

# Exploring Ezra

## 6. Ezra 5.3-6.12: Cyrus' Decree Confirmed by Darius

**Aim:** To think about how Christians trust in God, and respond to governing officials as they seek to carry out God's work.

### Part 1: Getting to know the story

Here is an opportunity for your cell to get dramatic using the script, two letters and report provided! (See Study 6 - Handouts 1-3)

Assign parts to members of the cell including the letters etc they need (For added entertainment you might like to give them appropriate props e.g. Crown, clipboard, etc too!) Read the reminder of the story so far and then 'act' out the biblical text from the script.

*Reminder of the story so far:* The Jews had been given permission by the gentile, King Cyrus, whose heart God moved, to rebuild the temple and city of Jerusalem. Some progress had been made, including the laying of the foundations to the temple. However, adversaries bribed local officials and intimidated the Jews. Some made a bad report about them to the new King Artaxerxes who decreed that they must cease the building work. However God through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah God exhorted the people to continue.

### Part 2: Considering the story

So though the people had been commanded to stop, a new King is on the throne and the people; responding the word of the Lord are able to start again with the building project.

1. How do you imagine the people would have been feeling about starting the project again and how do you think they would have felt when they were challenged by the officials?
2. What is your view on the answer the people gave to the officials (recorded in the officials' letter)? How would you describe it? (eg. Honest, politically savvy, deceitful, humble?)
3. Where do we see God in this story? (In what ways is this reminiscent of other Biblical stories?)

### Part 3: Applying the story

Christians are often engaged in work that brings them into contact with officials with authority.

What do you think we can learn from this story about:

- God's involvement in political matters?
- How we as believers engage with politics and officialdom?
- The approach believers might take when their work is stopped or challenged by officials?

### Responding

Take time to pray for those in your cell who are involved with all kinds of organisations where they come into contact with officials. Some may be officials! Pray for them that they may work faithfully and diligently for the good of all even in what can be challenging circumstances.

Pray too for the relationship that Kings and other churches and the Durham Christian Union have with the governing officials.

You may wish to use *1 Timothy 2:1-4*, *Romans 13:1-2* and *1 Peter 2:13-17* in your prayers.

