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Ezra

Cyrus Helps the Prisoners Return

1 During the first year* that Cyrus was king of Persia, the Lord encouraged Cyrus to make an announcement. Cyrus put that announcement in writing and had it read every place in his kingdom. This happened so that the Lord's message that was spoken through Jeremiah* would truly happen. This is the announcement:

²"From Cyrus king of Persia:

The Lord, the God of heaven, gave all the kingdoms on earth to me. And the Lord chose me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in the country of Judah. ³The Lord is the God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem. If any of God's people are living among you, then I pray God will bless them. You must let them go to Jerusalem in the country of Judah. You must let them go build the Lord's temple. ⁴And so in any place where there might be survivors* of Israel, the men in that place must support those survivors. Give those people silver, gold, cows, and other things. Give them gifts for God's temple in Jerusalem."

⁵So the family leaders from the family groups of Judah and Benjamin prepared to go up to Jerusalem. They were going to Jerusalem to build the Lord's temple. Also, every person that God had encouraged got ready to go to Jerusalem. ⁶All their neighbors gave them many gifts. They gave

them silver, gold, cows, and other expensive things. Their neighbors freely gave them all those things. ⁷Also, King Cyrus brought out the things that belonged in the Lord's temple. Nebuchadnezzar had taken those things away from Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar had put those things in his temple where he kept his false gods. ⁸Cyrus king of Persia told the man that keeps his money to bring those things out. That man's name was Mithredath. So Mithredath brought those things out to Sheshbazzar,* the leader of Judah.

⁹Those things from the Lord's temple that Mithredath brought out:

	gold dishes	30
	silver dishes	1,000
	knives and pans	29
¹⁰	gold bowls	30
	silver bowls like the gold bowls	410
	other dishes	1,000

¹¹All together, there were 5,400 things made from gold and silver. Sheshbazzar* brought all these things with him when the prisoners left Babylon and went back to Jerusalem.

The List of the Prisoners That Returned

2 These are the people of the province that came back from captivity. In the past, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took these people as prisoners to Babylon. These people came back to Jerusalem and Judah. Each person went back to his own town. ²These are the people who returned with Zerubbabel:* Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah,

first year That is, 538 B.C.

Lord's message ... Jeremiah See Jer. 25:12-14.

survivors People who escaped some disaster. Here this means the Jewish people who survived the destruction of Judah and Israel by its enemy armies.

Sheshbazzar This is probably the man named Zerubbabel, a name that means "Stranger in Babylon," or "He left Babylon." Sheshbazzar is probably his Aramaic name.

Zerubbabel He is also called Sheshbazzar.

EZRA 2:3–61**550**

Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. This is the list of names and numbers of men from Israel that came back:

3	The descendants of Parosh	2,172
4	the descendants of Shephatiah	372
5	the descendants of Arah	775
6	the descendants of Pahath Moab of the family of Jeshua and Joab	2,812
7	the descendants of Elam	1,254
8	the descendants of Zattu	945
9	the descendants of Zaccai	760
10	the descendants of Bani	642
11	the descendants of Bebai	623
12	the descendants of Azgad	1,222
13	the descendants of Adonikam	666
14	the descendants of Bigvai	2,056
15	the descendants of Adin	454
16	the descendants of Ater through the family of Hezekiah	98
17	the descendants of Bezai	323
18	the descendants of Jorah	112
19	the descendants of Hashum	223
20	the descendants of Gibbar	95
21	from the town of Bethlehem	123
22	from the town of Netophah	56
23	from the town of Anathoth	128
24	from the town of Azmaveth	42
25	from the towns of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth	743
26	from the towns of Ramah and Geba	621
27	from the town of Micmash	122
28	from the towns of Bethel and Ai	223
29	from the town of Nebo	52
30	from the town of Magbish	156
31	from the other town named Elam	1,254
32	from the town of Harim	320
33	from the towns of Lod, Hadid, and Ono	725
34	from the town of Jericho	345
35	from the town of Senaah	3,630

³⁶These are the priests:

	the descendants of Jedaiah through the family of Jeshua	973
37	the descendants of Immer	1,052
38	the descendants of Pashhur	1,247

³⁹ the descendants of Harim 1,017

⁴⁰These are the people from the family group of Levi:

	The descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel through the family of Hodaviah	74
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⁴¹These are the singers:

	The descendants of Asaph	128
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⁴²These are the descendants of the temple gatekeepers:

	The descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai	139
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⁴³These are the descendants of the special temple servants:

	Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,
44	Keros, Siaha, Padon,
45	Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub,
46	Hagab, Shalmai, Hanan,
47	Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah,
48	Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam,
49	Uzza, Paseah, Besai,
50	Asnah, Meunim, Nephussim,
51	Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,
52	Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,
53	Barkos, Sisera, Temah,
54	Neziah, and Hatipha.

⁵⁵These are the descendants of Solomon's servants:

	Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda,
56	Jaala, Darkon, Giddel,
57	Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth Hazzebaim,
	and Ami
58	The temple servants and descendants
	of Solomon's servants
	392

⁵⁹Some people came to Jerusalem from these towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer. But these people could not prove that their families were from the family of Israel:

60	The descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda	652
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⁶¹From the family of priests there were the descendants of:

Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai (If a man married a daughter of Barzillai from

Gilead, that man was counted as a descendant of Barzillai.)

⁶²These people searched for their family histories, but they could not find them. Their names were not included in the list of priests. They could not prove that their ancestors were priests, so they could not serve as priests. ⁶³The governor ordered these people not to eat any of the holy food. They could not eat any of this food until there was a priest who could use the Urim and Thummim* to ask God what to do.

^{64–65}All together, there were 42,360 people in the group that came back. This is not counting their 7,337 men and women servants. They also had 200 men and women singers with them. ^{66–67}They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

⁶⁸That group arrived at the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Then the family leaders gave their gifts for building the Lord's temple. They would build the new temple in the same place as the temple that was destroyed. ⁶⁹Those people gave as much as they were able. These are the things those people gave for building the temple: 1,100 pounds* of gold, 3 tons* of silver, and 100 coats that priests wear.

⁷⁰So 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 people of Israel settled in their own home towns.

Rebuilding the Altar

3 So, by the seventh month,* the people of Israel 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. ²Then 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. Those people built the altar of the God of Israel so they could offer sacrifices on it. They built it just like it says in the Law of Moses. Moses was God's special servant.

³Those people 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 those sacrifices in the morning and in the evening. ⁴Then they celebrated the Festival of Shelters* just like the Law [of Moses] said. They offered the right number of burnt offerings for each day of the festival. ⁵After that, they began offering the continual burnt offerings each day, the offerings for the New Moon, and for all the other festivals and holidays that were commanded by the Lord. The people also began giving any other gifts they wanted to give to the Lord. ⁶So, on the first day of the seventh month,* these people of Israel again began offering sacrifices to the Lord. This was done even though the temple had not been built again.

Rebuilding the Temple

⁷Then those people who had come back from captivity gave money to the stonecutters and carpenters. And those people gave food, wine, and olive oil. They used these things to pay the people of Tyre and Sidon to bring cedar logs from Lebanon. Those people wanted to bring the logs in ships to the sea coast town of Joppa like [Solomon did when he built] the first temple. Cyrus king of Persia gave permission for them to do these things.

⁸So, in the second month* of the second year after their arrival at the temple in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak began the work. Their brothers, the priests, Levites, and every person that came back to Jerusalem from captivity, began working with them. They chose Levites

Urim and Thummim Special stones that the High Priest wore in the judgement pouch. They were used to get decisions from God. See Ex. 28:30.

1,100 pounds Or, about 500kg. Literally, "61,000 drachmas."

3 tons Or, 3,000kg. Literally, "5,000 minas."

seventh month This was September-October, 538 B.C.

Festival of Shelters A festival in the seventh month to give thanks for the harvest. It continued for seven days. See Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:34–36, 43.

second month That is, April-May, 536 B.C.

that were 20 years old and older to be the leaders in the building of the Lord's temple. ⁹These were the men who supervised the work of building the Lord's temple: Jeshua and his sons, Kadmiel and his sons (the descendants of Judah), the sons of Henadad and their brothers, the Levites. ¹⁰The builders finished laying the foundation for the Lord's temple. When the foundation was finished, the priests put on their priests' 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 David, king of Israel, ordered in the past. ¹¹They sang the response songs* *Songs of Praise* and *Praise the Lord Because He is Good. His True Love Continues Forever*. And then all the people cheered—they gave a loud shout and praised the Lord. They did this because the foundation of the Lord's temple had been laid.

¹²But many of the older priests, Levites, and family leaders cried. Why? Because those older people had seen the first temple—and they remembered how beautiful it was. They cried out loud when they saw the new temple. They cried while many of the other people were happy and shouting. ¹³The sound could be heard far away. All those people made so much noise that no person could tell the difference between the shouts of joy and the crying.

Enemies Against Rebuilding the Temple

4¹⁻²Many people living in the area were against the people of Judah and Benjamin. Those enemies heard that the people that had come from captivity were building a temple for the Lord God of Israel. So those enemies came to Zerubbabel and to the family leaders and said, "Let us help you build. We are the same as you, we ask your God for help. We have offered sacrifices to your God since the time Esarhaddon king of Assyria brought us here."

³But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other family leaders of Israel answered, "No, you people can't 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, the king of Persia, commanded us to do."

⁴[This made those people angry.] So those people started bothering the Jews. They tried to discourage them and stop them from building the temple. ⁵Those enemies hired government officials to work against the people of Judah. Those officials constantly did things to stop the Jews' plans to build the temple. This continued the whole time that Cyrus was the king of Persia until Darius became the king of Persia.

⁶Those enemies even wrote letters to the king of Persia trying to stop the Jews. They wrote a letter the year that Xerxes* became the king of Persia.

Enemies Against Rebuilding Jerusalem

⁷And later, at the time Artaxerxes* became the new king of Persia, some of those men wrote another letter complaining about the Jews. The men who wrote the letter were: Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the other people in their group. They wrote the letter to King Artaxerxes in Aramaic* using the Aramaic way of writing.

⁸* 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:

⁹From 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 Elamite people from Susa, ¹⁰and from the other people that the great and powerful Ashurbanipal moved to the city of Samaria and other places in the country west of the Euphrates River.

Xerxes King of Persia about 485–465 B.C.

Artaxerxes King of Persia about 465–424 B.C. He was the son of Xerxes.

Aramaic The official language of the Babylonian empire.

Verse 8 Here the original language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic.

response songs Songs where one group (Levites) sang one part and the other group (the people) responded with another part. Here these are probably Psalms 111–118 and Psalm 136.

¹¹This is the copy of the letter sent to King Artaxerxes.*

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

¹²King Artaxerxes, we wish to inform you that the Jews you sent away from you have come here. Those Jews are now trying to build that city again. Jerusalem is a bad city. The people in that city have always rebelled against other kings. Now those Jews are fixing the foundations and building the walls.*

¹³Also, King Artaxerxes, you should know that if Jerusalem and its walls are built again, the people of Jerusalem will stop paying their taxes. They will stop sending money to honor you. They also will stop paying duty taxes. And the king will lose all that money.

¹⁴We have a responsibility to the king. We don't want to see those things happen. So we are sending this letter to inform the king.

¹⁵King Artaxerxes, we suggest that you search the writings of the kings that ruled before you. You will see in those writings that Jerusalem always rebelled against other kings. It has caused much trouble for other kings and nations. Many rebellions have started in this city since ancient times! That is why Jerusalem was destroyed!

¹⁶King Artaxerxes, we wish to inform you that if this city and its walls are built again, you will lose control of the area west of the Euphrates River.

¹⁷Then King Artaxerxes* sent this answer:

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

King Artaxerxes King of Persia about 465–424 B.C. He was the son of Xerxes.

building the walls This was a way of protecting a city, but these men wanted the king to think that the Jews were preparing to rebel against the king.

Greetings.

¹⁸The letter you sent us has been translated and read to me. ¹⁹I gave an order for the writings of the kings before me to be searched. The writings were read, and we found out that Jerusalem has a long history of rebellion against kings. Jerusalem has been a place where rebellion and revolt has happened often. ²⁰Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over it and over the whole area west of the Euphrates River. Taxes and money to honor kings, and duty taxes have been paid to those kings.

²¹Now, you must give an order for those men to stop work. That order must be given to keep Jerusalem from being built again until I say so. ²²Be careful not to overlook this business. We should not let the building of Jerusalem continue. If that work continues, I will not get any more money from Jerusalem.

²³So a copy of 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 the Jews to stop building.

The Work on the Temple Stopped

²⁴So the work stopped on God's temple* in Jerusalem. The work did not continue until Darius' second year* as king of Persia.

5 At that time, the prophets Haggai* and Zechariah son of Iddo* began to prophesy* in the name of God. They encouraged the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. ²So Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak again started working on the temple in Jerusalem. All of God's prophets were with them and were supporting the work. ³At that time Tattenai was the governor of the area west of

worked stopped ... temple 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.

Darius' second year That is, 520 B.C.

Haggai See Haggai 1:1.

Zechariah son of Iddo See Zechariah 1:1.

prophesy To speak for God.

the Euphrates River. Tattenai, Shethar Bozenai, and the men with them went to Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the others that were building. Tattenai and the people with him asked Zerubbabel and the people with him, “Who gave you permission to build this temple again and fix it like new?” ⁴They also asked Zerubbabel, “What are the names of the men who are working on this building?”

⁵But 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.

⁶Tattenai the governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, Shethar Bozenai, and the important people with them sent a letter to King Darius. ⁷This is a copy of that letter:

To King Darius, greetings

⁸King Darius, you should know that we went to the province 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.

⁹We asked their leaders some questions about the work they are doing. We asked them, “Who gave you permission to build this temple again and fix it like new?”

¹⁰We also asked for their names. We wanted to write down the names of their leaders so you would know who they are.

¹¹This is the answer they gave us:

“We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are building again the temple that a great king of Israel built and finished many years ago. ¹²But our ancestors made the God of heaven angry. So God gave our ancestors to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed this temple, and he forced the people to go to Babylon as prisoners. ¹³But, in the first year that Cyrus was king of Babylon, King Cyrus gave a special order for God’s temple to

be built again. ¹⁴And Cyrus brought out from his false god’s temple in Babylon the gold and silver things that were taken from God’s temple in the past. Nebuchadnezzar took those things from the temple in Jerusalem and brought them to his false god’s temple in Babylon. Then King Cyrus gave those gold and silver things to Sheshbazzar.* Cyrus chose Sheshbazzar to be governor.”

¹⁵Then Cyrus said to Sheshbazzar,* “Take these gold and silver things and put them back in the temple in Jerusalem. Build again God’s temple in the same place it was in the past.”

¹⁶So 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.

¹⁷Now, 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 build again God’s temple in Jerusalem. And then, sir, please send us a letter to let us know what you have decided to do about this.

The Order of Darius

6 So King Darius gave an order to search the writings of the kings before him. Those writings were kept in Babylon in the same place the money was kept. ²A scroll* was found in the fortress* of Ecbatana. Ecbatana is in the province of Media. This is what was written on that scroll:

Official Note: ³During Cyrus’ first year as king, Cyrus gave an order about the temple of God in Jerusalem. The order said:

Let the temple of God be built again. It will be a place to offer sacrifices. Let its foundations be built. The temple must

Sheshbazzar This is probably the man named Zerubbabel, a name that means “Stranger in Babylon,” or “He left Babylon.” Sheshbazzar is probably his Aramaic name.

scrolls A long roll of leather or papyrus (*paper*) used for writing books, letters, and legal documents.

fortress A building or city with tall, strong walls for protection.

be 90 feet* high and 90 feet wide. ⁴The wall around it_j must have three rows of large stones and one row of big wood timbers. The cost of building the temple must be paid for from the king's treasury. ⁵Also, the gold and silver things from God's temple must be put back in their places. Nebuchadnezzar took those things from the temple in Jerusalem and brought them to Babylon. They must be put back in God's temple.

⁶Now then, I, Darius, order you Tattenai, governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar Bozenai, and all the officials living in that province, to stay away from Jerusalem. ⁷Don't bother the workers. Don't try to stop the work on this temple of God. Let the Jewish governor and the Jewish leaders build it again. Let them build God's temple again in the same place it was in the past.

⁸Now I give this order. You must do these things for the Jewish leaders building God's temple: The cost of the building must be fully paid from the king's treasury. That money will come from the taxes collected from the provinces in the area west of the Euphrates River. Do these things quickly, so the work will not stop. ⁹Give those people anything they need. If they need young bulls, rams, or male lambs for sacrifices to the God of Heaven, give those things to them. If the priests of Jerusalem ask for wheat, salt, wine, and oil, then give those things to them every day without fail. ¹⁰Give those things to the Jewish priests so that they may offer sacrifices that please the God of Heaven. Give those things so that the priests may pray for me and my sons.

¹¹Also, I give this order: If any person changes this order, a wood beam must be pulled from that person's house. Then the wooden beam will be pushed through

that person's body. And his house will be destroyed until it is only a pile of rocks.

¹²God put his name there in Jerusalem. And I hope that God will defeat any king or other person that tries to change this order. If any person tries to destroy this temple in Jerusalem, I hope God will destroy that person.

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

Completion and Dedication of the Temple

¹³So, Tattenai the governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, Shethar Bozenai, and the men with them obeyed King Darius' order. Those men obeyed the order quickly and completely. ¹⁴So the Jewish elders (*leaders*) continued to build. And they were successful as Haggai the prophet and Zechariah son of Iddo encouraged them. Those people finished building the temple. This was done to obey the command of the God of Israel. It was also done to obey the orders that Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, the kings of Persia, gave. ¹⁵The temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar.* That was in the sixth year of the rule of King Darius.*

¹⁶Then the people of Israel celebrated the dedication* of God's temple with much happiness. The priests, the Levites, and all the other people that came back from captivity joined in the celebration.

¹⁷This is the way they dedicated* God's temple: They offered 100 bulls, 200 rams, and 400 male lambs. And they offered twelve male goats for all Israel for a sin offering. That is one goat for each of the twelve family groups of Israel. ¹⁸Then 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 just like it says in the *Book of Moses*.

third ... Adar That is, February-March. Some ancient writers have "23rd of Adar."

sixth ... Darius That is, 515 B.C.

dedication, dedicated(d) To give something for a special use, or to honor it for a special reason.

The Passover

¹⁹* On the fourteenth day of the first month,* those Jews that came back from captivity celebrated the Passover.* ²⁰The priests and Levites made themselves pure. They all made themselves clean and ready to celebrate the Passover. The Levites killed the Passover lamb for all the Jews that came back from captivity. They did that for their brothers the priests, and for themselves. ²¹So all the people of Israel that came back 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. Those pure people also shared in the Passover meal. Those people did this so they could go to the Lord, the God of Israel, for help. ²²They celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread* with much joy for seven days. The Lord made them very happy because he had changed the attitude of the king of Assyria.* So the king of Assyria had helped them do the work on God's temple.

Ezra Comes to Jerusalem

7 After these things,* during the rule of Artaxerxes* king 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. ²Hilkiah was the son of Shallum. Shallum was the son of Zadok. Zadok was the son of Ahitub. ³Ahitub was the son of Amariah. Amariah was the son of Azariah. Azariah was the son of Meraioth.

Verse 19 Here, the original language changes from Aramaic back to Hebrew.

first month That is, March-April, 515 B.C.

Passover Important holy day for Jews. They ate a special meal on this day every year to remember that God freed them from slavery in Egypt in the time of Moses.

unclean Not pure or not acceptable for worship. See Lev. 11–15 for the laws about uncleanness.

Festival of Unleavened Bread Same as Passover Festival, the most important holy day for Jews. On this day they ate a special meal with bread that was made without yeast.

king of Assyria This probably means Darius, the king of Persia.

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.

Artaxerxes King of Persia about 465–424 B.C. He was the son of Xerxes.

⁴Meraioth was the son of Zerariah. Zerariah was the son of Uzzi. Uzzi was the son of Bukki. ⁵Bukki 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.

⁶Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon. Ezra was a teacher.* He 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. ⁷[Many people of Israel came with Ezra.] Those were priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants. Those people of Israel arrived in Jerusalem during the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month* of the seventh year that Artaxerxes was king. ⁹Ezra [and the group with him] left Babylon on the first day of the first month. He arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. The Lord God was with Ezra. ¹⁰Ezra gave all his time and attention to studying and obeying the Law of the Lord. Ezra wanted to teach the rules and commandments of the Lord to the people of Israel. And he also wanted to help the people follow those laws in Israel.

King Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra

¹¹Ezra was a priest and teacher. He knew much about the commands and laws the Lord gave Israel. This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes* gave to Ezra the teacher:

¹²* From King Artaxerxes,

To Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of Heaven:

Greetings! ¹³I give this order: Any person, priest, or Levite from Israel living in my kingdom that wants to go with Ezra to Jerusalem, may go.

teacher Literally, "scribe." This was a person that made copies of books. These men studied those books and became teachers.

fifth month This was July-August, 458 B.C.

Verse 12 The text changes from Hebrew to Aramaic here.

¹⁴Ezra, I and my seven advisers send you. You must go to Judah and Jerusalem. See how your people are doing in obeying the Law of your God. You have that Law with you.

¹⁵I and my advisers are giving gold and silver to the God of Israel. God lives in Jerusalem. You must take this gold and silver with you. ¹⁶You must also go through all the provinces of Babylonia. Collect the gifts from your people, from the priests, and from the Levites. Those gifts are for their God's temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁷Use this money to buy bulls, rams, and male lambs. Buy the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with those sacrifices. Then sacrifice them on the altar in the temple of your God in Jerusalem. ¹⁸Then you and the other Jews may spend the silver and gold left over any way you want to. Use it in a way that is pleasing to your God. ¹⁹Take all those things to the God of Jerusalem. Those things are for the worship in the temple of your God. ²⁰And 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 you need.

²¹Now 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. ²²Give this much to Ezra: 3 3/4 tons* of silver, 600 bushels* of wheat, 600 gallons* of wine, 600 gallons of olive oil, and as much salt as Ezra wants. ²³Anything that the God of Heaven has ordered for Ezra to get, you must give to Ezra quickly and completely. Do those things for the temple of the God of Heaven. We don't

want God to be angry against my kingdom or against my sons.

²⁴I 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. Those people don't have to pay taxes, money to honor the king, or any duty taxes. ²⁵Ezra, I give you the authority to use the wisdom you have from your God and 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 if someone doesn't know those laws, those judges must teach him about those laws. ²⁶Any person that doesn't 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 put into prison.

Ezra Praises God

- ²⁷* Blessed is the Lord,
the God of our ancestors.
God put the idea into the king's heart
to honor the Lord's temple in
Jerusalem.
- ²⁸ The Lord showed his true love to me
in front of the king, his advisers
and the king's important officials.
The Lord God was with me,
so I was brave.
I gathered together the leaders of Israel
to go with me to Jerusalem.

List of Leaders Returning With Ezra

8 These are the names of the family leaders and the other people that came with me (*Ezra*) to Jerusalem from Babylon. We came to Jerusalem during the rule of King Artaxerxes. Here is the list of names: ²From the descendants of Phinehas, was Gershom; from the descendants of Ithamar, was Daniel;

3 3/4 tons Or, 3,400kg. Literally, "100 talents (kikars)."

600 bushels Or, 22,000 l. Literally, "100 cors."

600 gallons Or, 2,200 l. Literally, "100 baths."

Verse 27 The text changes from Aramaic to Hebrew here.

from the descendants of David, was Hattush;³ from the descendants of Shecaniah, were the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and 150 other men;⁴ from the descendants of Pahath Moab, were Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, and 200 other men;⁵ from the descendants of Zattu, were Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and 300 other men;⁶ from the descendants of Adin, were Ebed son of Jonathan, and 50 other men;⁷ from the descendants of Elam, were Jeshaiah son of Athaliah, and 70 other men;⁸ from the descendants of Shephatiah, were Zebadiah son of Michael, and 80 other men;⁹ from the descendants of Joab, were Obadiah son of Jehiel, and 218 other men;¹⁰ from the descendants of Bani, were Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and 160 other men;¹¹ from the descendants of Bebai, were Zechariah son of Bebai, and 28 other men;¹² from the descendants of Azgad, were Johanan son of Hakkatan, and 110 other men;¹³ from the last of the descendants of Adonikam were Eliphelet, Jeuel, Shemaiah, and 60 other men;¹⁴ from the descendants of Bigvai, were Uthai, Zaccur, and 70 other men.

The Return to Jerusalem

¹⁵I, (*Ezra*) called all those people to meet together at the river that flows toward Ahava. We camped at that place for three days. I learned there were priests in that group, but there were no Levites. ¹⁶So I called these leaders: Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And I called Joiarib and Elnathan. (These men were teachers.) ¹⁷I sent those men to Iddo. Iddo is the leader at the town of Casiphia. I told those men what to say to Iddo and his relatives. His relatives are the temple workers in Casiphia. I sent those men to Iddo so that Iddo might send us workers to serve in God's temple. ¹⁸Because God was with us, Iddo's relatives sent these men to us:

Sherebiah, a wise man from the descendants of Mahli (Mahli was one of Levi's sons. Levi was one of Israel's sons. They also sent his sons and brothers. In all there were 18 men from that family);

¹⁹ Hashabiah and Jeshaiah from the descendants of Merari (They also sent their brothers and nephews. In all there were 20 men from that family.);
²⁰ 220 of the temple workers (Their ancestors were the people David and the important officials had chosen to help the Levites. The names of all those men were written on the list.).

²¹There near the Ahava River, I (*Ezra*) announced that we all should fast.* We should fast to make ourselves humble before our God. We wanted to ask God for a safe trip for ourselves, our children, and for all the things we owned. ²²I was embarrassed to ask King Artaxerxes for soldiers and horsemen to protect us as we traveled. There were enemies on the road. The reason I was embarrassed to ask for protection was because of what we had told the king. We had said to King Artaxerxes, "Our God is with every person that trusts him. But God is very angry with every person that turns away from him." ²³So we fasted and prayed to our God about our trip. He answered our prayers.

²⁴Then I chose twelve of the priests that were leaders. I chose Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers. ²⁵I weighed the silver, gold, and the other things that were given for God's temple. I gave those things to the twelve priests I had chosen. King Artaxerxes, his advisers, his important officials, and all the people of Israel in Babylon gave those things for God's temple. ²⁶I weighed all these things. There were 25 tons* of silver. There were also 3 3/4 tons* of silver dishes and things. There were 3 3/4 tons of gold. ²⁷And I gave them 20 gold bowls. The bowls weighed about 19 pounds.* And I gave them two beautiful dishes made from polished bronze that were as valuable as gold. ²⁸Then I said to those twelve priests: "You and these things are holy to the Lord. People gave this silver and gold to the Lord,

fast To stop eating food for a special time of prayer and worship to God.

25 tons 22,100kg. Literally, "650 talents."

3 3/4 tons Or, 3,400kg. Literally, "100 talents."

19 pounds Or, about 8.5kg. Literally, "1,000 darics."

the God of your ancestors. ²⁹So guard these things carefully. You are responsible for them until you give them to the temple leaders in Jerusalem. You will give them to the leading Levites and the family leaders of Israel. They will weigh those things and put them in the rooms of the Lord's temple in Jerusalem.

³⁰So the priests and Levites accepted the silver, gold, and special things that Ezra had weighed and given to them. They were told to take those things to God's temple in Jerusalem.

³¹On the twelfth day of the first month* we left the Ahava River and started toward Jerusalem. God was with us, and he protected us from enemies and robbers along the way. ³²Then we arrived in Jerusalem. We rested there for three days. ³³On the fourth day, we went to the temple and weighed the silver, gold, and special things. We gave those things to Meremoth son of Uriah the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with Meremoth. And the Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui, were with them also. ³⁴We counted and weighed everything. Then we wrote down the total weight at that time.

³⁵Then the Jewish people that came back 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.

³⁶Then those people gave the letter from King Artaxerxes to the royal satraps (*leaders*) and to the governors of the area west of the Euphrates River. Then those leaders gave their support to the people of Israel and to the temple.

Marriages to Non-Jewish People

9After we finished all these things, the leaders of the people of Israel came to me. They said, "Ezra, the people of Israel have not kept themselves separate from the other people living around us. And the priests and the Levites have not kept themselves separate. The people of Israel are being influenced by

the very bad things done by the Canaanite people, the Hittite people, the Perizzite people, the Jebusite people, the Ammonite people, the Moabite people, the people from Egypt, and the Amorite people. ²The people of Israel have married the people living around us. The people of Israel are supposed to be special. But now they are mixed with the other people living around them. The leaders and important officials of the people of Israel have set a bad example in this thing." ³When 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. ⁴Then every person that respected God's Law shook with fear. They were afraid because the people of Israel that came back from captivity were not faithful to God. I was shocked and upset. I sat there until the evening sacrifice. And those people gathered around me.

⁵Then, when it was time for the evening sacrifice, I got up. I had made myself look shameful while I was sitting there. My robe and coat were torn, and I fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God. ⁶Then I prayed this prayer:

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. ⁷We have been guilty of many, 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. Those kings took away our wealth and made us ashamed. It is the same even today.

⁸But now, finally, you have been kind to us. You have let a few of us escape captivity and come to live in this holy place. Lord, you gave us new life and relief from our slavery. ⁹Yes, 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 we can build your temple again and fix it like new. God, you helped us build a wall to protect Judah and Jerusalem.

¹⁰Now, God, what can we say to you? We have stopped obeying you again! ¹¹God, you used your servants, the prophets, and gave

those commands to us. You said: “The land you are going to live in and own is a ruined land. It has been ruined by the very bad things the people living there have done. Those people have done very bad things in every place in this land. They have made this land dirty with their sins. ¹²So, people of Israel, don’t let your children marry their children. Don’t join those people! Don’t want the things they have! Obey my commands so 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.”

¹³The bad things that happened to us are our own fault. We have done evil things, and we have much guilt. But you, our God, have punished us much less than we should have been. We have done many terrible sins, and we should have been punished worse. And you have even let some of our people escape captivity. ¹⁴So we know that we must not break your commands. We must not marry those people. Those people do very bad things. God, if we continue to marry those bad people, we know you will destroy us! Then there would be no person from the people of Israel left alive.

¹⁵Lord, God of Israel, you are good! And you still have let some of us live. Yes, we are guilty! And because of our guilt, not one of us should be allowed to stand in front of 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 people of Israel—men, women, and children—gathered around him. Those people were also crying very hard. ²Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, spoke to Ezra. Shecaniah 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. ³Now let us make an agreement before our God to send away all those 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. ⁴Get up Ezra, this is

your responsibility, but we will support you. So be brave and do it.”

⁵So Ezra got up. He made the leading priests, the Levites, and all the people of Israel promise to do what he said. ⁶Then Ezra went away from the front of God’s house. Ezra went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While Ezra was there, he didn’t eat food, and he didn’t drink water. He did that because he was still very sad. He was very sad about the people of Israel that came back to Jerusalem. ⁷Then he sent a message to every place in Judah and Jerusalem. The message told all the Jewish people that had come back from captivity to meet together in Jerusalem. ⁸Any person that didn’t come to Jerusalem in three days would have to give up all his property. The important officials and the elders (*leaders*) made that decision. And that person could no longer be a member of the group of people where he was living.

⁹So, in three days all the men from the families of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month,* all the people met together in the temple yard. They were very upset because of the reason for the meeting and because of the heavy rain. ¹⁰Then Ezra the priest stood and said to those people, “You people have not been faithful to God. You have married foreign women. You have made Israel more guilty by doing that. ¹¹Now, you people must confess to the Lord that you have sinned. The Lord is the God of your ancestors. You must obey the Lord’s command. Separate yourselves from the people living around you and from your foreign wives.”

¹²Then the whole group that met together answered Ezra. They said with a loud voice: “Ezra, you are right! We must do the things you say. ¹³But there are many people here. And it is the rainy time of year, so we can’t stay outside. This problem can’t be solved in a day or two because we have sinned in a very bad way. ¹⁴Let our leaders decide for the whole group meeting here. Then let every person in our towns that married a foreign

ninth month That is, November–December.

woman come here to Jerusalem at a planned time. Let them come here with the elders (*leaders*) and judges of their towns. Then God will stop being angry at us.”

¹⁵Only a few men were against this plan. They were Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah. Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite also were against that plan.

¹⁶So the people of Israel that came back to Jerusalem agreed to accept that plan. Ezra the priest chose men that were family leaders. He chose one man from each family group. Each man was chosen by name. On the first day of the tenth month* those men that were chosen sat down to study each of the cases. ¹⁷And by the first day of the first month,* they finished discussing all the men who had married foreign women.

List of Men Who Married Foreign Women

¹⁸These are the names of the descendants of the priests that married foreign women:

From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and Jeshua’s brothers, these men: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. ¹⁹All those 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.

²⁰From the descendants of Immer, these men: Hanani and Zebadiah.

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

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

²³Among the Levites, these are the men who married foreign women: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (he is also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

²⁴Among the singers, this is the man who had married a foreign woman: Eliashib.

Among the gatekeepers, these are the men who had married foreign women: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

²⁵Among the people of Israel, these men married foreign women:

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰From the descendants of Pahath Moab, these men: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

³¹From the descendants of Harim, these men: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³²Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

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

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

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

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

⁴⁴All of those men had married foreign women. And some of them had children with those wives.

tenth month That is, December-January.

first month That is, March-April.