

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 6

Darius, on receiving the letter from his officers in Samaria, searched for the decree of Cyrus, and found it, and which he confirmed, (^{<15168>}Ezra 6:1-7) and made a fresh decree, and ordered expenses to be given out of his tribute for the building of the temple, and for the sacrifices of it; and that whosoever altered it should be hanged on the timber of his own house, and imprecated a curse on those that should destroy the house of God, (^{<15168>}Ezra 6:8-12) upon which the building went on, and was finished, (^{<15163>}Ezra 6:13-15) and the temple was dedicated to God in a solemn manner, (^{<15166>}Ezra 6:16-18), and the passover was kept by all the people, (^{<15169>}Ezra 6:19-22).

Ver. 1. *Then Darius the king made a decree*, etc.] To make inquiry after the edict of Cyrus, to search the public records for it:

and search was made in the house of the rolls; or “books”^{f52}, in a public library or museum:

where the treasures were laid up in Babylon; where things of worth and value were repositied; not only gold, silver, jewels, and precious stones, and things rare and curious, but all sorts of writings relating to the monarchy, and the dominions belonging to it; but it seems it could not be found here, and therefore the king ordered search to be made elsewhere.

Ver. 2. *And there was found at Achmetha*, etc.] Which Jarchi and Aben Ezra take to be the name of a vessel in which letters and writings were put for safety; but it was no doubt the name of a place; the Vulgate Latin version has it Ecbatana; and so Josephus^{f53}; which was the name of a city in Media, where the kings of that country had their residence in the summer time^{f54}; for it has its name from heat^{f55}; the Persian kings dwelt at Shushan in the winter, and at Ecbatana in the summer^{f56}; hence they are compared by Aelian^{f57} to cranes, birds of passage, because of their going to and from the above places:

in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, here was found

a roll; which was the decree of Cyrus, which perhaps he took with him when he went thither:

and therein was a record thus written; as follows.

Ver. 3. *In the first year of Cyrus the king; the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be builded*, etc.] (see ^{<1500>}Ezra 1:1-4 ^{<2348>}Isaiah 44:28),

the place where they offered sacrifices; to God in times past, ever since it was built by Solomon:

and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; so as to bear and support the building erected on them, as the word signifies:

the height thereof sixty cubits; which were thirty more than the height of Solomon's temple, (^{<1002>}1 Kings 6:2) though sixty less than the height of the porch, which was one hundred and twenty, (^{<404>}2 Chronicles 3:4) and which some take to be the height of the whole house; and hence it may be observed what Herod said ^{f58}, that the temple then in being wanted sixty cubits in height of that of Solomon's:

and the breadth thereof sixty cubits; whereas the breadth of Solomon's temple was but twenty, (^{<1002>}1 Kings 6:2), but since it cannot reasonably be thought that the breadth should be equal to the height, and so very disproportionate to Solomon's temple; many learned men understand this of the extension of it as to length, which exactly agrees with the length of the former temple, (^{<1002>}1 Kings 6:2).

Ver. 4. *With three rows of great stones*, etc.] Which Jarchi interprets of the walls of it, and these stones of marble; and so Ben Melech:

and a row of new timber; of cedar wood upon the rows of stone, (see ^{<1076>}1 Kings 6:36) or for the lining and wainscoting the walls:

and let the expenses be given out of the king's house; treasury, or exchequer; but it does not appear that this part of the decree was observed, at least hitherto; but the Jews built at their own expense, and perhaps did not exactly observe the directions given as to the dimensions of the house.

Ver. 5. *And also let the golden and silver vessels*, etc.] See (^{<1507>}Ezra 1:7-11) and which confirms what the Jews said to Tatnai, (^{<1514>}Ezra 5:14,15).

Ver. 6. *Now therefore Tatnai, governor beyond the river,* etc.] The river Euphrates, that side of it towards the land of Israel; Josephus^{f59} calls this man master of the horse:

Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence; keep at a distance from the Jews, and give them no disturbance, nor interrupt them in their work of building of the temple, but mind your own business and government.

Ver. 7. *Let the work of this house of God alone,* etc.] Suffer them to go on with it, and do not hinder them; it looks, by these expressions, as if he had some suspicion or hint given him that they were inclined to molest them, or that there were some that stirred them up to it, and were desirous of it:

let the governor of the Jews, and the elders of the Jews, build this house of God in his place; where it formerly stood; that is, go on with the building of it.

Ver. 8. *Moreover, I make a decree, what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God,* etc.] This must be considered as an additional decree of Darius, which was peculiarly made by him, in which more was granted in favour of the Jews, and as an encouragement to them to go on with the building of the temple; though Josephus^{f60} says this is no other than a confirmation of the decree of Cyrus; for, according to him, all that is here granted to them, or threatened to others, from hence to the end of (^{<5760>}Ezra 6:10), was contained in the decree:

that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river; what was collected out of his dominions on that side the river Euphrates, towards the land of Israel: according to Herodotus^{f61}, this Darius was the first of the kings of Persia that exacted tribute; under Cyrus and Cambyses only presents were brought; but he imposed a tribute, and was therefore called **καπηλος**, an huckster, as Cambyses had the name of lord, and Cyrus that of father: the same writer gives an account of the several nations he received it from, and the particular sums, which in all amounted to 14,560 Euboic talents of gold; among whom are mentioned all Phoenicia and Syria, called Palestine, the tribute of which parts is the tribute beyond the river he referred to: and this king was well disposed to the Jewish nation, temple, and worship, before he was king, if what Josephus^{f62} says is true, that, while a private man, he vowed to God that, if he should be king, he

would send all the sacred vessels that were in Babylon to the temple at Jerusalem: and out of the above tribute it is ordered,

that forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered; from going on with the building, for want of money to buy materials, and pay the workmen.

Ver. 9. *And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven,* etc.] All which were used for burnt offerings, (see ^{<BOOK>}Leviticus 1:2,10,14)

wheat, salt, wine, and oil; “wheat”, or “fine flour”, for the “minchah” or meat offering; “salt”, for every offering; “wine”, for the drink offerings; and “oil”, to be put upon the meat offerings, (see ^{<BOOK>}Leviticus 2:1,13 23:13),

according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail; for the daily sacrifice, and the meat and drink offerings which attended it, (^{<BOOK>}Exodus 29:38-41).

Ver. 10. *That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven,* etc.] Such as will be acceptable to him, (^{<BOOK>}Genesis 8:21)

and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons; prayer being wont to be made at the time of the morning and evening incense; and the Jews used to pray for other people besides themselves, and especially when desired, and particularly for kings and civil magistrates, to whom they were subject, (see ^{<BOOK>}Jeremiah 29:7 ^{<BOOK>}1 Timothy 2:1,2), the sons of Darius Hystaspis, for whose life, as well as his own, he would have prayer made, were, according to Herodotus ^{f63}, three by his first wife, the daughter of Gobryas, before he began to reign, the eldest of which was Artobazanes; which sons must be here meant, since this was towards the beginning of his reign; he had afterwards four more by Atossa the daughter of Cyrus, the eldest of which was Xerxes, who succeeded him: many of the Heathens had an high opinion of the God of the Jews, and of their prayers to him for them; even the Emperor Julian ^{f64} styles him the best of all the gods, and desired the Jews to pray to him for the welfare of his kingdom; nor need it seem strange that Darius should desire the same, since he was a devout prince; his father Hystaspes is supposed by some to be the same that was one of the most famous among the Persian Magi, or ministers in sacred things; and Darius himself had so great a veneration for the men of that sacred order, that he commanded that it should be put upon his sepulchral

monument, that he was master of the Magi ^{f65}; and by his familiarity with the priests of Egypt, and learning their divinity, had the honour, while alive, to have deity ascribed to him ^{f66}.

Ver. 11. *Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word,* etc.] Act contrary to this command, will not obey it, but as much as in him lies changes and revokes it:

let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him, be hanged thereon; that is, let a beam be taken from it, and a gallows or gibbet made of it, and hang him on it:

and let his house be made a dunghill for this; be pulled down, and never rebuilt more, (see Gill on “~~2M2~~ Daniel 2:2”), (see Gill on “~~2M9~~ Daniel 2:9”).

Ver. 12. *And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there,* etc.] Whose name is not only called upon there, and that called by his name; but who grants his presence, and causes his Shechinah, or divine Majesty, to dwell there, as in Solomon’s temple, which Darius had some knowledge of:

destroy all kings and people; let them be who they will, high or low:

that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God, which is at Jerusalem; this he said to deter from hindering the building of it now, and from attempting to destroy it hereafter:

I Darius have made a decree, let it be done with speed; be carried immediately into execution, especially with respect to the disbursement for the building of the temple, and for the sacrifices of it.

Ver. 13. *Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions,* etc.] Having received and read the above letter:

according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily; acquainted the Jews with what the king had written; were so far from hindering the work going forward, that they encouraged it; and made disbursements to them out of the king’s tribute, and furnished them with everything necessary for sacrifice: and this they did immediately, without delay.

Ver. 14. *And the elders of the Jews builded,* etc.] Went on with the building of the temple:

and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo; or grandson, as before; being animated and encouraged by them; and as they foretold and promised it would, be, so it was; they had success in their work, the Lord overruling the heart of Darius the king and his council in their favour:

and they builded and finished it; that is, the temple:

according to the commandment of the God of Israel; by the above prophets, who spoke to them, and prophesied in his name:

and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia; the commandment of Cyrus is in (^{<4500>}Ezra 1:1) that of Darius in this, (^{<4508>}Ezra 6:8), but who Artaxerxes is, and his commandment, is not easy to say; he cannot be the Artaxerxes between Cyrus and Darius, but one that followed the latter; besides, he was a hinderer of the building, (^{<4502>}Ezra 4:21-24), some think this was Xerxes the son and successor of Darius, and who might be partner with his father in the empire at this time, and so is joined with him in this commandment; which is more probable than that he should be his grandson Artaxerxes Longimamus, in whose reign the temple, it is supposed, was beautified and ornamented, though the exterior building of it was before finished; and so he is spoken of by anticipation; and still more plausible than that he should be, with others, Artaxerxes Mnemon, the son of Darius Nothus; but, after all, I am most inclined to think, with Aben Ezra, that he is Darius himself; and the words to be read, Darius, that is, Artaxerxes, king of Persia; Artaxerxes being, as he observes, a common name of the kings of Persia, as Pharaoh was of the kings of Egypt; though this is by some rejected ^{f67}; and who goes by this name in the continuance of this history, in whose seventh year, the year after this, Ezra went up to Jerusalem, and, in the twentieth of his reign, Nehemiah, (^{<4500>}Ezra 7:1-7 ^{<4600>}Nehemiah 2:1), and I find Dr. Lightfoot ^{f68} was of the same mind; and, according to Diodorus Siculus ^{f69}, the kings of Persia were called by the name of Artaxerxes after Mnemon; and so they might before; Cambyses is so called in (^{<4500>}Ezra 4:7). Herodotus ^{f70} says the name signifies “a mighty warrior”.

Ver. 15. *And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar*, etc.] The twelfth month of the year with the Jews, and answers to part of our February and part of March:

which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king; four years after the decree came forth.

Ver. 16. *And the children of Israel*, etc.] Those of the ten tribes that remained after the body of the people were carried captive, or came with the Jews at their return:

the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity; those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin:

kept the dedication of this house of God with joy; they set it apart for sacred use and service, with feasting and other expressions of joy and gladness, as follows.

Ver. 17. *And offered, at the dedication of this house of God, an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs*, etc.] Hecatombs of various sorts, which were always reckoned grand sacrifices, even among Heathens, of which Homer sometimes speaks; some of these were for burnt offerings, and others peace offerings, by way of thankfulness to God for the finishing of the temple; part of which belonging to the offerers, they feasted upon it with great gladness of heart:

and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel; for though the ten tribes were carried captive by Shalmaneser, yet, as before observed, there were some of them that remained in the land, and others that went and returned with the two tribes; and therefore a sin offering was made for them all, for the typical expiation of guilt contracted since they had been in an Heathen land, and, temple service had ceased.

Ver. 18. *And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God which is at Jerusalem*, etc.] All in their proper classes and courses, to do the work of the temple at Jerusalem in their turns:

as it is written in the book of Moses; (see ^{<ORIG>}Numbers 3:6 8:11,14,15), from hence it is plain the Pentateuch was not written by Ezra, as suspected by Spinosa¹⁷¹, but by Moses; see the argument of the book of Genesis. (See Gill on ^{<ORIG>}Genesis 1:1”).

Ver. 19. *And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.*] The month Nisan or Abib, which was

the month following that in which the temple was finished, (¹⁹¹⁶⁵Ezra 6:15), this passover was kept at the exact time the law commanded, (¹⁹¹¹²Exodus 12:2,6).

Ver. 20. *For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure*, etc.] They were all to a man pure, and all purified as one man; all were of one mind to purify themselves, and took care to do it, and did it with as much dispatch as if only one man was purified; so that they were more generally prepared for service now than in the times of Hezekiah, (¹⁹²⁸⁴2 Chronicles 29:34 30:3)

and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests and for themselves; which seems to have been done by the Levites, for themselves and for the priests, and for all the people, who were not so pure as the priests and Levites; or otherwise they might have killed it themselves, (¹⁹¹¹⁶Exodus 12:6), as Bochart^{f72} thinks.

Ver. 21. *And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity*, etc.] The tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with some of the ten tribes mixed with them:

and all such as had separated themselves unto them, from the filthiness of the Heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat; such of the Gentiles in the dominions of Babylon, and came with the Jews from thence, who were enlightened into the knowledge and worship of the true God, and not only renounced their idolatry, here called filthiness, but were circumcised, and embraced the religion of the Jews, and so were proselytes of righteousness, as they call them; or otherwise they would not have been allowed to eat of the passover, as they did, (¹⁹¹²⁸Exodus 12:48).

Ver. 22. *And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy*, etc.] Which immediately followed upon the passover, (¹⁹¹²⁸Exodus 12:18,19),

for the Lord had made them joyful; the building of the temple being finished, and the service of it restored to its original purity;

and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel; by giving them leave to go on in building the temple, and by encouraging and assisting them in it till they had finished it; this was Darius Artaxerxes, who, though called king of Persia, was also king of Assyria, being possessed of the Assyrian monarchy, as his predecessors were upon the taking of Babylon,

and the same is therefore called also the king of Babylon, (^{<16136>}Nehemiah 13:6). God, the God of Israel, who has the hearts of all men in his hands, and so the hearts of kings, and can turn them at his pleasure, inclined his heart to do them good, which was matter of joy unto them, (see ^{<13177>}Ezra 7:27).