

# Finishing Well

Lesson #1 - Finish The Work - January 6, 2021

II Tim. 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Paul is not commending himself for having "run the full distance."

Rather, he is describing what the grace of God had enabled him to do.

Nehemiah: From destruction to construction: Repair; Rebuild; Reinforce

Dan. 9:2 I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah [Jer. 25:11] the prophet, that he would accomplish 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem. [70 years of captivity is about to end.]

539 BC > Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonian Empire [Dan. 5] He defeated Belshazzar. Handwriting on the wall - Brilliant plan: reroute water; go in Babylon via the riverbed at night; defeated Babylon without a battle; 70 years of captivity is over

Note: When Cyrus made his grand entrance, Daniel showed him an ancient scroll of Isaiah.

[Josephus] It contained a personal letter addressing him by name! Note the prophecy:

Isa. 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."'

Note: Isaiah died 150 years before Cyrus was born. Prophecy was fulfilled in Ezra 1:1!

Ezra 1:1-3 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,  
<sup>2</sup> Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

<sup>3</sup> Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Decree of Cyrus of Persia [539 BC]

- He returned 5400 Temple vessels that had been plundered 70 years earlier.
- Gave them incentives to return home and rebuild their Temple.

God begins to do His work to fulfill His promise announced by His prophets.

- Restore His people from Babylon
- Rebuild their Temple at Jerusalem
- Renew their hope regarding the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom.

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

Note: God takes the initiative. No one, after falling into a carnal, apathetic state, would come back to Christ unless God brought him back.

Is God stirring your heart to rebuild His temple, His dwelling place?

I Thess. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

Phil 2:13 [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure *and* satisfaction *and* delight. [Amplified]

He is calling you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. My Continual Choice Group 1 left in 538 BC under Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. [Ezra 1-6]

Note: Before Nehemiah was born!

- Purpose: Restore House of God [His dwelling place]; Build Jewish community
- ~50,000 captives who journey ~900 miles in 4 months
- Faith, courage and sacrifice were required.

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem found their capital in ruins, their city walls shattered and their temple a heap of charred, shattered stones.

Refusing To Be Overwhelmed, This Remnant Began By: [535 BC]

- Starting Fresh After 70 Years: And when the seventh month was come, ...

Ezra 3:1a, 2b And when the seventh month was come...built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon,...

1. Building An Altar: original temple site in the midst of ruins to restore worship of God.

An altar almost invariably involves sacrifice, worship, and praise -- the sacrifice of apprehending the truth, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price"

Note: It wasn't necessary to wait until the temple was completed before offering sacrifices to God. (Broken heart & Contrite spirit)

Note: When I seek the Lord in prayer, submit and yield to Him, and confess my sin, it is like pushing a reset button. When I put first things first, the rest will come back into alignment.

Truth: Begin with worship and surrender. Restoration will follow.

Ezra 3:1-6 Starting Fresh After 70 Years: And when the seventh month was come, ...

- ❖ Offer burnt offerings morning and evening
- ❖ Kept the Feast of Tabernacles and the daily burnt offerings by number
- ❖ Offered the continual offerings of New Moons and ALL the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated
- ❖ Willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

Note: Ezra 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.

Ezra 3:8-10 2<sup>nd</sup> year; 2<sup>nd</sup> month - Workers laid the foundation

Ezra 3:11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endures forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout [#8643 Teruah = shout of joy], when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

But, the work was met with mixed feelings. Ezra 3:12-13:

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard afar.

Have you ever come back to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal -- a captive of sin's power -- with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were relaid by the Spirit? Yet also with regret for the lost and wasted years?

Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the temple being re-laid.

The sound was heard from afar > Opposition Immediately Develops

Truth: When you make a commitment to the Lord, be prepared to face the enemy's unrelenting attempt to set you back.

I Pet. 5:8 Be Sober, Be Vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Truth: A force is at work in every human heart that immediately rises up to oppose everything God attempts to do. We must get rid of the old man.

Rom. 6:6-7 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Spurgeon: Our old man is crucified, but he is long at dying.

- KNOW your old man is crucified with Him.
- RECKON yourself dead unto sin
- RECKON yourself alive unto God through Jesus Christ your Lord
- YIELD yourself to God and the power of the Holy Spirit

Satan's 1<sup>st</sup> Enemy Tactic: Weaken From Within: Enemy Joins The Team

The shout awakened the enemies of the Jews who had occupied the land while the Israelites were held captive. [They rejoiced and shouted when the foundation was laid.]

Note: This Opposition First Appears As Friendly Solitude. (Satan = Serpent To Deceive)

Ezra 4:1-2 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you; for we seek your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here." [681-689 BC]

Note: These enemies had been brought in ~130-142 years previously. It is now ~539 BC.

The enemy can masquerade as an angel of light. Their claims are a LIE.

Consider: Satan's most dangerous trick is to lure us into compromise under the guise of cooperation.

It is not very difficult to say no to an enemy who breathes fiery threats of slaughter. But when he comes dripping with solicitude and offers to help in your projects, it is very difficult to say no.

Zerubbabel's Response: Ezra 4:3 Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. [Why does he respond this way?]

Question: Who were these enemies of Judah & Benjamin? Assyria Resettles Samaria  
II Kings 17:24-26 Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria [Northern Kingdom] instead of the children of Israel; and They Took Possession Of Samaria And Dwelt In Its Cities. And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, That They Did Not Fear The LORD; therefore the LORD Sent Lions Among Them, Which Killed Some Of Them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God Of The Land; therefore He Has Sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land."

II Kings 17:27-28 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there One Of The Priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwelt there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

II Kings 17:32-33 So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the LORD, Yet Served Their Own Gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

II Kings 17:38-39 And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."

II Kings 17:40-41 However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. So these nations feared the LORD, Yet Served Their Carved Images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.

Problem: Syncretism = blend false religions with worship of God

1. If the Jewish exiles had worked together with the inhabitants, they would have fallen into spiritual compromise.

"Compromise is planned failure. You can't compromise with evil and expect to be victorious." Satan as the serpent to deceive had failed. God had commanded Israel not to mingle with other nations, or to engage with them in enterprises that concerned the faith. The opposition tries to interject worldly concepts, advice, and methods into the lives of God's people.

These are to be rejected as they are contrary to the work of the Spirit of God.

The world reflects the spirit of the devil, "Advance yourself. Do this for your own glory."

He uses religious ways to achieve self-satisfaction.

Satan's 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactic: Weaken From Within: Tool Of Discouragement  
Ezra 4:4a Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah,

Satan's 3<sup>rd</sup> Tactic: Weaken From Within: Fear Often Follows Discouragement

Ezra 4:4b and troubled [frightened] them in building,

Discouragement quickly turns into many fears about our future.

Consider: Satan's whispers: This dark valley will never end. You can't live the Christian life; why don't you give up. What if...?

The Veil Of Friendship Offered Quickly Turns To Hatred. (Satan = Lion To Devour)

Satan's 4<sup>th</sup> Tactic: Weaken From Without: Use Of Misinformation And False Accusations

Ezra 4:5-6 and Hired Counselors Against Them to FRUSTRATE THEIR PURPOSE

All The Days Of Cyrus King Of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Letter Writing Campaign: Weaken With Lies: Ezra 4:12-22 Jerusalem is a wicked city;

Will stop paying their taxes; troublesome to kings & provinces; long history of revolt & sedition; threat to royal interests

Ezra 4:18, 21 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.

Now Give The Command To Make These Men Cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

Ezra 4:23-24 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, They Went Up In Haste To Jerusalem Against The Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.<sup>24</sup> Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

This shows the unrelenting nature of Satan's opposition. He does not give up after one setback. He keeps on countering whatever the Lord's people try to do to move ahead spiritually.

4. Success of Opposition: Ezra 4 tells the success of the enemy in stopping the work of rebuilding the temple. By deliberately attempting to frustrate these people, by mocking them and taunting them, they discouraged Israel from doing work that God had commanded. This opposition severely tested their wavering faith.

God sent 2 prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to move the people's hearts to finish the task.

Consider Your Ways:

1. The Temple is in ruins.
  2. You are neglecting the worship of God.
  3. Your priorities are misplaced. You have drifted from the truth that God is first.
  4. Your ways are an embarrassment to God and a blemish on His reputation.
- Haggai's message was blunt. He pulled no punches and wasted no words.

Message #1 includes 4 admonitions to encourage them to get back to work and finish rebuilding the Temple. It is August 29, 520 BC

A. Put God First In Your Life [1:1-4]

He exposes the hypocrisy and unbelief. God knows our priorities.

Haggai 1:2-4 "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."'"

*Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"*

1. Excuses - Defending Our Inactivity

They intended to build God's house, but just had not got around to it yet. If you were to ask them about it, they would say, "I'm all for building the Temple. It is a great cause.

But we need to take care of our own families first. Times are hard. Jobs are scarce.

We need to pray about it some more. We will eventually build it, but not now."

It is always easy to make excuses when you don't want to obey God. We can always find rational justification for not doing what God wants us to do: The time is not right.

The first step to putting first things first is to Admit Our Responsibility.

2. Evidence - How could they doubt it was God's will for them to build the temple and restore worship? God moved Cyrus to commission them to return. He gave them money and materials.

So why did they refuse to obey and build God's house? Isaiah and Jeremiah had predicted a national restoration that would amaze the Gentile nations and bring glory to Israel.

[Isa. 2:1-5, 11, 35; 60:1-5; Jer. 30-31] That wonderful, anticipated event had not occurred!

They did not understand that some promises will be fulfilled in the end times.

By stopping the work, the Jews were admitting they had no faith in God's Word or in God's power to perform it. [Promise: Phil. 1:6]

Consider: I must stand on the promises of God's Word while I am under construction.

3. Cease Being Selfish

Haggai challenged the people's selfish behavior. "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" Paneled houses represented the finishing touches. Their homes were not "in process." No weeds were growing around their unfinished foundations. Their homes were complete while the Temple remained nonexistent.

Their homes were complete while the Temple remained nonexistent.

Consider: If I give no thought to how I am living, I will naturally live for myself.

The bent of our hearts is always toward selfishness.

B. Believe God's Promises

When their circumstances became worse due to the enemy, they doubted God and the dependability of His Word. [Prov. 30:5; 3:5-6]

God repeatedly tells the people: "Consider your ways."

1. Set your heart; fix your attention on this

Do I spend frequent time alone before God, in the Word and in prayer (Matt. 4:1-11)?

Do I immediately confess any known sin and turn from it in genuine repentance, without blaming or excuses (I John 1:9)?

Do I build into my life protection and accountability in order not to make any provision for the sins that so easily entangle me (Rom. 13:14; Heb. 12:1-2; James 5:16)?

Do I memorize and meditate on Scriptures that will keep me from temptation and sin (Ps. 119:9, 11)?

Is my love for Jesus Christ fervent and vital because I think often on what He did for me on the cross (Gal. 2:20; Rev. 2:4)?

Ps. 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way"

C. Honor God's Name

Haggai 1:7-8 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"<sup>8</sup> Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. When God is not first, we are indifferent to His glory—His fame and His reputation being spread. The chief business of every Christian is to bring glory to God.

D. Obey God's Commands

When God speaks to us by His Word, there's only one acceptable response, and that's obedience. We don't weigh the options, we don't examine the alternatives, and we don't negotiate the terms.

Haggai 1:12-15 ALL the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God [within 23 days],...and the people feared the presence of the LORD.<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai,...spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD." So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel... the spirit of Joshua... and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

Commitment to the task begins with joy and zeal for God. Then a little opposition or rejection comes my way.

Perhaps God fails to bless me in the way and within the time frame I expected. I thought life would be better. I become more and more self-absorbed, less active in the things of God.

I become disillusioned and bitter. I lack endurance.

Have I pinned my hopes on temporary things instead of eternal realities?

Discouragement can be a red flag to pause and consider my priorities.

God does not call us to do anything for which He is not also able and willing to equip us.

- To the Israelites of Haggai's generation, He said, "I am with you." [Hag. 1:13]
- My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid!" [Hag. 2:5]

Deut. 31:6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

- Count on and depend upon His strength and work.
- Let us not be as those who perished in the wilderness, who "...again and again...tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power" [Ps. 78:41-42].

Haggai: You have God's presence, His covenant, His promises, His provision  
KNOWING this > Take Courage > Finish The Work