

A TEMPLE RESTORED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God moves His people to obey Him so that He might be glorified.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Ezra 2–6

+ **SETTING:**

The exiles in Babylon were graciously granted permission to return home to Judah with the express purpose of rebuilding the temple of the Lord. Immediately, they set out to lay the foundation, which resulted in cries of joy from the young but tears from the old. But then outside opposition to this work set in with physical and political threats. The result was a delay in the construction and a loss of motivation in the people. They would need a prophetic word and the Lord's intervention to help them complete the house of God.

DAY 1

READ:

Ezra 4:1-5,24-5:17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ezra 5:1-2

NOTES

In the movie *Hoodwinked*, the classic story of Little Red Riding Hood is retold as a police investigation, taking the points of view of each of the different major characters to explain the broader story of what has gone on. In what appears to be a clear-cut case after Little Red Riding Hood is interviewed, the story becomes much more complex when the Big Bad Wolf's side of the story is heard. Suddenly, others are brought into the investigation and the story becomes much more nuanced and complex as each character is interviewed.

The Bible brings together many different angles to help us understand what God's people were dealing with at the time of the temple's rebuilding. The book of Ezra tells us that God's people had experienced growing opposition to the rebuilding of the temple. Over time, this discouragement became so great that the work ceased. While Ezra speaks of the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1), their ministries disclose that there had been different but complementary ministries going on. While Haggai had brought the word of the Lord with rebuke and correction, Zechariah spoke of a glorious day that lay ahead in the future. While Haggai spoke of the people building their own homes while the house of the Lord was rejected, Zechariah spoke of a day when the cleansing waters would flow from the temple and bring purification for sins.

Together, Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah present a fuller picture of the problems and the ministry needed to complete the task. Just as God had stirred the spirit of Cyrus to have the temple rebuilt and the hearts of the people to return, so the word of the Lord stirred the hearts of His people by rebuking, correcting, and encouraging them to complete the Lord's work.

What are some ways the Word of God has encouraged you when you needed a change of perspective?

DAY 2

READ:

Ezra 6:1-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ezra 6:14

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #19: GOD IS INFINITE

God's infinity means that there are no boundaries on His qualities and existence (Job 11:7-9; Psalm 147:5). For instance, God is infinite when it comes to space and time, meaning He is not confined by material space nor is He restricted by time since He is timeless (Psalm 90:1-2). God's infinity also extends to His knowledge of things as well as His power to do all things according to His will.

In 1993, Joseph Francis was working for R/Greenberg Associates in Manhattan. He had taken many computer-generated color images and reworked them so that they had similar hues. Each piece was its own photograph. But when stitched together, Francis had created *Live from Bell Labs*—a poster that looked like a larger picture of a face. This type of computer-generated photography is called a “photomosaic.” It is the act of reworking many pictures together to form one larger picture when they are all brought together.

History often looks like little individual photos to us, random, disconnected, and strange. But behind all of the events of history is the God who intervenes so that His purposes, plans, and power are put on display for all to see, if they have the eyes of faith.

In Ezra 6:14, several separate but important pieces of history come together to form the temple of the Lord. First, there is the proclamation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. These two men spoke the word of the Lord, and their messages motivated Zerubbabel and Jeshua, along with the rest of the leaders of Israel, to rebuild the temple (see Ezra 5:2). Second, the Lord had roused the heart of Cyrus to send the Jewish exiles home to rebuild the temple of the Lord (see Ezra 1:1). Finally, the Lord had moved in His people's hearts to obey His commands and supplied their needs through the edict of Darius (see Ezra 6:1-12). The combined result of these individual moments of history was the temple of the Lord being rebuilt.

What are some ways you can see God working history together for His glory and your good?

DAY 3

READ:

Ezra 6:16-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ezra 6:19-21

NOTES

Traditions are meaningful for us when they connect us to the past, reminding us of the significance of events long ago. We celebrate Christmas by giving gifts, remembering God's greatest gift to us in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. On Veteran's Day, those who gave their lives and fought for our freedom are remembered.

For the Jew, Passover is one of the most meaningful connections to the past. By celebrating this holiday on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, Jews remember a high point in Israel's salvation history. On the night when the angel of death came through the land of Egypt, those who had the blood of a spotless lamb upon their doorposts were spared, but those who didn't experienced the death of the firstborn son in their midst. Because of God's severe judgment on Egypt, the children of Israel were released from bondage and slavery so that they could be free and worship the Lord (see Exodus 12).

Today, Christians remember a related and greater salvation event by partaking of the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). In this special meal, we remember and celebrate our salvation from sin. We remember that during a Passover two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus gave His life as the Lamb of God to take away our sins and free us from the power of sin and the punishment of death (Mark 14:12,22-26; John 1:29). In Ezra 6:21, those who cleansed themselves from the uncleanness of the land could join Israel in celebrating their new exodus. And today, those who have turned from sin and trusted in Christ remember that Jesus is our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Communion is more than a tradition. It is a reminder that our story connects with the history of the people of God throughout all the ages, people who ultimately have been rescued from sin and death and brought out by God's great exodus work in Christ Jesus.

What can you do to make your next participation in the Lord's Supper more meaningful?

DAY 4

READ:

Ezra 6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ezra 6:22

NOTES

Everyone loves a good celebration. Decorations are put up to mark the occasion. A special meal is cooked or a decadent dessert is prepared for everyone to enjoy. At a birthday party, everyone chimes in to sing “Happy Birthday!” Presents are given at many celebrations. Candies or special treats might be handed out. Joy resounds at a party!

When God’s people completed the temple, Ezra 6:22 says that they celebrated with great joy because the Lord had made them joyful. This was a time for celebration, and they had many reasons to celebrate. After years of hard work, the temple was finally complete. The Lord had roused the heart of Cyrus to send the Jewish people back to their land (Ezra 1:1), and later Darius commanded that no one should oppose the Jewish efforts in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 6:11-12). After opposition had dried up their resolve so that construction was halted, they had received the Lord’s encouragement through the prophetic words of Zechariah and Haggai to finish the task (Ezra 5:2).

As the people stood looking at the completed temple, all of God’s work in bringing that day to reality would have brought the people great joy. The building was finished. The priests and Levites were in place to fulfill their tasks. And joy flowed from the hearts of the people.

When we look over our lives with the eyes of faith, the Lord will enable us to see that He has been working out His glorious purposes in our lives. As we stop and reflect on His gracious providence, our hearts should respond with resounding praise to God for His great love for us!

What ways can you reflect upon God’s work in your life and find joy in Him today?

DAY 5

READ:

Psalm 115

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 115:3

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer, without God's ordering and permission . . . There is no such thing as 'chance,' 'luck,' or 'accident' in the Christian's journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God. And all things are 'working together' for the believer's good."¹

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

No one likes to be around people who are perpetually unhappy, miserable, and cranky. Their inability to see life from any other perspective can bring cloudy skies to the sunniest of days. Like a pin to a balloon, joylessness pops the enthusiasm out of life.

Could you imagine what would happen if God were not happy? What would the world be like if God were a celestial being who was ornery, cranky, and frustrated that He didn't get His way? Would there be any happiness to be found by anyone if this were the nature of God? He would be someone we would avoid.

But God is in the heavens and He does whatever pleases Him. His happiness, found in the fact that His purposes cannot be frustrated, is the foundation for any of our joy in the Lord. Because there is no one greater than the Lord, because there is no power higher than His alone, the sovereign Lord is working out all things for His glory and good pleasure.

God's sovereign hand ought to fuel our joy in the Lord. Because nothing is outside of His purposes and plans, the hardest things, the most trying events, and the greatest sorrows all bow down and serve the Lord's good purposes. Nothing in your life will be wasted. No pain that is experienced today will thwart God's good pleasure to accomplish that which will bring you the most joy in this world and the next—to be conformed into the image of His Son.

Take heart! God is in control! Since He is sovereign, you can count every trial as working out pure joy in your life to form you into the person God wants you to be (James 1:2-4)!

How can thinking rightly about God's sovereignty give you joy in the Lord today?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The people obey because of divine encouragement (Ezra 4:24–5:2).

The Jews who had returned from exile allowed _____ and time to _____ them from their mission, causing the delay of what they were sent to _____ .

? Why is it easy to get distracted from the Lord's work?

The _____ and _____ of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah _____ God's people to obey God's will and commands.

? Why is it important to listen to godly wisdom from God's people?

POINT 2: The people succeed because of divine intervention (Ezra 6:13-15).

God works _____ , even in people who don't trust Him, to accomplish His purposes, as seen in the work of the _____ temple.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #19: GOD IS INFINITE

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? How should we live knowing that God is infinite?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The God of the universe has spoken, we believe what he says, and we will obey. We must make a decision that we will hold in the face of all opposition and apparent contradiction. The powers of hell can never prevail against the soul that takes its stand on God and on his Word."²

–Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

POINT 3: The people rejoice because of divine sovereignty (Ezra 6:16-22).

At the completion of the temple, God's people _____ and _____ God diligently and wholeheartedly, following the Lord's commands.



What are some commands for how we are to worship God because of our salvation in Jesus Christ?

God is _____ and always at work rescuing His people, from Egypt, from exile, and through Christ, from _____ death and punishment.



How should belief in God's power to rescue us bring joy to your life?

MY RESPONSE

Because God has forgiven our sin and dwells within us, we seek to show through our lives that God is our priority.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you have seen God glorified through the obedience of His people?
- **HEART:** What aspect of what Jesus has done for you stands out to you that you can praise Him for today?
- **HANDS:** How will you express your worship of God, in the Spirit and because of Jesus, through serving others this week?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us see to it that we keep God before our eyes, that we walk in His ways, and seek to please and glorify Him in all things great and small. Depend upon it, God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supplies."³

—Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)