

## Ezra 5:3-6:12 “Tables Turned”

**For the Children:** A “pessimist” is someone who always expects the worst. If it rains, he moans, “Oh no, it’s never going to stop, we’re all going to drown!” If he is short on money, he cries, “We’re going to starve to death!” God’s children should not be pessimists. For we are under God’s “eye.” Of course, He doesn’t really have an eye, since He doesn’t have a physical body. It means we are under His watchful care – even when things seem to be going wrong. Even then, we know He will look after us and cause things to work out well for us in the end – just as they did for Israel after the Exile ended. **Questions:** What was going wrong for Israel after the Exile ended? How did the Lord protect and support His people? How can the Lord use persecution of His people for good?

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### Introduction:

#### First Point: An Objective Investigation

- 1) More Trouble: Tattenai, the governor of Samaria, came with a team to investigate the Jews’ re-building – probably due to more complaints (6:6-7). The prophets had told God’s people to resume work, that the Lord would be with them. But this investigation must have scared them, especially when the leaders’ names were taken down and the information sent off to Babylon
- 2) Honest Answers: Nevertheless, the Jews answered the questions and supplied the names honestly. They gave a good witness to the Lord as His servants should. They explained that the reason the original temple had been destroyed was because of the sin of their fathers – not because Yahweh was weaker than Assyria’s or Babylon’s gods
- 3) A Letter to the King: Tattenai sends off the information in an objective manner. He describes the work as careful and effective, putting the Jews in a good light. Even in a secular society and government a certain nobility may be found. The Lord uses this as part of the preservation of His people. Severe persecution is thankfully fairly rare and short-lived
- 4) The Eye of Our God: All of this shows how the Jews were under God’s watchful eye. He influenced Tattenai and timed this with the reign of Darius, the preaching of the prophets and the zeal of the leaders and people of Israel

#### Second Point: A Positive Outcome

- 1) The Scroll Found: On Tattenai’s suggestion, Darius searched for and found Cyrus’ decree allowing the re-building, the return of the temple utensils and the decision to support the work from the royal treasury. Since Darius consciously modeled his reign on that of Cyrus, this scroll meant a lot to him
- 2) Government Support: Darius’ decree, similar to that of Cyrus, forbids interference on pain of death and curse. He re-iterates the financial backing from taxes paid to the Samarian Province. The strong language indicates Darius saw this as important. The accusation against the Jews is rejected (6:6)
- 3) Awareness of True Worship: Darius also shows great knowledge of Jewish beliefs and practices – the sacrificial animals, grain, wine etc for offerings, oil for anointing. The Jews must be able to offer “acceptable sacrifices” to Yahweh. Darius’ curse may be based on curses in Deuteronomy. This shows how persecution can be used by the Lord as a witness to Him
- 4) A Sudden Turnaround: The good witness of persecuted believers can also suddenly turn to the advantage of the church – as we see with Daniel and his friends (Dan. 3:16-18 and ch. 6), where their witness led to the elevation of God’s servants and death of their enemies (partly under Darius’ reign). The norm is actually that government rewards good and punishes evil (Rom. 13:3f, 1 Pet. 2:14, 3:13)
- 5) A Royal Prayer Request: In fact, this good witness can even lead to unbelievers and their rulers seeing that the church acts for their welfare by praying for them. Hence Darius supports the Jews so they can pray for him and his sons (6:10, with 1 Tim. 2:1-4, Mt. 5:44)

### Conclusion: