

CHAPTER 6

How solemnly the foundation of the temple was laid we read in Ezra 3. How slowly the building went on, and with how much difficulty, we found in Ezra 4 and 5. But how gloriously the topstone was at length brought forth with shoutings we find in this chapter; and even we, at this distance of time, when we read of it, may cry, "Grace, grace to it." As for God, his work is perfect; it may be slow work, but it will be sure work. We have here,

I. A recital of the decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple (v. 1-5).

II. The enforcing of that decree by a new order from Darius for the perfecting of that work (v. 6-12).

III. The finishing of it thereupon (v. 13-15).

IV. The solemn dedication of it when it was built (v. 16-18), and the handselling of it (as I may say) with the celebration of the passover (v. 19-22). And now we may say that in Judah and Jerusalem things went well, very well.

~~<300>~~ EZRA 6:1-12

THE FAVOURABLE DECREE OF DARIUS

We have here,

I. The decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple repeated. To this the Samaritans referred because the Jews pleaded it, and perhaps hoped it would not be found, and then their plea would be over-ruled and a stop put to their work. Search was ordered to be made for it among the records; for, it seems, the tribes had not taken care to provide themselves with an authentic copy of it, which might have stood them in good stead, but they must appeal to the original. It was looked for in Babylon (v. 1), where Cyrus was when he signed it. But, when it was not found there, Darius did not make that a pretence to conclude that therefore there was no such decree, and thereupon to give judgment against the Jews; but it is probable,

having himself heard that such a decree was certainly made, he ordered the rolls in other places to be searched, and at length it was found at Achmetha, in the province of the Medes, v. 2. Perhaps some that durst not destroy it, yet hid it there, out of ill will to the Jews, that they might lose the benefit of it. But Providence so ordered that it came to light; and it is here inserted, v. 3-5.

1. Here is a warrant for the building of the temple: *Let the house of God at Jerusalem, yea, let that house be built* (so it may be read), within such and such dimensions, and with such and such materials.

2. A warrant for the taking of the expenses of the building out of the king's revenue, v. 4. We do not find that they had received what was here ordered them, the face of things at court being soon changed.

3. A warrant for the restoring of the vessels and utensils of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away (v. 5), with an order that the priests, the Lord's ministers, should return them all to their places in the house of God.

II. The confirmation of it by a decree of Darius, grounded upon it and in pursuance of it.

1. The decree of Darius is very explicit and satisfactory.

(1.) He forbids his officers to do any thing in opposition to the building of the temple. The manner of expression intimates that he knew they had a mind to hinder it: *Be you far hence* (v. 6); *let the work of this house of God alone*, v. 7. Thus was the wrath of the enemy *made to praise God* and the remainder thereof did he restrain.

(2.) He orders them out of his own revenue to assist the builders with money,

[1.] For carrying on the building, v. 8. Herein he pursues the example of Cyrus, v. 4.

[2.] For maintaining the sacrifices there when it was built, v. 9. He ordered that they should be supplied with every thing they wanted both for burnt-offerings and meat-offerings. He was content it should be a rent-charge upon his revenue, and ordered it to be paid every day, and this without fail, that they might offer sacrifices and prayers with them (for the patriarchs, when they offered sacrifice, *called on the name of the Lord*, so did Samuel,

Elijah, and others) for the life (that is, the happiness and prosperity) of the king and his sons, v. 10. See here how he gives honour, *First*, To Israel's God, whom he calls once and again the *God of heaven*. *Secondly*, To his ministers, in ordering his commissioners to give out supplies for the temple service at the appointment of the priests. Those that thought to control them must now be, in this matter, at their command. It was a new thing for God's priests to have such an interest in the public money. *Thirdly*, To prayer: *That they may pray for the life of the king*. He knew they were a praying people, and had heard that God was nigh to them in all that which they called upon him for. He was sensible he needed their prayers and might receive benefit by them, and was kind to them in order that he might have an interest in their prayers. It is the duty of God's people to pray for those that are in authority over them, not only for the good and gentle, but also for the forward; but they are particularly bound in gratitude to pray for their protectors and benefactors; and it is the wisdom of princes to desire their prayers, and to engage them. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us.

(3.) He enforces his decree with a penalty (v. 11): “Let none either oppose the work and service of the temple or withhold the supports granted to it by the crown upon pain of death. If any alter this decree, let him be (*hanged before his own door* as we say), hanged upon a beam of his own house, and, as an execrable man, *let his house be made a dunghill*.”

(4.) He entails a divine curse upon all those kings and people that should ever have any hand in the destruction of this house, v. 12. What he would not do himself for the protection of the temple he desired that God, *to whom vengeance belongs*, would do. This bespeaks him zealous in the cause; and though this temple was, at length, most justly destroyed by the righteous hand of God, yet perhaps the Romans, who were the instruments of that destruction, felt the effects of this curse, for that empire sensibly declined ever after.

2. From all this we learn,

(1.) That the heart of kings is in the hand of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleases; what they are he makes them to be, for he is *King of kings*.

(2.) That when God's time has come for the accomplishing of his gracious purposes concerning his church he will raise up instruments to promote them from whom such good service was not expected. *The earth sometimes helps the woman* (^{<66216>}Revelation 12:16), and those are made use of for the defence of religion who have little religion themselves.

(3.) That what is intended for the prejudice of the church has often, by the overruling providence of God, been made serviceable to it, ^{<5012>}Philippians 1:12. The enemies of the Jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to suppress them, but, instead of that, they got an order to supply them. Thus *out of the eater comes forth meat*. The apocryphal Esdras (or Ezra), Book 1 ch. 3 and 4, gives another account of this decree in favour of the Jews, that Darius had vowed that if ever he came to the kingdom he would build the temple at Jerusalem, and that Zerubbabel, who was one of his attendants (whereas it is plain here that he was now at Jerusalem), for making an ingenious discourse before him on that subject (*Great is the truth and will prevail*), was told to ask what recompence he would, and asked only for this order, in pursuance of the king's vow.

^{<5763>}EZRA 6:13-22

COMPLETION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

Here we have,

I. The Jews' enemies made their friends. When they received this order from the king they came with as much haste to encourage and assist the work as their predecessors had done to put a stop to it, ^{<5923>}Ezra 4:23. What the king ordered they did, and, because they would not be thought to do it with reluctance, they *did it speedily*, v. 13. The king's moderation made them, contrary to their own inclination, moderate too.

II. The building of the temple carried on, and finished in a little time, v. 14, 15. Now the *elders of the Jews built* with cheerfulness. For aught I know, the elders themselves laboured at it *with their own hands*; and, if they did, it was no disparagement to their eldership, but an encouragement to the other workmen.

1. They found themselves bound to it by *the commandment of the God of Israel*, who had given them power that they might use it in his service.

2. They found themselves shamed into it by the commandment of the heathen kings, Cyrus formerly, Darius now, and Artaxerxes some time after. Can the elders of the Jews be remiss in this good work when these foreign princes appear so warm in it? Shall native Israelites grudge their pains and care about this building when strangers grudge not to be at the expense of it?

3. They found themselves encouraged in it by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, who, it is likely, represented to them (as bishop Patrick suggests) the wonderful goodness of God in inclining the heart of the king of Persia to favour them thus. And now the work went on so prosperously that, in four hours' time, it was brought to perfection. *As for God, his work is perfect.* The gospel church, that spiritual temple, is long in the building, but it will be finished at last, when the mystical body is completed. Every believer is a *living temple, building up himself in his most holy faith.* Much opposition is given to this work by Satan and our own corruptions. We trifle, and proceed in it with many stops and pauses; but he that has *begun the good work* will see it performed, and will *bring forth judgment unto victory.* *Spirits of just men will be made perfect.*

III. The dedication of the temple. When it was built, being designed only for sacred uses, *they showed by an example how it should be used*, which (says bishop Patrick) is the proper sense of the word *dedicate*. They entered upon it with solemnity and probably with a public declaration of the separating of it from common uses and the surrender of it to the honour of God, to be employed in his worship.

1. The persons employed in this service were not only *the priests and Levites* who officiated, but *the children of Israel*, some of each of the *twelve tribes*, though Judah and Benjamin were the chief, and *the rest of the children of the captivity or transportation*, which intimates that there were many besides the children of Israel, of other nations, who transported themselves with them, and became proselytes to their religion, unless we read it, *even the remnant of the children of the captivity*, and then, we may suppose, notice is hereby taken of their mean and afflicted condition, because the consideration of that helped to make them devout and serious in this and other religious exercises. A sad change! *The children of Israel*

have become *children of the captivity*, and there appears but a remnant of *them*, according to that prediction (^{<300B>}Isaiah 7:3), *Shear-jashub — The remnant shall return*.

2. The sacrifices that were offered upon this occasion were *bullocks, rams, and lambs* (v. 17), for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; not to be compared, in number, with what had been offered at the dedication of Solomon's temple, but, being according to their present ability, they were accepted, for, *after a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded to the riches of their liberality*, ^{<400B>}2 Corinthians 8:2. These hundreds were more to them than Solomon's thousands were to him. But, besides these, they offered twelve he-goats for sin-offerings, one for every tribe, to make atonement for their sins, which they looked upon as necessary in order to the acceptance of their services. Thus, by getting iniquity taken away, they would free themselves from that which had been the sting of their late troubles, and which, if not removed, would be a worm at the root of their present comforts.

3. This service was performed with joy. They were all glad to see the temple built and the concerns of it in so good a posture. Let us learn to welcome holy ordinances with joy and attend on them with pleasure. Let us serve the Lord with gladness. Whatever we dedicate to God, let it be done with joy that he will please to accept of it.

4. When they dedicated the house they settled the household. Small comfort could they have in the temple without the temple service, and therefore they *set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses*, v. 18. Having set up the worship of God in this dedication, they took care to keep it up, and made *the book of Moses* their rule, to which they had an eye in this establishment. Though the temple service could not now be performed with so much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, yet perhaps it was performed with as much purity and close adherence to the divine institution as ever, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the beauty of holiness.

IV. The celebration of the passover in the newly-erected temple. Now that they were newly delivered out of their bondage in Babylon it was seasonable to commemorate their deliverance out of their bondage in Egypt. Fresh mercies should put us in mind of former mercies. We may suppose that they had kept the passover, after a sort, every year since their

return, for they had an altar and a tabernacle. But they were liable to frequent disturbances from their enemies, were straitened for room, and had not conveniences about them, so that they could not do it with due solemnity till the temple was built; and now they made a joyful festival of it, it falling out in the next month after the temple was finished and dedicated, v. 19. Notice is here taken,

1. Of the purity of the priests and Levites that *killed the passover*, v. 20. In Hezekiah's time the priests were many of them under blame for not purifying themselves. But now it is observed, to their praise, that *they were purified together, as one man* (so the word is); they were unanimous both in their resolutions and in their endeavours to make and keep themselves ceremonially clean for this solemnity; they joined together in their preparations, that they might help one another, so that all of them were pure, to a man. The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministrations; so does their unity.

2. Of the proselytes that communicated with them in this ordinance: *All such as had separated themselves unto them*, had left their country and the superstitions of it and cast in their lot with the Israel of God, and had *turned from the filthiness of the heathen of the land*, both their idolatries and immoralities, *to seek the Lord God of Israel* as their God, did eat the passover. See how the proselytes, the converts, are described. They separated themselves from the filthiness of sin and fellowship with sinners, joined themselves with the Israel of God in conformity and communion, and set themselves to seek the God of Israel; and those that do so in sincerity, though strangers and foreigners, are welcome to eat of the gospel feast, as *fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God*.

3. Of the great pleasure and satisfaction wherewith they *kept the feast of unleavened bread*, v. 22. *The Lord had made them joyful*, had given them both cause to rejoice and hearts to rejoice. It was now about twenty years since the foundation of this temple was laid, and we may suppose the old men that then wept at the remembrance of the first temple were most of them dead by this time, so that now there were no tears mingled with their joys. Those that are, upon good grounds, joyful, have therefore reason to be thankful, because it is God that *makes them to rejoice*. He is the fountain whence all the streams of our joy flow. God has promised to all those who take hold of his covenant that *he will make them joyful in his house of prayer*. The particular occasion they had for joy at this time was

that God had *turned the heart* of the emperor to them, to *strengthen their hands*. If those that have been, or who we feared would have been, against us, prove to be for us, we may rejoice in it as a token for good, that *our ways please the Lord* (~~3167~~ Proverbs 16:7), and he must have the glory of it.