

Ezra

Prologue I:

The Return to Israel and the Foundation of the Temple

c. 538 B. C.

1.¹

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom (and also put it in writing) saying:

[1:1]

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of Yahweh, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”

[1:2-4]

2.

Then the heads of fathers’ households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem. All those about them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering.

[1:5-6]

3.

Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods; and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Now this was their number:

“30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 duplicates; 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second kind and 1,000 other articles. All the articles of gold and silver numbered 5,400.”

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Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

[1:7-11]

4.

Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city. These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah.

[2:1-2]

[See Appendix I: Ezra 2 Returning Exile Spreadsheet, for a table of 2:3-69]

Now the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

[2:70]

5.

Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. (So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, burnt offerings morning and evening--they celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required; and afterward there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of Yahweh that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to Yahweh—from the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh, but the foundation of the temple of Yahweh had not been laid.) **Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.**

[3:1-7]

6.

Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of Yahweh. Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons—[that is, the sons of Hodaviah]—and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

[3:8-9]

7.

Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of Yahweh, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise Yahweh according to the directions of King David of Israel. They sang, praising and giving thanks to Yahweh, saying, “For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Yahweh because the foundation of the house of Yahweh was laid.

[3:10-11]

8.

Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

[3:12-13]

9.

Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to Yahweh God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers’ households, and said to them, “Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.”

[4:1-2]

10.

But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers’ households of Israel said to them, “You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to Yahweh God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us.”

[4:3-4]

11.

Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

[4:5]

Excursus: Possibly from an Excerpt of a Letter from Nehemiah to King Artaxerxes on the Samaritan Oppression of Israel²

12.

Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

[4:6]

13.

And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic.

[4:7]

14.³

Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows—

“Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations which the great and honorable Osnappar deported and settled in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the region beyond the River.”

(Now this is the copy of the letter which they sent to him:)

“To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king’s dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was

² This section jumps forward in time to the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) and Artaxerxes. As such, it has been set off in italics.

³ This section begins the portion of Ezra written in Aramaic, which will continue until 6:18. It has been set off with a new font (Philosopher). This section is also still in italics.

laid waste. We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in the province beyond the River.”

[4:8-16]

15.

Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of the provinces beyond the River:

“Peace. And now the document which you sent to us has been translated and read before me. A decree has been issued by me, and a search has been made and it has been discovered that [while] that city has risen up against the kings in past days, [and while] rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it, [it is also the case] that mighty [foreign] kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all the provinces beyond the River, and that tribute, custom and toll were paid to them. So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me. Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings?”

[4:17-22]

16.

Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes’ document was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by force of arms.

[4:23]

Prologue Continued: The Rebuilding of the Temple

c. 522 B. C.

17.4

Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

[4:24]

18.

When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

[5:1-2]

⁴ This section is still in Aramaic but returns to the original timeline.

19.

At that time Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?"

[5:3]

20.

Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who were reconstructing this building. But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it.

[5:4-5]

21.

This is the copy of the letter which Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues the officials, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king. They sent a report to him in which it was written thus:

"To Darius the king, all peace.

Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands.

Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, 'Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?' We also asked them their names so as to inform you, and that we might write down the names of the men who were at their head.

Thus they answered us, saying, 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.

However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and brought them to the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor.

He said to him, "Take these utensils, go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and let the house of God be rebuilt in its place."

Then that Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed.'

Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this matter."

[5:6-17]

22.

Then King Darius issued a decree, and search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. In Ecbatana in the fortress, which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found and there was written in it as follows:

"Memorandum— In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus the king issued a decree:

Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered, be rebuilt and let its foundations be retained, its height being 60 cubits and its width 60 cubits; with three layers of huge stones and one layer of timbers. And let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. Also let the gold and silver utensils of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be returned and brought to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; and you shall put them in the house of God.

Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and your colleagues, the officials of the provinces beyond the River, keep away from there. Leave this work on the house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site.

Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the River, and that without delay. Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, it is to be given to them daily without fail, that they may offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

And I issued a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house and he shall be impaled on it and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this.

May the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change it, so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued this decree, let it be carried out with all diligence!"

[6:1-12]

23.

Then Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues carried out the decree with all diligence, just as King Darius had sent. And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

[6:13-15]

24.

And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

[6:16-18]

25.⁵

The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves. The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek Yahweh God of Israel, ate the Passover. And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for Yahweh had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

[6:19-22]

⁵ This section resumes the Hebrew text of Ezra.