

THE BOOK OF

EZRA

Commentary by **ROBERT JAMIESON**

CHAPTER 1

EZRA 1:1-6.

PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE.

1. *in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia* — The Persian empire, including Persia, Media, Babylonia, and Chaldea, with many smaller dependencies, was founded by Cyrus, 536 B.C. [HALES].

that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled — (See ^{<3052>}Jeremiah 25:12 29:10). This reference is a parenthetical statement of the historian, and did not form part of the proclamation.

2. *The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth* — Though this is in the Oriental style of hyperbole (see also ^{<2700>}Daniel 4:1), it was literally true that the Persian empire was the greatest ruling power in the world at that time.

he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem — The phraseology of this proclamation, independently of the express testimony of JOSEPHUS, affords indisputable evidence that Cyrus had seen (probably through means of Daniel, his venerable prime minister and favorite) those prophecies in which, two hundred years before he was born, his name, his victorious career, and the important services he should render to the Jews were distinctly foretold (^{<2943>}Isaiah 44:28 ^{<2944>}46:1-4). The existence of predictions so remarkable led him to acknowledge that all his kingdoms

were gifts bestowed on him by “the Lord God of heaven,” and prompted him to fulfill the duty which had been laid upon him long before his birth. This was the source and origin of the great favor he showed to the Jews. The proclamation, though issued “in the first year of Cyrus” [^{<1300>}Ezra 1:1], did not take effect till the year following.

3. *Who is there among you of all his people* — The purport of the edict was to grant full permission to those Jewish exiles, in every part of his kingdom, who chose, to return to their own country, as well as to recommend those of their countrymen who remained to aid the poor and feeble on their way, and contribute liberally towards the rebuilding of the temple.

5, 6. *Then rose up the chief of the fathers*, etc. — The paternal and ecclesiastical chiefs of the later captivity, those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with some also from other tribes (^{<1308>}1 Chronicles 9:3), who retained their attachment to the pure worship of God, naturally took the lead in this movement. Their example was followed by all whose piety and patriotism were strong enough to brave the various discouragements attending the enterprise. They were liberally assisted by multitudes of their captive countrymen, who, born in Babylonia or comfortably established in it by family connections or the possession of property, chose to remain. It seems that their Assyrian friends and neighbors, too, either from a favorable disposition toward the Jewish faith, or from imitation of the court policy, displayed hearty good will and great liberality in aiding and promoting the views of the emigrants.

^{<1307>}EZRA 1:7-11.

CYRUS RESTORES THE VESSELS.

7. *Cyrus ... brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord* — Though it is said (^{<1283>}2 Kings 24:13) that these were *cut in pieces*, that would not be done to the large and magnificent vases; and, if they had been divided, the parts could be reunited. But it may be doubted whether the *Hebrew* word rendered *cut in pieces*, does not signify merely *cut off*, that is, from further use in the temple.

8. *Shesh-bazzar, the prince of Judah* — that is, Zerubbabel, son of Salathiel (compare ⁴³⁰⁸Ezra 3:8 5:16). He was born in Babylon, and called by his family Zerubbabel, that is, stranger or exile in Babylon. Shesh-bazzar, signifying “fire-worshipper,” was the name given him at court, as other names were given to Daniel and his friends. He was recognized among the exiles as hereditary prince of Judah.

11. *All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred* — The vessels here specified amount only to the number of 2499. Hence it is probable that the larger vases only are mentioned, while the inventory of the whole, including great and small, came to the gross sum stated in the text.

them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem — All the Jewish exiles did not embrace the privilege which the Persian king granted them. The great proportion, born in Babylon, preferred continuing in their comfortable homes to undertaking a distant, expensive, and hazardous journey to a desolate land. Nor did the returning exiles all go at once. The first band went with Zerubbabel, others afterwards with Ezra, and a large number with Nehemiah at a still later period.

CHAPTER 2

⋈ EZRA 2:1-70.

NUMBER OF THE PEOPLE THAT TURNED.

1. *children of the province* — that is, Judea (⋈ Ezra 5:8), so called as being now reduced from an illustrious, independent, and powerful kingdom to an obscure, servile, tributary province of the Persian empire. This name is applied by the sacred historian to intimate that the Jewish exiles, though now released from captivity and allowed to return into their own land, were still the subjects of Cyrus, inhabiting a province dependent upon Persia.

came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city — either the city that had been occupied by his ancestors, or, as most parts of Judea were then either desolate or possessed by others, the city that was rebuilt and allotted to him now.

2. *Which came with Zerubbabel* — He was the chief or leader of the first band of returning exiles. The names of other influential persons who were associated in the conducting of the caravans are also mentioned, being extracted probably from the Persian archives, in which the register was preserved: conspicuous in the number are Jeshua, the high priest, and Nehemiah.

3. *The children* — This word, as used throughout this catalogue, means “posterity” or “descendants.”

5. *children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five* — The number is stated in ⋈ Nehemiah 7:10 to have been only six hundred fifty-two. It is probable that all mentioned as belonging to this family repaired to the general place of rendezvous, or had enrolled their names at first as intending to go; but in the interval of preparation, some died, others were prevented by sickness or insurmountable obstacles, so that ultimately no more than six hundred fifty-two came to Jerusalem.

23. *The men of Anathoth* — It is pleasant to see so many of this Jewish town returning. It was a city of the Levites; but the people spurned Jeremiah's warning and called forth against themselves one of his severest predictions (^{<2422>}Jeremiah 32:27-35). This prophecy was fulfilled in the Assyrian conquest. Anathoth was laid waste and continued a heap of ruins. But the people, having been brought during the captivity to a better state of mind, returned, and their city was rebuilt.

36-39. *The priests* — Each of their families was ranged under its prince or head, like those of the other tribes. It will be remembered that the whole body was divided into twenty-four courses, one of which, in rotation, discharged the sacerdotal duties every week, and each division was called after the name of its first prince or chief. It appears from this passage that only four of the courses of the priests returned from the Babylonish captivity; but these four courses were afterwards, as the families increased, divided into twenty-four, which were distinguished by the names of the original courses appointed by David [^{<13246>}1 Chronicles 23:6-13]. Hence we find the course of Abijah or Abia (^{<13340>}1 Chronicles 24:10) subsisting at the commencement of the Christian era (^{<4009>}Luke 1:5).

55. *The children of Solomon's servants* — either the strangers that monarch enlisted in the building of the temple, or those who lived in his palace, which was deemed a high honor.

61, 62. *the children of Barzillai* — He preferred that name to that of his own family, deeming it a greater distinction to be connected with so noble a family, than to be of the house of Levi. But by this worldly ambition he forfeited the dignity and advantages of the priesthood.

63. *Tirshatha* — a title borne by the Persian governors of Judea (see also ^{<4076>}Nehemiah 7:65-70 ^{<4688>}8:9 ^{<4001>}10:1). It is derived from the Persian *torsh* ("severe"), and is equivalent to "your severity," "your awfulness."

64. *The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore* — This gross amount is twelve thousand more than the particular numbers given in the catalogue, when added together, come to. Reckoning up the smaller numbers, we shall find that they amount to 29,818 in this chapter, and to 31,089 in the parallel chapter of Nehemiah [see ^{<4076>}Nehemiah 7:66-69]. Ezra also mentions four hundred

ninety-four persons omitted by Nehemiah, and Nehemiah mentions 1765 not noticed by Ezra. If, therefore, Ezra's surplus be added to the sum in Nehemiah, and Nehemiah's surplus to the number in Ezra, they will both become 31,583. Subtracting this from 42,360, there will be a deficiency of 10,777. These are omitted because they did not belong to Judah and Benjamin, or to the priests, but to the other tribes. The servants and singers, male and female, are reckoned separately (^{<HB5>}Ezra 2:65), so that putting all these items together, the number of all who went with Zerubbabel amounted to fifty thousand, with eight thousand beasts of burden [ALTING, quoted in DAVIDSON'S *Hermeneutics*].

68. *some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord offered freely for the house of God*, etc. — The sight of a place hallowed by the most endearing and sacred associations, but now lying in desolation and ruins, made the wellsprings of their piety and patriotism gush out afresh. Before taking any active measures for providing accommodation to themselves and their families, the chief among them raised a large sum by voluntary contributions towards the restoration of the temple.

69. *drams of gold* — rather, “darics,” a Persian coin (see on ^{<1307>}1 Chronicles 29:7).

priests' garments — (compare ^{<1071>}Nehemiah 7:70). This — in the circumstances — was a very appropriate gift. In general, it may be remarked that presents of garments, or of any other usable commodities, however singular it may seem to us, is in harmony with the established notions and customs of the East.

CHAPTER 3

⋈ EZRA 3:1-13.

THE ALTAR SET UP.

1. *when the seventh month was come* — The departure of the returning exiles from Babylon took place in the spring. For some time after their arrival they were occupied in the necessary work of rearing habitations to themselves amid the ruins of Jerusalem and its neighborhood. This preliminary work being completed, they addressed themselves to rebuild the altar of burnt offering. As the seventh month of the sacred year was at hand — corresponding to the latter end of our September — when the feast of tabernacles ([⋈]Leviticus 23:34) fell to be observed, they resolved to celebrate that religious festival, just as if the temple had been fully restored.

2. *Jeshua* — the grandson of Seraiah, the high priest, put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah ([⋈]2 Kings 25:18-21). His father, Josedech, had been carried captive to Babylon, and died there, some time before this.

Zerubbabel — was, according to the order of nature, son of Pedaiah ([⋈]1 Chronicles 3:17-19); but having been brought up by Salathiel, he was called his son.

built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon — This was of urgent and immediate necessity, in order, first, to make atonement for their sins; secondly, to obtain the divine blessing on their preparations for the temple, as well as animate their feelings of piety and patriotism for the prosecution of that national work.

3. *they set the altar upon his bases* — They reared it upon its old foundation, so that it occupied as nearly as possible the site on which it had formerly stood.

they offered burnt offerings ... morning and evening — Deeming it their duty to perform the public rites of religion, they did not wait till the temple should be rebuilt and dedicated; but, at the outset, they resumed the daily service prescribed by the law (^{<E238>}Exodus 29:38,39 ^{<E68>}Leviticus 6:9,11), as well as observed the annual seasons of solemn observance.

^{<E80>}EZRA 3:4-7.

OFFERINGS RENEWED.

4, 6. *They kept also the feast of tabernacles ... From the first day of the seventh month* — They revived at that time the daily oblation, and it was on the fifteenth day of that month the feast of tabernacles was held.

7. *They gave ... meat ... drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon* — They opened negotiations with the Tyrians for workmen, as well as for timber, on the same terms and with the same views as Solomon had done (^{<E81>}1 Kings 5:11 ^{<E425>}2 Chronicles 2:15,16).

^{<E88>}EZRA 3:8-13.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE LAID.

8. *appointed the Levites ... to set forward the work* — that is, to act as overseers of the workmen, and to direct and animate the laborers in the various departments.

9. *Jeshua with his sons* — not the high priest, but a Levite (^{<E50>}Ezra 2:40). To these, as probably distinguished for their mechanical skill and taste, the duty of acting as overseers was particularly committed.

12. *But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers ... wept with a loud voice* — Those painful emotions were excited by the sad contrast between the prosperous circumstances in which the foundations of the first temple had been laid and the desolate, reduced state of the country and city when the second was begun; between the inferior size and less costliness of the stones used in the foundations of the second

(^{<1000>}1 Kings 7:9,10), and the much smaller extent of the foundation itself, including all the appurtenances of the building (^{<3000>}Haggai 2:3); between the comparative smallness of their present means and the immense resources of David and Solomon. Perhaps, however, the chief cause of grief was that the second temple would be destitute of those things which formed the great and distinguishing glory of the first; namely, the ark, the shekinah, the Urim and Thummim, etc. Not that this second temple was not a very grand and beautiful structure. But no matter how great its material splendor was, it was inferior in this respect to that of Solomon. Yet the glory of the second far outshone that of the first temple in another and more important point of view, namely, the receiving within its walls the incarnate Savior (^{<3000>}Haggai 2:9).

13. *the people could not discern the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people* — Among Eastern people, expressions of sorrow are always very loud and vehement. It is indicated by wailing, the howl of which is sometimes not easily distinguishable from joyful acclamations.

CHAPTER 4

◀EZRA 4:1-6.

THE BUILDING HINDERED.

1. *the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin* — that is, strangers settled in the land of Israel.
2. *we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon ... which brought us up hither* — A very interesting explanation of this passage has been recently obtained from the Assyrian sculptures. On a large cylinder, deposited in the British Museum, there is inscribed a long and perfect copy of the annals of Esar-haddon, in which the details are given of a large deportation of Israelites from Palestine, and a consequent settlement of Babylonian colonists in their place. It is a striking confirmation of the statement made in this passage. Those Assyrian settlers intermarried with the remnant of Israelite women, and their descendants, a mongrel race, went under the name of Samaritans. Though originally idolaters, they were instructed in the knowledge of God, so that they could say, “We seek your God”; but they served Him in a superstitious way of their own (see on ◀2Kings 2 Kings 17:26-34,41).
3. *But Zerubbabel and Jeshua ... said ... Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God* — This refusal to co-operate with the Samaritans, from whatever motives it sprang, was overruled by Providence for ultimate good; for, had the two peoples worked together, familiar acquaintanceship and intermarriage would have ensued, and the result might have been a relapse of the Jews into idolatry. Most certainly, confusion and obscurity in the genealogical evidence that proved the descent of the Messiah would have followed; whereas, in their hostile and separate condition, they were jealous observers of each other’s proceedings, watching with mutual care over the preservation and integrity of the sacred books, guarding the purity and honor of the Mosaic worship, and thus contributing to the maintenance of religious knowledge and truth.

4, 5. *Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah*, etc. — Exasperated by this repulse, the Samaritans endeavored by every means to molest the workmen as well as obstruct the progress of the building; and, though they could not alter the decree which Cyrus had issued regarding it, yet by bribes and clandestine arts indefatigably plied at court, they labored to frustrate the effects of the edict. Their success in those underhand dealings was great; for Cyrus, being frequently absent and much absorbed in his warlike expeditions, left the government in the hands of his son Cambyses, a wicked prince, and extremely hostile to the Jews and their religion. The same arts were assiduously practiced during the reign of his successor, Smerdis, down to the time of Darius Hystaspes. In consequence of the difficulties and obstacles thus interposed, for a period of twenty years, the progress of the work was very slow.

6. *in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they ... an accusation* — Ahasuerus was a regal title, and the king referred to was successor of Darius, the famous Xerxes.

EZRA 4:7-24.

LETTER TO ARTAXERXES.

7. *in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam*, etc. — The three officers named are supposed to have been deputy governors appointed by the king of Persia over all the provinces subject to his empire west of the Euphrates.

the Syrian tongue — or Aramaean language, called sometimes in our version, Chaldee. This was made use of by the Persians in their decrees and communications relative to the Jews (compare ¹²⁸³²2 Kings 18:26 ²³³¹¹Isaiah 36:11). The object of their letter was to press upon the royal notice the inexpediency and danger of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. They labored hard to prejudice the king's mind against that measure.

9. *the Dinaites* — The people named were the colonists sent by the Babylonian monarch to occupy the territory of the ten tribes. "The great and noble Asnappar" was Esar-haddon. Immediately after the murder of

Sennacherib, the Babylonians, Medes, Armenians, and other tributary people seized the opportunity of throwing off the Assyrian yoke. But Esar-haddon having, in the thirtieth year of his reign, recovered Babylon and subdued the other rebellious dependents, transported numbers of them into the waste cities of Samaria, most probably as a punishment of their revolt [HALES].

12. *the Jews which came up from thee to us* — The name “Jews” was generally used after the return from the captivity, because the returning exiles belonged chiefly to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Although the edict of Cyrus permitted all who chose to return, a permission of which some of the Israelites availed themselves, the great body who went to settle in Judea were the men of Judah.

13. *toll, tribute, and custom* — The first was a poll tax; the second was a property tax; the third the excise dues on articles of trade and merchandise. Their letter, and the edict that followed, commanding an immediate cessation of the work at the city walls, form the exclusive subject of narrative at ^{<1500>}Ezra 4:7-23. And now from this digression [the historian] returns at ^{<1500>}Ezra 4:24 to resume the thread of his narrative concerning the building of the temple.

14. *we have maintenance from the king's palace* — literally, “we are salted with the salt of the palace.” “Eating a prince’s salt” is an Oriental phrase, equivalent to “receiving maintenance from him.”

24. *Then ceased the work of the house of God* — It was this occurrence that first gave rise to the strong religious antipathy between the Jews and the Samaritans, which was afterwards greatly aggravated by the erection of a rival temple on Mount Gerizim.

CHAPTER 5

Ⓢ EZRA 5:1-17.

ZERUBBABEL AND JESHUA SET FORWARD THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE IN THE REIGN OF DARIUS.

1. *Then the prophets ... prophesied ... in the name of the God of Israel* —

From the recorded writings of Haggai and Zechariah, it appears that the difficulties experienced and the many obstacles thrown in the way had first cooled the zeal of the Jews in the building of the temple, and then led to an abandonment of the work, under a pretended belief that the time for rebuilding it had not yet come (Ⓢ Haggai 1:2-11). For fifteen years the work was completely suspended. These two prophets upbraided them with severe reproaches for their sloth, negligence, and worldly selfishness (Ⓢ Haggai 1:4), threatened them with severe judgments if they continued backward, and promised that they would be blessed with great national prosperity if they resumed and prosecuted the work with alacrity and vigor.

Zechariah the son of Iddo — that is, grandson (Ⓢ Zechariah 1:1).

2. *Then rose up Zerubbabel ... and Jeshua ... began to build the house of God* —

The strong appeals and animating exhortations of these prophets gave a new impulse to the building of the temple. It was in the second year of the reign of Darius Hystaspes that the work, after a long interruption, was resumed.

3, 4. *At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river* —

The Persian empire west of the Euphrates included at this time Syria, Arabia, Egypt, Phoenicia, and other provinces subject to Darius. The empire was divided into twenty provinces, called satrapies. Syria formed one satrapy, inclusive of Palestine, Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and furnished an annual revenue of three hundred fifty talents. It was presided over by a satrap or viceroy, who at this time resided at Damascus. Though superior to the native governors of the Jews appointed by the Persian king, he

never interfered with their internal government except when there was a threatened disturbance of order and tranquillity. Tatnai, the governor (whether this was a personal name or an official title is unknown), had probably been incited by the complaints and turbulent outrages of the Samaritans against the Jews; but he suspended his judgment, and he prudently resolved to repair to Jerusalem, that he might ascertain the real state of matters by personal inspection and enquiry, in company with another dignified officer and his provincial council.

5-17. *But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews*, etc. — The unusual presence, the imposing suite, the authoritative enquiries of the satrap appeared formidable, and might have produced a paralyzing influence or led to disastrous consequences, if he had been a partial and corrupt judge or actuated by unfriendly feelings towards the Jewish cause. The historian, therefore, with characteristic piety, throws in this parenthetical verse to intimate that God averted the threatening cloud and procured favor for the elders or leaders of the Jews, that they were not interrupted in their proceedings till communications with the court should be made and received. Not a word was uttered to dispirit the Jews or afford cause of triumph to their opponents. Matters were to go on till contrary orders arrived from Babylon. After surveying the work in progress, he inquired: first, by what authority this national temple was undertaken; and, secondly, the names of the principal promoters and directors of the undertaking. To these two heads of enquiry the Jews returned ready and distinct replies. Then having learned that it originated in a decree of Cyrus, who had not only released the Jewish exiles from captivity and permitted them to return to their own land for the express purpose of rebuilding the house of God, but, by an act of royal grace, had restored to them the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had carried off as trophies from the former temple, Tatnai transmitted all this information in an official report to his imperial master, accompanying it with a recommendatory suggestion that search should be made among the national archives at Babylon for the original decree of Cyrus, that the truth of the Jews' statement might be verified. The whole conduct of Tatnai, as well as the general tone of his despatch, is marked by a sound discretion and prudent moderation, free from any party bias, and evincing a desire only

to do his duty. In all respects he appears in favorable contrast with his predecessor, Rehum (^{<450>}Ezra 4:9).

8. *the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones* — literally, “stones of rolling”; that is, stones of such extraordinary size that they could not be carried — they had to be rolled or dragged along the ground.

13. *Cyrus the king ... made a decree* — The Jews were perfectly warranted according to the principles of the Persian government to proceed with the building in virtue of Cyrus’ edict. For everywhere a public decree is considered as remaining in force until it is revoked but the “laws of the Medes and Persians changed not” [^{<200>}Daniel 6:8,12,15].

16. *Then came ... Shesh-bazzar ... since that time even until now hath it been in building* — This was not a part of the Jews’ answer — they could not have said this, knowing the building had long ceased. But Tatnai used these expressions in his report, either looking on the stoppage as a temporary interruption, or supposing that the Jews were always working a little, as they had means and opportunities.

CHAPTER 6

◀EZRA 6:1-12.

DARIUS' DECREE FOR ADVANCING THE BUILDING.

1. *Darius the king* — This was Darius Hystaspes. Great and interesting light has been thrown on the history of this monarch and the transaction of his reign, by the decipherment of the cuneatic inscriptions on the rocks at Behistun.

in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon — An idea of the form of this Babylonian register house, as well as the manner of preserving public records within its repositories, can be obtained from the discoveries at Nineveh. Two small chambers were discovered in the palace of Koyunjik, which, from the fragments found in them, MR. LAYARD considers “as a house of the rolls.” After reminding his readers that the historical records and public documents of the Assyrians were kept on tablets and cylinders of baked clay, many specimens of which have been found, he goes on to say, “The chambers I am describing appear to have been a depository in the palace of Nineveh for such documents. To the height of a foot or more from the floor they were entirely filled with them; some entire, but the greater part broken into many fragments, probably by the falling in of the upper part of the building. They were of different sizes; the largest tablets were flat, and measured about nine inches by six and a half inches; the smaller were slightly convex, and some were not more than an inch long, with but one or two lines of writing. The cuneiform characters on most of them were singularly sharp and well-defined, but so minute in some instances as to be almost illegible without a magnifying glass. These documents appear to be of various kinds. The documents that have thus been discovered in the house of rolls’ at Nineveh probably exceed all that have yet been afforded by the monuments of Egypt, and when the innumerable fragments are put together and transcribed, the publication of these records will be of the

greatest importance to the history of the ancient world” [*Nineveh and Babylon*].

2. *Achmetha* — long supposed to be the capital of Greater Media (the Ecbatana of classical, the Hamadan of modern times), [is] at the foot of the Elwund range of hills, where, for its coolness and salubrity, Cyrus and his successors on the Persian throne established their summer residence. There was another city, however, of this name, the Ecbatana of Atropatene, and the most ancient capital of northern Media, and recently identified by COLONEL RAWLINSON in the remarkable ruins of *Takht-i-Soleiman*. Yet as everything tends to show the attachment of Cyrus to his native city, the Atropatenian Ecbatana, rather than to the stronger capital of Greater Media, COLONEL RAWLINSON is inclined to think that he deposited there, in his fortress, the famous decree relating to the Jews, along with the other records and treasures of his empire [*Nineveh and Persepolis*].

8-10. *of the king’s goods, even of the tribute beyond the river ... expenses be given unto these men* — The decree granted them the privilege of drawing from his provincial treasury of Syria, to the amount of whatever they required for the furthering of the work and providing sacrifice for the service of the temple, that the priests might daily pray for the health of the king and the prosperity of the empire.

11, 12. *whosoever shall alter this word* — The warning was specially directed against the turbulent and fanatical Samaritans. The extremely favorable purport of this edict was no doubt owing in some measure to the influence of Cyrus, of whom Darius entertained a high admiration, and whose two daughters he had married. But it proceeded still more from the deep impressions made even on the idolatrous people of that country and that age, as to the being and providence of the God of Israel.

 EZRA 6:13-15.

THE TEMPLE FINISHED.

13-15. *Then Tatnai ... did speedily* — A concurrence of favorable events is mentioned as accelerating the restoration of the temple and infusing a

new spirit and energy into the workmen, who now labored with unabating assiduity till it was brought to a completion. Its foundation was laid in April, 536 B.C. (^{<STR>}Ezra 3:8-10), and it was completed on February 21, 515 B.C., being twenty-one years after it was begun [LIGHTFOOT].

^{<STR>}EZRA 6:16-18.

FEASTS OF THE DEDICATION.

16. *the children of Israel ... kept the dedication ... with joy* — The ceremonial was gone through with demonstrations of the liveliest joy. The aged who had wept at the laying of the foundation (^{<STR>}Ezra 3:12) were most, if not all of them, now dead; and all rejoiced at the completion of this national undertaking.

17. *twelve he-goats* — as at the dedication of the tabernacle (^{<STR>}Numbers 7:87 8:17).

18. *they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses ... as it is written in the book of Moses* — Although David arranged the priests and Levites in courses according to their families, it was Moses who assigned to the priests and Levites their rights and privileges, their stations and several duties.

^{<STR>}EZRA 6:19-22.

AND OF THE PASSOVER.

21. *all such as had separated themselves ... from the filthiness of the heathen of the land* — that is, who had given satisfactory evidence of being true proselytes by not only renouncing the impure worship of idolatry, but by undergoing the rite of circumcision, a condition indispensable to a participation of the passover.

22. *kept the feast ... with joy: for the Lord ... turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them* — that is, king of the Persian empire, which now included the possessions, and had surpassed the glory, of Assyria. The

favorable disposition which Darius had evinced towards the Jews secured them peace and prosperity and the privileges of their own religion during the rest of his reign. The religious joy that so remarkably characterized the celebration of this feast, was testified by expressions of lively gratitude to God, whose overruling power and converting grace had produced so marvellous a change in the hearts of the mighty potentates, and disposed them, pagans though they were, to aid the cause and provide for the worship of the true God.

CHAPTER 7

◀EZRA 7:1-10.

EZRA GOES UP TO JERUSALEM.

1, 2. *in the reign of Artaxerxes* — the Ahasuerus of Esther.

Ezra the son of Seraiah — that is, grandson or great-grandson. Seraiah was the high priest put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (◀2 Kings 25:18). A period of one hundred thirty years had elapsed between that catastrophe and the journey of Ezra to Jerusalem. As a grandson of Seraiah, namely, Jeshua, who held the office of high priest, had accompanied Zerubbabel in the first caravan of returning exiles, Ezra must have been in all probability a grandson, descended, too, from a younger son, the older branch being in possession of the pontificate.

6. *This Ezra ... was a ready scribe in the law of Moses* — The term “scribe” does not mean merely a penman, nor even an attorney well versed in forms of law and skilled in the method of preparing public or private deeds. He was a rabbi, or doctor, learned in the Mosaic law, and in all that related to the civil and ecclesiastical polity and customs of the Hebrew people. Scribes of this description possessed great authority and influence (compare ▶Matthew 23:25 ▶Mark 12:28).

the king granted him all his request — left Babylon entrusted with an important commission to be executed in Jerusalem. The manner in which he obtained this office is minutely related in a subsequent passage. Here it is noticed, but with a pious acknowledgment of the divine grace and goodness which disposed the royal mind in favor of Ezra’s patriotic objects. The Levites, etc., did not go at that time, but are mentioned here by anticipation.

8. *he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month* — that is, corresponding to the end of our July or beginning of our August. As he left Babylon on the Jewish New Year’s Day (◀Ezra 7:9), the journey must have occupied not

less than four months (a long period), but it was necessary to move at a slow pace and by short, easy stages, as he had to conduct a large caravan of poor people, including women, children, and all their household gear (see on ^{<5182>}Ezra 8:24).

10. *Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord*, etc. — His reigning desire had been to study the divine law — its principles, institutions, privileges, and requirements; and now from love and zeal, he devoted himself, as the business of his life, to the work of instructing, reforming, and edifying others.

^{<5171>}EZRA 7:11-26.

GRACIOUS COMMISSION OF ARTAXERXES.

11. *this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave* — The measure which this document authorized, and the remarkable interest in the Jews displayed in it, were most probably owing to the influence of Esther, who is thought to have been raised to the high position of queen a few months previous to the departure of Ezra [HALES]. According to others, who adopt a different chronology, it was more probably pressed upon the attention of the Persian court by Ezra, who, like Daniel, showed the prophecies to the king; or by some leading Jews on his accession, who, seeing the unsettled and disordered state of the colony after the deaths of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, and Zechariah, recommended the appointment of a commission to reform abuses, suppress disorder, and enforce the observance of the law.

12. *Artaxerxes, king of kings* — That title might have been assumed as, with literal truth, applicable to him, since many of the tributary princes of his empire still retained the name and authority of kings. But it was a probably a mere Orientalism, denoting a great and powerful prince, as the heaven of heavens signified the highest heaven, and vanity of vanities, the greatest vanity. This vainglorious title was assumed by the kings of Assyria, from whom it passed to the sovereigns of Persia.

unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven — The appointment of Ezra to this influential mission was of the highest importance to the Hebrew people, as a large proportion of them were become, in a great measure, strangers both to the language and the institutions of their forefathers.

14. *sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors* — This was the fixed number of the privy council of the kings of Persia (^{<15111>}Esther 1:10,14). The document describes, with great clearness and precision, the nature of Ezra's commission and the extent of power and prerogatives with which he was invested. It gave him authority, in the first place, to organize the colony in Judea and institute a regular government, according to the laws of the Hebrew people, and by magistrates and rulers of their own nation (^{<15125>}Ezra 7:25,26), with power to punish offenders by fines, imprisonment, exile, or death, according to the degree of their criminality. Secondly, he was empowered to carry a large donation in money, partly from the royal treasury and partly raised by voluntary contributions among his countrymen, to create a fund out of which to make suitable provision for maintaining the regular worship of God in Jerusalem (^{<15116>}Ezra 7:16,17). Thirdly, the Persian officers in Syria were commanded to afford him every assistance by gifts of money within a certain specified limit, in carrying out the objects of his patriotic mission (^{<15122>}Ezra 7:21).

22-24. *an hundred talents of silver* — about \$110,000, according to the rate of the silver talent of Babylon. Fourthly, Artaxerxes gave his royal sanction in the establishment of the divine law, which exempted priests and Levites from taxation or tribute and confirmed to them the exclusive right to officiate in the sacred services of the sanctuary. And, finally, in the expression of the king's desire for the divine blessing upon the king and his government (^{<15123>}Ezra 7:23), we see the strong persuasion which pervaded the Persian court, and had been produced by the captivity of the Hebrew people, as to the being and directing providence of the God they worshipped. It will be observed, however, that the commission related exclusively to the rebuilding of the temple — not of the walls. The Samaritans (^{<15120>}Ezra 4:20-22) had succeeded in alarming the Persian court by their representations of the danger to the empire of fortifying a city notorious for the turbulent character of its inhabitants and the prowess of its kings.

EZRA 7:27,28.**EZRA BLESSES GOD FOR THIS FAVOR.**

27. *Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers* — This devout thanksgiving is in unison with the whole character of Ezra, who discerns the hand of God in every event, and is always ready to express a pious acknowledgment for the divine goodness.

CHAPTER 8

⋈ EZRA 8:1-14.

EZRA'S COMPANIONS FROM BABYLON.

1. *this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon* — The number given here amounts to 1754. But this is the register of adult males only, and as there were women and children also (⋈ Ezra 8:21), the whole caravan may be considered as comprising between six thousand and seven thousand.

⋈ EZRA 8:15-20.

HE SENDS TO IDDO FOR MINISTERS FOR THE TEMPLE SERVICE.

15. *I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava* — This river has not been ascertained. It is probable that the Ahava was one of the streams or numerous canals of Mesopotamia communicating with the Euphrates [*Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*]. But it was certainly in Babylonia on the banks of that stream; and perhaps the place appointed for general rendezvous was in the neighborhood of a town of the same name. The emigrants encamped there for three days, according to Oriental custom, while the preparations for the departure were being completed and Ezra was arranging the order of the caravan.

I ... found there none of the sons of Levi — that is, the ordinary Levites. Notwithstanding the privilege of exemption from all taxes granted to persons engaged in the temple service, none of the Levitical tribes were induced to join the settlement in Jerusalem; and it was even not without difficulty Ezra persuaded some of the priestly families to accompany him.

16-20. *then sent I for Eliezer ... with commandment unto Iddo the chief*

— Ezra sent this deputation, either by virtue of authority which by his priestly character he had over the Levites, or of the royal commission with which he was invested. The deputation was despatched to Iddo, who was a prince or chief of the Nethinims — for the Persian government allowed the Hebrews during their exile to retain their ecclesiastical government by their own chiefs, as well as to enjoy the privilege of free worship. Iddo's influence procured and brought to the camp at Ahava thirty-eight Levites, and two hundred twenty Nethinims, the descendants of the Gibeonites, who performed the servile duties of the temple.

⌘ EZRA 8:21-36.**A FAST PROCLAIMED.**

21. *Then I proclaimed a fast there* — The dangers to travelling caravans from the Bedouin Arabs that prowl through the desert were in ancient times as great as they still are; and it seems that travelers usually sought the protection of a military escort. But Ezra had spoken so much to the king of the sufficiency of the divine care of His people that he would have blushed to apply for a guard of soldiers. Therefore he resolved that his followers should, by a solemn act of fasting and prayer, commit themselves to the Keeper of Israel. Their faith, considering the many and constant perils of a journey across the Bedouin regions, must have been great, and it was rewarded by the enjoyment of perfect safety during the whole way.

24-32. *Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests ... and weighed unto them the silver*, etc. — The custody of the contributions and of the sacred vessels was, during the journey, committed to twelve of the chief priests, who, with the assistance of ten of their brethren, were to watch closely over them by the way, and deliver them into the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. The treasures in silver and gold, according to the value of the Babylonian talent, amounted to over \$3,000,000.

27. *two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold* — Almost all commentators agree in maintaining that the vessels referred to were not

made of copper, but of an alloy capable of taking on a bright polish, which we think highly probable, as copper was then in common use among the Babylonians, and would not be as precious as gold. This alloy, much esteemed among the Jews, was composed of gold and other metals, which took on a high polish and was not subject to tarnish [NOYES].

31. *we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month* — Computing from the time of their setting out to the period of their arrival, they occupied about four months on the way. Their health and security were marvellous during so long a journey. The pilgrim-caravans of the present day perform long journeys through the wildest deserts of the East under the protection of a firman from the Porte, and an escort of soldiers. But for a large body, composed as that of Ezra — of some thousands of men, women, and children, unaccustomed to travel, undisciplined to order, and without military strength, and with so large an amount of treasure tempting the cupidity of the marauding, plundering tribes of the desert — to accomplish a journey so long and so arduous in perfect safety, is one of the most astonishing events recorded in history. Nothing but the vigilant care of a superintending Providence could have brought them securely to their destination.

33-36. *Now on the fourth day was the silver ... weighed in the house of our God* — The first three days after their arrival in Jerusalem were undoubtedly given to repose; on the next, the treasures were weighed and handed over to the custody of the officiating priests of the temple. The returned exiles offered burnt offerings, and Ezra delivered the royal commission to the satraps and inferior magistrates; while the Levitical portion of them lent all the assistance they could in performing the additional work which the arrival of so many new worshippers occasioned.

CHAPTER 9

<BIB> EZRA 9:1-4.

EZRA MOURNS FOR THE AFFINITY OF THE PEOPLE WITH STRANGERS.

1, 2. *Now when these things were done* — The first days after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem were occupied in executing the different trusts committed to him. The nature and design of the office with which the royal authority had invested him was publicly made known to his own people by the formal delivery of the contribution and the sacred vessels brought from Babylon to the priests to be deposited in the temple. Then his credentials were privately presented to the provincial governors; and by this prudent, orderly proceeding he put himself in the best position to avail himself of all the advantages guaranteed him by the king. On a superficial view everything contributed to gratify his patriotic feelings in the apparently flourishing state of the church and country. But a further acquaintance discovered the existence of great corruptions, which demanded immediate correction. One was particularly brought under his notice as being the source and origin of all others; namely, a serious abuse that was practiced respecting the law of marriage.

the princes came to me, saying — The information they lodged with Ezra was to the effect that numbers of the people, in violation of the divine law (^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 7:2,3), had contracted marriages with Gentile women, and that the guilt of the disorderly practice, far from being confined to the lower classes, was shared in by several of the priests and Levites, as well as of the leading men in the country. This great irregularity would inevitably bring many evils in its train; it would encourage and increase idolatry, as well as break down the barriers of distinction which, for important purposes, God had raised between the Israelites and all other people. Ezra foresaw these dangerous consequences, but was overwhelmed with a sense of the difficulty of correcting the evil, when

matrimonial alliances had been formed, families had been reared, affections engaged, and important interests established.

3. *when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle* — the outer and inner garment, which was a token not only of great grief, but of dread at the same time of the divine wrath;

plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard — which was a still more significant sign of overpowering grief.

4. *Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel*, etc. — All the pious people who revered God's word and dreaded its threatenings and judgments joined with Ezra in bewailing the public sin, and devising the means of redressing it.

I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice — The intelligence of so gross a violation of God's law by those who had been carried into captivity on account of their sins, and who, though restored, were yet unreformed, produced such a stunning effect on the mind of Ezra that he remained for a while incapable either of speech or of action. The hour of the evening sacrifice was the usual time of the people assembling; and at that season, having again rent his hair and garments, he made public prayer and confession of sin.

THE EZRA 9:5-15.

PRAYS TO GOD.

5-15. *I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God* — The burden of his prayer, which was dictated by a deep sense of the emergency, was that he was overwhelmed at the flagrant enormity of this sin, and the bold impiety of continuing in it after having, as a people, so recently experienced the heavy marks of the divine displeasure. God had begun to show returning favor to Israel by the restoration of some. But this only aggravated their sin, that, so soon after their re-establishment in their native land, they openly violated the express and repeated precepts which commanded them to extirpate the Canaanites. Such conduct, he exclaimed, could issue only in drawing down some great

punishment from offended Heaven and ensuring the destruction of the small remnant of us that is left, unless, by the help of divine grace, we repent and bring forth the fruits of repentance in an immediate and thorough reformation.

CHAPTER 10

¹⁵⁰EZRA 10:1-17.

EZRA REFORMS THE STRANGE MARRIAGES.

1. *Now when Ezra had prayed* — As this prayer was uttered in public, while there was a general concourse of the people at the time of the evening sacrifice and as it was accompanied with all the demonstrations of poignant sorrow and anguish, it is not surprising that the spectacle of a man so respected, a priest so holy, a governor so dignified as Ezra, appearing distressed and filled with fear at the sad state of things, should produce a deep sensation; and the report of his passionate grief and expressions in the court of the temple having rapidly spread through the city, a great multitude flocked to the spot.

2-4. *Shechaniah ... answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed* — This was one of the leading men, who was not himself a delinquent in the matter, for his name does not occur in the following. He spoke in the general name of the people, and his conduct evinced a tender conscience, as well as no small fortitude in making such a proposal; for as his father and five paternal uncles (^{¹⁵⁰Ezra 10:26) were involved in the guilt of unlawful marriages, he showed, by the measure he recommended, that he deemed it better to obey God than to please his nearest relatives.}

yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing — This hope, however, depended on timely measures of reformation, and therefore, instead of surrendering themselves to despair or despondency, he counselled them to amend their error without delay, relying on God's mercy for the past. Though the proposal may seem harsh and cruel, yet in the peculiar circumstances of the Jews it was just as well as necessary; and he urged the duty of seeing it executed on Ezra, as the only person competent to carry it into effect, being possessed of skill and address for so delicate and difficult a work, and invested by God, and under Him by

the Persian king (⁴⁵⁷²Ezra 7:23-28), with the requisite authority to enforce it.

5-8. *Then Ezra ... went into the chamber of Johanan* — At a private council of the princes and elders held there, under the presidency of Ezra, it was resolved to enter into a general covenant to put away their foreign wives and children; that a proclamation should be made for all who had returned from Babylon to repair within three days to Jerusalem, under pain of excommunication and confiscation of their property.

9-11. *Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin* — The returned captives belonged chiefly to these tribes; but other Israelites are also included under these names, as they all were then occupying the territory formerly assigned to those two tribes.

It was the ninth month — that is, between the end of December and the beginning of January, which is the coldest and most rainy season of the year in Palestine.

all the people sat in the street — that is, the court.

10-17. *Ezra the priest stood up, and said* — Having fully represented the enormity of their sin and urged them to dissolve their unlawful connections, he was gratified by receiving a prompt acknowledgment of the justice of his reproof and a promise of compliance with his recommendation. But as the weather was ungenial and the defaulters were too numerous to be passed in review at one time, it was resolved that a commission should be appointed to examine into the whole matter. These commissioners, assisted by the judges and elders of the respective cities, made a minute investigation into every case, and after three months' labor completely removed all traces of the abuse. Doubtless, an adequate provision was made for the repudiated wives and children, according to the means and circumstances of the husbands.

EZRA 10:18-44.

THOSE THAT HAD TAKEN STRANGE WIVES.

18. *among the sons of the priests* — From the names of so many men of rank appearing in the following list, some idea may be formed of the great and complicated difficulties attending the reformatory work.

19. *they gave their hands* — that is, came under a solemn engagement, which was usually ratified by pledging the right hand (^{<2061>}Proverbs 6:1 ^{<2378>}Ezekiel 17:18). The delinquents of the priestly order bound themselves to do like the common Israelites (^{<4502>}Ezra 10:25), and sought to expiate their sin by sacrificing a ram as a trespass offering.