

Ezra 5:1 ¶ 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 5:2 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 records that God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to minister to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. They both came to encourage the people to finish building the temple.

Haggai 1:7–8 “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 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.”

Zechariah 4:8–9 “Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.”

The NIV Commentary notes that Haggai ministered from August 29-December 8, 520 BC, and that Zechariah began his ministry two months after Haggai in the 8th month (October). This was 16 years after the foundation was first laid.

Guzik adds: “If all we had was Haggai to go by, we might conclude that all God was really interested in was the temple. Zechariah gives the rest of the story, and shows how God is interested in lives, not only buildings.”

Zerubbabel (civil leader) and Joshua (high priest) led the people in getting back to work on building the temple and the prophets joined in to help them as well.

Ezra 5:3 ¶ At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

Ezra 5:4 Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?

Ezra 5:5 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.

Tatnai, the appointed governor under Darius over the nations west of the Euphrates, and his buddies came to confront the Jews for once again working at rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They wanted the names of those involved.

Ezra notes that since God was with their leaders, the Jews did not let these men intimidate them. So the governor sent a letter to Darius concerning the matter—quite a different letter, it should be noted, than the one sent by their enemies as detailed in the previous chapter.

The New Bible Commentary offers this historical insight: “The Persian empire west of the Euphrates included at this time Syria, Arabia, Egypt, Phoenicia, and other provinces subject to Darius. The empire was divided into twenty provinces, called satrapies. Syria formed one satrapy, inclusive of Palestine, Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and furnished an annual revenue of three hundred fifty talents. It was presided over by a satrap or viceroy, who at this time resided at Damascus. Though superior to the native governors of the Jews appointed by the Persian king, he never interfered with their internal government except when there was a threatened disturbance of order and tranquillity. Tatnai, the governor (whether this was a personal name or an official title is unknown), had probably been incited by the complaints and turbulent outrages of the Samaritans against the Jews; but he suspended his judgment, and he prudently resolved to repair to Jerusalem, that he might ascertain the real state of matters by personal inspection and enquiry, in company with another dignified officer and his provincial council.”

Ezra 5:6 The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which *were* on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king:

Ezra 5:7 They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace.

Ezra 5:8 Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

Ezra 5:9 Then asked we those elders, *and* said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

Ezra 5:10 We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that *were* the chief of them.

The letter that Tatnai and his companions sent to Darius informed him that the rebuilding of the temple to “the great God” was proceeding quickly. They reported that they had attempted to get the names of all those that were involved in rebuilding the house and the walls of the city.

Ezra 5:11 And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up.

Ezra 5:12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.

Ezra 5:13 But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon *the same* king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.

Ezra 5:14 And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that *was* in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto *one*, whose name *was* Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;

Ezra 5:15 And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple

that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.
Ezra 5:16 Then came the same Sheshbazzar, *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and *yet* it is not finished.

They then reported that the Jews had answered by declaring themselves as “servants of the God of heaven and earth.” They declared that they were rebuilding the house that had stood in honor of Him that had originally been built by a great king of Israel (whom we know to be Solomon). They confessed that their ancestors had provoked God to the point that He gave them over to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. He had eventually destroyed the temple and taken the people into captivity.

They then told how Cyrus, King of Babylon, had made a decree authorizing the rebuilding of the temple in his first year as king. He even gave the treasured vessels that the Babylonians had taken from the temple into the care of Zerubbabel, whom he had appointed as their leader. He ordered them to take the vessels and go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Though Zerubbabel had led the people in laying the foundation for the temple, it had never been completed.

Ezra 5:17 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.

The letter suggested that the king make a search of the king’s treasure house in Babylon to verify if Cyrus had indeed made such a decree and then let them know what he wanted them to do about the matter.