

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

6

Ezra chapter 6 “will bring the story of the first twenty-odd years of the Return [from exile] to a satisfying conclusion, rounding off what we know of the age of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. A new age, that of Ezra and Nehemiah, will open in chapter 7, a lifetime away from these events.”¹

Read Ezra 6:1-12. The Decree of Darius²

1. In response to Governor Tattenai's request (5:17), King Darius orders a search of Babylonian archives. What is found, not in Babylon, but “in the citadel of Ecbatana” (v. 2)? (v. 2)
2. King Cyrus's proclamation in 1:2-4 and the memorandum recorded in 6:3-5 are “two independent records concerning the same case,”⁴ and the two records read quite differently.
 - a. What is the focus of the proclamation – written in Hebrew, the language of the exiles?
 - b. What is the focus of the memorandum – written in Aramaic, the language of the Persian officials?
 - c. Why do you think the proclamation and the memorandum differ so significantly in content?
 - d. How do you think God worked through both for the good of his people?

THE CITADEL OF ECBATANA

Ecbatana was the capital city of Media, a province under Persian rule (see the map provided at the beginning of our study). Located in what is now northwestern Iran, this mountain fortress served as a summer residence for Cyrus who “had stayed at Ecbatana in the summer of his first year as king of Babylon, the year in which he made this decision”³ to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

3. What instructions does King Darius give Governor Tattenai and his officials...

a. ...concerning the continuance of work on the temple? (vv. 6-7)

b. ...concerning funding for the project? (vv. 4b, 8b)

c. ...concerning Jewish ritual worship? (vv. 9-10a)

SIXTY CUBITS BY SIXTY CUBITS (6:3)*

“These dimensions... are probably not specifications of the temple as built but of the outer limits of a building the Persians were willing to subsidize. The second temple was not as grandiose as the first (3:12; Hag 2:3).”⁵

*Sixty cubits (or ninety feet) refers to the width and height of the façade.

4. What does King Darius hope the people will do while worshipping in the temple? (v. 10b)

Because we worship “the God of heaven” (v. 10) like the remnant, we have the privilege of praying for those in authority over us. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6 and take some time to lift up our leaders in prayer.

5. What severe warnings does King Darius’s decree contain? (vv. 11-12)

Read Ezra 6:13-18. Completion and Dedication of the Temple

6. Verses 13-15 almost sound like the epilogue at the end of a movie, tying up the different threads of the story line in minimal detail. What do we learn about...

a. ...the Persian officials? (v. 13)

b. ...“the elders of the Jews” (v. 14) and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah? (v. 14)

c. ...the progress of the temple project? (vv. 14b, 15)

d. ...the sovereignty of God? (vv. 13-15)

7. When the foundation of the temple was laid there was both weeping and joy (3:10-12). But many years have passed, many challenges have been faced, many promises from God kept, and provisions from God made. Now that rebuilding is complete, only joy remains among “the people of Israel – the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles” (v. 16). Given what you have learned so far in our study, what reasons can you think of for this overwhelming sense of joy?

8. What do the Israelites do to dedicate “this house of God” (v. 17)? (vv. 17-18)

Read Ezra 6:19-22. The Passover

9. “On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover” (v. 19). (📖 * Exod. 12, especially verses 14, 17-18, 24-25)

a. What details of this celebration are mentioned in these verses? (vv. 19-22)


b. Who do the Israelites welcome to share in the celebration? (v. 21)

c. Why do you think this Passover might have been an especially meaningful celebration for the returned exiles?

10. Verse 22 again speaks of the Israelites' joy.
- a. What, or rather who, "filled them with joy" (v. 22)?

 - b. What amazing thing did he do for them that prompted this joy?
11. Chapter six ends with a seven-day joy-filled celebration. "It was more than a political celebration or a displaced person's gladness at his return home. This was a deeply religious joy 'because the Lord had filled them with joy.'"⁶
- When has the Lord filled you with joy? Take time to reflect on this and give thanks. Look for an opportunity to share with others what God has done for you.

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.

¹ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezra & Nehemiah, An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 56.

² Section headings are from the NIV translation.

³ Kidner, 56.

⁴ E. J. Bickerman, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra I," quoted in Kidner, 56.

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 674 (footnote on 6:3).

⁶ Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 647.