

THE COMMANDMENT TO RESTORE AND TO BUILD JERUSALEM

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THE SUBJECT STATED

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"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times." Dan. 9:25.

Mr. WM. C. Thurman has recently put forth a work on chronology and prophecy, entitled, "The Sealed Book of Daniel Opened." Among the many Biblical expositions of this new volume which conflict with our views of divine truth, there is but one point of vital importance sustained by sufficient evidence to render it worthy of serious consideration. This relates to the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem. We have ever

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held that this was put forth by Artaxerxes. Ezra 7. Mr. Thurman teaches that it was issued by Cyrus. Ezra 1:6. If Mr. T. is correct in this position then our views of the commencement of the 2300 days are not founded in truth. But Mr. T. insists that he unsealed the book of Daniel by discovering that the sixty-nine weeks are to be dated from the decree of Cyrus. (Compare Thurman's Chronology, pages 48, 55, 129.) If Mr. T. is shown to be in error in this view of the commandment, then by his own confession his general theory is involved in ruin.

Let us do justice to the argument of Mr. T. Two texts, in his judgment, establish the fact that Cyrus issued the commandment from which the sixty-nine weeks are to be dated. The following are the texts:

"That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Isa. 44:28.

"I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." Isa. 45:13.

These texts will be considered in their proper place. But to the view taken of them by Mr. T. there are several weighty objections. 1. It is not Cyrus, but the Lord that Isaiah represents as saying to Jerusalem, "Thou shalt be built." 2. The commandment of Cyrus, recorded Ezra 1:6, does not authorize the rebuilding of Jerusalem. 3. No system of chronology, but that of Mr. T., can make the sixty-nine weeks extend from the decree of Cyrus even to the birth of our Lord.

Mr. T., in order to extend the 483 prophetic

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days from the decree of Cyrus to the birth of Christ, attempts to overthrow the canon of Ptolemy that he may thus change the first year of Cyrus from B.C. 536 to B.C. 488, an alteration of 48 years. From this point, according to Mr. T.'s theory, the 483 years extend to B.C. 5, the true date of Christ's birth.

In accordance with the teaching of many of the most distinguished expositors of the Bible, we have as a people held that the decree of Artaxerxes, which according to the canon of Ptolemy was B.C. 457, was the true date of the sixty-nine weeks; which from this point would extend to A.D. 27, when our Lord began his ministry with the impressive declaration, "The time is fulfilled." Mark 1:15. It is observed, therefore, that there are two different events, the birth of the Messiah, and his public manifestation to Israel, that respectively mark the termination of the sixty-nine weeks according to these two different theories. But it is not the object of this article to discuss the merits of Ptolemy's canon, nor Mr. T.'s theory of the different periods in Dan. 9:24-27, nor even the proper event to mark the end of the sixty-nine weeks. The one question before us for consideration is, What marks the commencement of the sixty-nine weeks?

That view of the subject is certainly the true one which embraces all the testimony, and gives to each part its proper weight and bearing. All ground of controversy ceases to exist, when the just claims of all the contending parties are fairly allowed. Truth is not partial and sectarian. It embraces within itself all the facts that have any bearing upon the subject of inquiry in every case. We have the truth concerning any doctrine of the

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Bible when we are able to present a divine harmony of all the scripture testimony pertaining to that subject. Why should we not recognize these facts when searching out the testimony relating to the commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem? Let us give all the facts recorded in the Bible concerning this subject their proper weight, and then accept the grand result as the truth of God.

To Cyrus belongs the high honor of having been designated by name by the God of Heaven, many years before his birth, as one that should act an important part in the restoration of Jerusalem. The commandment of the God of Heaven came to him, and from him issued authority that embraced an essential part of the work. Such of the Jews as pleased were authorized to return to Jerusalem, and were empowered to rebuild the temple. This laid the foundation of the entire work, and naturally drew after it all that followed. But this did not cover all the ground. It was an important part of that commandment by which Jerusalem was restored, but it was not all. Sixteen years after this edict of Cyrus, Darius renewed its grant of power. Ezra 6. Let Darius have due credit. He did not put forth the first part of the commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem, and he did not finish out that great edict by giving ample authority for the complete accomplishment of the work. But to the edict of Cyrus he added his own authority when it was greatly needed, and at the same time enlarged the power already given to the Jews.

It would be unjust to allow Darius the credit of granting all the power under which the people of God restored their ancient city; it would be equally wrong to deny due credit for that renewal and enlargement

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of power already given, which was the work of this king. Yet each of these errors has had its adherents.

Next in order in this work came Artaxerxes, who completed the grant of power which Cyrus began, and Darius renewed and enlarged. A portion of the commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem was issued by the first of these kings; the second added to this; and the third completed this important commandment by endowing Ezra with all needed authority for the complete restoration of Jerusalem. Ezra 7. After this, nothing in the form of a decree was ever issued from the Persian court relating to this matter.

To Cyrus belongs the honor of taking the first steps toward the restoration of Jerusalem, by allowing the Jews to return, and by giving them authority to rebuild the temple; but the credit of the whole commandment does not belong to him. Darius enlarged the authority given by Cyrus, but he left it incomplete. Artaxerxes finished the commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem by clothing Ezra with full power to do whatsoever should be proper in his sight, and to enforce the law of God with adequate penalties. The credit of the whole work belongs to no one of these monarchs; but to the first, the honor of making the first grant of power to the Jews, and of establishing the precedent in their behalf; to the second, of interposing his authority in maintaining what Cyrus had enacted when that act was called in question; to the last, the honor of rendering that commandment complete, and of sending forth with it a competent man to have it carried into effect. The commandment was complete when Artaxerxes gave his edict into the hands of Ezra. It WENT

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FORTH IN ITS COMPLETE FORM when Ezra, under its ample power, began to enforce the law of God with all its strictness in Jerusalem.

This argument, therefore, will vindicate the seventh of Artaxerxes, B.C. 457, as the date of the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem; but it differs from the view hitherto held by us in that we gave the credit of the entire commandment to Artaxerxes; whereas it is evident that Cyrus and Darius each framed a portion of the great edict, and that Artaxerxes completed this memorable grant of power. In accordance with these facts we find that the commandment is spoken of, first, as the commandment of the God of Heaven; second, as THE COMMANDMENT [singular] of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, the three kings of Persia through whose successive acts the entire legal authority necessary for the complete restoration of Jerusalem was granted. Ezra 6:14. This grand edict, being the starting-point of the 2300 days, may be compared to a monument set up by the providence of God from which to measure off that most important prophetic period. Cyrus laid the foundation of this monument; Darius added to the structure, and Artaxerxes rendered it complete. The book of Ezra may be termed the history of the several acts which constitute the commandment to restore and build

Jerusalem, and of the going forth of that commandment in its complete form in the commencement of the work of Ezra. Such are the views maintained in this article; let us now come to particulars.

THE GOING FORTH of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem marks the commencement of Daniel's sixty-nine prophetic weeks. It

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embraces in its purpose a two-fold object: 1. The RESTORATION of Jerusalem. 2. The REBUILDING of that city. These are named according to their relative importance, rather than to the order of their fulfillment. To rightly understand the work that was to be accomplished by this commandment, it is necessary to call to mind the condition of Jerusalem at the time when Gabriel made this visit to the prophet, B.C. 538. The death of good king Josiah, who was slain in the battle of Pharaoh-nechoh, king of Egypt, B.C. 610, may be said to mark the close of Jewish independence. 2 Kings 23; 2 Chron. 35. The people of the land then made Jehoaz, his wicked son, king in his stead; but at the end of three months he was deposed by the king of Egypt, who called at Jerusalem for this purpose on his return from warring against the king of Assyria at the river Euphrates. Jerusalem thus became subject to the king of Egypt, B.C. 610. Then Pharaoh-nechoh made Jehoiakim king in his brother's stead, "and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold." 2 Kings 23:31-37; 2 Chron. 36:1-5. But in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, his master Pharaoh-nechoh was overthrown in battle near the Euphrates, and the power of Egypt was broken by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Jer. 46. By virtue of this occurrence Jehoiakim became the vassal of the king of Babylon, and Jerusalem became subject to that monarch. This was B.C. 605. Then Nebuchadnezzar came up to Jerusalem and received the formal submission of Jehoiakim and his oath of allegiance. Three years he observed this oath, rendering the stipulated tribute. Then, under the influence of evil men, for he did that which

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was wicked in the sight of the Lord, he rebelled against the king of Babylon. After three years of this rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar came up against him in Jehoiakim's eleventh year, and carried him to Babylon with part of the vessels of the house of God, and with the first body of Jewish captives that was ever transported to that city. 2 Chron. 36:56; Jer. 52:28. See Bliss Sacred Chronology, pp. 125-127. Nebuchadnezzar did not at this time destroy the city, nor did he even expel the family of David from the throne. He allowed Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, to reign for a few months, when he, too, having done wickedly in the sight of the Lord, and having begun a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, that monarch took Jerusalem by siege, and carried him to Babylon with the vessels of the house of God, and with a large body of Jewish captives. The king of Babylon did not even at this time destroy the city of Jerusalem, nor did he dethrone the family of David.

Trusting that the people had learned something of his power and of their own weakness, and that they were made wiser by the things they had suffered, Nebuchadnezzar took Zedekiah, another member of the royal family, and having exacted

an oath of allegiance, placed him upon the throne. But Zedekiah "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the

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abominations of the heathen. . . . They mocked the messengers of God and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." 2 Chron. 36.

Then came up the king of Babylon, and after a terrible siege from the ninth year of Zedekiah to the eleventh, the city was taken in consequence of famine; for it seems to have been otherwise almost impregnable. Then Nebuchadnezzar put to the sword without distinction of age or sex, a large part of the people of Jerusalem. He burned the house of God, and the king's house, and all the houses of the great men, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and he broke down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. Those that escaped from the sword he led away captive in Babylon. 2 Chron. 36; Jer. 52. Thus Jerusalem was utterly blotted out of existence. Nor was this terrible destruction of all that gave visible existence to the city the full measure of the calamity that had come upon it. It had not merely ceased to exist, but its right ever to exist again, was, in the estimation of the kings of Babylon, forfeited by the treason and rebellion of its inhabitants, and all its peculiar privileges as the great central point of the worship of God upon the earth, forever extinguished.

One only hope was left, and this was found in the prophetic word. The Most High had promised that after seventy years of Babylonian servitude he would interpose for the deliverance of his people; and he even called by name, Cyrus, the king of Persia, as the one that should lay the foundation of that great work, and set in motion that train of events which should accomplish their

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complete restoration. Jer. 25; 29; Isa. 13; 44:21-28; 45.

From the time of its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem lay in ruins down to the time of the memorable visit of the angel to the prophet, and even for a considerable space afterward. Dan. 9. At the time of that visit, the kingdom of Babylon having been subjugated by the Medes and Persians, the Jews had changed masters, but the city of Jerusalem remained unchanged in its condition of utter desolation. The conquest of Babylon, and the accession of Darius and Cyrus to supreme power, being particularly marked in the scriptures of the prophets as the time when God should begin to deliver his people, in the first year of the reign of Darius, B.C. 538, Daniel attentively reads the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation, and then by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, he pours out his soul in behalf of the holy mountain of his God. Dan. 9.

This prayer of the prophet is made the occasion of the visit of Gabriel; but other matters more important than the restoration of Jerusalem itself, are made the principal theme of this interview. Thus the coming of the great Messiah to perform his predicted work, his sacrificial death, and the time of each of these events, as also the key to the proper reckoning of the 2300 days, and the prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and its desolation till the consummation, are all embraced in this wonderful discourse of the angel. The restoration of Jerusalem which was the burden of the prophet's prayer, has just this connection with the events predicted by the angel, viz., that the going

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forth of the commandment for that restoration is the starting point of the sixty-nine weeks which extend to the mission of the great Messiah, and of the seventy weeks which embrace all the events of that mission.

"Know therefore," said the angel, "and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times." Dan. 9:25.

The language of the angel is remarkably definite. Jerusalem is to be restored as well as rebuilt. Not only shall the temple be rebuilt, and the houses of the people once more cover that holy mountain, but the rights, privileges, laws and worship, that once distinguished Jerusalem shall be re-established, and idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, and marriages with heathen, shall be prohibited by the civil authority and punished by adequate penalties. This is properly implied in the restoring of the city, as distinguished from its rebuilding. And we shall find these very powers granted in "the commandment" and exercised by those to whom its execution was intrusted. And besides all this, the fortifications of Jerusalem were again to enclose the sacred city.

It is the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem that causes all this to take place. It has been generally believed that there were four of these commandments, and each of these has in turn been claimed as "the commandment" referred to by the angel. The four decrees in question are, 1. That of Cyrus, Ezra 1; 6; 2. That of Darius, Ezra 6; 3. That of the seventh year of Artaxerxes, Ezra 7; 4. That

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of Artaxerxes' twentieth year. Neh. 2. But this so-called fourth decree turns out to be no decree at all. The sixth chapter of Daniel shows that a Persian decree is a written document, signed by the king. Verses 8-15. But Artaxerxes gave to Nehemiah no such document relating to Jerusalem. He gave him letters to the governors, that they should help him on the way, and one to Asaph, the keeper of the kings' forest, to allow Nehemiah to cut down such timber as he pleased. But beyond this he had only verbal instructions in the matter; that is to say, the king told him what to do. And when Nehemiah reached Jerusalem and endeavored to encourage the Jews to action in rebuilding their city- he did not indeed produce and read the king's decree, for he had nothing of that kind, but he did the best that lay in his power, he told them "the king's

words that he had spoken" unto him. Neh. 2:17, 18. It is certain therefore, 1. That no new decree was issued. 2. That Artaxerxes held that the decree already issued, granted all needed legal authority for this work which Nehemiah was sent to perform. 3. That there is, therefore, no fourth Persian decree relating to Jerusalem.

We have, then, the edicts respectively of the first year of Cyrus, of the second year of Darius, and of the seventh year of Artaxerxes to which we may look for the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. The book of Ezra contains the record of all these acts, and, therefore, covers the entire field of inquiry. It will not be the object of this article to participate in the existing controversy relative to which of these kings is entitled to the honor of having issued "the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem."

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Evident it is that each did a part, and that no one of them is entitled to the credit of the entire act. Let us then do justice to each, and in so doing vindicate the truth. The following proposition appears to embody all the important facts in the case, and states with precision the doctrine of this article:

The commandment of the God of Heaven for the restoration and building of Jerusalem, was clothed with the legal authority of the Persian empire and made the law or commandment of that empire by the successive edicts of three different monarchs, Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes.

The following reasons in support of this proposition are certainly very decisive:

1. No one of these edicts covers all the ground, and hence no one of them by itself constitutes the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem.
2. But these edicts taken collectively, contain all the legal authority needed for the accomplishment of the work.
3. While each of the edicts constitutes a fragment only of the whole commandment, they give evidence in their character that they belong together. The first is the proper commencement of the whole thing; the second renews and enlarges that first act; the third renders the commandment complete.
4. The whole is by the Spirit of inspiration designated. (1.) The commandment of the God of Israel. (2.) THE COMMANDMENT (singular) of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes. Ezra 6:14.

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THE DECREE OF CYRUS

The decree of Cyrus-Jeremiah's prediction-How Cyrus was stirred up-Cyrus connects his decree with God's commandment-What Cyrus granted-Action of the Jews under this decree-The Samaritans stop the work-Cyrus did not issue the entire commandment for Jerusalem's restoration-Situation under Ahasuerus-A wicked letter to Artaxerxes-The king decides against the Jews-The argument from these letters stated-The decree of Cyrus not repealed.

The enactment of this commandment as a law of the Persian empire divides itself into three parts: 1. What Cyrus did; 2. What Darius did; 3. What Artaxerxes did. The book of Ezra, which is simply the history of the several acts, constituting the great commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, and of the going forth of that commandment in its complete form in the work of Ezra, appropriately begins with the action of Cyrus:

0 "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. 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. 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. 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, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chron. 36.

1 That prophecy of Jeremiah which had now reached the time of its fulfillment, and which

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called for this special display of God's providential power for its accomplishment, was the following:

"For thus saith the Lord that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good work toward you in causing you to return to this place." Jer. 29:10.

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, for he was the one to fulfill this prophecy, and the time had come for him to act. It is probable that the Lord did this (1.) By the prophet Daniel; (2.) By the angel Gabriel; (3.) By the archangel Michael. The prophet Daniel was prime minister of the Persian empire. Dan. 6. It is morally certain that Daniel showed to king Cyrus that portion of the prophecy of Isaiah in which he is called by name, and in which his acts in behalf of the Jews are foretold. Also that he showed him the prophecy of Jeremiah in which the time when these acts should be performed is given. Dan. 9; Jer. 29; Isa. 44, 45.

That part acted by the angel Gabriel in this matter is stated by himself in the vision recorded Dan. 10-12, given in the third year of Cyrus. But this was the third year

of Cyrus, reckoning the two years of his joint rule with his father-in-law, Darius, and was actually the first year of his sole reign; for Daniel continued only till the first year of Cyrus. Dan. 1:21. He was now about ninety years of age, and appears to have died immediately after this vision. Dan. 12:13.

Before this vision was given to the prophet, he was mourning three full weeks, seeking God in deep humiliation with fasting and prayer. It is every way probable that this was in the crisis of

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affairs with the Jews, and before Cyrus had decided to release them. But why did the Lord defer the answer to Daniel's prayer twenty-one days? Properly speaking, there was no deferment on the part of the Lord; for Gabriel who had charge of the revelation to be given Daniel, was sent on a mission to Cyrus as soon as the prophet began to pray. Gabriel states that Cyrus withstood him twenty-one days, when Michael the great prince came to his assistance. What was it that thus engaged the united action of Daniel, Gabriel and Michael? The Lord was stirring up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to act the part assigned him in prophecy. The commandment of the God of Israel for the restoration of Jerusalem must be clothed with the legal authority of the Persian empire, and made the law and commandment of that empire. To Cyrus had been assigned by prophecy the high honor of performing the first part of this great work. He was "stirred up" to this, by the united action of Daniel, Gabriel and Michael. The first words of his decree are a direct testimony to the fact that he was proclaiming the mandate of the God of Heaven with the authority of the Persian empire. This inseparably connects the commandment of the Most High with the first Persian edict in behalf of the Jews.

But what did Cyrus grant to the people of God? That they might go up to Jerusalem and build the house of the Lord God of Israel. This grant therefore allowed the Jews to return to their own land, and authorized them to rebuild the temple. This is the entire ground covered by the decree of Cyrus. It was indeed beginning the work at the foundation, and doing that which would naturally lead the subsequent Persian monarchs to add to

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and complete the existing law, until it should authorize the entire restoration of Jerusalem. But beyond these first acts, Cyrus did not go. The city itself lay in ruins; But Cyrus said nothing concerning it. Its walls round about were leveled with the ground; but there was no word of Cyrus that gave any authority for their reconstruction. Nor did Cyrus grant them the right to punish in the holy city itself, such crimes against the Divine Majesty, as idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, and marriages with idolaters. Yet this was in the highest degree necessary for the restoration of Jerusalem as the city of the great king. The providence of God appeared to move slowly in the restoration of the needed authority for these things, and in this divine slowness it made use of the jealous caution of the Persian monarchs; but it moved quite as fast as the Jewish people were prepared to follow.

The temple was the heart of Jerusalem, its object of chief interest and of vital importance. Beyond giving the Jews permission to rebuild this, Cyrus said nothing in behalf of Jerusalem. The city itself was a natural stronghold, capable of being rendered almost impregnable. After their first subjection to the king of Babylon the inhabitants of Jerusalem had sought every opportunity to rebel against him, and had most wantonly disregarded their repeated oaths of allegiance to him. In the final siege of Jerusalem in the times of Zedekiah, so great was the strength of its fortifications, and so difficult the place to besiege on account of its natural strength, and so desperate the valor of its inhabitants, that it withstood the utmost power of Nebuchadnezzar for many

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months, and was not taken till the famine was so sore that no bread was left in the city. 2 Kings 25:3; Jer. 52:6.

These things were well known to Cyrus, and the cautious wording of his decree attests their bearing upon his mind. Cyrus was not unaware that to allow the Jews to return to their own land and to give them permission to build their temple would cause many houses to be built in Jerusalem. But he refrains from any word that should legalize such acts. He tacitly permits what could but be the inevitable result of allowing the temple to be restored, but he carefully omits any word that should give them authority to do this, or that should legalize the restoration of that city, which after so terrible a siege had been destroyed for its rebellion. Much less did he in any manner authorize or even indirectly sanction the rebuilding of its walls. The action taken under this decree furnishes additional evidence of the most decisive character that the rebuilding of the temple and not the rebuilding of the city, was the subject of this edict.

The decree of Cyrus being proclaimed we learn what the Jewish people understood it to authorize them to do. "They rose up," says the sacred historian, "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." Ezra 1:5.

The whole congregation that returned under this edict, was 42,360. Ezra 2:64. When they reached the house of God, i.e., its ruins, some of the chief of the fathers "offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place." Verse 63.

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When the seventh month was come, the children of Israel "gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem;" but the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. Ezra 3:1-6.

Then they sent to Lebanon for cedar trees "according to the grant that they had of Cyrus." And in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, they laid the foundation of the temple, and there set forward the work of the house of God. Ezra 3:7-10. Observe that it was not the rebuilding of the city, nor the restoration of its walls that they were engaged in but the work of the house of God.

Next we read that the report of these things was carried to the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin. But the report did not affirm that they were building the city, or

setting up its walls, but it was "that the children of the captivity building THE TEMPLE unto the Lord God of Israel. Ezra 4:1.

Then they came to Zerubbabel and offered to help in the work. But he replied-and it shows just what they were doing, and just what Cyrus had commanded them to do-" 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." Verse 3.

Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building." Verse 4. As the Jews were few in number, and had no walls of defense, it was not difficult for their enemies to do this. Moreover, they hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the remaining days of Cyrus

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even to the reign of Darius. The prophet Daniel the prime minister of Cyrus, was now dead; and these wicked men gaining the ear of Cyrus, he would not interfere to punish the adversaries of the Jews who were forcibly hindering them from proceeding in the work of the house of God. The foundation of the temple was laid according to the prophecy of Isaiah; and this was all that took place during the life of Cyrus. Isa. 44:28; Ezra 3, 4. The decrees of Cyrus indeed allowed the return of the Jews, and authorized the rebuilding of the temple. But when they had laid its foundation he suffered their enemies to forcibly suspend the work for the rest of his reign. Who in the light of these facts can affirm that Cyrus issued the entire commandment of the God of Heaven for the restoration of Jerusalem?

The life of Cyrus, the first year of whose reign had been marked by such distinguished kindness toward the Jews, and whose later years were filled with indifference if not hostility toward them, ended with deep gloom resting upon that people. Nor did their circumstances improve under his successor. For the next king, Ahasuerus, the son of Cyrus, the Cambyses of the Greeks, suffered this forcible hindrance of the Jews in the rebuilding of their temple to continue without speaking one word in their behalf, though their enemies were in this very thing treating with contempt the grant of power made to the Jews by Cyrus his father. Hatred toward the worship of the true God which was being restored in Jerusalem, was the inciting cause that stirred up these heathen neighbors of the Jews to accuse them before the king of Persia, and to hinder them by force from rebuilding the temple; and the jealousy of the king at the remembrance

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of the former strength and greatness of Jerusalem, and the stubborn valor and independent spirit of its inhabitants that had made its subjugation by Nebuchadnezzar so great a task, was that which these wicked men took advantage of to accomplish their unholy purpose. Ezra 4:4-6.

But under the next king the affairs of the Jews grew still more disheartening. For Artaxerxes, called by the Greeks, Smerdis the Magian, was stirred up by the enemies of the Jews to acts of positive hostility toward them. Thus wrote these wicked men:

"Thy servants, the men on this side the river, and at such a timbre 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. 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. Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore have we sent and certified the king; that search may be made in the books 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. We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, this means that thou shalt have no portion on this side the river." Ezra 4:7-16.

This was a cruel, malicious falsehood, and it was as full of deep subtlety and craft as of malicious untruth. Instead of stating the honest truth that the Jews were simply building the temple of the Lord, they with Satanic malice and falsehood, excite the deep-seated jealousy of the king by telling him that the Jews were rebuilding Jerusalem itself,

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and had already set up the walls and fortifications of that rebellious and bad city, and that if he did not interfere to arrest the work they would rebel against him. Nor did the malice of this letter exhaust itself in the statement of this falsehood. Observe the artful manner in which the letter next misleads the mind of the king. He is requested to search the book of the records of his fathers. For what purpose? That he may ascertain just what Cyrus had authorized the Jews to do? Far from it. They turn his mind into a very different channel of inquiry. They set him to examine the history of the subjugation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and of its several acts of rebellion against him, until destroyed by him with a terrible destruction, after withstanding his mighty army during a siege of many months. The result was precisely what these evil men intended:

"Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancelor, 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. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. 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. 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. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this; why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" Ezra 4:17-22.

Had these wicked men simply stated the truth that the Jews were rebuilding the temple, and requested the king to examine the records of his predecessors, that he might learn whether authority had been granted them to do this, no such

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letter as this would have been written by the king. But this letter shows several things of importance. 1. The extreme jealousy of the kings of Persia relative to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and hence the caution with which they granted power to the Jews for the restoration of that city. 2. Strong additional evidence that the decree of Cyrus did not authorize the rebuilding of Jerusalem, or the king, instead of being moved so powerfully against the Jews, would have modified his displeasure against them, by the statement that they had authority from his predecessors for doing the work which their enemies charged them with doing. 3. This letter of the king forbids the building of Jerusalem, which shows that the decree of Cyrus did not authorize that act, or else that the Lord suffered the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem, to be repealed before it was acted upon. 4. That while this prohibition shows that the authority for rebuilding Jerusalem had not yet been granted, it does not stand in the way of that part of the great commandment of Dan 9:25, being issued at any time; for it is a prohibition against such time as royal authority for that act be granted. See verse 21 in which this remarkable clause is recorded.

When this letter reached the adversaries of the Jews, they went up in haste to Jerusalem and made them cease from the work by force and power. The next verse states just what it was that was brought to a close. It was not the work of rebuilding the city and setting up its walls which they had been accused of doing before the king. But it was the work of the temple, the very thing that Cyrus had authorized them to do that was stopped by force. Thus states the record:

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"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." Ezra 4:24. The fact that the adversaries of the Jews were able to stop them by force with so little trouble is another proof that all that they had said before the king relative to the Jews' having set up the walls of Jerusalem was false. These wicked men were without any excuse, for they were told in the first place just what Cyrus had granted, viz., that the temple should be built, and had offered to help in the work; but because they were allowed no part in this, they went to the king with a report that said not one word of what the Jews were really doing, but that consisted wholly in charging them with doing that of which the decree of Cyrus said nothing. Ezra 4:1-24.

This Artaxerxes who thus gave ear to the enemies of the Jews, must be carefully distinguished from that Artaxerxes who reigned some seventy years later and who granted to Ezra all his request in behalf of Jerusalem. Ezra 7. But this first Artaxerxes did not repeal or invalidate one word of the decree of Cyrus, for that related only to the building of the temple, while he forbade the building of the city and its walls, which their enemies falsely accused them of doing. Had the decree of Cyrus authorized the rebuilding of the city as well as the rebuilding of the temple, this act of Artaxerxes would have repealed an important part of that decree before it had been acted upon. But as that commandment of Cyrus related only to the temple, and this prohibition of Artaxerxes said nothing concerning the temple, but related wholly to what the enemies of the Jews falsely accused them of doing, it left the decree of

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Cyrus unrepealed, untouched, and in full force. The providence of God which put forth the great commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem by separate and successive acts, allowed no one of these to be repealed until the whole commandment was complete and carried into execution. That the decree of Cyrus was not repealed by this act of Artaxerxes, we have ample proof in that the Lord's prophets some two years later, under this very state of things stirred up the people, as we shall presently read, to resume the building of the temple. But the people of God when compelled by force to desist from the work, were utterly disheartened, and ceased all effort till the second year of Darius, the next king, when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah incited them again to action.

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THE DECREE OF DARIUS

The Prophet Haggai and Zechariah raised up-The prophecy of Haggai-The prophecy of Zechariah-Action of the Persian governor Tatnai-His letter to Darius-Darius issues his decree-It contained within itself the decree of Cyrus-Argument from this decree-Ezra 6:14-Elements that compose the commandment of Dan. 9:25-Out of many one-Illustration-How the case stood at the death of Darius.

"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." Ezra 5:1.

From the stand point of this narrative in Ezra, we shall be deeply interested in the study of the

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books of Haggai and Zechariah. Almost all the book of Haggai and the principal part of the first eight chapters of Zechariah relate to the very circumstances of the Jews we are now considering, and shed much additional light upon the history given us in Ezra. The book of Haggai opens thus:

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai, the prophet, unto Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in ceiled houses, and this house to lie waste?" Haggai 1:1-4.

These words were addressed to the Jews in all Judea, (Ezra 5:1,) and are therefore no direct evidence relative to the number of private residences in Jerusalem. The decree of Cyrus did not grant the legal right to build again the houses of the city, but only to rebuild the temple; yet Cyrus was well aware that this would result in the building of houses there for such of the people as chose to live around it. But he carefully reserved

the right of approving or disapproving these further acts as he might see cause. The words of Haggai show,

1. That the decree of Cyrus was unrepealed by the edict of Artaxerxes; for the people, though placed under disheartening circumstances, are rebuked for suspending their labor upon the temple, and saying "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."

2. The people were rebuked for not acting up to the providence of God, and doing that which

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that providence had placed in their power through the grant of Cyrus. But the rebuke relates wholly to the temple, and not at all to the rebuilding of the city, showing just how far the commandment of the God of Heaven for the restoration of Jerusalem had been up to this time, clothed with the legal authority of the Persian empire.

Next, the prophet incites the people to action in building the temple of the Lord, by stating the judgments that in the providence of God had fallen upon them for sitting down in inactivity because of the opposition of their adversaries. They should have gone resolutely forward in their work from the time of Cyrus, for they had the mandate of the God of Heaven and the legal authority of the Persian empire for the rebuilding of the temple. Hag. 1:5-11.

Then Zerubbabel and Joshua and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord, and did fear before the Lord; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts their God. Hag. 1:12-15. The second chapter of this prophecy which concludes the book, is mainly taken up with gracious words of encouragement concerning the temple, and with the promise that it should be more glorious than the temple of Solomon; for it should have the personal presence of "the Desire of all nations." The book of Haggai, therefore, which says so much to incite the people of God to build the temple and that says nothing to stir them up to rebuild the city, is an additional evidence that the decree of Cyrus authorized only the first of those acts.

The prophecy of Haggai was from the first day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius to the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of

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that year. Just before the testimony of Haggai was finished, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah in the eighth month of the second year of Darius. Zech. 1:1. Haggai had spoken to the people concerning the temple alone; for this was the great work which the Lord required at their hands, and this was all that they had legal authority for doing. But Zechariah, whose testimony comes at the close of Haggai's, was raised up in part, at least, for the purpose of inspiring the people with hope relative to the restoration of Jerusalem itself. He spoke words of encouragement concerning the temple, upon which the people in obedience to Haggai had resumed their labor; but he spoke much more fully concerning Jerusalem. And it is to be observed that he throws all this encouragement

concerning Jerusalem into the future; for the commandment of the God of Heaven as yet published by the authority of the Persian empire, extended only to the temple of the Lord.

The prophecy of Zechariah begins by stating the Lord's controversy with his people, and then invites them to seek him. Chap. 1:1-6. Next it presents the angelic agency by which God takes notice of human affairs. Verses 7-10. These angels report to their chief, who was perhaps Michael the prince of angels, that the whole earth was then in a state of entire peace. Verse 11. Upon this, the prince of these angels looking upon Jerusalem still in distress and comparatively uninhabited, chap. 7:7, cries out, "O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? Verse 12. The Lord answered him with

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good and comfortable words, upon which the angel bade Zechariah cry, saying, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great jealousy. . . . I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. . . . And the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." Verses 13-17.

This shows that the restoration of Jerusalem was at this time future, but that the providence of God was at work for its accomplishment. "I lifted up mine eyes again," said the prophet, "and looked, and behold a man with a measuring-line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. . . . And another angel went out to meet him and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein; for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, . . . for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. . . . And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again." Chap. 2. The Lord also makes the gracious promise that Zerubbabel who had laid the foundation of the temple should finish it. Chap. 4:9. From chapter 7:7, we learn that Jerusalem was at this time not restored from its desolate condition; and in chapter 8, is an extended prediction of its complete future restoration.

Such was the testimony of Haggai and Zechariah,

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who are introduced to our view in Ezra 5:1, as rising up in the second year of Darius, B.C. 520, to incite the people of God to action. They bade them resume labor under the unrepealed decree of Cyrus in behalf of the temple; and though there was at this time an express prohibition of the rebuilding of the city, they cheered them with the certain promise that the Lord should yet choose Jerusalem and cause it to be restored from its existing desolation. The record in Ezra tells us what they did in obedience to this teaching: "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build"-not the city-but "the house of God which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God helping them." Ezra 5:2: Hag. 1:12-15.

No sooner had the Jews resumed their labor upon the temple, than the Persian governor and other officials on that side of the river, i.e., on the west side of the Euphrates, came up to Jerusalem to inquire what they were doing. But the providence of God had not only given Darius the place of Artaxerxes as king of Persia, it had with the new king given them a new governor and associated officers. The people stepped out by faith to act in obedience to the testimony of the prophets, and the providence of God opened the way before them by moving out of the way that body of Persian officers that had accused them before the king, and by taking away that king that had issued his mandate against them. The new Persian governor and his associates though disposed to call the Jews to a strict account in behalf of the king, their master, were nevertheless perfectly cordial and truthful in their statement to the king,

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and entirely unlike the men who had accused the Jews before the previous king. These men made careful inquiry, and then wrote the king as follows:

"Unto Darius, the king, all peace. 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. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were chief of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying. We are 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. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of Heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon, the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. 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; 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. 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. 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." Ezra 5.

This letter bears every evidence of candor and truth upon its face, and is worthy of attentive study by those who would understand just what Cyrus had decreed, and what the Jews were really

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engaged in doing. The following matters are especially important: 1. That this letter of Tatnai to Darius is a perfect refutation of the one written two years before by Rehum, the chancellor, to the king Artaxerxes. That letter slanderously affirmed that the Jews were building the city, and had already nearly finished its walls; but it said not one word of what they were really doing, which was the rebuilding of the temple. This letter, on the contrary, states with candor the fact that the Jews were rebuilding the temple, but it contains not one allusion to any such work as that which Rehum had charged them with. 2. Thus they state just what the Jews are doing: the house of the great God "is builded with great stones and timber is laid in the walls," i.e., the walls of the house which was composed of these great stones. 3. Then they asked for the authority under which they built this house with walls of such strength. 4. The elders of the Jews answered that they builded the house which Solomon many years ago erected, and which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed, and that this action in rebuilding the temple was in consequence of a decree of Cyrus made in his first year, directing them to build this house of God. 5. When Cyrus issued this decree, he said to Sheshbazzar as he gave him the vessels of the temple to carry back; "Let the house of God be builded in his place." 6. Then the same Sheshbazzar, i.e., Zerubbabel, in obedience to this authority, went up to Jerusalem and laid the foundation of the temple, and from that time to the time of this interview, the temple had been in building. 7. Having stated these facts to the king they ask him to cause a search to be made that it may be seen "whether it be so, that a decree was made

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of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter."

Such were the circumstances under which Darius was stirred up to act in the Jews' affairs. The questions referred to him were properly these: 1. What did Cyrus decree concerning these things? 2. Shall the decree of Cyrus be considered as still in full force? We are now to have the whole matter looked up by the officers of the Persian court, and we have therefore the very best opportunity to learn exactly what the decree of Cyrus did relate to.

"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. 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: 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; with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house. 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. Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: 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. 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. 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

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of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail; 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. 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. 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." Ezra 6:1-12.

This shows, 1. That the decree issued by Darius, contained in its bosom the decree which Cyrus had formerly issued. 2. That the decree of Cyrus related to the temple and not to the city; for in the search made by the officers of Darius, it was found filed away with this inscription: "In the first year of Cyrus the king, the same Cyrus the king made a decree CONCERNING THE HOUSE OF GOD AT JERUSALEM. 3. The decree of Cyrus as recorded in Ezra 1:2-4 is the first part of the document, and that which is given here in Ezra 6:3-5 is the concluding part. If therefore the inscription which was placed upon the document when it was filed away in the Persian archives, and which is quoted in the first clause of Ezra 6:3 be omitted, then Ezra 1:2-4 and 6:3-5 may be read as one complete connected document. 4. That Darius observing how the decree of Cyrus had been defeated in its execution by the malice and violence of the adversaries of the Jews, and the poverty and the feebleness of the Jews themselves, decreed, 1. That the expense of building the house of God be met out of the king's revenue on that side of the river Euphrates, and also all the expense necessary for the maintenance of the worship of God in the temple. 2.

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That whoever should try to hinder the building of this house of God at Jerusalem, should be hanged on timber taken from his own house, and have his house itself made a dung hill.

This decree was admirably guarded against failure. It was addressed to Tatnai the governor, on the west side of the Euphrates, and it directed that the king's revenue in that district, should be used by him for the building of the temple, and that he should punish in the most summary manner whoever should attempt to hinder the work.

"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. 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 6:13, 14.

This last sentence is perhaps one of the most remarkable in the book of Ezra. It enumerates and distinguishes the elements that make up the great commandment of Dan, 9:25, and exhibits the unity of the whole. These are, 1. The commandment of the God of Israel. 2. The commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes. Let us take up each of these elements in order.

1. The commandment of the God of Israel. Where had he given a commandment on this subject? There is but one place in which the Most High had given such a commandment, and that is found in Isaiah 44:28: "Even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." It was therefore a prophetic commandment that existed in the purpose

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of God only, until tangible existence was given to it by the action of the Persian government.

2. To this prophetic mandate the angel alluded when he said to Daniel "that from the going forth of THE COMMANDMENT to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks." He did not first inform the prophet that such a commandment should go forth, and then state the time from that event to the Messiah, but he spoke of it as though the prophet well knew that such a commandment should go forth.

3. Daniel did know that Isaiah had published the prophetic mandate of the Almighty that Jerusalem and the temple should be rebuilt; and that the Most High in that commandment named Cyrus as the one that should do all his pleasure, so that to Cyrus it was a prophetic commandment assigning him a work to do.

4. This prophetic mandate declared that Cyrus should do all of God's pleasure; and the providence of God that fulfilled this prediction showed just what God's pleasure concerning Cyrus was, viz., that he should allow the return of the people and authorize the rebuilding of the temple.

5. When Cyrus issued his decree authorizing the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the temple, he stated that the God of Heaven had bidden him do this thing. This is an express acknowledgement on the part of Cyrus, that he was decreeing the very thing that the God of Heaven had previously commanded; in other words, that he was clothing the prophetic mandate of the Almighty with the legal authority of the Persian empire. Thus Cyrus acknowledges the commandment

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of God to him, and that commandment of God addresses itself to Cyrus by name. Thus the commandment of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus are inseparably united.

6. The work thus decreed by Cyrus, being only fairly begun in his lifetime, was forcibly hindered during the reigns of the next two kings. Then Darius, to whom the whole matter was referred, issued his decree repeating word for word a large part of the

decree of Cyrus, and adding largely to its grant of power. Thus the decree of Darius is inseparably united with that of Cyrus.

7. Under these connected acts, the temple was builded and finished as a structure, but was not beautified and adorned; and Jerusalem itself, as we may conclude from the facts named, though having no legal existence, had, to some extent, sprung into existence around the temple. Now Artaxerxes takes up and endorses all that had been done by Cyrus and Darius; for he greatly beautified and adorned the temple that had been erected under their decrees, finishing it a second time when it had been finished in a plain manner before by Darius. See Ezra 6:14, 15. And not only did he do this, but he spread the mantle of his legal authority over the city that had without any authority begun to grow up, and he gave back to it, as we shall see, its forfeited and long lost rights and privileges. This act of Artaxerxes, therefore, simply renders that work complete which had been in part accomplished by the authority of Cyrus and Darius, and make his own decree an embodiment of theirs with important additions.

8. Thus the prophetic commandment of the God of Israel becomes the commandment of the

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Persian empire by the acts of these three Kings of Persia. And thus we see the unity of these acts, and that they are inseparably connected together. It is remarkable that the sacred historian to show the unity of the whole, and to give all the elements that make up the great commandment, brings in the decree of Artaxerxes at this place (Ezra 6:14), though the decree itself is not found in the record till we reach Ezra 7. The oneness of these elements is thus exhibited in two important ways: 1. by the fact that they wonderfully fit into and render each other complete. 2. By the fact that they are all put together by the Spirit of inspiration and presented as one thing. Ezra 6:14.

To illustrate; here is a spy-glass with several joints or lengths that shut one into the other. The whole is now shut up. In this form the spy-glass represents god's prophetic commandment concerning Jerusalem and the temple as uttered by Isaiah. First Cyrus draws out one joint, then Darius draws out another, and Artaxerxes draws out the last joint, so that the spy-glass is exhibited at full length. The whole glass was complete while shut up in one length, but could not be used till thus drawn out; so God's prophetic commandment which covered the whole ground, must by his providence be made the commandment of that empire which then ruled the world; and this by the acts of these three men was perfectly accomplished.

The house of God was finished, i.e., as a plain unadorned structure, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. Ezra 6:15. Then the dedication was attended to with great joy on the part of Israel. And their thanksgiving shows just

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what had been granted them up to the close of the reign of Darius; for it is thus written: "The Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria (Assyria was now a part of the Persian empire) unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of THE HOUSE OF GOD, the God of Israel." Ezra 6:16-22.

Now at the close of the reign of Darius let us pause to see what has been accomplished in the great work of Jerusalem's restoration: 1. The Jews were allowed to return. 2. They were authorized to rebuild the temple, and during the life of Cyrus they began the work. 3. Darius by special decree protected them from all who would hinder their work and makes ample provision for the expense of completing the temple. 4. By tacit permission many houses had been built in Jerusalem. Such was the condition at the death of Darius. But, 5. There had been as yet no legal recognition of the city of Jerusalem. 6. No permission to rebuild the walls. 7. No restoration of the authority of god's law in Jerusalem as the civil law of the city. 8. The house of God was not beautified and adorned so as to be properly completed. All these things remained to be accomplished by the decree of Artaxerxes.

THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES

Decree of Artaxerxes-The wonderful provident of God that gave existence to this decree-What it enacted-It completes the grant of power needed to accomplish the restoration of Jerusalem-Ezra's journey to Jerusalem-When did the commandment go into execution?-A notable exercise of its power-The right to build the walls of Jerusalem proved by the words of Ezra-Confirmed by the action of Nehemiah-The prophecy concerning Cyrus-Illustrated by the case of Elijah, 1 Kings 19:15, 16-Conclusion.

"Now after these things in the reign of Artaxerxes the king of Persia . . . 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. . . . And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month which was in the seventh year of the king. . . . 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.

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. 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 free-will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. For as much as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counselors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand: and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem; 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; 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. 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. The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem.

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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. 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, unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred bottles of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatever 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? 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. 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. 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." Ezra 7:1-26.

It is said that the king granted Ezra all his request, which shows, 1. That this decree was solicited by this eminent man of God. 2. That its grant of power was in his estimation so ample that he could ask for nothing further. This decree sanctions all the work that had been accomplished under the decrees of Cyrus and Darius and greatly enlarges the grant of power made by them to the Jews. It is the last decree made by the kings of Persia for the restoration of Jerusalem. The providence of God appears in as signal a manner perhaps in this concluding decree, as in that of Cyrus which began the work. For this Artaxerxes was the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. The Septuagint which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, made about two centuries after the reign of Ahasuerus, calls him

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Artaxerxes. This translation was made by learned Hebrews in Egypt who could hardly have been mistaken as to the identity of this king. According to Josephus the Ahasuerus of Esther is the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7. Antiquities of the Jews, book 11, chap. 7. Such is the view maintained in Dr. Hale's Analysis of Chronology, and the Sacred Chronology of S. Bliss. Dean Prideaux has entered largely into the proof of this point. Such also is the view of Scott the commentator, and of Dr. A. Clarke, and of a host of eminent Biblical scholars.

The marriage of Esther with Artaxerxes, which was one of the most remarkable events of providence (see Esther 1; 2;) took place in the tenth Jewish month, Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Esther 2:16. But it is to be observed that the years of Artaxerxes reign begin between the fifth and nine months of the Jewish year, and consist therefore of a part of two of those years, the last part of one and the first part of another. Compare Ezra 7:7-9; Neh. 1:1; 2:1. So that Esther being married to Artaxerxes in the tenth Jewish month in the seventh year of his reign, it was some two months before the time when he gave to Ezra that decree which caused him in the first Jewish month of that year to set out for Jerusalem with a considerable body of his own people. The king, in honor of his marriage with Esther, signalized that year of his reign, which was the seventh, by making a release to the provinces and giving gifts according to his royal state. Esther 2:16, 18. This auspicious moment seems to have been seized by Esther to bring Ezra and his people to the favorable notice of Artaxerxes; and under this potent influence,

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for the hand of God was in it, the king and his seven counselors (compare Ezra 7:14; Esther 1:14) made great and costly offerings to the house of God, and granted to Ezra, whose great piety and worth were probably known to them, all the power that he could ask or use for the restoration of Jerusalem. This decree of Artaxerxes embraces the following important matters:

1. It renews the original grant of Cyrus relative to the return of the Hebrews, and allows every one in the Persian empire to return with Ezra if so disposed.

2. It expressly recognizes the legal existence of Jerusalem; or, rather, it confers legality upon the existence of that city, by sending Ezra to inquire concerning it, according to the law of his God that was in his hand. That law designated the place which God should choose, which proved to be Jerusalem, as that locality in which he should worship on earth. Deut. 16; 1 Kings 8. This was directly designed to make Jerusalem in this respect what it had been before its ruin.

3. It directed Ezra to carry the large sum which the king and his officers and such of the Israelites as did not go up, gave to the God of Israel.

4. After making ample provision for the sacrifice of the altar and for the maintenance of the worship of God in his temple, the king granted Ezra power to do WHATSOEVER should seem good to him and his brethren to do with the rest of the silver and gold; a grant that Ezra understood to authorize him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Ezra 9:9.

5. Ezra was directed to deliver the golden vessels

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which the king had given, in the house of God.

6. The King makes such provision for beautifying the house of God, that Darius had finished seventy years before, as to justify the statement of Ezra 6:14, that it was finished "according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia."

7. All the treasurers in that part of the king's domains, were required to fill Ezra's orders for a large sum in addition to that which Ezra took with him.

8. He was required to see that the worship of God was diligently maintained in Jerusalem.

9. The king takes off all toll, tribute and custom, from those engaged in maintaining the worship of God.

10. He authorizes Ezra to appoint all the magistrates and judges on that side of the river, probably in this case the Jordan, and gives him great power to compel men to acquaint themselves with the law of God.

11. He makes the law of God the civil law of Jerusalem, clothing it with all the power of the Persian empire.

Such is the great and ample grant of power made by Artaxerxes. No wonder Ezra could ask no more. It completed the great work of clothing the prophetic commandment of the God of Israel with the legal authority of the Persian empire, and of thus making it the law and commandment of that empire. Now, Jerusalem has a legal existence, and a right to erect its ancient walls. Now the house of God is to be perfectly restored, and the worship of God diligently maintained therein. And now, as the crowning act of all, there is legal authority from a heathen king, to

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enforce the law of God in Jerusalem, and to punish idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, and marriages with idolaters.

"The commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" is now complete as a law of the Persian empire. It will be of interest to discover, as nearly as possible, the first of those acts under Ezra, in which this complete mandate went into effect; for it is this that marks the commencement of the sixty-nine weeks.

Ezra, with the most devout gratitude, blesses God for putting it into the heart of Artaxerxes to beautify that house which Cyrus had founded, and Darius had erected, and that he had extended mercy to him before the king and his counselors, in granting him all his requests in this great bestowment of power. Ezra 7:27, 28. At the river Ahava, Ezra gathered his company to start for Jerusalem. About fifteen hundred males, probably adults, are enumerated. We may conclude that an equal number of females pertained to the party, and that there were at least as many children as adults. This would indicate some six thousand persons as belonging to the company that went up with Ezra. They carried with them a very considerable treasure: some six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and one hundred talents of gold; in all, according to the computation of Scott, about \$500,000. Besides this, the sacred vessels were in weight, of silver one hundred talents, and of gold, twenty basons of one thousand drams, and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. Starting from the river Ahava on the first day of the first month, they reached Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, and four days afterward

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delivered the treasure committed to their trust by the king, to the proper officers of the temple. Ezra 8.

The first great act of Ezra, by which the commandment went forth, or was carried into execution, was, no doubt, to select and appoint magistrates and judges who should restore the law of God to its proper place as the civil law of Jerusalem, and enforce that law with adequate penalties. In all probability, this occurred in the great solemnity of the seventh month, then just far enough in the future to give Ezra time to acquaint himself with the people and to make the proper selection. Closely connected with this work, was his act of delivering the king's commissions to his lieutenants and governors on that side of the river, who furthered the people and the house of God. Ezra 8:36.

But it is certain that in the ninth month, four months after his arrival at Jerusalem, we have a most notable instance of his exercising the great power bestowed by this final edict for the restoration of Jerusalem. For after these things which first demanded his attention in the execution of the king's decree, he learned to his great distress, that the wives of many of the people were idolatresses. After a season of the deepest humiliation before God, he arises, armed with the powers of that decree which completed the authority for Jerusalem's restoration, and with the way, no doubt, prepared by the judges and magistrates that he had appointed to enforce the law of God, (Ezra 7:25, 26; 10:14,) and taking hold of this matter with a strong hand, accomplishes the work under penalty of confiscation of goods and banishment. Ezra 9:9. It is certain, therefore, that "the going forth of the commandment," in its complete

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form in the work of Ezra, was somewhere between the fifth and ninth months of that year. There is another source of information on the subject, but it belongs to the consideration of the different periods in Dan. 9, and events that mark their conclusion.

One remarkable statement in the confession of Ezra should here be noticed: "For we were bondman; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto 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." Ezra 9:9. It is to be observed, 1. That Ezra attributes the restoration of the city and people, not to one king of Persia, but to several. 2. He enumerates their acts which were (1.) A reviving in their bondage in allowing them to return. (2.) The setting up of the house of God by Cyrus and Darius. (3.) The repairing of its desolations in its being beautified by Artaxerxes. (4.) The giving them a wall in Judah and Jerusalem, in the full grant of power, by Artaxerxes.

This statement of Ezra relative to the wall of Jerusalem, is fully confirmed in what we read in Neh. 1 and 2. Thirteen years after this, Nehemiah was at Shushan in the palace of the king of Persia. Here he learned that "the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province, are in great affliction and reproach: THE WALL OF JERUSALEM also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." Neh. 1:3. This causes him the greatest distress and consternation. It would be absurd to refer this calamity to the work of Nebuchadnezzar about one hundred and fifty

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years before, as this could be no news to Nehemiah. This statement of his astonishment and distress evinces that he was grieved, 1. That Ezra having authority to build the walls of Jerusalem, had not been able to do it because of the fierce attacks of the Samaritans, or 2. That Ezra having built up the walls of Jerusalem, the adversaries of the Jews had been able to throw them down. In either case, it is a testimony to the fact that power to restore the walls had been granted by the king, as Ezra 9:9, testifies. If it be borne in mind that the work of Haman recorded in the book of Esther transpired between the conclusion of the record in Ezra and the commencement of the record in Nehemiah, we may all understand that the remnant left of the captivity in Judea, had experienced great affliction. We have a further confirmation of the fact that Artaxerxes had granted to Ezra power to re-build the walls in that when he sent Nehemiah at his urgent request to do this work, he gave him no further decree on the subject; and indeed, Nehemiah asked none. And when he reached Jerusalem, and encouraged the Jews to build up the walls, that they be no more a reproach, he told the king's words which he had spoken unto him. Neh. 2:18. Mordecai and Esther had no doubt been the means of Nehemiah's promotion to the office of cup-bearer, and we may well conclude that the queen, who sat by when Nehemiah made his request unto the king, was no other than Esther. The further consideration of this subject properly belongs to the work of the seven weeks of Dan. 9:25.

In concluding this subject, a few words relative to the prophecy concerning Cyrus may be demanded.

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"That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Isa. 44:28. "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." Isa. 45:13.

It is not Cyrus, but the Most High, who is represented as "even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built." For, 1. The clause "even saying" properly attributes this sentence to him, who, in the sentences immediately preceding is thrice represented as speaking. It is the Most High who is the speaker. 2. The proclamation of Cyrus said nothing concerning the building of Jerusalem, as has been most fully shown. It is not Cyrus, therefore, who is represented in this prophecy as addressing Jerusalem. But of Cyrus it is said, 1. He shall do all my pleasure. 2. He shall build my city. 3. He shall let go my captives.

The book of Ezra, which records the acts of Cyrus toward the people of God, shows just what it was the pleasure of God that Cyrus should do in their behalf. 1. He released all the people of God, and allowed them to return to Jerusalem to build the temple; and he gave them back the sacred vessels of the former temple. 2. He protected them in the work until they had laid the foundation of the temple, when he suffered their enemies to stop them by force. Thus it appears that God's pleasure concerning Cyrus, as shown by the fulfillment of this prophecy, was that he should begin the work of the Jews' restoration, not that he should finish it.

But how did Cyrus build the Lord's city? 1. Not by decree that it should be built; for he did not authorize that act. 2. Not by protecting

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the Jews in building the city so far as they might venture to do this while erecting the temple; for they had no more than fairly laid the foundation of that building whose erection he had expressly decreed, when he suffered their enemies to stop them by force. But Cyrus did perform an important part in the building of Jerusalem. 1. In allowing the Jews to return and build their temple; for many houses must have sprung up around the temple for the use of those engaged in building that structure, and also for those interested in the work. 2. The temple was the great central object of interest in Jerusalem, the heart and life of the place. To decree the restoration of that building was therefore to do that which should in the end accomplish the rebuilding of Jerusalem itself. And such proved to be the fact. For though he suffered the work to be hindered after it was begun, yet his decree in behalf of the temple, which was the publication of the first part of the great commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem, set an example of showing favor to the people and the house of the God of Israel, and set in motion that train of events that caused Darius and Artaxerxes to carry forward and complete the whole work. Cyrus did a part of the work himself; and the remainder of it through those kings of Persia who were stirred up to follow his example, and to carry forward the work to completion. This prediction concerning Cyrus is well illustrated by the case of Elijah, in 1 Kings 19:15, 16.

"And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha, the son

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of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room."

Elijah anointed Elisha to be prophet in his room, and was then taken up to Heaven, leaving the other two acts unaccomplished. 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2. Several years after this event, Elisha appointed Hazael to be king over Syria; 2 Kings 8:7-13; and in the case of Jehu, Elisha himself did not act, but sent another person, one of the sons of the prophets, to anoint him king over Israel. 2 Kings 9:1-3. Elijah begun the work, Elisha, appointed to fill his place, carries it forward; and one of the sons of the prophets, appointed to fill the place of Elisha, completed the commandment of the Lord. And thus did Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, accomplish the restoration of Jerusalem.

The book of Ezra is simply the commandment for the restoration of Jerusalem, in an extended form, and the record of the going forth of that commandment. The book of Nehemiah is a witness and attestation that the commandment presented at full length in Ezra, was complete for the accomplishment of the work designed. The book of Esther connects the record in Ezra with that contained in Nehemiah.

Should Providence permit, and the cause of truth seem to demand it, the work of the seven weeks of Dan. 9:25, may be hereafter considered.

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