

# **BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS**

## **Ezra Nehemiah Esther**

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*People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).*

### **Ezra** Chapter Five *"The Dynamic Duo"*

#### **Introduction**

I had a *Batman & Robin* talking alarm clock. Every morning, I would rise to the Dynamic Duo alerting me that there was serious work to be done in the hours ahead.

The returnees in Ezra Five were spiritually sleeping. God woke them from their slumber. He sent them their own dynamic duo. Haggai and Zechariah sounded the alarm, saying, "Rise and build." They resumed work on the Temple that had ceased for some sixteen years.

Christians sometimes are asleep spiritually. We're supposed to be building, but have ceased. God wakes us from our spiritual slumber with another dynamic duo, telling us to "Rise and build."

*- being changed to bring change -*

We'll see this and more in our study as we organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Since You Have God's Enablers, Rise & Build, and #2 Since You Are God's Enabled, Be Resolved & Don't Stop Building.

#1 Since You Have God's Enablers,  
Rise & Build  
(v1-2)

Everything written in the Old Testament is for our learning. In these particular books – Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther – we are learning about building with God. We're not building a stone-and-mortar structure like the Temple at Jerusalem; we're building a Temple using living stones and the mortar of love for one another and others. You

and I, as Christians, are the Temple of God on earth – both individually and corporately.

The returnees had ceased building for sixteen years. They began again when God sent them two men, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Ezra 5:1 Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, *who was over them*.

It only makes sense that **prophets** would **prophesy**. Why didn't the prophets prophesy for sixteen long years?

1. One reason is that God had already prophesied to them about the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. Just because a prophecy is old doesn't mean it's lost its power. Too often we are looking for something new, when what we need has already been given to us by our loving heavenly Father.
2. A second reason they didn't prophesy is that God didn't lead them to. He waited to give them the words, waited until He saw that the people were not going to obey His previous words before He sent Haggai and Zechariah to stir them up. God is patient, and He will allow us a measure of freedom – even if it is freedom to falter.

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Although prophecy can involve *foretelling* the future, it most often is simply the *forth-telling* of the truth. Haggai's prophecy is a good example. His primary message to the people was not about some far-distant future event; it was to rise up from their complacency and begin to build again. It was an encouragement to them to return to the truth they already knew.

The entire Word of God, then – the Bible – ought to be received as prophetic. It certainly foretells the future with 110% accuracy. But it mostly forth-tells the truth, to stir you up to work as builders of God's spiritual Temple on earth.

Many times, when you are slumbering, or struggling, it is a Scripture you need. Chances are, God has already given it to you – but you

may not see it in its prophetic significance. Once you do, you're ready to press forward.

Ezra 5:2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God *were* with them, helping them.

Zerubbabel was the civil leader, and Jeshua the religious leader. The leaders are the only ones mentioned, but it is understood that when they rose up to build, the people followed. It's a word to those in any kind of leadership to set the example.

The prophets... *were with them, helping them.* They may have held a trowel, or set stones and timbers in place; but mostly their presence and prophesying were the help the people needed. It's not going too far to say that they *came alongside* them. Who does that sound like?

It sounds a lot like Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit into your heart to be with you, as your helper Who comes alongside you. The real Dynamic Duo in the life of a Christian is the prophetic Word of God empowered by the presence of the Spirit of God Who lives within you.

Let's talk briefly about this amazing combo, the Word and the Spirit. I think we sometimes miss the impact of God's Word. One reason is that we think of it only academically. For example: Here we are, in a lecture format. We'd describe me as teaching. Many of you are taking notes, learning as students.

While that is true, and we encourage it... There is more going on. Bible study **is** like a lecture on a subject; but it's also like a poetry reading by your favorite poet; it's also like a concert by your favorite performer; it's also like a story told by your favorite author. Ultimately, it is a love story, or love song, being brought to you by your Lover.

Pam had a thought she shared with me the other day. Some Christians lack interest in the Old Testament. Some denominations ignore most of the Old Testament. They have their reasons:

1. Christians can find certain passages tedious or downright boring.
2. Denominations don't see how the New Testament is in the Old Testament contained; while the Old is in the New explained.

But what if you saw God as your Lover? Then the Old Testament would be like suddenly discovering a bunch of notes and letters from your Lover that were hidden in the attic. *Of course you'd read them!* You'd hang on every word.

God's Spirit empowered Word is your enabler. It enables you to do *anything* and *everything* God asks or commands. Unless you have some real impairment, either physical or mental, the Spirit empowered Word is everything you need to live for God.

It doesn't 'work' only because we no longer believe in its sufficiency. Instead of believing I can do all things through Jesus Christ, Who strengthens me, I am looking for a condition or a syndrome that explains my shortcomings and failures. The vast majority of people do not suffer from any real condition or syndrome:

1. They are either unsaved and need to experience the joy of God's salvation
2. Or they are saved, but have limited God's Word to its academic interest.

You need to hang on God's every Word, aided by the Spirit Who lives within you, as if He were speaking directly to you, telling you how much He loves you.

If you are building for the Lord; or if you've ceased building; the solution is the same. Let the Spirit of God apply the Word of God and you will continue building.

Since you have these two dynamic enablers... *You are enabled!*

#2 Since You Are God's Enabled,  
Be Resolved & Don't Stop Building  
(v3-17)

The exiles returned to building. They again faced discouragement and difficulties; but they handled them differently. They kept on building despite the opposition.

What we want to notice in these verses is how an enabled person acts and reacts in the face of the opposition of this world to spiritual building. The first thing we notice is boldness:

Ezra 5:3 At the same time Tattenai the governor of *the region* beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?"

Ezra 5:4 Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building.

Notice they did not answer their question immediately. Their adversaries asked, *Who command you to build this Temple?* They answered by giving the names of those who were doing the building.

This is an example of boldness on two levels:

1. First, because it is bold to ignore a question and give as an answer information that is more important and meaningful.
2. Second, it is bold to identify yourself with the spiritual work going on when your adversaries are seeking an advantage against you.

- being changed to bring change -

When you are enabled by God, you act this way. You realize that a person's question is not as important as the eternal issues surrounding their life. And you identify yourself with Jesus, and as a Christian who is building something of lasting value in your life and in the lives of others.

The next characteristic of an enabled believer is perseverance:

Ezra 5:5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this *matter*.

They could not make them stop. The Jews persevered in the face of opposition. We will persevere when we are enabled by God.

It says that **the eye of their God** was upon them. Let me suggest something. We all know that God is watching us. But instead of being encouraged by it, we can get discouraged by it, because we think of Him as watching us in a negative sense. He's watching us fail and fall short – watching us in a disappointed manner.

**Not so!** His **eye** is **upon** us. He is seeking to protect you; to lead you; to show you the way. Sure, you will sin and fall short. But even then His eye is upon you to encourage you to get up and go on.

The adversaries of the building project in Jerusalem sent a lengthy letter to the Persian government. We want to focus on their description of the Jews, because it tells us more about how we act and react when we are enabled by God.

Ezra 5:6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent: The governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who *were in the region* beyond the River, to Darius the king.

Ezra 5:7 (They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus) To Darius the king: All peace.

Ezra 5:8 Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.

Stop there for a moment. The work went on **diligently**. The word for diligent is poetically translated *fast on* in the KJV: **The work goeth fast on**. In other words, they were enthusiastic and excited about it.

You can persevere without being diligent. You can plod along, doing the minimum. Or you can go *fast on* with joy.

Ezra 5:9 Then we asked those elders, *and* spoke thus to them: “Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?”

Ezra 5:10 We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who *were* chief among them.

Ezra 5:11 And thus they returned us an answer, saying: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed.

Ezra 5:12 But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon.

The builders did not allow their past to interfere with their present. God had disciplined them, and now they were back hard at it. This is the characteristic of forgetting those things that are behind.

We are being taught too much to dwell on our past – especially how we have been victimized by people or circumstances. We are told that we cannot move forward until all the issues in our past are resolved. I suggest to you that when you come to Jesus, and receive the forgiveness of your sins and a new nature from God – your past *is* resolved and you need not dwell upon it!

Ezra 5:13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God.

Ezra 5:14 Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon - those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor.

Ezra 5:15 And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple *site* that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.'

Ezra 5:16 Then the same Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished."

They said, from that time even until now [the Temple] has been under construction... It seems an untrue statement because they had ceased building the Temple for at least sixteen years. Were they lying?

No, they were not lying. They were realizing that every time you begin again with God, He has cancelled out your failure. He's not holding it over you; He won't remind you of it. An enabled person understands the grace of God.

If you have failed God; if you have fallen short; start again right now.

Ezra 5:17 Now therefore, if *it seems* good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which *is* there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this *matter*.



Their adversaries appealed to the highest authority in the land. You and I respect the authorities; but we answer to the Highest Authority in the universe! An enabled believer continues to serve God on earth, continues to build with and for the Lord, against even the most potent opposition. It may lead to persecution, or even martyrdom. But to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

### Applying the Word

If you are a Christian, God has provided His enablers – the Word and the Spirit. You are therefore enabled to go on building with Him and for Him in the face of any and all discouragements and difficulties. You can really do all things through Jesus, Who strengthens you.

If you are not yet a Christian, you are in the category of an adversary; you are an opponent of God's.

Look at it this way: What help do you have to get through life? Is it money? Family? Friends? Career? Your health?

Even if you had all the money you desired; a great family; lots of friends; a successful career; and good health to a ripe old age... You still couldn't get into Heaven without Jesus.

If you are honest, you are struggling. You know there is something missing; and you know it is spiritual.

It is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.



