

Finishing the Work with Joy

The Search That Changed Everything (vv. 1–5)

“Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives...” (v. 1 NKJV)

When the local Persian officials questioned the legitimacy of the temple rebuilding, King Darius ordered a thorough search through the royal archives. Surprisingly, the scroll wasn't found in Babylon, but in Achmetha (Ecbatana), a summer palace in the province of the Medes.

There they discovered Cyrus's original decree (see Ezra 1)—a document that not only confirmed the Jews' right to rebuild but ordered that the expenses be covered by the royal treasury. This was a divine reversal: what the enemy intended to stop, God used to accelerate and fund His work.

“Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury...” (v. 4)

This was a remarkable act of God's providence. Not only was their right to build upheld, but now the Persian government would supply the funds and sacrificial animals to support worship in the temple.

The Decree That Defended the Builders (vv. 6–12)

“Let the work of this house of God alone...” (v. 7)

“Whatever they need... let it be given to them day by day without fail.” (v. 9)

King Darius didn't just endorse the project—he protected it. He commanded the local officials to stop interfering, to help the Jews, and to provide daily provisions. The order even included a curse for anyone who would oppose the work:

“Let him be hanged on wood pulled from his own house...” (v. 11)

This mirrors the fate of Haman in Esther's day, who was executed on the very gallows he prepared for Mordecai. God is not only able to reverse opposition—He can turn curses into blessings and enemies into instruments of support.

The Temple Is Completed (vv. 13–15)

“So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah...” (v. 14)

The rebuilding project was finished in the sixth year of King Darius's reign, about 516 BC, exactly 70 years after the temple's destruction—just as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 25:11–12).

The people didn't just build—they prospered. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah not only preached, but also encouraged and helped. God's people moved forward when God's Word took priority.

Dedication and Celebration (vv. 16–18)

“Then the children of Israel... kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.” (v. 16)

Once the temple was finished, the people gathered in unity to dedicate it to God. They offered hundreds of sacrifices, including twelve goats as a sin offering—symbolizing all twelve tribes of Israel. This act of worship pointed to national unity and spiritual restoration, despite only a remnant being present.

They also reestablished the priests and Levites in their proper roles, according to the Law of Moses. This wasn't just about a building—it was about restoring the heart of worship in Israel.

Passover and the Joy of Restoration (vv. 19–22)

“And they kept the Passover... and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy...” (vv. 19, 22)

For the first time since exile, the people kept the Passover in their own land, in a newly built temple, with purified priests and joyful hearts. They remembered their deliverance from Egypt while experiencing a new kind of deliverance—from exile.

And they weren't alone. Verse 21 says others had “separated themselves from the filth of the nations” and joined them. This speaks of repentance and spiritual renewal. Worship was no longer confined to lineage—but open to those who sought the Lord with sincere hearts.

“The LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them...” (v. 22)

Even though Darius ruled the Persian Empire, Ezra refers to him as the “king of Assyria,” reminding the reader that God is sovereign over all empires, past and present. He can turn the heart of any ruler (cf. Proverbs 21:1).

Personal Application: God's Plans Are Not Easily Stopped

1. **God remembers His promises** – Even when man forgets, God's decrees stand. What He began through Cyrus, He brought to completion through Darius.
2. **Opposition cannot stop God's work** – Delays may come, but **God's purposes prevail**. What the enemy tries to destroy, God uses for good.
3. **Joy follows obedience** – When we walk in obedience, especially in worship and repentance, **God fills our hearts with joy**.
4. **God can turn hearts in high places** – Whether it's kings, leaders, or authorities, **God is still in control**. Pray for leaders. God can move them to bless His people.
5. **Worship restores identity** – The rebuilding of the temple led to a renewed sense of **who they were**, why they had been exiled, and what it meant to follow the Lord again. Worship centers us.

Key Reflection Questions

- What promises of God do you need to revisit and trust again today?
- Where has opposition delayed you, and how might God be working behind the scenes?
- Is your joy tied to your circumstances, or to obedience and worship?
- How can you be like Haggai and Zechariah—encouraging others to keep building?