

# RESTORING THE BROKEN

## A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Read Ezra 5:2-17.

1. After a break of sixteen years, the Jews resume work on the temple.
  - a. What prompts them to restart this work? (5:1-2)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Who is it who once again initiates the action? (Hag. 1:1-4, 12; Ezra 5:1; compare Ezra 1:1)
  
2. What information does Tattenai, the governor, seek from the Jews? (vv. 3-4)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How does Tattenai describe the temple and the work God's people have been doing? (v. 8)

**THE GREAT GOD** (v. 8)

Tattenai's use of the expression "the great God" may make it sound as if he is acknowledging Israel's God as the one true God. However, "[this] expression... as used by an outsider, probably meant no more than 'their chief God'."<sup>1</sup>
  
4. Given the opposition the Jews previously faced, think how intimidating it must have been for them to have these officials come and demand the names of the builders (vv. 3, 10).
  - a. How do they identify themselves in answer to this demand? (v. 11)

- b. Having begun their work on the temple “as one man” (3:1), in the face of opposition (4:1-5) they resorted to securing their own homes and abandoning the work of the Lord (Hag. 1:2-4). We will also be tempted to do the same in the face of opposition and trials. How do you think identifying as “servants of the God of heaven and earth” (5:11) reinforces the community of faith and encourages us to keep engaged in the work of the Lord?

5. What explanation do the Jewish elders give for why the first temple was destroyed? (v. 12)

6. In ancient times, when one people group defeated another, their victory was often interpreted as meaning that their God or gods had defeated the God or gods of the losers. How do the Jewish elders’ description of God and their explanation of the defeat of Judah undermine that common interpretation of events?<sup>2</sup> (vv. 11–12)

7. What authority do the Jewish elders give for their work? (vv. 13–16)

8. Why do you think so many details are included in Tattenai’s letter? (vv. 7-16)

9. With what request does Tattenai close his letter? (v. 17)

10. How would you characterize Tattenai’s letter—that is, what tone or attitude does it convey?

11. How does what Tattenai is doing in this chapter compare with what the neighboring peoples were doing in 4:4–5?
  
12. Through Jeremiah God had told his sinful people that he would send them into exile for 70 years and then bring them back into the Promised Land. When the 70 years was up, God moved Cyrus to decree that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt (1:1–2). Later, after a sixteen-year break during which the people experienced opposition from the peoples around them and ultimately seemed to lose sight of their goal of building a temple, God sent not one but two prophets to move the people to resume their work. What does all this suggest about God’s plans?

Then, after the work of building is finally resumed (v. 2), the governor starts asking questions (vv. 3ff.), and it looks like the building project might be facing another obstacle. But what reassuring truth does the author remind his readers of in verse 5? (📖\* 2 Chr. 16:9)

13. Ezra is a historical record, complete with historical documents like the letter in this week’s passage. But unlike typical historical records, the Bible always gives us insight into God’s care for his people. Today the same God continues to keep his eye (v. 5) on his people. Remember, God sees you and is accomplishing his plans (Eph. 1:11).

So let’s try to apply this. In light of these truths, how would you tell the story of your life? If you don’t feel like you can do this right now, ask God to fill you with faith to trust in his care for you.

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This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

📖\* For further study

<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Kidner, 55.