

Making a New Beginning with God

Ezra 5:1-17

How do you respond when everything you stand for—the gospel, the truth of the Scriptures, Christian morality, all of it—is challenged, mocked, opposed, and scorned?

When that happens, it is easy to give up and quit. We can cave in to fear of people. We can question whether or not it is worth being faithful. It is easy to compromise, to stay away from church, to stop reading Scripture.

When we get off track spiritually, we need to make a new beginning with God. We need to listen to God's Word, resist fear and criticism, and recommit ourselves to obeying God's commands.

To make a new beginning with God ...

King Cyrus of Persia issued the decree for the Jews to return to the Promised Land in 538 BC. They laid the foundation for the temple and began building in 536 BC. After initial opposition (4:4-5), they stopped building in 536 BC. Little work is done for 16 years until 520 BC.

Listen to the encouragement of godly people (1)

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah brought messages of rebuke, exhortation, encouragement, and assurance. Haggai (August – December 520 BC) reprimanded the people for neglecting God's house. People stopped rebuilding the temple and focused on building their own houses. Zechariah (October 520 BC – February 519 BC) encouraged the people to give God's interests priority over their own. He reminded them that the Messiah would one day walk in that temple.

Drought plagued the area, crops were meager, neighbors were hostile, and the people were apathetic about spiritual things. Both prophets placed the blame for the hard times the nation experienced during this period on the people's lack of obedience in not rebuilding the temple.

Reestablish the priority of worship (2)

Zerubbabel (civil leader) and Jeshua (religious leader) and their teams started working again. If the leaders had not led, if they had not responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the prophets, it would have been difficult to get the people to act in faith.

Expect opposition (3-17)

Tattenai, the Persian governor of Syria-Palestine, asked to see the building permit. The Persian Empire had undergone political upheaval since Cyrus' death in 530 BC. He may also have been concerned because of Zechariah's prophecies that the Messiah would soon appear and sit on David's throne.

Tattenai wrote a fair and objective letter, in contrast to Rehum and Shimshai's letter to Artaxerxes (4:11-16).

Opposition to Temple Construction Ezra 4-5			
Scripture	The form it took	What it tested	The reaction
4:1-2	Israel's enemies offered to help.	The Jews' wisdom (2 Corinthians 6:14)	Zerubbabel declined the offer.
4:4-5	They discouraged and frightened the builders.	Their faith (2 Timothy 1:7)	The Jews trusted God and pressed on.
4:6-23	They tried legal action and red tape.	Their patience (Matthew 16:18)	God gave a favorable decision through Artaxerxes, and Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the Jews.
5:3	They demanded proof of authority to build.	Their perseverance (Matthew 28:19-20)	The builders kept on working.

Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezra 2024, <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/ezra.pdf>

Rely on God (5)

Tattenai could have stopped the work, but he recognized God's hand was on the Jews.

"The hand of the Lord was on him" is repeated several times in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Nehemiah 2:8, 18). God was providentially caring for them (by his "eye") and blessing them (by his "hand").

Stand firm & keep working (5)

Despite the opposition, the builders kept working. Their persistence and perseverance indicates the people's faith that God would continue to keep the door open for continuing the work.

Know your identity and purpose (11)

The Jews knew whom they belonged to, the God of heaven and earth. They also knew their purpose, to rebuild the temple, the house of God.

Own your sin (12)

The Jews acknowledged that their sin caused them to experience punishment and exile. They recognized Nebuchadnezzar was God's agent in bringing judgment on his people.

Know your rights and communicate them (13-15)

The Jews made mention of the decree by Cyrus to return home and rebuild the temple. They had legal backing for their actions.

Wait on God for the outcome (17)

The Jews kept working while they waited for the official decision. The process would have taken 4-5 months to send and receive a reply.