

AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE BOOK OF EZRA

The history of this book is the accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the Jews out of Babylon. From its contents we especially learn, that every good work will meet with opposition from enemies, and be hurt by the misconduct of friends; but that God will make his cause to prevail, notwithstanding all obstacles and adversaries. The restoration of the Jews was an event of the highest consequence, tending to preserve religion in the world, and preparing the way for the appearance of the Great Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 1

The proclamation of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the temple. (1-4)

The people provide for their return. (5-11)

Ezra 1:1

Vs. 1-4: The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. The hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord. God governs the world by his influence on the spirits of men; whatever good they do, God stirs up their spirits to do it. It was during the captivity of the Jews, that God principally employed them as the means of calling the attention of the heathen to him. Cyrus took it for granted, that those among the Jews who were able, would offer free-will offerings for the house of God. He would also have them supplied out of his kingdom. Well-wishers to the temple should be well-doers for it.

Ezra 1:5

Vs. 5-11: The same God that raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim liberty to the Jews, raised up their spirits to take the benefit. The temptation was to some to stay in Babylon; but some feared not to return, and they were those whose spirits God raised, by his Spirit and grace. Whatever good we do, is owing to the grace of God. Our spirits naturally bow down to this earth and the things of it; if they move upward in any

good affection or good actions, it is God who raises them. The calls and offers of the gospel are like the proclamation of Cyrus. Those bound under the power of sin, may be made free by Jesus Christ. Whosoever will, by repentance and faith, return to God, Jesus Christ has opened the way for him, and raises him out of the slavery of sin into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Many that hear this joyful sound, choose to sit still in Babylon, are in love with their sins, and will not venture upon a holy life; but some break through all discouragements, whatever it cost them; they are those whose spirit God has raised above the world and the flesh, whom he has made willing. Thus will the heavenly Canaan be filled, though many perish in Babylon; and the gospel offer will not have been made in vain. The bringing back the Jews from captivity, represents the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

The numbers that returned. (1-35) The numbers of the priests and Levites. (36-63) The offerings for the temple. (64-70)

<small>Ezra 2:1

Vs. 1-35: An account was kept of the families that came up out of captivity. See how sin lowers a nation, which righteousness would exalt!

<small>Ezra 2:36

Vs. 36-63: Those who undervalue their relation to the Lord in times of reproach, persecution, or distress, will have no benefit from it when it becomes honorable or profitable. Those who have no evidence that they are, by the new birth, spiritual priests unto God, through Jesus Christ, have no right to the comforts and privileges of Christians.

<small>Ezra 2:64

Vs. 64-70: Let none complain of the needful expenses of their religion. Seek first the kingdom of God, his favor and his glory, then will all other things be added unto them. Their offerings were nothing, compared with the offerings of the princes in David's time; yet, being according to their ability, were as acceptable to God. The Lord will carry us through all undertakings entered on according to his will, with an aim to his glory, and dependence on his assistance. Those who, at the call of the gospel, renounce sin and return to the Lord, shall be guarded and guided through all perils of the way, and arrive safely at the mansions provided in the holy city of God.

CHAPTER 3

The altar and festivals. (1-7) The foundations of the temple laid. (8-13)

Ezra 3:1

Vs. 1-7: From the proceedings of the Jews on their arrival, let us learn to begin with God, and to do what we can in the worship of God, when we cannot do what we would. They could not at once have a temple, but they would not be without an altar. Fear of danger should stir us to our duty. Have we many enemies? Then it is good to have God our Friend, and to keep up communion with him. Our fears should drive us to our knees. The sacrifices for all these solemnities were a heavy expense for so poor a company; yet besides those expressly appointed, many brought free-will offerings to the Lord. And they made preparation for the building of the temple without delay: whatever God calls us to do, we may depend upon his providence to furnish us with the needful means.

Ezra 3:8

Vs. 8-13: There was a remarkable mixture of affection upon laying the foundation of the temple. Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all, praised the Lord with shouts of joy. To them, even this foundation seemed great. We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though it be not yet perfect. But those who remembered the glory of the first temple, and considered how far inferior this was likely to be, wept with a loud voice. There was reason for it, and if they bewailed the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. Yet it was wrong to cast a damp upon the common joys. They despised the day of small things, and were unthankful for the good they enjoyed. Let not the remembrance of former afflictions drown the sense of present mercies.

CHAPTER 4

The adversaries of the temple. (1-5) The building of the temple is hindered. (6-24)

Ezra 4:1

Vs. 1-5: Every attempt to revive true religion will stir up the opposition of Satan, and of those in whom he works. The adversaries were the Samaritans, who had been planted in the land of Israel, 2 Kings 17. It was plain that they did not mean to unite in the worship of the Lord, according to his word. Let those who discourage a good work, and weaken them that are employed in it, see whose pattern they follow.

Ezra 4:6

Vs. 6-24: It is an old slander, that the prosperity of the church would be hurtful to kings and princes. Nothing can be more false, for true godliness teaches us to honor and obey our sovereign. But where the command of God requires one thing and the law of the land another, we must obey God rather than man, and patiently submit to the consequences. All who love the gospel should avoid all appearance of evil, lest they should encourage the adversaries of the church. The world is ever ready to believe any accusation against the people of God, and refuses to listen to them. The king suffered himself to be imposed upon by these frauds and falsehoods. Princes see and hear with other men's eyes and ears, and judge things as represented to them, which are often done falsely. But God's judgment is just; he sees things as they are.

CHAPTER 5

The leaders forward the building of the temple. (1, 2) Letter against the Jews. (3-17)

Ezra 5:1

Vs. 1, 2: The building of the temple was stopped about fifteen years. Then they had two good ministers, who urged them to go on with the work. It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people, when he raises up prophets to be helpers in the way and work of God, as guides, overseers, and rulers. In Haggai, we see what great things God does by his word, which he magnifies above all his name, and by his Spirit working with it.

Ezra 5:3

Vs. 3-17: While employed in God's work, we are under his special protection; his eye is upon us for good. This should keep us to our duty, and encourage us therein, when difficulties are ever so discouraging. The elders of the Jews gave the Samaritans an account of their proceedings. Let us learn hence, with meekness and fear, to give a reason of the hope that is in us; let us rightly understand, and then readily declare, what we do in God's service, and why we do it. And while in this world, we always shall have to confess, that our sins have provoked the wrath of God. All our sufferings spring from thence, and all our comforts from his unmerited mercy. However the work may seem to be hindered, yet the Lord Jesus Christ is carrying it on, his people are growing unto a holy temple in the Lord, for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

CHAPTER 6

The decree for completing the temple. (1-12) The temple is finished. (13-22)

Ezra 6:1

Vs. 1-12: When God's time is come for fulfilling his gracious purposes concerning his church, he will raise up instruments to do it, from whom such good service was not expected. While our thoughts are directed to this event, we are led by Zechariah to fix our regard on a nobler, a spiritual building. The Lord Jesus Christ continues to lay one stone upon another: let us assist the great design. Difficulties delay the progress of this sacred edifice. Yet let not opposition discourage us, for in due season it will be completed to his abundant praise. He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

Ezra 6:13

Vs. 13-22: 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. Then spirits of just men will be made perfect. By getting their sins taken away, the Jews would free themselves from the sting of their late troubles. Their service was with joy. Let us welcome holy ordinances with joy, and serve the Lord with gladness.

CHAPTER 7

*Ezra goes up to Jerusalem. (1-10) The commission to Ezra. (11-26)
Ezra blesses God for his favor. (27, 28)*

Ezra 7:1

Vs. 1-10: Ezra went from Babylon to Jerusalem, for the good of his country. The king was kind to him; he granted all his requests, whatever Ezra desired to enable him to serve his country. When he went, many went with him; he obtained favor from his king, by the Divine favor. Every creature is that to us, which God makes it to be. We must see the hand of God in the events that befall us, and acknowledge him with thankfulness.

Ezra 7:11

Vs. 11-26: The liberality of heathen kings to support the worship of God, reproached the conduct of many kings of Judah, and will rise up in judgment against the covetousness of wealthy professed Christians, who will not promote the cause of God. But the weapons of Christian ministers are not carnal. Faithful preaching, holy lives, fervent prayers, and patient suffering when called to it, are the means to bring men into obedience to Christ.

Ezra 7:27

Vs. 27, 28: Two things Ezra blessed God for:

1. For his commission. If any good appear in our hearts, or in the hearts of others, we must own that God put it there, and bless him; it is he that worketh in us, both to will and to do that which is good.
2. For his encouragement: God has extended mercy to me. Ezra was a man of courage, yet he ascribed this not to his own heart, but to God's hand.

If God give us his hand, we are bold and cheerful; if he withdraw it, we are weak as water. Whatever we are enabled to do for God and those around us, God must have all the glory.

CHAPTER 8

The companions of Ezra. (1-20) Ezra implores God's blessing. (21-23) Treasures committed to the priests. (24-30) Ezra arrives at Jerusalem. (31-36)

Ezra 8:1

Vs. 1-20: Ezra assembles the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah. God raised up the spirits of a small remnant to accompany him. What a pity that good men should omit a good work, for want of being spoken to!

Ezra 8:21

Vs. 21-23: Ezra procured Levites to go with him; but what will that avail, unless he have God with him? Those who seek God, are safe under the shadow of his wings, even in their greatest dangers; but those who forsake him, are always exposed. When entering upon any new state of life, our care should be, to bring none of the guilt of the sins of our former condition into it. When we are in any peril, let us be at peace with God, and then nothing can do us any real hurt. All our concerns about ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty, by prayer to commit to God, and to leave the care of them with him. And, on some occasions, we should decline advantages which are within our reach, lest we should cause others to stumble, and so our God be dishonored. Let us ask wisdom of God, that we may know how to use or to refuse lawful things. We shall be no losers by venturing, suffering, or giving up for the Lord's sake. Their prayers were answered, and the event declared it. Never have any that sought God in earnest, found that they sought him in vain. In times of difficulty and danger, to set a season apart for secret or for social prayer, is the best method for relief we can take.

Ezra 8:24

Vs. 24-30: Do we expect that God should, by his providence, keep that which belongs to us, let us, by his grace, keep that which belongs to him.

Let God's honor and interest be our care; and then we may expect that our lives and comforts will be his.

Ezra 8:31

Vs. 31-36: Enemies laid wait for the Jews, but God protected them. Even the common perils of journeys, call us to go out with prayer, and to return with praise and thanksgiving. But what shall we render when the Lord has led us safely through the pilgrimage of life, through the gloomy vale of death, out of the reach of all our enemies, into everlasting happiness! Among their sacrifices they had a sin-offering. The atonement sweetens and secures every mercy to us, which will not be truly comfortable, unless sin be taken away, and our peace made with God. Then had the church rest. The expressions here used, direct us to the deliverance of sinners from spiritual bondage, and their pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem, under the care and protection of their God and Savior.

CHAPTER 9

Ezra mourns for the Jews' conduct. (1-4) Ezra's confession of sins. (5-15)

Ezra 9:1

Vs. 1-4: Many corruptions lurk out of the view of the most careful rulers. Some of the people disobeyed the express command of God, which forbade all marriages with the heathen, Deuteronomy 7. Disbelief of God's all-sufficiency, is at the bottom of the sorry shifts we make to help ourselves. They exposed themselves and their children to the peril of idolatry, that had ruined their church and nation. Carnal professors may make light of such connections, and try to explain away the exhortations to be separate; but those who are best acquainted with the word of God, will treat the subject in another manner. They must forebode the worst from such unions. The evils excused, and even pleaded for, by many professors, astonish and cause regret in the true believer. All who profess to be God's people, ought to strengthen those that appear and act against vice and profaneness.

Ezra 9:5

Vs. 5-15: The sacrifice, especially the evening sacrifice, was a type of the blessed Lamb of God, who in the evening of the world, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Ezra's address is a penitent confession of sin, the sin of his people. But let this be the comfort of true penitents, that though their sins reach to the heavens, God's mercy is in the heavens. Ezra, speaking of sin, speaks as one much ashamed. Holy shame is as necessary in true repentance as holy sorrow. Ezra speaks as much amazed. The discoveries of guilt cause amazement; the more we think of sin, the worse it looks. Say, God be merciful to me a sinner. Ezra speaks as one much afraid. There is not a surer or sadder presage of ruin, than turning to sin, after great judgments, and great deliverances. Every one in the church of God, has to wonder that he has not wearied out the Lord's patience, and brought destruction upon himself. What then must be the case of the ungodly? But though the true penitent has nothing to plead in his own behalf, the heavenly Advocate pleads most powerfully for him.

CHAPTER 10

Ezra encourages to reformation. (1-5) He assembles the people. (6-14) Reformation effected. (15-44)

Ezra 10:1

Vs. 1-5: Shechaniah owned the national guilt. The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease threatening, but not incurable. Now that the people begin to lament, a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out; now there is hope that God will forgive, and have mercy. The sin that rightly troubles us, shall not ruin us. In melancholy times we must observe what makes for us, as well as against us. And there may be good hopes through grace, even where there is the sense of great guilt before God. The case is plain; what has been done amiss, must be undone again as far as possible; nothing less than this is true repentance. Sin must be put away, with a resolution never to have any thing more to do with it. What has been unjustly got, must be restored. Arise, be of good courage. Weeping, in this case, is good, but reforming is better. As to being unequaled yoked with unbelievers, such marriages, it is certain, are sinful, and ought not to be made; but now they are not null, as they were before the gospel did away the separation between Jews and Gentiles.

Ezra 10:6

Vs. 6-14: There is hope concerning people, when they are convinced, not only that it is good to part with their sins, but that it is necessary; we must do it, or we are undone. So rich is the mercy, and so plenteous the redemption of God, that there is hope for the vilest who hear the gospel, and are willing to accept of free salvation. When sinners mourn for their sins, and tremble at the word of God, there is hope that they will forsake them. To affect others with godly sorrow or love to God, we must ourselves be affected. It was carefully agreed how this affair should be carried on. That which is hastily resolved on seldom proves lasting.

Ezra 10:15

Vs. 15-44: The best reformers can but do their endeavor; when the Redeemer himself shall come to Zion, he shall effectually turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And when sin is repented of and forsaken, God will forgive it; but the blood of Christ, our Sin-offering, is the only atonement which takes away our guilt. No seeming repentance or amendment will benefit those who reject Him, for self-dependence proves them still unhumbled. All the names written in the book of life, are those of penitent sinners, not of self-righteous persons, who think they have no need of repentance.