



*Wherefore comfort  
yourselves together,  
and edify one another,  
even as also ye do.*

1 Thess. 5:11

# CHAPTER FIVE



## To Instill Courage in Others

**READ: EZRA CHAPTER 5 AND HAGGAI 1 & 2**

It was 1979, in the land before email. I was sitting in front of an old wooden desk in the upstairs bedroom of our one-and-a-half story house. Under the window was a waist-high book shelf that housed an enormous collection of teen magazines. They contained everything from Bo Derek's braids to the Bee Gees. One thing they didn't contain however was the precious letter I held in my hand.

It was from my sister--an older sister who was lending advice and encouragement.

Remember one thing, she wrote, encouragement is like a cottonwood tree. When the weather is warm, the tree releases its seeds that float in the air like little white clouds. They're gentle yet powerful seeds.

Over the years I've come to realize just how true that is--encouragement is a powerful force.

It's the cheer at the end of a race that gives a runner that final push to the finish.

It's the nurturing of a parent that instills confidence in their child's life.

It's the words of a spouse who inspires you to grow in God's grace.

It's Haggai and Zechariah--two faithful prophets who encouraged the Jews to get back to work on rebuilding the temple.

### TO INSTILL COURAGE IN OTHERS

To encourage someone is to "instill courage" in them. Sometimes it a much-needed push, and other times it's a gentle reminder that God's on our side. No doubt Haggai and Zechariah spurred them on by reminding the Jews that God was on their side and that He was their strength. As such, the people of Judah courageously continued the work of the Lord.

*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. (1 Thessalonians 5:11, KJV)*

The Greek word for edify that we see here is oikodomeō (Strong's G3618). It means to build up a home or erect a building. The word is also used to describe a restoration, repair, or a rebuild.

## ≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Haggai's prophesy consisted of three messages that spanned a four-month period. They got back to work after the first prophesy, but Haggai and Zachariah continued to exhort them for three more months.

I can't think of a better word to describe the work that's taking place in this chapter than "edification," can you? As the men were rebuilding the temple, the prophets were rebuilding the men!

*Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them. (Ezra 5:2, KJV)*

The impossible is always possible when He calls you to act. If He's called you to it, He will see you through it. But sometimes we need people like Haggai and Zechariah to remind us of this.

## ≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

The book of Haggai (only 2 chapters long) fits right into verse 1 of this chapter. It expounds on the details of the prophecy mentioned in verse 1.

## DON'T LET YOUR FEAR HOLD YOU BACK

Here's the thing--don't let your fear or your weakness keep you from doing God's work. Remember David was just a boy when he killed the giant. Moses was slow of speech when he led the Exodus out of Egypt. Abraham was too old to have children when Isaac was born. Paul was a well-known sinner putting Christians to death when God called Him to bring salvation to the Gentiles. God used the weak and the few to show the mercy and power of His saving grace.

Was Jesus afraid? He was afflicted, that much we know. He wept, He was in agony, and He swept drops of blood. But knowing the journey ahead, He was still ready and willing to say, "Not my will but Thine be done."

There are some days when I feel more like hiding in my backyard behind a good book than sharing my faith, because I know there's a good chance I'll get hurt. But wanting and doing are two different things.

He'll See You Through it!

Imagine how David felt before facing the giant. Was he afraid? Was he facing a giant within before he stood face-to-face with Goliath?

Afraid or not, he stepped out in faith, conquered the giant, and brought glory to God.

Some days I feel like I'm facing a giant—an insurmountable problem that won't go away. If I face it, I'm taking a risk. If I put myself out there, I might get hurt. If I try I could fail...

And so, I'm left with a choice. I could ignore the problem (no, it won't go away), or I could courageously face it in faith. I can run from the enemy, or I can get into prayer down on my knees before I get up and fight.

## ≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

The word "prophecy" means, "To foretell or predict," but it can also mean, "To speak as a mediator between God and humankind or in God's stead."

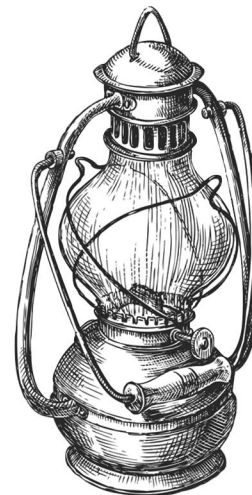
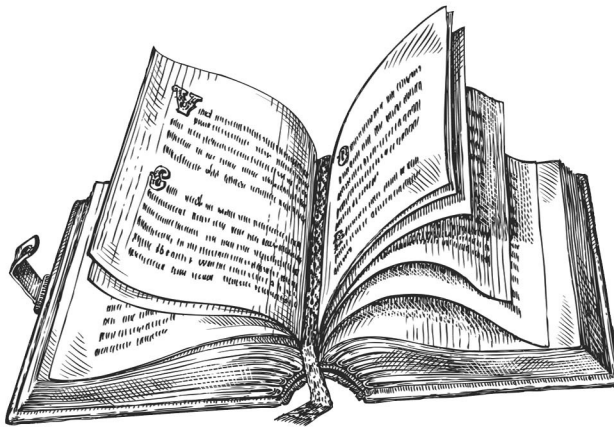
### WHAT VOICE ARE WE LISTENING TO?

Notice the words that Paul writes to Timothy,

*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.. (2 Timothy 2:3-4, KJV)*

After about a 15-year pause Zerubbabel and Joshua had a decision to make: were they there to please God or to please man?

I think that's a question we all need to ask. What voice are we listening to? Who is steering the ship? Answer that question, and just like the men in this chapter, the answer will dictate our steps.



According to verse 5, why couldn't the enemy stop the men from working?

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When the men asked for the workers names, what names did they give them?

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Who were the men that questioned Zerubbabel and Joshua?

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What was the name of the king that they sent a letter to?

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According to Haggai 1:1, when was Haggai's prophecy to these men?  
(Compare this with Ezra 4:24)

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What does Haggai 2:9 say? Write the verse out here:

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Do you remember that verse from an earlier chapter?  
Why do you think God said that?

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# CHAPTER SIX



## The Price Has Been Paid

### READ: EZRA CHAPTER 6

In the last couple of chapters, we saw the Israelites rebuilding the temple, and the enemy trying to stop them. We saw how accusations were brought before the king and how those accusations were found to be true. We saw a parallel to the sin of mankind.

The Bible tells us,

*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20, KJV)*

We're all guilty of sin. Good behavior can't change that, the law didn't take away sin, and our church can't wipe it away. Only Jesus can. The thing is, we need to come to that place of repentance where we accept the fact that we're sinners in need of salvation. The question isn't whether or not we are sinners, the law was put into place to prove that. The real question is are we ready to turn away from our sin and accept God's forgiveness and grace.

### GOD'S STORY DOESN'T END WITH ASHES

It's a sad story, really. Their work on the temple was halted that year, and it would almost seem like the enemy won. But, as Elisabeth Elliot would say, "Of one thing I am perfectly sure: God's story never ends with 'ashes.'"

We see that throughout scripture as it points us to that afternoon at a place called Gol-gatha. When darkness covered the land. When they crucified our Lord. When they stripped Him and whipped Him, and put a crown of thorns upon His head. When they spat on Him and cursed Him. When it must have felt like Satan won, but he didn't.

*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. (John 2:19-21, KJV)*

So it was in the book of Ezra. Just when it felt like Satan had won, he didn't. We see a foreshadow of the New Testament with its New Covenant in this chapter as a decree is sent out from the king.

## ≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

In 2 Samuel 24, we see David purchasing this piece of property, which was the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, for 50 shekels of silver.

This later became the location of both the first and second temples.

### THE PRICE HAS BEEN PAID

“Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:” the king says in verse 8, “Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop.”

Their temple was paid for from the king’s treasury. If that sounds familiar, it should, because ours was bought and paid for by the blood of our King, Jesus Christ.

*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, KJV)*

And so, yes, we are guilty of sin, but while we were yet sinners Christ died so that we might be saved. Like the men in this chapter, our story doesn’t end in ashes. Our salvation has merely begun.

## ≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

According to Jewish tradition, both Solomon’s Temple and the second temple were destroyed on the same day, which is the 9th of Av, also known as Tisha B’Av.

### HIS ACCUSATIONS ARE RENDERED USELESS

Maybe you’ve been accused of something in your life. And maybe the enemy has brought it up time and again. Perhaps he’s accused you of being a sinner, and maybe it’s true.

I love how Jon Courson puts it when he says, “Satan, keep accusing me! Remind me of my sins! Bring up my faults, time and time again. All it’s going to do is make me love Jesus all the more!”

The Price Has Been Paid

Why? Because he who's been forgiven much, loves much.

The more we're forgiven, the more that we love. At least that's the case with those who acknowledge their sin. Satan's accusations are rendered useless the minute that sinner repents and gives glory to God.

Each time you're accused, praise God all the more, thankful for His loving mercy and grace.

When you have sinned, praise God for His grace. When you are weak, praise God for His strength. If you've made bad choices, praise God you've learned from them. If you fail, praise God for His guidance. If you are rejected, praise God for His love.

Anytime you minimize your sin, you minimize God's grace. If you think that your sin is too horrific for God's forgiveness, then you underestimate the cost that was paid. And so, my point in all of this, isn't to minimize or to deny the sin that you're in. It's to bring you to that place of repentance where you turn away from your sin and leave it in the hands of our Lord.

The King has issued a decree! The King has paid the price for my sin! Let the temple be built! How beautiful are those words? How beautiful it is to be safe in the hands of the King.

## ≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

A number of cuneiform tablets bearing the name Tattenai have survived as part of what may have been a family archive. The tablet that links one member of this family to the Bible character is a promissory note dated to the 20th year of Darius I, 502 BC. It identifies a witness to the transaction as a servant of "Tattannu, governor of Across-the-River." The clay tablet can be dated to June 5, 502 BC exactly.

(Mykytiuk, Lawrence, Archaeology Confirms 3 More Bible People Biblical Archaeology Review)

## THE LAW OF THE MEDES AND PERSIANS

If you've ever read the story of Esther you might wonder why the king didn't just change his mind and annul his decree when he found out what Haman had done and how Esther's people were in danger of losing their lives.

Here's the thing: he couldn't reverse what had been already written, but he could issue a second decree which allowed the Jews to fight back and protect themselves.

*Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. (Esther 8:8, KJV)*

If you read the story of Daniel, you might have wondered why the king sent him into the den of lions only to grieve afterward.

When the king realized the plan that was set in motion he was greatly distressed, and in fact, we're told that he worked until sundown to save him.

So why not annul the decree and just write a new one? Because the law of the Medes and Persians strictly forbid it.

*The law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. (Daniel 6:15b, KJV)*

In much the same way that the king's decree could not be reversed, our God cannot lie. And so, we too have a royal decree, an unbreakable promise, a steadfast assurance of the hope set before us. And there's nothing on earth that can take that away.

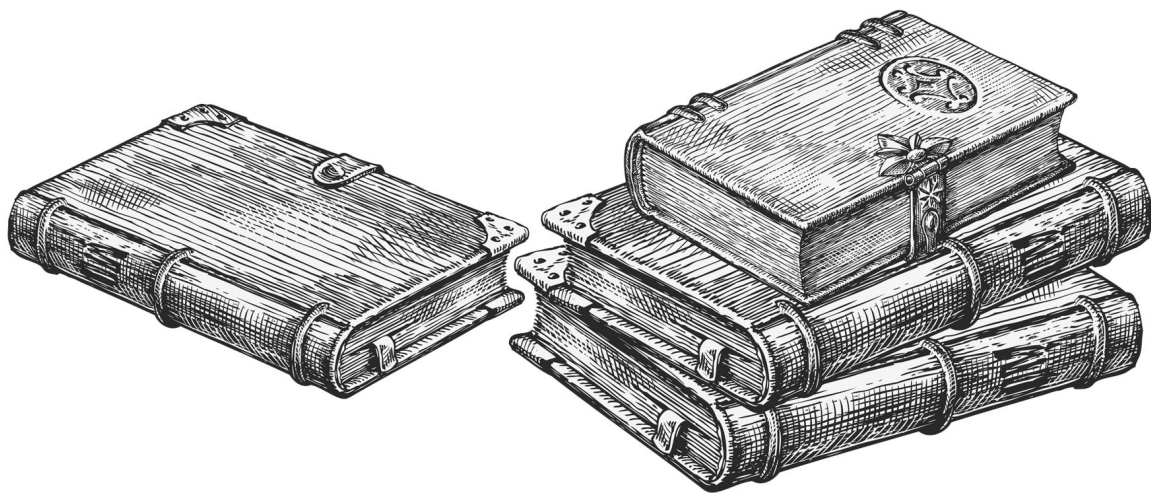
### THE OPPOSITION IS DIFFERENT THIS TIME

If you noticed in Chapter 4, the enemy didn't mention Cyrus at all when they went to the king. For if they had, the decree would have been enforced at that time. They didn't want to know the truth, all they wanted to do was deceive the king in hopes of destroying the temple.

This time it's different. This time Tattenai, Shethar-Bozenai, and their associates want to inform the king. They want to know the truth and they want the matter settled. And so, they go to the king with all of the information they have.

As I got to thinking about that today, I was reminded of Satan. How he tempted Jesus in the wilderness by twisting scripture into half-truths. How he deceives and schemes and lies. How he slanders, accuses, and misuses scripture, all so that he might destroy the work on the temple. The temple that you and I are. The temple in which God resides.

*For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (2 Corinthians 6:16, KJV)*



What does Romans 3:23 say about sin?

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What temple was Jesus talking about in John 2:19-21?

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Where was the money coming from for the rebuilding of the temple?

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The New Testament talks about believers being the temple of the Holy Ghost. What is the foundation we are built on, and what part of the building does Jesus represent? See Ephesians 2:20-22.

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What is a cornerstone, and why is this stone so important?

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*For ye are the temple of the living God*

How were the men that went to the king in this chapter different from the ones we read about in Chapter 4?

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