

young men while they engaged in the service thereof.

Verse 18. Some of the holy vessels were taken at each of the previous raids, but at this time they were all taken, including the royal treasury, and the valuables of the princes.

Verse 19. The temple had been spared through the previous years that the Babylonians had possession of the country. But even such a favor did not keep the Jews from their evil practices; now the complete destruction will take place. The besiegers did not stop at the temple, but destroyed the city wall also. They likewise destroyed the *palaces* and their valuable contents. We think of a palace primarily as the home of a king or other royal person. But there was only one of such in Jerusalem, while this word is plural. It is from an original that means any high and dignified structure. There were many of them in the city and they were all burnt. The beloved city of the nation of God; the capital of the mighty empire of David and Solomon was left in ruins by the relentless, destructive power of the Babylonians.

Verse 20. This verse is the climax of the 3rd captivity. (See comments at 2 Ki. 24: 1.) It came after a siege of about 2 years. (2 Ki. 25: 1, 2.) In that siege many perished from famine, and when the final assault was made, many died by the sword. Those who did not perish in the attack were carried off to Babylon to remain until the time of the Persian dominion. That event is mentioned because it coincides with the end of the "seventy years' captivity" that began with the 4th year of Jehoiakim. (2 Ki. 24: 1-4.) After coming to Babylon these Jews were made to serve the king as long as he lived, and then his successors until the end of the period described.

Verse 21. *To fulfill* refers to the preceding verse. That is, by remaining in captivity until the reign of Persia over Babylon, the prophecy will be fulfilled that was made by Jeremiah. That prophecy may be seen in his book, Ch. 25: 9, 11, 12; and Ch. 29: 10. The Babylonian captivity was to last 70 years, beginning with the 4th year of Jehoiakim in 606 B. C., and going to 536 B. C. In Lev. 25 is the law that required the land should rest every 7th year. It had been disobeyed until the land had been cheated out of 70 years. The captivity was to give it a chance to "catch up."

Verses 22, 23. This passage is the same as the first two verses of the next book, and the comments on it will be given there. The verses were attached to this book as a connecting link for the reader who might not have the Book of Ezra at hand. This was possible before the books of the Bible were collected into one volume.

## EZRA 1

Verse 1. *First year of Cyrus.* This means his first year as ruler over Babylon. He had been king of the Persians for some 20 years up to the time of his taking this city. It will throw some light on this part of the subject to quote from Myers' *Ancient History*, pages 88, 89: "Cyrus the Great (558-529 B. C.) founds a Great World Empire.—The leadership of the Median chieftains was of short duration. A certain Cyrus, king of Anshan, in Elam, overthrew their power, and assumed the headship of both Medes and Persians. Through his energy and soldierly genius Cyrus soon built up an empire more extended than any over which the scepter had yet been swayed by Oriental monarch, or indeed, so far as we know, by any ruler before his time. After the conquest of Media and the acquisition of the provinces formerly ruled by the Median princes, Cyrus rounded out his empire by the conquest of Lydia and Babylonia." A more extended account of the taking of Babylon may be found in *Five Great Monarchies*, by George Rawlinson; Vol. 3, pages 69-72. Between the close of the preceding book, and the beginning of this, some 51 years have passed in history. That space of time was what remained of the 70 years' captivity after the taking of Zedekiah, last Jewish king to sit on the throne in Jerusalem. Many events that occurred in the course of the famous 70 years will be referred to and discussed when we come to the books of the prophets. It is enough now for us to know that the captivity came to an end with the same event that ended the Babylonian Empire, which was brought about by the victory of Cyrus over Babylon, which is mentioned above. Passing over the history of the 70 years for the present, the inspired writer takes up the line at the beginning of the reconstruction in Jerusalem under the orders of Cyrus. *By the mouth of Jeremiah.* The prophet had foretold the conquest of Cyrus over Babylon, which put him in

position to release the Jews from captivity and to permit them to restore their city and country. See Ch. 33: 6-14 of the book of Jeremiah. *Stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.* God has used various kings and other persons of the world, both good and bad, to accomplish his purpose. See Ex. 9: 16; Num. 22 to 24; 1 Ki. 19: 15; Isa. 10: 5, 6. Cyrus was one of the good (morally) heathen kings. On this point I shall again quote some history: "Almost universal testimony has ascribed to him (Cyrus) the purest and most beneficent character of any Eastern monarch." Myers' Ancient History, P. 90. Cyrus not only released the Jews from their bondage (yet retaining them as citizens under him), but authorized them to return to their former country. *Made a proclamation* was an official order put out to the public notice, but applying to the Jews. *Put it in writing* would be necessary for two reasons. The dominions of Cyrus now were so extensive that the proclamation would have to be circulated by postman. Another reason was to prevent any misunderstanding of the requirements.

Verse 2. *Lord God of heaven.* Cyrus was a heathen, but when God saw fit to use him he made himself known to him in the things he wished him to do. It had nothing to do with his moral character, before or after the service. He was used as an instrument of God for a certain purpose. But in order for him to be available for the work, it was needful for God to assure him that he was being directed by a Being whom he should not ignore. Moreover, he was given to understand that the conquests he had made over the nations and kingdoms were made possible by this very God. *Given me all the kingdoms of the earth.* This was no vain boast, but was in fulfillment of a prophecy of Daniel in his book, Ch. 2: 38-40. It pertained to the 4 great world empires of which we will hear much in later studies of the Bible. Those empires were, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece or Macedonia, and Rome. Cyrus was king of the second of these world empires, hence it was necessary to give him all those kingdoms as he just claimed. He announced that he had been charged to build the Lord a house in Jerusalem. Not that he would personally supervise the work, but that he would see that the necessary provisions were made for the building. There was a political reason for this

official procedure. Jerusalem had been destroyed while in a state of revolt, and the restoration of it might be interpreted as an act of renewed rebellion. In fact the attempt was made to bring such a charge as we shall see in the progress of operations. So without the sponsorship of Cyrus the work of rebuilding would fail.

Verse 3. Cyrus called for volunteers to take up the work which was *charged* upon him to have done. He gave his good wishes for the favor of his (the volunteer's) God upon him, and gave his royal authority for him to leave the borders of Persia and go to Jerusalem. But let it be noted that it was not merely a furlough to make a journey of pleasure. He was to go to Judah *to build the house of the Lord.* And since there are lords many and gods many, Cyrus specified what one he meant; the God of Israel. *He is the God* was not a primary acknowledgment of God as the supreme One. He meant to say that the God of Israel was the God to be recognized in Jerusalem.

Verse 4. The Jews are no longer captives, for that period was ended by the overthrow of Babylon by the Persians. But they are still the citizens of the country that is being ruled by the successors of the Babylonian Empire. That relationship makes them accountable to the Persians in all matters pertaining to a national government. Even their religious privileges are subject to the "powers that be," and their exercise will depend on the will of the same. Fortunately, the incoming government is friendly toward the people of God, just as the Lord had predicted by his prophets that it would be. In taking possession of the Babylonian Empire, the Persians also gained control of the countries that had been under the control of that great power, which included Palestine and its adjacent territories. These facts should explain why Cyrus would have any business whatever in the affairs of the people sojourning *in any place.* Since that would include men who would be scattered throughout the various provinces in the Mesopotamian lands in general, as well as all Syria and Palestine, we should understand this verse in the light of the remarks at the beginning of this paragraph. Therefore, in all of the places indicated, there were individuals who might be interested in the restoration of the Jewish interests in Jerusalem.

The proclamation indicated in this verse was to make them feel free to show their friendliness toward that work, and be willing to assist it. It went further than permitting the men interested to lend a hand in the work. Such action would call for materials, and Cyrus ordered that the people of the communities among whom these others were *sojourning*, were to co-operate by furnishing them with materials for the building, and animals that they might use in their altar services.

Verse 5. *Then* is an adverb of time, referring to the proclamation of Cyrus, which was in the first year of his rule over Babylon and its possessions. Since the matter of dates has been brought up, I believe this is a good place to offer some explanatory remarks touching the chronological connection of this short, but comprehensive book. It covers two of the three important sections of the total reconstruction work that followed the "70" years. The three sections were, rebuilding of the temple (under Zerubbabel), the reformation of the worship (under Ezra), and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (under Nehemiah). The first is covered by chapters 1 to 6; the second by chapters 7 to 10, and the third is covered by the book of Nehemiah. The time consumed by the first was 21 years, reaching to the 6th year of Darius I of Persia. Nothing much was done further until the work of Ezra on the second section of the restoration. That began 58 years after the completion of the work of Zerubbabel. More will be said about that at the proper chapter; but now, let us come back to the immediate study of the present verse. The 10 tribes had been taken away by the Assyrians a century before the kingdom of Judah was overthrown by the Babylonians. The 10 tribes were in practically the same general territory as the others, but had become more or less interspersed with the people of the land, and their tribal distinction was not so evident. The 70 years just ended left the tribes forming the kingdom of Judah with their leading men still recognized as such, and they were the ones who took the lead in responding to the proclamation of Cyrus. We note that the priests and others of the tribe of Levi were among those who answered the call of the Persian king. The motive that prompted them to act favorably was the fact that God had *raised* or aroused

their spirit. In other words, they were going to Jerusalem to work in the cause of the Lord because their heart was in the matter.

Verse 6. In verse 4 is the order of Cyrus for the people with whom the Jews were sojourning to furnish them with metals and animals. That order was obeyed, and in addition they gave them things that had not been specifically required. That is what is meant by the words *beside all that was willingly offered*.

Verse 7. The vessels mentioned here are the ones of 2 Ki. 24: 13; 25: 13-17, and 2 Chr. 36: 18. This conduct of Cyrus was consistent with the proclamation he had just made on behalf of the Jewish nation. These sacred vessels had been taken out of the land of Judah by the captors, and had even been disgracefully used by the heathen king Belshazzar. (Dan. 5: 1-4.) Hence all the rules of war as well as moral justice required that they be restored to their former and rightful owner. In saying that the vessels were restored, exception must be made, of course, to the ark. It was never accounted for after being taken from Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Smith's Bible Dictionary says: "It was probably taken captive or destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Esdras 10: 22 [one of the apocryphal books], so that there was no ark in the second temple." Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia says of the ark: "It was probably burnt up in the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; and in the YOMA [a secular writing], it is said that there was a stone in the Holy of holies on the spot where the ark should have stood; and on this stone the postexilian (after the exile) high priests set the censor." The vessels that were still available will be numbered but not named in a following verse.

Verse 8. *Numbered* means he made a list or invoice of the articles with the knowledge of his own treasurer, and turned over to Sheshbazzar who was a leading man of the Jews. That action was for the protection of Cyrus' reputation as to honesty.

Verses 9-11. A *charger* is a basin to hold liquids and other loose matter. A *bason* is defined by Strong as "a covered goblet." *Second sort* is said of them because they were for a less important use. This is a clear instance of the thought in 2 Tim. 2: 20. These vessels were not in the tabernacle built by Moses. Solomon was permitted

to enlarge over the work done at Mt. Sinai, which is why we read of so many things here that are not to be found in the tabernacle service. This assortment of vessels was placed in the hands of Sheshbazzar who was a prince; that is, a leading man of the land of Judah. He was made responsible for the transportation of the precious articles, as the group of Jews went out of the land of their captivity to their own country, whose capital was Jerusalem.

### EZRA 2

Verse 1. *Province* is from MEDYNAH, and Strong defines it, "properly a judgeship, i. e. jurisdiction; by implication a district (as ruled by a judge); generally a region." The land of Judah had been taken over by the Babylonians, and they in turn had lost it to the Persians, who had the "jurisdiction" over it at the time of which we are studying. That is why it is referred to as a "province." The statement means that the "children" or people who are about to be named, belonged to the province of Judah. A record was kept of births, making a notation of the city where the birth was registered. And when this exodus of former citizens took place out of the land of their captivity, each man returned unto his city.

Verse 2. *Came with Zerubbabel* is so worded because he was the chief man in that group, and the one who took the lead in rebuilding the temple. *Nehemiah* was not the one in the book of that name. It was common for more than one man to have the same name. Smith's Bible Dictionary says of this man: "One of the leaders of the first expedition from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel." *Mordecai*. This is another name that might have referred to more than one man. Some authors make it mean the same as the one in the book of Esther, others say it was a different man. Either view could be correct since the events connected with the history of the two all happened within the possible span of a lifetime. The men named in this verse were leaders in the expedition. *The number of the men who came with them* will be given in several following verses. The ones named in the beginning of the several verses were family heads, and their descendants through several branches of the family "tree" are enumerated. It will not be necessary in every case to assign a paragraph to a verse.

Verses 3-35. This long group of verses is what was meant by the remarks at the close of the preceding paragraph. No information would be given were I to make separate comments on each verse. The ones that will be made will be more or less general. *Children*. The first impression this word makes on us is that it refers to a man's bodily offspring. It is proper that it should be so taken. However, let it not be forgotten that it may, and frequently does have a less definite meaning. I believe it will not be amiss to copy the definition of the original word that is in the lexicon. It is from the Hebrew word BEN, and Strong defines it thus: "a son (as a builder of the family name), in the widest sense (of literal and figurative relationship, including grandson, subject, nation, quality, or condition, etc.)" In the A. V. it has been translated by arrow, bough, branch, breed, calf, children, colt, foal, man, one born, people, son, them of, whelp, youth and others. The way it is used in these verses it means all of the members of the family tree whose head is the man named in the beginning of the verse. The Jews had a rule of being listed in the registers on file in their particular "home town." See Luke 2: 3, 4. Following that rule, these various family groups settled in their own proper city upon their return from their captivity.

Verses 36-39. Any man who was a lineal descendant of Aaron was eligible for the priesthood. It had been so many centuries since the time of starting said priesthood that many branches of the family had come into existence. The men named in this paragraph were some of those branches.

Verse 40. All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. Hence the registers would be filed in separate classes. Some men who would not be permitted to act as priests, even though they were of the tribe of Levi, yet were authorized to perform certain special services; for that reason they were noted in the list.

Verse 41. Smith's Bible Dictionary says there was a school or group of musical composers that was founded by Asaph, and they are the ones meant in this verse. When the more elaborate services were formed in the days of David and Solomon, these professional singers were enlisted for the exercises.

Verse 42. The porters were janitors or gatekeepers. Their work was con-



sidered necessary and they were given a place on the recorded program.

Verses 43-54. The *Nethinims* were a class of servants given over for the rougher work about the temple. They had no official status, but waited on the men who were conducting the service of the house of God. There must have been a considerable number of them, for this paragraph lists the descendants of 35 men who were classed in that service. We do not have any definite statement of the tasks they performed. A fair example of the kind of service they did is the case of the Gibeonites in Josh. 9: 21-23. I do not mean these people were put in the same rank as the *Nethinims*. They were of a foreign blood while the *Nethinims* were Israelites. But the nature of service that was exacted of them will serve as an illustration of the kind of work done by this particular class of servants that happened to be called *Nethinims*.

Verses 55-57. The persons mentioned here were distant descendants of the individual servants of Solomon. The *Nethinims* were generally required to render service wherever and however needed about the temple. But Solomon had appropriated a number of them for his use as king, and the classification was continued to be recognized.

Verse 58. The special servants for the king were named above, but the number was reserved to be given in this verse.

Verses 59. 60. These towns were in the country of Babylon, and some of the Jews had been stationed there, but they were not able to prove their relation to Israelite blood. However, they were at least given the "benefit of the doubt" to the extent of being given what is popularly called "honorable mention" in our language.

Verses 61, 62. It had been established that no one should be allowed to have part in the priesthood but those in the blood line of Aaron. The Lord was very particular about this; so much so that he afflicted an otherwise good king with that most loathsome of diseases, leprosy, because he presumed to participate in the rights of the priesthood when he was not in that class. (2 Chr. 26: 18.) There were certain persons who the inspired writer says were *children of the priests*. Yet they could not show their "birth certificate" and consequently were excluded from the group that would be allowed to act in the priestly service. As *polluted*

does not mean that they were considered as actually polluted. But the dignity of the priesthood was so great and the Lord was so particular about it, that people whose blood relation was doubtful were as objectionable for that office as if they were literally polluted.

Verse 63. *Tirshatha* is the original word, spelled out with English letters. The definition in Strong's lexicon is, "of foreign derivation; the title of a Persian deputy or governor." But that would not mean that this man was a Persian by blood. We recall that while the period of the captivity was over, all the people were still the subjects of the Persian Empire the same as other citizens of a country would be. That would account for the fact that the man authorized to take the lead in the movements would be called by the name used in the text. The evidence is, however, that he was of Jewish blood and understood the principles of the Mosaic law. The *Urim* and *Thummim* were the objects placed in the garments worn by the priest. See Ex. 28: 30. They were used in some supernatural manner in receiving communications from God (Heb. 1: 1), but were useless except when in the hands of the priest. (Num. 27: 21.) The persons mentioned in the preceding verse were excluded from the priesthood because of uncertain birth. Now the governor appointed by Cyrus to supervise the operations was not going to authorize any performance of the services until the lawful men showed up. They would be the men having the right to the priesthood; to handling the *Urim* and *Thummim*, which would be impotent in any other hands but those of a priest.

Verse 64. It must be understood that the number of the *whole congregation* means the leaders or heads, similar to the numbering in Num. 1: 46 and 26: 51. What I mean is, the comparison between these various numbers will give a fair estimate of the size of the congregation at the different times referred to. By such a comparison it is evident that the population was considerably reduced in course of the captivity. The ravages that were made into the personnel as well as the population in general accounts for this cutting down of the list. This was to be regretted, but at the same time the fact fulfilled several predictions on the subject. More than once the Lord had predicted that his people would

be exposed to the hardships of captivity, which would destroy their sons and daughters, as well as their old men and women. But in connection with such warning and predictions, he also gave them the assurance that a remnant would be salvaged out of the wreck of the years. On this subject, which is a mixture of joy and sadness, see 2 Ki. 19: 30, 31; Isa. 1: 9; 10: 20, 21; Jer. 23: 3; Ezk. 6: 8; Micah 2: 12. This prediction is written in many other places which will be noted in the studies of the prophetic books, to be considered in a later volume of this Commentary.

Verses 65-67. The *whole congregation* mentioned in the preceding verse was independent of these secondary persons. But the large number of such, as well as the goodly number of animals, all shows the prosperous state of the Israelites in spite of their long exile in a heathen land. Another point is in evidence, and that is the kindness of the nation that had the jurisdiction over them. Instead of cutting them down to a mere token, and driving them out with a be-gone-and-the-sooner-the-better attitude. Cyrus sent them out with his blessing, and with financial aid.

Verse 68. Gratitude at least would have prompted these fathers to make this contribution for the Lord's work. They had been treated very kindly by the Persian government, and the materials furnished them were in order that the Lord's work in Jerusalem could be advanced.

Verse 69. The amount of these offerings is stated which is great. However, that would not entitle them to any special credit were it not for the fact that it was *after their ability*. That is the basis upon which all of the offerings in the New Testament are to be made. See 1 Cor. 16: 2; 2 Cor. 8: 12.

Verse 70. After turning over the possessions in their hands to the work for which they had been given them, they retired to their homes. It is interesting to note that the several ranks and grades of the nation respected the assignments belonging to them as to residence, for it says they dwelt in *their cities*.

### EZRA 3

Verse 1. *Seventh month* of the first year of Cyrus' rule over Babylon was the time meant. The people of various classes had taken up their residences

in the cities that had been shown to be their proper location. Then, having been thus settled so that their families were cared for, the people next turned their attention to the city from which they had been taken 70 years before.

Verse 2. Since the altar service was the subject of immediate interest, it was fitting that the men of the priestly rank take the lead. Zerubbabel was the leader and main man to supervise the work of the first section of the restoration. When Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed the temple, it would be expected that he had wrecked the furniture of it also. The *vessels* that he took were the smaller articles of the service, such as bowls and trays that were used for eating and drinking purposes. Now then, in order to reinstate the sacrificial worship, it was necessary to erect an altar. They had not offered any sacrifices to God while in captivity. This is a fact not known or realized by many Bible students. The nation was sent into captivity because of the sin of worshipping idols, and that consisted chiefly in offering sacrifices to them, either of animals or other material things. One of the things to be accomplished, by the exile in a heathen land, was their being completely cured of the sin of idolatry. In keeping with that object, they were not permitted to offer any sacrifices to God while in captivity. This subject, the various predictions pertaining to it, and the history that shows the fulfillment, will be treated at length in the volume of this Commentary that contains the study of the prophetic books. For the present, the reader is cited to the following passages. Deut. 28: 36; Isa. 1: 10-15; 2: 18-21; 43; 22-28; Jer. 33: 8; Ezk. 20: 38; Hos. 2: 17; Micah 5: 13; Zech. 7: 4-6. It will be seen, when all the history has been consulted, that the Jews were entirely weaned from idolatry when they came back from the captivity. And since they were not permitted to offer sacrifices during those 70 years, it is easy to understand their earnestness in renewing the lawful service when the way was opened up to them.

Verse 3. *Bases* is from a word that the lexicon defines as meaning a pedestal or a spot. Moffatt's translation gives us "spot," and the footnote in the American Revised Version says "spot." The idea is, the people were in fear because of the kind of men and women who were in that country. The

Jews had great faith in their God, and relied on his protection in times of danger. But they understood that the Lord required something in the way of service before bestowing his favor on his servants. The most evident form of faithful devotion was in the animal sacrifices on the altar. Therefore, they lost no time in getting the altar in its place to begin the service.

Verse 4. As fast as they could, they resumed the national ceremonies. The feast of tabernacles properly came in the 7th month, which was the month now reached. So they kept this feast as it is written (Lev. 23: 34). In observing this festival season they needed to follow the law to the number, and according to the custom. This custom is recorded in detail in Num. 29: 12-34.

Verse 5. The continual burnt offering was another name for the "daily sacrifice." (Ex. 29: 38-42.) Both does not apply to the offering just described. It is a Biblical way of saying that something was to be done in addition to what was just described. It is as if it read, "And afterward . . . offering, also of the new moons," etc. The thought is the fact that the people were so glad to be again in their own land where they could worship the true God, that they attended to all of the ordinances as completely as the circumstances would permit. In addition to the specified ordinances required, the people volunteered other sacrifices.

Verse 6. From the first day would be in accordance with the law of Moses. The new moon was a holy day, also the beginning of the month (1 Sam. 20: 24, 27), and that called for a sacrifice; hence the statement in this place. The work of building the temple would require much more time than it would take to arrange for these services, therefore they did the latter before starting on the major task before them. Such is the significance of the closing sentence of the verse.

Verse 7. Having got the altar worship under way, the people turned their attention to the great work of rebuilding the temple. They had been allowed to take money with them when they left Babylon, and they expended it on the workmen employed in the building project. Tyre and Zidon were cities in the country of Phoenicia, the territory that produced the famous cedar trees, celebrated in story and song. Solomon had procured this wood from the king of Tyre for the first

temple, and now the Jews turned to that source for the same kind of timber. *Sea of Joppa* means the seacoast of Joppa, that city being an important shipping port on the Mediterranean Sea. From there the timber would be floated in rafts to some suitable port accessible to the territory of Judah. According to the grant refers to the permission that Cyrus gave the Jews to obtain materials for the building, and to pay for them with money obtained in the land of Persia proper, or other places under the same rule.

Verse 8. *Second year . . . to set forward the work of the house of the Lord.* This is a proper place to make some remarks as to dates and names, in order to keep the run of things clearly in mind. It should be borne in mind that all the civilized countries, practically, were under Persian rule at the time of which we are studying. What the Jews did was under the authority of various Persian kings, because the land of Israel had been taken over first, by the Babylonians, and they had given way to the Persians, making them the government over all lands, including Judah. Some of the Persian kings were favorable to the Jews and some were not. I will suggest that the reader draw a chart for reference while studying this and the following book. Make the chart as follows, with 6 perpendicular columns. At the top of the columns write the dates 536-529; 529-522; 522-521; 521-484; 484-464; 464-415. These numbers show the beginning and closing dates, B. C., of the reigns of the Persian kings named in the several columns. Next, put the following names in the 6 columns, from left to right: Cyrus, Cambyses, Smerdis, Darius I, Xerxes, Artaxerxes. Some of these men had other names in the Bible, and to keep the matter clear, put the following names in parentheses under the ones I shall denote. In the 2nd column write Ahasuerus, 3rd column write Artaxerxes, in the 6th column write Longimanus. This last name, however, is not in the Bible, but is a name given him by secular writers as a sort of nickname, meaning "longhanded." But it is well for us to use it to distinguish him from the Artaxerxes in the 3rd column. Now, having arranged your chart, have it near and put the information on it as I suggest while going on with the study. The first notation is in the first column as follows: "1st year, edict of Cyrus to rebuild the temple." Let it be understood that all references to 1st or 2nd or any other

year, mean such a year of the period indicated by the dates at the top of the column. We have reached the *second year* of the 1st column in our study, but the notation to be made in addition to that just indicated, will be suggested a few verses down.

Verse 9. The men named are the ones of Ch. 2: 40. *Set forward the workmen* means they put them at their work, to get the house of God under construction.

Verse 10. Now make the following notation in the first column of the chart: "2nd year, the foundation of the temple is laid." The manual labor of the foundation was accompanied with the praise service of the priests. They were in *their apparel* which signifies they put on their priestly garments, and gave the service of blowing the trumpets, which were instruments similar to our cornets as to the manner of playing. Even a Levite would not have the right to wear the special garments unless he belonged to the priestly family. That is why the writer mentions the priests in connection with the apparel, then adds his reference to the Levites who used the cymbals, which were instruments of metal, and used to make a loud sound by beating upon them in rhythmic count with the trumpets that were being played by the priests. Not all or just any of the Levites were used this time, but those who had belonged to that group of musical composers known as the sons of Asaph. This musical program was *after the ordinance of David*. See 1 Chr. 6: 31; 16: 4, 7; 25: 1, 2.

Verse 11. They sang by *course* which means they sang in sections; not all of them sang at one time. That method prevented confusion, so that the people could respond intelligently to the service. They did so, for it says all the people *shouted with a great shout* after this praise service. The first word is from BUWA and defined "a primitive root; to mar (especially by breaking); figuratively to split the ears (with sound), i. e. shout (for alarm or joy)."—Strong. The last word is from TERUWAH, and Strong's definition is, "clamor, i. e. acclamation of joy or a battle cry." Taking the central thought of the words as a basis, the whole expression would properly be worded, "the people made the ears to vibrate with their acclamations of joy." The cause of all this demonstration was the fact that *the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid*, which gave a

foresight of the restoration about to be accomplished.

Verse 12. This verse furnishes a practical illustration of an old saying namely: "Much depends on the viewpoint." All of the people were looking at the same object, yet some of them were made to weep, while others *shouted for joy*. The former were the older men who could remember the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. While the present one was good, it was inferior to the first one, and that caused them to weep in regret at the contrast. The latter were the younger ones who were contrasting the brightness of the prospects in view of the foundation, with the dejected situation they had been in for so many years in captivity. That was what caused them to be joyous. This subject is treated in Hag. 2: 3.

Verse 13. This indicates that the crowd was almost equally divided, either as to the number in each group, or in the volume of their expression of feelings.

#### EZRA 4

Verse 1. The people designated as *the adversaries* were the classes who had been brought in to occupy the country after the Assyrians took the 10 tribes away into captivity. For information on this subject see 2 Kings 17. Doubtless they had grown to be a numerous band in the two centuries that had gone by since then. In that time the captivity of the kingdom of Judah also had taken place, and these folk probably thought that they would have continuous and undisturbed possession of the whole land.

Verse 2. Envy was certainly the motive for the proposition these *adversaries* made. If any glory should come from this building project, they wanted a share in it. There was some truth in their claim about sacrificing to the same God that the men of Judah worshiped. On this point let the reader again read, carefully, the account that is given in the 17th chapter of 2 Kings. It will be seen just to what extent these people sacrificed to the Lord.

Verse 3. Zerubbabel was the leader or superintendent of the construction work of the temple. The other men referred to were under him and had some prominent part in the work. The motive that prompted these *adversaries* to make the proposition they did would have made it wrong to let them into the work. But a still greater reason



existed for refusing them. They were *adversaries* according to the inspired writer, and it would have been unsafe to permit them to have such an important connection with the sacred building. Another thing, Cyrus did not authorize any but the Jews to do this reconstruction, and that would have made them intruders to employ them as they suggested. Zerubbabel and his co-workers were true both to God and to Cyrus. They informed these people that it was the *house of our God*, which would make it inappropriate for the Lord's *adversaries* to take part in it. They also stated that their operations were according to the commandment of the king of Persia, and thus the whole project was not only a work of God, but was in harmony with the highest temporal authority over them.

Verse 4. This short verse is a general statement of the activities of the local citizens who were the *adversaries* of God's people. It merely says they *weakened* their hands, which means they "slackened" their hands in the work. It does not state how it was done, and that will be learned in the following verses. But before going on with the reading, make another notation in the first column of the chart as follows: "The work was hindered all the rest of the reign."

Verse 5. *Hired counsellors* would be about what we would mean were we to "employ an attorney." They wanted these counsellors to help devise some way of hindering the work of the temple. *Frustrate* means to "break up." One translation of the word in the A. V. is, "cause to cease". This verse makes a general statement of the length of time the hindrance lasted, but some following verses will give more details of the wicked actions.

Verse 6. This *Ahasuerus* is at the head of the 2nd column of your chart. In this reign these *adversaries* continued their opposition to the work of erecting the temple. No further detail is given of what they did except to write a letter to the Persian king in power at that time, whose name was referred to above. The notation to be made in this column is, "Work on the temple is still hindered."

Verse 7. *Artaxerxes* is at the head of the 3rd column of your chart. His reign was short, but much was done in that 1 year. The letter written by the counsellors to the preceding Persian ruler had its desired effect by causing the work to be hindered. Those

who did the writing in the preceding reign were the hired counsellors and referred to by the pronoun "they." Whether the persons named in this and some following verses were the same men, we do not know. But we do know that they used their influence in behalf of the *adversaries* of the Jews. They wrote a letter to Artaxerxes the Persian king, who, we should bear in mind, was then in Babylon. The letter was written in the *Syrian* tongue, which was another form of Aramean. These two words are used somewhat interchangeably in the Bible, and yet there is a distinction that should be recognized at times, or confusion will result. I will quote from history a few paragraphs for the information of the reader, and he is requested to refer to this verse and its comments when there is occasion for the information. "Aramaic languages are so called from *Aram*, a geographical term which in old Semitic usage designates nearly the same districts as the Greek word, *Syria*. *Aram*, however, does not include Palestine while it comprehends Mesopotamia. (Heb. *Aram* of two rivers), a region which the Greeks frequently distinguish from *Syria proper*. Thus the Aramic languages may be geographically defined as the Semitic dialects originally current in Mesopotamia and the regions extending S. W. from the Euphrates to Palestine." *Britannica*, Vol. 2, p. 307.

"Etymologically, 'Syria' is merely an abbreviation of 'Assyria,' a name which covered the subject lands of the Assyrian empire, the subject-people being also called 'Syrians.' Afterwards, in the Graeco-Roman period, the shorter word came to be restricted to the territory west of the Euphrates, the designation 'Syrians,' however, being given to the great mass of the Semitic population dwelling between the Tigris and the Mediterranean, who are more accurately called Arameans." *Britannica*, 22-321.

"*Aram*, which occurs in Scripture with the same frequency as *Asshur*, is, like *Asshur*, a name concerning the application of which there is no doubt. Our translators almost always render the word, as did the Septuagint interpreters, by 'Syria' and the term though etymologically quite distinct, is beyond a doubt, in its use by the Hebrews, a near equivalent for the 'Syria' of the Greeks and Romans. It designates a people distinct from, yet closely allied with, the Assyrians, which, in the re-

mostest times whereto history reaches, was established in the valley of the middle Euphrates, and in the tract between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean. This people, known to itself as Aramean, continued the predominant race in the country to the time of the Mohammedan conquest." *Rawlinson, Origin of Nations*, p. 234.

"Between the outer limits of the Syro-Arabian desert and the foot of the great mountain range of Kurdistan and Luristan intervenes a territory long famous in the world's history, and the chief site of three out of five empires of whose history, geography, and antiquities it is proposed to treat in the present volumes. Known to the Jews as Aram-Naharaim, or 'Syria of the two rivers'; to the Greeks and Romans as Mesopotamia, or 'the between-river country.'" *Rawlinson, Five Great Monarchies*, Vol. 1, P. 2. See also, in same volume, pp. 43, 179, 236, 262.

These men were subjects of the Persian power, but were of Syrian origin, hence they wrote their letter in that tongue. But since their king was a Persian, they realized they would have to send along also a Persian translation of the letter. That is what is meant by the words interpreted in the *Syrian tongue*.

Verses 8, 9. I do not know just how many different persons had a direct part in writing the letter, but evidently all of these who are named had something to do in forming the epistle. A *chancellor* was an important official in the employ of a king. A *scribe* corresponded to our secretary. The difficult names in verse 9 are some of the groups that had been brought into that country after the 10 tribes were taken into captivity. The account of this transferring of the foreign clans is recorded in 2 Ki. 17.

Verse 10. In the account given by the writer of 2 Kings, Esarhaddon, an important king of the Assyrians, is said to have brought these people over to Samaria, while here it says Asnapper was the man who did it. But there is no difficulty on that subject. A king or other leading man is said to have done a deed, when he has it done by one of his officers. Smith's Bible Dictionary has this to say on this matter: "Asnapper (swift), mentioned in Ezra 4: 10 as the person who settled the Cuthaeans in the cities of Samaria. He was probably a general of Esarhaddon." After giving all those names, representing the various groups of per-

sons cooperating in sending this letter, the writer sums up by the words *and at such times*, which corresponds to our "etc."

Verse 11. This verse is the introduction to the letter, with a general salutation that includes without naming, the various groups of people joining in the epistle that is addressed to the king of Persia. Their introduction concludes with the same words that mean "etc."

Verse 12. Jerusalem had rebelled against the king of Babylon (2 Ki. 24: 1), and had paid the penalty for it by being destroyed and its people taken into captivity. But that was over 80 years prior to this date. In that time the captivity had been ended and the captives had been given authority to do the very thing they were doing at the time this letter was planned. We should not become confused over mention of the *walls* as being set up. We know that it was in Nehemiah's time (75 years later) that the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. The walls mentioned here refer to the walls forming the foundation of the temple. It is true the adversaries feared that the entire city with its walls would be restored. But their immediate concern was for the walls of the foundation of the house. The language in Ch. 5: 3, 9, 16 and 6: 14 shows they used the word *wall* in connection with the house of the Lord.

Verse 13. These *adversaries* complained that if the work of the Jews was allowed to go on to completion, then the city would become independent and break off all diplomatic relations with the king. It is remarkable how forgetful an envious mind can be. At the start of this work, these very adversaries proposed helping with it. Now they claimed that such work was in rebellion against the king. Before, they pretended they wished to join in the work because it was on behalf of the God whom they all served. Next they opposed having the work done at all because of their loyalty to the king of Persia. When a man so glaringly contradicts himself, it is evident that he does not have an honest basis for his activities.

Verse 14. If either of the two motives these men stated was the true one, it was the first. Their support might be cut off if the king should lose some of his revenue. Selfishness was the true sentiment that prompted their ac-

tivities, but they pretended to be concerned about the king's honor.

Verse 15. The paragraph contained in this verse states some truth and some error. What truth it has is used in a way to make a false impression. It was true that the nation of which Jerusalem was the capital had opposed other provinces, but it was because of their evil ways. It is also true that the city was destroyed when it rebelled against the Babylonians. But in referring to those facts, the writers connected events that were many years apart, and which occurred by far different causes. When the city was destroyed, it was done by the nation that God caused to come against it. And that was done in punishment for their taking up the corrupt practices of the very kind of people who were writing this letter to the Persian king. In asking the king to search the official records, they went far enough back to omit the later accounts, that showed the authority for the present work that the Jews were doing. That record, however, will be brought to light before the case is ended.

Verse 16. The previous warning was repeated and summed up in the words *have no portion this side of the river* (of Euphrates). They meant that if the government in Jerusalem was allowed to be reestablished, it would again take possession of all the territory west of the noted river.

Verse 17. The warning and suggestion of the letter had the effect intended by its authors. The king of Persia was intimidated into having the official records examined. All kings and other rulers keep an account of the transactions within their realms, and of other countries in any way connected with them. But king Artaxerxes did not cause a complete search to be made; he looked only for the item that was suggested to him by the letter. Having done so, he sent an answer, and this verse is the formal salutation to the persons whose letter is being answered, the ones named in verses 8, 9. *Peace, and at such a time* is a friendly expression as a part of the salutation. Moffatt's translation condenses the whole phrase into "Greetings, etc."

Verse 18. *Plainly read* means the letter was interpreted to the king so that he could understand it in his (the Persian) language, it having been written in the Syrian tongue (v. 7). The whole performance as to the composi-

tion of this letter and the accompanying explanation, might well be described as the act of handing a student in a foreign language a sentence to translate, and with it handing him a vocabulary. The difference in this case is, the servants made the application of the vocabulary for the benefit of the king.

Verse 19. This verse repeats practically what the letter declared (in v. 15).

Verse 20. This verse makes the report even stronger than did the letter. It admits that *mighty kings* had ruled in Jerusalem. A very important item in the Persian record is the declaration that the government at Jerusalem had ruled over all the countries *beyond the (Euphrates) river*. That was promised to Abraham (Gen. 15: 18), and actually realized by Solomon (1 Ki. 4: 21). So it is interesting to find the Persian records corroborating those in our Bible.

Verse 21. The command directed to be given would be a royal decree and effective at once. However, an intimation was made that the king was taking the subject under advisement for further investigation. He left open the prospects of another order that might change the one just given. We shall find that it did take place, but not in the reign of this king.

Verse 22. The urge for strict obedience of the edict was based on the welfare of the kings, meaning the kings of the Persian Empire. The question of what was right or wrong was not considered; only the advantages of these heathen rulers were given consideration in transmitting the royal decree.

Verse 23. Here is another place to make a marking on the chart. In the 3rd column write as follows: "Work on the temple is stopped by order of the king." The promptness of the men when they received the order is significant; *they went up in haste*. Another thing that should be noted is, they made the work to be stopped by *force and power*. The first word is from EDRA and the definition of Strong is, "An orthographical variation for DERA; an arm, i. e. (figuratively) power." The second is from CHAYIL and Strong defines it, "An army, or strength." The thought is, they were compelled to stop by physical force that was backed by the military units of Persia. The Jews would not cease to work upon the mere order of these coun-

sellors. They had already had a test of that kind, when they had the proposal to help in the building project. (Vs. 2, 3.) There is no indication that the official letter was read or even shown to the Jews. They were told to cease a work that they knew had been ordered by a former king of Persia, hence were doing what they knew to be lawful. But when physical force was brought against them, the only thing that could be done was to stop.

Verse 24. This verse gives the authority for the notation just made in the 3rd column of the chart. By comparing the dates at the head of the chart, it will be seen that the work lay idle for two years.

### EZRA 5

Verse 1. *Then* applies to the date stated in the closing verse of the previous chapter; the 2nd year of Darius. He is the man whose name you have at the head of the 4th column of the chart. You have him designated as Darius I, which is correct. He is known also in secular history as Darius Hystaspes. He was thus associated with the name of his father to distinguish him from a number of other Persian rulers named Darius. He was a good man, morally, and showed the same attitude toward the Jews as did Cyrus. He had a long reign, and it was in his 2nd year that the work on the temple was resumed. The verse says that Haggai and Zechariah *prophesied*. Strong's definition of the word is, "a primitive root; to prophesy, i. e. speak (or sing) by inspiration (in prediction or simple discourse)." This definition will help us understand the verse as a whole, especially when we have read the passages that will be cited soon. The verse gives the mere fact of these two prophets' speaking as the reason the Jews resumed the work. Now, I urge that before reading further in the present book, the student read Haggai 1, and Zechariah 1: 1-17. Be sure to read these passages carefully and more than once, then you will be prepared to understand the chapter we are studying. Although Cyrus had given the Jews the right to rebuild the temple to their God, they had let the threatening of the adversaries interfere with their work. The edict of Cyrus had not been repealed, for the Persians never canceled one of their laws, except by enacting a new one that would counteract the old. But there was no evidence that what the

*adversaries* said to them was a law enacted by the king. Therefore, they should have paid no attention to it. It is true that force was brought to bear on them which they could not resist at once. They should have called for an investigation (as was done under Darius as we shall soon see), and then gone ahead with the work. But they were like many professed Christians. If some "unavoidable" circumstance causes an interference in their devotions to the Lord, they will often become indifferent toward their duty, and begin to show more interest in their personal affairs, just as these Jews did, as shown in the passages cited in the prophetic books. Then it becomes necessary for some man of God to get after them and rouse them to action. That is what these prophets did, and it produced the desired effect on the leaders. Now the reader should be prepared to understand the verses to follow the one of this paragraph. But before going further, put this notation in the 4th column of the chart: "2nd year, work resumed on the temple by order of the king." The basis for that notation will appear soon.

Verse 2. *Then rose up* means they became active after the two prophets delivered their messages. The messages contained exhortation and warning, and brought the Jewish leaders to realize how negligent they had been, and how nearly they had come to bringing the wrath of God upon them. Zerubbabel was a leading man of the tribe of Judah, and as general supervisor of the building. Jeshua, otherwise spelled Joshua, was a high priest, and hence a member of the tribe of Levi. These two men represented the material and religious interests of the nation at the time of its restoration. *Began to build* signifies they resumed the work of the house of God, that was stopped at the foundation 15 years before. The prophets helped them with their exhortations and encouraging speeches, addressed to the helpers of the work.

Verse 3. *This side the river* means west of the Euphrates. The Persian Empire had spread out over the civilized world which included the territory from the great river to the land of Palestine. Such a vast country could not be personally supervised by the king or any other one man, but had to be "sublet" to other rulers. All of them would be subject to the chief. Tatnai was one of those rulers, and



Shetharboznai was an officer under him. These men had some companions as helpers, and they were all concerned with the interests of their king in the territory placed under them. Their attention was called to the work going on in Jerusalem, and felt called upon to investigate. The circumstances show that it was a better motive that prompted these men in their activities than that of the ones in chapter 4. Those persons were envious, and did not make a sincere effort to get the right thing done. These last were true servants of their king, and were honest in their performances. They approached the group engaged in the work of the temple and asked for their authority in the building project.

Verse 4. The wording of this verse in the A. V. might be a little confusing. It sounds as if *we* were asking for the names of the workmen, but certainly that would not be true. Whoever the "we" represents personally, it means the ones connected with the work, and they had no reason for asking such a question. Instead, they were asked the names of the workmen, and the verse means to say what they told Tatnai in their answer. The American Standard translation words it, "then we told them," etc. The thought is, Tatnai not only wanted to know the authority for the work going on, but also the personnel of the men in charge of the work.

Verse 5. Tatnai and his fellows did not presume to interfere further with the work until they had communicated with their king. *The eye of God was upon the elders.* This accounts for the conduct of the Persian officers as stated in the beginning of this paragraph. So the work was to continue, pending word from the king.

Verses 6, 7. This paragraph introduces the reader to the letter that was sent to the King of Persia. The parties sending the letter were the ones who had made the investigation of the work going on in Jerusalem.

Verse 8. The expressions in this verse indicate that some progress had been made with the building. Mention is made of *timber*, which would not be put into the foundation. *Great stones* is rendered "stones of rolling" in the margin, and Strong's lexicon defines the word for *great*, "from a root corresponding to GALAL; weight or size (as if rolled)." It is an interesting subject, based on one of the methods used in ancient times for

raising huge stones to their places in the buildings, in the absence of cranes or derricks, such as are used today. A ramp or sloping roadway was built of earth, the highest point of which reached the surface of the preceding course in the wall of the building. The stone was then rolled over and over on this ramp, with the aid of strong levers, until it reached the top where it was skidded into its place in the wall. The ramp was then lengthened and raised to correspond with the height of the previous stone, and another was rolled up the ramp to its place. This procedure was continued until the desired height of the wall was reached. *The great God* was not said in derision. We will recall that after the captivity of the 10 tribes (2 Ki. 17) some people from an outside territory were brought in to occupy the country. They adopted a mixed religion that included a nominal recognition of the true God. The term used did not indicate all that we would mean by its use, but to them it was a proper way of designating the God of the place where the reported work was going on. *Work goeth fast on* was said to impress the king with the urgency of the case.

Verse 9, 10. These verses correspond with 3 and 4, and need no further comment.

Verse 11. This part of the answer from Zerubbabel is not given in the first account of the conversation, but is made a part of the letter to the king. The Jews said they were the servants of the *God of heaven and earth*, while the expression originating with Tatnai was merely *the great God*. The difference will be recognized if you will re-read the remarks in the preceding paragraph, explanatory of the expression of the Persian governor. He did not know about the God of heaven as we recognize him, but did think of him as the God of the temple. The *great king* that was mentioned by Zerubbabel and here repeated in the letter to Darius, was Solomon.

Verse 12. This is more of the answer of Zerubbabel to the inquiry of Tatnai. It is not likely that many persons who made this answer to him were living at the time of the captivity. But all such matters were put into the records and could be read by interested ones. This was a truthful though brief statement of the sad downfall of the kingdom of Judah at the hand of the king of *Babylon*, the *Chaldean*. These two

terms are again used in the same connection. Babylon was the name of the territory, and Chaldean was the name of a prominent people who were in possession of Babylon at the time of which we are studying.

Verse 13. The letter omitted the 70 years of the captivity, and came directly from the beginning of the period's start to its ending. *First year of Cyrus* means the first year after he had taken Babylon; he had been a ruler over the Persians about a score of years before. The dates at the top of the chart show only his rule over Babylon. The letter states that Cyrus made a decree the first year he came into Babylon, that the house should be built to the Lord in Jerusalem.

Verse 14. We desire to keep our "bearings" and understand who is who, and why the various names and places are used in such close connection. For this purpose I shall make a brief statement on the subject. At the time the kingdom of Judah was captured, the territory around Babylon was in control of the Babylonians, otherwise called Chaldeans. At the time when the people of God had "served out their sentence" of 70 years, the territory had changed rulers and was under the Persians. When Cyrus the Persian came into power in Babylon, he found the Jews there, as a man would find a bird in a cage that he had captured from another man. And, just as a compassionate man would open the cage and let the bird go free, so Cyrus permitted the imprisoned Jews to have their freedom. To use the illustration further, as the compassionate man might take the interest to provide a suitable nest for the bird, so did Cyrus use his advantage as king to help the Jews find a desirable home and headquarters. If there were articles of service found in the cage that the bird could use in his new home, the good man would transfer them thereto. Accordingly, Cyrus found some vessels in the cage (Babylon) that really belonged to the prisoners, and that had been taken from their native home. These were restored to the rightful owners, but to insure their safe transportation, they were put into the hands of his own officer, which the text calls a governor. The margin renders it "deputy," which is evidently correct, since Tatnai was governor over the territory west of the Euphrates River.

Verse 15. Don't forget that we are

still reading the letter that was sent to Darius, in which the edict of Cyrus made 15 years before is being recounted.

Verse 16. The letter goes on to state that the edict of Cyrus had been respected; that the foundation was laid and the work on the building started. *Since that time . . . been in building . . . not finished.* These words mean that work had been held up through the years, but was again being put forward.

Verse 17. Thus far the letter was giving a true report of what Tatnai learned when he investigated what was going on in Jerusalem. Also, what was told him upon his inquiry for their authority for what they were doing. Having made the report, the authors of the letter wrote a closing paragraph, in which they requested that the royal records be consulted to see if the Jews were correct in their claims. It was also requested that the king return word as to what he wished to have done about the matter.

#### EZRA 6

Verse 1. Acting on the request of Tatnai, Darius ordered a search to be made for the account of the decree of Cyrus. It is significant that the royal records were kept in the same house where the treasury was, which indicates they were valuable.

Verse 2. Not all of the records were kept in one city. After looking through the ones in Babylon, they went to Achmetha, otherwise called Ecbatana, where they found a record. Strong says that this city was a summer capital of Persia. The verse says, however, that it was in the province of the Medes. The mention of this will call for some explanation, and it will require some secular history to get the subject clarified. The full title for the government we are now considering is the Medo-Persian, or, as it is more familiarly spoken, the Medes and the Persians. It will now be useful to quote some history. "Kinship of the Medes and Persians.—It was in very remote times that some Aryan tribes, separating themselves from the other members of the Aryan family, sought new abodes on the plateau of Iran. The tribes that settled in the south became known as the Persians; while those that took possession of the northwest were called Medes. The names of the two peoples were always closely associated, as in the familiar legend, 'The law of the

Medes and Persians, which altereth not," Myers' Ancient History, p. 88. See also, Herodotus, 1-130. "The leadership of the Median chieftains was of short duration. A certain Cyrus, king of Anshan, in Elam, overthrew their power, and assumed the headship of both Medes and Persians." Myers' Ancient History, p. 88. In the light of these historical facts, we should understand why some of the royal papers of the Persian Empire would be found in a city of the Medes.

Verse 3. Sure enough, they found the report of the Jews to be true. The record said that Cyrus had issued a decree in his first year in Babylon, favoring the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. The decree even specified the size of the building that was authorized to be built, with some other details.

Verse 4. This verse stipulates some of the materials to be used, and authorizes the king's treasurer to furnish money for the house, out of the royal resources.

Verse 5. This decree agrees with Ch. 1: 7-11, which is a statement of what Cyrus did regarding the vessels belonging to the house of God. The present verse shows that the king had good foresight in providing against future misunderstandings. He was not satisfied just to have the work done while he lived and could personally enforce his orders, but had the decree made a part of the official record for the protection of future generations. We can see the wisdom of his acts now that Darius is called upon to settle the dispute. Had the *adversaries* who first opposed the work been as fair as Tatnai and his aides, the work would have been completed long ago.

Verse 6. Up to this point in the return letter, the king has been relating what he found in the official records; that it was in harmony with the claim of the Jews. From this on the letter will contain his own decree in the matter. It is directed to the officials who sent the letter of inquiry. In order that no hindrance be had in executing the decree, the officers are mentioned by name. *Beyond the river* means the same river as *this side of the river*. The difference is in the point from where the expression is made. The former is now made from the east side of the Euphrates, while the latter was from the west side. *Be ye far from thence* is a nice way of telling them to get out of the way of the work.

Verse 7. They not only must get away from the work as far as being objectors, but must not hinder it in any indirect manner; they must let *the work of this house of God alone*. They were not even to insist on participating in the work as did the *adversaries* in Ch. 4: 2, but let the Jews do it.

Verse 8. While his officers were not to dabble in the work, they were ordered to furnish support in the way of materials. Not out of their personal property, but to draw on the treasury of that part of the realm *beyond the river* for expense money, and give it to the leaders of the work among the Jews.

Verses 9, 10. Great empires always keep accurate accounts of the things going on in their realms. We have seen that a record was kept of the Jews and the treatment done to them. That would necessarily include the account of their captivity and the occasion for it. And after being brought into the land now being ruled by the Persians, those people had been prevented from practicing their religious services of sacrifices and offerings. But God had opened the hearts of the heathen kings and caused them to see the righteousness of restoring the temple to the unfortunate Jews. It was appropriate, therefore, that the services belonging thereto be restored also. For the purposes of their temple service, the decree of Darius was extended to the order for animals for the altar, and other things needed in their congregational activities. Darius did not dictate what animals were to be selected, but left it to the priests at Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that the king requested prayer to be offered for him. That was a lawful request. In Jer. 29: 7 the Jews were instructed to pray in behalf of the city of their captivity, and in 1 Tim. 2: 2 is the command for Christians to pray for temporal rulers. This is all in keeping with other teaching regarding God's interest in secular governments. Dan. 2: 21; 4: 17 says that God takes a hand in governments of the world. It is proper, therefore, that the people of God should pray for those rulers.

Verse 11. It is an established principle that a law without a penalty is, in reality, no law at all. On that basis it was consistent for the king of Persia to attach a penalty for the violation of his decree. And it was in a very impressive form in which the offender

was to be punished. He not only was to be executed by hanging, but was to furnish the material for his own gallows. *House be made a dunghill* means that the place where his house had stood was to be used as a place for refuse.

Verse 12. *Caused his name to dwell there.* The last word refers to the temple that was to be rebuilt by order of the king. He thus is offering an indirect prayer to God, asking him to support the Persian decree by punishing all persons who try to violate it. The whole document was made binding by the signature of Darius.

Verse 13. Upon receipt of the letter from the king, Tatnai, who was governor of the territory west of the Euphrates, and his aides, proceeded to obey the decree. It is worthy of note that they did so *speedily*.

Verse 14. This verse is a grand summary of the progress made in the rebuilding of the temple. In one paragraph all the factors are grouped that contributed to the final completion of the work. That took in the exhortations of the prophets, the commandments of God, and the various decrees of the Persian rulers who were friendly toward the Jews. The Artaxerxes mentioned is the one at the head of the 6th column of the chart. Thus far in our story he has not figured in the case, and will not for 58 years. But since the verse is a general statement of the fortunes of the Jews, the inspired writer could include the part this Persian will play in their affairs, for he will prove to be an important person in the matter.

Verse 15. This verse is short but very informative. The house was completed in the 6th year of this king Darius. The work on it was resumed in his 2nd year (Ch. 4: 24; 5: 1, 2). Hence the work on the body of the house was done during 4 years of the reign of Darius I. Here is the place to make another notation on the chart. In the 4th column write, "6th year, the temple was completed." While at the business of marking the chart, make the following notation in the 5th column: "The Ahasuerus of the book of Esther according to most authors." Some comments will be offered on this subject when we get to the book of Nehemiah or Esther.

Verse 16. Four classes of persons are named as taking part in this *dedication* or setting apart of the temple. The first is a general class; children

of Israel. The priests, meaning the part of the tribe of Levi that descended from Aaron, in the second class. The third is the tribe of Levi as a whole, and fourth, any individuals left out in the ones mentioned above, but designated as being among the captivity literally. Some Jews were permitted to remain in Palestine during the 70 years. These people, of course, were enslaved under the Babylonians, but not actually taken into the land possessed by their captors.

Verse 17. The offering of *sin offerings* was not especially an acknowledgement of sin, although they had enough sins charged up against them to call for such sacrifices; but certain offerings were thus designated, regardless of the purpose for which they were given. Special attention is called to the word *twelve* in connection with the tribes of Israel. There is a doctrine in the world to the effect that the 10 tribes were lost in the captivity, and as yet have never been found. Well, the services that went on at this dedication, were under the supervision of the priests. They certainly would have known it, had these tribes been lost. And if so, they would have had no occasion for counting them when providing the sacrifices *according to the number of the tribes*.

Verse 18. There is no practical difference between *divisions* and *courses* as used here. There was some work that the priests only could do, being of the family of Aaron. The other Levites had a more general line of duty, yet could perform some things that no other tribe could lawfully do. Also, the number of eligible men in both kinds had grown so numerous, that it became necessary to have them serve in turns and sections. A part of the arrangement for the courses or turns of the priests had been fixed by David (1 Chr. 24: 1-19), which was far this side of Moses, yet with the approval of God. Therefore, *as it is written in the book of Moses* refers only to the service, not to the turns or courses. The outstanding thought we should get out of this paragraph is that of good order or system. That is taught in the New Testament. (Col. 2: 5.)

Verse 19. *Children of the captivity* means the children of Israel that had just come back from the land of the captivity, having been released by Cyrus.

Verse 20. *Purified together* refers to



the law of Moses that required all persons to be clean, both actually and ceremonially, before they were permitted to partake of the feasts. See Num. 9: 6-11 and 19: 11-22. These passages give the general requirements as to uncleanness, all conditions coming under the rule must comply with the law for ceremonial cleansing. These members of the tribe of Levi had attended to the demands of the law, thereby qualifying them to prepare the passover for the others as well as for partaking of it themselves.

Verse 21. The children of Israel who had come up from Babylon had to be purified according to the law. There were others who had been living in the land of Palestine and thus in connection with the *heathen of the land*. These last named persons had *separated themselves unto them*. This means the ones who had been living in Palestine in the midst of the idolaters of the country, complied with the law of purification, then joined themselves to the ones lately come in from Babylon. All of them together took part in the great feast, mutually rejoicing in the favorable situation.

Verse 22. The feast of unleavened bread was kept immediately following the passover. (Ex. 12: 18-20; 13: 7-9; Deut. 16: 3.) Politically speaking, the "land of the captivity" was a Persian territory and ruled by Persian kings. But from a geographical standpoint it was the old country of Assyria. That is why we have the expression *king of Assyria*, really meaning the Persian king. He had *strengthened their hands* as we have seen in this chapter, by furnishing them materials, and it was a time of great rejoicing among the people of God. Not only because their term of exile had been terminated, but the former oppressors were in power no more.

### EZRA 7

Verses 1-5. *After these things* refers to the events of the preceding chapter. The small blank space on the paper between that and the present chapter represents more time in history than would seem possible, for it is an interval of 58 years. The dates at the top of your chart will show that to be the correct figure, but on such an important matter some quotations from authentic sources will be proper. I shall cite the following from Smith's Bible Dictionary: "Ezra, Book of, is a continuation of the books of Chronicles. The period covered by the book is 80

years, from the first of Cyrus, B. C. 536, to the beginning of the 8th of Artaxerxes, B. C. 456. It consists of the contemporary historical journals kept from time to time, containing, Chs. 1-10, an account of the return of the captives under Zerubbabel, and the rebuilding of the temple in the reign of Cyrus and Cambyses. Most of the book is written in Hebrew, but from Chs. 4: 8 to 6: 19 it is written in Chaldee. The last 4 chapters, beginning with Ch. 7, continue the history after a gap of 58 years—from the 6th of Darius to the 7th of Artaxerxes—narrating his visit to Jerusalem, and giving an account of the reforms there accomplished, referred to under *Ezra*. Much of the book was written by Ezra himself, though the first chapter was probably written by Daniel; and other hands are evident." Quotations pertaining especially to our present line of study will also be found in Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia, volume 1, as follows: "*Ezra*, book of (a chronicle of events occurring between 536 and 456 B. C.), consists of parts, the first of which extends through Ch. 6. Between these two sections lies an interval of 58 years. . . . The second section (Chs. 7 to 10) has Ezra for its chief actor." On account of the importance of Ezra as a person, his family line is given back to Aaron, who was the first high priest under the Jewish Dispensation.

Verse 6. Ezra was not only a high priest but was also a scribe. The business of such men was to make duplicate copies of the law, which was done by hand, there being no printing presses or other mechanical means for such work. It can readily be seen that much was at stake for the correct preservation of the text. There were some rigid rules imposed on the profession to guarantee the genuineness of the copies. I shall quote here an extract from a standard author: "The copies of the law must be transcribed from ancient manuscripts of approved character only, with pure ink, on parchment prepared from the hide of a clean animal, for this express purpose by a Jew, and fastened together by the strings of clean animals; every skin must contain a certain number of columns of prescribed length and breadth, each column comprising a given number of lines and words; no word must be written by heart or with points, or without being first pronounced orally by the copyist; the name of God is not to be written but

with the utmost devotion and attention, and previously to writing it, he must wash his pen. The want of a single letter, or the redundancy [unnecessary repetition] of a single letter, the writing of prose as verse, or verse as prose, respectively vitiates [spoils] a manuscript; and when a copy has been completed, it must be examined and corrected within thirty days after the writing has been finished, in order to determine whether it is to be approved or rejected. These rules, it is said, are observed to the present day by the persons who transcribe the sacred writings for the use of the Synagogue." *Horne*, Introduction, Vol. 1, p. 217. Such requirements surrounding the copying of the sacred writings explain the silence of Jesus and other speakers and writers of the Bible as to the faithfulness of the scribes. Those men were condemned by our Lord for their loose living and hypocrisy regarding their own obedience to the law, but not once were they ever even as much as complained of, much less condemned, for any unfaithfulness in their work as scribes. And yet, had they been guilty along that line it would have been the most serious of faults, and Jesus would certainly have exposed them for it. His silence on that matter, therefore, is an assurance to us that we have the copies of the original writings of the inspired men preserved correctly. An occasional error of a copyist due to a worn place in a letter or numeral sign is too insignificant to deserve any attention. Ezra is said to have been a *ready* scribe, which means he was skilful or expert, thus making his work the more useful and dependable. Let it be noted that after mentioning the *law of Moses*, the inspired writer says of it that it was that *which the Lord God of Israel had given*. This is another instance which exposes those who would belittle the authority of Moses, or try to make a distinction between his authority and that of God. Of course we understand that the motive for this insult to Moses is in order to evade the guilt of inconsistency in their practice. They pretend to keep the law as still binding, yet dodge the requirements concerning animal sacrifices. In order to make a show of defense for their actions, they try to distinguish between the law of God and the law of Moses, a distinction the scriptures do not allow. Ezra had requested the privilege of going to Jerusalem to bring about some reforms in the service about the temple.

The king of Persia was influenced by *the hand of the Lord God*. That means that God had a hand in all the affair and brought it to the necessary conclusion.

Verse 7. Make the following notation in the 6th column of the chart: "7th year, Ezra and many other prominent Jews are permitted to go to Jerusalem to restore the worship." The classes named were outstanding men of the Jewish nation, and took active interest in the great mission for the reforms so much needed at the capital of their home country. *Children of Israel* is a general reference to the several sections of the workers in the services of God. The *priests* were the particular members of the tribe of Levi who came down from Aaron; the *Levites* was a term referring to the tribe in general. The singers were the ones forming a special group that had been looked to for that item of the worship, and it was a service that had received its first support from David. The *porters* were doorkeepers or janitors. The *Nethinims* were a special group of servants, considered as attendants for the other men in the public services. The last phrase of the verse is the authority for the notation just written in the 6th column of the chart.

Verses 8, 9. Incidentally, we may get some information in this paragraph on the meaning of certain expressions in the Bible. In the 8th verse it says *Ezra came* to Jerusalem. But in the 9th verse it says he *began* to go to Jerusalem on the first day of the first month, and on the first day of the fifth month he *came*. All of this shows that a writer may speak of the time at which a person starts to a certain place, and word it as if he were speaking of the time he arrived at the place. This should be considered when studying the subject of arrival of the women at the tomb of Jesus (Matt. 28: 1; Mark 16: 2; Luke 24: 1). In the case of Ezra, he came or started toward Jerusalem on the 1st day of the 1st month, but was 4 months making the journey. That would not be strange, considering the distance traveled, and the obstacles to be encountered in the journey. He could not have made the trip in that time, had it not been for the help of God whose *good hand* was upon him, which means that God took a hand in the expedition and caused it to be a success.

Verse 10. *Prepared his heart signi-*

fies that he took his stand on behalf of the Lord. To carry out that determination, he would need to search the divine law in order to learn what he should do. He not only resolved to do the commandments as they pertained to his own conduct, but would teach the same to the children of Israel. This verse, short though it is, contains some fundamental principles pertaining to the conduct of man. Had Ezra been concerned in the liberty given him, only because of his personal enjoyment of the freedom, he might not have received the same assistance from God. But his motives were founded in the dignity of God's law, and the desire to instruct his Israelite brethren therein.

Verse 11. Ezra was a good man and was doubtless known as such to many of the nation. But the movement he was about to make was so great that he might have been questioned on his right to make it. I wish again to make some statements regarding the status of the Jews with reference to the government of the country. The 70 years of captivity had been ended three quarters of a century before. Yet the Jews were still subjects of the "powers that be" just the same as Christians in this country are subjects of the U. S. government. And if a Christian in continental America wished to go to some possession of the U. S. in another territory, it might be necessary to obtain some kind of paper or passport before he could lawfully make the journey. Likewise, the Jews were subjects of the Persian Empire at the same time they were servants of God. And to go out of the main land (Babylonia) into one of the provinces (Palestine), it was necessary to obtain a safe conduct through some formal document. For that purpose king Artaxerxes handed to Ezra this letter. The dual position of Ezra, scribe and priest, is kept before us, which should continually impress us with his importance. Besides, we have already seen from secular history, that he was the writer of this book. The same fact is indicated in V. 28 of this chapter, which will be commented on more at length when we reach that verse. Any man who did secretarial work, such as writing, would be called a scribe. Thus the inspired writer informs us that Ezra was a scribe of the words of the Lord, thereby designating his special work.

Verse 12. Artaxerxes styles himself *king of kings* which is to be under-

stood as a statement for purposes of emphasis. The usual impression made by the word "king" is that it designates a person in the highest authority. The word itself cannot mean that, else there could not be a king of kings. And the term was not a vain display of pomp as a false claim of a heathen ruler. In Dan. 2: 37 the prophet told Nebuchadnezzar that he was a king of kings. An inspired man would not give to any ruler a title that is impossible of fulfillment. That the term under consideration denotes a rank of unusual authority is shown by the further speech of Daniel in the verse cited. After telling Nebuchadnezzar that he was a king of kings, he immediately told him why; that it was because he had been given power, strength and glory. The same was true of Artaxerxes, so that he was entitled to the claim he made of himself. There was a logical reason for using the title in connection with the decree about to be announced. If he was *king of kings*, there could not be any other king who might try to counteract this decree by another of his own. And by addressing the decree to Ezra, there would not be left any opening for some one else to lay claim to the privilege granted in the royal document. There might be other men having the same name, so the designation was made that it was the Ezra who was both a priest and scribe. *Perfect peace, and at such a time means, "Greetings, etc."*

Verse 13. A decree is about the same as a judicial sentence, in that it has the authority of the power in force at the time all back of it. This document was put into the hand of Ezra, but its benefits were to be extended to the people of his race. That no misunderstanding might be had as to who could benefit by it, the various classes were named; *people of Israel, priests and Levites*. The decree does not dictate that any should act against his will. Only those who were *minde*d of their own free will were to be affected. Hence it would have been unlawful for Ezra to try to compel any of the Jews to go with him, if he were to base his order on the authority of the king.

Verse 14. *Seven counselors* was an advisory board in the service of the Persian king. They joined with him in authorizing Ezra to make this journey to Jerusalem. It was understood that he was to make an investigation into conditions in the former

capital of Israel. Said investigation was to be made in the light of the law supposed to govern the practice of that city. A copy of that law was then given to Ezra.

Verse 15. A heathen like Artaxerxes would not understand the full omnipresence of God as we do. His conception of him was that he was a God with a certain dwelling place. Hence we have him describing God as having his habitation in Jerusalem.

Verse 16. The silver and gold that Ezra could "find" would be that which he, as an authorized collector of revenue, would be able to lay hold of. In addition to such treasury, the people could bring forth out of their private stores of wealth, very much silver and gold. Ezra was hereby empowered to take all this wealth with him to Jerusalem, to be used in the temple service.

Verse 17. The money collected could not be used directly in the service of the house of God. But it could be used to buy animals and other articles for such use.

Verse 18. After obtaining all the animals that could be used in the temple, there might be a surplus of the money. The brethren of Ezra were authorized to join with him in deciding what to do with this surplus.

Verse 19. Some of the citizens would donate vessels of various kinds, who did not have money to give. All such were to be appropriated to the service. *God of Jerusalem* means the same as was explained in verse 15.

Verse 20. Even all of the sources mentioned for obtaining materials for the service of the God of Jerusalem might be insufficient to supply the demand. In that case Ezra was authorized to draw on the royal treasury for the needed funds.

Verse 21. The second grade officers of Artaxerxes were given the direct order so they would not have to rely solely on the word of Ezra. It would not be a small matter to open up the treasuries of the great king of Persia for the benefit of a former captive. The decree, therefore, was very opportune.

Verse 22. Even the details were taken care of. Some of the treasurers might be willing to give over to Ezra a part of the money, but not enough for the work. The order means, then, that whatever Ezra called for was to be given him, up to the amount stipulated. And no limit was placed on the amount of salt to be given. It might

be wondered why salt would even be mentioned in connection with the services about the temple. Let the reader see Lev. 2: 13 and he will learn that salt was a part of the offerings made from grain, and grain has been mentioned in this verse.

Verse 23. Personal safety or advantage might seem to have been the motive of Artaxerxes in all of his treatment of the Jews. Specific reference is made to the *wrath* that might be put on the king and his sons were they to disregard the *God of heaven*. It is true that the fear of punishment was in his motive. That is not necessarily to be disapproved, for Christians are exhorted to a life of faithfulness partly on the basis of such fear. (2 Cor. 5: 11.) If Artaxerxes was familiar with the history of his nation and its predecessor, he knew something of the power of this God of heaven in overthrowing human kings. He knew also that two of his own predecessors on the throne of Persia, Cyrus and Darius, had been told by this same God to do certain favors for the Jews in the realm, and that the country had been favored by the same God because of its assistance to the unfortunate people. Thus a great motive was urging the king in his friendliness for the people of God.

Verse 24. To *certify* means to make known. Artaxerxes was making known to his deputies, through Ezra, what was his will on the subject mentioned. The particular item of his decree that was meant concerned the matter of taxes. All of the officers or special classes among the Jews that were engaged in the services about the temple were to be exempt from all financial obligation to the Persian government. This ruling was consistent with the general situation. The Jewish nation had been deservedly punished for its sins by being deprived of the use of the land. That sentence had been served out and the present generation was innocent of the great iniquity. It was right for the people to be restored to the enjoyment of their own country, and be given a chance to "catch up" on their wealth and resources as a nation, free from the burden of taxes imposed by the government.

Verse 25. The instructions given to Ezra were similar to the advice that Jethro gave to Moses on the subject of governing the people. (Ex. 18: 13-26.) *Beyond the river* means west of the Euphrates, since this was written in



the land of the Persian capital which was east of the great river.

Verse 26. Two laws or authorities are considered in this verse; God's law and that of the Persian king. Artaxerxes had learned sufficient of the law of God and the conduct of the people regulated by it, to have respect for it. He was therefore willing to combine it with his own laws to the extent set out in the present conclusion. Four kinds of punishment were provided for as the penalty for disobeying either God's law or that of the king. As to which or how many of these penalties were to be imposed, it would be decided by the judges authorized in the preceding verse. Artaxerxes understood the fundamental principle involved in the operation of law—that a law without a penalty is void—and completed his great decree with naming the penalties.

Verses 27, 28. The preceding verse was the end of the decree and letter of king Artaxerxes. This paragraph is the language of the writer of the book we are studying. The pronoun in the first person is used four times, and in direct connection with the work that Ezra only was commissioned to do. We therefore know that he was the writer of this book. He blessed God for having put it in the king's heart to have the house of God adorned. This gives us an inspired explanation of why the Persian king acted as he did. Furthermore, I like to note the words *put . . . in the king's heart*. God can operate even on inanimate objects and cause them to move at his will. And he could force a king, like a piece of mechanism, to write and say just the things desired. But the great God of heaven wished the important work about to be accomplished through this heathen king to be entered into wholeheartedly. To do this he brought his influence to bear on his heart. The whole procedure was pleasing to Ezra. He was assured that in taking advantage of the commission given him by the king, he was also carrying out the will of his God, and he therefore felt no hesitancy in the proceeding. The true servant of God will do his duty in spite of the temporal powers over him, if he can. Yet how much happier he will feel if he can follow out his line of duty to the Lord, and at the same time be in harmony with the laws of the land in which he is living. With all these inducements to cheer him, Ezra proceeded to go into

action by first calling together the persons he expected to cooperate with him in the reform work about to be launched in Jerusalem. We should keep in mind the time of present activities, that it is the 7th year of the reign of Artaxerxes.

### EZRA 8

Verse 1. These *chief of their fathers* are the men referred to in the last verse of the preceding chapter. It was not expected that every Jew would make the journey to Jerusalem at this time, but the leading men among them, in order to accomplish the work at hand. The word *fathers* has special reference back to the beginning of the nation after they came out of Egypt. *Genealogy* means the family list. That is, when certain men are named, a jump may be made back to their forefathers to find the fountainhead of the person or persons, if two or more had a common ancestor.

Verse 2, 3. Some of these names are familiar, being among the early ancestors of the congregation of the Jews. Again, some cases are mere coincidents and should not be allowed to confuse us. The leading men of whatever unit is being considered will be named, then a sum of the number that went with them will be stated. Thus the number that was with the unit of this paragraph was 150 males. All of them were admitted to the expedition, having been represented in the *genealogy* or family list.

Verse 4. *Sons of Pahathmoab* is a general statement of the group the writer wished to consider in this unit. And out of that group he named Elihonenai, whose immediate father was Zerahiah. This man was associated with 200 males.

Verse 5. The next group was composed of the sons or descendants of Shechaniah. But not all of them could be represented in the movement, so a particular one was named to furnish the list. Jahaziel was the one chosen and the name of his son is not given, only that a son of his was given 300 males.

Verse 6. Adin stands for a group of seed of Israel, and both father and son who were selected are named. This son was given 50 males to journey with him.

Verses 7-14. Having considered several verses in detail, I believe the reader now understands the order or

method followed, which applies to each of the verses in this paragraph. It was thought unnecessary, therefore, to take space for all of them separately. The thought that will be added, and that applies to each of the verses from the 3rd on down, is the fact that only males are mentioned. That is in keeping with the general plan of the Mosaic system, which required the males only to take upon them the activities of the national services. That was in consideration for the females as being the weaker vessels (physically), and hence not qualified for the journeys and other strenuous items of the system. The sum of all the males listed in verses 3-14 is 1496, which is quite an army of workers and travelers, planning to journey to the native country of their forefathers.

Verse 15. *Ahava* was the name of some small stream, or a town on a stream, located on the border of the Persian dominions proper, at which Ezra collected the men for his expedition to Palestine. The reader may remember that Ch. 7: 8, 9 recorded the arrival of Ezra at Jerusalem, yet here we are, encamped on the banks of a stream only a short distance from the starting point. But many places in the Bible are not strictly chronological. The passage just referred to is a brief statement of the entire event of Ezra's expedition from the Persian dominions to Jerusalem. The writer then goes back with his story to the events preparatory to the journey. They included the formation of the letter containing the decree of Artaxerxes, authorizing Ezra to make the journey. Having given us a copy of that document, the writer goes on with his story and has the expedition formed and assembled at the place named in the beginning of this paragraph. Before launching out upon the main part of the journey, Ezra took an inventory of his crowd. He discovered, after three days of search, that among the priestly group, there were none of the Levites other than the priests. The idea is that while there were some who were from the family of Aaron in the crowd, and hence composed a group of priests, yet the tribe of Levi in general was not represented. They would be needed for the more rugged service about the temple activities.

Verses 16, 17. *Then sent I* means Ezra summoned these men into his presence from the crowd that was there at Ahava. The first 9 men named

were called chief or leading men. That would apply especially to their personal influence or prestige. The next 2 men were distinguished for their mental ability. These 11 men were sent with a commission to contact Iddo, another leading man at Casiphia, which was a district nearer the headquarters of the realm. The message to Iddo was that he should send along some *ministers* for the house of God, at which they were expecting to arrive. This word *minister* is what was indicated by the mention of Levites in verse 15. Please reread the comments in that place. The Nethinims were another group of servants that had been distinguished in the days of Solomon.

Verses 18, 19. *By the good hand* means God took a hand in the affair for their good. Such assistance guaranteed them the proper selection of a man, and consequently the man chosen had a pure lineage back to Levi, the head of the special tribe.

Verse 20. Lest we forget the information regarding the Nethinims, I shall here repeat it as far as can be learned from the sources. Smith's Bible Dictionary says this: "Nethinims (given, dedicated). As applied specifically to a distinct body of men connected with the services of the temple, this name first meets us in the later books of the Old Testament—in 1 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. The word and the ideas embodied in it may, however, be traced to a much earlier period. As derived from the verb *nathan*, i. e. give, set apart, dedicate, it was applied to those who were specially appointed to the liturgical [religious ceremonies] offices of the tabernacle." Young says they were "a class of persons employed as servants or assistants to the Levites; probably the Gibeonites and others reduced to servitude." Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia gives us the following: "Different from the Levites were the *Nethinims*, who performed the menial [less dignified but honorable] work for the Levites; hence they are mentioned along with the Levites (1 Chr. 9: 2; Ezra 7: 24). The original stock of the Nethinims were probably the Gibeonites, whom Joshua made 'hewers of wood, and drawers of water' (Josh. 19: 27). The Nethinims of 1 Chr. 9: 2, Ez. 2: 43, were probably sprung from captives taken by David in the later wars, who were assigned to the service of the tabernacle, replacing possibly

the Gibeonites, who had been slain by Saul (2 Sam. 21: 1). Undoubtedly these Nethinims were obliged to keep the Mosaic law. From Neh. 10: 29 we know that such was the case in the post-exilic [after the exile] period." From this information we can see that the term is not a racial or religious one, but one of social state. Such a group of servants might have come out of any order of persons who were brought into a state of servitude as described. In the case now before us, there were 220 of them and they were listed according to their individual names. Ezra had sent back for some of the Levites to join the expedition, and these Nethinims very properly accompanied them.

Verse 21. The law of Moses did not generally require the practice of fasting. It endorsed it and even encouraged it by offering certain rewards for its observance. The time was at hand, in the judgment of Ezra, for a season of fasting and devotional service. They were about to start on the main lap of the journey, that was to take them through a wild and perilous country. Hostile persons would likely be encountered, as well as other dangers connected with such a territory. *Affect* ourselves means to become humble and devote a season of time to serious prayer to God for safety.

Verse 22. It is evident from this verse that the Persian king had offered to furnish Ezra a military escort for the journey. The offer had been declined on the basis that he would rely on his God for protection. He had informed the king, though, that such help would come to those only who *seek him*. In accordance with that declaration, the appointment was made for the fast and other devotional activities of which we are now hearing. After refusing the offer of Artaxerxes, Ezra was ashamed to return to him to ask protection when he realized more fully the dangers confronting them.

Verse 23. The voluntary fasts consisted of more than the mere abstaining from food. Prayer and expressions of humility accompanied the period. *Intreated* means to "listen to prayer." The phrase signifies that God listened to or heard (favorably) the prayers of the people and of Ezra.

Verse 24. *Separated* is used in the sense of being appointed. The two men named and 10 others were spe-

cially called upon for the service soon to be described.

Verses 25, 26. In stating the amount Ezra *weighed unto these men*, it does not mean that he took just that much out of the supply on hand. It is another way of telling us that was the amount of the materials that had been given them by the king and his counsellors. Weighing it to the 12 men was for the purpose of checking afterward. As an illustration, a man might be handing a sum of money to another in settlement of an obligation. He may insist that the money be counted before they separate so that no misunderstanding could come up afterward. The same principle is taught in the New Testament (Rom. 12: 17; 2 Cor. 8: 20, 21; 1 Thess. 4: 11, 12). An honest man will not object to being "checked"; in fact, he will insist upon it. I have known treasurers of churches who never gave any statement to the congregation; if they were asked for it they would resent it. Something is wrong with a man when he does that way.

Verse 27. *Fine* copper is rendered "shining" in the margin. That fact signifies that it was the best grade since it would take a high polish. *Precious* as gold is likewise given another translation in the margin and is rendered "desirable." The lexicon agrees with it, because a material might be as desirable as gold, even though not as valuable in the market as a precious metal.

Verse 28. The word *holy* is used in the sense of being consecrated to God. The vessels and the metals, also the men having been charged with them, were appointed to the service of God in the temple, hence all was holy.

Verse 29. Ezra charged these men to weigh the valuables *before* the chief persons, which means to do it in their presence. That was for the same purpose that caused him to weigh them as they left his hands. See my comments at verses 25, 26. They were to be weighed in the presence of responsible persons. Special mention is made of the priests and Levites. The former were those members of the Levitical tribe who came down from the family of Aaron, the latter meant the tribe in general.

Verse 30. The priests and Levites not only took over the materials, but they took the *weight* of them. That was virtually a receipt for them, thus assuming responsibility for their proper

disposition for the great work then about to begin.

Verse 31. According to Ch. 7: 9 it had been 12 days since Ezra started from Babylon. Most of that time had been spent at Ahava, completing the preparation for the main portion of the journey. On the 12th day of the 1st month they started, and the trip was successful through the good hand of God. That fulfilled the assurance indicated in V. 23 when the prayer of Ezra was heard.

Verse 32. *Came to Jerusalem* are 3 words that cover 5 months of time according to Ch. 7: 7. *Abode there three days* means there was nothing done for that length of time. A journey that had taken 4 months, and extended several hundred miles, would call for a brief period of relaxation.

Verse 33. After a 3-day rest, the silver and gold was turned over to the proper men and in the proper place. It was not only handed over, but was *weighed* in the presence of responsible officers and men who would be witnesses if they were needed.

Verse 34. The metal was weighed and the pieces counted or numbered, making it doubly sure that no misrepresentation, either intentional or unintentional, could be done. And furthermore, that no misunderstanding due to faulty memory might occur, the list was written down at the same time.

Verse 35. It had been over 100 years since the captivity took place, and many children had been born in the land of the exile. They are the ones meant in the beginning of this verse. They did not know, from personal experience, of the humiliation attached to a siege and capture. But they did know that they had been in a land where no worship had been practiced publicly except that for idolatrous gods. They could therefore feel grateful for the freedom now given them of serving the true God in his own appointed way. They expressed that gratitude by large numbers of sacrifices.

Verse 36. The king's *commissions* means his edict, contained in the letter shown in the preceding chapter. It was proper to deliver it to the officers of Artaxerxes in charge of his affairs *this side* (west side) of the river Euphrates. Upon receiving the decree they proceeded to obey it, and the result was the furthering of the work about the house of God in the hands of the Jews.

## EZRA 9

Verse 1. One of the most outstanding predictions that appear in the writings of the prophets is that the Jews would be cured of idolatry by the captivity. That subject will be given complete discussion when writing on the prophetic books. This verse might seem to contradict that prediction by its charge that they were doing according to the evil ways of the heathen nations. The group named were the ones of old whose idolatrous practices had led the people of God into the condition that resulted in their downfall. But take note that the verse does not specify what the abominations were, except that some unlawful connection had been formed.

Verse 2. This is the place that tells us what was meant in the first verse of the chapter. The marriage between God's people and those of other nations had been forbidden by the law of Moses (Ex. 34: 16; Deut. 7: 3). That law had been violated by the Jews who had been living in Palestine. The reader will remember that a great many of the children of Israel had gone up there from Babylon in the days of Zerubbabel, 75 years before this period of which we are studying, and in that time these unlawful intermarriages had taken place. *Holy seed* means the children of Israel because they alone composed the nation that had been recognized as the people of God.

Verse 3. *Garment* means the main body of his clothing and the *mantle* was an outer piece, covering the upper part of the body. Many customs of old times seem odd to us, and we do not know their origin. But the actions of Ezra in this instance were part of the practices used in times of great anxiety or grief. *Astonied* is another form which means to be astonished or amazed.

Verse 4. To tremble at the words of God means to be respectful toward them, and to feel a great anxiety for those who have disobeyed. Such persons had brought the shocking report to Ezra, and now they gathered about him as he sat in his state of amazement. This sitting continued until the *evening sacrifice* which was at the middle of the afternoon. See Num. 28: 4, and the marginal reading in connection with it.

Verse 5. At that hour it would be necessary for Ezra to be concerned with the religious activities, including



an address to God as well as the regular sacrifice.

Verse 6. *Increased over our heads* signified that their iniquities were not confined to their personal surroundings; that they had reached up to the notice of high heaven. Ezra was not personally guilty of any of the evils present, but his concern for the nation was so great that he was overwhelmed with humiliation.

Verse 7. This verse is a general view of the history of the people, going back to the first generations. As a whole, the record of the nation was one of shameful disobedience, and it had brought them into contact with the heathen lands, whose people had been suffered to afflict them with the sword and other means of torture.

Verse 8. This verse comes down to the more favorable conditions at present surrounding the better part of the congregation. *Little space* is a comparative term, referring to the period that followed the 70 years of captivity. The *remnant* was noted in Ch. 2: 64, which see. When *nail* is used figuratively it means a fixed place. It here applied to the assurance that, while the nation had been subjected to great humiliation, yet through the preservation of the *remnant*, the people of God would still have a secure abode in the *holy place*, which was the temple in Jerusalem. *Reviving* refers to the renewed hope that had been brought to the remnant by the favorable turn of affairs through the king of Persia.

Verse 9. *Were bondmen* refers to the 70 years of captivity, during which time God kept a jealous eye over his people. And when their term of bondage was served out, the people who had been God's instruments for the chastisement due them, were themselves overthrown. The Persians came into power and would have been the overlords to continue the bondage of the people of God. But that was not the divine will, and the new rulers were influenced to be merciful to the captives they found in the country they took over. *Reviving* is defined in Strong's lexicon as "preservation of life." That was not restricted to the physical life of the individual, but applied to them as a nation. By granting the Jews a release from bondage, and by authorizing the restoration of their temple, their national existence also was preserved. *A wall in Judah* means that a defense was assured them, since a wall about a city was

one of its fortifications. While the word is used figuratively in this place, yet it had a literal application in its effect, for Ch. 7: 26 decreed that force should be used if necessary to protect the Jews in the privileges granted them by the Persian government.

Verses 10, 11. This paragraph starts with what is a question in form, but rather is an admission that something worthwhile should be done. The reasons for the admissions are then stated. The people had forsaken the commandments of God concerning the land into which they had been led by divine grace. They had been told beforehand that the people of the land were filthy and abominable. For that and other reasons they had been forbidden to permit marriages between their own young people and those of the nations. This law had been disregarded, and now Ezra made an admission in question form, that something should be done about it. This paragraph was addressed to God. It will be interrupted temporarily to give attention to the people.

Verse 12. In keeping with the agreement implied in his address to God in the preceding paragraph, Ezra then addressed himself to the people. It was on the subject that directly concerned the prevailing conditions, which pertained to their marriage relations. He forbade their marriages with the nations around them. They were not even to *seek their peace*, which means they were not to make any compromise with them in order to be at peace with them. As an inducement for such conduct, they were promised the best of the land for their enjoyment, and to be able to leave it for their children when they were gone.

Verse 13. Ezra then addressed himself to God again, and the whole speech was in the spirit of confession, and acknowledgement for the many favors they had received from the Lord. It also acknowledged that the punishment inflicted on them was less than they deserved. How different that spirit from what is so often manifested by the professed servants of God. We complain and speak of our lot as if it were unjust, when we should realize that if we were treated according to the just desert of our deeds, "we would long since have been lifting our piteous cries where hope and mercy can never reach." Let us read carefully and ponder Psa. 103: 10.

Verse 14. Ezra continued his prayer

and lamentation to God. While it was in question form, it was a declaration of the unreasonableness of their thought of disobeying God, after he has done so much for them. Should they do so, it should be expected that God would be angry with them and bring them to final destruction.

Verse 15. After exclaiming that God is righteous, Ezra gave a logical reason for his statement. It was the fact that they had *yet escaped*, notwithstanding the great sins of the nation. *Before thee in our trespass* means that their trespasses were exposed before God. *We cannot stand* signifies they had no justification to face the Lord in their awful sinful condition.

### EZRA 10

Verse 1. Ezra *confessed* which justifies my remarks in the preceding chapter, that his questions were really the same as admissions. His prayer and other demonstrations affected many of the people. A large number of them gathered around him and joined in the general lamentation. Their confidence in Ezra must have been great. They were sure that such a good man would not have given way to expressions of grief and anxiety as he had without a just cause.

Verse 2. The audience about Ezra found a spokesman by the name of Shechaniah. He did not try to deny nor even excuse the evils of which Ezra had charged them; instead, he acknowledged all that had been brought against them. *Strange* wives means wives "outside" the nation of Israel, that being the meaning of "strange." In spite of the confessed sins, however, he did not despair of some relief. He evidently had faith in the mercy of God, for he expressed a hope concerning Israel. But we shall see that he did not think they could realize that hope without doing something to discharge their own obligations regarding the matter.

Verse 3. True to his acknowledgment of their wrongs, Shechaniah exhorted the people to correct the evil by putting away their unlawful wives. There was nothing morally wrong in the marriage with the foreign women. The sin was in disobeying the express demand of the law, that they confine their marriages to the people of their own nation. God wanted to keep a "strain" of blood pure from Abraham down to Christ, hence frowned upon taking in the people from another

class. Besides, at that period of the world's history, idolatry was very prevalent, and the marriages among the heathen worshippers was sure to lead in the wrong direction. *Make a covenant* means to make a solemn promise to God. *My Lord* refers to Ezra, and *our God*, of course, means the God of heaven. Since Ezra was working in harmony with God, it was necessary to obey each at the same time. To *tremble* at the commandment of God means to have such respect for it that one would be afraid to disregard it.

Verse 4. In this verse Shechaniah addressed himself directly to Ezra. He advised him that he had the matter in his own hands of taking the lead in the work of adjustment. That was true since he was the *lord* over them and had the authority to act. He encouraged him with assurance that he would have the cooperation of the people.

Verse 5. The first act of Ezra was to call upon the whole assembly to take an oath to comply with the covenant that Shechaniah suggested. In his address to the audience he recognized 3 classes; *chief priests*, the *Levites* and *all Israel*. The first were the leading men who were the descendants of Aaron; the second was the tribe in general, and the third a listing of the congregation as a whole. The groups thus addressed by Ezra responded favorably and agreed to take the oath.

Verse 6. After securing the promise of the groups to correct the iniquity among them, Ezra "took time out" for a season of rest. He entered the room of one of the leading men, named Johanan. But it was not for the purpose of entertainment, for he was still mourning over the condition of the congregation. He even refused to partake of the necessities of life, he was so humiliated over the situation.

Verses 7. The first reaction to Ezra's demonstration of grief (V. 1) was the gathering to him of a great congregation *out of Israel*. After the decision to enter the covenant between God and all the people concerned, it was thought necessary to have a more complete representation of the nation. For that purpose a proclamation was made that *all the children of the captivity* should come to Jerusalem.

Verse 8. This is another instance showing that a law must have a penalty in order to be effective. It would require some time for the people to

reach the city if they lived in the outer regions of Palestine; because of that, a period of 3 days was allowed. The penalty for defaulting was the loss of property, and being expelled from the congregation of those who had been victims of the captivity.

Verse 9. Two tribes only are mentioned by name, but that is not because that none of the other tribes were among them. We have abundant evidence (too much to cite now), to the effect that all of the tribes survived the captivity and returned to their home country. But Judah and Benjamin had been last in charge of Jerusalem, and it was natural that they would be especially in evidence at a time like this. It was in the 9th month, which made it 4 months since Ezra and his company arrived in Jerusalem (Ch. 7: 9). It was a time of rain, yet the great assemblage from all over Israel sat down in the street before the temple. They were in a state of uneasiness over the awful proclamation that had been given them by the couriers sent out by Ezra.

Verse 10. *Ezra the priest*. The reader has doubtless noticed that Ezra has been generally referred to in the third person. That might raise the question whether he could be the author of this book. That would not affect the question in the least. Moses is almost always referred to in the first five books of the Bible in the third person, even in the place where he is said to have been meeker than all other men in the earth (Num. 12: 3), yet we know he was the author of that writing. An inspired author would be writing of himself in the same sense that he would use if writing about another. We can therefore be sure that Ezra was the author of the book that bears his name. When he was ready to speak to the greater group that had come in answer to the proclamation, he informed them of the evil of which they were guilty. In marrying strange (outside) wives, they had increased the trespass of Israel. That showed that their marriage irregularities were not the only evils they had done.

Verse 11. Ezra demanded a confession of wrong from the people. But confession of sins only will not be sufficient. All wrongs that one commits must be corrected as far as possible, in order to obtain the forgiveness of God. Accordingly, Ezra called upon the guilty to separate themselves from the foreign people of the land.

Verse 12. A positive and unanimous response was made to Ezra's demand; all agreed to do as he had asked.

Verse 13. The request for more time is often an indication of indifference, or a means of evading an unpleasant task. I am sure the opposite was the case with these people. The magnitude of the work necessary to be done, and its importance in the light of the law violated, justified the request for plenty of time. Another thing, the inclemency of the weather was mentioned. That was not just because of the unpleasantness of the situation, for they had shown already that such would not keep them from doing what they believed to be their duty. They had come from the far borders of the country and sat in the street while the rain was coming down upon them, showing something of their courage. But the activities connected with sorting out the foreign wives, making sure that no lawful ones were imposed upon, yet being careful to get all of the others—all this would require time and would be hindered by the weather.

Verse 14. It showed wisdom to suggest some systematic method for handling the great work. And it is noteworthy that they did not expect the officers to "run down" the offenders to force them to comply with their duty. They proposed to have the chief officers of the congregation remain in the capital while the people came to them for the transaction. Since there were so many people concerned, it was suggested that *appointed times* be understood for the several cities. When each one's time came he was to appear before these rulers, accompanied by the proper officials of his city, and then perform whatever ceremonies would be required by those having charge. By having the elders and judges present they would be sure of attending to the matter in a lawful manner; also would have witnesses for it. The motive for this revolutionary movement was to turn away the fierce wrath of God.

Verse 15. Two priests, Jonathan and Jahaziah, were appointed to have charge of the work. Two other men of the tribe of Levi were given to them as helpers; they were Meshullam and Shabbethai.

Verse 16. *Children of the captivity* were the ones who had been exiles, but had come back to Palestine in the days of Cyrus. They were the ones who had taken the unlawful wives

after coming from Babylon. They had agreed to correct the situation by putting away the strange wives. The priests mentioned in verse 15 took active charge of the ceremonies, but the transaction needed to be "checked" by other and superior men. For this work Ezra took some chief fathers and sat down to the task of reviewing the work that had been done. They began their work the 1st day of the 10th month. It had been started about the 20th of the 9th month (V. 9), which means that Jonathan and his helpers got a 10-day start ahead of Ezra's review work.

Verse 17. *First day of the first month* means, of the next year following the arrival in Jerusalem; so that we see the work of Ezra in examining the work of Jonathan required two months. All of this shows that care was taken in this serious business, so that the national personnel would again be pure.

Verse 18. As a rule, what is wrong for one man is wrong for another. A thing may be a greater wrong in one man, though, than in another, from the standpoint of his influence. For instance, a priest was more prominent in his position with the congregation, hence a wrong committed by him would be more outstanding. This is the reason this verse names certain men in the priestly group who had taken strange wives. The priests were expected to teach the people the law (Lev. 10: 11; Deut. 17: 9; Mal. 2: 7), therefore their sin was the less excusable.

Verse 19. The priests *gave their hands* which is a phrase that means they made a solemn promise to correct their wrongs. That was done first by putting away their strange wives; but that did not clear them before God. The law of Moses made provision that certain sacrifices should be offered to atone for sins called trespass. (Lev. 6: 6.) This service was performed by these men because they were *guilty*.

Verses 20-22. This paragraph is a continuation of the thoughts in verse 19. The same remarks would apply to these priests that were made at the preceding verse. But after having named a few of the priests and describing their actions regarding the strange wives, the inspired writer considered that to be a precedent for other like cases, hence the list making up this paragraph with nothing specified but their names.

Verse 23. All priests were Levites,

but not all Levites were priests. The preceding paragraphs listed the names of some Levites who were priests. The men named in this were Levites but not priests. It would be taken for granted they would follow the example of other Levites in the disposal of their wives, and in other duties.

Verse 24. David had formulated a group of Israelites whose special part of the services was the singing. In 1 Chr. 6: 31 a reference is made to certain men whom he had set over the service of song in the house of the Lord. Their exercises were accompanied with instrumental music generally. Among the units connected with this service were the *sons of Asaph* (1 Chr. 25: 1), and the classification of singers finally became very distinct. The fact accounts for their being specifically mentioned in the list of men we are now considering. The *porters* composed another special group of servants about the buildings of the Lord. Their work was equivalent to gatekeepers or janitors. They were somewhat prominent and thus became entitled to special mention in the account of the irregular marriages.

Verses 25-43. This long list of names has been grouped into one paragraph because nothing peculiar to any one of them is said. The list starts with the words of *Israel*. That means that after the mention of the special classes included in the preceding verses, all the rest to be named as being guilty were Israelites in general.

Verse 44. One statement was made that was common to all of this long list; they had taken strange wives. The specification for some of them was that they had children by these wives. That, in fact, was one of the main objections to these unlawful marriages. God had promised to Abraham that he should have a numerous race of descendants, through whom a seed would be given to the world for a universal blessing. Also, these descendants were to compose a nation that was to possess the land to which he was being led. In order to accomplish the two promises to the patriarch, it was necessary to keep the blood line pure, unmixed with that of outside races. That is the special reason it was forbidden to beget children by wives of an alien nation.

## NEHEMIAH 1

Verse 1. Make the following notation in the 6th column of the chart: "20th