

PROPHETS AND PROTESTS

Ezra 5:1-6

This portion of text relates that the work was resumed after 15 years of inactivity under the impetus of the powerful preaching of two great prophets of God. The rebuilt temple and the fully restored sacrificial system not only demonstrated their continuity with the people of God before the exile but also served as a visible sign of God's restoration of what had been lost.

I. Prophets – Verses 1-2

A. Haggai

1. Haggai's ministry began on August 29, 520 B.C.
2. The book of Haggai is styled as a royal administrative correspondence sent from the Sovereign King of the Universe through the messenger of the LORD, Haggai. Part of its message is addressed specifically to Zerubbabel, the political leader, and Joshua, the religious leader, telling them to "take courage and work" on the temple because God was with them (Hag 2:4).
3. In his first oracle, God asked the Jewish community, "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (Hag 1:4).

B. Zechariah, son of Iddo

1. Zechariah began his ministry roughly 2 months after Haggai.
2. Zechariah encouraged the people to respond to God's promise of future glory for Jerusalem.

C. Prophesied in the name of the God of Israel to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem

1. Prophesied
 - a. There were more unnamed prophets than just Haggai and Zechariah.
 - b. These two prophets gave severe reproaches and threats if the people did not return to the building and promised national prosperity if they did. Not long after the exiles heard this message, the temple work began afresh.
2. We see the impact of Biblical preaching.
3. In the name of the God of Israel
4. To the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem

D. Zerubbabel and Jeshua

1. Responded by beginning the task of rebuilding the temple of God in Jerusalem three weeks after Haggai began preaching, even before Zechariah began, which was September 20, 520 B.C.
2. Zerubbabel is honored in Haggai 2:20-23 and in Zechariah 4.
3. Jeshua is honored in Zechariah 3 and 6.

E. The prophets of God

1. Were with them
2. Helped them
 - a. Helping them did not imply manual labor but encouragement and moral support for those doing the work.

II. Protests – Verses 3-4

A. Tattenai and Shether-bozenai and their colleagues

1. Tattenai was the Persian governor responsible for the territory west of the river Euphrates including the whole of Syria and Palestine.
2. Shethar-boznai seems to have been his executive assistant.
3. The others were lower-level government officials.
4. Both were subject to Ushtani the satrap of the Trans-Euphrates.

B. Who gave you permission to rebuild this temple and restore this wall?

1. Joseph and Mary asked Jesus the same question of Jesus. "Who gave you permission?" Jesus answered, "I must be about my father's business."
 2. The Sanhedrin asked Jesus the same question. "Who gave you this authority?" "Myself as I AM THE I AM."
 3. Peter and John were asked the same question. "By whose authority?" "The name of Jesus. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
- C. Who is working on the temple
- III. Provision – Verse 5
- A. But because their God was watching over the leaders of the Jews, they did not cause the elders to cease from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned a letter stating his decision.
1. God's hand of protection which led this endeavor allowed the work to continue while official communication was going on with Darius, the Persian.
 2. This verse contains the first mention of the Jewish elders in the postexilic era. In the Persian period, real power was in the hands of the Persian-appointed authorities, while the elders more often were called together to witness important events and judicial decisions.

The prophets brought a message of cursing and blessing. The work began and was going smoothly. The people were working with enthusiasm and joy. But again, enemies tried to halt the rebuilding. This time, though, the Jews did not stop their rebuilding task. God was supervising their work. God cares about us and the outcome of our lives. If He cared for the rebuilding of the temple back then, surely He cares for the renewal of our lives – His temple – today.