

Notes on Ezra Chapter 6

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VI. The Temple Completed – Chap. 6

Verses 1-5

1. What did Darius do when he received Tattenai's letter (cf. chap. 5)? Where did he find the answer he sought?
2. How was the construction of the temple described?
3. How was the work financed (what did Cyrus send to help)?

The decree of Cyrus found

As the governor Tattenai had requested in his letter in chap. 5, King Darius made a search for the decree that the Jews claimed authorized their work. He searched in the archives where treasures were stored, and the decree was found recorded on a scroll in the palace in Achmetha in the province of Media. The NKJV footnote suggests that this was Ecbatana, capital of Media.

The decree said that Cyrus authorized the building of the temple, just as the Jews claimed, and as recorded already in Ezra 1:1-8; 5:13,14. It said the house of the Lord, where sacrifices were offered, should be rebuilt. The record even gave more detail than in Ezra 1. It said the height would be sixty cubits and the width sixty cubits (ninety feet by ninety feet). It would be built from three rows of heavy stones and one row of timber. This was the same as the original temple (1 Kings 6:36).

Furthermore it said the expenses were to be paid from the treasury of the king (cf. 3:7). And just as chap. 1 recorded, the gold and silver articles taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar should be returned to the house of God.

Vv 2-5 appear to be a record of the original decree written by Cyrus. But it also appears that the quotation begins the letter of King Darius to Tattenai, in response to the letter the governor had sent to the king. So that vv 6ff simply continue the king's response.

Verses 6-8

4. What did Darius tell Tattenai and his companions to do regarding the work (vv 6,7)?

The decree of Darius to continue to work

Having quoted the original decree, King Darius then continued by commanding governor Tattenai and his companions (cf. 5:3,6) to stay far away from the Jews and not hinder the work on the temple in any way. They were to allow the governor and elders of the Jews to proceed with the work of building the house of God.

In fact, he commanded that the government should provide things needed for the work. Tax money should pay for the work and should be given to the men in charge of the work, so they work would not be hindered in any way.

Verses 9-12

5. What decree did he issue to help provide for the work (vv 8-10)?
6. What did he hope the people would do in the temple (v10)? What can we learn?
7. What penalty would be incurred by any who opposed the work?

Further, the king decreed that tax funds should be used to pay for the animals and other provisions to be used for the sacrifices that the priests needed day by day in the offerings to be made at the temple in Jerusalem. This would result in a sweet aroma to go up to the God of heaven.

I don't know that this means the king was converted to believing in the God of the Old Testament as the one true God. I suspect more likely he just wanted the blessing of all the gods in the empire, so he tried to please them all.

Further, he hoped the people would pray to God on behalf of the king and his sons. The New Testament likewise teaches that we should do the same for rulers today – 1 Tim. 2:1,2.

Then he went still further and proclaimed a severe curse on anyone who attempted to change his decree. He said that, for such a person, a timber should be removed from his own house and used to hang the man on. Then his house should be destroyed to the level of a refuse heap (cf. Dan. 2:5; 3:29).

Finally, he called upon the God who caused His name to dwell in that place (Deut. 12:5,11; 1 Kings 9:3) to destroy any person or king who sought to alter the decree or to destroy the temple that would be built in Jerusalem.

This was Darius' decree, and he commanded diligent obedience to it.

Verses 13-15

8. How did Tattenai and his companions respond?

9. What did the people do, and what was the result (vv 14,15)? When was the work completed?

The completion of the temple

Tattenai and his companions then proceeded to diligently do as the king commanded. The work on the temple proceeded and prospered, guided by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (5:1).

The work thus proceeded till the temple was finished on the third day of the month Adar in the sixth year of Darius' reign. Haggai 1:1 said the work began again in the second year of Darius' reign (cf. Ezra 4:24; 5:1), so it took approximately four years after the work began again till it was completed.

This was said to be done according to the command of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes. The first two we have plainly seen were involved, but the involvement of Artaxerxes is less obvious. He became involved later (cf. 7:1,11; Neh. 2:1), so perhaps this is included by looking forward to what he later did.

Verses 16-18

10. What did the people do when the temple was complete? How did they do this (vv 16-18)?

Dedication of the temple

Following the completion of the temple, a dedication ceremony was held. Solomon had conducted a similar ceremony when he originally built the temple (1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5). This celebration occurred with great joy among the people and involved the offering of many sacrifices in the new temple: one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering, one goat for each of the tribes of Israel.

Then the service of the temple was organized, including priests and Levites set up in their divisions as provided for in the law. See 1 Chron. 23:6; 24:1; 2 Chron 35:5; Num. 3:6; 8:9. These, of course, were the people that God had assigned to care for the tabernacle/temple and to offer the sacrifices there.

Verses 19-22

11. What was the first feast celebrated at the temple? Describe the feast: What was done, and what was the purpose? Give **b/c/v**.

12. Application: How would the Jews know how to arrange the priests and keep the feasts? What lessons can we learn today?

The Passover celebrated

Now that the temple had been set up, the people were finally again able to participate in the various worship activities, including feast days, as provided for in the law. The temple had been

completed in the month Adar, the last month of the Jewish religious calendar (according to Waldron). The next month would be the first month, which was when the Passover was to be celebrated. So the temple was completed just in time for the Passover.

The Passover was the annual memorial to the last plague God brought through Moses on the Egyptians. The firstborn son in each home of the Egyptians died; but the children of the Israelites were protected by God, if they placed the blood of the Passover lamb on their doors. It was celebrated each year on the 14th day of the first month, followed by the 7-day feast of Unleavened Bread. See Ex. 12:6,15; 13:6,7; 2 Chron. 35:11; 30:21; 35:17.

The Jews kept this feast in the rebuilt temple, led by the priests and Levites. To do this the priests and Levites had to purify themselves, so they were ceremonially clean as required by the law. See 2 Chron. 29:34; 30:15. The priests led in offering the required sacrifices for themselves, for the Levites, and for the people.

The Israelites who had returned from captivity ate the Passover along with those who had cleansed themselves from the defilement of the land so they could seek God (cf. Ezra 9:11). These were apparently people from the region who had determined to follow God, along with those who returned from captivity.

The people also kept the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread. All this was done with joy, for the people rejoiced that God had returned them to the land by means of the decrees of the king of Assyria. Why refer to the king as the king of Assyria, rather than the king of Persia? Waldron claims that Darius was first king of Assyria as part of the Persian Empire. Then he became king also of the whole empire.

The principle of restoration

Note that we have here an example of the principle of restoration according to divinely revealed pattern in the written word. The priests were organized “as it is written in the Book of Moses” (v18). See also 3:1-6, especially v2. The law also spoke of the Passover. The people were able to know what to do to worship and serve God simply by reading and following the written word. This was true even though they had been gone for decades and neither the temple ritual nor the priesthood had been active for all those years. Likewise, today our service of God in His church can be restored by simply studying and following the written word of the gospel, even if people have not followed it for years.

Note also that this was done with great **joy**. We ought to have great joy to see God’s service restored in our own lives or in the lives of others where it has not been done (cf. Luke 15). But too often we lose the joy until God’s blessings are removed. Why provoke God to wrath, as Israel had done, till He punishes us so severely? Why not see all His great gifts to us day by day so that we rejoice at every opportunity to praise Him? Why be so unappreciative, as many are, so we do not have joy in our day-to-day service? Why wait till the opportunity is taken from us before we realize what we should have been doing?

Waldron points out that the story of Esther would have taken place during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) between Ezra 6 and 7.

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