

**March 24, 2024**

## **Ezra 6:1-12**

1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. 2 And in Ecbatana, the citadel that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: “A record. 3 In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices were offered, and let its foundations be retained. Its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, 4 with three layers of great stones and one layer of timber. Let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. 5 And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple that is in Jerusalem, each to its place. You shall put them in the house of God.” 6 “Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your associates the governors who are in the province Beyond the River, keep away. 7 Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond the River. 9 And whatever is needed—bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require—let that be given to them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill. 12 May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I Darius make a decree; let it be done with all diligence.”

Scriptures for further study:

Genesis 22:8

Ezra 1:1

Lamentations 3:37-39

Proverbs 19:21

John 1:14

Exodus 33:18

Hebrews 1:3



### **The Hand of God for our Blessing Ezra 6:1-12**

**BIG IDEA:** Because God's hand reaches down into life and history, let us look for the wonder of His blessing even when darker clouds of providence roll in.

Simple – The Gospel solidifies my confident expectations in the living God.

#### **OUTLINE**

1. The Dark Clouds of Providence
2. God's Involvement
3. God's Blessing

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These "Sermon Discussion Questions" are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Are there any dark clouds in your life? Dark clouds are circumstances that make it hard to see how God will provide or work for your good. (Read Philippians 4:19 & Romans 8:26-30)
2. Read Ezra 6:1. How can you hold on to hope and maintain composure and poise in the dark clouds of providence? "The word providence is a theological word that is a component of God's sovereignty. When we speak of God's sovereignty, we ultimately talk about control, power, and authority. Because God is sovereign, He has absolute control, total power, and ultimate authority over everything." -Pastor Bill
3. Read Ezra 6:2-7. How was God actively involved in ensuring that the Temple would be rebuilt despite the opposition the Israelites faced, described in Ezra 1-5? Read Lamentation 3:37-39, Proverbs 19:12, & John 1:14. How can these truths provide patience and strength in the dark clouds of providence?
4. Read 2 Samuel 22:7, 2 Chronicles 2:12, 2 Chronicles 7:3, 1 Corinthians 3:16, and Revelation 21:22. What was the reason God was determined to have the Israelites rebuild the Temple? Read Ezra 6:8-12. What blessings from God did the Israelites receive through Darius? What blessings has the Lord provided for you in the dark clouds of life?

***Praise to Jesus.*** Praise God today and through the week. He lives in you through the Holy Spirit; you are invited to His table, and you will live with Him for eternity. He has promised that He will be with you, that He is for you, Jehovah Jirah, the God who provides. Since He was willing to provide His Son as an atoning sacrifice so that you can have a seat at this extravagant table of blessings, He will provide for you today and every day through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Spend time this week in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to confess and repent for the times you did not recognize the dark storms in your life as part of the Lord's divine providence. Confess the times you allow the storms to rob you of patience, poise, strength, or hope.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** Because God is sovereign, He has absolute control, total power, and ultimate authority over everything. Hold on to hope in the midst of the dark clouds of providence and talk about God's great purpose and provision to yourself, your family, your neighbors, and your coworkers.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The search for Cyrus's decree was first made in Babylonia, where Cyrus declared himself king in 539 B.C., and many exiled Jews lived. But the scroll containing the record of the decree was found in Ecbatana, a summer residence of the Persian kings, where Cyrus may have gone soon after he triumphed over Babylon. The province of Media was formerly the seat of an empire, but Cyrus had made it part of the Persian realm.

The document now discovered is called a record. It is apparently a memorandum concerning the decree rather than the decree itself. This record is different from the decree in Ezra 1. It makes new stipulations about the building, location, size, and materials.

While the original decree required people in Babylon to support the cost of the exiles' project ([Ezra 1:4](#)), this record requires that the price be met from the royal treasury. Darius not only confirms Cyrus's decree but also provides for costs to be met from taxes raised in Beyond the River itself ([v. 8](#)). He also provides for materials for sacrifice in perpetuity ([v. 9](#)), with the political stipulation that the Jews pray for the life of the king and his sons ([v. 10](#))—showing that Darius's generosity was part of his policy to sustain Persian power. Darius makes, in effect, a further decree backed up with a typically threatened sanction ([v. 11](#)). The final warning borrows language from the Jews' own way of speaking about God's presence in Jerusalem (the God who has caused his name to dwell there, [v. 12](#); cf. [Deut. 12:5](#)); Darius strikingly acknowledges the efficacy of the God of Jerusalem in his own place (although, like Cyrus in [Ezra 1:3](#), he might not be claiming that there is only one true God).

-adapted from the ESV Study Bible

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. Review Ezra 5 to remind your children about the opposition who tried to get the Israelites to stop the rebuilding. These enemies asked the Israelites who gave them the authority to rebuild the Temple. They sent a letter to King Darius to persuade him not to allow it.

2. From Ezra 6:1-12, what was King Darius' answer? Did he rule in favor of the Israelites or not? (Yes, King Darius reaffirms the decree made by King Cyrus that we read in Ezra 1:2-4. Remind your children that we know from the book of Ezra that God is in control, and He guided all these events. We see that from Ezra 1:1,5 and 5:1,5.)

3. From Ezra 6:8-10 who did King Darius require to pay for the temple rebuilding? (In Ezra 6:8, we read that the costs were to be from the "royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond the River." Make sure your children understand how amazing this is that not only did King Darius allow the Israelites to rebuild the Temple, but that these government leaders who opposed the Israelites had to pay for this rebuilding.)

Scriptures for further study:

Romans 8:28

Genesis 50:20

## FOR STUDENTS

1. The letter inspires King Darius to search for records of Cyrus's decree (recall 1:1-4). Read the results (6:1-12) and list the requirements of Darius's decree. What strikes you? What was King Darius evidently seeking? And what was God clearly doing for His people?
2. Darius refers to the "God who has caused His name to dwell there" --this "house of God that is in Jerusalem" (v.12). In what ways does Darius get God's purposes exactly right? See Deuteronomy 12:1-11 and 1 Kings 8:27-30.
3. How does the response of King Darius to the construction of the Temple illustrate God's control over the hearts of kings?
4. What can we learn about God's provision in this passage?
5. How do you see God's sovereignty displayed in your life as it was in the story of the rebuilding of the Temple?
6. How does God use people and circumstances in this chapter to accomplish His purposes? Can you recall a situation where you've seen this in your life?

## FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. When the enemies of Israel challenged the rebuilding of the temple, King Darius searched in the royal archives and discovered (and verified) that the former King Cyrus had indeed authorized the rebuilding of the temple. Thus the Israelites were vindicated. But not only was the rebuilding allowed to resume, King Darius further added that the temple was now to be financed completely through the royal treasury (verse 8), to which one commentator notes, “The opposition to the rebuilding of the temple succeeded only in getting the work financed.” What an incredible turn of events that only God could have orchestrated!

CONSIDER just a few examples in the Bible of how God took what Satan (or sinful people) intended for harm and turned it into a triumph:

- A. The story of Joseph and his brothers (culminating in Genesis 50:19-21)
- B. The story of Esther and the Jews triumphing over Haman (see Esther chapter 9)
- C. The story of Daniel triumphing over his enemies (Daniel chapter 6)
- D. The evil work of those who put Christ to death, but then God using this to accomplish his purposes and plans to save all those who believe (Acts 2:23-24)
- E. Satan giving Paul a “thorn in the flesh,” which God ultimately used to humble Paul and teach him that God’s grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12)
- F. Paul’s imprisonment actually resulting in the advance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12)

CONSIDER now, and trust, how God can and will take whatever failures, disappointments, setbacks, sins, or hardships in your life, and actually turn those things for His glory and for His good redemptive purposes in your life!

2. King Darius operated under the prevailing Persian political policy that if the King should placate the local deities, he can expect to experience peace and blessing in his realm. (verse 10) But not only is Yahweh not just some local deity, but King Darius took a falsely transactional approach to God (i.e. if I do good, then God can be expected or even obligated to bless me), which was really just a way of trying to control God.

QUESTION: King Darius’ approach should strike us as wrong, but if we were being honest with ourselves, don’t we also fall into the same false thinking that if we do certain good things, or behave in a certain way, then God is obligated to bless us?!

3. Scholars tell us that there was around 16 years of delay and procrastination between the time they first started to rebuild the temple, and the time that they would now resume the rebuilding.

QUESTION: What areas of your life have been on hold for many years? Has your relationship with God stalled out or stagnated for many years? Is your marriage in long need of repair and revitalization? This passage reminds us that with God there is always hope for a new beginning. What are some ways you can take action right now to step out in trust and obedience and allow God to do that restorative work?

# The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



*The Ancient of Days*, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork:

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." This artistic rendering by Blake serves to encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances.

William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to bringing prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible to life; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

As a child, he came home one day and told his parents he saw "a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His middle-class mom and dad greatly loved him and all their seven children but didn't appreciate their son's story. Only the pleas of his mom saved him from the "beating" his dad said he deserved! Blake's visions continued throughout his fifty years. Among his many visions, Blake saw Christ with his Apostles and a great procession of monks and priests and heard their chant." He saw "God's face pressed against his window, seeing angels among the haystacks, and being visited by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel." Blake believed the Bible was the most significant work of poetry ever written. It was the basis for the art. His love for the Bible and his visions were the stuff of a vast collection of visual and literary art through which Blake attempted to describe "the body of God.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.