

Ezra 1-5 and Haggai
Zerubbabel Begins Rebuilding the Temple
Lesson 5

Key Verse

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

—Galatians 6:9

Key Verse Thought: Read the Key Verse. Understand that sometimes we get tired of doing what God wants us to do, but we are *never* to quit! God has promised to honor our work – if we do not quit. In this lesson, we will see God’s people begin the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Emphasis: Christians should never become tired of doing what God has for us – even when the adversaries try to stop us. We are to complete what God has for us to do, knowing He will honor that work.

Lesson Summary: As we begin this lesson, we remember that the people were carried captive in three definite movements. We will discover that the people were returned back to their homeland in three definite movements. We will learn of the first movement, led by Zerubbabel, today.

Cyrus was now ruler in the land of captivity (remember the Babylonians were defeated by the Medes and Persians). We will read that God stirred Cyrus’ heart to send people home (to Jerusalem) to rebuild the house of the Lord. Not only that, but he sent many treasures back to Jerusalem with the people – including the vessels that belonged in the house of the Lord. The first group to return to Jerusalem was led by Zerubbabel, a descendant of David.

Once they reached Jerusalem, Zerubbabel remained a leader. Jeshua (Joshua) was the high priest. These two men led the people first to rebuild the altar of the Lord. Then they laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord. That was when the troubles began. Adversaries arose, and Zerubbabel understood they were not for God’s people, but against them. Zerubbabel would not allow them to help in the building of God’s house. These adversaries caused trouble for years, stopping the building of the Temple.

God then sent His prophet, Haggai, to encourage the people to build the house of the Lord. First, he scolded them for living in their nice houses while the Temple of the Lord was not completed. He reminded the people that God was to come first. “7. **Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.** 8. **Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD**” (Haggai 1:7-8). Haggai then encouraged the leaders to complete the Temple. Zerubbabel and Joshua stepped up and began work on the Temple again – and God kept the enemy from stopping them.

Suggested Bible Reading to Prepare for This Lesson

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| • Monday: Ezra 1 | • Thursday: Ezra 4 |
| • Tuesday: Ezra 2 | • Friday: Ezra 5 |
| • Wednesday: Ezra 3 | • Saturday: Haggai 1- 2 |

Ezra 1-5 and Haggai
Zerubbabel Begins Rebuilding the Temple

1. Exiles Return (Ezra 1-2)
 - Cyrus' Decree
 - Zerubbabel leads captives home
2. Temple Building Begins (Ezra 3-4)
 - Foundation
 - Adversaries revealed
 - Building stopped
3. Haggai's Challenge (Haggai 1-2)
 - Build the house
 - The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant
4. Building Resumed (Ezra 5)
 - The people encouraged to build
 - The enemy opposes once again

Note: Remember that the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah took place in three definite movements:

1. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, taking Jehoiakim and many leading nobles (princes, possibly including Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mischaiah, and Azariah) captive
2. Nebuchadnezzar invaded a second time, took Jehoiachin and the most important people (most likely including Ezekiel)
3. When Zedekiah broke his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, joining an alliance with Egypt, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem burning the Temple and taking the final hostages to Babylon

Also, recall the final words we read in Second Chronicles that told us that the people of the Lord would be restored to their homeland (after the seventy years of captivity were fulfilled). “22. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD *spoken* by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, 23. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. Who *is there* among you of all his people? The LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up” (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). God touched the heart of King Cyrus to send His people home to rebuild the Temple.

In this lesson, we will learn of the first of the three definite movements of the return of God’s people back to Jerusalem:

1. Cyrus (of Persia) issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. Zerubbabel led this first group.
2. Ezra, a scribe and priest, led a second group back to Jerusalem about eighty years later.
3. Nehemiah returned to rebuild the city walls (the walls that had been broken and the gates that had been burned) of Jerusalem

1. Exiles Return (Ezra 1-2)

We found in our last lesson that the Medes and Persians defeated Babylon. “28. *PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.* 31. *And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old*” (Daniel 5:28, 31).

As we begin this lesson in the book of Ezra, we read that Cyrus was the ruler (just as God told us he would be when we read the end of Second Chronicles).

1. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, 2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. (Ezra 1:1-2)

Take notice that God stirred Cyrus’ heart to send the Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild God’s Temple. “Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God *be* with him, and let

him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:3). Notice that Cyrus too, acknowledged God as the God. Another interesting thing to consider: last week we learned that Daniel still prospered into the reign of Cyrus. “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Daniel 6:28). He saw God’s people return to Jerusalem.

God raised up men to return to Jerusalem to build the house of the Lord (see Ezra 1:5-6). In addition, King Cyrus brought all of the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the house of the Lord, had them numbered, and sent them back to Jerusalem.

Zerubbabel led the first group of the remnant back.

1. Now these *are* the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; 2. Which came with Zerubbabel ... (Ezra 2:1-2a)

The rest of Ezra chapter two lists the people who returned to Jerusalem. “64. The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred *and* threescore, 65. Beside their servants and their maids, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and *there were* among them two hundred singing men and singing women” (Ezra 2:64-65). Around fifty thousand people journeyed to Jerusalem in the first return of the captives.

A Deeper Path: As we just read at the beginning of Ezra, “The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Proverbs 21:1). What an amazing statement! Always remember that God is in control.

2. Temple Building Begins (Ezra 3-4)

Once the people were back in the land, the people gathered in Jerusalem. Jeshua (Joshua), Zerubbabel, and other priests built up the altar of God to offer offerings according to the writings in the Law of Moses. They proceeded to reestablish the feast of tabernacles and offer the daily offerings. “From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid” (Ezra 3:6). They gave money to the masons and carpenters, and they began to bring cedar trees to rebuild.

After two years, Zerubbabel, Jeshua (Joshua), and the priests and Levites began to set forward the work of the house of the Lord (see Ezra 3:8).

10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. (Ezra 3:10-11)

The foundation of the Temple of the Lord was now laid, but there was mixed emotion when this took place. We just read of the singing and praising that took place because the foundation of the Temple was built. Nevertheless, for those who were very old, those who had seen the Temple King Solomon had built, this was a time of great sorrow.

12. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: 13. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off. (Ezra 3:12-13)

This building could never match the glory and beauty of the Temple King Solomon had built. But it was still a time of rejoicing for what God had done. He had allowed His people to return to their homeland, and the Temple of the Lord was being rebuilt.

Do you remember what happens when God's people begin to serve God? The adversaries make themselves known. "1. Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; 2. Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye *do*..." (Ezra 4:1-2). **Adversaries** means "*one who troubles; an opponent; or an enemy.*" Zerubbabel understood that these men were not with them, but were against them and would cause trouble. Instead of receiving their help, see what happened. "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us" (Ezra 4:3). Nevertheless, the adversaries caused trouble. "4. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, 5. And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4-5). This was not a one-time trouble. They caused trouble for years and years, stopping the building of the Temple – which was the ulterior motive.

Read what they wrote in their letter to the king: Ezra 4:11-16:

- "11. This *is* the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, *even* unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.
12. Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls *thereof*, and joined the foundations.
13. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up *again*, *then* will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and *so* thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.
14. Now because we have maintenance from *the king's* palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;
15. That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.

16. We certify the king that, if this city be builded *again*, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.”

They mixed lies in with the truth.

Read the King’s response: Ezra 4:18-22:

- “18. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.
19. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and *that* rebellion and sedition have been made therein.
20. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all *countries* beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.
21. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until *another* commandment shall be given from me.
22. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?”

The king checked the historical records and sure enough, Israel was once a strong and mighty nation that ruled over all of the nations around, excising taxes. However, they were no longer that mighty nation. We just read that only around fifty-thousand people returned to the land to begin to rebuild. The letter to the king implied that they were rebuilding and strengthening the city; which they had not. All they had done was to begin rebuilding the Temple – with the blessings of King Cyrus. What happened when the king’s letter was read? “23. *Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes’ letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. 24. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia*” (Ezra 4:23-24).

The adversaries’ purpose had been accomplished – the building had been stopped.

“Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that *were* in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, *even* unto them.” (Ezra 5:1).

A Deeper Path: Just as the adversaries stopped the building of the Temple, even today, Christians have an adversary who is set about to stop the work of the Lord in this world. “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8).

Knowing Satan wants to defeat Christians, how can we survive his attacks? “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7). When we submit to God and His will in our lives, we can defeat Satan. Although the building on the Temple stopped, read on to see what God did for His people.

3. Haggai’s Challenge (Haggai 1-2)

When the adversaries came and stopped the work of the Temple, God sent a prophet to encourage the people (and even scold them for stopping their work). Remember: “*Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia*” (Ezra 4:24). Then read the first verse of Haggai. “*In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the*

LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying” (Haggai 1:1). Notice that God gave the people time to begin building again, but when they would not do it on their own, He sent His prophet, Haggai, to speak to them. For instead of building God’s house, they built their own – and they built nice houses!

Read the message God gave to Haggai to speak to His people.

4. *Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?* 5. Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 6. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes. 7. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 8. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. (Haggai 1:4-8)

When God’s people quit serving God, rebuilding His house, although they lived in nice houses, God’s blessings were not on their lives. It was as if they were earning lots of money and putting it in a bag with holes – they still did not have any money! God told them to consider their ways – get their priorities right! First, they had to put their heart upon God and the things of God. They had to resolve, in their heart, to do what God required of them. That was why God’s discipline was upon them (for there was a famine in the land. See Haggai 1:10-11). God’s people were to be about His business first. Then God would provide everything that they needed. They had not completed God’s work, so He sent a prophet to speak them. Therefore, once again, God commissioned them to, “*Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house*” (Haggai 1:8), for then God would be pleased. As we continue reading, we understand that God had sent that drought upon the land because they had quit God, refusing to complete His house.

What did the people do? “*Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD*” (Haggai 1:12). Once the people obeyed the voice of the Lord and feared Him, read the encouragement God gave to them. “*I am with you, saith the LORD*” (Haggai 1:13b).

Once the people decided to obey God and God gave them the encouragement that He would be with them, recognize what else God did for His people. “*And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God*” (Haggai 1:14). God did not leave His people alone. He stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua to lead the people. God understood that His people needed to have physical leaders that they could see, hear, and with whom they could talk. God provided for that need.

God then has Haggai give specific, encouraging, words to those leaders: Zerubbabel, Joshua, and to the few who remembered the Temple in its former glory.

3. Who *is* left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? *is it* not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? 4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I *am* with you, saith the LORD of hosts: 5. *According to* the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. (Haggai 2:3-5)

The words **be strong** mean “*to strengthen, support; to be courageous, be valiant, be helpful; to hold fast; to harden.*” They were to not quit, but be courageous and hold fast to the task at hand – completing the Temple. Also, understand that God was sensitive to the broken heartedness of those who had seen the glory of the former Temple.

7. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. 8. The silver *is* mine, and the gold *is* mine, saith the LORD of hosts. 9. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:7-9)

God promised that the glory that filled this house would be greater than the glory that filled the previous house. For Jesus, Himself, entered into this Temple while He was on earth; being God in the flesh. “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). God wanted them to know that completing this Temple was important.

A Deeper Path: Christians are to be about the business God has placed before them – first. “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33). Then God will meet any need his people may have.

Once a Christian chooses to walk with God, obeying His commands, troubles may come – just as we have learned today. Read the following verse that should be an encouragement to all Christians. “*What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?*” (Romans 8:31).

4. Building Resumed (Ezra 5)

Once Haggai encouraged the Israelites with God’s Words, “*Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem: and with them *were* the prophets of God helping them*” (Ezra 5:2). See the result when enemies came against them to try to stop them again. “*But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this *matter**” (Ezra 5:5). Once again, the letter was telling the king that the Jews had resumed working on the Temple. However, the governor, Tatnai (and his companions), wrote to the king asking about the permission the people had received from Cyrus. “*Now therefore, if *it seem* good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which *is* there at Babylon, whether it be *so*, that a decree was made of*

Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter” (Ezra 5:17).

Ezra 1-5 and Haggai 1-2 at a Glance:

Ezra:

- Chapter 1: Cyrus made a decree for any who would to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of the one true God
- Chapter 2: A listing and numbering of the returning exiles with Zerubbabel; the people returned and lived in their cities in Israel
- Chapter 3: First, they set up an altar to reestablish offerings; began preparing for the rebuilding of the Temple; foundation laid
- Chapter 4: Adversaries wanted to help build the Temple, but were not allowed; instead, they falsely accused and the building stopped
- Chapter 5: Years later building was resumed led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua; when challenged, a letter was sent asking King Darius what was permitted

Haggai:

- Chapter 1: Haggai challenged the people to go up to the mountain and build the house of the Lord; the Lord stirred up Zerubbabel
- Chapter 2: Haggai encouraged Zerubbabel and the people with a Word from the Lord – for the glory of the latter will be greater than the glory of the former; people reproved for their unfaithfulness

Reinforcement: In this lesson, we saw the beginning of God’s promise to return His people to their homeland. After building an altar, thanking God, they began to rebuild the Temple. However, they only completed the foundation. Once the work of God had begun, the adversaries made themselves known. However, Zerubbabel recognized that they were not for God so he would not allow them to help. We learned that they were not trying to help the work of God, but trying to stop it. And they did stop the building process. Nevertheless, when this happened, God sent a prophet, Haggai, to encourage the people. He reminded them that God was to come first in their lives. They must complete the work that God had for them. He even had specific words for the leaders. When the leaders acted upon those words, the people followed and the work began again.

As we learned in our key verse today (“**And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not**” Galatians 6:9), we are to never quit serving God as the Israelites did when the adversary opposed them. We must not only recognize the adversaries who try to stop God’s work, but we must continue what God has for us to do. God will also encourage us through His Word (the Bible) just as he encouraged the Israelites through His prophet, Haggai.

Closing: It would be good to close with a short prayer reinforcing today’s lesson. Always include any prayer requests you may have. *Today, pray that we will not be weary in well doing, but complete what God has for us – knowing God will honor that work if we do not quit!*