

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

Continuing narrative from previous chapter...

Darius the king did as requested Governor Tatnai and ordered that they search the archives that were stored in the building housing the special treasures of Babylon.

The NIV Commentary noted that discoveries in Egypt reveal that the Persians wrote on rolls of both papyrus and leather.

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

Evidently this order was also forwarded to the summer palace at Achmetha (Ecbatana) since it was used to store archives from the kings of Medo-Persia as well. It was there that they found the roll detailing the decree of Cyrus concerning the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The following verses tell us what it said.

**Ezra 6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king *the same* Cyrus the king made a decree *concerning* the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, *and* the breadth thereof threescore cubits;**

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

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

In his first year as king, Cyrus made a decree ordering the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. He commanded that it be built in the same location as the previous temple and that the foundation be made strong. He even detailed the dimensions and the material to be used and authorized finances from the royal treasury. He also commanded that the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the original temple be returned to the people for use in the rebuilt house of God.

Guzik offer this insight quoting Poole regarding the dimensions: "There is some question about the *size* of the temple as mentioned here, because these dimensions are greater than even Solomon's temple. The best answer is that Cyrus gave the *limits* of what they could build, instead of the actual dimensions of the new structure. 'He did not command them to make it so large, for he left the ordering of the proportions of the building to their skill and choice; but he restrained them that they should make it no larger, lest they should hereafter make use of it to other purposes against himself.'"

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

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

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

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

**Ezra 6:10** 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.

The decree continues by ordering his appointed officials in the area to leave the Jews alone and let them complete the building of the "house of God." He also ordered the officials to supply anything they needed to complete the work from the king's goods and the money collected in tribute. They were even to supply the animals needed to make burnt offerings to "the God of heaven," as well as a daily supply of wheat, salt, wine and oil as requested by the priests. They were to be supported in every way to be able to make sacrifices to please "the God of heaven" and pray for the king and his sons.

Though Cyrus may not have claimed "the God of heaven" as his own, he certainly wanted to make sure that He looked down on him with favor.

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

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

After revealing the contents of the decree from Cyrus, Darius added his own decree. He ordered that any person that altered the decree from Cyrus be put to death by hanging and his house destroyed. The Hebrew defines hanging as impaling. Which makes sense with the context of taking a plank of wood from his house upon which to impale him.

The CJB for verse 11 states: *"I also order that if anyone defies this order, a beam is to be pulled from his house; and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. His house is to be reduced to rubble."*

Darius then calls for God to destroy any person's name—to have no progeny left for posterity—that might try to alter the decree or destroy the house of God at Jerusalem. He closed his letter with a statement that he wanted his command

carried out quickly.

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

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

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

The governor and his companions quickly proceeded to carry out the commands of Darius the king. The Jewish leaders made great progress in the building, urged on by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The temple was finally finished on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of Adar (February / March) in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Darius. It is noted that three kings had a part in the building of the temple—Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.

Gill offers this possible explanation for the inclusion of Artaxerxes: "...some think this was Xerxes the son and successor of Darius, and who might be partner with his father in the empire at this time, and so is joined with him in this commandment; which is more probable than that he should be his grandson Artaxerxes Longimamus, in whose reign the temple, it is supposed, was beautified and ornamented, though the exterior building of it was before finished; and so he is spoken of by anticipation..."

**Ezra 6:16** And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, **Ezra 6:17** 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. **Ezra 6:18** And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which *is* at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

The people of Israel rejoiced as they dedicated the house of God. At the dedication they made a large offering that included 100 bulls, 200 rams and 400 lambs as a sin offer for all the people. They also sacrificed 12 male goats on behalf of each of the 12 tribes of Israel. They then established the priests by division and the Levites by course to serve in the temple as specified in the law by Moses.

I liked Guzik's comment: "The fact that sacrifice was made for the *twelve tribes* shows that regathered Israel had the real sense that they were the collective product of all twelve tribes, and there were not ten or any other number of "lost" tribes."

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

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

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

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

Those that had returned from captivity kept the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. The priests and Levites had purified themselves in preparation for killing the Passover on behalf of the people as well as themselves. All the people that had returned from captivity and separated themselves from the morally corrupt practices of the heathen in the land came to take part in the Passover meal.

Ironside made a great application as to how important separation from the world is for Christian unity. "There can be no true practical unity save as evil is refused, and Christ becomes the object of each soul. And separation from evil involves turning to the Lord alone, for He is the one only centre, apart from all the evil. Given His rightful place, the incongruity of endeavoring to cling to what is unholy while seeking to please God, is at once made manifest."

The people followed Passover by keeping the feast of unleavened bread for the next seven days, and it was a time of rejoicing. They knew that God had turned the heart of the king to strengthen them in rebuilding the temple in honor of "the God of Israel."

This is one of the great mysteries of scripture to me. God has given us the freedom to make our own choices. Without violating that freedom, God also works in the hearts of men to accomplish His purposes—even turning the hearts of men that do not acknowledge Him as their God, sometimes including very evil men.

There is a verse in Proverbs that applies here, and I believe it applicable to all men, king or not.

*Proverbs 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."*