

# EZRA

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF EZRA

This book, in the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions, is called the “First” Book of Ezra, Nehemiah being reckoned the “second”; but with the Jews both were accounted but one book <sup>f1</sup>; in the Syriac version, it is called the Writing or Book of Ezra the Prophet; and this title is given him, both by Jews <sup>f2</sup> and Christians <sup>f3</sup>; in the Arabic version, it is called the First Book of Ezra the Priest, skilful in the Law; and that he was a priest is clear, since he was the son of Seraiah the high priest, who was slain by Nebuchadnezzar, and the younger brother of Josedech, who succeeded his father as high priest, and uncle to Joshua that succeeded him; and he was also a ready scribe in the law of Moses, (see <sup><1500></sup>Ezra 7:1,6,10-12). That Ezra was the writer of this book is believed by the Jews <sup>f4</sup>, and by the generality of Christians; only Huetius <sup>f5</sup> thinks that the six first chapters were written by another hand, but his reasons are not satisfactory; and it has been universally received as canonical by all; it agrees with the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, and serves to illustrate them; it is of use for the continuation of the sacred history, to point at the fulfilment of prophecies concerning the return of the Jews from captivity, and the rebuilding of the temple; and to give us an account of the state of the church in those times, the troubles and difficulties it met with, and what care was taken to keep the tribes and families distinct, that it might be known from whom the Messiah sprung; this book contains an history of seventy years, according to the calculation of Bishop Usher <sup>f6</sup>, from A. M. 3468, to A. M. 3538.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 1

This chapter informs us of the proclamation of Cyrus king of Persia, for the Jews to return to their own country, and rebuild their temple, (<sup><1500b></sup>Ezra 1:1-4), and that, upon it, the chief of them rose up for that purpose, whose hands were strengthened and supplied by those about them, (<sup><1500b></sup>Ezra 1:5,6) and particularly by Cyrus, who gave orders that the vessels belonging to the temple should be delivered to them, (<sup><1500b></sup>Ezra 1:7-11).

**Ver. 1.** *Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia*, etc.] Not in the first of his reign over Persia, for he had been many years king over that, and now had all the kingdoms of the earth given him, (<sup><1500b></sup>Ezra 1:2), but over Babylon, and the dominions belonging to it, which commenced with Darius upon the taking of Babylon; he reigned in all thirty years, as Cicero <sup>f7</sup> from a Persian writer relates; or twenty nine, according to Herodotus <sup>f8</sup>; but in what year this was is not certain; Africanus <sup>f9</sup>, has proved, from various historians, that it was the first year of the fifty fifth Olympiad, perhaps about the twentieth of Cyrus's Persian government <sup>f10</sup>; (See Gill on "<sup><2700b></sup>Daniel 10:1"),

*that the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be fulfilled;* which foretold that the Jews should return from their captivity at the end of seventy years, which fell on the first of Cyrus, reckoning from the fourth of Jehoiakim, and the first of Nebuchadnezzar, (see <sup><2450b></sup>Jeremiah 25:1,11,12 29:10).

*The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia;* who has the hearts of all men in his hands, and even of the kings of the earth, and can turn them as he pleases; he wrought upon him, put it into his heart, enlightened his mind, showed him what was right, and his duty to do, and pressed him to the performance of it; so that he could not be easy until he had done it, and he was made thoroughly willing, and even eager to do it:

*that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom,* and put it also in writing; gave it in writing to his heralds to read and proclaim throughout all his dominions:

*saying*; as follows.

**Ver. 2.** *Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia*, etc.] Of whom, and this edict of his, Isaiah prophesied two hundred years before he was born, (~~23408~~ Isaiah 44:28)

*the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth*; many he had conquered before he took Babylon, and then the whole Babylonian monarchy fell into his hands. Herodotus <sup>f11</sup> says, he ruled over all Asia; Xenophon <sup>f12</sup> reckons up many nations that were under his government, Medes and Hyrcanians, Syrians, Assyrians, Arabians, Cappadocians, both the Phrygians, Carians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, Bactrians, Indians, Cilicians, Sacae or Scythians, Paphlagonians, Megadinians, and many other nations, the Greeks inhabiting Asia, and the Cyprians, and Egyptians; and elsewhere he says <sup>f13</sup>, the borders of his kingdom were, to the east the Red sea, to the north the Euxine Pontus, to the west Cyprus and Egypt, and to the south Ethiopia. And the possession of these kingdoms Cyrus ascribes, not to his own martial courage and skill, but to the providence and disposal of the God of heaven, which he seems to have had some notion of:

*and he hath charged me to build an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah*; in the prophecy of Isaiah, which, according to Josephus <sup>f14</sup>, he had seen and read, and believed it to be a charge upon him, and a command unto him to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem; however, to give leave for the rebuilding of it, and to encourage to it, and assist in it; an Arabic writer says <sup>f15</sup>, that Cyrus married a sister of Zerubbabel, and that it was at her request that the Jews had leave to return; which is merely fabulous.

**Ver. 3.** *Who is there among you of all his people?* etc.] The people of God, the Israelites, as well of the ten tribes, as of the two of Judah and Benjamin; for this edict was published throughout all his dominions, where were the one as well as the other:

*his God be with him*; to incline his heart to go, to protect him in his journey, and succeed and prosper him in what he goes about:

*and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, he is the God*; the one only living and true God:

*which is in Jerusalem*; who has been in former times, and is to be worshipped there; though Aben Ezra says, this is to be connected with “the house of the Lord”; as if the sense was, to build the house, that was in

Jerusalem, or to be built there; and so our version connects them, putting those words into a parenthesis, “he is God”; but this is contrary to the accents.

**Ver. 4.** *And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth,* etc.] Is left behind, and cannot go up through poverty, not having a sufficiency to bear his charges in his journey to Jerusalem:

*let the men of his place keep him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts;* with money to bear the expenses of his journey, with goods to furnish his house, or trade with, when he came to Judea, and with cattle to carry him, and his goods, and to till the ground with, when he came thither; and the men exhorted to this are either the Gentiles that dwelt in the cities where these poor Jews were, or the richer Jews, who chose as yet not to go up until they saw how things would succeed; and are therefore called upon to assist their brethren who had a will, but not ability:

*besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem:* which they freely gave, and sent by them for the rebuilding of the temple.

**Ver. 5.** *Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin,* etc.]. Princes of these tribes, and heads of families in them, and of some other tribes too, though chiefly of these, as appears from (<sup>430B</sup>1 Chronicles 9:3),

*and the priests and the Levites:* whose presence was necessary both to direct in the building of the temple, and to animate to it, and to set the vessels in their proper places; and particularly to assist in the setting up of the altar, and to offer sacrifices on it, which was the first thing done when come to Jerusalem, (<sup>430D</sup>Ezra 3:2,3)

*with all them whose spirit God raised to go up, to build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem;* God, who “works” in men “both to will and to do”, wrought powerfully by his Spirit on their hearts, inclined their minds, and made them willing to go up, and set about this work; and such a divine, powerful, and efficacious operation upon them, was necessary to engage them in it, since the embarrassments, difficulties, discouragements, and objections, were many: some of them were well settled, and had contracted a pleasing acquaintance with many of their neighbours, and indeed to most of them it was their native place; and as for Judea and Jerusalem, they knew nothing of but what their fathers had told them; the way to it unknown, long, and dangerous, at least fatiguing and troublesome

to their wives and children; and Judea and Jerusalem desolate and in ruins, and in the hands of enemies, from whom they had reason to expect trouble.

**Ver. 6.** *And all they that were about them*, etc.] Their neighbours, the Chaldeans:

*strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things*; which they either did of themselves at their own motion, or by the direction and example of Cyrus, (<sup><4500></sup>Ezra 1:4) and perhaps many of them to ingratiate themselves into the favour of their new monarch:

*besides all that was willingly offered*: by the rich Jews, who thought fit, at least for the present, to remain in Babylon.

**Ver. 7.** *And Cyrus brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord*, etc.] Or ordered them to be brought forth:

*which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem*; out of the temple there, when he took it and burnt it:

*and had put them in the house of his gods*; in the temple of Belus at Babylon, (see <sup><4600></sup>2 Chronicles 36:7 <sup><2700></sup>Daniel 1:2 5:2,3), by which means they were providentially preserved.

**Ver. 8.** *Even these did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer*, etc.] Or Mithridates, a name common with the Persians, from their god Mithras, the sun they worshipped:

*and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar prince of Judah*; delivered them by tale to him; who, according to the Jewish rabbins, as Jarchi says, was Daniel, who was so called, because he stood in six tribulations; but it does not appear that Daniel went up to Jerusalem with the captivity, as this man did, but remained at Babylon; rather, with Aben Ezra, it is best by him to understand Zerubbabel, who did go up, and was the prince of Judah; and Cyrus, in his letter <sup>f16</sup> to the governors of Syria, expressly says, that he delivered the vessels to Zerubbabel, the prince of the Jews. He had two names, Sheshbazzar, which signifies he rejoiced in tribulation, and Zerubbabel, which signifies either the seed of Babylon, being born there, or dispersed, or a stranger there, as others.

**Ver. 9.** *And this is the number of them*, etc.] Of the vessels delivered, as follows:

*thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver*; these, according to Ben Melech, were vessels in which water was put to wash hands in; but rather they were, as Aben Ezra observes from the Jerusalem Talmud <sup>f17</sup>, vessels in which they gathered the blood of lambs and bullocks slain for sacrifices:

*nine and twenty knives*; which, because the handles of them were of gold or silver, were valuable, and might be very large knives, and what the priests used in slaying and cutting up the sacrifices.

**Ver. 10.** *Thirty basins of gold*, etc.] Cups or dishes with covers, as the word seems to signify; but, according to Jarchi and Aben Ezra, they were vessels in which the blood of sacrifices was received, and out of which it was sprinkled on the altar:

*silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten*; perhaps lesser than the other, however not so valuable, being of silver; in the Apocrypha:

“And this was the number of them; A thousand golden cups, and a thousand of silver, censers of silver twenty nine, vials of gold thirty, and of silver two thousand four hundred and ten, and a thousand other vessels.” (1 Esdras 2:13)

the number is 2410; and in the letter of Cyrus, before referred to, it is 2400:

*and other vessels a thousand*; which are not particularly mentioned; Junius and Tremellius render the words,

*other vessels by thousands*, there being near 3000 that are not described.

**Ver. 11.** *All the vessels of gold, and of silver, were five thousand and four hundred*, etc.] Those that are mentioned make no more than 2499, which Aben Ezra thinks were the larger vessels; but this general sum takes in great and small, as in (~~1468~~ 2 Chronicles 36:18) in the letter of Cyrus, before mentioned, these vessels are more particularly described, and their several numbers given, which together amount to the exact number in the text, 5400; the apocryphal Ezra makes them 5469:

*all these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity, that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem*: of whom there is a large and particular account in the following chapter.