

Collective Redemption

COLLECTIVE REDEMPTION FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Focal Verses • EZRA 6:1-12

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER the pivotal role of Darius in getting the new Temple built in Jerusalem; CONTEMPLATE excuses we offer for failing to act in accord with God's will; and CONFESS our failings before God, receive the joy of forgiveness, and get on with the task at hand.

In Focus

Breana and Chanel have been best friends since college. They were there for each other through all the highs and lows.

Chanel was having another low in her life after the birth of her first daughter. Having her little mini-me was one of the happiest moments of her life, but since they came home from the hospital two months ago, Chanel's emotions were all over the place. She didn't feel like herself anymore. She thought no one would understand.

One day, Breana stopped by Chanel's to visit. Breana hadn't heard from Chanel since the baby was born, but Breana figured Chanel was just getting adjusted to being a mom. Breana was shocked to see the state of her best friend. "Girl, what is wrong?"

"Everything! All she does is cry. All Robbie does is work. I never get a moment to myself. My body isn't the same. I just need a break from everything."

"Chanel, why didn't you call me? It sounds like this might be postpartum depression," Breana explained. "I didn't think you'd understand," Chanel said. "There is nothing to be afraid or ashamed about. Many women face this issue, and God has equipped helpers to assist you."

Chanel felt relieved. "We are sisters. You can come to me about anything, and I'll be by your side. I will also ask my sister who she went to see about her postpartum," said Breana, hugging Chanel.

Like Chanel, God is calling us to play a role in redeeming those in our community. God may assign us to share his message of collective redemption with our friend group, church, city, or nation. What helps you to be sensitive to the plight of others in your community?



Keep in Mind

"And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed." (Ezra 6:12, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Ezra 6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:

5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:

10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

The People, Places, and Times

Darius's Law. Reigning between 522-486 BC, Darius the Great was an effective legislator, interested in policy. During his reign, the most important of these policies for biblical history was the revival of the decree of King Cyrus the Great, allowing the Jews to return to Judah, rebuild their Temple, and write down their laws. The Persian kings functioned differently from their Babylonian predecessors in that they did not mind their subjects worshipping their

own gods and having their own laws, which made them popular with their subjects. They also wanted the laws written down and codified so they could be followed and information on them held in the capital.

Tatnai. As the governor of the region that included Samaria and Judah during the reign of King Darius, Tatnai (NLT: Tattennai) was responsible for allowing the returned exiles to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Tatnai initially took issue with this project, feeling as though

it was an act of rebellion that undermined his authority, but after speaking with the leaders of the returned exiles, he sought to clear up the matter and receive official instruction from King Darius on how to proceed.

Background

The book of Ezra is not written in a clear chronological order even though the events it describes are telling a historical account. Between chapters 2-6, Ezra traces the history of rebuilding the Temple and restoring worship under King Cyrus the Great of Persia and then the interruption of the rebuilding process. There was resistance to rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem from many sides: people who were left in the city during exile, Samaritans who lived nearby, and enemies of Judah who did not want them restored to the land. In addition, the people had gotten distracted, focusing on rebuilding their own homes and assimilating to the culture around them, rather than restoring worship at the Temple.

Within this messy context of building, stopping, and facing continued resistance, we come to Ezra 6 when the rebuilding continues with renewed fervor.

What sorts of things keep people from following through on projects? Are they different or similar to things that keep people from obeying God? Why or why not?

At-A-Glance

1. Resurrected Decree (Ezra 6:1-4)
2. Restored Protection (vv. 5-7)
3. Renewed Resources (vv. 8-12)

In Depth

1. Resurrected Decree (Ezra 6:1-4)

King Darius investigated his imperial records after he received an inquiry from his

governor Tatnai about whether or not the Jews could rebuild their Temple. It was a sign of wisdom and humility that the king looked for the decision of his predecessor rather than simply dismissing prior history and making a new decree himself. The information was not found in the place he expected, but in a fortress in a completely different city.

The original decree from Cyrus the Great was for the Jews to rebuild their Temple in the same place it had been, and to have it paid for from the royal treasury of the Persian Empire. This was an incredible set of circumstances that led to incredible news. God's will to have the Jews rebuild the Temple was being carried out, and He was using the wisdom, authority, and resources of a conquering king to do it.

What documentation methods do your church and local governments use to make sure they stand by previous decisions?

2. Restored Protection (vv. 5-7)

King Darius added to this decree that the materials that were stolen from the Temple by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon were to be restored to the Temple in Jerusalem. Further, in addition to restoring precious treasures, the king restored the protection of Judah. He commanded his governor to leave the Jews alone as they rebuilt the Temple, and he commanded all of his other officials in the region to leave the Jews alone. This would not only protect the peace of the people of Judah as they rebuilt, but it meant the king was protecting the rebuilding project.

How has God protected you or a loved one in the past?

3. Renewed Resources (vv. 8-12)

The king concluded by instructing the governor to help the people of Judah rebuild the Temple and make sure they had all of the resources they needed to finish. This went a step beyond leaving them alone to actively helping them. What a testimony

of God's power, that those who were (and still are) enemies are used as servants and helpers!

King Darius didn't stop there. He wanted to make sure the priests had everything they needed to give proper sacrifices to the Lord, not just once, but consistently. He asked that they honor the Lord on his behalf as well. He was an unbeliever who wanted to help God's people worship and to worship himself. Lastly, the king added that anyone who tried to stop the Jews from rebuilding their Temple would be executed and their houses destroyed. The king had spoken, and his decree would not be broken!

What resources are needed to accomplish the things God has called you to do as a believer? What resources are needed to accomplish the mission of your local church?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who were the people who needed to authorize the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:1, 6)?
2. What would be supplied by the king to help the Temple be rebuilt (vv. 8–9)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The people of Judah had returned to the land with a commission from God, and yet faced resistance and distraction that caused them not to follow through. How can we resist temptation that distracts us from God's will? How can we work to follow through on what God has called us to do?
2. What are some obstacles that keep us from trying again if we haven't finished something? How can we overcome those obstacles?

Liberating Lesson

During political campaigns we often hear campaign promises and policy proposals that would be beneficial to our communities, yet often we do not see them come to pass. It can be easy to grow cynical and believe that all politicians are bad, and feel hopeless about what we can

do to help our neighbors and ourselves. But in our democratic society, the government is built to serve the people, and often the policies that get enacted are in response to the people who engage the most with government, whether it be lobbyists or just actively engaged citizens.

How can we as individuals and churches be more actively engaged to make sure our government leaders respect our values and implement policies that benefit our communities? This is especially important to lift up concerns for marginalized groups such as immigrants, children, those returning from prison, and those who face homelessness or discrimination. If we stay engaged collectively, we can get far more accomplished than people with the loudest voices or largest donations and then see more of the changes we want. What policy proposals would your community benefit from seeing implemented? How can you work with your church and others to convince government officials to enact those policies?

Application for Activation

There are a diversity of ways to worship God, and everyone should be free to worship God in the ways that feel most meaningful and authentic to them. There are some people who worship loudly and expressively and some people who worship quietly or in silence. Some people love to dance, others love to sing, others love to lay down, and some stand with their hands raised. Some people feel most worshipful when they are reading the Word of God, others when they are listening to Scripture, and others praying or reciting Scripture. Some write, some walk or run, and some meditate, some give to others, and some even cook.

But often when we attend worship services, check social media, or see someone else in worship we may feel pressure to worship like those around us. This week consider how you feel most connected to God in worship. Is there anything

that makes you feel restricted in your worship?
How can you spend time with God alone and
with others in ways that feel meaningful to you?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Breneman, Mervin. *Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah. Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.
Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press. 2004. 427-437.
Lester, L. Grabbe. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Ezra and Nehemiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003.

Say It Correctly

Achmetha. ak-MEE-tha.

Tatnai. tat-NIE.

Shetharboznai. sheh-THAR-boze-nie.

Apharsachites. ah-FAR-sah-kites.

Ecbatana. ek-bah-TAH-nah.

Aramaic. air-ah-MAY-ik.

Akkadian. ah-KAY-dee-an.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 71

Joshua 16–18

Psalms 33:12–19

DAY 72

Joshua 19–21

Psalms 33:20–22

DAY 73

Joshua 22–24

Psalms 34:1–7

DAY 74

Judges 1–2

Psalms 34:8–14

DAY 75

Judges 3–7

Psalms 34:15–18

DAY 76

Judges 8–12

Psalms 34:19–22

DAY 77

Judges 13–15

Psalms 35:1–6