

document so as to contravene the command of the king. The penalty for modifying the edict is severe. Impalement on a sharpened pole was an excruciatingly painful and deadly form of punishment. It was practiced by the Assyrians as portrayed in the reliefs depicting their conquest of Lachish in the time of King Hezekiah. These were recovered from Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh by Austen Henry Layard in the mid-1800s. This method of punishment was apparently taken over by the Persians.

The phrase . . . **God, who has caused his Name to dwell there** recalls Deuteronomy 12:5 and is another hint that a Jewish scribe helped the king to draw up the decree.

A certain poetic justice is threatened by Darius. Anyone who will interfere in the rebuilding of God's house will have his own house destroyed.

## **G. COMPLETION AND DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE (6:13-18)**

### **1. Work on the Temple Completed (6:13-15)**

<sup>13</sup>Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. <sup>14</sup>So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. <sup>15</sup>The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

**6:13-15** Tattenai and his associates had asked Darius for his decision. Having received it, they did not hesitate to carry out the specific requirements of the decree. The combination of the ongoing work of the builders while awaiting the decision from Persia, the benefits of Darius's decree, and the continued encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah brought the project to completion on the third of Adar (March/April), 515 B.C.

Skeptics may argue that the prophecies of Haggai date to 519

B.C. and Zechariah's to no later than 518 B.C. How, then, could they have encouraged the completion of the work some four years later? Clearly, we do not have all that these prophets may have spoken. What was collected and recorded of their prophecies, however, is sufficient to inform us of their part in the plan of God for the reestablishment of the Jerusalem temple. All Scripture is sufficient — inspired and useful for teaching (2 Tim 3:16).

Mention of Artaxerxes is puzzling since his rule postdates the completion of the temple and is related to the repair of the city's walls. However, our author has mentioned him previously, as noted above (4:7-8). One explanation is that it is a later addition at the hands of a copyist. A better reason is that he was to be instrumental later in the reconstruction of the city walls, a part of which connected to the temple. Our author is using all three kings involved in the restoration as illustrations of how even mighty kings are tools to accomplish **the command of the God of Israel**.

## 2. The Second Temple Dedicated (6:16-18)

<sup>16</sup>Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. <sup>17</sup>For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. <sup>18</sup>And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

### 6:16 Then the people of Israel—

Although all of the priests and Levites and most of the rest of the participants in the dedication were Judeans, the event is seen as involving all Israel. The offerings are for all Israel, including the twelve goats for the twelve tribes. A similar number had been offered when the altar in the wilderness was dedicated (Num 7:87).

### 6:17 . . . dedication . . .

The Hebrew חֲנֻכָּה (*ḥānukkāh*) is the same as the festival name, Hanukkah, instituted in 165 B.C., after the rededication of the temple

following its cleansing after being profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. That later festival is still celebrated by Jews. No annual observance of the dedication of the second temple was established, but the actual event was marked with joy. The project had been completed despite delays and opposition. What elation follows the attainment of a worthy goal after enduring the struggle to reach it!

**6:18** It had been approximately seventy years since the Solomonic temple had been destroyed. With the rebuilt temple, the articles that belonged in it were now able to be used again, and with the priestly and levitical officiants reinstalled **according to what is written in the Book of Moses**, the daily ritual was reestablished.

#### **H. THE FIRST PASSOVER CELEBRATED IN THE SECOND TEMPLE (6:19-22)**

**<sup>19</sup>On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover. <sup>20</sup>The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their brothers the priests and for themselves. <sup>21</sup>So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>22</sup>For seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.**

**6:19-20** (The author changes from Aramaic back to the Hebrew language here.) Shortly after the dedication of the restored temple, the first Passover on its premises was celebrated. The date was that specified in Exodus 12:6, approximately April 21, 515 B.C. Rabbi Slotki has noted that “Whenever the celebration of this feast is recorded in the Bible, it is in connection with an important landmark in the national life (cf. Num. ix.5; Josh. v.10; 2 Kings xxiii.21; 2 Chron. xxx.1ff, xxxv.1ff).”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Slotki, *Daniel-Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 148.

**6:21 . . . together with all who had separated themselves . . .**

Kidner has pointed to the significance of this verse, which is “crucial for correcting the impression . . . of a bitterly exclusive party. . . in reality we find that only the self-excluded were unwelcome. The convert found an open door, as Rahab and Ruth had done.”<sup>40</sup> “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,” said the Lord in Jeremiah 29:13.

**6:22 . . . Feast of Unleavened Bread . . .**

The direct connection between the Passover and this feast is established in Exodus 12:14-20. The Passover was a reminder of how God had saved the firstborn of his people from the power of the death angel in Egypt. The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread was directly connected to that event. It was a celebration of the exodus from Egypt that followed immediately after the Passover night. Always joyous, this celebration was particularly so because of God’s behind-the-scenes work on their behalf in changing the attitude of the Persian royal house.

**. . . the king of Assyria . . .**

This reference to the ruler of an empire long departed, succeeded by the Babylonians and then the Persians, is perplexing. One explanation could be scribal error; however, it was in the text from which the LXX was translated. More likely, the author intended to use the expression to recall the beginning of oppression in pre-exilic days that had undergone a dramatic change in the attitude of the contemporary monarch who ruled the region once conquered by the Assyrians (see Neh 9:32).

Implicit in the closing statement of this first part of Ezra is the fact that the God of Israel is in control to accomplish his will and purposes. His people are called to faithfulness to his worship and service even though they are subject to the political control of others. Revolution is not required in order to remain faithful to the God of heaven and of Israel.

The author of Ezra–Nehemiah now skips without notice some sixty years until the arrival of Ezra. We hear nothing more of the earlier leaders, such as Jeshua and Zerubbabel, who would all have died

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<sup>40</sup>Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, p. 60.

before Ezra's arrival. Our author is not intent on composing a political history. His concerns are theological, with the underlying hand of God at work to assure the continued existence of his restored people. The only note we have of the silent period is the reference to Xerxes in 4:6. Far from Jerusalem and Yehud, events were occurring in Susa that are recorded in the Book of Esther, but no direct connection is made in it to Jerusalem. The only other window into the situation in Jerusalem is the possibility that Malachi prophesied shortly before the arrival of Ezra. His concerns would reflect the problems that evolved between the joyous dedication of the reconstructed temple and the conditions which Ezra confronted upon his arrival. Those conditions demanded reform, as the next section of Ezra–Nehemiah makes clear.

## VIII. EZRA COMES TO JERUSALEM (7:1-10)

### A. EZRA'S GENEALOGY (7:1-6a)

<sup>1</sup>After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup>the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup>the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup>the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup>the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest— <sup>6</sup>this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given.

**7:1a After these things,**

This vague expression bridges the time between the earlier events relating to the early returnees and those that will follow, related to the returnees led by Ezra.

**during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia,**

This is the same Artaxerxes (I) briefly mentioned in 4:6-23. He was the fifth Persian monarch in the Achaemenid dynasty established by Cyrus.

**7:1b-5 Ezra son of Seraiah, . . .**

His name is a shortened form of **Azariah**, one of his forebears