



# Community Group Discussion Guide

January 11, 2026

**Ezra 6:1-12,16-22 | God's Temple Rebuilt**

## MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: What is one of the most difficult tasks you have ever undertaken? What was the end result?*

## DISCUSS

The book of Ezra recounts the return of Jewish exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem and the restoration of the temple and religious life in Israel. It covers a period of about eighty years and is divided into two parts. The first part, chapters 1–6, focuses on the first two waves of exiles who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Lord's temple. On the surface, their work seemed insurmountable and the restoration process faced opposition at every turn. Yet theirs was not a man-made assignment. Ezra 6:1-12, 16-22 records how God turned resistance into provision, demonstrating His faithfulness. God sovereignly worked through pagan rulers to see His temple brought to completion.

⇒ *How does God's sovereignty relate to His faithfulness?*

### **1. Ezra 6:1-12: God is able to use any means to restore worship of Him.**

**Ezra 6:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. <sup>2</sup> And in Ecbatana, the citadel that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: "A record. <sup>3</sup> In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices were offered, and let its foundations be retained. Its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, <sup>4</sup> with three layers of great stones and one layer of timber. Let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. <sup>5</sup> And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple that is in Jerusalem, each to its place. You shall put them in the house of God."

Soon after the temple's foundation was set and dedicated, opposition to the work emerged. Enemies sought to sabotage the efforts of God's people: first by attempting to infiltrate their work and then by making them afraid to build. The opposition also bribed officials to frustrate the work (Ezra 4:1-5). Unfortunately, the enemies' crusade to crush the construction efforts succeeded.

The work on the house of God stopped "until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia" (Ezra 4:24). For over a decade, the job site sat in silence. Day after day, year after year, God's people passed by the unfulfilled slab of rock dedicated for the structure central to their life and worship.

⇒ *Why would the lack of a temple and a place to worship and make sacrifices be significant to the returned exiles?*

⇒ *When has opposition discouraged you from obeying God or from worshipping Him?*

In His perfect timing, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to re-declare God's plan and stir up God's people to restart the rebuilding efforts. But this also rekindled the difficulties. A letter from the regional governor, Tattenai, was sent to King Darius of Persia investigating the legitimacy of

the Jews' claims and asking if this construction project was allowed (Ezra 5:1-17).

The faithful God of Israel led King Darius to respond to the letter. It took about ten years, but Darius investigated and discovered King Cyrus had decreed that the Jews could rebuild their temple. Documents with Cyrus' decree were found in Ecbatana, one of four capital cities within the Persian Empire. The essence of the decree stated that the house of God at Jerusalem be rebuilt including the altar. Cyrus had also declared that the gold and silver vessels from God's temple which had been carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar be returned to the temple and be put in the house of God. As a result of recovering this decree, Darius supported, protected, and provided for the construction of God's house.

⇒ *How did God use both Cyrus and Darius to accomplish His will? What does this reveal about Him?*

**Ezra 6:6-7:** <sup>6</sup>"Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your associates the governors who are in the province Beyond the River, keep away. <sup>7</sup> Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site.

Darius told the local provincial leaders to leave the Jews alone and not interfere with their rebuilding efforts. Even though the enemies of God tried relentlessly to stop the rebuilding of His temple, God had a plan in place that would not be thwarted by their schemes. God's people needed to continue to serve Him and follow His commands even through the constant opposition they faced.

⇒ *How is God's faithfulness on display in how He used a pagan king to protect the reconstruction of His temple?*

**Ezra 6:8-12:** <sup>8</sup> Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond the River. <sup>9</sup> And whatever is needed—bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require—let that be given to them day by day without fail, <sup>10</sup> that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. <sup>11</sup> Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill. <sup>12</sup> May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I Darius make a decree; let it be done with all diligence."

In keeping with Medo-Persian law, in which a decree of the king is irrevocable, and in deference to "the God of heaven," Darius made a new decree declaring that not only could the Jews rebuild but that the cost of the work would be paid from the royal revenue. The king did not want anything to hold up the rebuilding efforts. This certainly would have been unexpected news for the people who had faced delays for nearly a decade. Not only was Darius going to protect them as they rebuilt but he was also going to provide the supplies needed for their temple.

⇒ *How has God unfailingly provided all you needed, precisely when you needed it?*

In addition, Darius promised to provide daily sacrifices for the offerings "to the God of heaven." Darius was known for allowing the nations he conquered certain freedoms of religion, often allowing them to continue worshiping their gods. Certainly, Darius was motivated by seeking to keep political peace, yet God used Darius' generosity to bring about His plan.

- ⇒ *Have you ever experienced God's provision from an unlikely place?*
- ⇒ *What does it say about Darius that he even asked the priests to "pray for the life of the king and his sons?"*

God's protection and provision for the people came from an unlikely place in King Darius. When God makes a promise, He will deliver on that promise. God's promise that the temple would be rebuilt was a reminder of His steadfast faithfulness. Despite the years of opposition, God had a plan in place for His people to finish this work. At times, God needed to send prophets to encourage the people to get the rebuilding started again. Now, the encouragement came from a pagan king.

- ⇒ *The Jews likely were concerned about whether or not they would be able to finish rebuilding the temple. The constant stopping and starting of the work would have been draining. What evidence is there that God never abandoned the people who were seeking to faithfully obey Him?*

God's protection through Darius was seen graphically at the end of the decree. Anyone who interfered with the rebuilding of the temple would be publicly humiliated and impaled on a beam from his own home. God Himself would judge severely anyone who tried to thwart the work, whether commoners, governors, or kings. Ezra 6:13-15 records that by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia, the temple rebuild was completed in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

- ⇒ *How should God's faithfulness bring you courage as you seek to live for Him moment by moment?*
- ⇒ *When you face trials and hardship, how can you be certain that God will protect and provide for you?*

## **2. Ezra 6:16-22: When we celebrate God's past faithfulness, joyful worship ensues.**

**Ezra 6:16-18:** <sup>16</sup> *And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.* <sup>17</sup> *They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.* <sup>18</sup> *And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.*

Once the work was completed, it was time for the people to dedicate the temple and to celebrate God's faithfulness. The text says, "And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy." Although the exiles who returned from captivity were from only three tribes (Judah, Benjamin, Levi, Ezra 1:5), they were seen by the author to represent all of Israel. These were the faithful remnant that God had kept for this purpose. Despite all the sorrow they had previously experienced, the people were joyful at the dedication of the temple.

- ⇒ *Why does God's faithfulness produce joy and gladness?*

⇒ *Why should we praise God that He can work through a faithful remnant?*

The offerings recorded in Ezra 6 are a fraction of the number presented by Solomon at the dedication of God's first temple, a sober reminder of how far God's people had fallen (1 Kings 8:5, 63). It may not have been much compared to other offerings, but it did demonstrate the people's devotion to God as well as symbolizing the reconciliation between God and His people.

They offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs. They also offered twelve male goats as a sin offering for all Israel—one for each Israelite tribe, present or not. Sin offerings had not been offered at the temple for decades, seeing as there was no temple in which to offer them. Thus, it was fitting that at the dedication of the temple, a sin offering would be made.

⇒ *How were these sin offerings a visible reminder for the people that they needed atonement for their sin to be purified of their guilt and to be in relationship with God?*  
 ⇒ *How does this relate to Christ and His cross?*

The final verse of the temple dedication narrative states that they also appointed the priests by their divisions and the Levites by their groups to the service of God in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the book of Moses. The priests and Levites were organized to fulfill their duties given in the law regarding sacrifices and purification rituals. The reason for the mention of these duties was to show that this new temple was a genuine house of worship for the people.

⇒ *What are your insights into the returned exiles' restoration of worship? How do we relate this to our worship today?*

**Ezra 6:19-22:** <sup>19</sup> *On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover.* <sup>20</sup> *For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves.* <sup>21</sup> *It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel.* <sup>22</sup> *And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.*

The returned exiles had experienced great loss and hardship; however, their temple was rebuilt. The people had renewed hope, experiencing firsthand God's sustaining grace in their lives. He could have left them in captivity, yet He graciously delivered them and let them return to their homeland.

It was time for them to celebrate not just what God did in their lives but in the history of their people. Among the most significant observances of the Jews was the celebration of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, both supposed to be observed each year as a permanent reminder of past events (Exodus 12:14-20; Deuteronomy 16:1-8). The two celebrations are closely linked together which is why they are often mentioned together in Scripture.

- **The Passover:** This was an important feast in the life of the Jews because it was a reminder of how God had saved them out of slavery in Egypt by the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt.

In Exodus 12, God commanded the Israelites to spread the blood of a lamb on their doorposts, and the destroyer would “pass over” their houses.

- The Feast of Unleavened Bread: This observance follows the celebration of Passover, commemorating the swift departure of the Israelites from Egypt. This feast remembered how the Jews were instructed to bake bread without any leaven, since they would need to leave Egypt quickly. For seven days, they could not have any bread with leaven (yeast) in their homes. Also called the Festival of Shelters or the Feast of Booths, this celebration also reminded the people of the wilderness wandering and God’s protection.

⇒ *The destruction of the temple prevented these types of celebrations. How were the observances of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread a restorative event?*

⇒ *How do these celebrations speak of God’s mercy, judgment, and deliverance?*

Ezra 6:21 explains who participated in the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread: “It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel.” Notice that it was not only the returned exiles. The participants likely included resident aliens who had been circumcised so they could worship the Lord as well (Exodus 12:48).

⇒ *Discuss this statement: Though the remnant Jews in Jerusalem faced an uncertain future under Persian rule, they chose to worship God for His past deeds and what He was presently doing.*

⇒ *Why is recalling God’s faithfulness vital to our faith and worship?*

The temple was not just another building for the people of God. God gave the people the temple so that they might have a visible picture of His rule in their lives and their need to be brought into right relationship with Him. The people were able to begin a new life of worship and celebration for what God did for them in their lives and in the history of their people. This joy was not an artificial act. God produced this joy in their hearts because He acted mightily to save and provide for them. Joy accompanied their worship because they remembered God’s faithfulness in the present and the past.

This is a great reminder for all of us. When we find ourselves going through trials and hardship, we should call to mind God’s faithfulness in our lives. Joy is not simply walking around with a smile on our face. No, our joy is rooted in the God who saves; He is the source of our joy.

⇒ *How can remembering God’s past and present faithfulness help you worship God more deeply today?*

⇒ *How does recalling God’s faithfulness fuel your joy?*

## **TRANSFORM**

God made the rebuilding of the temple possible so the people could see His faithfulness to them, resulting in joy and celebration. God’s faithfulness is not confined to the past; it remains evident today. Just as He orchestrated the temple’s restoration, He continues to work in our lives, leading us into joyful worship. When we recognize His faithfulness, our natural response should be celebration and devotion.

1. HEAD: In the hustle and bustle of daily life, it’s easy to forget why we exist. God created us for His

glory. He has left us on this earth for His glory. He will call us into eternity for His glory. We must settle this in our minds to live out our purpose rightly. Any other purpose falls short of why we exist. We exist for God's glory.

⇒ *What are some ways you can regularly remind yourself that you exist for God's glory?*

2. HEART: Worship can sometimes feel like an abstract concept or archaic relic of the past. Yet the reality is our hearts are made to worship. With every moment shared, effort given, dollar spent, talent used, word spoken, and deed done, we worship. The question we must seek to answer is this: Who or what is the object of my worship? If the answer is anything other than God, we have work to do when it comes to our worship.

⇒ *Who or what has been the true object of your worship lately? Why?*

3. HANDS: As we seek to turn our hearts toward Christ more each day because He is always faithful in our salvation, we can be encouraged that we are not left to our own devices. God has given us many gifts of grace to help our pursuit of His worship as we combat the idols vying for our affections. Chiefly, He has provided His truth-filled Word, His Spirit—our Helper, Counselor, and Guide—and His people to live, learn, suffer, and worship alongside. These provisions have been gifted lavishly. But we must intentionally employ them to enjoy their benefits if we seek to worship God better in our lives.

⇒ *How can you better enjoy and employ God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's people this week?*

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