

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 5

This chapter relates, how that the people of the Jews were stirred up by the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to set about the building of the temple again, notwithstanding the orders to the contrary from the deputy governors of the king of Persia; nor could the present ones cause them to cease from it; though it must be owned they behaved towards them in a better manner than the former ones did, (^{<45701>}Ezra 5:1-5), and who, upon the answers received from the Jews, wrote a letter to Darius, to know the truth of things; and in which they seem to state fairly the case of the Jews, as they had it from them, so far as they understood it, (^{<45706>}Ezra 5:6-17).

Ver. 1. *Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo,* etc.] The grandson of Iddo; for he was the son of Berechiah, (^{<3000>}Zechariah 1:1),

prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel; this they both did in the second year of Darius; the one began in the sixth month, and the other in the eighth month of the year, (^{<3000>}Haggai 1:1 ^{<3000>}Zechariah 1:1), even “unto them”; or “against them”, as Deuteronomy Dieu; reproving them for their sloth and neglect of building the temple, when they were careful enough to raise up goodly houses for themselves to dwell in; and for being intimidated by the command of the king of Persia, which only forbid the building of the city, that is, the walls of it, but not the temple any more than their own houses; and besides, there was now a new king, from whom they had not so much to fear.

Ver. 2. *Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak,* etc.] Whose spirits were stirred up and quickened by the ministry of the prophets, the Lord accompanying it by his Spirit, (^{<3002>}Haggai 1:12,14),

and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem; to go on with the building of it; for they had laid the foundation before, and perhaps had carried it up to some little height, at least, before they ceased from it, (^{<4570>}Ezra 3:10)

and with them were the prophets of God helping them; with words of counsel, comfort, and exhortation, directing and encouraging them, and promising them protection and success: these are the prophets before named.

Ver. 3. *At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions,* etc.] These were new governors and officers under the king of Persia in those parts, the old ones, Rehum, Shimshai, etc. being either dead, or removed upon this new king coming to the throne: these came to the Jews,

and said thus unto them, who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? for it seems by this time they had raised up the walls of the temple from its foundation to some height; for of these it must be understood, (see ^{<1508>}Ezra 4:8,9) for it can hardly be thought they were as yet enclosing it with a wall round about it; now they asked them by what authority they did this? who set them to work? and what were their names? for that this question was asked, though not here expressed, is clear from (^{<1540>}Ezra 4:10) and to which an answer is given in the next verse.

Ver. 4. *Then said we unto them after this manner,* etc.] In answer to their questions; namely, Ezra and other Jews replied; for though Ezra is said after this to come from Babylon in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, he might go thither on some business, and then return again at that time; some indeed think these are the words of Tatnai and those with him; so Ben Melech, which seems to be favoured by (^{<1540>}Ezra 4:10), and by reading the words with an interrogation, as we do; Aben Ezra says they are either the words of the builders, or of the scribes, the secretaries that came to question them; but they are the words of the former, as order requires, or otherwise no answer would be returned, at least as expressed; and the next clause may be read without an interrogation, and the sense be, that they told them not only that they acted according to an edict of Cyrus king of Persia, for this was said, as appears from (^{<1563>}Ezra 5:13), but they declared

what were the names of the men that did make this building; or employed them in it, namely, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the chief men of the Jews; they made no scruple of telling them who they were; neither ashamed of their masters nor of their work, nor afraid of any ill consequences following hereafter.

Ver. 5. *But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews*, etc.] He in his providence looked favourably at them, smiled upon them, encouraged them in the work by his good Spirit, and by the prophets, and gave them success, and protected and defended them, (see ^{<380>}2 Chronicles 16:9 ^{<380>}Zechariah 3:9 4:10),

that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius; they were not intimidated by what the governor and those with him said to them, but went on in their work; nor did the governor attempt to interrupt them, they having referred him and their cause to Darius for the truth of what they had said, and for further information from him:

and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter; that is, Tatnai and those with him sent a letter to Darius about this affair, to which they had an answer, which are both related in this and the following chapters.

Ver. 6. *The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river*, etc.] Which is thought by some to be one of the nations mentioned, (^{<390>}Ezra 4:9) the name being pretty near alike to two of them; but perhaps might be a distinct colony in those parts Tatnai was governor of:

these sent unto Darius the king; and is as follows.

Ver. 7. *They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus*, etc.] Or this was the inscription of it:

unto Darius the king, all peace; wishing him all kind of happiness and prosperity.

Ver. 8. *Be it known unto the king*, etc.] This seems to have been the usual form of beginning a letter to a king in those days, (^{<392>}Ezra 4:12) that we went into the province of Judea; which from a kingdom was reduced to a province, and was become a part of the Babylonian, now Persian, monarchy, (see ^{<390>}Ezra 2:1) to the house of the great God; as the Jews called the Lord their God; and even the Heathens had a notion that there was one supreme God, though they worshipped inferior ones; and some had a notion that Jehovah the God of the Jews was he:

which is builded with great stones; marble stones; as Jarchi ^{f51}, stones of rolling, as it may be rendered; which, according to Aben Ezra, were so large and heavy, that they could not be carried, but were obliged to roll them:

and timber is laid in the walls, cedar wood, as Aben Ezra interprets it, for beams, for flooring and rafting; or rather, is put upon the walls, for the lining and wainscoting of them, which was done with cedar wood:

and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands; and, unless timely prevented, will soon be finished.

Ver. 9. *Then asked we those elders*, etc.] The elders of the province of Judea; the chief men of it:

who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? (see ^{
}Ezra 5:3).

Ver. 10. *We asked their names also*, etc.] The names of the elders, those that set men about this work:

to certify that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them; take the names of them in writing, that they might with certainty acquaint the king who they were, and that if it was necessary they might be called to an account for what they were doing.

Ver. 11. *And thus they returned us answer*, etc.] To the purpose and in the manner following:

saying, we are the servants of the God of heaven and earth; signifying that they were doing his work, in obedience to his will, and to whom they were accountable:

and build the house that was builded these many years ago; even five hundred years ago, or thereabout; so that they were not erecting a building where there was none before, but were rebuilding what was in ruins:

which a great king of Israel builded and set up; King Solomon, who was a great king for wisdom, honour, riches, peace, prosperity, and extent of his kingdom.

Ver. 12. *But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath*, etc.] By their idolatries; which accounts for it how it was that they who were the servants of the great God of heaven and earth, and this

temple built for the honour of his name, were not preserved by him; but they were carried captive, and this house left desolate: it was for their sins for which

he (God) gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon; (see ^{<4830>}2 Chronicles 36:19,20).

Ver. 13. *But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon,* etc.] That is, the first year he was king of Babylon, having taken it, otherwise he was king of Persia many years before:

the same King Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God; (see ^{<4500>}Ezra 1:1-4).

Ver. 14,15 *And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God,* etc.] Of which, and of what is said concerning them, and particularly of the delivery of them to Sheshbazzar, whom Cyrus made governor of Judah, and ordered him to carry them to Jerusalem, and build the temple there, and put them in it, (see ^{<4500>}Ezra 1:7-11).

Ver. 16. *Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem,* etc.] Which makes it clear, that by Sheshbazzar is meant Zerubbabel; for he it was that laid the foundation of the temple, or at least by whose order it was laid, (see ^{<3000>}Zechariah 4:9)

and since that time even until now; from the first of Cyrus to the second of Darius, a space of about eighteen years, and just seventy from the destruction of the temple:

hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished; the work going on slowly, not without interruption and intermission, through the enmity of the Samaritans unto them, who had made false representations of them; but these men, Tatnai and those with him, as the Jews gave them a very particular account of things, as above, so they fairly and fully related them in this their letter to the king.

Ver. 17. *Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon,* etc.] Where were the archives of the kingdom, where the laws, decrees, edicts, and proclamations, and other things relating to the state, were laid up, that recourse might be had to them upon occasion:

whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem; which the Jews affirmed was made by him, and upon which they proceeded:

and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter; whether the Jews should be allowed to go on with the building of their temple, and finish it, or whether they should be restrained from it; signifying they were ready to do his will and pleasure either way, as he thought fit.