

Fact Sheet for **“Open Door, Closed Door?”**
Ezra 3-6

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Have you ever heard anyone speak of an “open door” or a “closed door” when they were talking about how to find God’s will? Colossians 4:3 is the favorite verse I heard cited. Another one is Revelation 3:8. These are the only two verses in scripture that mention an “open door” like this. But if you are merely looking for an “open door” or a “closed door” in order to discern God’s will for your life, then you might fail a test God placed before you. It’s always easier to make decisions by sight and not by faith. Look at a time when Philip, one of the 12, was caught in this (John 6:5-7). On the other hand if you perceive a door of opportunity to be closed, it may merely be closed for a moment in order to strengthen your resolve (Luke 18:1). It can get really difficult to discern God’s will for your life if you rely on your perceived open doors or closed doors. This morning we will see in the book of Ezra a better way of discerning God’s will.

Remember what God has said about Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28). The significance of this verse in Isaiah is that Isaiah referred to Cyrus **by name** almost 200 years before Cyrus made this decree! And Isaiah also prophesied what Cyrus would do! Only the true God of the universe can do this!

Following Cyrus’s decree some over 42,000 Jews and 7,000 of their servants came to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s army (Ezra 2:64-65a). The first thing they did was to rebuild the altar that was in front of the temple (3:2). They began to offer burnt offerings and kept the Feast of Booths. But the foundation of the temple was not yet laid (3:6). Then in the second year after their coming to Jerusalem they laid the foundation of the temple (3:8-13). Trumpets sounded and cymbals clashed. The people of God sang, wept, and shouted with joy. But did this door of opportunity that was opened by Cyrus for God’s people now slam shut? What was God doing?

4:1 ¶ Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, ² they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we worship 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."

Esarhaddon, a son of Sennacherib who had conquered the northern ten tribes in 722 B.C., had aggressively pursued the policy of partial deportation of conquered peoples. In exchange, people from within the Assyrian empire were brought in to take their place (2 Kings 17:23-24).¹ These imports were not Jews and only worshipped the God of the OT as one of many gods.

4:3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

Ezra’s answer was both correct and proper. If Ezra had accepted their help he would have weakened the commitment of the Jewish people to the true God of the OT. The people who

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 660.

were already living in and around Jerusalem didn't like Ezra's answer. And they looked for ways to have them stop construction.

4:4 ¶ Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build ⁵ and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Right after verse 5 may I suggest you put a mark in your Bibles. **4:6-23 is a parenthesis.** If you miss it the history of this book will become confusing. These were the Persian kings in order, beginning with Cyrus who decreed that the temple was to be rebuilt: Cyrus 559-530 B.C., Cambyses 530-522 B.C., Smerdis 522 B.C., Darius 521-486 B.C., Ahasuerus 485-465 B.C., Artaxerxes 464-424 B.C. It was during the reign of Darius that the temple was completed (515 B.C., Ezra 7:15). This was just over 40 years after Cyrus made his decree. The opposition continued all through the construction of the temple. But it didn't stop even then. There was an opposition letter written to Ahasuerus (4:6). There was another opposition letter written to Artaxerxes (4:7). Those letters were not in opposition to the temple being built, because it had already been completed. Those letters were in opposition to *Jerusalem* being rebuilt. The narrative of the rebuilding of the temple continues beginning in 4:24.

4:24 Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The people were dispirited by the opposition. Was this a closed door? For the work on the temple to have stopped like it did indicated that many thought it was. But no one on the face of this planet can ever hope to stop God's plan! God named Cyrus by name two centuries earlier and told of Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple. This was God's will! Those who didn't want to see the temple rebuilt could never hope to stop it! This wasn't a closed door. This called for faith. The OT prophets Haggai and Zechariah stepped in to encourage God's people and the work on the temple resumed (5:1-2). Tattenai, the then current governor of that area, objected (5:3-4), but look at the next verse...

5:5 But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.

Listen to how God worked things out concerning Tattenai's letter to Darius Ezra 6:1-12. The opposition that so dispirited so many of God's people who began work on the temple did not represent a closed door! The temple was completed and God's people celebrated the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Over the years I have heard many speakers encourage their listeners to look for open or closed doors to help discern God's will for their lives. Does God open some doors and close others? Absolutely! Is this a good way to discern God's will for your life? Not really. There are too many possibilities. Can we pray for God to open or close doors of opportunity? Yes! Consider the book of Ezra. It was God's will, and God's will alone, that made an open door that would not be shut for the rebuilding of the temple. There was opposition. God was calling for faith in His plan. Look for what God wants from believers from His Word. Pray that God would open some opportunities you would like to see open. Perhaps pray that God would even close some opportunities you know from His Word aren't right. Pray for wisdom to choose the best path. This isn't as flashy as merely looking for "open doors" or "closed doors" but it certainly works a great deal better.