth, when we are in fellowship and obedience to the Lord He is watching over us to give us success. When the nation returned to the Lord and started rebuilding they eye of their God was on them so they were not stopped from rebuilding but permitted to continue the work that was succeeding. When we get back in fellowship with the Lord and obedience to Him He brings about a success that is against all odds and that we could never accomplish in and of ourselves. Fifth, God is sovereign over all the cosmos, including men and the decisions of men and yet men are fully responsible for their choices. God was sovereign over Cyrus in raising him up to issue the decree to return and rebuild the Temple while Cyrus was doing exactly what he wanted to do to ensure the prospering of his kingdom. God was sovereign over Tattenai in allowing the Jews to continue rebuilding for the time being while Tattenai was doing exactly what he wanted to do to ensure he was acting as an excellent servant of King Cyrus. There is thus no contradiction between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. In the end God's sovereign plan always comes to pass and men always do what they most want to do. God's covenant program will be accomplished through genuine human action!

ⁱ This accusation made in the early years of Ahasuerus may have set the anti-Semitic stage for the background of Esther.

ⁱⁱ Contrary, interestingly, to many of our founding fathers who gave up entire fortunes in order to found this country.

ⁱⁱⁱ As this pattern of examples show repeatedly, man always does what he wants to do and God's plan always comes to pass.

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