
THE BOOK OF EZRA.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

THERE can be no question who was the penman of this book of God. *Ezra*, whose name it bears, was evidently the writer of it. Though indeed if he literally was the scribe of the whole, he must have been an ancient man at his death, for it contains in point of history a period of at least 80 years. It begins with the first year of the reign of Cyrus, which was about 536 years before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; and closeth somewhat about the 456th year before the Christian æra.

The name of *Ezra* is not without signification, for it implies an *helper*. And certain it is that he well answered to this name, for his ministry must have been highly beneficial to the church of God in the critical period in which he lived. And I conceive the Lord hath made his labors a blessing and an help to the church, in all the intermediate periods, to the present hour.

The Reader will have a better apprehension of the several contents of this book, and will enter with more clearness of understanding into the design of the Holy Ghost in causing this faithful record to have been committed to writing, and handed down to the church, if he considers before he begins the perusal of it, the precise time of the church to which it refers, and connects also with the reading of it the view of the several cotemporary writers in the church, whose ministry and labors were exercised much about the same æra. What *Ezra* hath here stated, as an history, will have great light thrown upon it, if the Reader consults what the prophets, who ministered in the successive ages before, had predicted should be accomplished. If he looks no further back than the ministry of *Isaiah*, and traces in the writings of the prophets that follow to *Micah*, the sacred writings of those inspired men will be of great use to the advantageous reading the book of *Ezra*. And although the prophets *Haggai* and *Zechariah* did not begin their ministry so early by many years as *Ezra*, yet as they were both engaged in the Lord's service before that *Ezra* finished his labors, a reference to those parts of scripture will be highly profitable.

Another interesting point for the pious Reader to observe before he enters upon the perusal of this book of God, will be to call to mind the state of the church at this period of its history. The Babylonish captivity was now over. The church was liberated

from Babylon, though still tributary to the Persian government which succeeded it. And such of the people as the Lord had inclined to return to Jerusalem, were now inhabiting again their beloved city, though all in ruins. But the kingly government which their fathers possessed, was lost. Such was the state of God's Israel at the period when *Ezra* wrote and begun this scriptural record.

I have only to detain the Reader with a request, before he enters upon the perusal of the book of *Ezra*, that both at the commencement and through every part of it, he will be on the look out in every chapter and verse, more or less, as the several portions may direct, for a glimpse, (if it be but a glimpse), of him to whom the whole is intended to minister, and on whose account alone it becomes most highly interesting. The Holy Ghost hath never, in any one period of the church, left himself without witness that it is to Jesus he is ministering, and all the records he hath graciously given the church, by whatever servant he hath thought proper to send, they all, like so many rivulets directing their course towards the sea, point to Jesus. This was he of whom *Moses and the prophets did write*. This was he whose day the patriarchs saw afar off, rejoiced in the prospect, and was glad. And this was he for whose sake Jehovah declared himself to *Cyrus* two hundred years before *Cyrus* was born, that he had called him by name, and commissioned him to the deliverance of his people, when opening before him the two-leaved gates into Babylon. See *Isaiah* xlv. 14. And the same is he whose redemption we are equally interested in, whom the fathers looked forward to, and whose faith we would desire to follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

Reader! let you and I pray the Almighty Spirit, even God the Holy Ghost, who caused this scripture to be written, that he will bless it to our perusal, and more especially in that sweet and most precious part of it which contains Jesus; that in whatever part of scripture he is spoken of, or under what shadow soever he is veiled, like *Ezra*, we may be scribes, as he was, *well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, to find and bring forth out of the treasury things new and old. And as *Ezra*, it is said, (*Chap. vii. 10, 16*) prepared his heart to teach in Israel, and was a ready scribe in things which are divine; so may we be prepared, from the same gracious source, to discover somewhat in every page of him, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Oh! Lord! do thou, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, grant both to him that writes, and the eye that reads, increasing testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus; that as these things are written that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God; so in believing we may have life through his name, Amen.

CHAP. I.

CONTENTS.

The book of Ezra, from the commencement of it to the conclusion, contains a very interesting record in the history of the church. It opens with the proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, to permit the Jews to return from their captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem. Here is an account of the return of certain of the people. The rebuilding of the temple; and the vessels of the temple, carried away in the captivity, brought back and restored.

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 writing, saying,

This first year of Cyrus was immediately upon the finishing the 70th year of Israel's captivity. This is a great point in this history to attend to, inasmuch as it becomes a confirmation of the word of God concerning the desolation of Jerusalem. Jeremiah xxv. 11, 12. Now, whoever is desirous to make the calculation will find, that it corresponds, perhaps to a day, as the case of Egypt, in the deliverance of Israel from thence, did before. Exod. xii. 40—42. Calculating by the reigns of the several kings of Judah, and comparing with the reigns of the kings of Babylon from the first of Judah's captivity, it will be found completing the seventy years exactly. Jerem. lii. with 2 Kings xxv. 27—30. The captivity of the people began in the first year, it should seem, of *Nebuchadnezzar*, who reigned 45 years. To him succeeded his son *Evilmerodach*, who reigned twenty-three years. And after him his son *Belshazzar*, whose reign was about two years. So that those periods added together make seventy years. But what is worthy also of equal regard is, that the end of Israel's captivity was the end of the Babylonish empire. The Lord had taken Babylon as a rod to correct his people; but when that purpose was accomplished, the rod is cast away. No doubt Babylon mightily oppressed poor Israel, as we read in that pathetic mournful song of the church on the occasion, Psalm cxxxvii. And Daniel intimates as much when standing up before *Nebuchadnezzar*, Dan. iv. 27. But Reader! perhaps the most interesting account of any to be attended to in this wonderful subject, was concerning the instrument by whom the Lord wrought the deliverance of his people, I mean *Cyrus*, concerning whom the prophet *Isaiah* had been commissioned two hundred years before Cyrus was born, to tell the church both of his name and the deliverance he should accomplish. Before you go further in the history, I beg you to pause here, and to read the forty-fifth chapter of *Isaiah's* prophecy, and diligently attend to what the prophet, or rather the Holy Ghost by the prophet, tells the church. The *two leaved gates*, which the Lord promised to open him, were probably those mighty gates under the walls of Babylon which had

no entrance but through the great river. And the *loins of kings the Lord promised to loose*. How was this astonishing prediction accomplished when Belshazzar trembled in the very night when the impious monarch was slain and Babylon taken? Dan. v. 6. 30. And may we not add, that as the Lord condescended to call Cyrus his anointed on this grand concern, was he not a type of our adorable anointed Jesus, whom the Father from everlasting anointed to deliver the prisoners out of prison, and them that sat in darkness out of the prison house? Isaiah xlii. 6, 7. Reader! never lose sight of this, I beg of you. For what a sweet testimony is here afforded of Jesus, that every thing, and all events, had a reference to him. And is not this indeed the first and principal sense and meaning of what Jehovah said to Cyrus on this occasion before he was born, (*calling, as the apostle saith, things that are not as though they were*) when the Lord said, *For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect*. Isaiah xlv. 4. Is not Jacob here named for Jesus? And was not Jacob's seed blessed in and for Jesus's sake? Yes! Jesus is the Holy One, the elect, the beloved of the Father. And in his name, and for his sake, both Israel and his seed are blessed.

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 an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah.

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.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem.

I think it is probable that some of the Lord's hiddeu ones might have pointed out to Cyrus what the Lord's prophet Isaiah had predicted concerning him. But that Cyrus knew nothing of the Lord in a way of grace, though the Lord stirred up his mind to those acts of clemency, seems decided, Isaiah xlv. 4, 5. And it is possible from the awful end of Belshazzar, who died in the very act of profaning the holy vessels of the temple, that Cyrus sent away those sacred things from a dread and fear.

5 ¶ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised,

to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered.

It should seem that many of the people remained in Babylon reconciled to their captivity, and had mingled with the Chaldees. An awful representation of characters, in all ages, whose condemnation is *that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* John iii. 19. And those precious souls whose spirits God had raised up to return to Jerusalem, what a sweet representation are they of all that through the blessed recoveries of grace emerge out of the captivity of sin and Satan, and seek Jesus, of whom Jerusalem, the holy city, was a type. Reader! see in this the blessed lesson the Holy Ghost teacheth. Jerusalem was in ruins at this time; the temple destroyed, the walls thrown down. But amidst all this discouragement the people willingly, and with joy, returned. And doth not the poor sinner, when once his eyes are opened, his prison-doors thrown open, and the Lord's grace leading him by the hand, *ask the way to Zion with his face thitherward, to join himself to the Lord in a covenant that cannot be forgotten?* Jerem. l. 5.

7 ¶ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

9 And this *is* the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

10 Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second *sort* four hundred and ten, *and* other vessels a thousand.

11 All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. *All these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them* of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

Was not Cyrus a type, in this instance, of the gentile church, concerning whom it was said *that they should bring of their abundance to*

beautify the place of God's sanctuary. Isaiah lx. 3—14. And it is remarkable, as if the Lord meant from the earliest days of the church to point out his holy will and pleasure, in making the Jew and Gentile church at length one in Jesus, that in the first wilderness church after the people departed out of Egypt, the church was supplied from the spoils of the Egyptians. Exod. xii. 35, 36. But I wish the Reader to make another observation which those verses suggest, namely, amidst all the impiety and profaneness of the kings of Babylon, in desecrating the holy vessels of the temple, how did the Lord watch over both the people and the temple treasures. Yes! the Lord's eye was upon them, and according to his own precious word, their memorial was always before him: *In my wrath I smote thee, saith the Lord; but in my favor have I had mercy upon thee.* Isaiah lx. 10. How sweet a lesson this to the long and painful exercises of his afflicted ones now. He knows all they feel; hears every groan, and is speaking to them in the same gracious words; *I the Lord do keep it. I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* Isaiah xxvii. 2, 3.

REFLECTIONS.

HERE let our contemplations be called forth in the account given of Cyrus, and behold in him a lively type of the truly anointed of the Lord, full of grace and truth, the Lord Jesus Christ. *Cyrus* was foretold two hundred years before he came, that he should deliver the Lord's people from Babylon. But Jesus was held forth as a deliverer of the Lord's people from sin and death, from everlasting. The *one* ministered to a temporal salvation; the *other* to an eternal. The *one* proved a blessing for a time; the *other* for ever. The *one* saved from this world's sorrow; the *other* from all the evils of this life and that which is to come. Hail! all-glorious, almighty Deliverer! the Lord of hosts is thy name.

But, my soul, did Cyrus proclaim deliverance to captives? Did the Persian king cause it to be published that every one with whom God was might go out free, and return to Jerusalem from their captivity? And did the people willingly offer themselves, in whose hearts the Spirit of Jehovah was, to avail themselves of these privileges? And shall Jesus, whom the Father hath anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, and to give liberty to the captives, issue forth his proclamation and none regard it? Oh! Lord God! thou who didst graciously put thy Spirit into the minds of the chief of the fathers; put forth thy Spirit now. Lord incline the hearts of sinners, that they may see and know the year of jubilee is come. Let that precious promise be fulfilled in which thou hast said, *In the day that the great trumpet is blown, they shall come that are ready to perish.* Do thou, precious Lord Jesus! do thou work in the minds of sinners both *to will and to do of thy good pleasure.* And Lord in mercy grant, that none of thine may remain in the Babylon of this world, nor be fond of the chains which sin and Satan hath cast around them. Let them hear thy voice thou Son of God, for thou hast said, *all that hear shall live.* *By the blood of thy covenant bring forth the prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.*

Take to thyself thy great name, and reign and rule the Almighty, universal Lord, of all. Amen.

CHAP. II.

CONTENTS.

This chapter contains the record of the number which returned of the people from Babylon. Of certain priests, which could not shew their pedigree.

NOW these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city ;

We are not to suppose that these were individually the very same persons which were carried away and all lived to return. Seventy years must have produced both deaths and births in the several tribes. But I rather conceive, by this register, is meant the exact number of those in each tribe that survived to return.

2 Which came with Zerubbabel: Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:

3 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two.

4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two.

5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five.

6 The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve.

7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five.

9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore.

10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two.

- 11 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three.
- 12 The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two.
- 13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six.
- 14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six.
- 15 The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four.
- 16 The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight.
- 17 The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three.
- 18 The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve.
- 19 The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three.
- 20 The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.
- 21 The children of Beth-lehem, an hundred twenty and three.
- 22 The men of Netophah, fifty and six.
- 23 The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight.
- 24 The children of Azmaveth, forty and two.
- 25 The children of Kirjath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three.
- 26 The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one.
- 27 The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two.
- 28 The men of Beth-el and Ai, two hundred twenty and three.
- 29 The children of Nebo, fifty and two.
- 30 The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six.
- 31 The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.

33 The children of Lod, Hadad, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five.

34 The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five.

35 The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

No doubt during the captivity a faithful register was kept of the several families, and therefore their number was the more clearly ascertained. Chiefly with an eye to the promised Messiah, each father of the tribe carefully preserved his record. One feature in this record of the families of Israel I cannot help remarking. I mean the smallness of the children of Bethlehem compared to some;—*only* 123. This was what the prophet *Micah* had before noticed. *And thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.* *Micah* v. 2. What a sweet thought this suggests, not to despise the day of small things!

36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.

37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.

38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.

39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

This list is of the priests. And a very large proportion they were to the whole mass; somewhat about a tenth part.

40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four.

41 The singers: the children of Asaph an hundred twenty and eight.

42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, *in* all an hundred thirty and nine.

43 ¶ The Nethinims: the children of Ziha,

the children of Hasupha, the children of Tab-
baoth,

44 The children of Keros, the children of
Siaha, the children of Padon,

45 The children of Lebanah, the children of
Hagabah, the children of Akkub,

46 The children of Hagab, the children of Shal-
mai, the children of Hanan,

47 The children of Giddel, the children of Ga-
hah, the children of Reaiah,

48 The children of Rezin, the children of Ne-
koda, the children of Gazzam,

49 The children of Uzza, the children of Pa-
seah, the children of Besai,

50 The children of Asnah, the children of Me-
hunim, the children of Mephusim,

51 The children of Bakbuk, the children of
Hakupha, the children of Harhur,

52 The children of Bazluth, the children of
Mehida, the children of Harsha,

53 The children of Barkos, the children of Si-
sera, the children of Thamah,

54 The children of Neziah, the children of Ha-
tipha.

55 The children of Solomon's servants: the
children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the
children of Peruda,

56 The children of Jaalah, the children of Dar-
kon, the children of Giddel,

57 The children of Shephatiah, the children of
Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the
children of Ami.

58 All the Nethinims, and the children of So-
lomon's servants, *were* three hundred ninety and
two.

I include the whole of these in one list, for Levites, Nethinims, and
the Singers, with the children of Solomon's servants, may be summed

up as bearing offices in one and the same household, though in different departments.

59 And these *were* they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they *were* of Israel:

60 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two.

This inability to prove their stock of Israel is mentioned as a reproach. But yet we find that they were of those whose hearts the Lord had inclined to go to Jerusalem; were they not types also of those concerning whom we read in the last call of the Jews, *who shall take hold of the skirts of a true Israelite, saying, we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.* Zech. viii. 23.

61 And the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name:

62 These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.

63 And the Thirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

It is delightful to observe even in these times of deep poverty, how tenacious the Israelites were of their true origin and descent both from Israel and among the order of Aaron. And this is to be referred into an higher cause than merely human considerations or human wisdom. The hand of the Lord was in it that every tribe, and especially the tribe of Judah, might have a clear unquestionable descent from father to son.

64 ¶ The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred and three-score,

65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred

thirty and seven: and *there were* among them two hundred singing men and singing women.

If the Reader will compare accounts in this of the return with that of their carrying away, he will find that they had multiplied as they had done in Egypt under all their affliction. Precious thought! the church may be, must be, oppressed, assaulted, persecuted; but it is Jesus's church, and she shall increase. *A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.* Isaiah lx. 22.

66 Their horses *were* seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five;

67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; *their* asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

Their treasures of cattle make no inconsiderable figure, considering that they came out of a long captivity.

68 ¶ And *some* of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which *is* at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

Their liberal offerings are taken notice of because they were given with a liberal heart, though compared to former gifts in the building of the first temple, their whole collection was small indeed. There they gave in *talents*. Now only in *drachms*. The widow's mite was a costly offering in the sight of our Lord.

70 So the priests, and the Levites, and *some* of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Their residence is noticed inasmuch as it implied, amidst all the desolations of their cities, that they were delighted to be in Jerusalem once more. The prophet had said, that *the Lord's servants should take pleasure in the very stones of Zion, and favor the dust thereof.* And here we see it fulfilled. Psm. cii. 14. But Reader! think with what holy joy and rapture will the redeemed of Zion return to their Jerusalem which is above, when the captivity of sin, and Satan, and death, and the grave, is for ever over! Oh! what unknown, inexpressible, inconceivable delight will break in upon the soul when they shall *come to Zion with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads*; when all those enemies shall be known, and felt, and feared no more. In the blessed prospect of it I would say, *Haste, my beloved, and be thou*

like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bether. Song ii. 17.

REFLECTIONS.

VERY precious, and very highly interesting, are the thoughts which arise out of this chapter under the blessed Spirit's teaching. And Reader! let you and I see that we do not lose sight of them.

Behold, then, how careful the fathers were to pre-serve, amidst the most calamitous times, a faithful record that they were of the stock of Israel, and had Abraham for their father. Though living in Babylon, they had not incorporated with the seed of Babylon; but though cast down for their sins, they considered themselves not finally cast off. God was still their God, and his covenant engagements not broken. Let us interpret this of gospel-times, and see how highly it speaks to the true children of promise in Jesus. We are not simply recorded in the genealogy of families if we are children of God in Christ Jesus, but our record is on high, and our names written in the Lamb's book of life. And though we, like the church of old, live in the Babylon of this world, yet, blessed be God, Jesus tells us we are not of this world. And if Israel were saved and brought home, because of God's covenant-promises to Abraham, think how everlastingly certain and sure must be the covenant engagements of Jehovah with his dear Son, purchased and confirmed by his blood, and all his people justified in his righteousness. Oh! the precious, precious privileges Jesus hath secured to his church to insure their final triumphs over all the captivity of sin and Satan. And oh! Reader! let us be highly jealous of these vast privileges. See, day by day, that we do not lose sight of our interest in them, but live in the constant use of them; and not like some of the priests and people, unable to prove their pedigree. Oh, dearest Jesus! may it be my daily delight, with the first of the morn and the last of the night, to look again and again over the love-tokens of thy favor. Surely I may say of thee as the church of old, *Oh! that thou wert (for thou art) as a brother to me, that sucked the breasts of my mother; when I should find thee without I would kiss thee, yea, I should not be despised.*

And while I am upon these sweet thoughts, suggested by the view of the church as here numbered in their return from Babylon, do I not behold in it also a blessed and a glorious type of the whole nation of the redeemed on earth returning at the last day, when Babylon, the great mother of harlots, shall be cast down, and *the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus,* shall fall to rise no more. Precious, precious Lord Jesus! ride forth now thou Almighty Lord of all, and win the nations to the sceptre of thy grace. Proclaim, as Cyrus thy type did, for thy people to return. Let the enemies of thy cross fall before thee, and dare no longer to retain thy captives. Bring them, Lord, to thine home, to build thee a spiritual temple, in thy strength, riches, and power. In every age make up the register of those whose names are written in thy book, until at length all that the Father hath given thee are gathered to thee, and the millions whose bodies sleep under the

altar in heaven in hope, shall at thy call arise to all the wonders of futurity, and the whole purposes of creation and redemption being fully answered in the union of thy glorious body being brought to thee, the song of everlasting, unceasing praise and hallelujahs, shall fill the realms of bliss to the Holy Three in One, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for evermore.

CHAP. III.

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This chapter opens with an account of the zeal of the fathers and the people to begin the temple. They set up the altar; renew their offerings; and the foundation of the temple is laid.

AND when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

This seventh month was probably at the time of gathering in their summer fruits. What the country had produced of them is not said. But it was a fit season for assembling upon the great purpose they had in view. I would not have the Reader, methinks, overlook the unanimity which subsisted among them; for we are told they gathered themselves together as one man. Reader! it is this sweet feature of Jesus's gospel which makes both him and his blessed cause so dear. Oneness with him will be sure to make the same with his members. If I love him I must love my brother that is part of him.

2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as *it is* written in the law of Moses the man of God.

I must beg the Reader very particularly to mark this verse. Here we find that before they begun, or even had power to begin, the foundation for the temple, the altar was set up. Was not this typical of Jesus? Is he not, and was he not ever, the Altar, the Sacrifice, and Priest? What a precious allusion then was this to him, in whom all sacrifices had their substance, and to whom they all referred.

3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt offerings morning and evening.

4 ¶ They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as

it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

5 And afterward *offered* the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid.

Observe the morning and evening sacrifice. Here again remember, Reader, as this was according to the law of Moses, the lamb of the morning and evening sacrifice was offered. And what could more fully shadow forth the *Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world?* Observe what is said of the fear of the people. They were surrounded with foes ready to take advantage of their present defenceless state. But yet in the midst, the Lord's services shall not be neglected. Recollect, Reader, how it is said that the Spirit of the Lord was upon them, in inclining their hearts to the business. It is always profitable to eye the Holy Ghost in his gracious ministry.

7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

The assistance they obtained from *Tyre and Zidon* in building the temple, suggests to us once more how the Lord had a continued reference to the poor Gentiles of the earth. They shall have somewhat to do with Jesus even before they know the Lord Jesus, or are conscious of their want of him. For the Lord Jehovah, our Father, had given the ends of the earth to his dear Son from the moment he set him up as King in Zion. This the Lord Jesus assured the church of, when he said, *I will declare the decree.* Psm. ii. 6—8.

8 ¶ Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity

unto Jerusalem ; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

9 Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God : the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

If the Reader will peruse with this account what *Haggai* hath recorded concerning the building of the temple, the one scripture will, as it is designed, throw great light upon the other. And this will be *comparing spiritual things with spiritual*. 1 Cor. ii. 13.

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD ; because *he is good*, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

There is an uncommon degree of sweetness in this account. *The mercy of God endureth for ever*. Surely this mercy is Jesus. And did not the Israelites consider it so when they sung the hymn? Jesus is the first-born in the womb of mercy. He is emphatically called mercy ; even *the mercy promised*. Luke i. 72. And as all mercies are folded up in him, and can only be opened from him, and by him ; this makes the song sweet indeed, and may well be sung everlastingly, for this mercy of Jehovah in Jesus endureth for ever. It endured even while in Babylon ; for the efficacy of redemption by him was as great in that season as in any other. Reader ! shall not you and I join the song, and shout aloud in praises from the same cause, Jesus, the mercy of Jehovah, endureth for ever.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice ; and many shouted aloud for joy :

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the

weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

This account affords an interesting moment of history, and furnisheth out as beautiful a representation of the love and zeal of both characters. It must have been a striking sight to have beheld those who were clamorous with holy joy, as well as those who were grieved with holy sorrow. The prophet Haggai was commissioned to quiet the minds of the afflicted ones with that precious promise; that notwithstanding all outward splendor was wanting in this second temple, compared to the first, *yet the glory of the latter should be greater than the glory of the former.* And was it not so, when in after ages the Lord Jesus came, in the substance of our flesh, into it? Haggai ii. 9. Precious promise then to quiet the minds of the afflicted. And oh! how infinitely more precious now, who have lived to see it fulfilled. Blessed be the Lord, who hath come to his temple, *even the messenger of the Covenant, whom we delight in.* Malachi iii. 1.

REFLECTIONS.

SEE, my soul, in those perilous, poor times of the church, yet amidst all their poverty, the altar was set up, and the foundation of the temple laid. But thine Altar is for ever established, and thy foundation from everlasting laid; even Jesus, who is the sum and substance of every altar, sacrifice, and priesthood, and the whole of the temple, foundation, and top-stone, brought forth *with shoutings of grace, grace unto it.* Yes! thou dear Redeemer, in the secret and mysterious nature of thy person, work, and office, thy blood and righteousness, do thy people find the Altar, on which all offerings can alone be offered. *On thee, and in thee, and by thee,* all the presentations of thy people's persons and prayers come up with acceptance. And thou art the foundation on which is built their life, safety, happiness, and comfort, both in time and eternity. And, Lord, grant that in the view of thee and thy finished work, I may lose sight of all outward things; for neither the splendor of Solomon's temple, nor the want of splendor in the second temple, is any thing, for thou art *All, and in all.*

Where thou art, blessed Jesus, thou givest glory indeed, to the service, to the offering, in the church, in the heart of all thy people; and without thee what is all the outward adorning, or inward parade of church or worship? My soul therefore will weep like those men if thou art not present, and shout for joy when thou art with me. Every where, and in all things, be thou my portion; and then in all things my happiness will be compleat. Thou art my dwelling place, my church, my temple, my altar, my sacrifice: for how full of all things art thou to supply every spiritual necessity? And while my soul is sweetly solacing herself in thee and on thee; while Christ is my home, my house, my habitation; his flesh my food; his blood my drink; his righteousness my covering; and all that belongs to Jesus my treasure; angels will be my ministering spirits; and Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, my companions both here and for ever.

CHAP. IV.

CONTENTS.

This chapter relates an interruption to the labours of the people in building the temple from their enemies. Commandment issued from the king to put a stop to the work.

NOW when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel;

2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

I beg the Reader to remark with me the several interesting circumstances which occur in this chapter. As an history they are deserving attention; but as a spiritual subject in reference to the building of the temple of God, they become much more so. Let the Reader observe how the adversaries of Judah speak of God's people reproachfully, in calling them *the children of the captivity*. And are not God's people in all ages branded with some reproachful name of contempt? And let the Reader remark further who those adversaries were. Not the Chaldeans, their old masters, nor the Persians, their new ones; but those of the land. Persons who lived near them, and carried on a mungrel kind of religion; who professed to call upon the Lord, and yet served their idol gods? Alas! who are the greatest enemies gracious souls have to contend with now? Not open ones; not professed Infidels. *A man's foes* (says one that could not be mistaken) *are they of his own household*. Matt. x. 36. And if possible nearer yet than this, in a spiritual sense: what greater foes hath a follower of Jesus than the opposers in his own heart from sin and unbelief, and the corruptions of his own nature. But Reader! doth not the gospel of Jesus in building the spiritual temple to his glory, meet with the same opposition all over the earth? And wheresoever the true gospel of Jesus is preached, doth not the enemy raise up foes either subtle, insinuating, or more open and bold, continually to oppose it?

3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

No doubt the Lord was their guide in this wise counsel. And we have need of much grace to be always upon our guard against the sly advances of the enemy under feigned affection. The devil never more artfully deceives than when *transformed into an angel of light*. Jesus is the whole sum and substance of the gospel. The smallest departure from him is more to be guarded against than all the daring attacks of infidelity. For this latter is manifest, that it comes from the devil: but the former is not so speedily discovered.

4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

5 And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

By weakening the hands of the people, perhaps is meant, alarmed some weak minds to relax in their service. And by continually thwarting the people, no doubt it operated to their great discouragement. Such is not unfrequently the case now. But the Lord overrules these oppositions not unfrequently to good. Reader! mark it down as a certain truth, whatever drives a child of God to a throne of grace, and makes his visits there more frequent than otherwise they would be; these things must be mercies.

6 And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they *unto him* an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 ¶ And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter *was* written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:

9 Then *wrote* Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, *and* the Elamites,

10 And the rest of the nations whom the great

and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest *that are* on this side the river, and at such a time.

11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, *even* unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.

12 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls *thereof*, and joined the foundations.

13 Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up *again*, *then* will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and *so* thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.

14 Now because we have maintenance from *the king's* palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers; so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.

16 We certify the king that, if this city be builded *again*, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

It should seem that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes are both names of the same person: probably meaning the same as King. And it should seem that the enemies of the church caught at the first moment in the opening of this man's reign to throw down the temple. There must have been a period of at least 12 years in this interval. And Reader! do not overlook (for it is a feature which hath in all ages marked the character of God's enemies) how disaffection to government is urged by way of exciting the displeasure of the court against God's faithful servants. And was not our Lord Jesus accused in the same manner as if he forbade to give

tribute to Cæsar? Whereas Jesus paid the tribute, and those that accused him hated the Roman government, under whom Judea was in tribute, and would not have paid it if they had dared to refrain. Witness their hatred to the tax-gatherers the publicans.

17 ¶ Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time.

18 The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.

19 And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and *that* rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all *countries* beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.

21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until *another* commandment shall be given from me.

22 Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

23 Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter *was* read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews and made them to cease by force and power.

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.

The accomplishment of their wicked purpose may serve to shew us how the Lord is pleased sometimes, for the exercise of faith in his people, to let the enemy triumph. And when the short-lived victories of our deadly foes have this blessed effect upon our hearts to make us more sensible of our nothingness, and to make Jesus and his fulness more precious; even our foes become instruments in the Lord's hand to his glory

and our greater good. When the Jews had nailed Jesus to the cross, how distressed must have been the minds of all his followers. But behold, that cross soon after became his people's glory, and now it is the everlasting joy of all his followers, and will be the song of redemption in heaven with all the ransomed of Jesus for evermore.

REFLECTIONS.

WE have a very beautiful instruction given us by the Holy Ghost, in what this chapter holds forth to us of the opposition the people of God receive from false friends, as well as open enemies, in the progress of the divine life. *They that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.* It is a mark of the christian character, and impossible wholly to avoid it. But, my brother, in the spiritual building, whether far advanced in the superstructure, or whether the foundation be but just laid, yet if Jesus be the foundation stone, depend upon it it is *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*, to all carnal characters around you. Do not forget therefore, your high calling; but seek grace to go on with the building, being more and more established in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Look daily to your foundation, even to Jesus; *for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, Jesus Christ.* On him rest the whole weight and burden of your salvation, and let him too bear all the glory. And as stones highly polished, let one grace be added to another, and one ordinance make way for another. *In nothing being terrified by your adversaries; but living upon, walking with, rejoicing in, the Lord Jesus Christ.* And depend upon it, however apparently the work may seem hindered, yet Jesus is secretly carrying it on, and his people are growing unto *an holy temple in the Lord, for an habitation of God through the Spirit.* And as the apostle in his sweet consolation speaks, *the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, will comfort our hearts, and stablish us in every good word and work.*

CHAP. V.

CONTENTS.

The affairs of the church put on a better aspect than in the foregoing chapter. Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people to resume the building, and Zerubbabel and Joshua are animated to the work.

THEN the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, *even* unto them.

2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem: and with them *were* the prophets of God helping them.

We shall do well to compare the prophecies of *Haggai* and *Zechariah* with this part of the history; for both scriptures will mutually explain each other. How beautiful it is when the Lord at any time stirreth up his people. And how important a part it must be of a gospel ministry, to stir up the minds of the saints of God by way of remembrance. And how doubly beautiful is it, when the church is supported by the civil power, as was the case here; when *Zerubbabel* the governor, as well as *Joshua*, put their shoulders to the work. It should seem, by what the prophet *Haggai* said, that there were some that concluded the time was not come to build the temple, by which the minds of others were discouraged. *Haggai* i. 2—8.

3 At the same time came to them *Tatnai*, governor on this side the river, and *Shethar-boznai*, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

4 Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?

5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to *Darius*: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this *matter*.

I think it an object of considerable moment to remark on this part of the history, that the enemies of Israel made no interruption to their building houses for themselves, though this was contrary to the king's commandment; but no sooner were their hands engaged to the work of the Lord's house, than the adversaries came forth to oppose them. *Chap.* iv. 21. And is it not exactly the same now, and in all ages: particularly concerning the chief features of the gospel. Satan never rages at the preaching of a flimsy morality, for he well knows that this never did nor ever will, make a man moral, or form the foundation even for morality in the heart. It is *by the Spirit* only that sinners can *mortify the deeds of the body and live*. *Rom.* viii. 13. But the moment the cross of Christ is held up, and atonement by the blood of Jesus is declared to be the only salvation for a poor sinner, all hell is up in arms to interrupt the spiritual building.

6 The copy of the letter that *Tatnai*, governor on this side the river, and *Shethar-bosnia*, and his companions the *Apharsachites*, which *were* on this side the river, sent unto *Darius* the king:

7 They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto *Darius* the king, all peace.

8 Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.

9 Then asked we those elders, *and* said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

10 We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that *were* the chief of them.

11 And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up.

12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.

13 But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon *the same* king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.

14 And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that *was* in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto *one*, whose name *was* Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;

15 And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.

16 Then came the same Sheshbazzar, *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and *yet* it is not finished.

17 Now therefore, if it *seem* good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

The Lord had certainly softened the minds of those men, that though they sent an accusation against the people to the king, yet the Lord overruled the inditing of it. When *a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.* Prov. xvi. 7. But I beg the Reader to observe further what confidence the people had taken from the consciousness that the eye of the Lord their God was upon them. No doubt the Lord blessed the words of his servants the prophets unto them. I cannot sufficiently praise the firmness and zeal of the people in stating their just pretensions to prosecute the work; not only because Cyrus the king had tolerated, but from an infinitely higher cause, that the king of kings, even the God of heaven and earth, they were servants to. And they had suffered his displeasure in the captivity they were lately brought out of, for neglecting what they now were determined to engage in. Oh! how precious it is to find souls faithful to God and Christ, and determined to persevere in his service, be the consequence what it may. Reader! make your just observations upon the same characters, as they appeared in the foregoing chapter and in this. *There* through fear of man, which bringeth a snare, they ceased from the work. *Here*, through fear and love of God, which giveth confidence, they set up their banners. But Reader! do not fail at the same time to put down this different conduct to the right cause. Left to themselves in the former instance, we see what human strength is. Aided and encouraged by the Lord's prophets, and more especially the Lord's grace, in this latter instance, we see what man can do, the Lord helping. Precious Jesus! I can do nothing by myself except to sin and forget thee. But I can do all things when thou art by and guidest me on, and enablest me.

REFLECTIONS.

BLESSED Jesus! do I not behold thee even in this chapter, when I perceive thy servants stirring up the minds of thy people to thy cause. Surely thou art the Lord God of the prophets, and when thou didst influence the several characters in thy church, both ministers and people, was it not a plain manifestation that thou wert speaking in them and by them in procuring peace to the prosecution the work of thy temple. Indeed, from everlasting thou, and thou alone, art the peace, and the peace maker, in all cases, and upon all occasions. Thou hast made our peace with God by thy blood. Thou hast made our peace with ourselves, and with our own consciences. All nature, and all things, by the fall were at enmity with man; and all the inferior orders instantly arose in rebellion against him, because he had rebelled against God. But when Jesus came

he restored all things: To God his glory—to man his peace—to all creation order and regularity. And as thou hast purchaced our peace by thy blood; so by thy continual advocacy thou livest to render it effectual. And now in thy blessed gospel thou comest to preach peace to them that are afar off, and to them that are nigh. Hail! glorious, almighty, blessed Prince of peace! Lord, in thy peace make me to go on in defiance of the opposition of hell and the world, in building thine house; and being myself built up in my most holy faith. And let devils assault, or the enemies of God and of his Christ fail; yet, Lord, speak but thy peace to my soul, and all shall be well. Say unto me as thou didst to thy disciples; *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but in me ye shall have peace.*

CHAP. VI.

CONTENTS.

This Chapter relates an event of great joy to the people of God. Darius commands the building to go on. It is finished. They celebrate the passover, and make a feast of dedication.

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.

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:

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 sarifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, *and* the breadth thereof threescore cubits.

4 *With* three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expences be given out of the king's house:

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.

Surely the Lord's hand was in this, for otherwise when the decree of *Cyrus* was not found in Babylon, what could have prompted the mind of *Darius* to have had search made for it in another of his provinces, especially as no doubt *Tatnai* and the enemies of the cause would have been very forward to have prevented it, had not some overruling power led on to the enquiry. How precious is it, dearest Lord, to trace thy steps going before thy church and people every where? And indeed must it not be so? Didst thou not sing to thy church, *A vineyard of red wine?* And didst thou not say, *I the Lord do keep it. I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* Isaiah xxvii. 3. Reader! let us seek grace never to lose sight of this in all the circumstances of the church; and in all our own private trials.

6 Now *therefore*, *Tatnai*, governor beyond the river, *Shether-bosnai*, and your companions the *Apharsachites*, which *are* beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

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.

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 expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

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:

10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven; and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

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 dung-hill for this.

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.

Observe how the hand of the Lord is with this decree. *Tatnai* and his companions are reprov'd for opposing God's work. *Darius* not only commands the temple to be built, but at his own cost and charge. Nay more, he makes allowance for the daily sacrifice; and desires that in this temple prayers and sacrifices may be continually offer'd for the life of himself and his sons. Yea, as if under the spirit of prophecy, he looks up to God to vindicate his own cause in destroying kings as well as people, whosoever shall put forth an hand to the ruin of the temple. Surely one is led almost to believe, that such a friend to God's cause must be a partaker of God's grace. Was not this another instance of the Jew and Gentile being alike interested in Jesus? Solomon's temple had a *Hiram*, king of Tyre, to give aid: and here is a *Darius*, king of Persia, contributing to the second temple. Were not both, blessed Jesus, meant by thee to prefigure the united church of thy glorious redemption, as including both the Jew and the Gentile?

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.

See how the Lord can change the face of things in a moment. The very men that went forth for the ruin of God's cause are made unwilling instruments for the promotion of his glory. And thus, Reader! depend upon it, will even the malice of Satan be made subservient to the greater glory of Jesus and the joy of all his people. *Fear not, little flock.*

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.

How truly beautiful in their place are God's ministers, when they *strengthen the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees.*

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.

I think there must have been a space of nearly 20 years from the foundation of the temple to the finishing of it. And in the building up of every individual of Christ's mystical temple, how long sometimes, how

frequently interrupted, and in some instances, how apparently given over, as it was here, doth the work seem to many precious souls, in their own case and in that of others! Oh! precious, precious Jesus! well is it for thy people that both the work and the glory is thine. The spark of grace thou preservest from being extinguished. The incorruptible seed thou keepest from rotting.

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,

17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an 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.

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.

19 ¶ And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth *day* of the first month.

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.

21 And the children of Israel, which were home 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,

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.

How beautiful and truly interesting is it, to discover, more or less, through the Bible, from the first forming of the church on our fathers' coming out of Egypt, even to the days of the Lord Jesus, how this great

typical feast of the passover was kept and most religiously observed. Surely nothing upon earth can more decidedly prove the vast and infinite importance of the thing signified, when the sign was thus preserved with such solemnity of holiness from generation to generation. Think, Reader, I charge you, how vast, how infinitely momentous must be the passover of Jesus's blood, when through so many ages the shadow of it was thus religiously observed with the most scrupulous exactness. Oh! sir! *how shall we escape*, how shall any man escape, *who wilfully neglects so great salvation?* Heb. ii. 3.

REFLECTIONS.

AT length we have seen, after many years expectation to the people, and much opposition from their enemies, the temple built and dedicated; and once more the church enjoying unmolested the privilege of her ordinances. But while we bless God for thus watching over his people for good, and in his own good time doing good to Zion; let us look to him whom that temple, and whom every ordinance, points to, and in whom all have their meaning and completion. Yes! precious Jesus! I would desire grace to look unto thee; for on thee all the eyes of saints and angels are unceasingly fixed with delight. And well may a poor sinner therefore look with delight on thee, since but for thee, and thy great salvation, he must have been looking up in the misery of the damned for evermore. Help me, then, thou precious Lord, to contemplate thy beauties, thy glories, thy loveliness, in thyself; thy loveliness and suitability to thy people. Surely thou art *the Lord our righteousness*. Thou art indeed the temple, the altar, the sacrifice, the High Priest, the offering, the Lamb of God, and the all-sufficient propitiation; the advocate, the intercessor of thy people. Angels are gazing on thee, thou peerless beauty! the spirits of just men made perfect have their eyes fixed on thee. Every redeemed soul now in glory among the ransomed in the Zion which is above, is looking on thee with love, with rapture, with unspeakable, undescribable delight! Lord Jesus! make me one of the blessed multitude, and keep my heart, my soul, mine eyes, for ever and for ever gazing on thee. And while on earth my poor feeble frame is on the stretch to see thee in every thing, to bless thee for every mercy, and to enjoy thee in all; oh! let me live near thee, and to thee, and with thee, day by day in a life of faith, until at thy second coming faith shall be swallowed in sight, and my soul sit down at the fountain head of everlasting enjoyment, in the presence of God and the Lamb for evermore, Amen. Hallelujah.

CHAP. VII.

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We are here brought more particularly acquainted with Ezra, the writer of this book. He had modestly said nothing of himself in the opening of his records of the church; but here he is obliged to say somewhat concerning his own history, from the part he took in the public service. He is represented as going up to Jerusalem; obtains a commission from the king for that purpose; and he enters upon it with blessing God for the appointment.

NOW after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,

2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,

4 The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,

5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:

We cannot too particularly bless God that amidst all the darkened days of the church in Babylon, a secret work of the Holy Ghost upon the minds of the people, prompted them to be very tenacious of the records of each tribe and family. For had this not been the case, how should we have traced our Lord's genealogy so as to ascertain the accomplishment of the promise. Hail! holy, blessed Spirit! be thou adored for this precious instance of thy mercy in watching over the church when our fathers merited so justly thy displeasure!

6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he *was* a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

7 And there went up *some* of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which *was* in the seventh year of the king.

9 For upon the first *day* of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first *day* of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

We ought to pause over this account, short as it is, of Ezra's character. A scribe was one conversant with the Scriptures: and as

Ezra was a ready scribe, and had dedicated himself particularly to this service, no doubt the thing was of the Lord. For as the Holy Ghost hath caused his writings to be so faithfully preserved and handed down to us, and as from their great importance in this part of the church's history they form so interesting a portion of God's sacred word, we cannot be at a loss to discover the work of the blessed Spirit accompanying all his labours with success. Reader! think if Ezra was so earnest in the study of the books of the scripture which were extant in his day, and in which Jesus was so little known, compared to our vast privileges in this gospel day in which we live; how ought we to be alive in searching those precious scriptures, where Jesus forms the sum and substance of every book and chapter! Dear Lord! grant me grace to be unceasingly enquiring after thee in the word of thy truth, that *I may be made wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus!* It is somewhat remarkable that Ezra should have been left so long in Babylon after the return of the children of the captivity. But it should seem that the Lord had work for him there to do. The obtaining this commission from the king for the great purposes conceived in Ezra's mind, seems to explain the cause of his detention there very fully. From all calculations, however, as the temple was now built, it must have been many years.

11 ¶ Now this *is* the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, *even* a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.

12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect *peace*, and at such a time.

13 I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

The kindness of the Persian king was very great. For not only Ezra, but as many as had a mind to accompany him, were permitted to join in his expedition.

14 Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which *is* in thine hand;

15 And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation *is* in Jerusalem,

16 And all the silver and gold that thou canst

find in all the province of Babylon, with the free-will offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which *is* in Jerusalem:

17 That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which *is* in Jerusalem.

18 And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.

19 The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, *those* deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem.

20 And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow *it* out of the king's treasure house.

21 And I, *even* I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which *are* beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily,

22 Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing *how much*.

23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done, for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

24 Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy

God, that *is* in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that *are* beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God: and teach ye them that know *them* not.

26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it *be* unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

The several features in this grant were all in favor of the church. And how strange would it seem did we not look deeper than the surface of the matter, and behold the Lord's hand in the direction, to view an idolatrous heathen giving assistance to the church of Jesus. John saw *a wonder in heaven* when he saw *the earth helping the woman*. Rev. xii. 16. And surely it is a wonder which grace only can explain, when men become the unwilling instruments of accomplishing the very reverse of what they intend. Witness the sons of Jacob in their intended ruin of Joseph. And yet infinitely higher and more important, and never to be lost sight of, when the Jews crucified the Lord of life and glory, how little *did* they consider what blessings they became the instruments to accomplish! I have to call upon the Reader to admire and adore the Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, for the wonderful change which must have been wrought in the minds of Artaxerxes and his princes, to favour the cause of God so very highly. Not only giving Ezra authority to take with him all as many as felt inclined to go up to Jerusalem, but also to grant him money so liberally to do all that was in his heart. And to impose upon all his subjects an obedience to whatever Ezra should demand in favour of the cause he was engaged in. Surely no higher proof can be required that the hearts of all men are at the Lord's disposal, and that like *rivers of water he turneth them whithersoever he pleaseth*. Prov. xxi. 1.

27 ¶ Blessed *be* the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put *such a thing* as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem:

28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God *was* upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

How beautiful is this ascription of praise in the mouth and heart of Ezra. How lovely is it to see when men have grace to pass by second causes and look wholly at the first. Joseph's history affords a me-

morable instance of this, when referring the unkind behaviour of his brethren unto the kind ordination and predisposing government of the Lord. *So now* (said he) *it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* Gen. xlv. 8.

REFLECTIONS.

How truly lovely doth Ezra the scribe appear in the view here given of him! a scribe indeed well instructed in the law of God. Trained in a foreign land, and under captivity, yet still his attachment to his beloved Jerusalem, and the people of his fathers, and yet above all to the God of his fathers, how near at heart had Ezra an interest in all that concerned the welfare of Zion. Truly might he say, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I do not prefer Jerusalem before my chief joy.*

But while we pay all due respect to a character of such eminency as Ezra, how is the mind directed in the view of him to the recollection of one, to whom Ezra was but as the faint shadow to the substance. Jesus came to his beloved Jerusalem with full commission from the King of kings, even God his father, and had all power given to him in heaven and in earth. And as many as were minded of their own will, when by his grace the Lord had made them willing in the day of his power, the Father gave to be his companions, that *Jesus might give eternal life, to as many as the Father had given to him.* And the Lord Jesus declared the decree which Jehovah had made for this express purpose. But with what power was Jesus vested; to what extent his commission; to receive all honor, that as the Father was honored, so also should be the Son! All his ministers and servants freed from tribute; for if *the Son had made them free, they then are free indeed.* And all who refuse to bow the knee to the sovereignty of his grace, must bend before the iron rod of his justice. Hail! thou Almighty Jesus! who camest to us in thy Father's name, and by his authority. All power, grace, and salvation be thine. May every knee bow before thee, and every tongue confess, *that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Amen.

CHAP. VIII.

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We have here a further relation of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem. He begins it with prayer; the Lord conducts him and those who accompanied him in safety. An account of his arrival, and his entrance on business.

THESE are now the chief of their fathers, and *this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.*

It is to the honor of *Ezra's* company that the Holy Ghost hath caused

their register to be made in the book of God. Strange indeed it is, to consider that so long after the proclamation made by Cyrus, so many of the people remained in Babylon; and yet were afterwards to go. But is not this the case in the call of the gospel? The hour was not yet come. And the Lord by this testimony, plainly shews that the work is with him. *Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but neither is he that planteth, neither he that watereth any thing, but God that giveth the increase.*

2 Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush.

3 Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharoah; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty.

4 Of the sons of Pahath-moab; Elihoenai the son of Zerabiah, and with him two hundred males.

5 Of the sons of Shecaniah; the son of Jehaziel, and with him three hundred males.

6 Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males.

7 And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males.

8 And of the sons of Shephathiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males.

9 Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males.

10 And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males.

11 And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males.

12 And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males.

13 And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names *are* these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males.

14 Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zab-bud, and with them seventy males.

The whole number is fourteen hundred ninety and six, beside the heads of the houses themselves. A goodly company! How sweet is the gospel proclamation, when made successful to win souls unto Christ. Was it not in allusion to this, both in the Jewish and gospel church, that the prophet cried out, *The Lord shall make an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.* Isaiah xi. 16.

15 ¶ And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

The pause that *Ezra* made before his departure, no doubt, was with a view to begin his journey in prayer. *Carry us not up hence, is; or should be, the language of every truly regenerated believer, when like Moses we are about to set forth on any expedition; unless thy presence goeth with us.* Exod. xxxiii. 15. Is it not a matter of great astonishment, that none of God's ministers, the Levites, should, unasked, have been forward to go, especially as *Artaxerxes* had granted free permission? But, Reader, do not overlook the pious conduct of *Ezra* on this occasion, in his anxiety to have the ministers with him for the service of the house of God.

16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding.

17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God.

18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherabiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;

19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of

the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty ;

20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims : all of them were expressed by name.

I admire the promptness of the Levites in coming forward at the call. And I equally admire the piety of *Ezra* in ascribing this readiness of the sons of Levi to the good hand of God.

21 ¶ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way : because we had spoken unto the king, saying, 'The hand of our God *is* upon all them for good that seek him ; but his power and his wrath *is* against all them that forsake him.

23 So we fasted and besought our God for this, and he was intreated of us.

The prophet Jeremiah had predicted of the manner in which the people should return, both the dispersed of Judah and Jerusalem ; *going and weeping*. Jerem. i. 4, 5. *Ezra* therefore, in a most pious manner, proclaims a fast to seek the Lord's presence, like the pillar to Israel, to go before them. And though the way from Babylon to Jerusalem exposed the people to much danger, from the several enemies through whose territories they must pass ; yet, from a well grounded confidence in the Lord, *Ezra* would not seek any convoy from Artaxerxes. And as *Ezra* confided in the Lord, the Lord honoured *Ezra's* faith. Oh ! Reader ! what hath a well grounded faith in God's mercy in Jesus Christ accomplished in all ages ? For I hope I need not remind the Reader that the confidence of *Ezra* in a God in covenant, implied the covenant made with Abraham. And what was that but, that *in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth should be blessed*. Gal. iii. 16.

24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them,

25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, *even* the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his coun-

sellors, and his lords, and all Israel *there* present, had offered:

26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, *and* of gold an hundred talents;

27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.

28 And I said unto them, *Ye are* holy unto the LORD; the vessels *are* holy also; and the silver and the gold *are* a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers.

29 Watch ye, and keep *them*, until ye weigh *them* before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.

30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring *them* to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

Is there not a sweet spiritual instruction here? Doth not the apostle, in allusion to gospel treasures for himself and his faithful companions, observe, *we have this treasure in earthen vessels.* 2 Cor. iv. 7. Indeed, are not all the precious truths of God considered as the treasures of his grace, *More to be desired than gold, yea, than fine gold?* And is not Jesus the whole sum and substance of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Blessed Redeemer! commit thy treasure, O Lord, unto faithful men. And ye that are ministers, *be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.* Isaiah. lii. 11.

31 Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth *day* of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.

Was not this journey a type of the gospel pilgrimage—long and dangerous, exposed to the *dens of lions, and the mountains of leopards?* And is not the hand of our God upon us, to deliver us from every foe? Precious Jesus! how art thou going before thy people, and protecting them continually!

32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Merimoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him *was* Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them *was* Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites;

34 By number *and* by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.

35 *Also* the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats *for* a sin offering: all *this was* a burnt offering unto the LORD.

36 And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

I admire the continual observance of the offerings, and the sacrifices; not for the multitudes of beasts slaughtered, but for the evident reference the whole had to the person of the Lamb of God. Oh! how impossible must it have been for all the art and contrivance of man, in such a succession of ages, to have kept up so expensive a train of services, had not the Lord's hand been evidently with them to testify of his dear Son. Yes! blessed Jesus! thy *one offering, by which thou hast for ever perfected them that are sanctified*, unfolds, and explains the whole, and carries a palpable demonstration with it, that all referred to Thee, *the Lamb slain, from the foundation of the world.* Rev. xiii. 8.

REFLECTIONS.

My soul! doth not this view of Ezra's return from Babylon, with the number of the people here named and recorded, suggest to thee the ransomed of Zion, which shall one day return with everlasting joy upon their heads; when Jesus shall again be seen on the holy mount, and with him, not only *the hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of Israel, but also a multitude which no man can number of all kindreds, nations, and languages!* Oh! how delightful will be that appearance; and how sure and certain is the journey to it now. There is an highway opened, and it is indeed called *the way of holiness*. And it is truly called the way of holiness, for Jesus is himself the way; and the holiness of his person and finished-work, is the holiness of his people. *The way-faring men, though fools, cannot err therein.* Here, precious Jesus, may I be found, returning from the Babylon of this world to the Jerusalem of a better. Yes! thou dearest Lord, thou art indeed the way, the only way, the

sure way. For in thy person, thy redemption-work, thy covenant righteousness, thy atoning blood, followed with all the promises, and invitations, and assurances of thy gospel, my soul finds a sure way, and would walk in no other. Most fully convinced I am, that *salvation is in no other; neither is there any other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.* Witness for me, that my soul is come in this way: And oh! fulfil that precious promise, Lord, to my soul, that *all that do come thou wilt in no wise cast out.*

CHAP. IX.

CONTENTS.

In the prosecution of Ezra's commission, he makes discovery that the people of God had formed affinity with strangers. This calls forth great distress. Ezra seeketh to God in solemn prayer upon the occasion.

NOW when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

The Lord hath expressly commanded (Deut. vii. 1—4.) that there should be no intermarriages between Israel and the nations around. Chiefly, no doubt, with an eye to Christ. God's people were a nation of priests, an holy seed, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood. Therefore this mingling with the heathens was a direct outrage to the divine law. Alas! what are we not capable of doing, when the Lord withholds his grace! And, Reader! have you never remarked in your own instance, how sometimes this is done to teach us what we are, and to cause us to look back again to *the hole from whence we were digged.* Isaiah li. 1.

3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

4 Then were assembled unto me every one

that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

What a finished picture hath the Holy Ghost here drawn of a saint of God; silent under the heavy affliction of soul, arising from indignation at the awful calamity. The rending the garment, and the plucking off the hair, were strong expressions of an holy zeal for God's honor, and an holy sorrow for man's transgression. But what I most particularly desire the Reader to notice, is the silent humblings of Ezra, until *the evening sacrifice*. That grand, and all-important hour, which in all ages of the church, and in every sacrifice, pointed to Jesus. Most probably the ninth hour, the very hour in which Jesus on the cross finished redemption-work, and gave up the ghost, when he offered himself a sacrifice for sin. I cannot but still consider this hour (which corresponds, in point of time, to our three o'clock in the afternoon) as a most important hour, in reference to Jesus, and with an eye to his sacrifice. For as the several ages, from the time of the first institution of sacrifices to the death of Christ, set apart this hour with peculiar solemnity, as the hour for offering the evening sacrifice; so from the death of Christ, believers now, in looking back to the great event then accomplished, find peculiar comfort in the exercise of faith, in all their prayers and ordinances, which have an eye to the thing signified.

5 ¶ And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,

I would have the Reader observe, that until the hour of the evening sacrifice, the man of God expressed the perturbations of his mind in humble silence. Neither the rending of the garment, nor the mantle, could expiate the offence. Not all the silence, and humbleness of soul, could atone for it, or do it away. Neither tears, nor prayers, nor repentance, sweet signs as they are of the humbled state of the soul, can wash away sin. But Jesus alone, in his complete salvation, can make up the deadly breach. Oh! Reader! how precious is it to see Jesus, and his atoning blood, thus looked to by faith, in ages so long before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Doth it not comfort your heart in the review? I profess, with all thankful acknowledgment to the Lord, it doth mine. We have another beautiful example, which the Lord favored the prophet Daniel with, in the preceding generation to this of Ezra, while in Babylon. Dan. ix. 3—21.

6 And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

7 Since the days of our fathers *have we been in*

a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, *and* our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as *it is* this day.

8 And now for a little space grace hath been *shewed* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bandage.

9 For we *were* bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments,

11 Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

12 Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* for an inheritance to your children for ever.

13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this;

14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed *us*, so that *there should be no remnant nor escaping?*

15 O LORD God of Israel, thou *art* righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as *it is* this day: behold, we *are* before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

Reader! what sweet and gracious signs of sorrow, and of real communion with God. The blushing, and dropping countenance, under the conscious sense of the divine presence, are among the truest tokens of this state of the soul. Reader! do not fail to remark the precious lesson held forth to all true believers in Christ in this example. We as fully enjoy the manifestations of Jesus, and the love of Jehovah in him, when we lie low in the dust before him, as when in those rapturous moments we are like the apostles in the mount of transfiguration, and the Son of God unveils to us his glories, and our interest in him. Matt. xvii. 4, 5, I stay not to particularize the several features of Ezra's devotion: I rather desire the Reader to mark, in his own view of things, the leading points in it, which bespeak the gracious impressions he was under. The general confession of the sins of Israel he dwells upon, and takes care to point out the part he himself took in them. Every gracious soul doth this, and in his approaches to the mercy-seat feels his own as if they were the heaviest. And how sweetly doth he dwell upon the divine mercies, in their abundance, fulness, and continuance: as if the Lord had taken occasion, from man's undeservings, to magnify his mercy, and the exceeding riches of his grace; that where *sin abounded, grace did much more abound*. Never, blessed Jesus, was there an instance like to thine, when thou camest to seek and save *that which was lost!* I beg the Reader to notice these precious things in Ezra's holy mourning before the throne and mercy-seat. A more beautiful instance of the powerful effects of grace upon the soul, except in the parallel humblings of Daniel, (Chap ix.) is not to be found in the Bible. But I cannot dismiss this view of Ezra, without calling on the Reader to mark one feature more in his approach to God upon this occasion, and the more so because it leads my soul to yet an higher subject, from whence, if I mistake not, the whole virtue and efficacy of Ezra's devotion derived its strength. I mean *the spreading* out his hands unto the Lord his God, meaning God in covenant, as his God in Christ. Doth it not carry the Reader's mind, on the wings of faith, to Calvary, where Jesus' arms were stretched out on the cross, as if in a twofold posture of entreaty, both with God and man. Can we behold Ezra stretching forth his hands in supplication for Israel on this occasion, and shall we forget, or overlook thee, thou blessed Jesus, whose precious feet were fixed to the cross, while thine arms were stretched forth, at once looking up to the Father in intercession, and spread abroad below to embrace all that came to thee, as if saying, *Behold me, behold*

me; look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else, and beside me there is no Saviour. Isaiah lxxv. 1. xlv. 21, 22.

REFLECTIONS.

PAUSE, Reader, over this chapter, and mark in strong characters on your mind the distinguishing love of God to Israel. The Lord by prophecy had pointed out their distinction ages before. They were to *dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.* And from everlasting it had been so determined upon. In the gracious purposes of God in covenant relation, they were set apart to be known by their distinguishing peculiarity and character. And their happiness consisted in this; their singularity was to be their singular honor. They were to be a nation of priests, distinguished with peculiar sacrifices, peculiar duties, peculiar privileges, peculiar blessings: a people near to God and set apart for himself. Judge, then, the awful apostacy when Israel forgot her blessings, mercies, privileges, and above all, the God of her fathers, and mingled the holy seed with the idolatrous nations around. Reader! let the thought be suitably impressed upon your mind as one of the spiritual seed of Israel. Are not believers in Christ peculiarly set apart and formed for Jesus' glory? Are they not a *chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.* Doth not Jesus mark them for his own; make them *kings and priests to God and the Father;* the purchase of his blood, the subjects of his grace, and the token, gift, and pledge of the Father's love? And what ought to be the immediate consequence of these distinguishing mercies, but to *shew forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.* *Who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God; who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Let me only add one thought more on this sweet chapter. Who can behold *Ezra* thus acting as the intercessor for Israel, but must instantly call to mind that Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, in this glorious, all-prevailing office, in whose eventful death and intercession all the high priests under the law found favor and acceptance with God. Yes! blessed Jesus! to thee would I unceasingly direct my attention. Now, even now, thou wearest thy priesthood still; appearest in a vesture dipped in blood, to denote the sure efficacy of thine high office, and that *thou ever livest to make intercession for sinners.* Let me never open thy blessed scriptures at any part, read a page, or verse, of thy several servants' ministering, without an eye to thee. Thou art the sum and substance of all their services. The whole law, and the whole priesthood, were *but a shadow of good things to come.* In thee the whole centers; and the whole is completed for the salvation of sinners, and the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

CHAP. X.

CONTENTS.

This Chapter gives us the history which followed Ezra's prayer. Shecaniah encourageth Ezra to set about a reform. Ezra with fasting

begins it. The people feel suitable sorrow, and the strange wives are put away.

NOW when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

There is somewhat truly interesting in this account of Ezra. His great concern manifested in those several acts of sorrow and humiliation, shew what a holy zeal he had for the glory of God, and Israel's prosperity. But we must look deeper than the surface to discover the grand motive of Ezra's concern. The preservation of the holy seed from intermarrying with other nations of the earth, was one of the most important precepts of the law, and evidently given and made important with an eye to Jesus Christ. The prophets had it in commission to tell the church where Christ was to be born, and from what stock he was to proceed. *Isaiah* pointed to him as the seed of *David*: *Isaiah* xi. 1. And *Micah* pointed to the place of his birth, *Bethlehem*: *Micah* v. 2. Hence, when the Lord Jesus came, though the Jews confounded their views by imagining Christ was of Galilee, because he came from Galilee, after the flight of his mother there on account of Herod, *Matt.* ii. 1, 22. yet they uniformly bore testimony that Christ was, according to the scripture, to come of the seed of *David*, and from the town of *Bethlehem*, where *David* was. *John* vii. 41, 42. Hence *Paul* is express to confirm this grand truth, for he calls upon *Timothy* to remember that *Jesus Christ* was of the seed of *David*: *2 Tim.* ii. 8. Now from all these views of scripture together, we behold the great testimony to prove the descent of our Lord Jesus Christ, after the flesh, from the stock of *David*. But Reader! how should this have been ascertained and proved, if the children of Israel had intermarried with heathen nations? Oh! how sweet is it to behold God the Holy Ghost watching over the church of Jesus! And oh! how sweet is it to observe such lively faith as we behold in *Ezra*, and the mourning people, in looking forward to the *promised seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head*. I desire, Holy Spirit, to adore thy love and mercy in those precious views here given of both.

2 And *Shechaniah* the son of *Jehiel*, one of the sons of *Elam*, answered and said unto *Ezra*, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my

lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

4 Arise; for *this* matter *belongeth* unto thee: we also *will be* with thee: be of good courage, and do *it*.

No doubt in the evil already induced from these improper connections, the Holy Ghost had guarded the stock of David from any evil consequences in this grand matter. But it was high time that Israel should be made sensible of the sin, and be divorced from all such alliances. Here is a sweet spiritual improvement arising out of this subject. Believers in Jesus must be divorced from all carnal connections, in order to their union with the Lord. Hence Paul saith, that *he was jealous over the church*, because he had *espoused her to Christ*. 2 Cor. xi. 2. And with what tears and vows do true believers in Christ engage in his service, when turning our back upon the world, we resolve to be wholly Jesus's! This *Shechaniah* is honorably spoken of in this place by the Holy Ghost. Oh! how truly valuable thus to be honorably recorded in the book of God.

5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

6 ¶ Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and *when* he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

9 ¶ Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It *was* the ninth month, and the

twentieth *day* of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter, and for the great rain.

Who but must admire the holy zeal of Ezra? What a wonderful attempt it must have been? What a crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts? Do, Reader, observe how the Lord seemed to answer the droppings of his people's tears by the droppings of the heavens in rain. This heavy rain is spoken of as being evidently a peculiar manifestation, intimating that God looked on and took part in the reform of the people.

10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. —

12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

13 But the people *are* many, and *it is* a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither *is this* a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.

14 Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

No doubt the hand of the Lord was upon them, and with them, so that grace triumphed over nature, that all the people, as the heart of one man consented unto the thing. Oh! how delightful is it when grace enters the heart, and the soul melts before God in consequence of it.

15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this *matter*: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them.

16 And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, *with* certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by *their* names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.

17 And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.

The Holy Ghost hath thought proper to be particular in stating the precise time this great reform took to make it effectual and complete. Mark, Reader! how attentive the Lord is to all the circumstances of his people. *He telleth the wanderings of his people; he putteth their tears into his bottle; they are noticed in his book.* Psalm lvi. 8.

18 ¶ And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: *namely*, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah.

19 And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and *being* guilty, *they offered* a ram of the flock for their trespass.

20 And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah.

21 And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah.

22 And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasa.

23 Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same *is* Kelita,) Pethabiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

24 Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri.

25 Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miniamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah.

26 And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Ze-

chariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah.

27 And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, *and* Aziza.

28 Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, *and* Athlai.

29 And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth.

30 And the sons of Pahath-moab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh.

31 And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,

32 Benjamin, Malluch, *and* Shemariah.

33 Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, *and* Shimei.

34 Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel.

35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh,

36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,

37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau,

38 And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei,

39 And Shelamiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah,

40 Machuadebai, Shashai, Sharai,

41 Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,

42 Shallum, Amariah, *and* Joseph.

43 Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah.

44 All these had taken strange wives: *and some* of them had wives by whom they had children.

Observe, Reader, how the names of the offenders are recorded. No doubt both in judgment and in mercy. How fully doth it shew forth the covenant love of God in Christ, while it fully sets forth also his people's sin and depravity. Oh! what could have atoned for this dreadful rebellion, but the blessed provision made for Israel's sin in the

redemption by Israel's God. Here, blessed Jesus, as in every other case, we see the glorious resource in thy salvation. In every age, and upon every occasion, the precious truth is read and confirmed again and again; *Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned, and doth reign, unto death; so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.* Romans v. 21.

REFLECTIONS.

PAUSE, my soul, over this chapter, and before I close this book of divine inspiration, and shut up the view of this great man's history and reform; see, and consider what the Holy Ghost graciously intended to teach the church from it of a spiritual, gospel nature.

And here, my soul, stand still and consider how much of thine own life and conduct is strikingly set forth. Have I not from the womb been seeking out and forming strange alliances, and taking up connection with any thing, and with every thing, rather than being married to Christ? In Adam and his stock, fallen, sinful, and polluted I was born; by nature closely attached to him, and seeking nothing but what proved my alliance to him. Married to the law, wedded to my own righteousness, (or rather my fancied righteousness, for in reality righteousness I had none); how did I seek to find justification before God by the works of the law? And though that law became only the ministration of death; though its demands of unsinning obedience, making no one allowance whatever, might have made my very soul tremble under its universally condemning power; yet notwithstanding its rigour; notwithstanding the dreadful condemnation it held forth; still infatuated to my own present and everlasting ruin, never should I have put away those strange wives had not Jesus, like another *Ezra*, have come with grace in his lips, and love in his heart, and by his Holy Spirit convinced me of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and divorcing me from every other alliance, betrothed me to himself, and made me his for ever. Oh! thou almighty Bridegroom of thy church and of thy people! what unknown, unexplored riches are contained in that tender character. Yes! my soul! *thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name. And thy Redeemer, the God of the whole earth, shall he be called.* Help me, Jesus, my Lord and my God, to put away all the strange alliances my poor sinful heart hath been making. Do thou, dearest Jesus, hedge up my path, my way, with thorns, if at any time my wandering soul should be going away from thee after my old lovers! oh! draw me, thou dear Lord Jesus, that I may run after thee; and be thou my *Ishi*, my husband, my Holy One, the Lord my righteousness.

Farewell, *Ezra*, faithful servant of my God! I bless thy Lord, and my Lord, that he was pleased to sanctify thy ministry in this sweet book of thine, under God the Spirit, in shewing so much of Jesus shadowed forth in the several parts of it. And, blessed Lord God, be thou eternally praised, when from the services of thy inspired ministers glory thereby reverts to Jesus; everlasting glory be to the holy undivided Three in One, for all salvation. Amen.