

## Supplementary Materials for KOOL Journal for Parents/Adults

Week 3: 5 to 11 February, 2018 (pp. 26 – 33)

### Context

The freedom that the Persians gave other religious groups to practice their rites and beliefs - and to even support them with funds from the imperial treasury - was not just unusual in those days, it was unique. The Persian kings also prayed in the temples of the peoples they ruled as did Cyrus the Great in Babylon. This approach is intrinsic to the Zoroastrian ethic practised by the kings, and a lack of respect towards other religious groups was either a deviation from this norm or a response to groups that failed to respect the rights of others.

### Key Characters No.1: Haggai (“festive” or “festal”)

**Haggai** was probably born in captivity in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 538 BC (Ezra 1-2). As the returned exiles did not complete the rebuilding of the Temple due to opposition by their enemies, Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the leaders (**Zerubbabel and Jeshua**) and the people to get their priorities right and resume work after stopping for 10 years. Haggai warned them against putting their possessions and jobs ahead of God (Haggai 1:3-11). Neglect of our spiritual priorities can be just as devastating today to fulfilling God’s purpose. For more information on this prophet’s ministry, see Week 8’s study on the book of Haggai.

### Key Characters No.2: Zechariah (“Yahweh remembers”)

**Zechariah** was born in Babylon during the exile and was a fairly young man when he returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC. He began his priestly and prophetic ministry at the same time as Haggai (520-518 BC). His first prophecy was delivered two months after Haggai’s first prophecy. Unlike Haggai, he shared his visions of a future king who would one day establish an eternal kingdom. This gave the people hope. He combated the people’s spiritual apathy, despair over the pressures from their enemies and discouragement over the smaller scale of the new Temple foundation. Even in times of discouragement and despair, God is working out His plan. God protects and guides us; we just need to trust and follow him.

### Key Persian Characters

Ezra 6:14 mentions all the kings who decreed for the temple to be rebuilt: **Cyrus, Darius** (refer to Week 1 & 2 supplements) **and Artaxerxes** (refer to Week 5 supplement). Ezra 6:15 then mentions the Temple was completed in the sixth year of king Darius but even though the building itself was fully erected, the temple was not fully complete without the articles taken from Babylon and an Official Priest as mentioned in Ezra 7. Note that Cyrus is called the king of Persia in 1:1 and king of Babylon in 5:13 because Cyrus had just conquered Babylon and was king over both Persia and Babylon. Similarly, Darius was also called the Assyrian king (6:22) as he ruled over the conquered land of Assyria.

**Tattenai** is one of the few Persian officials mentioned in the Bible for whom there is independent attestation; he is mentioned in a promissory note in a cuneiform tablet dated 502 BCE. He was the

Persian governor of the Beyond the (Euphrates) River province where Judea was located but his seat of government could have been in Damascus although he resided in Samaria. At the beginning of Darius' reign in 521 BC, many revolts flared throughout the Persian Empire. In this volatile environment, Tattenai heard that the Jews were building the Temple (probably apprised of it by the groups who frustrated the rebuilding a decade earlier). As governor, Tattenai had to ensure that resumption of Temple construction would not evolve into another revolt. He did not rush to judgment but investigated the Jerusalem temple construction first hand. Meanwhile, he allowed the construction to continue until he heard back from King Darius. Tattenai recognized the people's desire for a place where they could worship their god. His investigations revealed that the Jews did have the royal permission to rebuild the Temple. He was instructed by Darius not only to let the Jews build their God's temple, but to pay the costs of rebuilding from the royal treasury. Such a decree would have reduced Tattenai's personal revenue and the amount of money the province sent to Darius; thus lessening his political influence with the royal government. Nonetheless, Tattenai enacted Darius' directions meticulously. Historical documents indicated that he was later promoted to satrap of the entire Trans-Euphrates region.

**Shethar-Bozenai** was numbered among the governor's staff, and may have been the official scribe who wrote a letter to Darius, regarding the activity of the Jews who were rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem.

### Ezra Chapters 5 – 6

#### Watch video

For another overview of Ezra and a different perspective, access this link:

David Pawson, **Unlocking the Old Testament Part 25 - Ezra and Nehemiah 1**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS-c9qS8uA8>, (33:53), published on Jan 12, 2015.

#### Review Verse of the Week **Ezra 5:2**

*Then Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel) and Joshua (son of Jozadak) set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.*

Date/Passage	Reflection and Response (R & R)
<p><b>Mon. 6</b> 5:1 – 5  { 5:1– 2}</p>	<p>Zerubbabel and Jeshua responded positively to the encouragement and challenge by Haggai and Zechariah to resume the construction of the Temple which had stopped for 10 years. This time it was carried out despite having an on-going investigation regarding the legality of the rebuilding process (5:3).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did Haggai and Zechariah get the returned exiles to resume rebuilding?</li> <li>• In the face of opposition or hindrances to doing God's work, how should we respond?</li> <li>• Reflect on 5:5 – <b>"God was watching over the Jewish elders."</b></li> </ul> <p>"Human power is inadequate to accomplish God's purposes." Marvin Williams</p>
<p><b>Tue. 7</b> 5:6 – 17</p>	<p>When confronted by Tattenai regarding the legality of the construction, the people boldly but respectfully replied, "We were the servants of the God of heaven and earth..." (5:11).</p>

<p>{Ezra 5:11–17}</p>	<p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What caused the people to be less intimidated by Tattenai compared to their reaction to the opposition they faced 10 years earlier?</li> <li>• When we face opposition, what specific steps can we take to persist in doing what is right in spite of our discouragement?</li> <li>• What is the difference between the letter to Darius and that written to Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:11-16 and their consequences?</li> </ul> <p>“Respect for authority brings glory to God.” Dave Branon</p>
<p><b>Wed. 8</b></p> <p>6:1 – 12</p> <p>{Ezra 6:1-2,12}</p>	<p>The returned exiles had kept an authentic copy of Cyrus’ decree, which might have stood them in good stead. The search began in Babylon (6:1) where Cyrus signed it. But when it was not found there, Darius ordered the rolls in other places to be searched (6:2), and at length it was found at Ecbatana (Cyrus’ summer capital). Perhaps the opposition group had hoped Cyrus’ decree could not be found, and a stop put to their work of rebuilding. But God’s purpose could not be thwarted. Darius’ decree that all assistance were to be given for the rebuilding of the Temple and the cost of any hindrance intimates that he knew the opposition group had a mind to hinder it. Note in 6:10 how he gave honour to Israel’s God, whom he called once and again the God of heaven. In 6:12, note that what Darius would not do himself to protect the Temple, he desired that God would do. Though this Temple was, at length, most justly destroyed by the righteous hand of God, the Romans as the instruments of that destruction in AD 70, felt the effects of this curse, for the Roman empire declined ever after.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did the Persian king Darius honour the God of Israel?</li> <li>• How is God’s sovereignty revealed in this turn of events?</li> <li>• How should we pray for those in authority?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Thu. 9</b></p> <p>6:13 – 18</p> <p>{Ezra 6:13 - 15}</p>	<p>The enemies of the Jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to suppress them, but, instead of that, they got an order to supply them. They did so with as much haste to encourage and assist the work as their predecessors had done to put a stop to it. The Jews themselves lost no time to complete the rebuilding in a short four years (6:15; 4:24) by 515 B.C., under the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah. The sacrifices that were offered for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings for the dedication of the Temple (6:17) could not to be compared to the 200 times more cattle and sheep that had been offered at the dedication of Solomon’s temple. But, being according to their present ability as returned exiles, these represented their rich generosity. More importantly, the sin offerings of a male goat for each of the 12 tribes represented atonement for their sin. Though the temple service could not now be performed with as much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, it was performed with as much purity and close adherence to the divine institution as ever, “according to what was written in the Book of Moses” (probably Leviticus).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Jews had often departed from following God’s Word (as revealed to them in the Pentateuch, leading them into the worst kinds of idolatry and immorality with devastating consequences including the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. Unlike them, we now have both the Old and New</li> </ul>

	<p>Testaments to guide us. What are some disciplines we can develop that will help us become more grounded in God’s Word?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In our worship at the church of today, why do we need/not need the worship leader/speaker to create that desire or motivate us to seek a closer personal relationship with God?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fri. 10</b> 6:19—22 {Ezra 6:19 - 22}</p>	<p>The Passover was an annual celebration commemorating Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (Exo 12:1-30). Note that besides the returned Israelite exiles, there were “others in the land who had turned from their immoral customs to worship the Lord, the God of Israel” (6:21). Together they celebrated with great joy the Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imagine the great joy celebrating in the Temple again after 70 years of captivity! How relevant are these two festive celebrations to us as Christians? Refer to 1 Cor 5:7-9.</li> <li>• There are many ways to pray for God’s help. Have we ever considered that God could change the attitude of a person or group of persons? Does He first need to change our own attitude?</li> <li>• What lessons can we draw from 6: 22?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sat. 11</b></p>	<p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have we learnt about God’s hand in history through these two chapters?</li> <li>• How do these lessons apply to each of our personal situations in life today?</li> </ul> <p>“The heart of kings is in the hand of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleases; what they are he makes them to be, for he is King of kings.” Matthew Henry.</p>

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