

1. How do we "win in life" despite the obstacles we face? How do we overcome problems we must deal with? In these chapters, the Israelites overcame all the obstacles that prevented them from finishing God's temple. By the middle of Chapter 6, the project's finished and we then read of the Israelites celebrate by doing one of their God ordained rituals (Passover). Chapter 6 seems like a good place to end the book. After all, the main purpose of these Israelites returning there was to rebuild the temple. The last few chapters introduced us to those who tried to stop the Israelites from completing that task. The "good guys" won, so shouldn't this be the end of the book? As with any other work for God, we're never really done until we're called home to be with Him, so in that sense were never done. Still by the middle of Chapter 6, "it's party time". We'll read of the temple being finished and the Israelites are back to their holiday rituals. The great lessons to be learned in these two chapters is about "how to win" in spite of the obstacles we face in life. Yes this lesson is about on relying upon God in order to achieve that victory. To state what should be obvious, we don't just stand still and pray. Hard work is required to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus. We'll see that concept in these two chapters. They also show that victory over the forces that try to prevent us from making a difference for God, can be defeated by our trust in Him and simply "moving forward" to make that difference for Him.
 - a) OK, long paragraph, time for a breather! We don't read of that victory until the middle of Chapter 6. We need to get through Chapter 5 to get to Chapter 6. I'll just say those who do oppose God's work give it their best shot in this chapter. Don't take it lightly. There was a long period of time where the work didn't get done and the temple stood unfinished for all that time. There was about a twenty-year period before this project was done.
 - b) Assume we're not building a temple or even a church right now. Suppose we're just going through life, trying our best to be a good witness for Jesus, and involved in regular things at our church, how do we get this kind of victory? How does it apply to us? First I'll state that God gives each of us gifts and finding ways to use them to make a difference for God is never a waste of our lives. Still, life is not one continuous project. We usually have lots of projects, steps and phases to go through in life. We may even teach others. Those we're teaching may even go on to teach others. My point is life's full of the simple moments where we can appreciate what we've accomplished. We can pause to enjoy the moment as we appreciate what we did for God before moving on. For example, I enjoy the simple moments when I finish a book get thank you letters. All I'm saying is if we don't stop to appreciate life, we'll miss it completely.
 - c) Bottom line, these two chapters read like a "primer" on how God works in our lives so we can overcome the obstacles that we face to make a difference for Him. Therefore, my lesson title, is "How can have victory in life as a witness for Jesus". Let me continue:
2. Chapter 5 and the early part of Chapter 6 focus on two letters. The first is the local officials write to the Persian Emperor questioning the temple building project being done in Jerusalem. Then we get a second letter, which is the emperor's response. The bottom line is the Persian leadership already gave the order to rebuild the temple and the Israelites followed through on that order. Realize the Persians had a rule on their books that says in effect, once a law's in place it can't be overturned anyone even by another emperor. That rule made sure the Persians were careful as to what they decreed as new laws. By having these historical letters as a part of the text, we see that praying to God is not the "just pray and we're all set" solution to all our problems. God does for us what we can't do for ourselves. What we can do for ourselves, He expects us to do it. As I like to say, God's answer to a lot of prayer, is "I gave you a brain, now use it".
 - a) Chapter 5 also has mentions of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Yes the two who got their own books among the Minor Prophets. The point is when we need encouragement, I find that God brings encouragers to help us accomplish our work.

- b) Grant it, we don't have official bible prophets show up at our door and say, "God said that we need to get rolling on this project, so get dressed, we got work to do!" However, I have seen God regularly send encouragers, when we're "down in the dumps" as His desire is a lot more than just "we're saved, go away for now". God saves us for a purpose, so that we can use our lives to make a difference for Him. So we lead others to Him and help people to grow in their faith in Him. That's an overly brief version of how God wants us to live as a witness for Him. Speaking of witnesses, let's get back to the Israelites.
 - c) We established the encouragers, next it's back to the issue at hand: These chapters include a letter from the local government officials to the emperor. The people doing this project are listed. I don't think these are the "enemies" of the last chapter. This is more like those in charge wanting to get to the "bottom of this!" The impression is they were in charge of the area and simply wanted to make sure what the Israelites were doing was legal. We get a review of the decree to rebuild the temple and the story of the status to date.
3. Chapter 6 opens with what I call "Permission granted". It was the official response that they could continue to build it and despite all the efforts by the local enemies to stop it, "things can continue as planned". After five and half chapters it's mission accomplished. That leads to the question of why is there ten chapters in this book if it's built in Chapter 6? The answer of course is similar to the one of salvation. Now that we're saved, "so what"? What do we do now? We'll get to the last four chapters in the next few lessons. For right now, I need to discuss the rest of Chapter 6.
- a) The short version is once the temple was done, it's time to "use it". Yes the sacrifices have been going since the altar was first built and the temple could be used for the rituals listed in Leviticus as a prime example.
 - b) The main point is that Chapter Six gives an illustration to us that once we finish preparing to worship God, we need to "get on with the show". For the Israelites that meant not only the sacrifices but also the holidays associated with worshipping Him. It just happened to finish right before the holiday of Passover (the day Jesus was crucified). That day marks a new beginning in the Israelite life as they remembered how God preserved them through Egypt and it marks for Christians how Jesus died for our sins that day. So it's logical that's a good time to "start again", which I admit would make a good alternative title here.
 - c) The Christian equivalent might be, "OK, the building's built, now lets use it as a gathering place to worship, encourage fellow believers, draw in new people and plan ways that we can work to make a difference for Jesus. There's "church" in a nutshell! The temple here in Jerusalem was to be built essentially according to God's intent. The underlying purpose is a place for His people to seek forgiveness of their sins and honor Him as God. I'd argue the main purpose of any church gathering is a place where we can work together to make a difference for Him.
4. OK you get the idea. The Israelites "starting over" is a model of how God wants to use our lives to continue to make a difference for Him. Even after we mess up, He still desires we work as a team in order not only to grow the church, but also to work together to encourage each other and find ways to use our lives for His glory. Even if you're not in the professional ministry, God desires all believers do their share with their time and resources to make a difference for Him in this world. In other words, we're saved for a purpose, to glorify God with our lives.
- a) These two chapters and this book are a great model of how to glorify God as we each use our lives to make a difference for Him. Of course some work harder than others. Yes we all have other things we want to accomplish in life. What we need to ask is in the end, did we do what really matters for all of eternity? Yes we need to work and yes we have family issues to deal with. I never want to look back at life and say I wasted the gifts He gave me. I want to say I used His gifts He gave me for His glory. That's what makes life worth living. That's why we're saved in the first place.
 - b) The rest of course is the details. Therefore, I invite you to join me as we go through all the verses in these two chapters. Let's begin.

5. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. ² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.
- a) The first thing to keep in mind is a "time gap". In the last chapter there were "locals" who worked to stop the construction of the temple. Some argue the locals even got the leaders to make sure the work stopped. Bottom line it was probably a good number of years. I'm guessing it was about two decades where this project went unfinished.
 - b) If you wonder if this project is important to God, consider the fact he sent two prophets to specifically encourage the Israelites to finish the temple. If you study the books of Haggai and Zechariah, the former was more pragmatic and the latter was more of a visionary. I'm just saying God uses people with different background and different personalities as to be a witness for the Israelites. Never knock the role of an encourager. I'm willing to bet that these two actually got their hands dirty. They didn't say, "Wait a minute I can't be part of the construction team, God might speak to me any second now!" I'm just saying yes, they gave words of encouragement but I'm also willing to bet they gave their time where their mouth is, so to speak.
 - c) In Verse 2, we got the civil leader Zerubbabel and the religious leader Jeshua also working on the rebuilding project. It's like thinking, "God wants us to do this, why have we wasted all this time pleading with our enemies when we should be at it?"
 - d) Let me also ask the other obvious question: When we start a work for God, we don't get a couple of God ordained bible prophets to say, "Build this or else"! All we can do is use the bible as a model of how we're supposed to act to make a difference for Him. I'm reminded of the old Christian joke, "Look God we built a flood control channel for the Spirit to work through". To state the obvious God does what God wants. My point is we must pray and watch where God leads versus trying to lead without Him. All we have to do is pray and then make the best decisions we can after that and assessed the situation. We always need to be flexible, in that we planned to do "this", but it became obvious is we should be doing "that". That's usually how God guides us!
 - e) Meanwhile back in Jerusalem about 2,500 years ago, we have an unfinished temple that is God ordained and ordered by the emperor to build. Since the marching orders are pretty clear here, they needed to get back on task.
6. Verse 3: At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?" ⁴ They also asked, "What are the names of the men constructing this building?" ⁵ But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.
- a) As I stated in the introduction, these aren't the "bad guys" of the previous lesson. They're most likely the Persian leaders in charge of Jerusalem and that area. The idea effectively is that a building project is going on in our backyard, and we want to make sure it's ok as to protect our jobs! Therefore, they asked in effect, "Who is in charge, who's doing the work, and why are you doing this?"
 - b) As a modern example, suppose we travel somewhere to help build a school, hospital or if we want to be a street witness for Jesus. Pretty soon local officials will knock on our door as if to ask, "Who said you can do this?" Then of course, we'd have to explain ourselves as we desire to "Make a difference". Most of the time, the locals would say, "You want to put a new playground or hospital here, as long as it's done to code, go ahead. If you desire to go in the street and tell people about Jesus, just do it nicely and don't beat a bible over the head of people" (I'm exaggerating to make a point but you get the idea!) I know of those who witness for Jesus in places where it's illegal and yes there are times where one has to obey God versus obeying men. My point is this idea ties to these verses.

7. Verse 6: This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to King Darius. ⁷ The report they sent him read as follows: To King Darius: Cordial greetings. ⁸ The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God. The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction.
- a) Keep in mind the order to rebuild the temple came under a king named Cyrus. The next emperor was Darius. The last lesson mentioned opposition to the emperor after Darius. I simply mention that to show that the time line of Chapters 4-5 go past Chapter 6 a little.
 - b) Anyway, the local Persian officials ruling over the Israelites were concerned the building of this project may not have been approved. Thus this letter was written to work its way "up the chain of command".
 - c) By the way by the Persian local officials calling the temple "The Great God" does not mean all the Persians thought of God that way. It just means this is what the locals call their god and uses that title as a sense of formality.
 - d) This letter gives us a few details on the scope of the project. The Israelites are using large stones and lining the inside walls with timber. The scope states, "progress to date" and we again get a progress report. As I stated, I'm sure it was done to make sure "it's legal." The letter continues:
8. Verse 9: We questioned the elders and asked them, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?" ¹⁰ We also asked them their names, so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information. ¹¹ This is the answer they gave us: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. ¹² But because our fathers angered the God of heaven, he handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.
- a) We get a "repeat" of the fact the names were asked of who was building the temple. That's because it was part of this letter. The letter itself is part of the text.
 - b) Time for a secret for those who don't know or haven't figured it out yet. Ezra himself has not been a part of the story so far. If you have read the text carefully to date, the text never mentions Ezra himself. That's because he doesn't come on the scene until about 60 years after the events of Chapters 1-6. Ezra relies on historical documents to tell this story and I am sure it also includes talking to the Israelites who were there when he got there. All I'm saying is we get a lot of "letters and records" in Chapters 1-6 as Ezra himself wasn't there!
 - c) Meanwhile back this letter itself. This letter includes the response the Israelites gave those officials. It's a good twenty years since the sacrificial altar was set up. Most of the gang is still alive, as the leaders appear to be the same.
 - d) Notice the response the Israelites gave. They blamed themselves for the old temple going down for the count. They also named Nebuchadnezzar, who was part of the Babylonian group the Persians conquered. It's as if they're saying, "We're not blaming the Persians at all for this, in fact we're grateful that they're letting us rebuild it as we'll read in Verse 13.
 - e) My point is when we deal with nonbelievers for a project we believe God called us to do, I would say it's important to be diplomatic. State how we're helping the community for the project we're taking on. If their government officials gave us permission to do a project, it may be necessary to explain it, "show them our building permits" to get on with it.
 - f) I'm convinced one of the main reasons the Israelites were able to finish the temple, is they were diplomatic with the local officials. Grant it, it's been twenty years and God sent them a few prophets. Just like He might send people to encourage us or even help our project a little. I find that any work for God is time consuming and obstacles will appear. In spite of all of that, like this project, ours too will get done on His timing if it is His will. With that bit of encouragement out of my system, back to Chapter 5.

9. Verse 13: "However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. ¹⁴ He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon "Then King Cyrus gave them to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor, ¹⁵ and he told him, 'Take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem. And rebuild the house of God on its site.' ¹⁶ So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem. From that day to the present it has been under construction but is not yet finished."
- a) We get more "review" of the first four chapters in this paragraph. Again this is the official letter so they're stating the facts again. The reason this is included (in my opinion) as due to the Persian rule that one of their laws can never be reversed. Therefore, the emperor is told what the previous emperor did so the current guy "couldn't mess with history". Here we get the facts that the "stuff" that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple, Cyrus (the last emperor of Persia) said in effect, "Take all that stuff back to Israel" and rebuild the temple!
 - b) I am still amazed as I think about all this. Stop and consider all the nations in history that were conquered and scattered. No nation in history every became a country again, except for Israel. The leader of the largest empire the world had ever seen to date, said they can return to their land and "take their stuff with them". As I said in the first lesson, it is a 4-6 month journey to travel back to Israel and some Israelites chose to make that trip. Besides taking over that land again, the "first order of business was to rebuild the temple, which is the main story of this book.
 - c) By the way, I talked earlier about the names Sheshbazzar as the leader and Zerubbabel as the leader. Some scholars think it's one and the same. Others argued that Sheshbazzar did die and Zerubbabel took over. Don't worry, that's not on the "final quiz". We just get both names as civil leaders, and those are the two likely explanations.
 - d) As I've been stating it's been a good 20 years since the Israelites got there and the temple's not done yet. Personally, I think God's behind this letter. I think God got the local leaders to "get the ball rolling" and thus this letter. In these two chapters we don't read about any of the Israelite enemies (Samaritans) being a problem. I think the leaders said in effect, we are going to bring this situation to a head once and for all. Thus the letter. Do I think God is working behind the scenes here? Yes, since obviously he wanted the temple built.
 - e) Let me pause to ask the question, why was this so important? Yes Solomon built one and the one Ezra's letter discusses actually stood a little longer than Solomon's temple when it includes the remodeling that Herod did roughly around Jesus time. What I mean is why can't the Israelites just pray for God's forgiveness and offer sacrifices to ease their guilt? I would argue that God ordained all of this not for His sake, but to help people realize that He desires to draw close to us, but the sin issue has to be dealt with first. The reason that we Christians don't have an official temple, is because Jesus is our payment for all of our sins, past, present and future. The sacrifices are a model of that.
 - f) So why don't religious Jews rebuild that temple today? Many want to. The issue is that spot is where a famous Muslim mosque stands and it'd start another world war if it was taken down. Thus we have a "stalemate" for the last 50 years (more or less).
10. Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter.
- a) Realize the emperor didn't live in Babylon but it still existed as a city. The letter requests a search be made of the "royal library" to find the order the previous emperor Cyrus made again about 20 years earlier. In other words the Israelites are saying in effect, "The ball's in your court, your highness". Check the records "do a google search" and verify all of this is true. Obviously the answer wasn't going to come in a day. It takes months for all that to go from Persian headquarters, so everyone was on hold until an answer was given.

11. Chapter 6, Verse 1: King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon.² A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it: Memorandum:³ In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid.
- a) Note that Chapter 6 is not the same letter. It's the response sent back to Israel. In effect, it says the emperor found the record of what the previous leader did in the first year of His reign. Therefore, the current Persian emperor had to go along with it.
 - b) A little history might help here. When Darius took over, there was some "uproar" as there was rebellion against the empire and he had to squash it. Therefore, to get people rooting for him (so to speak), I think he gave the decree. It's like the old joke about the Romans, if you don't rebel against Rome and pay your taxes, you can do what you want. That's what I see behind the scenes of this response.
 - c) OK John, this is neat ancient history. I should care because? Remember the basic idea that God will do for us what we can't do for ourselves. If the "officials" won't allow us to do a work for God, it still can be done, but it's a lot harder to do. I know missionaries who are working "illegally" to bring the gospel in areas where it is forbidden. Still where it can be done with government permission, it's a whole lot easier, especially when it's a noticeable big project like a big temple.
 - d) Bottom line the emperor gave his blessing on the project, everybody "back to work".
12. Verse 3 (cont.): It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide,⁴ with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury.⁵ Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.
- a) Here we get some specifics. The original dimensions are in "cubits" which is essentially a measurement from the elbow to the fingertip. It was an official standard. Commentaries love to speculate why the height was stated the width was stated but not the depth. First it was a little different in size than Solomon's temple. Maybe, the emperor just liked those measurements. It's one of those bits of bible trivia we can ask God one day. I suspect but I can't prove is that Ezra got this letter roughly sixty years later somehow that little detail either didn't make the official translation or was lost through the millenniums. It doesn't make a difference since the Romans destroyed that temple. Now you know all of that, so let's move on.
 - b) The emperor even mentioned some of the construction details. Three courses (layers) was made of stone and it was lined with wood on the inside. All the "stuff" associated with the temple (except the ark itself, which is another topic) came back to Israel and were going to be used once again. If nothing else, it shows the hand of God in restoring what was dead back to life again. Yes it's another model of resurrection, but I'll leave it at that.
 - c) Anyway the letter acknowledges the stuff the Israelites brought back for the temple can be used there, and that's stating the obvious, so onto Verse 6.
13. Verse 6: Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you, their fellow officials of that province, stay away from there.⁷ Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.
- a) Here's where the emperor took it one step further: He effectively wrote, "don't mess with the Israelites, let them do their thing". I'm sure that implies to stop anyone who wants to prevent this from being finished. Bottom line, the external threat to getting God's temple built has been eliminated! Want proof that God's behind this project, that's it right there.
 - b) OK John, we don't get a letter from the emperor green lighting our project. The leaders of our church don't count. So how do we relate to all of this? Thought you'd never ask.

- i) As I stated, there are times there are times when Christians take risks to serve in an area where it is illegal. Let's say it's something "easier" like building an orphanage or a hospital or even a new playground. I find that if the Christians are doing good usually the governments allow such things. A lot of Christian projects are often on the border. For example, teaching English in a foreign country. Often a witness is a matter of being subtle about it. My advice is praying and using good judgment for the decisions we must make.
 - c) Now that the project got the second official "green light", we can move on.
14. Verse 8: Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God: The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop.⁹ Whatever is needed--young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem--must be given them daily without fail,¹⁰ so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.
- a) Keep in mind this was all done by a non-Jewish leader. So if Satan wants to stop or try to slow down God's plans, why did Satan allow this? The answer's prayer and God working in the background. No plan of God can be stopped if we pray it through and He does the things we can't do. With all that said, we get a supply list here.
 - b) If you recall that I stated earlier, the emperor was concerned with solidifying his rule, so I see him ordaining all of this as if to say, "Hey guys, pay your taxes don't rebel and I'll help with this temple in exchange for your tax money!" Am I positive that's what he thought? No, but it makes sense if you understand politics.
 - c) Bottom line, the temple can be rebuilt and the supplies were being taken care of!
 - d) Notice the emperor even said "Pleasing to the God of heaven". Do I think he was sincere in that comment? Who knows? It may have been politics or maybe not. Either way, the supplies are being sent, so "be quiet and get back to work everyone!"
 - e) As to us, when we get "Green lighted" we may not like all the conditions, but accept it as it is and trust God's working His way on His timing. Often our works for God will come in phases. So if we only get to "step 1" today, remember that if it's God will, the rest of it, will occur on His timing.
 - f) Time for my favorite line of the chapter:
15. Verse 11: Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble.¹² May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.
- a) Of all things, I want to talk a little about crucifixion. The Romans didn't invent the concept but they did perfect the maximum amount of pain that could be inflicted. It was invented by the Persians. If you study the book of Esther, that punishment was used for those who wanted to kill the Jewish people after Esther exposed their leader. I bring that up here, as I see the reference to a board being pulled out of the temple in Verse 11 as a threat. It's the idea of saying, "Mess with the Persians or even with the temple construction, you're going get nailed to die on a piece of wood". I don't know about you, but that'd scare me to avoid that type of punishment.
 - b) Then just in case any conspiracy theory was bigger than one man, Verse 12 states that any group that tries to stop the construction of the temple or interferes with worship there, it's bad news for those people. If you wonder why the Samaritans we read about earlier here are not mentioned, I'd say this edict pretty much shut them up!
 - c) The point for you and me is when we face problems bigger than we can handle, yes those are the ones we must turn over to God and He prevents them His way on His timing.

16. Verse 13: Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. ¹⁴ So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. ¹⁵ The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.
- a) Here's the really good news. We made it to the end of the construction project.
 - b) Anyway, the emperor said, the local leaders carried it out and it got built. We even get an encore mention of Haggai and Zechariah as they probably were still encouraging this. Yes it's party time as the work got done.
 - c) Time for another quick bit of trivial. The first three emperors were Cyrus, Darius and then a man named Artaxerxes. So if the temple was done under Darius, why list the third guy? One has to understand ancient writing. By the time Ezra came on the scene again, about 6 decades later (Chapter 7), Artaxerxes was on the throne. In Chapter 7, that emperor gives his own decree regarding the Israelites so Ezra's covering the scope of this whole thing.
 - d) For those who like time stamps, best we can tell it was the spring of 515BC. Scholars also like to point out that the books of Haggai and Zechariah were completed by now. We do not read of how these two prophets encouraged them. They may have repeated some of the things they wrote, but I think it was more of a sense of encouraging people as well as helping with the construction.
 - e) So why is Zechariah always listed as "son of Iddo". The answer is there 's a bunch of men with that name in the bible, so his "full name" is given to show which Zechariah is was.
 - f) Since the temple happened to be done right before the traditional spring holidays (yes I'm taking about Passover), what a better time to break it in once and for all!
 - i) As I stated in the introduction, one's work for God is never done. Once a church is built, it's no good unless it's used! It's sort of the same idea here!
17. Verse 16: Then the people of Israel--the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles--celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. ¹⁷ For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸ And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.
- a) As I said a few times in this lesson, "It's party time now". So you know the visual picture of the word translated joy (end of Verse 16) literally means to jump up and down as one's so excited. So yes, it is party time!
 - b) For my math challenged readers, a total of 712 animals were sacrificed. Yes it was one big BBQ for God. Try to picture marching 712 animals to one spot to be butchered. Yes it was one big bloody mess, but that's what animal sacrifices were. Here's something I'd suspect most of you never thought of: None of the sacrificial animals were predators. The reason is, innocent animals being sacrificed show how the innocent suffer due to our sins. That is why we get all of that. By the way when Solomon's temple was dedicated about 400 years earlier, far, far more animals were done. Anyway the priests were busy. Remember those priests were all of the tribe of the Levites so the rest helped them.. We tend to think of the priests as nice people giving sermons and blessing children. In fact, they also had to do a bunch of butchering, so keep that in mind!
 - c) Remember that officially"the old kingdom of Judah were two of the 12 tribes. Remember that the Persians conquered the Babylonians who conquered the Assyrians who were the ones who conquered the northern Israelite kingdom. I suspect people from all 12 groups were there. Even if they're not God's still the God of "all 12 tribes" of Israel wherever the people lived in the world. I like the expression Jewish people do fail to recognize Jesus is the Messiah. Christians fail to recognize we worship a Jewish God.

- d) Let me explain the dedication from another perspective: Does God need all of this? Does He have a need to be worshipped? Is it ego? No. It's not about Him, it's about us. When we work together to honor the God who created us, it gives us a sense of perspective that we should regularly consider about why we were created: To glorify God with our lives.
 - i) Even with all that said, why all the animals? Was it to put on a big show? No, it's so the people realize their sinful nature before God. Sacrificing all those animals is a reminder of how sinful we are. Yes I know the "blood of goats and calves cannot take away our sins", (Hebrews 9:12) but until the Messiah came in the world, that's all that could be done. So the big BBQ went on from there.
 - e) One more thing before I move on. If you studied Jeremiah he made a big deal that it will be exactly 70 years for the Israelites to return. If you measure from the time the first time the Babylonians attacked Israel to the time the Israelites returned yes it was 70 years. It is also exactly seventy years from the day the Babylonians destroyed the temple to the time it was built and dedicated. So does that mean God wanted to delay the construction so it would be exactly 70 years? No it simple means He knows all things and He knew the big "70" was a fulfillment of prophesy two ways!
18. Verse 19: On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover.²⁰ The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their brothers the priests and for themselves.²¹ So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel.²² For seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.
- a) First question, why bring up Passover? Yes the Israelites have not done it in Jerusalem for a long time, but still why bring this up here? Couldn't the text just say, "the temple's done and now life goes on with all the standard holidays and rituals observed"?
 - i) My thought is because this holiday's about separating those who are serious about seeking God with those who "just live locally". If you don't know, there are three holidays that "run together" in the spring. Passover is the most famous for us as it is the day Jesus was crucified. (Jesus as the Israelites sacrifice lambs to remember how God preserved them in Egypt, so Jesus is "ultimate sacrifice for sin", thus it's appropriate He was crucified on that date.) The "Feast of Unleavened Bread" is a separate holiday that comes right after Passover. Jewish people must not work on the first and last day of that festival.
 - b) The point here is simply that the Israelites were in a good mood and the temple happened to be done right before this holiday so it was an occasion to break it in. After all the work is all done. The purpose of building a temple to God is to use it. The purpose of building a church is to use it, so that got emphasized here for that reason.
 - c) With all that said, we made it through the temple!
19. Let me close by coming back to my title: "How can have victory in life as a witness for Jesus". We may not get the great victory the Israelites got at that point, but they didn't always get one either. God calls us to use our lives to be a witness for Him. I'd argue if we pray for His will to be done, if we pray for boldness to carry out that will, we make the effort and do what's logical, then yes I would say we are having that victory. Grant it we may not get the big party until the next life, but if we do use our lives for His glory, we can't lose no matter what, and despite the mistakes that'll occur along the way. I never claim to be perfect and God knows I've messed up a lot. In spite of all that, all I can do is beg for forgiveness, deal with the consequences and keep moving forward to make a difference for Him. If we do that, we can't lose no mater what.
- a) With that said, before I close in prayer, never think "I'm not good enough for God or there is nothing I can contribute", God's always willing to use anyone who humbles themselves.

20. Heavenly Father, thank You for choosing us, faults and all. Thank You for calling us to live a life so we can make a difference for You. Despite our mistakes and our failures, all we can do is ask for Your mercy and humble ourselves before You. We know that You work through imperfect people and ask that You continue to work through us, faults and all. May we trust in Your Spirit as we continue to use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!