

Ezra 1:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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.

This verse provides administrative details showing the official, orderly nature of the restoration. Mithredath, whose name means 'gift of Mithra' (Persian deity), served as royal treasurer, indicating high governmental involvement. His participation demonstrates that this wasn't informal permission but formal state action with full bureaucratic support.

The verb 'numbered' (sapar) indicates careful inventory, suggesting accountability and precision. The sacred vessels weren't casually handed over but formally counted and documented, protecting both parties from later dispute. This attention to detail reflects both Persian administrative efficiency and the vessels' importance to Jewish worship.

Sheshbazzar appears here as 'prince of Judah' (nasi liYhudah), a title indicating royal lineage. Most scholars identify him with Shenazzar, son of King Jehoiachin (1 Chronicles 3:18), making him of Davidic descent. His appointment as leader suggests Persian recognition of Davidic legitimacy even while maintaining imperial control. This preserved messianic hope while working within Persian political structures.

Historical Context

Persian administrative practice valued detailed record-keeping, as evidenced by numerous clay tablets documenting official transactions. The involvement of the royal treasurer elevated this transaction to state-level importance, preventing local officials from hindering the return or confiscating the valuable vessels.

Sheshbazzar's identity and relationship to Zerubbabel (who later leads the community) remains debated. Some suggest they were the same person with different names (Sheshbazzar being his Babylonian name), while others see them as successive leaders. The mention of him as 'prince' would have resonated deeply with returned exiles, providing connection to pre-exilic monarchy and messianic expectations.

The title 'prince of Judah' carefully avoids claiming kingship (which would threaten Persia) while maintaining Davidic legitimacy. This political wisdom allowed preservation of messianic hope within imperial reality. Such navigation of competing loyalties characterized post-exilic Judaism.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the involvement of Persian officials in returning sacred vessels demonstrate God's sovereignty over secular authorities?
2. What does the careful inventory of vessels teach about the relationship between spiritual devotion and practical accountability?
3. How can modern believers maintain ultimate allegiance to God's kingdom while engaging responsibly with earthly political structures?

Interlinear Text

וְצִיֵּא ׀	כּ וְכָשׁ	מֶלֶךְ	פֶּרַס	עַל	יָד
bring forth	Even those did Cyrus	king	of Persia	H5921	by the hand
H3318	H3566	H4428	H6539		H3027
מִתְרַדָּת	הַגִּזְבָּר	וּסְפָרִים	לְשֶׁשְׁבַּזָּר	הַנָּשׁ יָא	
of Mithredath	the treasurer	and numbered	them unto Sheshbazzar	the prince	
H4990	H1489	H5608	H8339	H5387	
לִיהוּדָה:					
of Judah					
H3063					

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 5:14 (Kingdom): 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;