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## Ezra

The book of Ezra continues the story that ended the book of 2 Chronicles. The story begins with the announcement that the Jewish captives in Babylon will be released. An official message is sent to the whole empire. It says that the Jews are to be freed to return home to Judah. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are about important parts of this return. They actually describe at least two returns that took place during a period of almost 100 years.

God wanted his people to gather again in Jerusalem and rebuild his Temple. And Ezra tells how God made this happen. But the way God did this is probably not the way any of us would think to do it. God used a foreign king.

The Persian king Cyrus and his army had conquered a large part of the ancient world. His defeat of the Babylonians was considered to be his greatest victory. But the Bible teaches us that it was not the Persian king's victory. It was God who chose King Cyrus to free the Jewish captives in Babylon (Isa. 45:1-3). When Cyrus conquered Babylon, it was actually God's victory. In fact, all the battles Cyrus fought prepared him to free God's people. The life of King Cyrus teaches us that God is in control of the world. He even directs the rulers of nations.

Ezra reports what happened when the Jews first returned to Jerusalem. He also reports what happened many years later when he himself returned there. This was about the

same time that Nehemiah arrived to rebuild the city walls. But Ezra's story is not like a news report today. It does not include all the events. In fact, chapter 7 begins by skipping over more than 50 years with the words, "After these things...".

God ordered the Jews who returned from Babylon to rebuild his Temple. The Temple would be the centre of their worship. But they had to learn what it meant to be the people of God. And they needed teaching about how to worship God in the Temple. Ezra the priest was the man God chose to teach them. Ezra taught them about God and how to please him. They had to be different from the other nations. They had to be devoted to God and live pure lives.

Ezra studied the Scriptures every day. This led him to make decisions for the people that would help them be the people of God. They needed to become a purely Jewish community again. One of these decisions was a very hard one. Ezra ordered the men of Israel to send their foreign wives and children away. This was difficult. But it was necessary to remove the bad influence these wives had on Israel.

The book of Ezra tells how...

The first group of captives is freed and returns to Judah (1:1 – 2:70)

The rebuilding of the Temple begins (3:1 – 6:22)

The second group of captives returns (7:1 – 8:36)

Ezra makes hard decisions to protect God's people from evil influence (9:1 – 10:44)

### Cyrus Helps the Captives Return

**1** In the first year that Cyrus king of Persia began to rule,\* the LORD caused him to make an announcement. It was written down, and Cyrus ordered that it be read throughout his kingdom. This was done so that what the LORD had told Jeremiah† years before would now happen. This was the announcement:

<sup>2</sup>“From King Cyrus of Persia:

“The LORD, the God of heaven, gave all the kingdoms on earth to me. And he chose me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in the country of Judah. <sup>3</sup>If any of God’s people are living among you, I pray that God will bless them. You must let them go to Jerusalem in the country of Judah. You must let them go and build the Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>And so in every place where there are survivors of Israel, the men in that place must support these survivors. Give them silver, gold, animals and other things. Give them gifts for God’s Temple in Jerusalem.”

<sup>5</sup>Then God caused many of his people to want to go to Jerusalem. These included the family leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites, and many others. They all prepared to go and rebuild the LORD’s Temple. <sup>6</sup>All their neighbours gave them many gifts. They gave them silver, gold, animals and other expensive things. Their neighbours freely gave them all these gifts. <sup>7</sup>Also, King Cyrus brought out the things that Nebuchad-

nezzar had taken from the LORD’s Temple in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar had put these things in the temple where he kept his false gods. <sup>8</sup>King Cyrus told Mithredath, the man in charge of his treasury, to bring those things out. So Mithredath brought them out to Sheshbazzar, the leader of Judah.

<sup>9</sup>This is what Mithredath brought out: 30 gold dishes, 1000 silver dishes, 29 knives, <sup>10</sup>30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls similar to the gold bowls and 1000 other dishes.

<sup>11</sup>All together, there were 5400 things made from gold and silver. Sheshbazzar brought them all with him when the captives left Babylon and went back to Jerusalem.

### The List of the Captives Who Returned

**2** King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had taken many people from Judah as captives to Babylon. They now returned to Jerusalem and other places in Judah, everyone to their own towns. <sup>2</sup>These are the leaders of the people who returned: Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah. And here is a list showing how many men returned in each Israelite family group:

<sup>3</sup>the descendants of Parosh: 2172

<sup>4</sup>the descendants of Shephatiah: 372

<sup>5</sup>the descendants of Arah: 775

<sup>6</sup>the descendants of Pahath Moab of the family of Jeshua and Joab: 2812

<sup>7</sup>the descendants of Elam: 1254

<sup>8</sup>the descendants of Zattu: 945

<sup>9</sup>the descendants of Zaccai: 760

<sup>10</sup>the descendants of Bani: 642

\***1:1 began to rule** Probably meaning when Cyrus, after capturing Babylon, became ruler of a great empire about 538 BC.

†**1:1 what the LORD had told Jeremiah** See Jer. 25:12-14.

<sup>11</sup> the descendants of Bebai: 623  
<sup>12</sup> the descendants of Azgad: 1222  
<sup>13</sup> the descendants of Adonikam: 666  
<sup>14</sup> the descendants of Bigvai: 2056  
<sup>15</sup> the descendants of Adin: 454  
<sup>16</sup> the descendants of Ater through the family of Hezekiah: 98  
<sup>17</sup> the descendants of Bezai: 323  
<sup>18</sup> the descendants of Jorah: 112  
<sup>19</sup> the descendants of Hashum: 223  
<sup>20</sup> the descendants of Gibbar: 95  
<sup>21</sup> from the town of Bethlehem: 123  
<sup>22</sup> from the town of Netophah: 56  
<sup>23</sup> from the town of Anathoth: 128  
<sup>24</sup> from the town of Azmaveth: 42  
<sup>25</sup> from the towns of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth: 743  
<sup>26</sup> from the towns of Ramah and Geba: 621  
<sup>27</sup> from the town of Micmash: 122  
<sup>28</sup> from the towns of Bethel and Ai: 223  
<sup>29</sup> from the town of Nebo: 52  
<sup>30</sup> from the town of Magbish: 156  
<sup>31</sup> from the other town named Elam: 1254  
<sup>32</sup> from the town of Harim: 320  
<sup>33</sup> from the towns of Lod, Hadid and Ono: 725  
<sup>34</sup> from the town of Jericho: 345  
<sup>35</sup> from the town of Senaah: 3630  
<sup>36</sup> These are the priests who returned: the descendants of Jedaiah through the family of Jeshua: 973  
<sup>37</sup> the descendants of Immer: 1052  
<sup>38</sup> the descendants of Pashhur: 1247  
<sup>39</sup> the descendants of Harim: 1017  
<sup>40</sup> These are the people from the tribe of Levi:  
the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel through the family of Hodaviah: 74  
<sup>41</sup> These are the singers:  
the descendants of Asaph: 128  
<sup>42</sup> These are the Temple gatekeepers:  
the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai: 139  
<sup>43</sup> These are the special Temple servants:

the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,  
<sup>44</sup> Keros, Siah, Padon,  
<sup>45</sup> Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub,  
<sup>46</sup> Hagab, Shalmal, Hanan,  
<sup>47</sup> Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah,  
<sup>48</sup> Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam,  
<sup>49</sup> Uzza, Paseah, Besai,  
<sup>50</sup> Asnah, Meunim, Nephussim,  
<sup>51</sup> Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,  
<sup>52</sup> Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,  
<sup>53</sup> Barkos, Sisera, Temah,  
<sup>54</sup> Neziah and Hatipha.  
<sup>55</sup> These are Solomon's servants whose descendants returned:  
Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda,  
<sup>56</sup> Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel,  
<sup>57</sup> Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth Hazzebaim and Ami.  
<sup>58</sup> The total of the descendants of the Temple servants and of Solomon's servants: 392  
<sup>59</sup> These people came to Jerusalem from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer:  
<sup>60</sup> the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda: 652  
But none of these could prove that they were descendants from the family of Israel.  
<sup>61</sup> There were also these three families of priests:  
the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai, who was given this name because he married a daughter of Barzillai from Gilead.  
<sup>62</sup> These three families searched for their family histories, but they could not find them. So they were disqualified from serving as priests. <sup>63</sup> The governor ordered them not to eat any of the holy food until a priest could use the Urim and Thummim to ask God what to do.  
<sup>64</sup> All together, there were 42,360 people in the group who returned. <sup>65</sup> This is not counting their 7337 men and women

slaves. They also had 200 men and women singers with them. <sup>66</sup>They had 736 horses, 245 mules, <sup>67</sup>435 camels and 6720 donkeys.

<sup>68</sup>When the group arrived at the place in Jerusalem where the LORD's Temple had been, the family leaders gave their gifts for building this house of God again. They wanted to build it in this same place. <sup>69</sup>They gave as much as they were able. These are the things they gave for building the Temple: 500 kilogrammes<sup>‡</sup> of gold, 3000 kilogrammes<sup>¶</sup> of silver and 100 robes for the priests.

<sup>70</sup>So the priests, Levites and some of the other people moved to Jerusalem and the area around it. This group included the Temple singers, gatekeepers and the Temple servants. The other Israelites settled in their own home towns.

### Rebuilding the Altar

**3** So by the seventh month,<sup>§</sup> the Israelites had moved back to their own home towns. At that time all the people met together in Jerusalem. They were all united as one people. <sup>2</sup>Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and the priests with him, along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and the people with him, built the altar of the God of Israel. They built the altar so that they could use it to offer sacrifices. They followed the instructions in the Law of Moses, the man of God.

<sup>3</sup>They were afraid of the other people living near them, but that didn't stop them. They built the altar on its old foundation and offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD. They offered sacrifices in the morning and in the evening. <sup>4</sup>Then they celebrated the Festival of Shelters

just as the Law of Moses said. They offered the right number of burnt offerings for each day of the festival. <sup>5</sup>After that, they began offering the continual burnt offerings each day and the offerings for the New Moon and all the other festivals that were commanded by the LORD. The people also began giving any other gifts they wanted to give to the LORD. <sup>6</sup>So on the first day of the seventh month, these Israelites again began offering sacrifices to the LORD. This was done, even though the LORD's Temple had not been rebuilt.

### Rebuilding the Temple

<sup>7</sup>Then those who had returned from captivity gave money to the stonemasons and carpenters. They also gave food, wine and olive oil. They used these things to pay the people of Tyre and Sidon to bring cedar logs from Lebanon. They wanted to bring the logs in ships to the coastal town of Joppa. King Cyrus of Persia gave permission for them to do this.

<sup>8</sup>So in the second month<sup>\*\*</sup> of the second year after they came to the Temple in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak began the work. Their relatives, the priests and Levites, and everyone who returned from captivity began working with them. They chose Levites who were 20 years old and older to be the leaders in the building of the LORD's Temple. <sup>9</sup>Jeshua, his sons and his brothers—Kadmiel, Binnui and Hodaviah—together supervised the Temple workers. (These Temple workers were the sons of Henadad, their sons

<sup>‡</sup>2:69 **500 kilogrammes** Literally, "61,000 drachmas".

<sup>¶</sup>2:69 **3000 kilogrammes** Literally, "5000 minas".

<sup>§</sup>3:1 **seventh month** That is, September–October, 538 BC.

<sup>\*\*</sup>3:8 **second month** That is, April–May, 536 BC.

and their brothers the Levites.)<sup>10</sup> The builders finished laying the foundation for the LORD's Temple. When the foundation was finished, the priests put on their special clothing. Then they got their trumpets, and the sons of Asaph got their cymbals. They all took their places to praise the LORD. This was done the way King David of Israel had ordered in the past.<sup>11</sup> They sang songs of praise and thanksgiving, taking turns in singing each part.<sup>††</sup> They sang, "The LORD is good. His faithful love will continue forever." Then all the people cheered—they gave a loud shout and praised the LORD because the foundation of the LORD's Temple had been laid.

<sup>12</sup> But many of the older priests, Levites and family leaders, who could remember seeing the first Temple, began to cry aloud. They cried while the others there shouted for joy.<sup>13</sup> The sound could be heard far away. All of them made so much noise that no one could tell the difference between the shouts of joy and the crying.

### Enemies Against Rebuilding the Temple

**4** Some people living in the area were against the people of Judah and Benjamin. They heard that these people who had returned from captivity were building a Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel.<sup>2</sup> So they came to Zerubbabel and to the family leaders and said, "Let

us help you build. We want to worship your God, the same as you. We have offered sacrifices to him ever since King Esarhaddon of Assyria brought us here."

<sup>3</sup> But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the other family leaders of Israel answered, "No, you cannot help us build a Temple for our God. Only we can build the Temple for the LORD. He is the God of Israel. This is what King Cyrus of Persia commanded us to do."

<sup>4</sup> So these people who lived near them tried to discourage them and make them afraid so that they would stop building the Temple.<sup>5</sup> They paid government officials to work against the people of Judah to keep them from completing their building plans. They did this the whole time Cyrus was the king of Persia and continued until Darius became king.

<sup>6</sup> The year Xerxes<sup>‡‡</sup> became the king of Persia, these enemies of Judah sent him a letter containing their complaints against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

### Enemies Against Rebuilding Jerusalem

<sup>7</sup> Later, when Artaxerxes became the new king of Persia, some of these men wrote another letter complaining about the Jews. The men who wrote the letter were Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the people with them. The letter was written in Aramaic and then translated.<sup>¶¶</sup>

<sup>††</sup>3:11 *taking turns ... part* These songs were sung in two parts. One group (the Levites) sang the first part and the other group (the people) responded with the second part. Here, these are probably Ps. 111 – 118 and Ps. 136.

<sup>‡‡</sup>4:6 *Xerxes* Hebrew, "Ahasuerus". He was king of Persia about 485-465 BC.

<sup>¶¶</sup>4:7 *The letter ... translated* Or "The letter was written in the local language, but with Aramaic characters, and then translated into Aramaic." This would mean the scribe used the "modern" Aramaic alphabet rather than the older alphabet that was still being used in Judah.

<sup>8</sup>§§ Then Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary wrote a letter against the people of Jerusalem. They wrote the letter to Artaxerxes the king. This is what they wrote:

<sup>9</sup> From Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary, and from the judges and important officials over the men from Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, and from the Elamites from Susa, <sup>10</sup> and from the other people who the great and powerful Ashurbanipal moved to the city of Samaria and other places in the country west of the Euphrates River.

<sup>11</sup> This is the copy of the letter sent to King Artaxerxes:

From your servants living in the area west of the Euphrates River.

<sup>12</sup> King Artaxerxes, we wish to inform you that the Jews you sent from there are now in Jerusalem. They are trying to rebuild that terrible city. The people there have always refused to obey other kings. Now they have almost finished repairing the foundations and building the walls.\*

<sup>13</sup> Also, King Artaxerxes, you should know that if Jerusalem and its walls are rebuilt, the people of Jerusalem will stop paying their taxes. They will stop sending money to honour you. They also will stop paying customs fees, and the king will lose all that money.

<sup>14</sup> We have a responsibility to the king. We don't want to see this happen, so we are sending this letter to inform the king.

<sup>15</sup> King Artaxerxes, we suggest that you search the writings of the kings who ruled before you. You will find in the writings that Jerusalem is a city that is difficult to rule. It has always refused to obey other kings and nations who tried to control it. It has a long history as a place where trouble begins. That is why it was destroyed.

<sup>16</sup> King Artaxerxes, we wish to inform you that if this city and its walls are rebuilt, you will lose control of the area west of the Euphrates River.

<sup>17</sup> Then King Artaxerxes sent this answer:

To Rehum the commanding officer, Shimshai the secretary, and all the other leaders with them living in Samaria and other places west of the Euphrates River.

Greetings:

<sup>18</sup> The letter you sent us has been translated and read to me. <sup>19</sup> I gave an order for the writings of the kings before me to be searched. We found that Jerusalem has a long history of refusing to obey their kings. It has been a place where this kind of refusal and revolt has happened often. <sup>20</sup> Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over it and over all the area west of the Euphrates River. Their kings received taxes, customs and fees.

<sup>21</sup> Now, order the people to stop the work of rebuilding the city. I do not want them to rebuild Jerusalem until I myself give the order. <sup>22</sup> Make sure you stop the work right away. The longer that work continues,

§§4:8 Here, the original language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic. See Aramaic in the Word List.

\*4:12 *building the walls* This was a way of protecting a city. These men wanted the king to think that the Jews were preparing to rebel against the king.

the more loss it will cause for my kingdom.

<sup>23</sup>So the letter that King Artaxerxes sent was read to Rehum, Shimshai the secretary and the people with them. They went very quickly to the Jews in Jerusalem and forced them to stop building.

### The Work on the Temple Stopped

<sup>24</sup>So the work stopped<sup>†</sup> on God's Temple in Jerusalem. The work did not continue until the second year<sup>‡</sup> that Darius was king of Persia.

**5** At that time the prophets Haggai<sup>†</sup> and Zechariah son of Iddo<sup>§</sup> began to prophesy in the name of God. They encouraged the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>So Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak started working again on the Temple in Jerusalem. All of God's prophets were with them and were supporting the work. <sup>3</sup>At that time Tattenai was the governor of the area west of the Euphrates River. Tattenai, Shethar Bozenai and the men with them went to Zerubbabel and the people with him and asked, "Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and repair it like new?" <sup>4</sup>They also asked, "What are the names of the men who are working on this building?"

<sup>5</sup>But God was watching over the Jewish leaders. The builders didn't have to stop working until a report could be sent to King Darius. They continued working until the king sent his answer back.

<sup>6</sup>Tattenai the governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, Shethar

Bozenai and the important people with them sent a letter to King Darius. <sup>7</sup>This is what it said:

To King Darius.

Greetings:

<sup>8</sup>King Darius, you should know that we went to the territory of Judah. We went to the Temple of the great God. The people in Judah are building that Temple with large stones. They are putting big wooden timbers in the walls. The work is being done with much care, and the people of Judah are working very hard. They are building very fast; it will soon be done.

<sup>9</sup>We asked their leaders some questions about the work they are doing. We asked them, "Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and repair it like new?" <sup>10</sup>We also asked for their names. We wanted to write down the names of their leaders so that you would know who they are.

<sup>11</sup>This is the answer they gave us:

We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the Temple that a great king of Israel built and finished many years ago. <sup>12</sup>But our ancestors made the God of heaven angry, so God put them under the control of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean who ruled Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed this Temple and took the people to Babylon as captives. <sup>13</sup>But, in the first year that Cyrus was king of Babylon, King Cyrus gave a special or-

<sup>†</sup>4:24 *the work stopped* Here, this refers to the time of Xerxes, when work on the Temple was stopped, not to the time of Artaxerxes, when work on the walls around Jerusalem was stopped.

<sup>‡</sup>4:24 *second year* That is, 520 BC.

<sup>†</sup>5:1 *Haggai* See Hag. 1:1.

<sup>§</sup>5:1 *Zechariah son of Iddo* See Zech. 1:1.

der for God's Temple to be rebuilt. <sup>14</sup>And King Cyrus returned the gold and silver things that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from God's Temple in Jerusalem and had brought to Babylon. King Cyrus took these things from the temple in Babylon where they were stored. Then he sent them to Jerusalem with Sheshbazzar, the man he chose to be governor of Judah.

<sup>15</sup>Then Cyrus said to Sheshbazzar, "Take these gold and silver things and put them back in the Temple in Jerusalem. Rebuild God's Temple in the same place it was in the past."

<sup>16</sup>So Sheshbazzar came and built the foundations of God's Temple in Jerusalem. From that day until now, the work has continued, but it is not yet finished.

<sup>17</sup>Now, if it pleases the king, please search the official records of the king. See if it is true that King Cyrus gave an order to rebuild God's Temple in Jerusalem. And then, sir, please send us a letter to let us know what you have decided to do.

### The Order of Darius

**6** So King Darius gave an order to search the writings of the kings before him. The writings were kept in Babylon in the same place the money was kept. <sup>2</sup>A scroll was found in the fortress of Ecbatana, which is in the territory of Media. This is what was written on that scroll:

Official Note: <sup>3</sup>During the first year that Cyrus was king, he gave an order about the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The order said:

Let the Temple of God be rebuilt. It will be a place to offer sacrifices. Let its foundations be built. The Temple must be 27 metres\*\* high and 27 metres wide. <sup>4</sup>Its wall will be in layers that have three rows of large stones†† and one row of wooden timbers. The cost of building the Temple must be paid for from the king's treasury. <sup>5</sup>Also, the gold and silver things from God's Temple must be put back in their places. Nebuchadnezzar took them from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon. They must be put back in God's Temple.

<sup>6</sup>So King Darius sent this message to his officials:

To Tattenai, governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, to Shethar Bozenai and to all the officials living in that territory. I order you to stay away from Jerusalem. <sup>7</sup>Do not bother the workers or try to stop the work on this Temple of God. Let the Jewish governor and the Jewish leaders rebuild it. Let them rebuild God's Temple in the same place it was in the past.

<sup>8</sup>Now I give you this order to help the Jewish leaders building God's Temple: pay the full cost of the building from the king's treasury. The money will come from the taxes collected from the provinces in the area west of the Euphrates River. Do these things quickly so that the work will not stop. <sup>9</sup>Give them anything they need. If they need young bulls, rams or lambs for sacrifices to the God of heaven, give these things to them. If the priests of Jerusalem ask for wheat, salt, wine and oil, give

\*\*6:3 27 metres Literally, "60 cubits".

††6:4 large stones Or "marble stones".

these things to them every day without fail. <sup>10</sup> Give them to the Jewish priests so that they may offer sacrifices that please the God of heaven. Give these things so that the priests may pray for me and my sons.

<sup>11</sup> Also, I give this order: if anyone changes this order, a wooden beam must be pulled from their house and pushed through their body. Then their house must be destroyed until it is only a pile of rocks.

<sup>12</sup> God put his name there in Jerusalem. May God defeat any king or other person who tries to change this order. If anyone tries to destroy this Temple in Jerusalem, may God destroy that person.

I, Darius, have ordered it. This order must be obeyed quickly and completely.

### The Temple Completed and Dedicated

<sup>13</sup> So Tattenai the governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, Shethar Bozenai and the men with them obeyed King Darius' order. They obeyed the order quickly and completely. <sup>14</sup> So the Jewish leaders continued to build. Encouraged by the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah son of Iddo, they had great success. They finished building the Temple as the God of Israel had commanded and as Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, the kings of Persia, had ordered. <sup>15</sup> The Temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar.<sup>‡</sup> That was in the sixth year of the rule of King Darius.<sup>¶</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Then the Israelites celebrated the dedication of God's Temple with great joy. The priests, the Levites and all the other people who had returned from captivity joined in the celebration.

<sup>17</sup> This is the way they dedicated God's Temple: they offered 100 bulls, 200 rams and 400 lambs. And they offered twelve male goats for all Israel for a sin offering. That is one goat for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Then they chose the priests in their groups and the Levites in their groups to serve in God's Temple in Jerusalem. They did these things as it is written in the *Book of Moses*.

### The Passover Festival

<sup>19</sup> §§ On the fourteenth day of the first month,<sup>\*</sup> the Jews who had returned from captivity celebrated Passover. <sup>20</sup> All the priests and Levites made themselves clean and ready to celebrate Passover. The Levites killed the Passover lamb for all the Jews who had returned from captivity. They did that for their brothers the priests and for themselves. <sup>21</sup> So all the Israelites who had returned from captivity ate the Passover meal. Other people washed themselves and made themselves pure from the unclean things of the people living in that country. These people also shared in the Passover meal. They did this so that they could go to the LORD, the God of Israel, for help. <sup>22</sup> They celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread with great joy for seven days. The LORD made them very happy because he had changed the attitude of the king of Assyria.<sup>†</sup> So the king of As-

<sup>‡</sup>6:15 *third ... Adar* That is, February–March. Some ancient writers have “twenty-third of Adar”.

<sup>¶</sup>6:15 *the sixth year ... Darius* That is, 515 BC.

§§6:19 Here, the original language changes from Aramaic back to Hebrew.

\*6:19 *first month* That is, March–April, 515 BC.

†6:22 *king of Assyria* This probably means King Darius of Persia.

syria had helped them do the work on God's Temple.

### Ezra Comes to Jerusalem

**7** After these things,<sup>3</sup> during the rule of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon. Ezra was the son of Seraiah. Seraiah was the son of Azariah. Azariah was the son of Hilkiah. <sup>2</sup>Hilkiah was the son of Shallum. Shallum was the son of Zadok. Zadok was the son of Ahitub. <sup>3</sup>Ahitub was the son of Amariah. Amariah was the son of Azariah. Azariah was the son of Meraioth. <sup>4</sup>Meraioth was the son of Zeremiah. Zeremiah was the son of Uzzi. Uzzi was the son of Bukki. <sup>5</sup>Bukki was the son of Abishua. Abishua was the son of Phinehas. Phinehas was the son of Eleazar. Eleazar was the son of Aaron the high priest.

<sup>6</sup>Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon. He was a teacher<sup>4</sup> and knew the Law of Moses very well. The Law of Moses was given by the LORD, the God of Israel. King Artaxerxes gave Ezra everything he asked for because the LORD was with Ezra. <sup>7</sup>Among the people who came with Ezra were Israelites, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and Temple servants. They arrived in Jerusalem during the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. <sup>8</sup>Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month<sup>8</sup> of the seventh year that Artaxerxes was king. <sup>9</sup>Ezra left Babylon on the first day of the first month and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. With God's blessing his journey went well. <sup>10</sup>Ezra had always given his time and attention to studying and obey-

ing the Law of the LORD. He also loved to teach its rules and commandments to others in Israel.

### King Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra

<sup>11</sup>Ezra was a priest and teacher. He knew much about the commands and laws that the LORD gave Israel. This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the teacher:

<sup>12\*\*</sup>From King Artaxerxes,  
To Ezra the priest, a teacher of the law of the God of heaven:  
Greetings.

<sup>13</sup>I give this order: any of the Israelites living in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who want to go with you to Jerusalem, may go.

<sup>14</sup>I and my seven advisers send you to Judah and Jerusalem. Go and see how your people are doing in obeying the law of your God. You have that law with you.

<sup>15</sup>I and my advisers are giving gold and silver to the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. You must take this gold and silver with you. <sup>16</sup>You must also go through all the territories of Babylonia. Collect the gifts from your people, from the priests and from the Levites. The gifts are for the Temple of their God in Jerusalem.

<sup>17</sup>Use this money to buy bulls, rams and lambs. Buy the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with these sacrifices. Then sacrifice them on the altar in the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. <sup>18</sup>Then

<sup>3</sup>7:1 *After these things* There is a time period of 58 years between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. The story of Esther takes place at this time.

<sup>4</sup>7:6 *teacher* Literally, "scribe". This was a person who made copies of books. These men studied those books and became teachers.

<sup>8</sup>7:8 *fifth month* That is, July–August, 458 BC.

<sup>\*\*</sup>7:12 Here, the text changes from Hebrew to Aramaic.

you and the other priests may spend the silver and gold left over in any way you want. Use it in a way that is pleasing to your God. <sup>19</sup>Take all these things to the God of Jerusalem. They are for the worship in the Temple of your God. <sup>20</sup>And you may get any other things that you need for the Temple of your God. Use the money in the king's treasury to buy anything else you need.

<sup>21</sup>Now I, King Artaxerxes, give this order: I order all the men who keep the king's money in the area west of the Euphrates River to give Ezra anything he wants. Ezra is a priest and a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven. Do this quickly and completely. <sup>22</sup>Give this much to Ezra: 3400 kilogrammes<sup>††</sup> of silver, 10,000 kilogrammes<sup>‡‡</sup> of wheat, 2200 litres<sup>¶¶</sup> of wine, 2200 litres of olive oil and as much salt as Ezra wants. <sup>23</sup>Anything that the God of heaven has ordered for his Temple, you must give to Ezra quickly and completely. We don't want the God of heaven to be angry with my kingdom or my sons.

<sup>24</sup>I want you men to know that it is against the law to make the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants and other workers in God's Temple pay taxes. They don't have to pay taxes, money to honour the king or any customs fees. <sup>25</sup>Ezra, I give you the authority to use the wisdom you have from your God to choose civil and religious judges. These men will be

judges for all the people living in the area west of the Euphrates River. They will judge all the people who know the laws of your God, and they will teach those who don't know those laws. <sup>26</sup>Anyone who does not obey the law of your God, or the law of the king, must be punished. Depending on the crime, they must be punished with death, or sent away to another country, or their property taken away or be put into prison.

### Ezra Praises God for the King's Letter

<sup>27</sup>§§“Praise the LORD, the God of our ancestors. He put the idea into the king's heart to honour the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem. <sup>28</sup>God showed his faithful love to me for all to see. And because the king, his advisers and the king's important officials saw this, they were willing to help. The LORD my God was with me, and that gave me courage. So I gathered some leaders from Israel to return to Jerusalem with me.”

### List of Leaders Returning With Ezra

**8** These are the names of the family leaders and the other people who came with me to Jerusalem from Babylon. We came to Jerusalem during the rule of King Artaxerxes. Here is the list of names:

<sup>2</sup>from the descendants of Phinehas: Gershom; from the descendants of Ithamar: Daniel; from the descendants of David: Hattush;

<sup>3</sup>from the descendants of Shecaniah: the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah and 150 other men;

††7:22 **3400 kilogrammes** Literally, “100 talents”.

‡‡7:22 **10,000 kilogrammes** Literally, “100 cors”.

¶¶7:22 **2200 litres** Literally, “100 baths”.

§§7:27 Here, the text changes from Aramaic back to Hebrew.

- <sup>4</sup> from the descendants of Pahath Moab: Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah and 200 other men;
- <sup>5</sup> from the descendants of Zattu: Shecaniah son of Jahaziel and 300 other men;
- <sup>6</sup> from the descendants of Adin: Ebed son of Jonathan and 50 other men;
- <sup>7</sup> from the descendants of Elam: Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah and 70 other men;
- <sup>8</sup> from the descendants of Shephatiah: Zebadiah son of Michael and 80 other men;
- <sup>9</sup> from the descendants of Joab: Obadiah son of Jehiel and 218 other men;
- <sup>10</sup> from the descendants of Bani: Shelomith son of Josiphiah and 160 other men;
- <sup>11</sup> from the descendants of Bebai: Zechariah son of Bebai and 28 other men;
- <sup>12</sup> from the descendants of Azgad: Johanan son of Hakkatan and 110 other men;
- <sup>13</sup> from the descendants of Adonikam (the last family to leave): Eliphelet, Jeuel, Shemaiah and 60 other men;
- <sup>14</sup> from the descendants of Bigvai: Uthai, Zaccur and 70 other men.

### The Return to Jerusalem

<sup>15</sup>I, Ezra, called all these people to meet together at the river that flows towards Ahava. We camped at that place for three days. I carefully looked over the priests in the group, but there were no Levites. <sup>16</sup>So I called these leaders: Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam. I also called two teachers, Joiarib and Elnathan. <sup>17</sup>I sent the men to Iddo, leader in the town of Casiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and his relatives, who were Temple workers now

living in Casiphia. I told the men to ask Iddo and his relatives to send us workers to serve in God's Temple. <sup>18</sup>Because God was with us, they sent Sherebiah, a skilled man from the descendants of Mahli. (Mahli was a son of Levi, one of Israel's sons.) They also sent his sons and brothers, 18 men in all. <sup>19</sup>They also sent Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, along with their brothers and nephews. In all, there were 20 men. <sup>20</sup>Besides these, there were 220 Temple workers whose ancestors had been chosen by David and his officials to help the Levites. The names of all these men were written on the list.

<sup>21</sup>There, near the Ahava River, I announced that we should all fast to humble ourselves before our God. We wanted to ask God to give us a safe journey and to protect us, our children and everything we owned. <sup>22</sup>I didn't want to ask King Artaxerxes for protection because of what we had told him. We had said, "Our God is with everyone who trusts him, but he is very angry with everyone who turns away from him." So I was embarrassed to ask the king to send soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on our journey. <sup>23</sup>So we fasted and prayed to our God about our journey. And he answered our prayers.

<sup>24</sup>Then I chose twelve of the priests who were leaders. I chose Sherebiah, Hashabiah and ten other priests. <sup>25</sup>I weighed the silver, gold and the other things that were given for God's Temple. I gave them to the twelve priests I had chosen. King Artaxerxes, his advisers, his important officials and all the Israelites in Babylon had given those things for God's Temple. <sup>26</sup>I weighed all these things. There were 22 tonnes\* of silver. There were also 3400 kilo-

\*8:26 22 tonnes Literally, "650 talents".

grammes<sup>†</sup> of silver utensils. There were 3400 kilogrammes of gold.<sup>27</sup> And I gave them 20 gold bowls. The bowls weighed more than 8 kilogrammes.<sup>‡</sup> And I gave them two beautiful dishes made from polished bronze that were as valuable as gold.<sup>28</sup> Then I said to the twelve priests: “You and these things are holy to the LORD. People gave this silver and gold to the LORD, the God of your ancestors.<sup>29</sup> So guard these things carefully. You are responsible for them until you weigh them in front of the leading priests, the Levites and the family leaders of Israel in Jerusalem. You will weigh these things at the storeroom of the LORD’s Temple in Jerusalem.”

<sup>30</sup> So the priests and Levites accepted the silver, gold and other objects that Ezra had weighed and given to them. They were told to take them to God’s Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>31</sup> On the twelfth day of the first month,<sup>¶</sup> we left the Ahava River and started towards Jerusalem. God was with us, and he protected us from enemies and robbers along the way.<sup>32</sup> When we arrived in Jerusalem, we rested there for three days.<sup>33</sup> On the fourth day, we went to the Temple and weighed the silver, gold and other objects. We gave them to Meremoth son of Uriah the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with Meremoth. The Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua, and Noadiah son of Binui were with them also.<sup>34</sup> We counted and weighed everything, and we wrote down the total weight.

<sup>35</sup> Then the Jewish people who had returned from captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel. They offered twelve bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, 77

male lambs and twelve male goats for a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD.

<sup>36</sup> Then the people gave the letter from King Artaxerxes to the regional rulers and to the governors of the area west of the Euphrates River. Then the leaders gave their support to the Israelites and to the Temple.

### Marriages to Non-Jewish People

**9** After we finished all these things, the leaders of the Israelites came to me and said, “Ezra, the Israelites have not kept themselves separate from the other people living around us. And the priests and the Levites have not kept themselves separate. The Israelites are being influenced by disgusting things done by the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites.<sup>2</sup> The Israelite men have found wives for themselves and their sons from among the people living around us. The Israelites are supposed to be special, but now they are mixed with the other people living around them. And the Israelite leaders and officials are the ones who have led the way in doing this.”<sup>3</sup> When I heard about this, I tore my robe and my coat to show I was upset. I pulled hair from my head and beard. I sat down, shocked and upset.<sup>4</sup> Then everyone who respected God’s Law shook with fear. They were afraid because the Israelites who had returned from captivity were not faithful to God. I was shocked and upset. I sat there until the evening sacrifice, and the people gathered around me.

<sup>5</sup> Then, when it was time for the evening sacrifice, I got up from where

<sup>†</sup>8:26 **3400 kilogrammes** Literally, “100 talents”.

<sup>‡</sup>8:27 **8 kilogrammes** Literally, “1000 darics”.

<sup>¶</sup>8:31 **first month** That is, March–April, 458 BC.

I had been sitting in shame and sorrow. My robe and coat were torn, and I fell on my knees with my hands lifted up to the LORD my God. <sup>6</sup>Then I prayed:

“My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to look at you. I am ashamed because our sins are higher than our heads. Our guilt has reached all the way up to the heavens. <sup>7</sup>We have been guilty of many sins from the days of our ancestors until now. We sinned, so our kings and priests were punished. Foreign kings attacked us and took our people away. They took away our wealth and made us ashamed. It is the same even today.

<sup>8</sup>“But now, finally, you have been kind to us. You have let a few of us escape captivity and return to live in this holy place. LORD, you gave us new life and relief from our slavery. <sup>9</sup>Yes, we were slaves, but you would not let us be slaves forever. You were kind to us. You made the kings of Persia be kind to us. Your Temple was ruined, but you gave us new life so that we could rebuild your Temple and repair it like new. God, you helped us build a wall to protect Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup>“Now, God, what can we say to you? We have stopped obeying you again. <sup>11</sup>You used your servants the prophets to give these commands to us. You said, “The land you are going to live in and own is a ruined land. It has been ruined by disgusting things the people living there have done. They have done very bad things everywhere in this land. They have made this land dirty with their sins. <sup>12</sup>So Israelites, don’t let your children marry their children. Don’t join them. Don’t want the things they have. Obey my commands so

that you will be strong and enjoy the good things of the land. And then you can keep this land and give it to your children.’

<sup>13</sup>“What has happened to us is our own fault. We have done evil things, and we have much guilt. But you, our God, have punished us much less than we deserve. And you have even allowed some of our people to escape captivity. <sup>14</sup>So we know that we must not break your commands. We must not marry these people who do such disgusting things. God, if we continue to do this, we know you will destroy us. Then there would be no one from the Israelites left alive.

<sup>15</sup>“LORD, God of Israel, you are good, and you have even let some of us live. Yes, we are guilty, and because of our guilt, not one of us should be allowed to stand before you.”

### The People Confess Their Sin

**10** Ezra was praying and confessing. He was crying and bowing down in front of God’s Temple. While Ezra was doing that, a large group of the Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They were crying loudly. <sup>2</sup>Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, spoke to Ezra and said, “We have not been faithful to our God. We have married the people living around us. But, even though we have done this, there is still hope for Israel. <sup>3</sup>Now let us make an agreement before our God to send away all these women and their children. We will do that to follow the advice of Ezra and the people who respect the laws of our God. We will obey God’s law. <sup>4</sup>Get up, Ezra. This is your responsibility, but we will support you. So be brave and do it.”

<sup>5</sup> So Ezra got up. He made the leading priests, the Levites and all the Israelites promise to do what he said. <sup>6</sup> Then Ezra went away from the front of God's Temple. He went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While Ezra was there, he didn't eat food or drink water. He did that because he was still very sad. He was very sad about the Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem. <sup>7</sup> Then he sent a message everywhere in Judah and Jerusalem. The message told all the Jewish people who had returned from captivity to meet together in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> Those who did not come to Jerusalem in three days like the officials and leaders said would lose their property and be removed from the group.

<sup>9</sup> So in three days all the people from the families of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month,<sup>§</sup> all the people met together in the Temple courtyard. They were very upset because of the reason for the meeting and because of the heavy rain. <sup>10</sup> Then Ezra the priest stood and said to them, "You have not been faithful to God. You have married foreign women. You have made Israel more guilty by doing that. <sup>11</sup> Now you must confess your sins to the LORD, the God of your ancestors. You must obey his command. Separate yourselves from the people living around you and from your foreign wives."

<sup>12</sup> Then the whole group who met together answered Ezra. They shouted, "Ezra, you are right! We must do what you say. <sup>13</sup> But there are many people here. It is the rainy time of the year, so we cannot stay outside. And this problem cannot be solved in a day or two

because we have sinned in a very bad way. <sup>14</sup> Let our leaders decide for the whole group meeting here. Then let every man in our towns who married a foreign woman come here to Jerusalem at a planned time. Let them come here with the leaders and judges of their towns. Then God will stop being angry with us."

<sup>15</sup> Only a few men were against this plan. They were Jonathan son of Asahel, Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite.

<sup>16</sup> So the Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem accepted the plan. Ezra the priest chose men who were family leaders from each tribe. Each man was chosen by name. On the first day of the tenth month,<sup>\*\*</sup> the men who were chosen sat down to study each of the cases. <sup>17</sup> And by the first day of the first month,<sup>††</sup> they had finished discussing all the men who had married foreign women.

#### List of Men Who Married Foreign Women

<sup>18</sup> These are the names of the descendants of the priests who married foreign women:

From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and Jeshua's brothers, these men: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah. <sup>19</sup> All of them promised to divorce their wives. And then each one of them offered a ram from the flock for a guilt offering. They did that because of their guilt.

<sup>20</sup> From the descendants of Immer, these men: Hanani and Zebadiah.

<sup>21</sup> From the descendants of Harim, these men: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uziah.

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§**10:9 ninth month** That is, November–December.

\*\***10:16 tenth month** That is, December–January.

††**10:17 first month** That is, March–April.

<sup>22</sup>From the descendants of Pashhur, these men: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah.

<sup>23</sup>Among the Levites:

Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer.

<sup>24</sup>Among the singers: Eliashib.

Among the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri.

<sup>25</sup>Among the Israelites:

From the descendants of Parosh, these men: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah and Benaiah.

<sup>26</sup>From the descendants of Elam, these men: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah.

<sup>27</sup>From the descendants of Zattu, these men: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza.

<sup>28</sup>From the descendants of Bebai, these men: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai.

<sup>29</sup>From the descendants of Bani, these men: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal and Jeremoth.

<sup>30</sup>From the descendants of Pahath Moab, these men: Adna, Kelal, Be-

naiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh.

<sup>31</sup>From the descendants of Harim, these men: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, <sup>32</sup>Benjamin, Mal-luch and Shemariah.

<sup>33</sup>From the descendants of Hashum, these men: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh and Shimei.

<sup>34</sup>From the descendants of Bani, these men: Maadai, Amram, Uel, <sup>35</sup>Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, <sup>36</sup>Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, <sup>37</sup>Mattaniah, Mattenai and Jaasu.

<sup>38</sup>From the descendants of Binnui, these men: Shimei, <sup>39</sup>Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, <sup>40</sup>Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, <sup>41</sup>Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, <sup>42</sup>Shallum, Amariah and Joseph.

<sup>43</sup>From the descendants of Nebo, these men: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel and Benaiah.

<sup>44</sup>All these men married foreign women, and some of them had children with these wives.