

CRITICAL NOTES.

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Verse 14. The elders builded. Observe the leadership of the chief men; men who, because of their years and experience and representative character, held the responsibility of carrying forward the public work. **Prospered through Haggai and Zechariah.** The extant prophecies of the men here named are invaluable commentaries on this period of Jewish history. This Book of Ezra helps to explain the prophecies of the post-exile prophets, and the books of those prophets serve a like purpose in understanding the contents of the Books both of Ezra and Nehemiah. In like manner, the other prophets of the Old Testament supply information of the first importance for understanding the history of their times, and, on the other hand, without a knowledge of the facts recorded in the historical Books of Kings and Chronicles, the prophetic books of the Old Testament cannot be understood and appreciated. **According to the commandment of God.** The reference here is to the word of Jehovah as communicated through the prophets. The oracles of Haggai and Zechariah begin with the announcement that they are "the word of the Lord." See Hag. 1. 1, 12; 2. 1, 10, 20. Zech. 1. 1, 7. **Cyrus . . . Darius . . . Artaxerxes.** The temple was completed in the reign of **Darius** (verse 15), but the writer, who lived after **Artaxerxes** had come to power (see chap. 7. 1), quite naturally mentions him also as one from whom the Jews obtained great favor. For like reason he also goes back to **Cyrus**, who had died some fifteen years before the completion of the temple. Such inaccuracy of statement, therefore, as building and finishing the house according to a decree of **Artaxerxes** is to be explained as a prolepsis, not unnatural to a writer in the time of Ezra, and the more natural if Ezra himself were the compiler of this book which bears his name. The latter chapters of the book seem to be an autobiography of Ezra, and it is commonly believed that he also compiled the preceding chapters.

15. Adar. The end of the Jewish year, and falling about the time of our March. The word appears to be of Babylonian origin, and besides this passage occurs only in the Book of Esther. The foundation of the temple was laid in the second year of Cyrus (Ezra 3. 8), and continued with various oppositions of surrounding peoples through the four remaining years of Cyrus and the eight of Cambyses. It was interrupted during the short rule of the usurper called Artaxerxes in chap. 4. 7, resumed in the second year of Darius, and completed in his sixth year. From the second year of Cyrus unto the sixth year of Darius was a period of about nineteen years. The temple of Solomon was seven years in building

(1 Kings 6. 38). The enlargement and renewal of the second temple, begun by Herod the Great, occupied forty-six years (John 2. 20).

16. Kept the dedication . . . with joy. As well they might, for it was a turning point in Israelitish history, and marked the close of a long period of calamity and exile.

17. They offered. The number of sacrificial victims here mentioned seems large and liberal when we consider the circumstances of the people. The one hundred, two hundred, and four hundred are graded according to the relative value of **bullocks, rams, and lambs**. The notably greater number and different value of Solomon's dedication, as stated in 1 Kings 8. 63, were in proportion to his immense wealth and the peaceful and prosperous condition of the kingdom of Israel in his day. **Twelve he-goats, according to the . . . tribes of Israel.** The old envy and bitterness between Judah and Israel had now perished, and Israel's memorable prophecy was so far fulfilled (Isa. 11. 13). The chastisements of the exile had thoroughly broken up the old national factions, and at the feast of dedication they seek to make atonement for all Israel by means of a sin offering, which in the number of the offerings made would present them as one people and one nation. So, too, was fulfilled a prophecy of Jeremiah, according to which Judah and Israel should return to Zion and be joined to Jehovah in an everlasting covenant (see Jer. 50. 4-7). There was no longer any motive or disposition to perpetuate the ancient schism.

18. Priests . . . Levites . . . courses . . . service . . . book of Moses. The connection of these words in this one verse has a noticeable bearing on current critical discussions of the history and religion of Israel. The obvious import is that the distinction of **priests and Levites** was no novelty at that time, and their distribution into **courses for the service of God** is not mentioned as an arrangement now for the first time instituted. Moreover, the whole thing is spoken of as something prescribed by law and written in the **book of Moses**. What form that book may then have had, and how far identical with our present well-known books of Moses, may be an open question; but that Mosaic legislation touching the services of priests and Levites was no recent thing is manifest upon the face of this narrative.

19. Kept the passover . . . first month. This first month was doubtless the Nisan, following immediately after the Adar mentioned in verse 15. The passover, no less than the service of priests and Levites, was an institution as old as the times of Moses, and we find the record of its