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INTRODUCTION

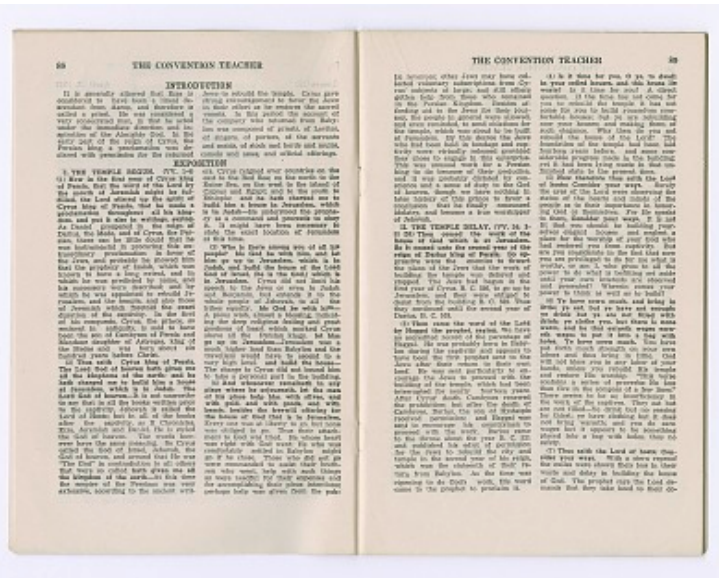
It is generally allowed that Ezra is considered to have been a lineal descendant from Aaron, and therefore is called a priest. He was considered a very consecrated man, in that he acted under the immediate direction and inspiration of the almighty god. In the early part of the reign of Cyrus, the Persian king, a proclamation was declared with permission for the returned Jews to rebuild the temple. Cyrus gave strong encouragement to favor the Jews in their effort as he restores the sacred vessels. In this period the account of the company who returned from Babylon was composed of priests, of Levites, of singers, of porters, of the servants and maids, of stock and herds and mules, camels and asses, and official offerings.

EXPOSITION

I. THE TEMPLE BEGUN. (VV. 1-4) (1) Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the lord by the mouth of jeremiah might be fulfilled, the lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writings, saying, As Daniel prospered int he reign of Darius, the Mede, and of Cyrus, the Persian, there can be little doubt that he was instrumental in procuring this extraordinary proclamation in favor of the Jews, and probably he showed him that the prophecy of Isaiah, which was known to have a long extent, and in which he was predicted by name, and his successors were described; and by which he was appointed to rebuild Jerusalem, and the temple, and also those of Jeremiah which foretold the exact duration of the captivity. In the first of his conquests, Cyrus, the prince, so eminent in antiquity, is said to have been the son of Cambyses of Persia, and Mandane the daughter of Astyages, king of the Medes and was born about six hundred years before Christ.

(2) Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the lord god of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. The lord god of heaven -- It is not unworthy to say that in all the books written prior to the captivity, Jehovah is called the lord of Hosts; but in all of the books after the captivity, as II Chronicles, Ezra, Jeremiah and Daniel. He is styled the God of heaven. The words however have the same meaning. So Cyrus called the God of Israel, Jehovah, the God of heaven, and around that He was "the God" in contradiction to all others that were so called hath given to me all the kingdom of the earth -- At this time the empire of the Persians was very extensive, according to the ancient writers. Cyrus reigned over countries on the east to the Red Sea; on the north to the Exine Sea, on the west to the island of Cyprus and Egypt; and to the south to Ethiopia: and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in judah -- He understood the prophecy as a command and proceeds to obey it. It might have been necessary to state the exact location of Jerusalem at this time.

(3) Who is there among you of all his people? his god be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the god,) which is in Jerusalem. Cyrus did not limit his speech to the Jews or even to Judah and Benjamin, but extends it to the whole people of Jehovah, to all the whole people of jehovah, to



all the tribes equally. his God be with him-- A pious wish, almost a blessing, indicating the deep religious feeling and great goodness of heart which marked Cyrus above all the Persian kings. go up to Jerusalem --Jerusalem was a much higher land than Babylon and the travellers would have to ascend to a very high level. and build the house -- The charge to Cyrus did not bound him to take a personal part in the building.

(4) And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with the silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of god that is in Jerusalem. Every one was at liberty to go, but none was obliged to go. Thus their attachment to God was tried. He whose heart was right with God went; He who was comfortably settled in Babylon might go if he chose. Those who did not go were commanded to assist their brethren who went, help with such things as were needful for their expenses and for accomplishing their pious intentions; perhaps help was given from the public

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revenues; other Jews may have collected voluntary subscriptions from Cyrus' subjects at large; and still others gotten help from those who remained in the Persian Kingdom. Besides affording aid to the Jews for their journey, the people in general were allowed, and even reminded, to send oblations for the temple, which was about to be built at Jerusalem. By this decree the Jews who had been held in bondage and captivity were virtually released provided they chose to engage in this enterprise. This was unusual work for a Persian king to do because of their prejudice, and it was probably dictated by conscience and a sense of duty to the god of heaven, though we have nothing in later history of this prince to favor a conclusion that he finally renounced idolatry, and became a true worshipper of Jehovah.

II. THE TEMPLE DELAY. (VV. 24; 3-8) (24) Then ceased the work of the house of god which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. So oppressive were the enemies to thwart the plans of the Jews that the work of building the temple was delayed and stopped. The Jews had begun in the first year of Cyrus, B. C. 536, to go up to Jerusalem, and they were obliged to desist from the building B. C. 522. Thus they continued until the second year of Darius, B. C. 519.

(3) Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, We have no accredited record of the parentage of Haggai. He was probably born in Babylon during the captivity and appears to have been the first prophet sent to the Jews after their return to their own land. He was sent particularly to encourage the Jews to proceed with the building of the temple, which had been interrupted for nearly fourteen years. After Cyrus' death, Cambyses renewed the prohibition; and Haggai was sent to encourage his country men to proceed with the work. Darius came to the throne about the year B. C. 521 and published his edict of permission for the Jews to rebuild the city and temple in the second year of his reign, which was the sixteenth of their return from Babylon. As the time was ripening to do god's work. His word came to the prophet to

proclaim it.

(4) It is time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Is it time for you? A direct question. IF the time has not come for you to rebuild the temple it has not come for you to build yourselves comfortable houses; but ye are rebuilding now your houses; and making them of such elegance. Why then do you not rebuild the house of the Lord? The foundation of the temple had been laid fourteen years before, and some considerable progress made in the building; yet it had been lying waste in that unfinished state to the present time.

(5) Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Surely the eyes of the lord were observing the status of the hearts and minds of the people as to their importance in honoring god or themselves. For he speaks to them, Consider your ways. It is not fit that you should be building yourselves elegant houses and neglect a place for the worship of your god who had restored you from captivity. But are you considerate in the fact that now you are privileged to do for me what is worthy, or am I, who gives to all the power to do what is befitting set aside until your own interests are observed and presented? Wherein comes your power to think as well as to build?

(6) Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm, and he that earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Ye have sown much. You have put forth much strength on your own labors and thus bring in little. god will not bless you in any labor of your hands, unless you rebuild his temple and restore his worship. "This verse contains a series of proverbs: No less than five in the compass of a few lines." There seems to be an insufficiency in the work of the captives. They eat but are not filled--Ye drink but no ceasing for thirst; ye have clothing but it does not bring warmth; and you do earn wages but it appears to be something placed into a bag with holes, thus no safety.

(7) Thus saith the lord of hosts; Consider your ways. With a stern reproof the exiles were shown their loss in their waste and delay in building the house of God. The prophet says the lord demands that they take heed to their do-

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