

## Victory over the Enemy

**Text:** Ezra 6:1-22

### Introduction:

1. Ezra 6 records the reversal of Tatnai's attempt to stop the work of God from going ahead. It is a wonderful testament to the power of God to give victory over the attacks of the enemy when God's people remain faithful at their post in the midst of the battle and keep on working for Him. Have a no retreat mindset as a believer!
2. The chapter also reminds us that God alone is the source of true victory. We are no match for the enemy with our own strength and resources but the power and Providential workings of God are more than enough to meet the challenge.
3. Concerning the structure of the chapter, M.K. Hall writes, "The first part of the chapter (1-12) is concerned with decrees – that of Cyrus, and three now made by Darius. The second section (Vs. 13-22) records the triumphant completion of the house of God and the joy which flowed from this and from obedience to the law of God in the celebration of the Passover."
4. We should also note that this chapter marks the end of the first main section in Ezra that deals with the rebuilding of the temple. Chapter 7-10 deals with the ministry of Ezra.
5. We will divide the chapter under 3 headings as we see God's hand work to bring about this victory.

### I. THE PRESERVATION OF THE WORK (VS. 1-12)

All through Ezra we see God's hand moving in the hearts of the Persian kings to ensure His work can go ahead. It is a reminder of how "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD (Prov. 21:1). God used two Persian decrees to preserve His work – one in the past from Cyrus and a new decree in the present from Darius. In fact, there are three decrees of Darius between verse 1-12. We could call them:

- The Decree to Search (Vs. 1-7)
- The Decree to Supply (Vs. 8-10)
- The Decree to Sentence (Vs. 11-12)

#### A. The Decree to Search (Vs. 1-7)

1. The Recovery of Cyrus' Decree (Vs. 1-2).
  - a. Where the roll was not found (Vs. 1). Search was made in the treasure house of Babylon but the copy of Cyrus' decree was not found.
  - b. Where the roll was found (Vs. 2). It was found at another palace in Achmetha which is noted as being in the province of the Medes.

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- i. Remember, the Persian Empire was made up of both the Medes and the Persians, the Persians eventually becoming the more dominant of the two groups.
  - ii. Achmetha was Cyrus' original capital, hence why the scroll was found there. Bible commentator M.K. Hall explains, "Greek historians of the period say that this city was the capital of the province of Media, and was Cyrus' capital city before the conquest of Babylon. It is also known that in 538 BC Cyrus, as was his wont, spent the summer in Ecbatana (Achmetha). Almost certainly, therefore, his decree charging the Jewish captives to go up to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord was issued from this city, and it explains why the record was found in the palace at Achmetha."
  - c. Note: The discovery of the decree of Cyrus validated the claims of the godly remnant. It is important that when we are challenged as believers, we speak the truth so that when the world searches out our claims, our testimony is maintained when they find we spoke the truth. It reminds us of the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 4:1-2 "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have **renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully**; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Don't lie to try and help out the cause of Christ! It will end in disaster. **The truth will always stack up to scrutiny!**
2. The Record of Cyrus' Decree (Vs. 3-5)
- We have encountered the content of Cyrus' decree earlier in the and it is quoted again here but now with some additional details. Cyrus decreed:
- a. The Rebuilding of the Temple (Vs. 3-4)
    - i. The place for the temple (Vs. 3a)
    - ii. The dimensions for the temple (Vs. 3b). "Its height and its width were each to be sixty cubits. No length is mentioned. Keil suggest this was because the length was assumed to be the same as that of Solomon's temple – 60 cubits. It is also interesting to note that the height and breadth of the first Temple were smaller than these dimensions in Zerubbabel's temple, being respectively thirty and twenty cubits (1 Kings 6:2). (Hall)
    - iii. The materials for the temple (Vs. 4a). The temple was to be made of great stones with timber supports. Peter picks up on this picture in the New Testament as he refers to

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believers as living stones in the church. “Ye also, as **lively stones**, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5) Christ is the Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:6).

- iv. The provisions for the temple (Vs. 4b). The expenses of the project were to be covered out of the king’s treasury.
  - b. The Restoration of the Vessels (Vs. 5). There is an additional detail concerning the vessels in this verse. The king was concerned that each vessel be in its proper place – “every one to his place”. Every Christian needs to be in their proper place in the local church if it is going to run in a God-honouring fashion.
3. The Ratifying of Cyrus’ Decree (Vs. 6-7)  
Darius’ instruction was clear, blunt and unambiguous.
    - a. Leave it be! (Vs. 6)
    - b. Let it be built! (Vs. 7)

### B. The Decree to Supply (Vs. 8-10)

Darius now issues his own decree to aid the work. Under Persian law, he could not reverse Cyrus’ decreed but he could add his own decree. God moved in his heart to ensure it was a favourable decree. Remember how Artaxerxes wrote a second decree as recorded in Esther that effectively dismantled the first.

1. The Materials (Vs. 8-9)  
“God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply!”  
(Hudson Taylor)
  - a. The construction costs of God’s house (Vs. 8).
  - b. The running costs of God’s house (Vs. 9-10).
2. The Motivation (Vs. 8b, 10)  
The king was motivated to ensure:
  - a. The success of the project – “that they be not hindered” (Vs. 8b).
  - b. The supplications of the people – “and pray for the life of the king” (Vs. 10). This says something of Darius’ character as a heathen monarch. The Bible gives no indication that he became a true believer in the One True God of Israel but he evidently had a reverence for God and believed in the power of prayer. A good ruler will covet the prayers of God’s people. We are commanded to pray for those in positions of authority over us (1 Tim. 2:2).

### C. The Decree to Sentence (Vs. 11-12)

A double warning is added by Darius to motivate obedience. There is a two-fold sentence against those who would disobey the king’s commandment and interfere with the work. There was:

1. A death sentence instituted (Vs. 11).

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- a. The command was not to be altered - “whosoever shall alter this word”. To tamper with or disobey the king’s command would be a most serious offense. If it was such a serious offence to alter an earthly king’s word, how much more serious is it to tamper with and disobey the Word of the King of kings! And yet the Word of God is being tampered with all the time in the modern version and by believers who try to twist the Word of God to say something it does not say (See Rev. 22:18). How many believers would not break certain laws of the land on account of the stiff penalties that would apply and yet think nothing of disobeying God Almighty.
  - b. The penalty was severe. The offender’s house was to be pulled down, then he was to be hung on timber from his own house. His house was then to be in ruins and never used again except for unclean purposes. Strong penalties for crime in a society is a good thing as it serves as a powerful deterrent to evil.
2. A Divine sentence invoked (Vs. 12)
- a. Darius further proclaims his desire that God Himself would destroy those who would try and damage and destroy God’s house.
  - b. It reminds us of the New Testament warning in 1 Cor. 3:17 “If any man **defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy**; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.” The words ‘defile’ and ‘destroy’ come from the same Greek word ‘phtheiro’ which means to corrupt, ruin, destroy. Concerning this word A.T. Robertson writes, “God makes his home in the hearts of his people or the church in any given place like Corinth. It is a terrible thing to tear down ruthlessly a church or temple of God like an earthquake that shatters a building in ruins. This old verb ‘*phtheirō*’ means to corrupt, to deprave, to destroy. It is a gross sin to be a church-wrecker. There are actually a few preachers who leave behind them ruin like a tornado in their path.”

## II. THE PROSPERING OF THE WORK (VS. 13-15)

The work went on, prospered and ultimately was completed. There were several things that helped bring about the success of the work.

### A. The Defeat of the Adversary (Vs. 13)

1. The enemy’s opposition was paused by the Providential workings of God through Darius, giving the remnant space to complete the project.
2. This is the nature of the Christian life. There are times of intense battle followed by seasons of respite before the attack is renewed.

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Luke 4:13 “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him **for a season.**”

3. You still have to build during the battle! The remnant did that during Tatnai’s offensive. Nehemiah and the people of God persisted with rebuilding the walls in the midst of repeated attacks from the enemy, the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. But then the Lord in His mercy also gives us pauses in the battle so that His work can go ahead unhindered.

### B. The Declaration of the Word (Vs. 14a)

1. The faithful preaching of Haggai and Zechariah was the key to the success of the work. The preaching of God’s Word brought challenge, encouragement and correction to the people of God and kept them energized in their service.
2. Concerning the prophet, H.A. Ironside writes, “The true prophet is the one whose words come from heaven to men on earth, searching the heart, reaching the conscience, and exposing the evil that may have come in.”
3. No work can last or prosper without the preaching of the Word of God. We believe in the primacy of preaching in the local church. A genuine work of God is built on the preaching of the Word of God. This is an important reminder in a day when preaching is being neglected in favor of feel-good speeches and pulpits are being replaced with bar stools and glass lecterns and preachers are being replaced with sissy, effeminate men with spiked hair and ripped jeans.
4. As a believer is you are going to “prosper” in your Christian walk you need to be under a sound preaching ministry in a separated, biblical local church. Only through the Word of God can we have true prosperity and success (See Josh. 1:7-8).

### C. The Diligence of the Workers (Vs. 14b-15)

These saints of old:

1. Obeyed the command (Vs. 14b)
  - a. They obeyed the Heavenly Sovereign – “the God of Israel”. There is an important order in the verse. God’s authority is supreme and they were there by Divine appointment to rebuild the temple.
  - b. They obeyed the earthly sovereigns – Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes are mentioned.
  - c. This project had the backing of four kings!
    - i. The King of kings.
    - ii. King Cyrus.
    - iii. King Darius.
    - iv. King Artaxerxes.
2. Finished the job (Vs. 15)

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- a. Twice it is noted that they “finished” the work. Today we have lots of starters and lots of quitters but few faithful finishers. Finish the race well that God has called you to run. Finish the work He has given to you!
- b. Ultimately, it was God who actually finished the work that He started but it was done through His people as they cooperated with Him. God will finish the work He started in you if you will walk with Him! Php. 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:”
- c. The work was completed in the sixth year of Darius’ reign. The work had gotten back underway in the second year of Darius (See Ez. 4:24) so it took around 4 years for them to complete the temple after the work was resumed. It was now around 20 years since they had returned and the initial foundation had been laid. Zechariah prophesied of Zerubbabel: “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.” (Zech. 4:9)

### III. THE PRAISE FOR THE WORK (VS. 16-22)

This section of the chapter records the rejoicing of the remnant in response to the completion of the work. Seeing God accomplish His work through His people is a wonderful joy and encouragement! The remnant demonstrated their gratitude through their:

#### A. Offerings to the Lord (Vs. 16-17)

- a. Offerings of worship (Vs. 17a)  
They offered:
  - i. 100 bullocks.
  - ii. 200 rams.
  - iii. 400 lambs.
  - iv. Compared to the dedication of Solomon’s temple, this was tiny. Theirs was the day of “small things” but God was with them as much as when He was with Solomon.
- b. Offerings for sin (Vs. 17b)
  - i. Twelve goats are offered, one for each tribe of Israel. Interestingly there were only two main tribes represented in the returned remnant – Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom of Israel comprised of the other 10 tribes had been taken into captivity by Assyria before the southern kingdom comprised of Judah and Benjamin had been taken captive by Babylon.
  - ii. It reveals a sober mindset on the part of the returned remnant. There was a clear recognition of the enormity of the

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nation's sins, hence the sin offering. It reminds us that Christ is our sin offering and that cleansing is available for the believer.

### B. Obedience to the Lord (Vs. 18-22)

Obedience in:

1. The structures of the Lord (Vs. 18)
  - a. They “set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses” in obedience to what was “written in the book of Moses”.
  - b. This reminds us of the New Testament truths that God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33) and that God would have all things done “decently and in order” in His local churches (1 Cor. 14:40).
2. The services of the Lord (Vs. 19, 22)
  - a. The feast of Passover (Vs. 19). Approximately six weeks had gone by since the house had been completed on the third day of the twelfth month Adar. The first feast of the Lord in the new year to be celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month was Passover. (Hall) The Passover commemorated the Jews deliverance from Egypt. No doubt as they celebrated it for the first time since returning to the land, they thought also of how God had delivered them from Babylon.
  - b. The feast of unleavened bread (Vs. 22)
3. The separation unto the Lord (Vs. 20a, 21b)

Note the two parts to their godly separation.

  - a. Separation from – “the filthiness of the heathen of the land”.
  - b. Separation to – “unto them...to seek the LORD God of Israel”.
    - i. They were separated unto the people of God. We need to be in the company of other likeminded believers who are also living a pure life of separation from sin, the world and error.
    - ii. They were separated unto God. This is the most important aspect. The purpose of their separation was that they might seek the Lord. Make sure both aspects of separation are real in your life.

**Conclusion:** Are you in a battle? Look to Christ for victory! And when God does give the victory don't forget to thank and praise Him for it.