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**THE WORD OF THE LORD SPOKEN BY JEREMIAH FULFILLED:  
A Collaboration between the Priestly Writer (P) and the Prophetic  
Tradition in the Narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 on the Rebuilding of the  
Temple in Jerusalem**

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**Abstract:**

The presence of the narrative in Ezra 1:1-11 by the Priestly writer (P) concerning the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem does not rely solely on his own sources. The author of the Chronicler's History, identified as P, draws upon other sources beyond his personal records, ranging from the Abrahamic tradition to the era of Solomon. This includes the traditions of prophets both before and after the exile, such as Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah. P elaborates on these various sources in detail, rendering the narrative engaging and rich in content. As a result, the narrative offers a new theology for both the post-exilic community and contemporary readers. It seems that the rebuilding did not occur solely due to Cyrus's decree. In fact, the decree was not realized during Cyrus's reign; rather, it took nearly eighteen years before the reconstruction of the Second Temple actually began. This paper offers an examination of the Priestly writer (P) and the traditions within the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 concerning the history of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. The approach taken in this study employs relevant literature to substantiate the sources used by P and other materials incorporated into Ezra 1:1-11.

**Keywords:**

Collaboration; Ezra 1:1-11; Priestly Code (P); Prophetic Tradition.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mario Liverani<sup>1</sup> and other historians describe the long and difficult historical journey experienced by the people of God. These historical events are narrated in the Bible by biblical writers who utilized various sources and traditions. For example, in 587/6 BCE, the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. This history can be found in both historical and prophetic books (Ezra 1:1-11; Neh. 7:6-73; Isa. 48:28; 45:1-4). The Temple built by King Solomon was destroyed, and all its furnishings were seized and taken to Nebuchadnezzar's palace. This occurred during the reign of King Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:18-20, 25:8-21; 2 Chron. 36:11-21; Jer. 39:8-10, 52:1-13). The prophets were also exiled to Babylon, and they prophesied from there regarding the future rebuilding of the Temple.

Furthermore, Liverani states that the writer of the Book of Ezra recounts how the Persian king permitted the people of Judah to return from exile and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> However, that promise was not fulfilled by the end of Cyrus's reign. The reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was delayed for quite some time, even though King Cyrus of Persia had issued an official decree for the Temple's reconstruction. Did the decree of Cyrus fail, or did the prophets' prophecies fail? This paper does not focus on the failure of Cyrus's decree but instead highlights the beauty of the narrative in Ezra 1:1-11, which was written by P using other sources.

Therefore, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem holds a 'divine mystery' that is valuable to uncover. It is presented in such a way through various traditions and important sources. This is where the skill of the writer of the Book of Ezra lies, in presenting the story to readers while affirming that it truly happened and is highly accurate. Other significant sources were included to complete the historical narrative.

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and The History of Israel* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 191-192.

<sup>2</sup> Liverani, *Israel's History and The History of Israel*, 194-95.

The inclusion of prophetic traditions provides clarity and completeness to the events. These traditions are essential to strengthen the historical account, which was written long after the events took place. The writing tradition developed rapidly and was followed by other writers, eventually culminating in the Bible as a written document throughout the centuries. For instance, the traditions of the patriarchal election and the Exodus from Egypt recorded in the Pentateuch were initially oral traditions that later became written traditions. These oral traditions evolved up to Solomon's era and then transitioned into written form, documented by his disciples. Peter F. Ellis<sup>3</sup> states that the Yahwist tradition, written by the disciples of King Solomon around 950 BCE, was made an official source for retelling past historical events. There are also other traditions such as E, D, and P, which have been identified through the development of biblical research, especially within the Old Testament. Robert B. Coote and David Robert Ord<sup>4</sup> identify P as the final source in the writing of the Bible. Among the prominent priestly groups during the Persian period was the Zadokite priesthood, which first appeared during David's time. Furthermore, according to Jan Christian Gertz, the Priestly document (P) places greater emphasis on cultic tradition, both before and after the exile.<sup>5</sup>

What about the prophetic tradition? Gerhard von Rad, a German theologian, has long employed prophetic tradition in his research on Old Testament books. According to von Rad, prophetic tradition is a primary and legitimate source for studying the Old Testament itself. He even argues that much of Old Testament theology is discovered within prophetic traditions. The use of this tradition has been positively received and further developed by other Old Testament scholars in their study of the scriptures.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter F. Ellis, *The Yahwist, The Bible's First Theologian* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1968), 150-53. Laurence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament, An Introduction*, 74-78.

<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Coote and David Robert Ord, *Pada Mulanya, Penciptaan & Sejarah Keimaman* (Jakarta: BPK GM, 2018), 42-45.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Christian Gertz, "'Dokumen Priest' Dokumen-dokumen yang tidak lengkap" in Jan Christian Gertz, Angelika Berlejung, Konrad Schmid (eds), *Purwa Pustaka, Explorasi Ke Dalam Kitab-kitab Perjanjian Lama Dan Deuterokanonika* (Jakarta: BPK GM, 2017), 347-52.

A similar view is held by Walther Zimmerli, who regards prophetic tradition as part of Old Testament literature and an official document for Old Testament scholars. Zimmerli sees that prophetic tradition permeates every proclamation of the Bible, including prophecies concerning the rebuilding of the Temple, where prophets played a key role in voicing the need for reconstruction. In fact, the rebuilding of the Temple became a central theme in prophetic proclamation, before, during, and after the exile.

Before proceeding further and to make this paper easier to understand, there are five key questions that will be addressed. First, what is the significance of the narrative in Ezra 1:1-11 within the Old Testament, particularly in the historical books? Second, how is the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 presented by the P source, and what other sources are found within this narrative? Third, what is the strength and impact of the decree of Cyrus in the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 for the post-exilic community up to the present day? Fourth, what lessons can be learned from the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 for church life in Indonesia?

## **METHODS**

The method used in this paper is a literature review of the sources and traditions found within the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11, which are elaborated into an engaging story. The primary sources used are the Bible (Indonesian Standard Version, TB 2 LAI) and the Hebrew text. Howard M. Teeple states that every story in the Bible originates from an oral tradition passed down by key biblical figures, priests, kings, and prophets, as mediators of God. This oral tradition was later continued and developed into written tradition, which then became official literature. The second source consists of scholarly works written by experts who have discussed this topic across different periods of time.

Such is the tradition used by P in presenting the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. This tradition is believed to be an accurate source of an actual event that occurred in the history of the people of Israel as God's covenant people through the generations. God spoke (*amar*

*YHWH*) through priests, kings, and prophets, and these utterances were passed on to the people orally. Later, these sayings were turned into written sources used by the biblical writers.

The Priestly Code or P document represents a group of historical writers who recorded much historical evidence by incorporating various traditions beyond their personal accounts, drawn from different time periods. For example, the traditions of the Pentateuch, Mosaic, Davidic, and Solomonic eras, including the prophetic tradition, are used in presenting the history of the Temple Rebuilding (*banā bayt YHWH*). Through the integration of source material and prophetic traditions, the historical account becomes complete and compelling in the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11. The Chronicler's History draws from material across various timeframes, beginning from the election of the patriarchs to the era of the exilic and post-exilic prophets..

## **DISCUSSION**

### **From the Abrahamic Tradition to the Solomonic Tradition**

Terence E. Fretheim emphasizes that the rebuilding of the Temple is a story of profound significance in the life of God's people. Fretheim connects the Temple with the Pentateuch, the historical books, and the prophetic books. The rebuilding of the Temple by the post-exilic community represents a continuation of the election and formation of the people of God (*'am YHWH*). This means that the historical rebuilding of the Temple in the life of Israel was a major event in the overall narrative of God's people. It is considered an act of liberation (read: salvation) no less important than the exodus from Egypt during the time of Moses (Exod. 3). By order of Cyrus, the king of Persia, the Jews were allowed to carry out the rebuilding of the Temple after returning to the ancestral land they had left, Jerusalem. On the other hand, the construction of the Temple holds a central place in the Old Testament history of God's people. In the Pentateuchal tradition (for instance, the Yahwist), it is also told that when Abraham was called by God, he built an altar and *'mizbeah'* (Gen. 12:6-9; 13:4, 8; 22:9). Abraham

praised God and responded to His calling. This is considered the seed of what would later become the Temple in the time of King Solomon.

Martin Noth, one of the scholars of the book of Exodus, states that the Mosaic tradition (for example, the Elohist) tells how, when Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, he constructed a tabernacle, a sacred tent (Exod. 9:22; 25:9; 26:17). It was in this tabernacle that God's people gathered and presented offerings to Him. This same idea is echoed by Sara Japhet, who draws a parallel between the rebuilding of the Temple and the exodus from Egypt.

The same is true of the prophetic tradition. Gerald Flurry and Dennis Leap, for example, assert that the rebuilding of the Temple is a central theme in the message of the prophets, whether before the exile, during the exile, or after it. The writer of the book of Ezra puts it this way:

“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 an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (Ezra 1:2).

When Cyrus became king of Persia and conquered Babylon in 539/8 BCE, it marked the beginning of the Jewish people's return from Babylon. King Cyrus issued a decree allowing the exiles to return from Babylon. The Priestly writer (P) records this emphatically in 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5:

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, 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, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.”

Andrew E. Steinmann argues that the group returning from exile was led by Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah in their journey back to Jerusalem (Ezra 2). It was during this occasion that the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem was planned. This rebuilding is seen as a connecting thread between the Old and New Testaments, and even for today's era.

In another study, A. Philip Brown II suggests that the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem represents a proclamation of independence (liberation) for the Jewish people from Babylonian slavery. God once again liberated His people

and restored their lost identity. According to Brown II, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem serves as a connecting line within God's election plan for His people as they move into the next phases of history.

Roddy L. Braun, for example, notes that the Deuteronomistic historian (Dtr.G) writes that in the time of Solomon, plans for building a Temple were already underway, not only as a place of worship but also as the center of Solomon's kingdom. The construction of the Temple in Solomon's time fulfilled God's promise to David, as noted by Reinhard G. Kratz. Thus, around 950 BCE, King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, both Kratz and Braun assert that this construction was significant not only for Solomon but also for the people of Israel themselves. However, the rebuilding of the Temple by the post-exilic community was not merely a repeat of Solomon's Temple construction.

### **The Work of Their Own Hands: The 'Priestly Code'**

Tamara C. Eskenazi, who conducted research on the historical books (Chronicles History), states that originally, the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah were considered a single unified book. This book contains genealogies and historical narratives of the journey of God's people in the past. The writer begins by listing the descendants of Adam (1 Chr. 1:1) and concludes with the story of the rebuilding of the Temple and the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27-13:31). It is within this context that P presents the history of the Temple reconstruction using a wide range of traditions. This "second exodus" historian uses them to supplement his own sources, making the narrative reliable. The author is referred to as part of the Chronicler's History, a group of priests including Ezra and Nehemiah themselves, who lived around the 5th century or approximately 450 BCE. They utilized other sources such as the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic history, and prophetic traditions.

Furthermore, the historical books, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, provide a brief overview of Israel's past. Although this book may not be as comprehensive as other biblical narratives, it still enables readers to trace

historical records and affirm past events. As depicted by the chronicler, many significant and fascinating events are worthy of investigation. This historical record includes stories from the time of Adam and his descendants (1 Chr. 1:1-27), the time of Abraham and his descendants (1 Chr. 1:28-33), the descendants of David (1 Chr. 3:1-24), the time of the kings (2 Chr. 32:24-36:21), and the post-exilic period (2 Chr. 36:22-23), which is referred to as the “second exodus.” However, the chronicler gives particular emphasis to the stories beginning with Abraham and the deliverance from Egypt. Among these narratives, the rebuilding of the Temple receives special attention.

### **Prophetic Tradition**

The research presented by von Rad and Zimmerli was followed by other Old Testament scholars who focused specifically on the development of the prophetic tradition in Israel. David L. Peterson, in particular, studied the prominence of the prophetic tradition in the historical books. The presence of this prophetic tradition clarifies the purpose behind the post-exilic community’s rebuilding of the Temple. Similarly, Joseph Blenkinsopp highlights the role of prophetic tradition in shaping the narrative of the Temple’s reconstruction.

Peterson and Blenkinsopp both emphasize the seriousness with which the prophets foretold the rebuilding of the Temple. Their influence becomes even more apparent during the exile and the post-exilic period in Babylon. The prophets boldly proclaimed their prophecies as words from God delivered to His people through them. The prophets who delivered these messages include Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah. Among their various prophetic utterances, the message concerning the rebuilding of the Temple stands out as a distinct prophetic voice.

### **King Cyrus as God’s Shepherd**

Specifically in Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-45), we find one of the prophecies concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. This prophetic message was



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delivered around 742 BCE to the people of Judah who were in exile in Babylon. A. Joseph Everson, for example, notes that the author of Deutero-Isaiah emphasizes the name of a king who is considered God's servant, namely Cyrus, as mentioned in Ezra 1:1. Cyrus, the king of Persia, is referred to as a shepherd for the Jewish people coming out of Babylon. Similarly, according to Moshe Reiss, the name Cyrus, recorded in Isaiah 44:28, is portrayed as the "initiator" of the plan for both the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple. It is through him that the people of Judah were able to return from exile, following a decree given both orally and in writing (Ezra 1:1). This prophecy is seen in the words of Deutero-Isaiah:

"that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28).

Reiss further asserts that the mention of Cyrus's name strengthens the plan for rebuilding the Temple amid the changing political, social, and religious situation of God's people.

Deutero-Isaiah prophesies how the Temple of God would be rebuilt once His people returned from exile. The emphasis on Cyrus is repeated again:

"I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts." (Isa. 45:13).

### **Seventy Years Completed for Babylon**

There is no doubt about the presence of Jeremiah's prophecy in the context of the rebuilding of the Temple. The Priestly writer (P) explicitly mentions the prophet Jeremiah in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1. Christopher J.H. Wright states that as a descendant of priests, Jeremiah's prophecy demonstrates a vision concerning the Temple. Wright emphasizes that it is this prophecy that shows how the prophets proclaimed and foretold the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jeremiah's message was delivered while the people of Israel were still in Jerusalem and continued after the exile, around 658/7 to 587/6 BCE.

"For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." (Jer. 29:10)

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Peterson interprets this text as a promise of the fulfillment of the Temple's reconstruction. Therefore, the Priestly writer includes this prophecy in Ezra 1:1, which opens with the words:

"Now 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..."

In another passage, Jeremiah's prophecy refers directly to the seventy years.

"And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25:11-12).

The phrase "seventy years" (*syibbim syana*) in this prophecy points to the beginning of the plan to rebuild the Temple, through the decree of Cyrus, calculated from the Babylonian exile in 597 BCE.

### **The Glory of the Lord Returns to Jerusalem**

In 597/6 BCE, Babylon conquered Judah and brought its people into exile. The prophet Ezekiel was also taken into exile. It was during this time that Ezekiel was called as a prophet to deliver prophecies concerning Israel (1:1-3). His prophecies are particularly found in chapters 40-48. These prophecies are revealed through a series of visions. One of those visions concerns the new Temple (chapter 41). The vision begins with the words:

"And behold a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man's hand a measuring reed of six cubits long by the cubit and an hand breadth: so he measured the breadth of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed." (40:5).

Peterson points to this text as a prophecy of the reconstruction of the Temple that would take place in Jerusalem. Ezekiel was among those exiled to Babylon, and the Temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet in exile, Ezekiel received visions, which he then shared with the people of God.

Ezekiel's vision points to the rebuilding of the Temple after the return to Jerusalem, similar to what had happened in Solomon's time.

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“Afterward he brought me to the temple, and measured the posts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the tabernacle” (41:1).

Furthermore, according to Corrine L. Carvalho, Ezekiel’s vision prophesies that the glory of God will return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. In Jerusalem, the Temple would be rebuilt as desired by the people of Judah. This indicates that the glory of the Lord (*kabod YHWH*) would be revealed to His people through the rebuilding of the Temple in the future.

### **Is This House Still in Ruins?**

The prophecy of Haggai is different from those of earlier prophets like Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Chunsink Park observes that Haggai’s prophecy is somewhat harsher and more critical of the people of Judah for not yet beginning the reconstruction. Indeed, this rebuke stems from the fact that they had to wait for a decision from the next king after Cyrus was succeeded by another ruler, namely Darius. In addition, the political situation between Babylon and Persia remained unstable. As a result, the people of Judah were unable to initiate the rebuilding (1:1; cf. 2:1). The prophet Haggai’s sharp warning is delivered as follows:

“Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD” (Zech. 1:3-4).

A similar view is expressed by John Kessler. The prophet Haggai rebuked the people, questioning why they had not yet rushed to begin the reconstruction of the Temple, even though they were already back in their ancestral land. Perhaps through Haggai’s warning, the people would consider acting quickly to carry out the rebuilding. Haggai was, in fact, aware of the challenges the returning Jews were facing, but the prophecy had to be proclaimed in order to remind the people of Judah. Haggai’s prophecy is thus a stern warning about the delay in rebuilding. That is why Haggai proclaims again:

“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” (Hag. 2:3).

## **CONCLUSION**

The Priestly Code or Document P, as the primary author of the narrative in Ezra 1:1-11, also employed other sources and traditions to supplement the supporting data in presenting the narrative of the rebuilding of the Temple. These diverse traditions and sources made the story more engaging and accurate throughout time. Although the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was delayed for several years, this was due to the unstable political situation in Jerusalem during the reign of Cyrus. As a result, the rebuilding plan was hindered for 18 years. The people of Judah, as a post-exilic community, remained focused on the physical reconstruction of the Temple, even though they themselves were supposed to be the true Temple.

The writer of the historical books intended to show that God's faithfulness continues throughout the history of humankind, beginning with the calling of the patriarchs. Abraham built an altar to the Lord in response to God's covenantal love. Likewise, when Moses led the people out of Egypt, he erected a tabernacle as a place of worship. This was later continued with the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem by King Solomon.

Logically, this prolonged period of waiting might have caused them to wonder whether God no longer loved them, or whether He no longer desired His Temple to be built. Yet the historical writer intended to emphasize that God was laying a strong foundation of faith in the life of His people. The post-exilic community had to first rebuild their confidence that God still loved them. God remained faithful to them throughout history. This was one of the purposes behind the P source presenting the narrative of Ezra 1:1-11 by incorporating various traditions in the rebuilding of the Temple as depicted in the Old Testament. However, the delay in rebuilding the Temple did not nullify the truth of the prophetic declarations concerning that plan. The P writer composed the storyline in such a way to show that spiritual rebuilding takes precedence over physical reconstruction. This rebuilding must be viewed within two frames: the

first being physical construction, and the second being spiritual edification, with God present in both.

In the Indonesian context, the reconstruction of the Temple (read: church) represents a long-standing struggle that is difficult to resolve. For instance, the Joint Ministerial Decree of two or three ministers issued in 2006 has generated both support and opposition among Christians in Indonesia, at both church leadership and congregational levels. Some Christians in Indonesia may wonder whether God has forgotten His people. However, in responding to this struggle, the rebuilding of the Temple should not be viewed merely from the angle of “difficulty” but rather from the angle of “benefit.” In other words, rebuilding the Temple in Indonesia should not only be seen in terms of physical construction but also spiritual development. Christians must continue to believe that God is at work and remains faithful to His people. Of course, this must be voiced prophetically by the Church through His servants so that the struggles and questions can be answered. God remains faithful to His people!.

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