

Cyrus was the hammer of God, breaking the chains of his people and the idols of the Gentile world. **By the mouth of Jeremiah.** The prophecy of the "seventy years of captivity" was given in a letter (Jer. 29) to the captives in Babylon, before the final destruction of the city of Jerusalem. **The Lord stirred up.** Probably the agent of God in this matter was the aged Daniel, who had perhaps aided Cyrus in his conquest, and was treated by the conqueror with great respect. It is said by Josephus that Daniel urged this act of mercy and justice, and pointed out to Cyrus the prophecies concerning himself. (1) *How noble is the work of leading the thoughts of men to God's word! Made a proclamation.* This proclamation of Cyrus has left results in history larger than all his conquests. (2) *Deeds for self die, but those for God abide forever.*

2. The Lord God of heaven. This is the Jewish translation of the proclamation, which in the Persian original may have been, "Ormazd the God of heaven." **Given me all the kingdoms of the earth.** This was scarcely an exaggeration, for nearly all the civilized world of that era was comprised in the Persian Empire. Rome was an inconsiderable city, Athens was just beginning its history, and England was an unknown wilderness; while the empire of Persia embraced all the territory from the Indus to the Nile and the ~~Aegean~~, and from the Black Sea to the Great Desert. **He hath charged me.** The reverential tone of this proclamation is in full accord with all the ancient inscriptions of Cyrus. (3) *Let us not sink below the intelligence of this heathen by forgetting him who gives us all things. To build him a house.* That is, to rebuild the temple which had been destroyed fifty years before. (4) *What dwelling-place for God can we build to-day?*

3. Who is there among you. The proclamation was addressed to the Jews and Israelites, who were dispersed in little communities all through the Persian Empire. **His God be with him.** God's blessing is invoked upon all who enter upon the work. **Let him go up to Jerusalem.** As the carrying away of the captives had taken place at intervals of from seventy to fifty years before, there were but few of the original exiles remaining, and it is somewhat remarkable that so many of their descendants, fifty thousand in all, should be willing to go to a country which they had never seen. **Build the house.** This was their great errand, not to build their own houses, but the house of God. (5) *Let us have the noble purpose to share in some work for God which shall endure when we have passed away. He is the God.* We can understand this great truth far more clearly than could Cyrus. (6) *Let us see that we live out the knowledge which we possess.*

4. Whosoever remaineth. That is, all the exiles who were still living, not those who chose to remain in their houses. **Let the men of his place.** This refers especially to the Jews who did not return to Palestine, who were ten times the number of those who returned. **Help him.** Those who cannot work for God's house should give all the more toward it, but the working is better than the giving. **Besides the free-will offering.** This was probably the gift of Cyrus himself from the royal treasury.

5. The lesson omits the account of the journey and the list of the families. On their arrival at Jerusalem their first act was to rebuild the altar on the old site, and begin the daily sacrifice. **In the second year.** They delayed for a year to begin the building of the temple, perhaps because houses for themselves were needed, and some defer-~~ed~~ against enemies. It may be that it was requisite also to wait for building materials from Lebanon. Still a comparison of this record with the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah shows that there

was some dereliction of duty on the part of the people and their rulers. **Zerubbabel.** His name means "born in Babylon." He was the descendant of David through the double line of Solomon and of Nathan, and hence was the lineal head of the nation, as well as their governor appointed by the Persian king. **Jeshua the son of Jozadak.** Called also "Joshua the son of Josedech." He was the high-priest, and representative of the line of Aaron. **The remnant of their brethren.** Rev. Ver., "the rest of their brethren;" referring to the priests and the Levites, or descendants of Levi. **Appointed the Levites.** Those of the Levites who had returned from captivity were placed in charge of the building of the temple, as they were the priestly tribe. **From twenty years old.** This was in accordance with the rule established by David. I Chron. 23. **To set forward the work.** By taking charge of the contributions and directing the builders.

9. Then stood Jeshua with his sons. From Chap. 2. 40, we see that this was not the high-priest, but a Levite of the same name. **Kadmiel and his sons.** We know only the names of these men, but it is to be noticed that we should not even know their names if they had not given their hearts to God's work. **The sons of Judah.** Elsewhere called Hodaviah. Chap. 2. 40. **To set forward the workmen.** Rev. Ver., "to have the oversight of the workmen."

10. When the builders laid the foundation. This was the official service at beginning the work, like our corner-stone laying. **The temple of the Lord.** We know very little of this second temple, but it probably resembled the first: with a large open court in which rose the house, which had a lofty tower on the front, two principal rooms, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies; and apartments for the priests around the building. **The priests in their apparel.** The priests wore a linen tunic, fastened around the waist with a girdle. **The sons of Asaph.** Asaph was a leader of music and writer of psalms in David's time, and his descendants formed the choral bands of the temple. **After the ordinance of David.** One characteristic of this new period upon which the Jews entered with the restoration was the desire to fashion all their religious customs after ancient precedents and patterns.

11. They sang together by course. That is, in antiphonal choruses, one section singing the first part and the other the second of a stanza. Thus one would sing, "Give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good," and the other would respond "For his mercy endureth forever." (7) *We can always see God's goodness if we will look for it. Because the foundation.* For in the foundation they recognized God's past mercies in bringing them back to their own land, and the promise of his continued grace.

12. Ancient men, that had seen the first house. The first temple was destroyed about fifty-one years before the date of these events, so that some who had witnessed it might be present. **Wept with a loud voice.** Their weeping was in mingled sorrow and joy; sorrow over the memories of the past, and joy with hopes for the future. Probably, too, they contrasted the former temple in its splendor with the lack of adornment in the plans of the new one. (8) *We live in a world where joy and sorrow are ever mingled.*

13. The people could not discern. The pra~~is~~ers and the weepers were both loud in their manifestations, and their sounds were blended. Even while we rejoice over the divine renewal of the fleshly temple, we may not forget the ruin into which it had fallen.

HOME READINGS.

M. The second temple. Ezra 1. 1-4; 3. 8-11.

Tu. The preparations made. Ezra 1. 5-11; 3. 1-7.

W. The first temple. 1 Kings 6. 1-30.

Th. The building suspended. Ezra 4. 11-24.

F. The work resumed. Ezra 6. 1-12.

S. The temple dedicated. Ezra 6. 13-22.

S. The goodness of God. Psa. 136. 1-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.

They praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. Ezra 3. 11.

LESSON HYMNS.

No. 288, Dominion Hymnal.

Wake the song of joy and gladness.

No. 224, Dominion Hymnal.

Jerusalem the golden.

No. 2.2, Dominion Hymnal.

When he cometh, when he cometh.

TIME.—536 B. C. The first year of Cyrus alone. 70 years since 606. Captivity ended. 61st Olympiad. Year of Rome, 217.

PLACES.—Jerusalem, Babylon, possibly Susa.