

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE BOOK OF

E Z R A.

The Jewish church puts on quite another face, in this book, from what it *had* appeared with; its state is much better, and more pleasant, than it was of late in Babylon, and yet far inferior to what it had been formerly. The dry bones here live again, but *in the form of a servant*; the yoke of their captivity is taken off, but the marks of it in their galled necks remain. Kings we hear no more of, *the crown is fallen from their heads*. Prophets they are blessed with, to direct them in their re-establishment, but, after a while, prophecy ceases among them, till the great Prophet appears, and his fore-runner. The history of this book is the accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the Jews out of Babylon, at the end of 70 years, and a type of the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Apocalypse, concerning the deliverance of the gospel-church out of the New Testament Babylon. Ezra preserved the records of that great revolution, and transmitted them to the church in this book. His name signifies *a helper*; and so he was to that people. A particular account concerning him we shall meet with, *ch. 7.* where he himself enters upon the stage of action. The book gives us an account,

I. Of the Jews' return out of their captivity, *ch. 1, 2.*

II. Of the building of the temple, the opposition it met with, and yet the perfecting of it at last, *ch. 3..6.*

III. Of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem, *ch. 7, 8.*

IV. Of the good service he did there, in obliging those that had married strange wives, to put them away, *ch. 9, 10.* This beginning again of the Jewish nation was small, yet its latter end greatly increased.

EZRA, I.

CHAP. I.

In this chapter, we have I. The proclamation which Cyrus, king of Persia, issued out for the release of all the Jews that he found captives in Babylon, and the building of their temple in Jerusalem, v. 1..4. II. The return of many, thereupon, v. 5, 6. III. Orders given for the restoring of the vessels of the temple, v. 7..11. And this is the dawning of the day of their deliverance.

1. **N**OW 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, 2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah: 3. Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and

let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD (God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem. 4. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the free-will-offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

It will be proper for us here to consider,

1. What was the state of the captive Jews in Babylon; it was upon many accounts very deplorable; they were under the power of those that hated them, had nothing they could call their own: they had no temple, no altar. If they sang psalms, their enemies ridiculed them; and yet they had prophets among them. Ezekiel and Daniel were kept distinct from the heathen: some of them were preferred at court, others had comfortable settlements in the country, and they were all borne up with hope that, in due time, they should return to their own land again, in expectation of which, they preserved among them the distinction of their families, the knowledge of their religion, and an aversion to idolatry.

2. What was the state of the government, under which they were. Nebuchadnezzar carried many of them away into captivity, in the 1st year of his reign, which was the 4th of Jehoiakim; he reigned 45 years, his son Evil-merodach 23, and his grandson Belshazzar 3 years, which make up the 70 years. So Dr. Lightfoot. It is charged upon Nebuchadnezzar, that he *opened not the house of his prisoners*, Isa. 14. 17. And if he had showed mercy to the poor Jews, Daniel told him it would have been the *lengthening of his tranquillity*, Dan. 4. 27. But the measure of the sins of Babylon was, at length, full, and then destruction was brought upon them by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, which we read of, Dan. 5. Darius, being old, left the government to Cyrus, and he was employed as the instrument of the Jews' deliverance, which he gave orders for, as soon as ever he was master of the kingdom of Babylon, either in contradiction to Nebuchadnezzar, whose family he had cut off, and because he took a pleasure in undoing what he had done; or in policy, to recommend his newly-acquired dominion as merciful and gentle; or, as some think, in a pious regard to the prophecy of Isaiah, which had been published, and well known, above 150 years before, where he was expressly named, as the man who should do this for God, and for whom God would do great things, Isa. 44. 28.—45. 1, &c. and which perhaps were showed him by those about him. His name, some say, in the Persian language, signifies the *sun*, for he brought light and healing to the church of God, and was an eminent type of Christ the *Sun of Righteousness*. Some say that his name signifies a *father*, and Christ is the everlasting Father.

Now here we are told,

1. Whence this proclamation took its rise. *The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus*. Note, The hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord, and, like the rivulets of water, he turneth them which way soever he will. It is said of Cyrus, that he knew not God, nor how to serve him; but God knew him, and how to serve himself by him, Isa. 45. 4. God governs the world by his influence on the spirits of men, and, whatever good is done at any time, it is God that stirs up the spirit to do it, puts thoughts into the mind, gives to the understanding to form a right judgment, and directs the will which way he pleases. Whatever good offices

therefore are, at any time, done for the church of God, he must have the glory of them.

II. The reference it had to the prophecy of Jeremiah, by whom God had not only promised that they should return, but had fixed the time, which set time to favour Zion, was now come. Seventy years were determined; (Jer. 25. 12.—29. 10.) and he that kept the promise made concerning Israel's deliverance out of *Egypt to a day*, (Exod. 12. 41.) was, doubtless, as punctual to this. What Cyrus now did, was long since said to be the *confirming of the word of God's servants*, Isa. 44. 26. Jeremiah, while he lived, was hated and despised; yet thus did Providence honour him long after, that a mighty monarch shall act in pursuance of the word of the Lord by his mouth.

III. The date of this proclamation. It was in his 1st year, not the 1st of his reign over Persia, the kingdom he was born to, but the 1st of his reign over Babylon, the kingdom he had conquered. Those are much honoured, whose spirits are stirred up to begin with God, and to serve him in their first years.

IV. The publication of it; this was made by word of mouth, he *caused a voice to pass throughout all his kingdom*, like a jubilee trumpet (a joyful sabbatical year after many melancholy ones) proclaiming liberty to the captives; the publication was made also by writing, that it might be the more satisfactory, and might be sent to those distant provinces where the ten tribes were scattered, in Assyria and Media, 2 Kings 17. 6.

V. The purport of this proclamation of liberty.

1. The preamble shows the causes and considerations him thereunto moving, v. 2. It should seem, his mind was enlightened with the knowledge of *Jehovah*, for so he calls him, the God of Israel, as the only *living and true God*, the *God of heaven*, who is the sovereign Lord and Disposer of all the *kingdoms of the earth*; of him he says, (v. 3.) *He is the God*, God alone, God above all: though he had not known God by education, God made him so far to know him now, as that he did this service with an eye to him. He professes that he does it, (1.) In gratitude to God for the favours he had bestowed upon him. *The God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth*. This sounds a little vain-glorious, for there were *many kingdoms of the earth* which he had nothing to do with; but he means, that God had given him all that was given to Nebuchadnezzar, whose dominion, Daniel says, was *to the end of the earth*, Dan. 4. 22.—5. 19. Note, God is the Fountain of power; the kingdoms of the earth are at his disposal: whatever share any have of them, they have it from him: and those whom God has entrusted with great power and large possessions, should look upon themselves as obliged thereby to do much for him. (2.) In obedience to God. He hath *charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem*; probably, by a dream or vision of the night, confirmed by comparing it with the prophecy of Isaiah, where his doing it was foretold. Israel's disobedience to God's charge, which they were often told of, is aggravated by the obedience of this heathen king.

2. He gives free leave to all the Jews that were in his dominions, to go up to Jerusalem, and to *build the temple of the Lord* there, v. 3. His regard to God made him overlook, (1.) The secular interest of his government. It had been his policy to keep so great a number of serviceable men in his dominions, and seemed impolitic to let them go and take root again in their own land; but piety is the best policy. (2.) The honour of the religion of his country. Why did he not order them to build a temple to the gods of Babylon or Persia? He believes the God of Israel to be the *God of heaven*,

and therefore obliges his Israel to worship him only; let them *walk in the name of the Lord their God*.

3. He subjoins a brief for a collection to bear the charges of such as were poor, and not able to bear their own, *v. 4*. "Whosoever remaineth, because he has not wherewithal to bear his charges to Jerusalem, *let the men of his place help him*:" some take it as an order to the king's officers to supply them out of his revenue, as *ch. 6. 8*. But it may mean a warrant to the captives, to ask and receive the alms and charitable contributions of all the king's loving subjects. And we may suppose the Jews had conducted themselves so well among their neighbours, that they would be as forward to accommodate them, because they loved them as the Egyptians were, because they were weary of them. At least, many would be kind to them, because they saw the government would take it well. Cyrus not only gave his good wishes with them that went, (*Their God be with them, v. 3.*) but took care also to furnish them with such things as they needed. He took it for granted that those among them who were of ability, would offer their *free-will offering for the house of God*, to promote the rebuilding of it. But beside that, he would have them supplied out of his kingdom. Well-wishers to the temple should be well-doers for it.

5. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. 6. And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered. 7. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; 8. Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9. And this *is* the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives. 10. Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second *sort* four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11. All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them* of the captivity, that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

We are here told,

I. How Cyrus's proclamation succeeded with others.

I. He having given leave to the Jews to go up to Jerusalem, many of them went up accordingly, *v. 5*. The leaders herein were the *chief of the fathers* of Judah and Benjamin, eminent and experienced men, from whom it might justly be expected, that as they were above their brethren in dignity, so they should go before them in duty. The priests and Levites were (as became them,) with the first

that set their faces again toward Zion. If any good work is to be done, let ministers lead in it. They that accompanied them, were such as God had inclined to go up. The same God that had raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim this liberty, raised up their spirits to take the benefit of it; for it was done, *not by might, nor power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, Zech. 4. 6*. The temptation perhaps was strong, to some of them, to stay in Babylon; they had convenient settlements there, had contracted an agreeable acquaintance with the neighbours, and were ready to say, *It is good to be here*: the discouragements of their return were many and great, the journey long, their wives and children unfit for travelling, their own land was to them a strange land, the road to it an unknown road. Go up to Jerusalem? And what should they do there? It was all in ruins, and in the midst of enemies to whom they would be an easy prey. Many were wrought upon by these considerations to stay in Babylon, at least, not to go with the first; but there were some that got over those difficulties, that ventured to break the ice, and feared not the lion in the way, the lion in the streets; and they were those whose spirits God raised. He, by his Spirit and grace, filled them with a generous ambition of liberty, a gracious affection to their own land, and a desire of the free and public exercise of their religion. Had God left them to themselves, and to the counsels of flesh and blood, they had staid in Babylon; but he put it into their hearts to set their faces Zion-ward, and as strangers, to ask the way thither; (*Jer. 50. 5.*) for they, being a new generation, went out, like their father Abraham, from this land of the Chaldees, not knowing whither they went, *Heb. 11. 8*. Note, Whatever good we do, it is owing purely to the grace of God, and he raises up our spirits to the doing of it, *works in us both to will and to do*. Our spirits naturally incline to this earth and the things of it; if they move upward, in any good affections or good actions, it is God that raises them.

The call and offer of the gospel are like Cyrus's proclamation; *deliverance is preached to the captives*, *Luke 4. 18*. Those that are bound under the unrighteous dominion of sin, and bound over to the righteous judgment of God, may be made free by Jesus Christ. Whoever will, by repentance and faith, return to God, his duty to God, his happiness in God, Jesus Christ has opened the way for him, and lets him go up out of the slavery of sin into the *glorious liberty of the children of God*. The offer is general to all; Christ makes it, in pursuance of the grant which the Father has made him of *all power both in heaven and in earth*, (a much greater dominion than that given to Cyrus; *v. 2.*) and of the charge given him to *build God a house*, to set him up a church in the world, a kingdom among men. Many that hear this joyful sound, choose to sit still in Babylon, are in love with their sins, and will not venture upon the difficulties of a holy life; but some there are, that break through the discouragements, and resolve to *build the house of God*, to make heaven of their religion, whatever it cost them; they are those *whose spirit God has raised* above the world and the flesh, and whom he has made *willing in the day of his power*, *Ps. 110. 3*. Thus will the heavenly Canaan be replenished, though many perish in Babylon; and the gospel-offer will not be made in vain.

2. Cyrus having given orders that their neighbours should help them, they did so, *v. 6*. All they that were about them, furnished them with plate and goods to bear the charges of their journey, and to help them in building and furnishing both their own houses and God's. As the tabernacle was made of the spoils of Egypt, and

the first temple built by the labours of the strangers, so the second by the contributions of the Chaldeans; all intimating the admission of the Gentiles into the church, in due time. God can, where he pleases, incline the hearts of strangers to be kind to his people, and make those to strengthen their hands, that have weakened them; *the earth helped the woman*. Beside *what was willingly offered* by the Jews themselves, who staid behind, from a principle of love to God and his house, much was offered, as one may say, unwillingly by the Babylonians, who were influenced to do it by a divine power on their minds, which they themselves could give no account of.

II. How this proclamation was seconded by Cyrus himself. To give proof of the sincerity of his affection to the house of God, he not only released the people of God, but restored the vessels of the temple, v. 7, 8. Observe here, 1. How careful Providence was of the vessels of the temple, that they were not lost, melted down, or so mixed with other vessels, that they could not be known, but that they were all now forth-coming: such care God has of the living *vessels of mercy, vessels of honour*, of whom it is said, (2 Tim. 2. 19.) *The Lord knows them that are his, and they shall none of them perish*. 2. Though they had been put into an idol's temple, and, probably, used in the service of idols, yet they were given back, to be used for God. God will recover his own; and the spoil of the strong man armed shall be converted to the use of the conqueror. 3. Judah had a prince, even in captivity. Sheshbazzar, supposed to be the same with Zerubbabel, is here called *prince of Judah*; the Chaldeans called him *Sheshbazzar*, which signifies *joy in tribulation*; but among his own people he went by the name of *Zerubbabel, a stranger in Babylon*; so he looked upon himself, and that Jerusalem was his home, though, as Josephus says, he was captain of the life-guard to the king of Babylon. He took care of the affairs of the Jews, and had some authority over them, probably, since the death of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who made him his heir, he being of the house of David. 4. To him the sacred vessels were numbered out, (v. 8.) and he took care for their safe conveyance to Jerusalem, v. 11. It would encourage them to build the temple, that they had so much rich furniture ready to put in it when it was built. Though God's ordinances, like the vessels of the sanctuary, may be corrupted and profaned by the New Testament Babylon, they shall, in due time, be restored to their primitive use and intention, for not one jot or tittle of divine institution shall fall to the ground.

CHAP. II.

That many returned out of Babylon upon Cyrus's proclamation, we were told in the foregoing chapter; we have here a catalogue of the several families that returned, v. 1. I. The leaders, v. 2. II. The people, v. 3. . . 35. III. The priests, Levites, and retainers to the temple, v. 36. . . 63. IV. The sum total, with an account of their retinue, v. 64. . . 67. V. Their offerings to the service of the temple, v. 68. . . 70.

1. **N**OW these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; 2. Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bil-

shan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel. 3. The children of Parosh, two thousand a hundred seventy and two. 4. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5. The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8. The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10. The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12. The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13. The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. 14. The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15. The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18. The children of Jorah, a hundred and twelve. 19. The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20. The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. 21. The children of Beth-lehem, a hundred twenty and three. 22. The children of Netophah, fifty and six. 23. The men of Anathoth, a hundred twenty and eight. 24. The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25. The children of Kirjath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three. 26. The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27. The men of Michmas, a hundred twenty and two. 28. The men of Beth-el and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29. The children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30. The children of Magbish, a hundred fifty and six. 31. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35. The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

We may observe here,

1. That an account was kept in writing of the families that came up out of captivity, and the numbers of each family, (1.) For their honour, as part of their recompense for their faith and courage, their confidence in God, and their affection to their own land, and to stir up others to follow their good example. Those that honour God, he will thus honour. The names of all those Israelites indeed, that accept the offer of deliverance by Christ,

shall be found, to their honour, in a more sacred record than this even in the *Lamb's book of life*. (2.) For the benefit of posterity, that they might know from whom they descended, and to whom they were allied.

2. That they are called *children of the province*. Judah, that had been an illustrious kingdom, to which other kingdoms had been made provinces, subject to it and dependent on it, was now itself made a province, to receive laws and commissions from the king of Persia, and to be accountable to him. See how sin diminishes and debases a nation, which righteousness would exalt. But by thus being made servants, (as the patriarchs by being sojourners in a country which was their's by promise,) they were reminded of the *better country, that is the heavenly*, (Heb. 11. 16.) a *kingdom which cannot be moved*, or changed into a province.

3. That they are said to come *every one to his city*, that is, the city appointed them, in which appointment an eye, no doubt, was had to their former settlement by Joshua; and to that as near as might be, they returned, for it does not appear that any others, at least, any that were able to oppose them, had possessed them in their absence.

4. That the leaders are first mentioned; (v. 2.) Zerubbabel and Jeshua were their Moses and Aaron, the former their chief prince, the latter their chief priest. Nehemiah and Mordecai are mentioned here; some think not the same with the famous men we afterward meet with of those names: probably, they were the same; but afterward returned to court for the service of their country.

6. Some of these several families are named from the persons that were their ancestors, others from the places in which they had formerly resided; as with us many surnames are the proper names of persons, others of places.

6. Some little difference there is between the numbers of some of the families here, and in Neh. 7. where this catalogue is repeated; which might arise from this, that some who had given in their names, at first, to come, afterward drew back,—said, *I go, Sir, but went not*, which would lessen the number of the families they belonged to; others that declined, at first, *afterward repented and went*, and so increased the number.

7. Here are two families that are called *the children of Elam*, one, v. 7. another v. 31. and, which is strange, the number of both is the same, 1254.

8. The children of Adonikam, which signifies a *rich lord*, were 666, just the *number of the beast*, (Rev. 13. 18.) which is there said to be *the number of a man*, which, Mr. Hugh Broughton thinks, has reference to this man.

9. The children of Beth-lehem (v. 21.) were but 123, though it was David's city: for Beth-lehem was *little among the thousands of Judah*, yet there must the Messiah arise, Mic. 5. 2.

10. Anathoth had been a famous place in the tribe of Benjamin, and yet here it numbered but 128, (v. 23.) which is to be imputed to the divine curse which the men of Anathoth brought upon themselves by persecuting Jeremiah, who was of their city, Jer. 11. 23, *There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth*. And see Isa. 10. 30, *O floor Anathoth!* Nothing brings ruin on a people sooner than persecution.

36. The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 37. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 38. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 39. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. 40. The Levites:

the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. 41. The singers: the children of Asaph, a hundred twenty and eight. 42. The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, *in all* a hundred thirty and nine. 43. The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 44. The children of Keros, the children of Siaba, the children of Padon. 45. The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, 46. The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmai, the children of Hanan, 47. The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, 48. The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, 49. The children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai, 50. The children of Asnah, the children of Mehumim, the children of Nephusim, 51. The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 52. The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 53. The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamiah, 54. The children of Nezhiah, the children of Hatipha. 55. The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, 56. The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 57. The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hatil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. 58. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred ninety and two. 59. And these *were* they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsa, Cherub, Addan, *and* Immer; but they could not show their father's house, and their seed, whether they *were* of Israel: 60. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two. 61. And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; (which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name;) 62. These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 63. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

Here is,

I. An account of the priests that returned, and they were a considerable number; about a tenth part of the whole company: for the whole were above forty-two thousand, (v. 64.) and four families of priests made up above forty-two hundred, (v. 36..39.) thus was the tenth God's part; a blessed decimation. Three of the fathers of the priests here named, were heads of courses, 1 Chron. 24. 7, 8, 14. The fourth was Pashur, v. 38. If these were of the posterity of that Pashur that abused Jeremiah, (Jer. 20. 2.) it is strange that so bad a man should have so good a seed, and so numerous.

II. Of the Levites; I cannot but wonder at the small number of them, for, taking in both the singers and the porters, (v. 40..42.) they did not make 350. Time was, when the Levites were more forward to their duty than the priests, (2 Chron. 29. 34.) but they were not so now. If one place, one family, has reputation for pious zeal now, another may have it another time. *The wind blows where it listeth*, and shifts its points.

III. Of the Nethinims, who, it is supposed, were the Gibeonites, *given* (so their name signifies) by Joshua first, (Joshua 9. 27.) and again by David, (Ezra 8. 20.) when Saul had expelled them, to be employed by the Levites in the work of God's house as hewers of wood and drawers of water; and with them of the children of Solomon's servants, whom he gave for the like use, (whether they were Jews or Gentiles, does not appear,) and who are here taken notice of among the retainers of the temple, and numbered with the Nethinims, v. 55, 58. Note, It is an honour to belong to God's house, though in the meanest office there.

IV. Of some that were looked upon as Israelites by birth, and others as priests, and yet could not make out a clear title to the honour.

1. There were some that could not prove themselves Israelites; (v. 59, 60.) a considerable number, who presumed they were of the seed of Jacob, but could not produce their pedigrees, and yet would go up to Jerusalem, having an affection to the house and people of God: these shamed those who were true-born Israelites, and yet were not called Israelites indeed; *came out of the waters of Judah*, (Isa. 48. 1.) but had lost the relish of those waters.

2. There were others that could not prove themselves priests, and yet were supposed to be of the seed of Aaron. What is not preserved in black and white, will, in all likelihood, be forgotten in a little time. Now we are here told, (1.) How they lost their evidence. One of their ancestors married a daughter of Barzillai, that great man whom we read of in David's time; he gloried in an alliance to that honourable family, and, preferring that before the dignity of his priesthood, would have his children called after Barzillai's family, and their pedigree preserved in the registers of that house, not of the house of Aaron, and so they lost it. In Babylon, there was nothing to be got by the priesthood, and therefore they cared not for being akin to it. Those who think their ministry, or their relation to ministers, a diminution or disparagement to them, forget who it was, that said, *I magnify my office*. (2.) What they lost with it. It should not be taken for granted that they were priests, when they could not produce their proofs, but they were *as polluted, put from the priesthood*. Now that the priests had recovered their rights, and had the altar to live upon again, they would gladly be looked upon as priests. But they had sold their birth-right for the honour of being gentlemen, and therefore were justly degraded, and forbidden to *eat of the most holy things*. Note, Christ will be ashamed of those that are ashamed of him and his service.

It was the Tirshatha, or governor, that put them

under this sequestration, which some understand of Zerubbabel the present governor, others of Nehemiah, who is so called, (Neh. 8. 2.—10. 1.) and gave this order when he came some years after. But the prohibition was not absolute, it was only a suspension, till there should be a High Priest *with Urim and Thummim*, by whom they might know God's mind in this matter. This, it seems, was expected and desired, but it does not appear that ever they were blessed with it under the second temple. They had the canon of the Old Testament complete, which was better than Urim; and by the want of that oracle, were taught to expect the Messiah the great Oracle, which the Urim and Thummin was but a type of. Nor does it appear that the second temple had the ark in it, either the old one or a new one; those shadows, by degrees, vanished, as the substance approached; and God, by the prophet, intimates to his people, that they should sustain no damage by the want of the ark, Jer. 3. 16, *In those days, when they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord neither shall it come to mind, for they shall do well without it*.

64. The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore. 65. Besides their servants and their maids, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: *there were* among them two hundred singing-men and singing-women. 66. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; 67. Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; *their* asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty. 68. And *some* of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which *is* at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: 69. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work, threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. 70. So the priests, and the Levites, and *some* of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Here is,

I. The sum total of the company that returned now out of Babylon. The particular sums before mentioned amount not quite to 30,000, (29,818,) so that there were above 12,000 that come not into any of those accounts, who, it is probable, were of the rest of the tribes of Israel, beside Judah and Benjamin, that could not tell of what particular family or city they were, but that they were Israelites, and of what tribe. Now, 1. This was more than double the number that were carried captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, so that, as in Egypt, the time of their affliction was the time of their increase. 2. These were but few to begin a nation with, and yet, by virtue of the old promise made to their fathers, they multiplied so, as, before their last destruction by the Romans, about 500 years after, to be a very populous country. When God says, "Increase and multiply," *a little one shall become a thousand*.

II. Their retinue. They were themselves little better than servants, and therefore no wonder that their servants were comparatively but few (v. 65.)

and their beasts of burthen about as many, *v.* 66, 67. It was not with them now, as in days past. But notice is taken of 200 *singing-men and women* whom they had among them, who, we will suppose, intended, as those, 2 Chron. 35. 25. to excite *their mourning*, for it was foretold, they should, upon this occasion, *go weeping*, (Jer. 50. 4.) with ditties of lamentation.

III. Their oblations. It is said, (*v.* 68, 69.) 1. That they *came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem*; and yet that house, that holy and beautiful house, was now in ruins, a heap of rubbish; but, like their father Abraham when the altar was gone, they came with devotion to the *place of the altar*; (Gen. 13. 4.) and it is the character of the genuine sons of Zion, that they favour even *the dust thereof*, Ps. 102. 14. 2. That they offered freely toward the *setting of it up in its place*. That, it seems, was the first house they talked of setting up; and though they came off a journey, and were beginning the world, (two chargeable things,) yet they offered, and offered freely, toward the building of the temple. Let none complain of the necessary expenses of their religion, but believe that when they come to balance the account, they will find that it clears the cost. Their offering was nothing in comparison with the offerings of the princes in David's time; then they offered by talents, (1 Chron. 29. 7.) now by drams, yet these drams, being after their ability, were as acceptable to God as those talents, like the widow's two mites. The 61,000 drams of gold amount, by Cumberland's calculation, to so many pounds of our money, and so many groats. Every maneh, or pound of silver, he reckons to be 60 shekels, namely, 30 ounces, which we may reckon 7 pounds 10 shillings of our money, so that this 5,000 pounds of silver will be above 37,000 of our money. It seems, God had blessed them with the increase of their wealth, as well as of their numbers, in Babylon; and, as God had prospered them, they gave cheerfully to the service of his house. 3. That they *dwelt in their cities*, *v.* 70. Though their cities were out of repair, yet, because they were their cities, such as God had assigned them, they were content to dwell in them; and were thankful for liberty and property, though they had little of pomp, plenty, or power. Their poverty was a bad cause, but their unity and unanimity were a good effect of it. Here was room enough for them all, and all their substance, so that there was no strife among them, but perfect harmony, a blessed presage of their settlement, as their discords, in the latter times of that state, were of their ruin.

CHAP. III.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we left *Israel in their cities*, but we may well imagine what a bad posture their affairs were in, the ground untilled, the cities in ruins, all out of order: but here we have an account of the early care they took about the re-establishment of religion among them. Thus did they lay the foundation well, and begin their work at the right end. 1. They set up an altar, and offered sacrifices upon it, kept the feasts, and contributed toward the rebuilding of the temple, *v.* 1. . . 7. II. They laid the foundation of the temple with a mixture of joy and sorrow, *v.* 8. . . 13. This was the day of *small things*, which was *not to be despised*, Zech. 4. 10.

1. **A**ND when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. 2. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of

Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as *it is written* in the law of Moses the man of God. 3. And they set the altar upon his bases; (for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries;) and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt-offerings morning and evening. 4. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as *it is written*, and *offered* the daily burnt-offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; 5. And afterward *offered* the continual burnt-offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a free-will-offering unto the LORD. 6. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid. 7. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar-trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

Here is,

I. A general assembly of the returned Israelites at Jerusalem in the *seventh month*, *v.* 1. We may suppose that they came from Babylon, in the spring, and must allow at least 4 months for the journey, for, so long, Ezra and his company were in coming, *ch.* 7. 9. The seventh month therefore soon came, in which many of the feasts of the Lord were to be solemnized; and then they gathered themselves together by agreement among themselves, rather than by the command of authority, to Jerusalem. Though they were newly come to their cities, and had their hands full of business there, to provide necessities for themselves and their families, which might have excused them from attending on God's altar till the hurry was a little over, as many foolishly put off their coming to the communion till they are settled in the world, yet such was their zeal for religion, now that they were newly come from under correction for their irreligion, that they left all their business in the country to attend God's altar; and (which is strange) in this pious zeal they were all of a mind, they came *as one man*. Let worldly business be postponed to the business of religion, and it will prosper the better.

II. The care which their leading men took to have an altar ready for them to attend upon. Jeshua and his brethren the priests, Zerubbabel and his brethren the princes, built *the altar of the God of Israel*, (*v.* 2.) in the same place (it is likely) where it had stood; upon the same bases, *v.* 3. Bishop Patrick, observing that before the temple was built, there seems to have been a tabernacle pitched for the divine service, as was in David's time, not on mount Moriah, but on mount Sion, supposes that this altar was erected there, to be used while the temple was in building. Let us learn hence, 1. *To begin with God*. The more difficult and necessitous our case is, the more concerned we are to take him along with us in all our ways. If we expect to be directed by his oracles, let him be honoured by our offerings. 2. *To do what we can* in the worship of God, when *we can*.

not do what we would. They could not immediately have a temple, but they would not be without an altar. Abraham, wherever he came, *built an altar*; and, wherever we come, though we may, perhaps, want the benefit of the candlestick of preaching, and the show-bread of the eucharist, yet if we bring not the sacrifices of prayer and praise, we are wanting in our duty, for we have an altar that sanctifies the gift, ever ready.

Observe the reason here given why they hastened to set up the altar, *Fear was upon them, because of the people of the land*; they were in the midst of enemies that bore ill will to them and their religion, for whom they were an unequal match. And, (1.) *Though* they were so, yet they built the altar, so some read it; they would not be frightened from their religion by the opposition they were like to meet with in it. Never let the fear of man bring us into this snare. (2.) *Because* they were so, therefore they set up the altar. Apprehension of danger should stir us up to our duty. Have we many enemies? Then it is good to have God our Friend, and to keep up our correspondence with him. This good use we should make of our fears, we should be driven by them to our knees. Even Saul would think himself undone, if the enemy should come upon him before he had made his supplication to God, 1 Sam. 12. 13.

III. The sacrifices they offered upon the altar. The altar was reared to be used, and they used it accordingly. Let not those that have an altar, starve it.

1. They began on the *first day of the seventh month*, v. 6. It doth not appear that they had any fire from heaven to begin with, as Moses and Solomon had, but common fire served them, as it did the patriarchs.

2. Having begun, they kept up the *continual burnt-offering*, (v. 5.) *morning and evening*, v. 3. They had known by sad experience what it was to want the comfort of the daily sacrifice, to plead in their daily prayers, and now that it was re-ived, they resolved not to let it fall again. The daily Lamb typified the Lamb of God, whose righteousness must be our confidence in all our prayers.

3. They observed all the *set feasts of the Lord*, and offered the sacrifices appointed for each, and particularly the *feast of tabernacles*, v. 4, 5. Now that they had received such great mercy from God, that joyful feast was, in a special manner, seasonable. And now that they were beginning to settle in their cities, it might serve well to remind them of their fathers dwelling in tents in the wilderness. That feast also, which had a peculiar reference to gospel-times, (as appears, Zech. 14. 18.) was brought, in a special manner, into reputation, now that those times drew on. Of the services of this feast, which continued seven days, and had peculiar sacrifices appointed, it is said that they did *as the duty of every day required*. See Num. 29. 13, 17, &c. So it is in the original, *Verbum diei in die suo*—*The word, or matter, of the day in its day*. A phrase that has become proverbial with those that have used themselves to scripture-language. If the feast of tabernacles was a figure of gospel conversation, in respect of continual weanedness from the world, and joy in God; we may infer that it concerns us all to do the *work of the day in its day, according as the duty of the day requires*, that is, (1.) We must improve time, by finding some business to do every day, that will turn to a good account. (2.) We must improve opportunity, by accommodating ourselves to that which is the proper business of the present day. Every thing is beautiful in its season. The tenth day of this month was the day of atonement, a solemn day, and very seasonable now: it is very probable that they ob-

served it, yet it is not mentioned, nor indeed in all the Old Testament do I remember the least mention of the observance of that day; as if it were enough, that we have the law of it, (Lev. 16.) and the gospel of it, which was the chief intention of it in the New Testament.

4. They offered *every man's free-will offering*, v. 5. The law required much, but they brought more; for though they had little wealth to support the expense of their sacrifices, they had much zeal, and, we may suppose, spared at their own tables, that they might plentifully supply God's altar. Happy they that bring with them out of the furnace of affliction such a holy heat as this!

IV. The preparation they made for the building of the temple, v. 7. This they applied themselves immediately to; for, while we do what we can, we must still be aiming to do more and better. Tyre and Sidon must now, as of old, furnish them with workmen, and Lebanon with timber; orders for both which they had from Cyrus; what God calls us to, we may depend upon his providence to furnish us with.

8. Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

9. Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God; the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites. 10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11. And they sung together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD, because *he is good*, for his mercy *endureth* for ever towards Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12. But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy; 13. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

There was no dispute among the returned Jews, whether they should build the temple or no, that was immediately resolved on, and that it should be

done with all speed; what comfort could they take in their own land, if they had not that token of God's presence with them, and the record of his name among them? We have here therefore an account of the beginning of that good work. Observe,

I. When it was begun; in the second month of the second year, as soon as ever the season of the solemnities of the passover. They took little more than half a year for making preparation of the ground and materials; so much were their hearts upon it. Note, When any good work is to be done, it will be our wisdom to set about it quickly, and not to lose time; yea, though we foresee difficulty and opposition in it. Thus we engage ourselves to it, and engage God for us. Well begun, (we say,) is half ended.

II. Who began it; Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and their brethren. Then the work of God is likely to go on well, when magistrates, ministers, and people, are hearty for it, and agree in their places to promote it. It was God that gave them one heart for this service, and it boded well.

III. Who were employed to further it; they appointed the *Levites to set forward the work*, (v. 8.) and they did it by *setting forward the workmen*, (v. 9.) and strengthening their hands with good and comfortable words. Note, They that do not work themselves may yet do good service by quickening and encouraging those that do work.

IV. How God was praised at the laying of the foundation of the temple; (v. 10, 11.) the priests with the trumpets appointed by Moses, and the Levites with the cymbals appointed by David, made up a concert of music, not to please the ear, but to assist the singing of that everlasting hymn which will never be out of date, and to which our tongues should never be *out of tune*; *God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever*: the burthen of Ps. 136. Let the streams of mercy be traced up to the fountain. Whatever our condition is, how many soever our griefs and fears, let it be owned that God is good; and, whatever fails, that his mercy fails not. Let this be sung with application, as here; not only his mercy endures for ever, but it endures for ever toward Israel; when captives in a strange land, and strangers in their own land. However it be, yet *God is good to Israel*, (Ps. 73. 1.) good to us. Let the reviving of the church's interests, when they seemed dead, be ascribed to the continuance of God's mercy for ever, for therefore the church continues.

V. How differently the people were affected. A remarkable mixture of various affections there was upon this occasion. Different sentiments there were among the people of God, and each expressed himself according to his sentiments, and yet there was no disagreement among them, their minds were not alienated from each other, nor the common concern retarded by it.

1. Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all, when they saw but the foundation of one laid, praised the Lord with shouts of joy, v. 11. To them even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls even this was sweet. They shouted, so that *the noise was heard afar off*. Note, We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though it be not yet come to perfection; and the foundations of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be the fountains of joy to every faithful Israelite.

2. Those that remembered the glory of the first temple which Solomon built, and considered how far this was likely to be inferior to that, perhaps in dimensions, certainly in magnificence and sumptuousness, *wept with a loud voice*, v. 12. If we date the captivity with the first, from the 4th of Jehoia-

kim, it was about 52 years since the temple was burnt, if from Jeconiah's captivity, it was but 59. So that many now alive might remember it standing; and great mercy it was to the captives, that they had the lives of so many of their priests and Levites lengthened out, who could tell them what they themselves remembered of the glory of Jerusalem, to quicken them in their return. These lamented the disproportion between this temple and the former. And, (1.) There was some reason for it, and if they turned their tears into the right channel, and bewailed the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. Sin sullies the glory of any church or people, and when they find themselves diminished and brought low, that must bear the blame. (2.) Yet it was their infirmity to mingle these tears with the common joys, and so cast a damp upon them. They *despised the day of small things*; and were unthankful for the good they enjoyed, because it was not so much as their ancestors had, though it was much more than they deserved. In the harmony of public joys, let not us be jarring strings. It was an aggravation of the discouragements they hereby gave to the people, that they were priests and Levites, who should have known and taught others how to be duly affected under various providences, and not to let the remembrance of former afflictions drown the sense of present mercies.

This mixture of sorrow and joy here is a representation of this world; some are bathing in rivers of joy, while others are drowned in floods of tears. In heaven all are singing, and none sighing; in hell all are weeping and wailing, and none rejoicing; but here on earth we can scarcely *discern the shouts of joy from the noise of the weeping*. Let us learn to *rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*; and ourselves to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and weep as though we wept not.

CHAP. IV.

The good work of rebuilding the temple was no sooner begun, than it met with opposition from those that bare ill will to it; the Samaritans were enemies to the Jews and their religion, and they set themselves to obstruct it. I. They offered to be partners in the building of it, that they might have it in their power to retard it; but they were refused, v. 1, 3. II. They discouraged them in it, and dissuaded them from it, v. 4, 5. III. They basely misrepresented the undertaking, and the undertakers, to the king of Persia, by a memorial they sent him, v. 6, 16. IV. They obtained from him an order to stop the building, (v. 17, 22.) which they immediately put in execution, v. 23, 24.

1. **N**OW when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel, 2. Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him, since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. 3. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, You have nothing to do with us to build a 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. 4. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of

Judah, and troubled them in building; 5. And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

We have here an instance of the old enmity that was put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. God's temple cannot be built, but Satan will rage, and the *gates of hell will fight against it*. The gospel-kingdom was, in like manner, to be set up with much struggle and contention. In this respect the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former, and it was more a figure of the temple of Christ's church, in that Solomon built his temple when *there was no adversary, nor evil occurrent*, 1 Kings 5. 4. But this second temple was built notwithstanding great opposition, in the removing and conquering of which, and the bringing of the work to perfection, at last, in despite of it, the wisdom, power, and goodness, of God, were much glorified, and the church encouraged to trust in him.

I. The undertakers are here called *the children of the captivity*, (v. 1.) which makes them look very little. They were newly come out of captivity, were born in captivity, had still the marks of their captivity upon them; though they were not now captives, they were under the control of those whose captives they had lately been. Israel was God's son, his first-born, but by their iniquity they sold and enslaved themselves, and so became children of the captivity; but it should seem, the thought of their being so, quickened them to this work, for it was by their neglect of the temple that they lost their freedom.

II. The opposers of the undertaking are here said to be *the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin*, not the Chaldeans or Persians, they gave them no disturbance, ("Let them build and welcome,") but the relics of the ten tribes, and the foreigners that had joined themselves to them, and patched up that mongrel religion we had an account of, 2 Kings, 17. 33, *They feared the Lord, and served their own gods too*. They are called *the people of the land*, v. 4. The worst enemies Judah and Benjamin had, were these that *said they were Jews, and were not*, Rev. 3. 9.

III. The opposition they gave, had in it much of the subtilty of the old serpent. When they heard that the temple was in building, they were immediately aware that it would be a fatal blow to their superstition, and set themselves to oppose it. They had not power to do it forcibly, but they tried all the ways they could, to do it effectually.

1. They offered their service to build with them, only that thereby they might get an opportunity to retard the work, while they pretended to further it.

Now, (1.) Their offer was plausible enough, and looked kind; "*We will build with you, will help you to contrive, and will contribute toward the expense; for we seek your God as you do,*" v. 2. This was false, for though they sought the same God, they did not seek him only, nor seek him in the way he appointed, and therefore did not seek him as they did. Herein they designed, if it were possible, to hinder the building of it, at least, to hinder their comfortable enjoyment of it; as good almost not have it, as not have it to themselves, for the pure worship of the true God, and him only. Thus are the *kisses of an enemy deceitful*; his words *smoother than butter, when war is in his heart*.

But, (2.) Their refusal of their proffered service was very just, v. 3. *The chief of the fathers of Israel* were soon aware that they meant them no kindness, whatever they pretended, but really de-

signed to do them a mischief, and therefore (though they had need enough of help, if it had been such as they could confide in) told them plainly, "*You have nothing to do with us, have no part nor lot in this matter, are not true-born Israelites, nor faithful worshippers of God, you worship you know not what*, John 4. 22. You are none of those with whom we dare hold communion, and therefore *we ourselves will build*;" they plead not to them the law of their God, which forbade them to mingle themselves with strangers, (though that especially they had an eye to,) but that which they would take more notice of, the king's commission, which was directed to them only, "*The king of Persia has commanded us to build this house, and we shall distrust and affront him, if we call in a foreign aid.*" Note, In doing good, there is need of the *wisdom of the serpent*, as well as the *innocency of the dove*, and we have need, as it follows there, to *beware of men*, Matth. 10. 16. 17. We should carefully consider with whom we are associated, and on whose hand we lean. While we trust God with a pious confidence, we must trust men with a prudent jealousy and caution.

2. When this plot failed, they did what they could to divert them from the work, and discourage them in it: they weakened their hands, by telling them it was in vain to attempt it, calling them *foolish builders*, who began what they were not able to finish, and by their insinuations troubled them, and made them drive heavily in it: all were not alike zealous in it: those that were cool and indifferent, were by these artifices drawn off from the work which wanted their help, v. 4. And because what they themselves said, the Jews would suspect to be ill meant, and not to be influenced by, they, under-hand, *hired counsellors against them*, who, pretending to advise them for the best, should dissuade them from proceeding, and so *frustrate their purpose*; (v. 5.) or dissuade the men of Tyre and Sidon from furnishing them with the timber they had bargained for; (*ch.* 3. 7.) or, whatever business they had at the Persian court, to solicit for any particular grants or favours, pursuant to the general edict for their liberty, there were those that were hired, and lay ready, to appear of counsel against them. Wonder not at the restlessness of the church's enemies in their attempts against the building of God's temple: he whom they serve, and whose work they are doing, is *unwearied in walking to and fro through the earth to do mischief*. And let those who discourage a good work, and weaken the hands of them that are employed in it, see whose pattern they follow.

6. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they *unto him* an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7. And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter *was* written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. 8. Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: 9. Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the

Susanehtes, the Dehavites, *and* the Elamites, 10. And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest *that are on this side the river, and at such a time.* 11. *This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king: Thy servants on this side the river, and at such a time.* 12. Be it known unto the king, that the Jews, which came up from thee to us, are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls *thereof*, and joined the foundations. 13. Be it known now unto the king, that if this city be builded, and the walls set up *again, then* will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and *so* thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings. 14. Now, because we have maintenance from *the king's* palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king, 15. That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know, that this city *is* a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. 16. We certify the king, that if this city be builded *again*, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

Cyrus steadfastly adhered to the Jews' interest, and supported his own grant; it was to no purpose to offer any thing to him in prejudice of it, what he did was from a good principle of the fear of God, and therefore he adhered to it; but though his reign, in all, was 30 years, yet, after the conquest of Babylon, and his decree for the release of the Jews, some think that he reigned but 3 years, others 7, and then either died, or gave up that part of his government, in which his successor was Ahasuerus, (v. 6.) called also *Artaxerxes*, (v. 7.) supposed to be the same that in heathen authors is called *Cambyses*, who had never taken that cognizance of the despised Jews, as to concern himself for them, nor had he that knowledge of the God of Israel that his predecessor had; to him these Samaritans applied themselves by letter for an order to stop the building of the temple; and they did it in the beginning of his reign, being resolved to lose no time, when they thought they had a king for their purpose. See how watchful the church's enemies are to take the first opportunity of doing it a mischief; let not its friends be less careful to do it a kindness. Here is,

I. The general purport of the letter which they sent to the king, to inform him of this matter. It is called, (v. 6.) *an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.* The Devil is the *accuser of the brethren*, Rev. 12. 10. And he carries on his malicious designs against them, not only by accusing them himself before our God, as he did Job, but by acting as a lying spirit in the mouths of his instruments, whom he employs to accuse them before magistrates and kings, and to make

them odious to the many, and obnoxious to the mighty. Marvel not, if the same arts be still used to run down serious godliness.

II. The persons concerned in writing this letter. The contrivers are named, (v. 7.) that plotted the thing; the writers, (v. 8.) that put it into form, and the subscribers, (v. 9.) that concurred in it, and joined with them in this representation, this *misrepresentation* I should call it. Now see here, 1. How the *rulers take counsel together against the Lord* and his temple, with their companions: the building of the temple would do them no harm, yet they appear against it with the utmost concern and virulence, perhaps because the prophets of the God of Israel had foretold the *famishing* and *perishing* of all the *gods of the heathen*, Zeph. 2. 11. Jer. 10. 11. 2. How the people concurred with them in imagining this vain thing. They followed the cry, though ignorant of the merits of the cause: all the several colonies of that plantation, (nine are here mentioned,) who had their denomination from the cities or countries of Assyria, Chaldaea, Persia, &c. whence they came, set their hands, by their representatives, to this letter. Perhaps they were incensed against these returned Jews, because many of the ten tribes were among them, whose estates they were got into the possession of, and of whom they were therefore jealous, lest they should attempt the recovery of them hereafter.

III. A copy of the letter itself, which Ezra inserts here out of the records of the kingdom of Persia, into which it had been entered; and it is well we have it, that we may see whence the like methods, still taken to expose good people, and baffle good designs, are copied.

1. They represent themselves as very loyal to the government, and nightly concerned for the honour and interest of it; and would have it thought that the king had no such loving faithful subjects in all his dominions as they were, none so sensible of their obligations to him, v. 14. *Because we are salted with the salt of the palace*, so it is in the margin: "We have our salary from the court, and could no more live without it, than flesh could be preserved without salt; or, as some think, their pay or pension was sent them in salt; or, "Because we had our education in the palace, and were brought up at the king's table," as we find, Dan. 1. 5. These were they whom he intended to prefer; they did *eat their portion of the king's meat*. Now, in consideration of this, *it is not meet for us to see the king's dishonour*; and therefore they urge him to stop the building of the temple, which would certainly be the king's dishonour more than any thing else. Note, A secret enmity to Christ and his gospel, is often gilded over with a pretended affection to Cæsar and his power. The Jews hated the Roman government, and yet, to serve a turn, could cry, *We have no king but Cæsar*. But, (to allude to this,) if they lived upon the crown, thought themselves bound in gratitude thus to support the interests of it, much more reason have we thus to argue ourselves into a pious concern for God's honour; *we have our maintenance from the God of heaven*, and are *salted with his salt*, live upon his bounty, and are the care of his providence; and therefore it is *not meet for us to see his dishonour*, without resenting it, and doing what we can to prevent it.

2. They represent the Jews as disloyal, and dangerous to the government; that Jerusalem was *the rebellious and bad city*, (v. 12.) *hurtful to kings and provinces*, v. 15. See how Jerusalem, *the joy of the whole earth*, (Ps. 48. 2.) is here reproached as the scandal of the whole earth. The enemies of the church could not do the bad things they design against it, if they did not first give it a bad name.

Jerusalem had been a loyal city to its rightful princes, and its present inhabitants were as well affected to the king and his government, as any of his provinces whatsoever. Daniel, who was a Jew, had lately approved himself so faithful to his prince, that his worst enemies could find no fault in his management, Dan. 6. 4. But thus was Elijah most unjustly charged with troubling Israel, the apostles with *turning the world upside down*, and Christ himself with *perverting the nation*, and *forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar*; and we must not think it strange, if the same game be still played. Now here,

(1.) The history of what was past, is invidious; that *within this city, sedition had been moved of old time*, and, for *that cause it was destroyed*, v. 15. It cannot be denied but that there was some colour given for this suggestion by the attempts of Jehoia-kim and Zedekiah to shake off the yoke of the king of Babylon, which, if they had kept close to their religion and the temple they were now rebuilding, they had never come under. But it must be considered, [1.] That they were themselves, and their ancestors, sovereign princes, and their efforts to recover their rights, if there had not been in them the violation of an oath, for aught I know, had been justifiable, and successful too, had they taken the right method, and made their peace with God first. [2.] Though these Jews, and their princes, had been guilty of rebellion, yet it was unjust therefore to fasten this as an indelible brand upon this city, as if that must, for ever after, go under the name of *the rebellious and bad city*. The Jews, in their captivity, had given such specimens of their good behaviour, as were sufficient, with any reasonable men, to roll away that one reproach; for they were instructed (and we have reason to hope that they observed their instructions) to *seek the peace of the cities where they were captives, and pray to the Lord for it*, Jer. 29. 7. It was therefore very unfair, yet not uncommon, for them to impute the iniquity of the fathers to the children.

(2.) Their information concerning what they were now doing, was grossly false, in matter of fact. Very careful they are to inform the king that they had *set up the walls of this city*, nay, had *finished* them, so it is in the margin, and *joined the foundations*, (v. 12.) when it was far from being the case. They had only begun to build the temple, which Cyrus commanded them to do, but as for the walls, there was nothing done, nor designed, toward the repair of them, as appears by the condition they were in, many years after, (Neh. 1. 3.) all in ruins. *What shall be given, and what done, to these false tongues*; these false pens, *sharp arrows*, doubtless, of the mighty, and *coals of juniper*? Ps. 120. 3, 4. If they had not been perfectly lost to all virtue and honour, they would not, and if they had not been very secure of the king's countenance, they durst not, have written that to the king which all their neighbours knew to be a notorious lie. See Prov. 29. 12.

(3.) Their prognostics of the consequences were altogether groundless and absurd. They were very confident, and would have the king believe it upon their word, that if this city be built, not only the Jews would *pay no toll, tribute, or custom*, (v. 13.) but (since a great lie is as soon spoken as a little one) that the king would have no portion at all on this side the river, (v. 16.) that all the countries on this side the Euphrates would instantly revolt, drawn to it by their example; and if the prince in possession should connive at this, he would wrong, not only himself, but his successors, *Thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings*. See how every line of this letter breathes both the subtilty and malice of the old serpent.

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

18. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. 19. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. 20. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. 21. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. 22. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? 23. Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem, unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. 24. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Here we have,

1. The orders which the king of Persia gave, in answer to the information sent him by the Samaritans against the Jews. He suffered himself to be imposed upon by their fraud and falsehood, took no care to examine the allegations of their petition concerning that which the Jews were now doing, but took it for granted that the charge was true, and was very willing to gratify them with an order of council to stay proceedings.

1. He consulted the records concerning Jerusalem, and found that it had indeed rebelled against the king of Babylon, and therefore that it was, as they called it, a *bad city*, v. 19. And withal, that, in times past, kings had reigned there, to whom all the countries on that side the river had been tributaries, (v. 20.) and that therefore there was danger, that if ever they were able, (which they were never likely to be,) they would claim them again. Thus he says as they said, and pretends to give a reason for it. See the hard fate of princes, who must see and hear with other men's eyes and ears, and give judgment upon things as they are represented to them, which things are often represented falsely. Therefore God's judgment is always just, because he sees things as they are, and is according to truth.

2. He appointed these Samaritans to stop the building of the city immediately, till further orders should be given about it, v. 21, 22. Neither they, in their letter, nor he, in his order, make any mention of the temple, and the building of that, because both they and he knew that they had not only a permission, but a command, from Cyrus to rebuild that, which even these Samaritans had not the confidence to move for the repeal of; they spake only of the city, "Let not *that* be built," that is, "as a

city with walls and gates; whatever you do, prevent *that, lest damage grow to the hurt of the kings:*" he would not that the crown should lose by his wearing it.

II. The use which the enemies of the Jews made of these orders so fraudulently obtained; upon the receipt of them, they went up *in haste to Jerusalem*, v. 23. *Their feet run to evil*, Prov. 1. 16. They were impatient till the builders were served with this prohibition, which they produced as their warrant to *make them cease by force and power*. As they abused the king in obtaining this order, by their mis-informations, so they abused him in the execution of it: for the order only, was to prevent the walling of the *city*; but, having force and power on their side, they construed it as relating to the *temple*, for that was it which they had an ill will to, and which they only wanted some colour to hinder the building of. There was indeed a general clause in the order, to *cause these men to cease*, which had reference to their complaint about building the walls; but they applied it to the building of the temple. See what need we have to pray, not only for kings, but for all in authority under them, and the *governors sent by them*, because the *quietness and peaceableness* of our lives, in *all godliness and honesty*, depend very much upon the integrity and wisdom of inferior magistrates, as well as the supreme.

The consequence was, that *the work of the house of God ceased*, for a time, through the power and insolence of its enemies; and so, through the coldness and indifference of its friends, it stood still till the 2d year of Darius Hystaspes, for to me it seems clear by the thread of this sacred history, that it was that Darius, v. 24. Though now a stop was put to it by the violence of the Samaritans, yet that, soon after, they might have gone on by connivance, if they had had a due affection to the work, appears by this, that before they had that express warrant from the king for doing it, (*ch. 6.*) they were reproved by the prophets for not doing it, *ch. 5. 1.* compared with Hag. 1. 2, &c. If they had taken due care to inform Cambyzes of the truth of this case, perhaps he had recalled his order; but, for aught I know, some of the builders were almost as willing it should cease, as the adversaries themselves were. At some periods, the church has suffered more by the coldness of its friends than by the heat of its enemies; but both together commonly make church-work slow work.

CHAP. V.

We left the temple-work at a full stop; but, being God's work, it shall be revived, and here we have an account of the reviving of it. It was hindered by might and power, but it was set a going again by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts*. Now here we are told how that blessed Spirit, I. Warmed its cool-hearted friends, and excited them to build, v. 1. 2. II. Cooled its hot-headed enemies, and brought them to better tempers, for though they secretly disliked the work, as much as those in the foregoing chapter, yet, 1. They were more mild toward the builders, v. 3. 5. 2. They were more fair in their representation of the matter to the king, which here we have an account of, v. 6. 17.

1. **T**HEN the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that *were in Judah and Jerusalem* in the name of the God of Israel, *even unto them*. 2. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which *is at Jerusalem*: and with them *were the prophets of God* helping them.

Some reckon that the building of the temple was suspended for only 9 years; I am willing to believe that 15 years were the utmost; during which time they had an altar, and a tabernacle, which, no doubt, they made use of. When we cannot do what we would, we must do what we can, in the service of God, and be sorry we can do no better. But the counselors that were hired to hinder the work, (*ch. 4. 5.*) told them, and perhaps, with a pretence to inspiration, that the time was not come for the building of the temple, Hag. 1. 2. They might urge that it was long ere the time came for the building of Solomon's temple; and thus the people were made easy in their own *ceiled houses*, while *God's house lay waste*. Now here we are told how life was put into that good cause which seemed to lie dead.

1. They had two good ministers, who, in God's name, earnestly persuaded them to put the wheel of business in motion again; these were Haggai and Zechariah, who both began to prophesy in the 2d year of Darius, as appears, Hag. 1. 1. Zech. 1. 1. Observe, (1.) The temple of God among men is not to be built by prophecy, not by secular force, (that often hinders it, but seldom furthers it,) but by the word of God; as the *weapons of our warfare*, so the instruments of our building, *are not carnal, but spiritual*, and they are ministers of the gospel, that are the master builders. (2.) It is the business of God's prophets to stir up God's people to that which is good, and to help them in it, to strengthen their hands, and by suitable considerations fetched from the word of God, to quicken them to their duty, and encourage them in it. (3.) It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people, when he raises up prophets among them to be their helpers in the way and work of God, their guides, overseers, and rulers.

Further observe, [1.] To whom these prophets were sent. They prophesied unto the *Jews*, (for, as to them pertained the giving of the law, so also the gift of prophecy, and therefore they are called the *children of the prophets*, (Acts 3. 25.) because they were educated under the tuition and instruction,) *even unto them, upon them, even upon them*, so it is in the original, as Ezekiel prophesied *upon the dry bones*, that they might live, Ezek. 37. 4. They prophesied *against* them, so Bishop Patrick, for they reproved them because they did not build the temple. The word of God, if it be not received now as a testimony to us, will be received another day as a testimony against us, and will judge us. [2.] Who sent them. They prophesied in the name, or, as some read it, *in the cause*, or, for the sake of the *God of Israel*; they spake by commission from him, and argued from his authority over them, his interest in them, and the concern of his glory among them.

2. They had two good magistrates, who were forward and active in this work; Zerubbabel their chief prince, and Jeshua their chief priest, v. 2. They that are in places of dignity and power, ought with their dignity to put honour upon, and with their power, to put life into, every good work; thus it becomes them that *precede*, and them that *preside*, with an exemplary care and zeal to *fulfil all righteousness*, and to *go before in a good work*. These great men thought it no disparagement to them, but a happiness, to be taught and prescribed to by the prophets of the Lord; and were glad of their help in reviving this good work. Read the first chapter of the prophecy of Haggai here, (for that is the best comment on these two verses,) and see what great things he does by his word, which he magnifies above all his name, and by his Spirit working with it.

3. At the same time came to them Tat-

nai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? 4. Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? 5. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter. 6. The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which *were* on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: 7. They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus: Unto Darius the king, all peace. 8. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. 9. Then asked we those elders, *and* said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? 20. We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that *were* the chief of them. 11. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. 12. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebucadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. 13. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon, *the same* king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. 14. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple, that *was* in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto *one* whose name *was* Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; 15. And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. 16. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem: and since that time, even until now, hath it been in building, and *yet* it is not finished. 17. Now therefore, if *it seem* good to the king,

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

We have here,

I. The cognizance which their neighbours soon took of the reviving of this good work; a jealous eye, it seems, they had upon them, and no sooner did the Spirit of God stir up the friends of the temple to appear for it, than the evil spirit stirred up its enemies to appear against it. While the people built and ceiled their own houses, their enemies gave them no molestation, (Hag. 1. 4.) though the king's order was to put a stop to the building of the city, *ch.* 4. 21. But when they fell to work again at the temple, then the alarm is taken, and all heads are at work to hinder it, *v.* 3, 4. The adversaries are here named, *Tatnai* and *Shethar-boznai*; the governors we read of, (*ch.* 4.) were, it is probable, displaced at the beginning of this reign, as is usual; it is the policy of princes often to change their deputies, proconsuls, and rulers of provinces. These, though real enemies to the building of the temple, were men of better temper than the other, and that made some conscience of telling truth; if *all men have not faith*, (2 Thess. 3. 2.) it is well some have, and a sense of honour. The church's enemies are not all alike wicked and unreasonable. The historian begins to relate what passed between the builders and those inquisitors, (*v.* 3, 4.) but breaks off his account, referring himself to the ensuing copy of the letter they sent to the king, where the same appears more fully and at large, which he began to abridge, (*v.* 4.) or to make an extract out of, though, upon second thoughts, he inserted the whole.

II. The care which the Divine Providence took of this good work, *v.* 5. *The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews*, who were active in the work, so that their enemies could not cause them to cease, as they would have done, till the matter came to Darius. They desired they would only cease, till they had instructions from the king about it. But they would not so much as yield them that, for *the eye of God was upon them*, even their God. And, 1. That baffled their enemies, infatuated and enfeebled them, and protected the builders from their malicious designs. While we are employed in God's work, we are taken under his special protection; his eye is upon us for good, seven eyes upon one stone in his temple; see *Zech.* 3. 9.—4. 10. 2. That quickened them; the elders of the Jews saw *the eye of God upon them*, to observe what they did, and own them in what they did well, and then they had courage enough to face their enemies, and to go on vigorously with their work, notwithstanding all the opposition they met with. Our eye upon God, observing his eye upon us, will keep us to our duty and encourage us in it, when the difficulties are ever so discouraging.

III. The account they sent to the king of this matter. In which we may observe,

1. How fully the elders of the Jews gave the Samaritans an account of their proceedings. They finding them both busy and prosperous, that all hands were at work to run up this building, and that it went fast on, put these questions to them. "By what authority do you these things, and who gave you that authority? Who set you to work? Have you that which will bear you out?" To this they answered, that they had sufficient warrant to do what they did; for, (1.) "*We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth*: the God we wor

ship, is not a local deity, and therefore we cannot be charged with making a faction or setting up a sect, in building this temple to his honour; but we pay our homage to a God on whom the whole creation depends, and therefore ought to be protected and assisted by all, and hindered by none." It is the wisdom, as well as duty, of kings, to countenance the servants of the *God of heaven*. (2.) "We have a prescription to this house; it was built for the honour of God by Solomon, many ages ago. It is no novel invention of our own; we are but *raising the foundations of many generations*," Isa. 58. 12. (3.) "It was to punish us for our sins, that we were, for a time, put out of the possession of this house; not because the gods of the nations had prevailed against our God, but because we had provoked him, (v. 12.) for which he delivered us and our temple into the hands of the king of Babylon, but never intended thereby to put a final period to our religion. We were only suspended for a time, not deprived for ever." (4.) "We have the royal decree of Cyrus, to justify us and bear us out in what we do. He not only permitted and allowed us, but charged and commanded us, to build this house, (v. 13.) and to build it in its place, (v. 15.) the same place where it had stood before." He ordered this, not only in compassion to the Jews, but in veneration of their God, saying, *He is the God*. He also delivered the vessels of the temple to one whom he instructed to see them restored to their ancient place and use, v. 14. And they had these to show in confirmation of what they alleged, (5.) "The building was begun according to this order, as soon as ever we were returned, so that we have not forfeited the benefit of the order, for want of pursuing it in time; still it has been in building, but, because we have met with opposition, it is not finished." But observe, they mention not the falsehood and malice of the former governors, nor make any complaint of that, though they had cause enough; to teach us not to render bitterness for bitterness, nor the most just reproach for that which is most unjust, but think it enough, if we can obtain fair treatment for the future, without an invidious repetition of former injuries, v. 16. This is the account they give of their proceedings; not asking what authority they had to examine them, or upbraiding them with their idolatry, and superstitions, and medley religion. Let us learn hence, with meekness and fear to *give a reason of the hope that is in us*, (1 Pet. 3. 15.) rightly to understand, and then readily to declare, what we do in God's service, and why we do it.

2. How fairly the Samaritans represented this to the king. (1.) They call the temple at Jerusalem, *the house of the great God*; (v. 8.) for though the Samaritans, as it should seem, had yet gods many and lords many, they owned the God of Israel to be the *great God*, that is, above all gods, "It is the house of the *great God*, and therefore we dare not oppose the building of it, without orders from thee." (2.) They tell him truly what was done, not as their predecessors did, that they were fortifying the city, as if they intended war, but only rearing the temple, as those that intended worship, v. 3. (3.) They fully represent their plea, tell him what they had to say for themselves, and are willing that the cause should be set in a true light. *Lastly*, They leave it to the king to consult the records, whether Cyrus had indeed made such a decree, and then to give directions as he should think fit, v. 17. We have reason to think that if Artaxerxes, in the foregoing chapter, had had the Jews' cause as fairly represented to him, as it was here to Darius, he would not have ordered the work to be hindered. God's people could not be persecuted, if they were not belied; could not be baited,

if they were not dressed up in bears' skins. Let but the cause of God and truth be fairly stated, and fairly heard, and it will keep its ground.

CHAP. VI.

How solemnly the foundation of the temple was laid, we read, ch. 3. How slowly the building went on, and with how much difficulty, we found ch. 4. and 5. but how gloriously the topstone was, at length, brought forth with shoutings, we find in this chapter: and even we, at this distance of time, when we read of it, may cry, *Grace, Grace, to it*. As for God, his work is perfect; it may be slow work, but it will be sure work. We have here, I. A recital of the decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple, v. 1..5. II. The enforcing of that decree by a new order from Darius for the perfecting of that work, v. 6..12. III. The finishing of it, thereupon, v. 13..15. IV. The solemn dedication of it when it was built, v. 16..18. And the handselling of it (as I may say) with the celebration of the passover, v. 19..22. And now we may say, that in Judah and Jerusalem things went well, very well.

1. **THEN** Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. 2. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: 3. In the first year of Cyrus the king, *the same* Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, *and* the breadth thereof threescore cubits; 4. *With* three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: 5. And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, *every one* to his place, and place *them* in the house of God. 6. Now *therefore*, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which *are* beyond the river, be ye far from thence; 7. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews, and the elders of the Jews, build this house of God in his place. 8. Moreover, I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: that, of the king's goods, *even* of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. 9. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which *are* at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail; 10.

That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. 11. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and, being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. 12. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there, destroy all kings and people that shall put their hand to alter *and* to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. 1 Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

We have here,

I. The decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple repeated. To this the Samaritans referred themselves, because the Jews pleaded it, and perhaps hoped it would not be found, and then their plea would be overruled, and a stop put to their work. Search was ordered to be made for it among the records, for, it seems, the tribes had not taken care to provide themselves with an authentic copy of it, which might have stood them in good stead, but they must appeal to the original. It was looked for in Babylon, (v. 1.) where Cyrus was when he signed it. But when it was not found there, Darius did not make that a pretence to conclude that therefore there was no such decree, and, thereupon, to give judgment against the Jews; but, it is probable, having himself heard that such a decree was certainly made, he ordered the rolls in other places to be searched, and, at length, it was found at Achmetha, in the province of the Medes, v. 2. Perhaps some that durst not destroy it, yet hid it there, out of ill-will to the Jews, that they might lose the benefit of it. But Providence so ordered, that it came to light; and it is here inserted, v. 3. 5. 1. Here is a warrant for the building of the temple, *Let the house of God at Jerusalem, yea, let that house be builded*; so it may be read, within such and such dimensions, and with such and such materials. 2. A warrant for the taking of the expenses of the building out of the king's revenue, v. 4. We do not find that they had received what was here ordered them, the face of things at court being soon changed. 3. A warrant for the restoring of the vessels and utensils of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away, (v. 5.) with an order that the priests, the Lord's ministers, should return them each to their place in the house of God.

II. The confirmation of it by a decree of Darius, grounded upon it, and in pursuance of it. By which,

1. He forbids his officers to do any thing in opposition to the building of the temple. The manner of expression intimates that he knew they had a mind to hinder it: *Be ye far from thence*; (v. 6.) *Let the work of this house of God alone*, v. 7. Thus was the wrath of the enemy made to praise God, and the remainder thereof did he restrain.

2. He orders them out of his own revenue to assist the builders with money. (1.) For carrying on the building, v. 8. Herein he pursues the example of Cyrus, v. 4. (2.) For maintaining the sacrifices there, when it was built, v. 9. He orders that they should be supplied with every thing they wanted, both for burnt-offerings and meat-offerings. He was content it should be a rent-charge upon his revenue, and orders it to be paid every day, and this, without fail, that they may offer sacrifices, and prayers with them, (for the patriarchs, when they offered sacri-

fice, called on the name of the Lord, so did Samuel, Elijah, and others,) for the life, that is, the happiness and prosperity, of the king and his sons, v. 10. See here how he gives honour, [1.] To Israel's God, whom he calls once and again the *God of Heaven*. [2.] To his ministers, in ordering his commissioners to give out supplies for the temple-service, at the appointment of the priests; they that thought to have controlled them, now must be, in this matter, at their command. It was a new thing for God's priests to have such an interest in the public money.

[3.] To prayer, *That they may pray for the life of the king*. He knew they were a praying people, and had heard that God was nigh to them in all that which they called upon him for. He was sensible he needed their prayers, and might receive benefit by them; and was therefore kind to them, that he might have an interest in their prayers. It is the duty of God's people to pray for those that are in authority over them, not only for the good and gentle, but also for the froward; but they are particularly bound, in gratitude, to pray for their protectors and benefactors; and it is the wisdom of princes to desire their prayers, and to engage them. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us.

3. He enforces his decree with a penalty, (v. 11.) "Let none either oppose the work and service of the temple, or withhold the supports granted to it by the crown, upon pain of death. If any alter this decree, let him be" (*hanged before his own door*, as we say) "hanged upon a beam of his own house, and, as an execrable man, let his house be made a dunghill."

4. He entails a divine curse upon all those kings and people that should ever have any hand in the destruction of this house, v. 12. What he could not do himself for the protection of the temple, he desires that God, to whom vengeance belongs, would do. This bespeaks him zealous in the cause; and though this temple was, at length, most justly destroyed by the righteous hand of God, yet perhaps the Romans, who were the instruments of that destruction, felt the effects of this curse, for that empire sensibly declined ever after.

Now from all this we learn, (1.) That the heart of kings is in the hand of God, and he turns it which way soever he pleases; what they are, he makes them to be, for he is *King of Kings*. (2.) That when God's time is come for the accomplishing of his gracious purposes concerning his church, he will raise up instruments to do it, from whom such good service was not expected. *The earth sometimes helpeth the women*, (Rev. 12. 16.) and those are made use of for the defence of religion, that have little religion themselves. (3.) That what is intended for the prejudice of the church, has often, by the overruling providence of God, been made serviceable to it, Phil. 1. 12. The enemies of the Jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to suppress them, but instead of that, they got an order to supply them. Thus *out of the eater cometh forth meat*. The apocryphal Esdras, (or Ezra,) Book I. ch. 3. and 4, gives another account of this decree in favour of the Jews, that Darius had vowed that if ever he came to the kingdom, he would build the temple at Jerusalem, and that Zerubbabel, who was one of his attendants, (whereas it is plain here, that he was now at Jerusalem,) for making an ingenious discourse before him on that subject, (*Great is the truth, and will prevail*,) was bid to ask what recompense he would, and asked only for this order, in pursuance of the king's vow.

13. Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their compa-

nions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily. 14. And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo: and they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. 16. And the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17. And offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and, for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. 19. And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. 20. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat. 22. And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Here we have,

I. The Jews' enemies made their friends. When they received this order from the king, they came with as much haste to encourage and assist the work, as their predecessors had to put a stop to it, *ch. 4. 23.* What the king ordered, they did, and, because they would not be thought to do it with reluctance, they did it *speedily, v. 13.* The king's moderation made them, contrary to their own inclination, moderate too.

II. The building of the temple carried on, and finished, in a little time, *v. 14, 15.* Now the *elders of the Jews builded* with cheerfulness. For aught I know, the elders themselves laboured at it *with their own hands*; and if they did, it was no disparagement to their eldership, but an encouragement to the other workmen. 1. They found themselves bound to it *by the commandment of the God of Israel*, who had given them power, that they might use it in his service. 2. They found themselves shamed into it by the commandment of the heathen

kings, Cyrus formerly, Darius now, and Artaxerxes some time after. Can the elders of the Jews be remiss in this good work, when these foreign princes appear so warm in it? Shall native Israelites grudge their pains, and care about this building, when strangers grudge not to be at the expense of it? 3. They found themselves encouraged in it by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, who it is likely, represented to them (as Bishop Patrick suggests) the wonderful goodness of God in inclining the heart of the king of Persia to favour them thus. And now the work went on so prosperously, that in four years' time, it was brought to perfection. *As for God, his work is perfect.* The gospel-church, that spiritual temple, is long in the building, but it will be finished at last, when the mystical body is completed. Every believer is a *living temple, building up himself in his most holy faith*; much opposition is given to this work by Satan and our own corruptions; we trifle, and proceed in it with many stops and pauses; but he that has *begun the good work*, will see it performed, and will bring forth judgment unto victory. *Spirits of just men will be made perfect.*

III. The dedication of the temple. When it was built, being designed only for sacred uses, now *they showed by an example how it should be used*, which (says Bishop Patrick) is the proper sense of the word *dedicate*. They entered upon it with solemnity, and, probably, with a public declaration of the separating of it from common uses, and the surrender of it to the honour of God, to be employed in his worship. 1. The persons employed in this service were not only the *priests and Levites* who officiated, but the *children of Israel*, some of each of the *twelve tribes*, though Judah and Benjamin were the chief, and the *rest of the children of the captivity or transportation*; which intimates that there were many beside the children of Israel, of other nations, who transported themselves with them, and became proselytes to their religion; unless we read it, *even the remnant of the children of the captivity*, and then, we may suppose, notice is hereby taken of their mean and afflicted condition, because the consideration of that helped to make them devout and serious in this and other religious exercises. A sad change! The *children of Israel* are become *children of the captivity*, and there appears but a remnant of them, according to that prediction, (*Isa. 7. 3.*) *Shear-jashub, The remnant shall return.* 2. The sacrifices that were offered upon this occasion, were, *bullocks, rams, and lambs, (v. 17.)* for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; not to be compared, in number, with what had been offered at the dedication of Solomon's temple, but, being according to their present ability, it was accepted, for, *after a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded to the riches of their liberality*, 2 Cor. 8. 2. These hundreds were more to them, than Solomon's thousands were to him. But, beside these, they offered twelve he-goats for sin-offerings, one for every tribe, to make atonement for their sins, which they looked upon as necessary, in order to the acceptance of their services. Thus, by getting iniquity taken away, they would free themselves from that which had been the sting of their late troubles, and which, if not removed, would be a worm at the root of their present comforts. 3. This service was performed with joy; they were all glad to see the temple built, and the concerns of it in so good a posture. Let us learn to welcome holy ordinances with joy, and attend on them with pleasure; let us serve the Lord with gladness. Whatever we dedicate to God, let it be done with joy, that he will please to accept of it. 4. When they dedicated the house, they settled the household; small comfort could they have in

the temple, without the temple-service, and therefore they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, v. 18. Having set up the worship of God in this dedication, they took care to keep it up, and made the book of Moses their rule, to which they had an eye in this establishment. Though the temple-service could not now be performed with so much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, yet, perhaps it was performed with as much purity, and close adherence to the divine institution as ever, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the beauty of holiness.

IV. The celebration of the passover in the newly-erected temple. Now that they were newly delivered out of their bondage in Babylon, it was seasonable to commemorate their deliverance out of their bondage in Egypt. Fresh mercies should put us in mind of former mercies. We may suppose that they had kept the passover, after a sort, every year since their return, for they had an altar and a tabernacle. But they were liable to frequent disturbances from their enemies, were straitened for room, and had not conveniences about them, so that they could not do it with due solemnity till the temple was built; and now they made a joyful festival of it, it falling out in the next month after the temple was finished and dedicated, v. 19.

Notice is here taken, 1. Of the purity of the priests and Levites that killed the passover, v. 20. In Hezekiah's time, they were many of them under blame for not purifying themselves. But now it is observed, to their praise, that they were purified together, as one man, so the word is; they were unanimous both in their resolutions, and in their endeavours, to make and keep themselves ceremonially clean for this solemnity; they joined together in their preparations, that they might help one another, so that all of them were pure, to a man. The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministration; so does their unity. 2. Of the proselytes that communicated with them in this ordinance. All such as had separated themselves unto them, had left their country and the superstitions of it, and cast in their lot with the Israel of God, and had turned from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, both their idolatries and their immoralities, to seek the Lord God of Israel as their God, did eat the passover. See how the proselytes, the converts, are described; they separate themselves from the filthiness of sin, and fellowship with sinners, join themselves to the Israel of God, in conformity and communion, and set themselves to seek the God of Israel; and those that do so in sincerity, though strangers and foreigners, are welcome to eat of the gospel-feast, as fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. 3. Of the great pleasure and satisfaction wherewith they kept the feast of unleavened bread, v. 22. The Lord had made them joyful, had given them both cause to rejoice, and hearts to rejoice. It was now about 20 years since the foundation of this temple was laid, and we may suppose the old men that then wept at the remembrance of the first temple, were most of them dead by this time, so that there were no tears mingled with their joys. Those that are, upon good grounds, joyful, have therefore reason to be thankful, because it is God that makes them rejoice. He is the Fountain whence all the streams of our joy flow. God has promised to all those who take hold of his covenant, that he will make them joyful in his house of prayer. The particular occasion they had for joy at this time, was, that God had turned the heart of the emperor to them, to strengthen their hands. If those that have been, or, we feared, would have been, against us, prove to be for us, we may rejoice in it as a token for good, that our ways

please the Lord, (Prov. 16. 7.) and he must have the glory of it.

CHAP. VII.

Ezra's precious name saluted us, at first, in the title of the book, but in the history we have not met with it, till this chapter introduces him into public action in another reign, that of Artaxerxes. Zerubbabel and Jeshua we will suppose, by this time, to be grown old, if not gone off; nor do we hear any more of Haggai and Zechariah; they have finished their testimony. What shall become of the cause of God and Israel, when these useful instruments are laid aside? Trust God, who has the residue of the spirit, to raise up others in their room. Ezra here, and Nehemiah in the next book, are as serviceable in their days, as those were in theirs. Here is, 1. An account, in general, of Ezra himself, and of his expedition to Jerusalem for the public good, v. 1. . . 10. II. A copy of the commission which Artaxerxes gave him, v. 11. . . 26. III. His thankfulness to God for it, v. 27, 28. The next chapter will give us a more particular narrative of his associates, his journey, and his arrival at Jerusalem.

1. **N**OW after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2. The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3. The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4. The son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5. The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest: 6. This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. 7. And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. 8. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Here is,

I. Ezra's pedigree. He was one of the sons of Aaron, a priest; him God chose to be an instrument of good to Israel, that he might put honour upon the priesthood, the glory of which had been much eclipsed by the captivity. He is said to be the son of Seraiah, that Seraiah, as is supposed, whom the king of Babylon put to death, when he sacked Jerusalem, 2 Kings 25. 18, 21. If we take the shortest computation, it was 75 years since Seraiah died; many reckon it much longer, and, because they suppose Ezra called out, in the prime of his time, to public service, do therefore think that Seraiah was not his immediate parent, but his grand-father, or great-grand-father; but that he was the first

eminent person that occurred in his genealogy upward, which is carried up here as high as Aaron, yet leaving out many, for brevity-sake, which may be supplied from 1 Chron. 6. 4, &c. He was a younger brother, or his father was Jozadak, the father of Jeshua, so that he was not High Priest, but nearly allied to the High Priest.

II. His character; though of the younger house, his personal qualifications made him very eminent.

1. He was a man of great learning. A scribe, a *ready scribe in the law of Moses*, v. 6. He was very much conversant with the scriptures, especially the writings of Moses, had the words ready, and was well acquainted with the sense and meaning of them. It is to be feared that learning ran low among the Jews in Babylon; but Ezra was instrumental to revive it. The Jews say that he collected and collated all the copies of the law he could find out, and published an accurate edition of it, with all the prophetic books, historical and poetical, that were given by divine inspiration, and so made up the canon of the Old Testament, with the addition of the prophecies and histories of his own time; if he was raised up of God, and qualified and inclined to do this, all generations have reason to call him *blessed*, and to bless God for him. God sent to the Jews *prophets and scribes*, Matth. 23. 34. Ezra went under the latter denomination; now that prophecy was about to cease, it was time to promote scripture knowledge, pursuant to the counsel of God by the last of the prophets, Mal. 4. 4, *Remember the law of Moses*. Gospel-ministers are called *scribes instructed to the kingdom of heaven*, (Matth. 13. 52.) New Testament scribes. It was a pity that such a worthy name as this, should be worn as it was, in the degenerate ages of the Jewish church, by men who were professed enemies to Christ and his gospel. (*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees,*) who were learned in the letter of the law, but strangers to the spirit of it.

2. He was a man of great piety and holy zeal, v. 10. *He had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, &c.* (1.) That which he chose for his study, was, *the law of the Lord*. The Chaldeans, among whom he was born and bred, were famed for literature, especially the study of the stars, to which, being a studious man, we may suppose that Ezra was tempted to apply himself; but he got over the temptation; the law of his God was more to him than all the writings of the magicians and astrologers, which he knew enough of with good reason to despise them. (2.) *He sought the law of the Lord*, that is, he made it his business to inquire into it; searched the scriptures, and sought the knowledge of God, and his mind and will, in the scriptures, which is to be found there, but not without seeking. (3.) He made conscience of doing according to it; he set it before him as his rule, formed his sentiments and temper by it, and managed himself in his whole conversation according to it. This use we must make of our knowledge of the scriptures; for happy are we, if we do what we know of the will of God. (4.) He set himself to teach Israel the statutes and judgments of that law. What he knew, he was willing to communicate for the good of others; for *the ministration of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal*. But observe the method; he first learned, and then taught; sought the law of the Lord, and so laid up a good treasure, and then instructed others, and laid out what he had laid up. He also first did, and then taught, practised the commandments himself, and then directed others in the practice of them; thus his example confirmed his doctrine. (5.) He prepared his heart to do all this; or, he fixed his heart. He took pains in his studies, and thoroughly furnished himself for what he designed, and then put on reso-

lution to proceed and persevere in them, and thus he became a ready scribe. Moses in Egypt, Ezra in Babylon, and both in captivity, were wonderfully fitted for eminent services to the church.

III. His expedition to Jerusalem, for the good of his country. He *went up from Babylon*, (v. 6.) and, in four months' time, came to Jerusalem, v. 8. It was strange that such a man as he, staid so long in Babylon, after his brethren were gone up; but God sent him not thither, till he had work for him to do there; and none went, but those *whose spirits God raised* to go up. Some think that this Artaxerxes was the same with that Darius whose decree we had, (ch. 6.) and that Ezra came the very year after the temple was finished, that was the 6th year, this the 7th, v. 8. So Dr. Lightfoot. My worthy and learned friend, lately deceased, Mr. Tallents, in his chronological tables, places it about 57 years after the finishing of the temple; others further on. I have only to observe, 1. How kind the king was to him; he *granted him all his request*, whatever he desired, to put him into a capacity to serve his country. 2. How kind his people were to him; when he went, many more went with him, because they desired not to stay in Babylon when he was gone thence, and because they would venture to dwell in Jerusalem when he was gone thither. 3. How kind his God was to him; he obtained this favour from his king and country, by *the good hand of the Lord that was upon him*, v. 6, 9. Note, Every creature is that to us, that God makes it to be, and from him our judgment proceeds. As we must see the events that *shall* occur in the hand of God, so we must see the hand of God in the events that *do* occur, and acknowledge him with thankfulness, when we have reason to call it *his good hand*.

11. Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, *even* a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. 12. Artaxerxes, king of kings, Unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect *peace*, and at such a time. 13. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. 14. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which *is* in thy hand; 15. And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation *is* in Jerusalem; 16. And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the free-will-offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which *is* in Jerusalem: 17. That thou mayest buy speedily with this money, bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat-offerings, and their drink-offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which *is* in Jerusalem. 18. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with

the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. 19. The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, *those* deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. 20. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow *it* out of the king's treasure-house. 21. And I, *even* I, Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which *are* beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, 22. Unto a hundred talents of silver, and to a hundred measures of wheat, and to a hundred baths of wine, and to a hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing *how much*. 23. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? 24. Also we certify you, that, touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God; it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. 25. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that *is* in thy hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that *are* beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know *them* not. 26. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether *it* be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

We have here the commission which the Persian emperor granted to Ezra, giving him authority to act for the good of the Jews; and it is very ample and full, and beyond what could have been expected. The commission runs, we suppose, in the usual form. Artaxerxes, *king of kings*, that is too high a title for any mortal man to assume; he was indeed king of some kings, but to speak as if he were King of all kings, is to usurp his prerogative, who hath *all power both in heaven and in earth*. He sends greeting to his trusty and well-beloved Ezra, whom he calls a *scribe of the law of the God of Heaven*, (v. 12.) a title which (it seems by this) Ezra valued himself by, and desired no other, not when he was advanced to the proconsular dignity. He reckoned it more his honour to be a *scribe of God's law*, than to be a peer or prince of the empire. Let us observe the articles of this commission:

I. He gives Ezra leave to go up to Jerusalem, and as many of his countrymen as pleased, to go up with him, v. 13. He and they were captives, and therefore they would not quit his dominions without his royal license.

II. He gives him authority to inquire into the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem, v. 14. The rule of the inquiry was to be *the law of his God, which was in his hand*; whether the Jews, in their religion,

had, and did, according to that law; whether the temple was built, the priesthood settled, and the sacrifices offered conformable to the divine appointment: if, upon inquiry, he found any thing amiss, he must see to get it amended, and, like Titus in Crete, must *set in order the things that were wanting*, Tit. 1. 5. Thus is God's law magnified and made honourable, and thus are the Jews restored to their ancient privilege of governing themselves by that law, and are no longer under *the statutes that were not good*, the statutes of their oppressors, Ezek. 20. 25.

III. He intrusts him with the money that was freely given by the king himself and his counsellors, and collected among his subjects, for the service of the house of God, v. 15, 16. Let this be taken notice of, 1. To the honour of God, as the one only living and true God; for even those that worshipped other gods, were so convinced of the sovereignty of the God of Israel, that they were willing to incur expenses, in order to recommend themselves to his favour. See Ps. 45. 12.—68. 29. 2. To the praise of this heathen king; that he honoured the God of Israel, though his worshippers were a despicable handful of poor men, that were not able to bear the charges of their own religion, and were now his vassals; and that though he was not wrought upon to quit his own superstitions, yet he protected and encouraged the Jews in their religion, and did not only say, *Be ye warmed, and be ye filled*, but gave them such things as they needed. 3. To the reproach of the memory of the wicked kings of Judah; they that had been trained up in the knowledge and worship of the *God of Israel*, and had his law and his prophets, often plundered and impoverished the temple; but here a heathen prince enriches it. Thus afterward the gospel was rejected by the Jews, but welcomed by the Gentiles. See Rom. 11. 11. *Through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles*, Acts 13. 46.

Ezra is intrusted, (1.) To receive this money; and to carry it to Jerusalem; for he was a man of known integrity, whom they could confide in, that he would not convert to his own use the least part of that which was given to the public. We find St. Paul going to Jerusalem upon such an errand, *to bring alms to his nation and offerings*, Acts 24. 17. (2.) To lay out this money in the best manner; in sacrifices to be offered upon the altar of God, (v. 17.) and in whatever else he or his brethren thought fit, (v. 18.) with this limitation only, that it be *after the will of your God*, which they were better acquainted with than he was. Let the *will of our God* be always our rule in our expenses, and particularly in what we lay out for his service. God's work must always be done according to his will. Beside money, he had vessels also given him *for the service of the temple*, v. 19. Cyrus restored what of right belonged to the temple; but these were given over and above: thus it *receiveth its own with usury*; these he must deliver before the God of Jerusalem, as intended for his honour, there where he had put his name.

IV. He draws him a bill, or warrant rather, upon the *treasurers on that side the river*, requiring them to furnish him with what he had occasion for out of the king's revenues, and place it to the king's account, v. 20.—22. This was considerably done; for Ezra, being yet to inquire into the state of things, knew not what he should have occasion for, and was modest in his demands; it was also kindly done, and evinced a very great affection to the temple, and a great confidence in Ezra. It is the interest of princes and great men to use their wealth and power for the support and encouragement of religion. What else are great revenues good for, but that they enable men to do much good of this kind, if they have but hearts to do it?

V. He charges him that nothing should be wanting, that was requisite to be done in or about the temple, for the honour of the God of Israel. Observe, in this charge, (v. 23.) 1. How honourably he speaks of God; he had called him before *the God of Jerusalem*, but here, lest it should be thought that he looked upon him as a local deity, he calls him twice, with great veneration, *the God of heaven*. 2. How strictly he eyes the word and law of God, which, it is likely, he had read and admired; "Whatsoever is *commanded by your God*," (whose institutions, though he wrote himself *King of kings*, he would not presume, in the least iota or tittle, to alter or add to,) "let it be done, let it be diligently done, with care and speed." And, 3. How solicitously he deprecates the wrath of God; *Why should there be wrath against the realm?* The neglect and contempt of religion bring the judgments of God upon kings and kingdoms; and the likeliest expedient to turn away his wrath, when it is ready to break out against a people, is, to support and encourage religion. Would we secure our peace and prosperity? Let us take care that the cause of God be not starved.

VI. He discharges all the ministers of the temple from paying taxes to the government; from the greatest of the priests to the least of the Nethinims, it shall not be lawful for the king's officers to impose that toll, tribute, or custom, upon them, which the rest of the king's subjects paid, v. 24. This put a great honour upon them, as free denizens of the empire, and would gain them respect as favorites of the crown; and it gave them liberty to attend their ministry with more cheerfulness and freedom. We suppose it was only what they needed for themselves, and their families, and the maintenance of their ministry, that was hereby allowed to come to them custom-free; if any of them should take occasion, from this privilege, to meddle in trade and merchandise, they justly lost the benefit of it.

VII. He impowers Ezra to nominate and appoint judges and magistrates for all the Jews on that side the river, v. 25, 26. It was a great favour to the Jews, to have such nobles of themselves, and especially to have them of Ezra's nomination. 1. All that *knew the laws of Ezra's God*, that is, all that professed the Jewish religion, were to be under the jurisdiction of these judges, which intimates that they were exempted from the jurisdiction of the heathen magistrates. 2. These judges were allowed, and encouraged, to make proselytes; Let them *teach the laws of God to those that do not know them*. Though he would not turn Jew himself, he cared not how many of his subjects did. 3. They are authorized to enforce the judgments they gave, and the orders they made, conformable to the *law of God*, (which was hereby made the *law of the king*;) with severe penalties—imprisonment, banishment, fine, or death, according as their law directed. They are not allowed to make new laws, but must see the laws of God duly executed; and *therefore* they are intrusted with the sword, that they may be *a terror to evil doers*. What could Jehoshaphat, or Hezekiah, or David himself, as king, have done more for the honour of God, and the furtherance of religion!

27. Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put *such a thing* as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem; 28. And hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strength-

ened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Ezra cannot proceed in his story, without inserting his thankful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him and his people, in this matter. As soon as he has concluded the king's commission, instead of subjoining, *God save the king*, (though that had been proper enough,) he adds, *Blessed be the Lord*; for we must, in every thing, give thanks, and, whatever occurrences please us, we must own God's hand in them, and praise his name. Two things Ezra blessed God for,

1. For his commission. We suppose he kissed the king's hand for it, but that was not all; *Blessed be God* (says he) *that put such a thing as this into the king's heart*. God can put things into men's hearts, which would not arise there of themselves, and into their heads too, both by his providence and by his grace, in things *pertaining both to life and godliness*. If any good appear to be in our own hearts, or in the hearts of others, we must own it was God that put it there, and bless him for it; for it is he that *worketh in us both to will and to do* that which is good. When princes and magistrates act for the suppression of vice, and the encouragement of religion, we must thank God that *put it into their hearts* to do so, as much as if they had granted us some particular favour. When God's house was built, Ezra rejoiced in what was done to beautify it. We read not of any orders given to paint or gild it, or garnish it with precious stones, but to be sure that the ordinances of God were administered there constantly, and carefully, and exactly according to the institution; and that was indeed the beautifying of the temple.

2. For the encouragement he had to act in pursuance of his commission, v. 28. He has *extended mercy to me*. The king, in the honour he did him, we may suppose, had an eye to his merits, and preferred him because he looked upon him to be a very sensible ingenious man; but he himself ascribes it purely to God's mercy, that was it, that recommended him to the favour of his prince. Ezra himself was a man of courage, yet he attributed his encouragement, not to his own heart, but to God's hand; "I was strengthened to undertake the services, *as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me*, to direct and support me." If God gives us his hand, we are bold and cheerful; if he withdraw it, we are weak as water. Whatever service we are enabled to do for God and our generation, God must have all the glory of it. Strength for it is derived from him, and therefore the praise of it must be given to him.

CHAP. VIII.

This chapter gives us a more particular narrative of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem, which we had a general account of in the foregoing chapter. 1. The company that went up with him, v. 1. 20. II. The solemn fast which he kept with his company, to implore God's presence with them in this journey, v. 21. 23. III. The care he took of the treasure he had with him, and the charge he gave the priests concerning it, to whose custody he committed it, v. 24. 30. IV. The care God took of him and his company in the way, v. 31. V. Their safe arrival at Jerusalem, where they delivered their treasure to the priests; (v. 33, 34.) their commissions to the king's lieutenants; (v. 36.) offered sacrifices to God, (v. 35.) and then applied themselves to their business.

1. **THESE** are now the chict of their fathers, and *this is* the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. 2. Of

the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush: 3. Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned, by genealogy, of the males a hundred and fifty. 4. Of the sons of Pahath-moab; Elihoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males. 5. Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahziel, and with him three hundred males. 6. Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. 7. And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. 8. And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males. 9. Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. 10. And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him a hundred and threescore males. 11. And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. 12. And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him a hundred and ten males. 13. And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Elphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males. 14. Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males. 15. And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. 16. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief, at the place Casiphia; and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. 18. And, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19. And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah, of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; 20. Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

Ezra, having received his commission from the

king, beats up for volunteers, as it were, sets up an ensign to assemble the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah, Isa. 11. 12. "Whoever of the sons of Sion, that *dwell with the daughters of Babylon*, is disposed to go to Jerusalem, now that the temple there is finished, and the temple-service set a-going, now is their time." Now, one would think that under such a leader, with such encouragements, all the Jews should, at length, have *shaken themselves from their dust, and loosed the bands of their neck*, according to that call, Isa. 52. 1, 2, &c. I wonder how any of them could read that chapter, and yet stay behind. But multitudes did, who loved their ease better than their religion, thought themselves well off where they were, and either believed not that Jerusalem would better their condition, or durst not go thither through any difficulties. But here we are told,

I. That some offered themselves willingly to go with Ezra. The heads of the several families are here named, for their honour, and the numbers of the males that each brought in, amounting in all to 1496. Two priests are here named, (v. 2.) and one of the sons of David, but, it should seem, they came without their families, probably, intending to see how they liked Jerusalem, and then either to send for their families, or to return to them, as they saw cause. Several of their families, or clans, here named, we had before, *ch. 2*. Some went up from them at that time, more went up now, as God inclined their hearts; some were called into the vineyard at the third hour, others not till the eleventh, yet even those were not rejected. But here we read of the *last sons of Adonikam*, (v. 13.) which some understand to their dispraise, that they were the last that enlisted themselves under Ezra; I rather understand it to their honour, that now all the sons of that family returned, and none staid behind.

II. That the Levites who went in this company, were, in a manner, pressed into the service. Ezra appointed a general rendezvous of all his company, at a certain place upon New-year's day, the first day of the first month; (*ch. 7. 9.*) then and there he took a view of them, and mustered them, and (which was strange) *found there none of the sons of Levi*, v. 15. Some priests there were, but none other that were Levites; where was the spirit of that sacred tribe? Ezra a priest, like Moses, proclaims, *Who is on the Lord's side?* They, unlike to Levi, shrink, and desire to abide among the *sheep-folds to hear the bleatings of the flock*; synagogues we suppose they had in Babylon, in which they prayed and preached, and kept sabbaths; (and when they could not have better, they had reason to be thankful for them;) but now that the temple at Jerusalem was opened, to the service of which they were ordained, they ought to have preferred the gates of Zion before all those synagogues; it is upon record here, to their reproach, but *tell it not in Gath*. Ezra, when he observed that he had no Levites in his retinue, was much at a loss; he had money enough for the service of the temple, but wanted men. The king and princes had more than done their part, but the sons of Levi had not half done theirs. Eleven men, chief men and men of understanding, he chooses out of his company, to be employed for the filling up of this lamentable vacancy. And here we are informed,

1. Of their being sent; Ezra sent them to a *proper place*, where there was a college of Levites, *the place Casiphia*, probably, a street, or square in Babylon allowed for that purpose; (*Silver-street*, one may call it, for *Ceseph* signifies *silver*;) he sent them to a *proper person*, to Iddo, the chief president of the college, not to urge him to come himself, (we will suppose him to be old, and unfit for such a remove,) but to send some of the juniors, *ministers for the house of our God*, v. 17. The furnishing

of God's house with good ministers, is a good work, which will redound to the comfort and credit of all that have a hand in it.

2. We are informed of their success; they did not return without their errand, but, though their warning was short, they brought about 40 Levites to attend Ezra; Sherebiah, noted as a very intelligent man, and 18 with him; (v. 18.) Hashabiah, and Jeshaiiah, and 20 with them, v. 19. By this it appears that they were not averse to go, but were slothful and inattentive, and only wanted to be called upon, and excited to go. What a pity is it that good men should omit a good work, merely for want of being spoken to! What a pity that they should need it, and if they do, what a pity that they should want it! Of the Nethinims, the servants of the sacred college, the *species infima*—the lowest order of the temple-ministers, more appeared forward to go than of the Levites themselves; of them 220, upon this hasty summons, enlisted themselves, and had the honour to be expressed by name in Ezra's muster-roll, v. 20. "Thus" (says Ezra) "were we furnished with Levites, by the good hand of our God upon us." If, where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well supplied, let God have the glory, and his good hand be acknowledged as qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them.

21. Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23. So we fasted, and besought our God for this; and he was entreated of us.

Ezra has procured Levites to go along with him; but what will that avail, unless he have God with him? That is therefore his chief care; in all our ways, we must acknowledge God, and in those particularly wherein we are endeavouring to serve the interest of his kingdom among men; Ezra does so here. Observe,

1. The steadfast confidence he had in God, and in his gracious protection; he told the king, (v. 22.) what principle he went upon, that those who seek God, are safe under the shadow of his wings, even in their greatest dangers; but that those who forsake him, are continually exposed, even when they are most secure. God's servants have his power engaged for them, his enemies have it engaged against them. This, Ezra believed with his heart, and with his mouth made confession of it before the king; and therefore he was ashamed to ask of the king a convoy, lest thereby he should give occasion to the king, and those about him, to suspect either God's power to help his people, or Ezra's confidence in that power. They that trust in God, and triumph in him, will be ashamed of seeking to the creature for protection, especially of using any sorry shifts for their own safety, because thereby they contradict themselves and their own confidence. Not but that those who depend upon God, must use proper means for their preservation, and they need not be ashamed to do it; but when the honour of God is concerned, one would rather ex-

pose one's-self than do any thing to the prejudice of that, which 'ought to be dearer to us than our lives.

2. The solemn application he made to God in that confidence; he proclaimed a fast, v. 21. No doubt, he had himself begged of God direction in this affair, from the first time he had it in his thoughts, but, for public mercies, public prayers must be made, that all who are to share in the comfort of it, may join in the request for it. Their fasting was, (1.) To express their humiliation; this he declares to be the intent and meaning of it, *that we might afflict ourselves before our God* for our sins, and so be qualified for the pardon of them. When we are entering upon any new condition of life, our care should be to bring none of the guilt of the sins of our former condition into it. When we are in any imminent peril, let us be sure to make our peace with God, and then we are safe, nothing can do us any real hurt. (2.) To excite their supplications; prayer was always joined with religious fasting; their errand to the throne of grace was, *to seek of God the right way*, that is, to commit themselves to the guidance of the Divine Providence, to put themselves under the divine protection, and to beg of God to guide and keep them in their journey, and bring them safely to their journey's end. They were strangers in the road, were to march through their enemies' countries, and had not a pillar of cloud and fire to lead them, as their fathers had; but they believed that the power and favour of God, and the ministration of his angels, would be to them instead of that, and hoped by prayer to engage this for them. Note, All our concerns about ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty by prayer to commit to God, and leave the care of with him, Phil. 4. 6.

3. The good success of their doing so, v. 23, *we besought our God by joint-prayer, and he was entreated of us*; they had some comfortable assurance in their own minds, that their prayers were answered, and the event declared it; for never any that sought God in earnest, sought him in vain.

24. Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 25. And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, *even* the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel *there* present, had offered; 26. I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels a hundred talents, *and* of gold a hundred talents; 27. Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. 28. And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a free-will-offering unto the Lord God of your fathers: 29. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord. 30. So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, unto the house of our God.

We have here an account of the particular care which Ezra took of the treasure he had with him, that belonged to God's sanctuary. Observe, 1. Having committed the keeping of it to God, he committed the keeping of it to proper men, whose business it was to watch it; though, without God, they would have watched in vain. Note, Our prayers must always be seconded with our endeavours; the care of Christ's gospel, his church, and ordinances, must not be so left with him, but that it must also be *committed to faithful men*, 2 Tim. 2. 2. 2. Having prayed to God to preserve all the substance they had with them, he shows himself especially solicitous for that part of it, which belonged to the house of God, and was an offering to him. Do we expect that God should, by his providence, keep that which belongs to us? Let us, by his grace, keep that which belongs to him: let God's honour and interest be our care; and then we may expect that our lives and comforts will be his.

Observe, (1.) The persons to whom he delivered the offerings of the house of God. Twelve chief priests, and as many Levites, he appointed to this trust, (v. 24, 30.) who were bound by their office to take care of the things of God, and were, in a particular manner, to have the benefit of these sacred treasures. Ezra tells them why he put those things into their hands; (v. 28.) *Ye are holy unto the Lord, the vessels are holy also; and who so fit to take care of holy things, as holy persons?* Those that have the dignity and honour of the priesthood, must take along with it the trust and duty of it. The prophet is foretelling the return of God's people and ministers out of Babylon, when he gives the solemn charge, (Isa. 52. 11.) *Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.*

(2.) The great exactness with which he lodged this trust in their hands; he *weighed to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels*, (v. 25.) because he expected to have it from them again by weight. In all trusts, but especially sacred ones, we ought to be punctual, and preserve a right understanding on both sides. In Zerubbabel's time, the vessels were delivered by number, here, by weight, that all might be forth-coming, and it might easily appear if any were missing; to intimate that such as are intrusted with holy things, (as all the stewards of the mysteries of God are,) are concerned to remember, both in receiving their trust, and in discharging it, that they must shortly give a very particular account of it, that they may be faithful to it, and so give up their account with joy.

(3.) The charge he gave them with these treasures; (v. 29.) *"Watch ye, and keep them, that they be not lost, or embezzled, or mingled with the other articles; keep them together, keep them by yourselves, keep them safe, till you weigh them in the temple, before the great men there;"* hereby intimating how much it was their concern to be careful and faithful, and how much it would be their honour to be found so. Thus when St. Paul charges Timothy with the gospel-treasure, he bids him keep it *until the appearing of Jesus Christ*, and his appearing before him to give an account of his trust, when his fidelity would be his crown.

31. Then we departed from the river of Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33. Now on the fourth day was the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, weigh-

ed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest: and with him *was* Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them *was* Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; 34. By number *and* by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. 35. *Also* the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt-offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he-goats *for* a sin-offering: *all this was* a burnt-offering unto the LORD. 36. And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river; and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

We are now to attend Ezra to Jerusalem, a journey of about four months in all; but his multitude made his marches slow, and his stages short: now here we are told,

1. That his God was good, and he owns it; *The hand of our God was upon us*, to animate us for our undertaking; to him they owed it, (1.) That they were preserved in their journey, and not all cut off; for there were enemies that *laid wait for them by the way* to do them a mischief, and, at least, like Amalek, to *smite the hindmost of them*, but God protected them, v. 31. Even the common perils of journeys are such as oblige us to sanctify our going out with prayer, and our returns in peace with praise and thanksgiving; much more ought God to be thus eyed in such a dangerous expedition as this was. (2.) That they were brought in safety to their journey's end, v. 32. Let them that have steadfastly set their faces toward the new Jerusalem, proceed and persevere to the end, *till they appear before God in Zion*, and they shall find that he *who has begun the good work, will perfect it*.

2. That his treasurers were faithful; when they were come to Jerusalem, they were impatient to be discharged of their trust, and therefore applied themselves to the great men of the temple, who received it from them, and gave them an acquittance in full, v. 33, 34. It is a great ease to one's mind, to be discharged from a trust; and a great honour to one's name, to be able to make it appear that it has been faithfully discharged.

3. That his companions were devout; as soon as they came to be near the altar, they thought themselves obliged to offer sacrifice, whatever they had done in Babylon, v. 35. That will be dispensed with, when we want opportunity, which, when the door is opened again, will be expected from us. It is observable, (1.) That among their sacrifices they had a sin-offering; for it is the atonement that sweetens and secures every mercy to us, which will not be truly comfortable, unless *iniquity be taken away*, and our peace made with God. (2.) That the number of their offerings related to the number of the tribes, 12 bullocks, 12 he-goats, and 96 rams, that is, 8 times 12. Thus the union of the two kingdoms was intimated, according to what was foretold, Ezek. 37. 22. They did not any longer go two tribes one way, and ten another, but all the twelve met by their representatives at the same altar.

4. That even the enemies of the Jews became their friends, veiled to Ezra's commission, and, in-

stead of hindering the people of God, furthered them, (v. 36.) purely in complaisance to the king; when he appeared moderate, they all coveted to appear so too. *Then had the churches rest.*

CHAP. IX.

The affairs of the church were in a very good posture, we may well suppose, now that Ezra presided in them. Look without; the government was kind to them, we hear no complaints of persecution and oppression, their enemies had either their hearts turned, or, at least, their hands tied; their neighbours were civil, and we hear of no wars, or rumours of wars; there were none to make them afraid; all was as well as could be, considering that they were few, and poor, and subjects to a foreign prince. Look at home; we hear nothing of Baal, or Ashtaroth, or Moloch, no images, or groves, or golden calves, no not so much as high places, (not only no idolatrous altars, but no separate ones,) but the temple was duly respected, and the temple-service carefully kept up: yet there was some mixture of evil; the purest ages of the church have had some corruptions, and it will never be presented *without spot or wrinkle*, till it is a glorious church, a church triumphant, *Eph. 5. 27*. We have here, I. A complaint brought to Ezra of the many marriages that had been made with strange wives, v. 1, 2. II. The great trouble which he, and others influenced by his example, were in, upon this information, v. 3, 4. III. The solemn confession which he made of this sin to God, with godly sorrow and shame, v. 5. 15.

1. **N**OW when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.* 2. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. 3. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. 4. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Ezra, like Barnabas, when he came to Jerusalem, and *saw the grace of God* to his brethren there, no doubt, was glad, and *exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord*, Acts 11. 23. He saw nothing amiss; many corruptions lurk out of the view of the most vigilant rulers: but here is a damp upon his joys, information is brought him, that many of the people, yea, and some of the rulers, had married wives out of heathen families, and joined themselves in affinity with strangers. Observe,

I. What the sin was, that they were guilty of; it was *mingling themselves with the people of those lands*, (v. 2.) associating with them both in trade and in conversation, making themselves familiar with them, and, to complete the affinity, taking *their daughters in marriage* to their sons. We are willing to hope that they did not worship their gods, but that their captivity had cured them of their idolatry: it is said indeed that they *did ac-*

cording to their abominations; but that (says Bishop Patrick) signifies here only the imitation of the heathen in promiscuous marriages with any nation whatsoever; which, by degrees, would lead them to idolatry again. Herein, 1. They disobeyed the express command of God, which forbade all intimacy with the heathen, and particularly in matrimonial contracts, Deut. 7. 3. 2. They profaned the crown of their peculiarity, and set themselves upon a level with those, above whom God had, by singular marks of his favour, of late, as well as formerly, dignified them. 3. They distrusted the power of God to protect and advance them, and were led by carnal policy, hoping to strengthen themselves, and make an interest among their neighbours, by these alliances. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all the sorry shifts we make to help ourselves. 4. They exposed themselves, and much more their children, to the peril of idolatry, the very sin, and introduced by this very way, that had once been the ruin of their church and nation.

II. Who were the persons that were guilty of this sin; not only some of the unthinking people of Israel, that knew no better, but *many of the priests and Levites*, whose office it was to teach the law, and this law among the rest, and whom, by reason of their elevation above common Israelites, it was a greater crime. It was a diminution to the sons of that tribe, to match into any other tribe, and they seldom did, except into the royal tribe; but for them to match with heathen, with Canaanites, and Hittites, and I know not whom, was such a disparagement, as, if they had had any sense, though not of duty, yet of honour, one would think, they would never have been guilty of: yet this was not the worst; *The hand of the princes and rulers*, who by their power should have prevented, or reformed, this high misdemeanor, *was chief in this trespass*. If princes be in a trespass, they will be charged as chief in it, because of the influence their example will have upon others; *many will follow their pernicious ways*. But miserable is the case of that people, whose leaders debauch them, and cause them to err.

III. The information that was given of this to Ezra; it was given *by* the persons that were most proper to complain, the princes, those of them that had kept their integrity, and with it their dignity; they could not have accused others, if they themselves had not been free from blame. It was given to the person who had power to mend the matter, who, as a *ready scribe in the law of God*, could argue with them, and, as king's commissioner, could awe them. It is probable that these princes had often endeavoured to redress this grievance, and could not; but now they apply themselves to Ezra, hoping that his wisdom, authority, and interest, would prevail to do it. Those that cannot of themselves reform public abuses, may yet do good service by giving information to those that can.

IV. The impression this made upon Ezra; (v. 3.) *he rent his clothes, plucked off his hair, and sat down astonished*. Thus he expressed the deep sense he had, 1. Of the dishonour hereby done to God. It grieved him to the heart, to think that a people called by his name, should so grossly violate his law, should be so little benefited by his correction, and make such bad returns for his favours. 2. Of the mischief the people had hereby done to themselves, and the danger they were in of the wrath of God breaking out against them. Note, (1.) The sins of others should be our sorrow, and the injury done by them to God's honour, and the souls of men, is what we should lay to heart. (2.) Sorrow for sin must be great sorrow, such Ezra's was, *as for an only son or a first-born*. (3.) The

scandalous sins of professors are what we have reason to be astonished at. We may stand amazed to see men contradict, disparage, prejudice, ruin, themselves. Strange that men should act so inconsistently, and so inconsistently with themselves! *Upright men are astonished at it.*

V. The influence which Ezra's grief for this, had upon others; we may suppose that he *went up to the house of the Lord*, there to humble himself, because he had an eye to God in his grief, and that was the proper place for deprecating his displeasure: public notice was soon taken of it, and all the devout serious people that were at hand, assembled themselves to him, it should seem of their own accord, for nothing is said of their being sent to, *v.* 4. Note, 1. It is the character of good people, that they *tremble at God's word*; they stand in awe of the authority of its precepts, and the severity and justice of its threatenings, and to them that do so *will God look*, Isa. 66. 2. 2. They that tremble *at the word of God*, cannot but tremble *at the sins of men*, by which the law of God is broken, and his wrath and curse incurred. 3. The pious zeal of one against sin, may perhaps provoke very many to the like, as the apostle speaks in another case, 2 Cor. 9. 2. Many will follow, who have not consideration, conduct, and courage, enough to lead in a good work. 4. All good people ought to own those that appear and act in the cause of God against vice and profaneness, to stand by them, and do what they can to strengthen their hands.

5. And at the evening-sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, 6. And said, O my God! I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over *our* head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. 7. Since the days of our fathers *have we been* in a great trespass unto this day: and for our iniquities have we, our kings, *and* our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as *it is* this day. 8. And now for a little space grace hath been *showed* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. 9. For we *were* bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. 10. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, 11. Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it

from one end to another with their uncleanness. 12. Now, therefore, give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever; that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* for an inheritance to your children for ever. 13. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this; 14. Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that *there should be* no remnant nor escaping? 15. O LORD God of Israel, thou *art* righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as *it is* this day; behold, we *are* before thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

What the meditations of Ezra's heart were, while, for some hours, he sat down astonished, we may guess by the words of his mouth, when, at length, he *shake with his tongue*; and a most pathetic address he here makes to Heaven, upon this occasion. Observe,

I. The time when he made this address; *at the evening-sacrifice, v.* 5. Then (it is likely) devout people used to come into the courts of the temple, to grace the solemnity of the sacrifice, and to offer up their own prayers to God in concurrence with it. In their hearing, Ezra chose to make this confession, that they might be made duly sensible of the sins of their people, which, hitherto, they had either not taken notice of, or had made light of. Prayer may preach. The sacrifice, and especially the evening-sacrifice, was a type of the great propitiation, that *blessed Lamb of God*, who, *in the evening* of the world, was to *take away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, to which we may suppose that Ezra had an eye of faith in this penitential address to God; he makes confession with his hand, as it were, upon the head of that great Sacrifice, through which *we receive the atonement*. Certainly Ezra was no stranger to the message which the angel Gabriel had, some years ago, delivered to Daniel, at the time of the evening-sacrifice, and, as it were, in explication of it, concerning Messiah the Prince; (Dan. 9. 24.) perhaps he had regard to that in choosing this time.

II. His preparation for this address. 1. He *rose up from his heaviness*, and so far shook off the burthen of his grief, as was necessary to the lifting up of his heart to God. He recovered himself from his astonishment, got the tumult of his troubled spirits somewhat stilled, and his spirit composed for communion with God. 2. He *fell upon his knees*, put himself into the posture of a penitent humbling himself, and a petitioner suing for mercy; in both, representing the people for whom he was now an intercessor. 3. He *spread out his hands*, as one affected with what he was going to say, offering it up unto God, waiting, and reaching out, as it were, with an earnest expectation, to receive a gracious answer: in this he had an eye to God, as the Lord, and his God, a God of power, but a God of grace.

III. The address itself. It is not properly to be

called a *prayer*, for there is not a word of petition in it; but if we give prayer its full latitude, it is the offering up of pious and devout affections to God, and very devout, very pious, are the affections which Ezra here expresses. His address is a penitent confession of sin, not his own, (from a conscience burthened with its own guilt, and apprehensive of his own danger,) but the sin of his people, from a gracious concern for the honour of God, and the welfare of Israel. Here is a lively picture of ingenuous repentance. Observe in this address,

I. The confession he makes of the sin, and the aggravations of it, which he insists upon, to affect his own heart, and their's that joined with him, with holy sorrow and shame and fear, in the consideration of it, that they might be deeply humbled for it. And it is observable that though he himself was wholly clear from this guilt, yet he puts himself into the number of the sinners, because he was a member of the same community, *our sins, and our trespass*. Perhaps he now remembered it against himself as his fault, that he had staid so long after his brethren in Babylon, and had not separated himself so soon as he might have done, from the people of those lands. When we are lamenting the wickedness of the wicked, it may be, if we duly reflect upon ourselves, and give our own hearts leave to deal faithfully with us, we may find something of the same nature, though in a lower degree, that we also have been guilty of. However, he speaks that which was, or should have been the general complaint.

(1.) He owns their sins to have been very great; "*Our iniquities are increased over our heads*, (v. 6.) we are ready to perish in them as in deep waters;" so general was the prevalency of them, so violent the power of them, and so threatening were they of the most pernicious consequences. "Iniquity is grown up to that height among us, that it reaches to the heavens, so very impudent that it dures heaven, so very provoking that, like the sin of Sodom, it cries to heaven for vengeance." But let this be the comfort of true penitents, that though their sins reach to the heavens, God's mercy is in the heavens, Ps. 36. 5. *Where sin abounds, grace will much more abound*.

(2.) Their sin had been long persisted in; (v. 7.) *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass*. The example of those that were gone before them, he thought so far from excusing their fault, that it aggravated it; we should take warning not to stumble at the same stone. The corruption is so much the worse, that it has taken deep root, and begins to plead prescription, but by this means we have reason to fear that the measure of the iniquity was nearly full.

(3.) The great and sore judgments which God had brought upon them for their sins, did very much aggravate them. *For our iniquities we have been delivered to the sword and to captivity*, (v. 7.) and yet not reformed, yet not reclaimed; brayed in the mortar, and yet the *folly not gone*; (Prov. 27. 22.) corrected, but not reclaimed.

(4.) The late mercies God had bestowed upon them, did likewise very much aggravate their sins. This he insists largely upon, v. 8, 9. Observe, [1.] *The time of mercy; Now for a little space*, that is, "It is but a little while since we had our liberty, and it is not likely to continue long." This greatly aggravated their sin, that they were so lately in the furnace, and that they knew not how soon they might return to it again; and could they yet be secure! [2.] *The fountain of mercy; Grace has been showed us from the Lord*. The kings of Persia were the instruments of their enlargement; but he ascribes it to God, and to his grace, his

free grace without any merit of their's. [3.] *The streams of mercy; they were not forsaken in their bondage*, but even in Babylon had the tokens of God's presence, inasmuch as they were a remnant of Israel tes left, a few out of many, and those narrowly escaped out of the hands of their enemies, by the favour of the kings of Persia. But Ezra was more especially struck with the consideration that they had a *nail in his holy place*, that is, (as it is explained, v. 9.) that they had set up the *house of God*. They had their religion settled, and the service of the temple in a constant method. We are to reckon it a great comfort and advantage, to have stated opportunities of worshipping Grd. *Blessed are they that dwell in God's house*, like Anna that departed not from the temple. *This is my rest forever*, says the gracious soul. [4.] *The effects* of all this; it enlightened their eyes, and it revived their hearts; that is, it was very comfortable to them, and the more sensibly so, because it was in their bondage, it was life from the dead to them: though but a little reviving, it was a great favour, considering that they deserved none, and the day of small things was an earnest of greater. "Now," (says Ezra) "how ungrateful are we to offend a God that has been so kind to us; how disingenuous to mingle ourselves in sin with these nations from whom we have been, in wonderful mercy, delivered; how unwise to expose ourselves to God's displeasure, when we are tried with the returns of his favour, and are upon our good behaviour for the continuance of it!"

(5.) It was a great aggravation of the sin, that it was against an express command. *We have forsaken thy commandments*, v. 10. It seems to have been an ancient law of the house of Jacob, not to match with the families of the uncircumcised, Gen. 34. 14. But beside that, God had strictly forbidden it. He recites the command, v. 11, 12. *For their sin appears sin, appears exceeding sinful, when we compare it with the law which is broken by it: nothing could be more express, Give not your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons*. The reason given, is, because if they mingled with those nations, they would pollute themselves; it was an unclean land, and they were a holy people; but if they kept themselves distinct from them, it would be their honour and safety, and the perpetuating of their prosperity. Now, to violate a command so express, backed with such reasons, and a fundamental law of their constitution, was very provoking to the God of heaven.

(6.) That in the judgments by which they had already smarted for their sin, God had *punished them less than their iniquities deserved*, so that he looked upon them to be still in debt upon the old account. "What! And yet shall we run up a new score? Has God dealt so gently with us in correcting us, and shall we thus abuse his favour, and turn his grace into wantonness?" God, in his grace and mercy, had said concerning Sion's captivity, *She hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins*, Isa. 40. 2. but Ezra, in a penitential sense of the great malignity that was in their sin, though the punishment was very great, owns it *less than they deserved*.

2. The devout affections that were working in him, in making this confession. Speaking of sin,

(1.) He speaks as one much ashamed. With this he begins, (v. 6.) *O my God, I am much ashamed and blush, O my God*, (so the words are placed,) *to lift up my face unto thee*. Note, [1.] Sin is a shameful thing; as soon as ever our first parents had eaten forbidden fruit, they were ashamed of themselves. [2.] Holy shame is as necessary an ingredient in true and ingenuous repentance as holy sorrow. [3.] The sins of others should be our

shame, and we should blush for those who do not blush for themselves. We may well be ashamed that we are any thing related to those who are so ungrateful to God, and unwise for themselves. This is *clearing ourselves*, 2 Cor. 7. 11. [4.] Penitent sinners never see so much reason to blush and be ashamed, as when they come to *lift up their faces before God*. A natural sense of our own honour which we have injured, will make us ashamed, when we have done a wrong thing, to look *men* in the face; but a gracious concern for God's honour will make us much more ashamed to look *him* in the face. The publican, when he went to the temple to pray, hung down his head more than ever, as one ashamed, Luke 18. 13. [5.] An eye to God as our God, will be of great use to us in the exercise of repentance. Ezra begins, *O my God*; and again, in the same breath, *My God*. The consideration of our covenant-relation to God as our's will help to humble us, and break our hearts for sin, that we should violate both his precepts to us, and our promises to him: it will also encourage us to hope for pardon, upon repentance. He is my God, notwithstanding this, and every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant.

(2.) He speaks as one much amazed, (v. 10.) "*What shall we say after this?* For my part, I know not what to say: if God do not help us, we are undone." The discoveries of guilt excite amazement, the more we think of sin, the worse it looks; the difficulty of the case excites amazement, How shall we recover ourselves? Which way shall we make our peace with God? [1.] True penitents are at a loss what to say: Shall we say, We have *not sinned*, or, *God will not require it*? If we do, *we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*. Shall we say, Have patience with us, and we will pay thee all, with *thousands of rams, or our first-born for our transgression*? God will not thus be mocked, he knows we are insolvent. Shall we say, *There is no hope, and let come on us what will?* That is but to make bad worse. [2.] True penitents will consider what to say, and should, as Ezra, beg of God to teach them; What shall we say? Say, "I have sinned; I have done foolishly; God be merciful to me a sinner;" and the like. See Hos. 14. 2.

(3.) He speaks as one much afraid, v. 13, 14. "After all the judgments that are come upon us, to reclaim us from sin, and all the deliverances that have been wrought for us, to engage us to God and duty, if we should again break God's commandments, by joining in affinity with the children of disobedience, and learning their ways, what else could we expect, but that God should be *angry with us till he had consumed us*, and there should not be so much as a remnant left, nor any to escape the destruction? There is not a surer or sadder presage of ruin to any people, than revolting to sin, to the same sins again, after great judgments, and great deliverances. They that will be wrought upon neither by the one nor by the other, are fit to be rejected, as reprobate silver, for the *founder melteth in vain*."

(4.) He speaks as one much assured of the righteousness of God, and resolved to acquiesce in that, and to leave the matter with him, whose judgment is *according to the truth*, (v. 15.) "*Thou art righteous, wise, just, and good*; thou wilt neither do us wrong, nor be hard upon us, and therefore, behold, *we are before thee*, we lie at thy feet, waiting our doom; *we cannot stand before thee*, insisting upon any righteousness of our own, having no plea to support us or bring us off, and therefore *we fall down before thee, in our trespass*, and cast ourselves on thy mercy, *do unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee*," Jude. 10. 15. We have nothing to say, nothing to do, but to make supplication to our Judge,"

Job. 9. 15. Thus does this good man lay his grief before God, and then leave it with him.

CHAP. X.

In this chapter, we have that grievance redressed, which was complained of, and lamented, in the foregoing chapter. Observe, I. How the people's hearts were prepared for the redress of it, by their deep humiliation for the sin, v. 1. II. How it was proposed to Ezra by Shechaniah, v. 2. . . 4. III. How the proposal was put in execution. 1. The great men were sworn to stand to it, v. 5. 2. Ezra appeared first in it, v. 6. 3. A general assembly was called, v. 7. . . 9. 4. They all, in compliance with Ezra's exhortation, agreed to the reformation, v. 10. . . 14. 5. Commissioners were appointed to sit, *de die in diem—day after day*, to inquire who had married strange wives, and to oblige them to put them away, which is done accordingly, (v. 14. . . 17.) and a list of the names of those that were found guilty, given in, v. 18. . . 44.

1. **N**OW when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men, and women, and children: for the people wept very sore. 2. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. 3. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4. Arise; for *this matter belongeth* unto thee: we also *will be* with thee; be of good courage, and do it. 5. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swear.

We are told,

I. What good impressions were made upon the people by Ezra's humiliation and confession of sin. No sooner was it noised in the city, that their new governor, whom they rejoiced in, was himself in grief, and to so great a degree, for them and their sin, than presently there *assembled to him a very great congregation*, to see what the matter was, and to mingle their tears with his, v. 1. Our weeping for other people's sins may perhaps set those a weeping for themselves, who otherwise would have continued senseless and remorseless. See what a happy influence the good examples of great ones may have upon their inferiors. When Ezra, a scribe, a scholar, a man in authority under the king, so deeply lamented the public corruptions, they concluded that they were indeed very grievous, else he would not have thus grieved for them; and this drew tears from every eye: *men, women, and children, wept very sore*, when he wept thus.

II. What a good motion Shechaniah made, upon this occasion. The place was *Bochim*, a place of weepers; but for aught that appears, there was a profound silence among them, as among Job's friends, who *spoke not a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great*, till Shechaniah

(one of Ezra's companions from Babylon, *ch.* 8. 3. 5.) stood up and made a speech, addressed to Ezra, in which,

1. He owns the national guilt, sums up all Ezra's confession in one word, and sets to his seal that it was true, "*We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives, (v. 2.)* the matter is too plain to be denied, and too bad to be excused." It does not appear that Shechaniah was himself culpable in this matter, (if he had had the beam in his own eye, he could not have seen so clearly to pluck it out of his brother's eye,) but his father was guilty, and divers of his father's house, as appears, *v.* 26. and therefore he reckons himself among the trespassers; nor does he seek to excuse or palliate the sin, though some of his own relations were guilty of it, but, in the cause of God, *says to his father, I have not known him*, as Levi, *Deut.* 33. 9. Perhaps the strange wife that his father had married, had been an unjust unkind step-mother to him, and had made mischief in the family, and he supposed that others had done the like, which made him the more forward to appear against this corruption; if so, it was not the only time that private resentments had been overruled by the providence of God to serve the public good.

2. He encourages himself, and others, to hope that though the matter was bad, it might be amended; "*Yet now there is hope in Israel*, (where else should there be hope, but in Israel!" They that are strangers to that commonwealth, are said to have *no hope*, *Eph.* 2. 12.) even *concerning this thing*. The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed, a stop put to the spreading of the contagion; and so the judgments which the sin deserves, may be prevented, and all will be well. *Now there is hope*; now that the disease is discovered, it is half cured. Now that the alarm is taken, the people begin to be sensible of the mischief, and to lament it, a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out upon them, and they all are thus humbling themselves before God for it, *now there is hope*, that God will forgive, and have mercy. *The valley of Achor*, that is, of trouble, is the *door of hope*; (*Hos.* 2. 15.) for the sin that truly troubles us, shall not ruin us. There is hope, now that Israel has such a prudent, pious, zealous, governor as Ezra, to manage this affair. Note, (1.) In melancholy times, we must see and observe what makes for us, as well as what makes against us. (2.) There may be good hopes through grace, even then when there is the sense of great guilt before God. (3.) Where sin is seen and lamented, and good steps taken towards a reformation, even sinners ought to be encouraged. (4.) Even great saints must thankfully receive seasonable counsel and comfort from those that are much their inferiors, as Ezra from Shechaniah.

3. He advises that a speedy and effectual course should be taken for the divorcing of the strange wives. The case is plain; what has been done amiss, must be undone again as far as possible; nothing less than that, is true repentance. Let us *put away all* *he wives, and such as are born of them, v. 3.* Ezra, though he knew this was the only way of redressing his grievance, yet perhaps did not think it feasible, and despaired of ever bringing the people to it, which put him into that confusion that we left him in, in the foregoing chapter, but Shechaniah, who conversed more with the people than he did, assured him the thing was practicable, if they went wisely to work. As to us now, it is certain that sin must be put away, a bill of divorce must be given it, with a resolution never to have any thing more to do with it, though it be dear as the wife of thy bosom, nay, as a right eye, or a right hand, otherwise there

is no pardon, no peace. What has been unjustly got, cannot be justly kept, but must be restored; but as to the case of being *unequally yoked with unbelievers*, Shechaniah's counsel, which he was then so clear in, will not hold now; such marriages, it is certain, are sinful, and ought not to be made, but they are not null. Our rule, under the gospel, is, *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet—That which ought not to have been done, must, when done, abide. If a brother has a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away,* *1 Cor.* 7. 12, 13.

4. He puts them into a good method for the effecting of this reformation, and shows them not only that it must be done, but how. (1.) "Let Ezra, and all those that were present in this assembly, agree in a resolution that this must be done; pass a vote immediately to this effect, it will now pass *ne mine contradicente—unanimously*, that it may be said to be done *according to the counsel of my lord*, the president of the assembly, with the unanimous concurrence of those that *tremble at the commandment of our God*, which is the description of those that were gathered to him, *ch.* 9. 4. Declare it to be the sense of all the sober serious people among us, which cannot but have a great sway among Israelites." "Let the command of God in this matter, which Ezra had recited in his prayer, be laid before the people, and let them see that it is *done according to the law*; we have that to warrant us, nay, that binds to what we do; it is not an addition of our own to the divine law, but the necessary execution of it." (3.) "While we are in a good mind, let us bind ourselves by a solemn vow and covenant, that we will do it, lest, when the present impressions are worn off, the thing be left undone. Let us covenant, not only that, if we have strange wives ourselves, we will put them away, but that, if we have not, we will do what we can in our places to oblige others to put away their's." (4.) "Let Ezra himself preside in this matter, who is authorized by the king's commission, to inquire whether the law of God was duly observed in Judah, and Jerusalem, (*ch.* 7. 14.) and let us all resolve to stand by him in it, (*v.* 4.) *Arise, be of good courage*. Weeping, in this case, is good, but reforming is better." See what God said to Joshua in a like case, *Josh.* 7. 10, 11.

III. What a good resolution they came to, upon this good motion, *v.* 5. They not only agreed that it should be done, but bound themselves with an oath that they would do according to this word. Fast bind, fast find.

6. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and *when* he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water; for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. 7. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; 8. And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away. 9. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three

days: it was the ninth month, and the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter, and for the great rain. 10. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives to increase the trespass of Israel. 11. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. 12. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do. 13. But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is *this* a work of one day or two; for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. 14. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

We have here an account of the proceedings upon the resolutions lately taken up concerning the strange wives; no time was lost; they struck when the iron was hot, and soon set the wheels of reformation a going.

I. Ezra went to the council-chamber, where, it is probable, the priests used to meet upon public business. And till he came thither, (so Bishop Patrick thinks it should be read,) till he saw something done, and more likely to be done, for the redress of this grievance, he did *neither eat nor drink*, but continued mourning. Sorrow for sin should be abiding sorrow; be sure to let it continue till the sin be put away.

II. He sent orders to all the children of the captivity to attend him at Jerusalem within *three days*; (v. 7, 8.) and, being authorized by the king to enforce his orders with penalties annexed, (ch. 7. 26.) he threatened, that whosoever refused to obey the summons, should forfeit his estate, and be outlawed. The doom of him that would not attend on this religious occasion, should be, that his substance should, in his stead, be, ever after, appropriated to the service of their religion, and he himself, for his contempt, should for ever after, be excluded from the honours and privileges of their religion; he should be excommunicated.

III. Within the time limited, the generality of the people met at Jerusalem, and made their appearance in the street of the house of God, v. 9. They that had no zeal for the work they were called to, nay, perhaps had a dislike to it, being themselves delinquents, yet paid such a deference to Ezra's authority, and were so awed by the penalty, that they durst not stay away.

IV. God gave them a token of his displeasure, in the great rain that happened at that time, (v. 9.) and again, (v. 13.) which perhaps kept some away; it was, however, grievous to them that met in the open street: yet the circumstance of the heavens weeping, when they wept, might signify that though God was angry with them for their sin, yet he was well pleased with their repentance, and (as it is said, Judg. 19. 16.) *his soul was grieved for the mi-*

sergy of Israel; it was also an indication of the good fruits of their repentance, for the rain makes the earth fruitful.

V. Ezra gave the charge at this great assize; he told them that he called them together now, because he found that since their return out of captivity, they had increased the trespass of Israel by marrying strange wives, that they had added to their former sins this new transgression, which would certainly be the means of introducing idolatry again, the very sin they had smothered for, and which he hoped, they had been cured of in their captivity. He informed them too that he called them together, that they might confess their sins to God, and, having done that, might declare themselves ready and willing to do his pleasure, as it should be made known to them, (which all those will do, that truly repent of what they have done to incur his displeasure,) and particularly, that they might separate themselves from all idolaters, especially idolatrous wives, v. 10, 11. On these heads, we may suppose, he enlarged, and, probably, made such another confession of the sin now, as he made, ch. 9. which he required them to say *Amen* to.

VI. The people submitted themselves, not only to Ezra's jurisdiction in general, but to his inquisition and determination in this matter; "*As thou hast said, so we must do*, v. 12. We have sinned in mingling ourselves with the heathen, and have thereby been in danger, not only of being corrupted by them, for we are frail, but, of being lost among them, for we are few; we are therefore convinced that there is an absolute necessity of our separating from them again." There is then hope concerning people, when they are convinced, not only that it is good to part with their sins, but that it is indispensably necessary; we must do it, or we are undone.

VII. It was agreed that this affair should be carried on, not in a popular assembly, nor that they should think to go through with it all on a sudden, but that a court of delegates should be appointed to receive complaints, and to hear and determine upon them. It could not be done at this time, for it was not put into a method, nor could the people stand out because of the rain; the delinquents were many, and it would require time to discover and examine them. Nice cases would arise, which could not be adjudged without debate and deliberation, v. 13. "And therefore let the crowd be dismissed, and the rulers stand to receive informations; let them proceed city by city, and let the offenders be convicted before them in the presence of the judges and elders of their own city; and let them be instructed to see the orders executed; thus *take time*, and *we shall have done the sooner*; whereas, if we do it in a hurry, we shall do it by halves, v. 14. If, in this method, a thorough reformation be made, the fierce wrath of God will be turned from us, which, we are sensible, is ready to break forth against us for this transgression."

Ezra was willing that his zeal should be guided by the people's prudence, and put the matter into this method; he is not ashamed to own that the advice came from them, any more than he was to comply with it.

15. Only Jonathan the son of Asabel, and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah, were employed about this matter; and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. 16. And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their

fathers, and all of them by *their* names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the month. 18. And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives; *namely*, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19. And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and *being* guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass. 20. And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. 21. And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah. 22. And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasa. 23. Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24. Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. 25. Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. 26. And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. 27. And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jerimoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. 28. Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. 29. And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth. 30. And of the sons of Pahath-moab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. 31. And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon. 32. Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. 33. Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. 34. Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel. 35. Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh. 36. Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashub. 37. Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau. 38. And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei. 39. And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah. 40. Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai. 41. Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah. 42. Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. 43. Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah. 44. All these had taken strange wives: and *some* of them had wives by whom they had children.

The method of proceeding in this matter being

concluded on, and the congregation dismissed, that each in his respective place might gain and give intelligence, to facilitate the matter; we are here told,

I. Who were the persons that undertook to manage the matter, and bring the cause regularly before the commissioners; *Jonathan and Jehaziah*, two active men, whether of the priests or of the people, does not appear; probably, they were the men that made that proposal, (v. 13, 14.) and were, therefore the fittest to see it pursued; two honest Levites were joined with them, and *helped them*, v. 15. Dr. Lightfoot gives a contrary sense of this; *Only* (or *nevertheless*) *Jonathan and Jehaziah stood against this matter*, (which reading the original will very well bear,) and these two *Levites helped them*, in opposing it, either the thing itself, or this method of proceeding. It was strange, if a work of this kind was carried on, and met with no opposition.

II. Who were the commissioners that sat upon this matter; Ezra was president, and with him *certain chiefs of the fathers* who were qualified with wisdom and zeal, above others, for his service, v. 16. It was happy for them that they had such a man as Ezra to head them; they could not have done it well without his direction, yet he would not do it without their concurrence.

III. How long they were about it; they began, *the first day of the tenth month, to examine the matter*, (v. 16.) which was but ten days after this method was proposed, (v. 9.) and they finished in three months, v. 17. They sat close, and minded their business, otherwise they could not have despatched so many causes as they had before them, in so little time; for we may suppose that all who were impeached, were fairly asked what cause they could show why they should not be parted. If we may judge by other cases, provided the wife were proselyted to the Jewish religion, she was not to be put away; the trial of which would require great care.

IV. Who the persons were, that were found guilty of this crime; their names are here recorded to their perpetual reproach: many of the priests, nay, of the family of Jeshua, the High Priest, were found guilty, (v. 18.) though the law had particularly provided for the preserving of their honour in their marriages, that, being holy themselves, they should not marry such as were profane. Lev. 21. 7. They that should have taught others the law, brake it themselves, and by their example emboldened others to do likewise. But, having lost their innocency in this matter, they did well to recant, and give an example of repentance; for, 1. They promised *under their hand* to put away their strange wives; some think that they swore it with their *hands lifted up*. 2. They took the appointed way of obtaining pardon, bringing the ram which was appointed by the law *for a trespass-offering*, (Lev. 6. 6.) so owning their guilt, and the desert of it, and humbly suing for forgiveness.

About 113 in all are here named, who had married strange wives, and some of them, it is said, (v. 44.) had children by them, which implies that not many of them had, God not crowning those marriages with the blessing of increase. Whether the children were turned off with the mothers, as Shephaniah proposed, does not appear: it should seem not: it is, however, probable that the wives which were put away, were well provided for, according to their rank. One would think this grievance was now thoroughly redressed, yet we meet with it again, Neh. 13. 22. and Mal. 2. 11. for such corruptions are easily and insensibly brought in, but not without great difficulty purged out again. The best reformers can but do their endeavour, but when the Redeemer himself shall *come to Sion*, he shall effectually *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*.