

# CONTENTS

Preface	5
Ezra: Historical Background	9
Part One: The First Return Under Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1-6)	17
Part Two: The Second Return Under Ezra (Ezra 7-10)	48
Nehemiah: Historical Background	67
Part One: The Restoration of the City Walls (Nehemiah 1-7)	72
Part Two: The Reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8-13)	99
Appendix: Historical Survey of the Restoration Period	123
Selected Bibliography	131

# PART ONE

## THE FIRST RETURN UNDER SHESHBAZZAR

(EZRA 1-6)

The Babylonian exile was a direct result of Israel's disobedience to the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 20:3—23:33).<sup>1</sup> At Mt. Sinai God set before His people Israel two possible paths of life—the way of obedience leading to life and prosperity, or the way of disobedience resulting in death and adversity (Deut. 30:15-20). He promised the blessings of agricultural prosperity, national security, and military victory for those who obeyed the stipulations of the covenant (Lev. 26:3-13). On the other hand, God warned His people about the curses of military defeat, agricultural disaster, and severe famine should they choose the course of disobedience (Lev. 26:14-39).

The ultimate judgment on Israel's disobedience to the stipulations of the covenant was to be exile from the Promised Land and dispersion among the foreign nations. The Lord said, "But if you do not obey Me . . . I will scatter [you] among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste" (Lev. 26:14, 33). The penalties of disobedience, which had been spelled out so clearly, were realized among the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom when Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. A century later God began to raise up the Babylonians to serve as His instrument of judgment on the Southern

<sup>1</sup>For an extremely helpful discussion of the Mosaic Covenant, see Cleon L. Rogers, "The Covenant with Moses and Its Historical Setting," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (Summer 1971): 141-55.

Kingdom of Judah (Hab. 1:6). The Judeans were taken into exile in the years 605 B.C. (Dan. 1:1-3), 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:10-16), and 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1-12).

But the God of righteous wrath is also the God of loving grace, and with the promise of judgment for disobedience came the offer of restoration on the basis of repentance and confession (Lev. 26:40-45). Even while His people were in exile God promised to remember His covenant with the patriarchs and restore the Israelites to their land (see Lev. 26:45; Deut. 30:1-5). The prophet Jeremiah promised that God would bring His people back to their homeland after seventy years of captivity (Jer. 29:10). The first restoration, led by Sheshbazzar, marks the fulfillment of God's Word through the prophet. Israel's return to the land is a tremendous testimony to God's faithfulness and grace.

#### I. THE RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON (1-2)

Ezra 1-2 records the first return of the Jews from Babylon under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, whom Cyrus had appointed in 537 B.C. to govern Judah. The specific purpose of the return as set forth in Cyrus's decree was to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and to restore Yahweh worship. Receiving from Cyrus the holy vessels that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had looted from the Temple, Sheshbazzar and a group of approximately forty thousand Jewish exiles returned to Judah.

Over a century before the exile even took place, Isaiah the prophet declared that Yahweh would raise up an anointed deliverer who would serve as His instrument for liberating the Jews and initiating the restoration of the Temple. Isaiah prophesied that God would call this deliverer from the east and give him victory over the nations (Isa. 41:2). Although not a believer in Yahweh as the only true God (Isa. 45:4-5), his way would be prospered by the Lord and he would let the exiles go free (Isa. 45:13). He would perform God's desire in connection with rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring the Temple (Isa. 44:28). Isaiah went so far as to identify the deliverer

as “Cyrus” nearly two hundred years before his appearance on the political scene of the Ancient Near East (Isa. 44:28; 45:1)!

With the hand of Yahweh upon him, it is little wonder that Cyrus founded the largest empire the ancient Near East had ever seen. In 559 B.C. Cyrus inherited the throne of Anshan, a small state near the Persian Gulf. After unifying the Persian people, he attacked the weak and corrupt Astyages, king of Media. The army deserted Astyages for Cyrus, and the Persians were able to take the capital city of Ecbatana (Achmetha) in 550 B.C. without a battle. Cyrus then welded the Medes and Persians into a unified nation—Medo-Persia. Four years after the capture of Ecbatana, Cyrus defeated Croesus, king of Lydia, and captured his capital at Sardis (546 B.C.). The Babylonian Empire was in a weakened state and thus in no condition to resist Cyrus. According to the account of Herodotus, the fifth-century B.C. Greek historian, Cyrus and his soldiers managed to divert the waters of the Euphrates, which ran through the city of Babylon.<sup>2</sup> The Persians then entered the city under the wall through the river bed and captured Babylon without a battle on October 12, 539 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

Cyrus desired to win over the people of his great kingdom. To accomplish that he showed restraint toward those he conquered and those who had been forcibly removed from their homelands by previous rulers. In effect, Cyrus reversed the repressive policies of the Assyrians and Babylonians. He allowed exiles to return to their homelands and permitted subject peoples to enjoy some degree of local autonomy, particularly in religious affairs. Cyrus himself writes: “ I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent

<sup>2</sup>Herodotus I. 190-91.

<sup>3</sup>Cyrus's brief account of the capture of Babylon is inscribed on a clay cylinder. See James B. Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton: Princeton U., 1958), pp. 206-8.

sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their habitations.”<sup>4</sup>

Under this lenient policy of political and religious tolerance, Cyrus decreed the return of the Jews to Jerusalem in the first official year of his rule.

#### A. THE EDICT OF CYRUS (1:1-4)

One of the first official acts of Cyrus after the capture of Babylon in 539 B.C. was to decree the release of the Jewish exiles. The “first year of Cyrus” (1:1) should be identified as his first regnal year, beginning in Nisan 538 B.C., rather than his accession year as ruler of conquered Babylon (539 B.C.).<sup>5</sup> It is from this point that the author Ezra dates the reign of Cyrus, since only then did he begin to exercise sovereignty over Palestine. Ezra views the decree as divinely intended to fulfill Jeremiah’s prophecy of restoration after a seventy-year captivity (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). He observes that Yahweh “stirred up” Cyrus to act even as Isaiah had prophesied (Isa. 41:25; 45:13). Ezra notes that the release of the captive Jews was proclaimed publicly as well as recorded in writing. The existence of a written record of the edict sets the stage for the events of chapters 5 and 6.

The book of Ezra contains two ordinances of Cyrus—one in Hebrew (1:2-4) and one in Aramaic, the official diplomatic language of that day (6:3-5). The ordinance of Ezra 1:2-4 was a royal proclamation addressed to the Jews and published by heralds throughout the kingdom in many languages, including Hebrew. The ordinance of Ezra 6:3-5 is an official memorandum of the edict addressed directly to the royal treasurer and was not made public at the time.<sup>6</sup> This document was stored in Ecbatana, a fortress city and summer residence of the Persian kings.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>5</sup>Edwin M. Yamauchi, “The Archaeological Background of Ezra,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (July-September 1980): 201.

<sup>6</sup>E. J. Bickerman, “The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra I,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65 (1946): 249-51.

In verse 2 Cyrus acknowledges Yahweh as the God of heaven, but there is no indication that he recognized Yahweh as the *only* true God. As a polytheist, Cyrus acknowledged many gods. He could worship the god Sin at Ur, Marduk in Babylon, and Yahweh in Jerusalem. On the Cyrus Cylinder the king attributes his victory over Babylon to Marduk, and expresses the hope that the people he has resettled in their homelands will beseech the gods Bel and Nebo in his behalf! Cyrus wanted the blessing of Yahweh on his kingdom and sought His favor by decreeing the rebuilding of His Temple in Jerusalem. Lest there be any question regarding his spiritual status, Isaiah indicates clearly that Cyrus did not “know” Yahweh as a true believer would (Isa. 45:4-5).

The edict of Cyrus provided both a labor force (1:3) and financing to rebuild the Temple (1:4). According to Josephus, Cyrus had read the prophecy of Isaiah 44:28, which names him in connection with the rebuilding of the Temple. Josephus suggests that Cyrus was “seized by a strong desire and ambition to do what had been written.”<sup>7</sup> The reference to “every survivor” calls to mind Isaiah’s prophecy that a remnant of Jews would survive the captivity and return to the land (Isa. 10:20-21). In addition to the voluntary gifts provided by the neighbors of those who decided to return, the official memorandum to the treasurer (6:4-5) allowed for the cost of rebuilding the Temple to be paid out of the royal treasury!

#### B. THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE (1:5-6)

As God stirred up Cyrus (1:1), so He “stirred up” a remnant of the Jewish people in Babylon into action. Some of the people responded by *going* (1:5), while others responded by *giving* (1:6) of their material resources to help finance the trip. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are named, since, generally speaking, the exiles in Babylon were from the Southern Kingdom and members of those tribes. The

<sup>7</sup>Josephus *Antiquities* XI. 5-6.

relationship between “the priests and the Levites” (1:5) is a thorny problem for students of the Old Testament. Essentially, the Levites (descendants of Levi’s tribe) ministered to the priests (descendants of Aaron, a Levite) in the outward elements of the worship services (Num. 1:50; 3:6). The priests performed the ceremonial exercises of the worship itself. All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

In addition to providing the pilgrims with gold, silver, household goods, and cattle, many of the Jews in Babylon participated in a freewill offering for the Temple. It is interesting that most of the exiles decided to remain in Babylonia, where they were well settled and enjoying a good life (see Jer. 29:4-7). Josephus mentions that many Jews did not want to leave Babylon on account of their possessions.<sup>8</sup>

C. THE RETURN OF THE TEMPLE VESSELS (1:7-11)

Although not mentioned in the royal proclamation recorded in Ezra 1:2-4, the official memorandum (6:5) provided for the return of the Temple vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the Temple in 605, 597, and 586 B.C. (Dan. 1:1; 2 Chron. 36:7, 18). It was the custom of ancient warriors to take their idols into battle so that their gods could grant them victory (2 Sam. 5:21; 1 Chron. 14:12). A conqueror would capture the gods of his vanquished enemy and place the idols in his own sanctuary. But since the Jews had no images of Yahweh (Exod. 20:4-6), the Temple vessels were taken by the victorious Babylonians as a substitute. Cyrus had his royal treasurer count the vessels out before Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed to govern Judah. The treasurer’s Persian name, “Mithredath,” honors Mithras the sun god and means “Mithras has given.”<sup>9</sup>

The name *Sheshbazzar* confronts students of Scripture with something of an identity crisis. Who was Sheshbazzar? His

<sup>8</sup>Josephus *Antiquities* XI. 8

<sup>9</sup>Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1979), p. 34.

name may be connected with “Shamash,” the Babylonian sun god. He is identified as “the prince of Judah” (1:8), but the word *prince* may be too specific a translation, for the Hebrew word *nasi* simply refers to one who is “lifted up” as is used to denote various leaders of Israel. The translation “leader” or “chief” would serve well in this context.

There are three main views as to the identity of Sheshbazzar and his relationship with Zerubbabel. Some expositors argue that Sheshbazzar is simply another name for Zerubbabel. Daniel is cited as an example of a Hebrew who had two names (Dan. 1:7). In support of this view is the fact that Zerubbabel is said to have laid the foundation of the Temple (Ezra 3:8; 5:2; Zech. 4:9), but in an official letter to Darius, Sheshbazzar is said to have done this (Ezra 5:16). It is then concluded that the two must be the same person. But couldn’t both men have participated in this project? Others have suggested that Sheshbazzar may have been the officially appointed leader (Ezra 5:14), whereas Zerubbabel rose up as a popular but unofficial leader at the time of the first return. However, First Esdras 6:18 states that the Temple vessels being returned to Jerusalem were entrusted to Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel as separate individuals. The view that most satisfactorily corresponds with the biblical record is that Sheshbazzar was appointed by Cyrus (1:8; 5:14), but may have died soon after the return in 537 B.C. Zerubbabel, who was probably Sheshbazzar’s nephew (1 Chron. 3:17-19),<sup>10</sup> was then elevated to the position vacated by his uncle and received the title “governor of Judah” (Hag. 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21). In favor of this view is the fact that although both men have been associated with laying the foundation of the Temple in 536 B.C. (Ezra 5:16; Zech. 4:9), only Zerubbabel is associated with completing the project two decades later (Hag. 1:1, 12; Zech. 4:9).

The total number of articles of gold and silver that were brought back to Jerusalem by the exiles is 5,400 (1:11). Unfortunately, this figure does not correspond with the subtotals

<sup>10</sup>This suggestion is based on the assumption that the “Shenazzar” of 2 Chron. 3:18 is a variation of the name “Sheshbazzar.”



provided in Ezra 1:10-11, which add up to 2,499. Although it is possible that the numbers were miscopied by a scribe, nothing in the Hebrew text would point to this conclusion. More likely, only the larger or more important vessels were enumerated in verses 10 and 11 (amounting to 2,499 objects), whereas a total of 5,400 Temple vessels were returned to Jerusalem.

D. THE REGISTER OF RETURNING EXILES (2:1-70)

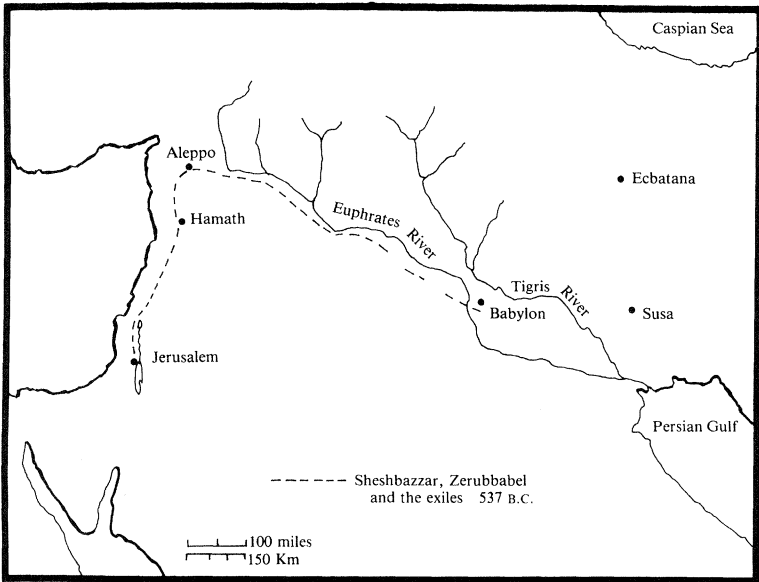
Ezra 2 contains an orderly, group-by-group register of the exiles who returned to Judah under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. It is not a list of individuals (with the exception of 2:2), but a list of families (lay, priestly, and levitical) and towns with their inhabitants. The same list with some variation in names and numbers appears in Nehemiah 7:6-73. The differences between the two lists may be due to scribal errors or technical difficulties in the transmission of numbers. It has been suggested that Cyrus's edict applied only to Jews, and that the list served to establish the rights of those who desired to avail themselves of the king's permission to return. However, the list includes individuals who were unable to prove their Jewish ancestry (2:59-60). It is more likely that the list was compiled simply as a historical record of a memorable and significant event—the return and resettlement of the exiles of Judah.

1. *The leaders* (2:1-2a). The leaders of the people head the list of those who returned to Judah and Jerusalem. The returnees are designated “the people of the province” (2:1). It is debated whether “the province” in Ezra 2:1 and Nehemiah 7:6 refers to the province *from* which the exiles returned, Babylonia,<sup>11</sup> or the province *to* which they returned, Judah.<sup>12</sup> The context of 2:1 and the fact that Judah had its own gover-

<sup>11</sup>F. C. Fensham, “*Medina* in Ezra and Nehemiah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (October 1975): 795-97.

<sup>12</sup>Kidner, p. 37.

**THE RETURN UNDER SHESHBAZZAR**  
(Ezra 1-6)



nor (5:14) would suggest the latter view. *Zerubbabel*, a grandson of Jehoiakim and nephew of Sheshbazzar (1 Chron. 3:17-19) was a natural candidate to assume a position of leadership in the return. *Jeshua* the high priest (Zech. 3:1) provided leadership for the reestablishment of the Temple institutions. The *Nehemiah* referred to here is not Nehemiah the wall builder who returned to Jerusalem in 444 B.C. Nor is this *Mordecai* the cousin of Esther (Esther 2:5). Differences in time and place would rule out such identifications.

2. *The lay people* (2:2b-35). There were two ways an individual's relationship to the people of Israel could be certified—by presenting genealogical records of his recognized family, or by identifying himself as a former resident or property owner in a particular city of Judah. Ezra 2:2b-20 records those exiles who could identify themselves with a known Jewish ancestor. Ezra 2:21-35 records those exiles who could identify themselves with a certain city, either as a former resident or an heir to property there. The name "Gibbar" in 2:20 is identified as "Gibeon" in Nehemiah 7:25. Although the names agree substantially with the list in Nehemiah 7:7-66, half the numbers disagree—a stark testimony to the difficulty involved in transmitting and translating Hebrew numbers. It is possible that the numbers were originally written with signs or letters of the alphabet that were later misunderstood. It has also been suggested that since the numbers of Nehemiah's list are generally larger, the original figures may have in some cases been estimates, which were later revised.<sup>13</sup>

3. *The priests* (2:36-39). Only four of the twenty-four priestly families organized by David (1 Chron. 24:7-18) were represented among the Jews who returned to Jerusalem. However, the 4,289 priests could have managed well the ceremonial exercises of sacrifice and worship at the new Temple. The name "Pashur" (2:38) is not found in 1 Chronicles

<sup>13</sup>John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), p. 33.

24, but is probably to be identified with a descendant of the Malchijah group (see 1 Chron. 9:12; 24:9).

4. *The Levites (2:40-42)*. Only 341 Levites returned to assist the priests in the outward elements of the worship services. A similar reluctance to leave Babylonia was evidenced by the Levites at the time of Ezra's return (Ezra 8:15).

5. *The Temple servants (2:43-54)*. According to Ezra 8:20 this order of Temple workers was founded by David. They were designated *Nethinim* ("given," i.e., dedicated to God) and served as assistants to the Levites.

6. *The descendants of Solomon's servants (2:55-58)*. This group is closely linked with the previous one, for the single total in verse 58 serves both groups. They may have been descendants of prisoners of war captured by Solomon who were later dedicated to the Temple service (see Exod. 12:48; Num. 15:14-16).

7. *The exiles of obscure origin (2:59-60)*. Some who returned from Babylon could not establish their Jewish ancestry with certainty. Without family records they could not prove property ownership or ethnic purity. That, however, did not prevent them from participating in the return to Judah.

8. *The priests with unconfirmed claims (2:61-63)*. There were also those among the returned exiles who claimed to be priests but could not confirm their claims by genealogical records. In keeping with the warning of Numbers 16:40, "no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before the LORD," they were not allowed to exercise the official duties of the priesthood. In addition, Sheshbazzar the governor ruled that they should not eat from the holy offerings (Num. 18:9-10) until their status be finally decided. The means of determining God's will in the matter would be by the Urim and Thummim. These objects ("lights

and perfections”) were attached to the breastpiece of the high priest’s ephod (Exod. 28:15-30) and were used by the priests to determine God’s will when faced with two alternative courses of action (1 Sam. 23:9-12).

The total number of those who returned with Sheshbazzar apart from the servants and singers (2:65) is given as 42,360 both in Ezra 2:64 and Nehemiah 7:66. However, when the individual sums are added, the total amounts to 29,818 in Ezra and 31,089 in Nehemiah. Various explanations for the discrepancy between the totals have been offered. The approximately 10,000 “missing” exiles have been identified as members of the Northern Kingdom, women, or children. None of these solutions is suggested by the text. The root of the problem lies with the difficulty in the transmission and translation of Hebrew numbers. It may be best to leave the problem of the numbers in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 as an area inviting further research.

Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, the exiles went to the site of the former Temple. There, looking upon the ruins left by Nebuchadnezzar’s warriors, they gave of their financial resources to assure the rebuilding of the Temple. It is significant that they “offered willingly” and “according to their ability” (2:68-69). These principles of giving are commended in the New Testament by the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 8:3; 9:7). The people of Judah were back in the land as God had promised. Now they could begin the work of rebuilding the Temple.

## II. THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION INITIATED (3-4)

Soon after their return to the land of Judah, the Jews resumed sacrificial worship and began rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 3). But no sooner had the foundation of the Temple been laid than the Jews began to experience difficulties (Ezra 4). First, they were tempted to compromise their testimony by associating themselves with the pagan peoples of the land.

Then, active opposition to the Jews began and continued from 536 B.C. until the days of Artaxerxes (c. 446 B.C.).

#### A. THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION BEGUN (3)

The first and foremost priority upon returning to Judah was to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute sacrificial worship. Since the altar was the center of Jewish worship, it was the first thing to be rebuilt. It was in the seventh month—Tishri (October-September)—that the people of Israel gathered in Jerusalem, united (“as one man”) by their common desire to see the Temple rebuilt. The year was 537 B.C. Although the return had been decreed in Nisan 538 B.C., it would have been too late in that year to have organized and prepared for such a long journey. The exiles probably left Babylonia early in the spring of 537 B.C. and were settled in Judah by the fall of the same year.

Tishri was a very important month on the Jewish religious calendar. The Feast of Trumpets was celebrated on the first day of the month (3:6; Lev. 23:24-25); the Day of Atonement was observed on the tenth of the month (Lev. 23:27-32); and the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) was celebrated from the fifteenth through the twenty-first of Tishri (3:4; Lev. 23:34-44). What an appropriate season to reinstitute Jewish worship! Jeshua the high priest and Zerubbabel gave leadership to the rebuilding of the altar (3:2). This project was carried out in strict conformity to the law of Moses (see Deut. 12:4-14; Exod. 27:1-8; 38:1-7).

One motivating factor in the rebuilding of the altar was the returned exiles’ fear of the “peoples of the lands” (3:3). This reference probably includes the syncretistic Samaritans to the north (Ezra 4:1-2) and other non-Jewish people in the surrounding territories. The Jews recognized in their undefended state that the Lord, who would meet them at the altar, would be their greatest source of strength and protection (Exod. 29:43; Ps. 62:6-8).

Verse 3 mentions in summary fashion the reestablishment

of the morning and evening burnt offerings in accordance with Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:3-8. Verses 4-6 give the details and reveal that the renewal of sacrifice was in connection with the celebration of the feasts of the month Tishri. The Feast of Trumpets (3:6) on the first of Tishri marked the beginning of the civil year and reminded the people to prepare for the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement on the tenth of Tishri was the high point of Israel's religious year (Lev. 16), but is for some reason not mentioned here. The Feast of Tabernacles (3:4) on the fifteenth through the twenty-first of Tishri commemorates the wilderness wanderings and celebrates the last harvest of the year.

By the end of the month of Tishri, the altar had been rebuilt and sacrificial worship renewed, but the foundation of the Temple was yet to be laid (3:6*b*). This job called for experienced builders, so skilled masons (i.e., stoneworkers) and carpenters (i.e., woodworkers) were recruited (3:7). Cedar timbers from Lebanon were purchased from the Sidonians and the Tyrians. Because of their country's mountainous geographical situation, the Phoenicians were more successful in shipping and trade than in agriculture (see Acts 12:20), and were glad to exchange some of their natural resources for foodstuffs (1 Kings 5:11; 2 Chron. 2:10). As in the days of Solomon's Temple-building, the cedar was rafted by sea from Lebanon to the port city of Joppa, about thirty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 2:16).

It was not until 536 B.C., the year after the return to Judah, that the actual work on the foundation of the Temple began. Ezra mentions that it was in the second year (536 B.C.) and the second month (Iyyar, or April-May) that the work commenced (3:8). Careful planning and coordination were essential for such an undertaking, so supervisors and building inspectors were appointed. The Levites twenty years and older were appointed to oversee the work (3:8). They probably functioned something like building inspectors and were concerned with design and quality control. The reference to the age "twenty years" is interesting. According to the Mosaic

regulations, the Levites entered the ministry at age twenty-five and probably had a five-year training period before assuming their official duties (Num. 4:3; 8:24). However, an ordinance of David reduced the age to twenty (1 Chron. 23:24, 27). Perhaps because there were so few Levites who had returned to Judah (only 341), the Davidic ordinance was followed to allow for a few more Levites to participate in the Temple building. Not only were there overseers for the work (3:8), there were overseers for the workmen (3:9). The priestly families of Jeshua, Kadmiel, Hodaviah,<sup>14</sup> and Henadad supervised the workmen and probably functioned like job foremen or supervisors. They probably assigned tasks and coordinated the work force.

Ezra 3:10-13 records the response of the people when they gathered at the Temple site to praise God that the initial step toward the rebuilding of the Temple had been accomplished. The priests and Levites provided musical accompaniment for the songs of praise that ascended as an offering to the Lord from the lips of the people (see Heb. 13:15). Ezra recognized that the use of music in worship was in keeping with the "directions of King David" (3:10) who appointed singers and musicians from among the Levites (1 Chron. 6:31; 25:1-31).

Verse 11 is very instructive on the subject of praise. The word "praising" (*hallel*) refers to "boastful shouts for joy." The words "give thanks" (*hodoth*) refer to "giving public acknowledgment." The worshiping Hebrews were giving boastful shouts for joy and public acknowledgment concerning the person of God! The two attributes they emphasized were God's goodness and His lovingkindness. The word "lovingkindness" (*hesed*) is better translated "loyal-love" and speaks of the covenant loyalty God exercises in His dealings with His people (Ps. 136). Principles of praise to be gleaned from these verses include the following: (1) Praise is the act of publicly exalting God's person and work. (2) Praise

<sup>14</sup>The name "Judah" is probably a scribal error for Hodaviah. The names are quite similar in Hebrew, and the more familiar "Judah" could have easily slipped into the text. The reading "Hodaviah" would be in keeping with the names mentioned in Ezra 2:40 and Nehemiah 10:9-10.



can be enhanced through the use of music and songs. (3) Praise is a participating activity, not a spectator sport; it is worship people join in, not a program people watch. Praise involves God's people in singing and playing, boasting and testifying to the greatness and goodness of the Lord!

But mingled with those shouts of praise at the Temple site were also tears of sorrow (3:12). While the young rejoiced in what had been accomplished, those of an older generation who had seen the great Solomonic Temple in all its glory thought that the Restoration Temple was a less-than-adequate replacement. In comparison to the Temple founded by Solomon, the Restoration Temple "[seemed] like nothing" (Hag. 2:3). There is a real danger in comparing the past with the present. Such reflection often brings discouragement and regret. The world is a place of change. Things will never again be as they were in the past. The best policy of life is to follow Paul's example of "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13).

#### B. THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION OPPOSED (4:1-23)

It was not long before the returned exiles were confronted with hostility and opposition to their building program. No work of God will proceed unchallenged. Satan will always bring his worldly forces to bear against those who would seek to serve the Lord (John 15:18-25). Ezra 4 records how this Jewish opposition began in the time of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (536 B.C.) and continued until the days of Nehemiah (444 B.C.). Verses 6-23 record opposition in the reigns of Ahasuerus (486-464 B.C.) and Artaxerxes (464-424 B.C.). Although some have thought these verses to be "chronologically misplaced,"<sup>15</sup> it is more consistent with the context to see them as illustrating the fact that the opposition to the Temple rebuilding in 536 B.C. was not an isolated incident. It was simply characteristic of the opposition experienced by the Jews during the Restoration Period.

<sup>15</sup>John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 374.

1. *Opposition in the days of Cyrus* (4:1-5). The opposition hinted at in Ezra 3:3 becomes more explicit in 4:1-5. When the enemies of the returned exiles learned of the Temple rebuilding, they asked Zerubbabel and the leaders of the people for permission to join them in the project. The “enemies of Judah and Benjamin” (4:1) are identified in verse 2 as the foreigners whom Esar-haddon (681-669 B.C.), son of the infamous Sennacherib, resettled in Samaria after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. Second Kings 17:23-24 records, “So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day. And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon . . . and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel.” These foreigners brought their religion with them and continued to worship and serve idols (2 Kings 17:30-31). But in order to appease the god of the land in which they were living, they added Yahweh’s name to their list (2 Kings 17:32-33). The people of Samaria then became involved in the syncretistic worship of Yahweh and other gods, and this religious heritage was passed on from generation to generation (2 Kings 17:41). This historical background is crucial to one’s understanding of the Jewish-Samaritan controversy that forms the historical setting of many New Testament passages (e.g., John 4:1-42).

The decision of Zerubbabel and Jeshua was based on the biblical principle of separation from religious apostasy. Paul sets forth this principle in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 where he questions, “What has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” This does not mean that a believer must cease all associations with unbelievers, but rather that binding or contractual relationships with unbelievers should be avoided. Quite appropriately the leaders of the Restoration community responded, “You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God” (4:3).

The refusal to compromise may bring opposition, but that does not mean that a believer is out of God’s will. Quite often the opposite is true (2 Tim. 3:12). Angered by being excluded from the Temple building, the “people of the land” organized

a campaign of harassment to undermine the project. It has been argued that the “people of the land” are not Samaritans but rather “the common people” who are ignorant of the duties and observances of their religion.<sup>16</sup> However, the general reference, “people of the land,” is clarified in the context as “the enemies of Judah and Benjamin” (4:1) who were settled in Samaria by the Assyrians (4:3; cf. 2 Kings 17:24-33). The campaign of harassment included discouragement, threatenings (“frightened them”), and conspiracy through the use of false counselors (4:4-5). Such opposition to the work of rebuilding the Temple continued through the reign of Cyrus (559-530 B.C.), the reign of Cambyses (530-522 B.C.), and into the reign of Darius I (522-486 B.C.).

2. *Opposition in the days of Ahasuerus* (4:6). The first illustration of similar opposition to the Jews of the Restoration dates from the reign of Ahasuerus (Khshayarsha in Persian), better known by the Greek form of his name, Xerxes (486-464 B.C.). It was during the reign of Ahasuerus that Haman plotted the death and destruction of the Jewish people in Persia (Esther 3). Sometime during his reign, at least thirty years after the Temple was rebuilt, the adversaries mentioned in verses 1-5 sent a letter of accusation to the king. What resulted, if anything, is not recorded. But the reference serves to illustrate the fact that the opposition to the Temple rebuilding was not an isolated incident in the history of the Restoration.

3. *Opposition in the days of Artaxerxes* (4:7-23). The next example of opposition cited by Ezra occurred during the reign of Artaxerxes (464-424 B.C.). The date of this incident is not given in the text, but a comparison of Ezra 4:21-23 with Nehemiah 1:1-3 would suggest a date of around 446 B.C., several years before Artaxerxes’ decree of 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:1-8). The enemies of the people—probably Samaritans—en-

<sup>16</sup>R. J. Coggins, “Interpretation of Ezra IV:4,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (April 1965): 124-27.

listed two Persian officials, Rehum and Shimshai, to write a letter to Artaxerxes accusing the Jews in Jerusalem of plotting revolt.

The letter to Artaxerxes and its reply is written in Aramaic, the lingua franca (common language) of the Persian Empire. In fact, the whole of Ezra 4:8—6:18 is in Aramaic, and so too is 7:12-26. Some have suggested that this material was written at a different time and later incorporated into Ezra, but there is no textual basis for late dating this material. The author and readers were bilingual and would have had no problem with switching to the recognized language of the Persian Empire to record this official correspondence. It has been suggested that the short connecting passages were written in Aramaic to avoid too many transitions from one language to another.<sup>17</sup>

The letter itself was written by Rehum and Shimshai in association with a number of judges, governors, and officials recognized by the Persian government. The name “Osnappar” (4:10) is an Aramaized form of Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king who ruled from 669-626 B.C.<sup>18</sup> There was apparently a succession of deportations from the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:6; Ezra 4:2). The phrase “beyond the River” (4:16) refers to the region west of the Euphrates River and includes Syria and Palestine.

The letter of accusation (4:11-16) was designed to thwart the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the returned exiles. The “Jews who came up from you” (4:12) would be the exiles who returned with Ezra in 458 B.C. They were engaged in an effort to rebuild the walls and repair the foundations of Jerusalem. Quite likely they were operating under the generous provision of the 458 B.C. decree of Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 7:21. A threefold argument is set forth to convince the king that the rebuilding of Jerusalem would not be in his best interests. *First*, if the walls were rebuilt, the people would stop paying

<sup>17</sup>Kidner, p. 136.

<sup>18</sup>A. R. Millard, “Assyrian Royal Names in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 21 (1976): 11.

tribute, and Artaxerxes would suffer financially (4:13). *Second*, to be deprived of revenue from Jerusalem would impair the king's honor (4:14). *Third*, since Jerusalem had a history of rebellion and revolt, to allow the city to be rebuilt would be to encourage insurrection that might spread through the province and result in a loss of territory for Persia (4:15-16).

In his official reply to Rehum, Shimshai, and their associates (4:17-22), Artaxerxes confirmed that Jerusalem was indeed a city with a history of rebellion (4:19) and that it was once the capital of a mighty empire (4:20). In order to protect his interests, Artaxerxes ruled that work on the city should cease immediately *until* he should issue a decree authorizing such rebuilding. The little word "until" is crucial. The decree came several years later at the request of Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1-8).

When Artaxerxes' letter was received by Rehem and Shimshai, they took immediate steps to halt the construction project. The Samaritans hurried to Jerusalem and stopped the work "by force of arms" (4:23). Evidently they even destroyed the wall and gates of the city. It was the news of this disaster that stirred Nehemiah to prayer regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh. 1:1-3).

#### C. THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION HALTED (4:24)

The parenthesis concerning the history of opposition experienced by the Restoration community has been completed (4:6-23). With the word "then," Ezra picks up the historical narrative of 4:1-5. As a result of the discouragement, threatenings, and conspiracy of the Samaritans, work on the Temple ceased (4:24). The year was 536 B.C., and only the foundation of the Temple had been laid. Not until the second year of Darius I (522-486 B.C.), a full sixteen years later, did work on the Temple resume.

#### III. THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED (5-6)

From 536 to 520 B.C. the work of rebuilding the Temple stagnated. Overcome by the continual threats and subsequent

military intervention by the Samaritans to the north, the returned exiles stopped working on the Temple and took up less dangerous pursuits. They began working on their own houses. Apparently many were remodeled and paneled with fine wood (Hag. 1:4). Now, there is nothing wrong with having a beautiful home—except when it causes one to neglect one's spiritual priorities. Good things, you see, can often crowd out the *best*. This was the case in the time of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. These two men of God were providentially used to rebuke the Restoration community for their selfish neglect of the Temple of God. Haggai explained to the people that their failure to focus on spiritual priorities was resulting in crop failure, drought, and the threat of famine (Hag. 1:9-11). Fortunately for them, the people of the Restoration responded well to the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, and work on the Temple resumed (5:1—6:12). The building was completed in 515 B.C. (6:13-22). Now God could pour out His blessing upon His people (Hag. 2:19).

#### A. THE CONSTRUCTION RESUMED (5)

The work on the Temple resumed in the second year of Darius (520 B.C.) under the prophetic ministry of the post-exilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai, whose name means "festal" or "my feast," was probably born in Babylon and returned to Judah with the first contingent of Jews under Sheshbazzar in 537 B.C. His book contains four precisely dated messages, which were delivered within a period of about four months in 520 B.C. Zechariah, whose name means "Yahweh remembers," was the grandson of Iddo, one of the heads of the priestly families that returned to Judah after the exile (Neh. 12:4, 16). His father, Berechiah, apparently died before assuming the priesthood (Zech. 1:1). Zechariah commenced his prophetic ministry two months after Haggai concluded his first oracle (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1). Jesus apparently refers to this prophet's martyrdom on the Temple grounds in Matthew 23:35.

A prophet is essentially a spokesman for God.<sup>19</sup> In the biblical period a prophet would address the people of Israel as a representative of the Lord. Thus Haggai and Zechariah prophesied “in the name of the God of Israel (5:1). They spoke God’s words to God’s people. Haggai’s first message is recorded in Haggai 1:2-11. The theme of his message was, “Rise up and rebuild the Temple!” He records that in response to his preaching the people “obeyed the voice of the LORD their God . . . and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.” (Hag. 1:12-14). Ezra reports that Zerubbabel and Jeshua gave their leadership to the renewed efforts to rebuild the Temple. It is significant that the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah did not cease with one sermon. They continued in a supportive role (“supporting them”), encouraging the people with prophetic messages (5:2). Haggai’s recorded messages were delivered in 520 B.C.; Zechariah’s last dated prophecy was given in 518 B.C. (Zech. 7:1).

It was not long after the Jews resumed building that the work was again opposed. This time the opposition was led by Tattenai, the Persian governor of the province “beyond the River.” His name appears as “Ta-at-tan-ni” in Babylonian records dated 502 B.C.<sup>20</sup> The whole region of Syria and Palestine—including Judah—would have fallen under his jurisdiction. “Shethar-bozenai” may have been his assistant or secretary. These men and some other Persian officials issued a challenge, “Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?” (5:3). The historical situation in Persia at this time suggests that they had good cause for suspicion. The Persian Empire was in a bit of an upheaval. The first two years of Darius’s rule were characterized by rebellion and trouble. When Cyrus died in 530 B.C., his son Cambyses had to deal with several attempts

<sup>19</sup>J. Carl Laney, “The Role of the Prophet in God’s Case Against Israel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (October-December 1981): 313-25.

<sup>20</sup>A. T. Olmstead, “Tattenai, Governor of ‘Across the River,’” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3 (1944): 46.

to take over his throne. In his efforts to solidify the Persian Empire under his rule, he had his brother, Smerdis, slain. Then a nobleman in Egypt, Gaumata by name, proclaimed himself the true Smerdis and revolted. The people of the empire then abandoned Cambyses and gave their allegiance to the pretender. When Cambyses took his own life in 522 B.C., the Persian army gave their support to a distant cousin of Cambyses, Darius Hystaspes. After overthrowing Gaumata and his allies, Darius dealt with other claimants for the throne and put down rebellion in Parsa, Media, Elam, Assyria, Egypt, Armenia, Parthia, and Babylon. Thus all of Persia was eventually secured under his rule.<sup>21</sup>

So when Tattenai learned of the rebuilding going on in Jerusalem and saw that the Temple was “being built with huge stones” (5:8), perhaps he suspected the Jews of constructing a fortress! He took the names of the builders in order to give a full report to Darius (5:4). While they were waiting for a reply from the king, the builders continued their work. Reflecting on the incident, Ezra reports that “the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews” (5:5). In other words, the leaders of the people never ceased to be under Yahweh’s watchful, protective care. Similar imagery is found in Deuteronomy 11:12 and Psalm 33:18.

A copy of Tattenai’s letter to Darius is found in Ezra 5:7-17. Tattenai first reported on the building activities of the Jews (5:7-8). He reported that the people of Judah were actively and successfully engaged in rebuilding the Temple of God (5:8). The phrase “huge stones” literally reads “stones of rolling,” that is, stones too big to be carried. They had to be moved on wooden rollers. The “beams . . . being laid in the walls” probably functioned as joists to support the floors and ceilings.

Tattenai then inquired of Darius concerning the decree of Cyrus, which the Jews cited as their authorization to rebuild (5:9-17). Ezra 5:13-15 gives the essence of the decree, which is

<sup>21</sup>A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1948), pp. 107-16.



recorded in Ezra 1:2-4. The identity of "Sheshbazzar," whom Cyrus appointed governor of Judah (5:14), is a question that was treated in connection with the comments on Ezra 1:8. Sheshbazzar is said to have laid the foundation of the Temple (5:16). Since his name is associated only with the laying of the foundation, he probably died before the job was completed, and the responsibility for the project then passed to Zerubbabel (Hag. 1:1, 12; Zech. 4:9). According to Tattenai's letter (5:16), the Temple was under construction from "then" (536 B.C.) until "now" (520 B.C.). This statement does not preclude the interruption of the work. There may have been sporadic attempts between 536 and 520 B.C. to continue the building.

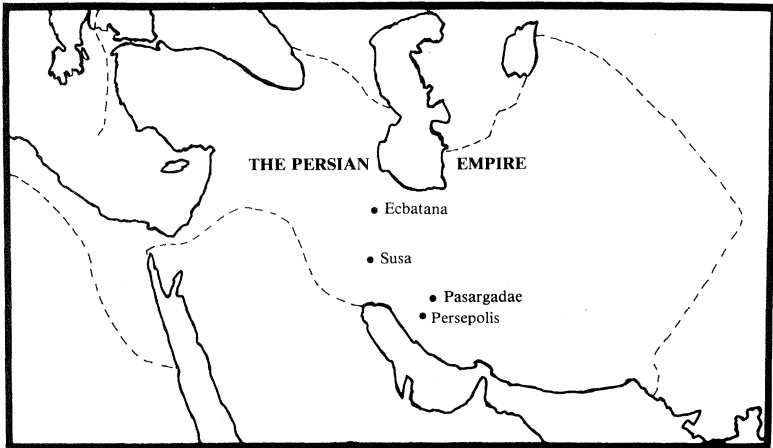
Tattenai concluded his letter with the request that a search be conducted through the royal records in Babylon for some confirmation of the decree of Cyrus that had been cited by the Jews (5:17). He asked Darius to send his decision on the matter, either authorizing the building project in Jerusalem or rescinding the decree, should it be found.

#### B. THE DECREE CONFIRMED (6:1-12)

In response to Tattenai's report (5:7-17), Darius gave instructions for a search to be made among the royal archives of Babylon for some record of Cyrus's decree (6:1). When no decree was found, it was apparently remembered that Cyrus returned to Ecbatana after taking Babylon in 539 B.C.<sup>22</sup> "Ecbatana" is the Greek name for the Aramaic "Achmetha" found in the biblical text. This city had been the capital of Media. It was strategically located in the Zagros mountains on a caravan route which ran from Mesopotamia to the Persian plateau. Ecbatana was known for its cold winters but delightful summers and was chosen by Cyrus as his summer residence. It was there in his first regnal year (538 B.C.) that the return of the Jews had been decreed.

<sup>22</sup>E. J. Bickerman, "The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra I," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65 (1946): 251.

## The Royal Cities of Persia



**PASARGADAE**—The first capital of the Persian Empire. Pasargadae is the site of the park and palace of Cyrus.

**PERSEPOLIS** —The capital of Persia from the time of Darius I. The city is located forty miles southwest of Pasargadae. Darius built a splendid palace there.

**ECBATANA** —The old capital of Media. Ecbatana (the Greek name for Achmetha) served as the summer residence of the Persian kings. Cyrus issued his decree from Ecbatana in 538 B.C.

**SUSA** —The old capital of the Elamites. Susa served as the winter residence of Darius and his successors. It was the home of Nehemiah and the city from which Artaxerxes issued his decree in 444 B.C.

When the search was extended to the fortress of Ecbatana an official memorandum of the decree of Cyrus was found (6:2). Unlike the decree recorded in Ezra 1:2-4, the memorandum says nothing about the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. As an official memo addressed to the treasurer (6:4), it simply confirms that permission to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple had been granted by Cyrus, and that the expenses were to be paid by the Persian government. The record also provides details concerning the dimensions of the Temple, the size of the stones ("huge stones," 5:8), and the return of the sacred vessels that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar (6:3-5). It is interesting that the height of the Temple was to be double and the width three times that of Solomon's Temple (Ezra 6:3; cf. 1 Kings 6:2). The length is omitted, but the dimensions suggest that Cyrus had plans to excel Solomon's great Temple. If so, the plans failed in their execution by the Jews (Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:3; Zech. 4:10). The official record found in Ecbatana provided Darius with abundant historical evidence that Cyrus had decreed the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple. He then took steps to formally authorize the work.

Darius prefaced his own decree concerning the rebuilding of the Temple with some words of warning for Tattenai and his colleagues (6:6-7). Darius warned Tattenai and the Persian officials of the province "beyond the River" (Syria and Palestine) to "keep away" from Jerusalem (literally, "be distant") and not to interfere with the rebuilding of the Temple. Whereas Tattenai had only mentioned the "elders" (5:9), Darius makes specific reference in verse 7 to the "governor" —Zerubbabel.

Darius must have stunned Tattenai not only by this warning, but by a decree of his own (6:8-12) which was calculated to insure that the edict of Cyrus be followed. Darius commanded that the edict of Cyrus be executed by providing the money for the building operations out of the royal tribute collected in the province "beyond the River."<sup>23</sup> The words,

<sup>23</sup>Loring W. Batten, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (New York: Scribner's, 1913), p. 146.

“from the royal treasury” (6:8), literally read, “from the king’s property” in Aramaic. In other words, the expenses for the Temple would be paid to the Jews out of the tribute that the province beyond the river would customarily transmit to the king. The funds were to be provided “without delay” so that the building of the Temple would not again be disrupted. In addition, Darius ordered that Tattenai provide offerings to insure that daily sacrifices be offered in Jerusalem without fail. Darius’s apparent motivation in providing the decree was to encourage the Jews in Jerusalem to pray for him and the royal family (6:10).

Darius ordered severe punishment for anyone who would dare to violate his edict (6:11). The transgressor would be killed, his body dishonored, and his house destroyed! In promising the impalement of anyone who violated his decree, Darius was making no idle threat. Herodotus, the fifth century B.C. Greek historian, reports that Darius impaled three thousand Babylonians after he put down a rebellion in their city.<sup>24</sup> Impalement could be used as a form of execution or simply as a means of dishonoring the dead by public exposure. Such was probably the fate of wicked Haman in the book of Esther (Esther 7:9-10). Darius concluded his decree with an imprecation calling down divine wrath upon any king or people who would seek to alter the decree or prevent the Temple from being rebuilt (6:12).

C. THE TEMPLE COMPLETED (6:13-22)

The serious tone of the king’s decree convinced Tattenai that he meant business. As provincial governor he saw to it that the decree of Darius was carried out “with all diligence” (6:13). Verse 14 illustrates how the individual pieces of God’s plan fit into a harmonious whole. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to rebuild; the elders of the Jews gave leadership to the building project; the decrees of Cyrus and Darius gave the endeavor official sanction and

<sup>24</sup>Herodotus III. 159.

provided financial backing; and the command of the God of Israel brought it all about. He decreed the return and, as a faithful God, saw that it was carried out! Artaxerxes, who belongs to the next century (464-424 B.C.), is mentioned by Ezra in verse 14 since he helped maintain the Temple (7:15-16, 21). It is well-known that Old Testament narratives are not so much concerned with chronological analysis as with historical continuities, and view history more from a thematic perspective. The reference to Artaxerxes helps unify the history and prepares the reader for the events of chapter 7.

Thus the Temple was completed on the third of Adar (February-March) in the sixth year of Darius, or 515 B.C. (6:15). This was twenty-one years after the foundation had been laid, but just four and a half years after Haggai summoned the people to action. It is probable that the completion of the Temple marks the end of Jeremiah's seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10) dating from 586 B.C. when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed (2 Kings 25:8-9). The seventy years would actually exclude the year 515, since the month of Adar is just a few months into the year. The fulfillment is quite precise when rounded to the nearest year (586 B.C. minus seventy years equals 516 B.C.).

Following the completion of the Temple, the exiles celebrated the dedication of the house of God with great rejoicing (6:16-18). Whitcomb observes that Solomon offered more than two hundred times as many oxen and sheep at the dedication of his Temple,<sup>25</sup> but the Restoration community was small and would have had fewer worshipers to eat the sacrifices. Priests and Levites were appointed to serve in the sacrificial worship that would take place in the new Temple (6:18). The division of labor and assignment of duties are in keeping with the instructions in Numbers 3:5-10; 4:15; 8:5-26; 10:8 (see also 1 Chron. 23-24).

Five weeks after the dedication of the Temple the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were celebrated (6:19-22).

<sup>25</sup>John C. Whitcomb, "Ezra" in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1962), p. 429.

This passage is appropriately recorded in Hebrew rather than Aramaic. The “first” month (6:19) would be Nisan (March-April). Those who participated in the celebration included those who had been exiled as well as those who had separated themselves from the impure ways of the Gentile nations surrounding Judah (6:21; cf. 4:1-3). Following the celebration of Passover, the people observed the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8). Note the emphasis on “joy” (6:16, 22). Ezra wants the reader to appreciate the fact that this was a very happy time for the Jewish people.

The reference in verse 22 to the “king of Assyria” has been taken by many to be a scribal error. However, the Septuagint also reads “Assyria,” and nothing in the Hebrew text suggests an error. Obviously, Darius is meant. In Nehemiah 9:32 the designation “kings of Assyria” is used to include Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian kings.<sup>26</sup> Since the Persians ruled former Assyrian territories, it could be said that Darius was “king of Assyria,” just as Cyrus claimed the title “king of Babylon.”<sup>27</sup>

It is on this note of joy and rejoicing (6:16, 22) over the rebuilding of the Temple that Ezra concludes his account of the first return under Sheshbazzar. The next great event in the history of the Restoration to be chronicled by Ezra is the return to Jerusalem in 458 B.C.—the return that Ezra himself led.

<sup>26</sup>L. H. Brockington, ed., *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic, 1969), p. 87.

<sup>27</sup>Pritchard, p. 207.