

Ezra Chapter 6

Verses 1-12

The reference to “rolls” in verse 1 is to “archivers.”

The “Achmetha” of verse 2 is Ecbatana the capital of the old Median Empire.

The roll of verse 2 means a papyrus or leather scroll (a different Hebrew word), instead of the usual clay tablet.

Verses 6-12

Contain a strongly worded decree from Darius which reinforced the original one from Cyrus.

The threat (in verse 11), is heightened by Herodotus’s account, which states that Darius impaled three thousand Babylonians after conquering their city.

Verses 1-2

“Babylon ... Achmetha”:

The Vulgate Latin version has it Ecbatana.

Ecbatana was one of the Persian capitals, 300 miles northeast of Babylon in the foothills, where Cyrus and others had their summer homes.

Ezra 6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

“Darius the king made a decree”:

Rather than a public edict, this was a simple order issued to a small group of officials.

“Darius I”

The great, is also known as Darius Hystaspis, or Darius, son of Hystaspis.

He reigned over Persian from about 521 to 485 B.C. as one of the most able Persian kings.

Darius continued Cyrus the Great’s policy of restoring the Jewish people to their homeland.

In 520 B.C., Darius's second year as king, the Jews resumed work on the still-unfinished temple in Jerusalem.

Darius assisted by ordering the project to continue, even granting a generous subsidy to help revive temple worship (verses 1-12).

The temple was completed in 516 B.C., in the sixth year of Darius's reign.

See Ezra 4:5-6; Hag. 1:1, 15; 2:10; Zech. 1:1, 7; 7:1).

This is saying that Darius sent orders for the records to be searched to see if such a decree had been made by Cyrus.

They searched first in Babylon, but there was more than one place for the records that were kept.

The record in Babylon was destroyed, if there was one.

Ezra 6:2 "And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that [is] in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein [was] a record thus written:"

"Therein was a record thus written":

A particular kind of document called a memorandum (Ezra 4:15; Mal. 3:16).

Administrative officials often kept these documents of administrative decisions made, or issues remaining to be settled, to retain the details of administrative action for future reference.

"Achmetha" (also called Ecbatana; modern-day Hamadan in Iran), was one of four cities that served as a capital in Persia.

Its elevation (6,000 feet above sea level), provided an ideal climate for keeping royal records and scrolls.

This was a place in the province of the Medes.

It was possibly, an extra copy of the decree that Cyrus had made.

He was aware that one might be destroyed probably.

Achmetha was the capital of northern Media.

Cyrus the 2nd held his court here.

Ezra 6:3 "In the first year of Cyrus the king [the same] Cyrus the king made a decree [concerning] the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they

offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, [and] the breadth thereof threescore cubits;"

"First year" (ca. 538 B.C.; compare 1:2-4).

"Thereof threescore cubits ... threescore cubits":

These dimensions exceed those of Solomon's temple (compare 1 Kings 6:2).

In this decree, we see more details than we had in the first chapter, where we read of Cyrus wanting to re-build the temple.

They not only found the decree, but it spelled out exactly what was to be done.

Ezra 6:4 "[With] three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:"

Which Jarchi interprets of the walls of it, and these stones of marble; and so Ben Melech.

"And a row of new timber":

Of cedar wood upon the rows of stone (see 1 Kings 6:36), or for the lining and wainscoting the walls.

"And let the expenses be given out of the king's house":

Treasury, or exchequer.

But it does not appear that this part of the decree was observed, at least hitherto.

But the Jews built at their own expense, and perhaps did not exactly observe the directions given as to the dimensions of the house.

Cyrus had given from his own treasury toward this building.

The Jews had put money in on this themselves as well.

It appears from this, however, that all expenses were to be paid for by Persia.

Ezra 6:5 "And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which [is] at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which [is] at Jerusalem, [every one] to his place, and place [them] in the house of God."

"And also let the golden and silver vessels . . . be restored":

The desecration of these vessels by Belshazzar (Dan. 5:2-3), was thus to be atoned for.

Every word, including the twice repeated "house of God," is most emphatic.

And place them in the house of God":

Thus far the decree of Cyrus is recited, which justified all the allegations of the Jews in the foregoing chapter.

In the next verse the decree of Darius thereupon appears to begin.

"Nebuchadnezzar took" (see note on 1:7).

This also had been done with all of the vessels found that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem, when Zerubbabel led the first group back to Judah.

Verses 6-12

God often uses unbelievers, like the pagan king Darius, to carry out His will (Isa. 46:10; Acts 4:24-28).

In this case, the continued rebuilding of the temple affirmed God's presence in Jerusalem.

Ezra 6:6 "Now [therefore], Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which [are] beyond the river, be ye far from thence:"

The river Euphrates, which side of it was towards the land of Israel; Josephus calls this man master of the horse.

Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence.

Keep at a distance from the Jews, and give them no disturbance, nor interrupt them in their work of building of the temple, but mind your own business and government.

Tatnai was not to have anything to do with stopping the work.

Darius sent him word to leave them alone.

The message in short was, "leave them alone".

Verses 6-7

God so favored the Jews (compare 5:5), that, through Darius, He forbade the officials from interfering with the building project.

Ezra 6:7 "Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place."

Let them to go on with it, and do not hinder them.

It looks, by these expressions, as if he had some suspicion or hint given him that they were inclined to molest them, or that there were some that stirred them up, and were desirous of it.

"Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place":

Where it formerly stood; that is, go on with the building of it.

Darius warned Tatnai not to interfere in any way with the building of this temple.

They were to be left alone to build the temple of God.

Verses 8-10

Not only could the officials not hinder the building, but they also had to help finance it by giving the Jews some of their portion of taxes collected for the Persian king.

The Jews could draw from the provincial treasury.

Ezra 6:8 "Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, [even] of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered."

This must be considered as an additional decree of Darius, which was peculiarly made by him, in which more was granted in favor of the Jews, and as an encouragement to them to go on with the building of the temple.

Though Josephus says this is nothing other than a confirmation of the decree of Cyrus; for, according to him, all that is here granted to them, or threatened to others, from hence to the end of (Ezra 6:10), was contained in the decree.

"That of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river":

What was collected out of his dominions on that side the river Euphrates, towards the land of Israel.

According to Herodotus, this Darius was the first of the kings of Persia that exacted tribute.

"Forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered":

From going on with the building, for want of money to buy materials, and pay the workmen.

Darius commanded Tatnai to give the tribute money to them to pay their men for the work on the temple.

They must not be hindered in this work.

Darius would make sure they did everything that Cyrus promised to do.

Ezra 6:9 "And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which [are] at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:"

All which were used for burnt offerings (see Lev. 1:2).

"Wheat, salt, wine, and oil":

"wheat", or "fine flour", for the "minchah" (the afternoon prayer service in Judaism), or meat offering; "salt", for every offering.

Wine", for the drink offerings; and "oil", to be put upon the meat offerings (see Lev. 2:1).

“According to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail”:

For the daily sacrifice, and the meat and drink offerings which attended it (Exodus 29:38).

Somehow, he had to know which animals they used in sacrifice.

These were to be given to them in abundance, so they would have enough for their sacrifices.

They were to be fed of the king's supplies.

This was to be seen after every single day.

Ezra 6:10 "That they may offer sacrifices of sweet saviors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons."

“Pray for the life of the king, and of his sons”:

This was essentially the same self-serving motive that prompted Cyrus to decree that all captured peoples should return to their countries, rebuild the temples that Nebuchadnezzar and others had destroyed, and placate the offended deities.

He wanted all the gods on his side, including Israel's God.

Darius wanted them to pray for him and his sons.

He believed the power of their God was the true power.

Ezra 6:11 "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this."

"Pulled down ... hanged ... made a dunghill":

Typical punishment for a serious infraction (compare Rev. 22:18-19).

This was specifically directed at the hostile Samaritans.

There would be no more opposition, because of the punishment to be inflicted on those who opposed the building of the temple.

Verses 12-22

In this section, the temple is finished in the "sixth year of the reign of Darius" (March 12, 515 B.C.).

While it was being built (the events of Zechariah chapter 7 occurred).

They kept the "dedication "of the house of God with joy."

The word for "dedication" is *chenukah* (Hanukkah), which was later to become the name of a festival in memory of the temple's re-consecration (in 165 B.C.), after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Solomon had offered more than two hundred times as many oxen and sheep at the dedication of his temple (1 Kings. 8:63, with 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep).

Beginning with (verse 19), the text is again in Hebrew.

Verse 21 indicates two groups of people:

- (1) Those who had returned from exile; and
- (2) Possibly a group of Jews who had not gone into captivity, or a group of proselytes (compare Exodus 12:44, 48).

The reference to the “king of Assyria” is accurate because Darius was also the sovereign of Assyria, so he could easily have been called king of Assyria.

There is a similar use of the term in a Babylonian king list which starts with the Assyrian Kandalanu, mentions the Chaldeans, Nabopolassar, and Nebuchadnezzar, then refers to Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius, and ends with the names of Seleucid kings.

Ezra 6:12 "And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter [and] to destroy this house of God which [is] at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed."

Whose name is not only called upon there, and that called by his name; but who grants his presence, and causes his Shekinah, or divine Majesty. To dwell there, as in Solomon's temple, which Darius had some knowledge of.

"Destroy all kings and people":

Let them be who they will, high or low.

"That shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God, which is at Jerusalem":

This he said to deter from hindering the building of it now, and from attempting to destroy it hereafter.

"I Darius have made a decree, let it be done with speed":

Be carried immediately into execution, especially with respect to the disbursement for the building of the temple, and for the sacrifices of it.

The decree of Darius went even further than the decree of Cyrus.

He was speaking of the One True God here.

He called for God to destroy any king, or people, who came against the building of the temple.

Ezra 6:13 "Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily."

Having received and read the above letter.

"According to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily":

Acquainted the Jews with what the king had written; were so far from hindering the work going forward, that they encouraged it.

And made disbursements to them out of the king's tribute, and furnished them with everything necessary for sacrifice.

And this they did immediately, without delay.

Tatnai did exactly as the king had commanded him to do.

Ezra 6:14 "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished [it], according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia."

“Prospered” (Haggai 1:7-11).

The Israelites “builded, and finished” the temple according to their highest authority: “the commandment of the God of Israel”.

“The commandment of the God of Israel ... commandment of Cyrus”:

This is not the normal term for command, but it is the same word translated “decree” or “administrative order” throughout the book.

The message here is powerful.

It was the decree from God, the Sovereign of the universe, which gave administrative authority to rebuild the temple.

The decrees (same word), of 3 of the greatest monarchs in the history of the ancient Near East were only a secondary issue.

God rules the universe and He raised up kings, then pulls them from their thrones when they have served His administration.

“Artaxerxes”:

Although he did not contribute to the project under Zerubbabel, he did under Ezra (compare 7:11-26).

Haggai prophesied of a day when the house of the LORD would be far greater than anything in the past.

His prophecies encouraged the people so greatly, that they worked diligently on the temple to complete it.

There was no shortage of funds, because Darius had agreed to pay for the services of the people in this work.

The chiefs of the fathers, and the priests, and high priests, and even Zerubbabel, were to oversee the work.

All the young men 20 years old, and older, did the actual labor.

Haggai and Zechariah preached and kept them with the desire to do this according to the will of God.

Cyrus had written instructions that the LORD had given him, and Darius and Artaxerxes gave orders of how it was to be finished too.

Verses 15-17

The temple was completed (in 515 B.C.), about 23 years after the project was started.

Although this was a time of great celebration and blessing, the number of sacrifices they offered was less than those offered when Solomon dedicated the first temple (1 Kings 8:63).

The people were not as prosperous or as numerous as they were before the exile.

The priestly divisions are described (in 1 Chron. Chapter 24).

Ezra 6:15 "And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king."

The twelfth month of the year with the Jews, and answers to part of our February and part of March.

"Which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king":

Four years after the decree came forth.

"Adar ... sixth year":

The 12th month (Feb./Mar.; in 516 B.C.).

We find that from the time the foundation was laid until its completion, the temple was 23 years in the building.

After God sent Haggai and Zechariah to them, it took 4 years and 5 months.

Many of the 23 years there was nothing done on it all.

Adar was the twelfth month on their calendar.

It would be equivalent to our March.

Ezra 6:16 "And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy,"

Those of the ten tribes that remained after the body of the people were carried captive, or came with the Jews at their return.

"The priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity":

Those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

"Kept the dedication of this house of God with joy":

They set it apart for sacred use and service, with feasting and other expressions of joy and gladness (as follows in verse 17).

This dedication was on the order of the dedication that Solomon did, when he and the people dedicated the temple the first time.

This was a time of great joy, because they were re-united in fellowship with their God.

They suddenly had a place of worship.

At this point, the people were really home.

Ezra 6:17 "And offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel".

Hecatombs (a great public sacrifice), of various sorts, which were always reckoned grand sacrifices, even among Heathens, of which Homer sometimes speaks.

Some of these were for burnt offerings, and others peace offerings, by way of thankfulness to God for the finishing of the temple.

Part of which belonging to those offering, as they feasted upon it with great gladness of heart.

"And for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel".

For though the ten tribes were carried captive by Shalmaneser, yet, as before observed, there were some of them that remained in the land, and others that went and returned with the two tribes.

And therefore, a sin offering was made for them all, for the typical act of making amends of guilt contracted since they had been in a Heathen land and temple service had ceased.

This number of animals offered were many less than was offered by Solomon at his dedication, and fewer even than those offered by Hezekiah.

We must remember however, that there were not nearly as many people living in Judah now as there were then.

In Solomon's time, all 12 tribes were included.

Ezra 6:18 "And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which [is] at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses."

“Divisions” (compare 1 Chron. Chapter 24), where the priestly divisions are delineated.

Although David arranged the priest and Levites in order according to families, it was Moses who assigned their rights, privileges and duties (see notes on Num. chapters 3 and 4).

The book of Moses”:

I.e., the Torah, “Hebrew; or Pentateuch, “Greek translation; or, the Law of Moses; which are all the first five books of the bible.

Everything was done as it was prescribed in the book of Moses.

We remember, that the priests were Levites too.

Not all Levites were priests however.

Some were keepers of the doors.

Some were singers and musicians.

All Levites were set aside for the service of the LORD.

Just a few were priests.

Verses 19-21

The Passover was celebrated by Jews who had returned from exile and by recent converts who had abandoned (“separated ... unto them”), from the other religions (“the filthiness of the heathen of the land”), to follow Israel’s God.

Ezra 6:19 "And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth [day] of the first month."

"Passover" (compare Lev. 23:4-8).

Other notable Passovers include Hezekiah's (2 Chron. 30:1-22) and Josiah's (2 Chron. 35:1-19).

"First month":

March/April.

The returned exiles were spoken of as Israel.

Not all who returned were of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Some were from the other 10 tribes and all of the people of the various tribes, who came back into the land, kept the Passover.

This day is approximately the 14th day of April by our calendar.

Passover was a remembrance of the night in Egypt, when death passed over the Hebrew houses that had the blood of a lamb over and around their doors.

This was the 10th plague God sent on Egypt to free the children of Israel.

Ezra 6:20 "For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them [were] pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves."

They were all to a man pure, and all purified as one man.

All were of one mind to purify themselves, and took care to do it, and did it with as much dispatch as if only one man was purified.

So that they were more generally prepared for service now than in the times of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:34).

"And killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves".

Which seems to have been done by the Levites, for themselves and for the priests, and for all the people, who were not so pure as the priests and Levites.

Or otherwise they might have killed it themselves (Exodus 12:6).

The priests were anointed to the LORD while they were in the temple for service.

In this case, it seems that all of the Levites, for all of the various services were anointed with the anointing oil for service.

Ezra 6:21 "And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,"

“The filthiness of the heathen of the land”:

These were proselytes (a person who has converted from one religion to another, especially recently), to Judaism, who had confessed their spiritual uncleanness before the LORD, been circumcised, and renounced idolatry to keep the Passover (verse 22).

The passover lamb was eaten by all of the people sacrificing.

Each family had a lamb the size their family could eat in one night.

This Passover is very similar to communion that the Christians partake of.

The lamb the Hebrews ate was symbolic of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb.

The Unleavened Bread that we take at communion, also symbolizes the body of our Lord Jesus.

Verses 6:22 – 7:1

The book of Esther fits in this 59 year gap between the completion of the temple (ca. 516 B.C.), under Zerubbabel (Ezra chapters 1 through 6), and the second return (ca. 458 B.C.), under Ezra (Ezra Chapters 7 to 10; Ezra 4:6 provides a glimpse into this period also).

Ezra 6:22 "And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

The king of Assyria” was a title assigned to any Persian king (in this instance, Darius), who ruled the territory previously controlled by the Assyrians.

The “Feast of Unleavened Bread” started on the day immediately following the Passover feast (Exodus 12:15-20; Lev. 23:4-8; Num. 28:16-17).

“Turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them”:

By turning the heart of the king in their favor in allowing them to complete the rebuilding, God encouraged His people.

They understood the verse, “The king’s heart is ... in the hand of the LORD” (Prov. 21:1), better through this ordeal.

The title “King of Assyria” was held by every king who succeeded the great Neo-Assyrian Empire regardless of what country they may have come from.

The celebration of Unleavened Bread overlaps Passover.

We mentioned that the Unleavened Bread symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Bread of life.

It must be unleavened, because He was without sin.

We partake of His righteousness.

"Seven" means spiritually complete.

The king of Assyria recognizes the LORD as God.

Ezra Chapter 6 Questions

1. What did Darius do to find Cyrus' decree?
2. Where did they search first?
3. Where were they found?
4. What was on the roll?
5. What were the dimensions of the temple to be built?
6. What was to be done with the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple?
7. Who had led the first group back to Judah from captivity?
8. What message did Tatnai receive from Darius?
9. The funds to build the temple would come from where?
10. In verse 9, we read of what being given to the Hebrews?
11. Why did Darius want to be sure they sacrificed to their God?
12. What decree did Darius make about anyone who changed the word?

13. What did he decree that would happen to anyone who tried to destroy the temple?
14. How did Tatnai take the orders from Darius?
15. Who supervised the building?
16. What three kings were in on the building of the temple?
17. How did Haggai encourage them?
18. What other prophet was helpful to the building of the temple.
19. Who did the actual work on the temple?
20. How long did it take to build the temple from the time the foundation was laid?
21. How many of those years were after the prophets came?
22. What was the example for the dedication?
23. Why were there fewer animals sacrificed here, than in Solomon's dedication?
24. When was the house finished?
25. Who kept the dedication?
26. When did they keep the Passover?
27. Who were purified for service for the Passover?
28. Who ate the Passover lamb?
29. What did the Passover lamb symbolize?
30. What does Passover celebrate?
31. When is Unleavened Bread celebrated?
32. Who is the Unleavened Bread?