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Ezra

Chapter 1

¹During the first year after Cyrus, king of Persia, {conquered the kingdom of Babylon,} Yahweh motivated Cyrus to write a message. Yahweh did this in order to fulfill a prophecy that Jeremiah had spoken. Cyrus sent messengers throughout his empire with copies of the message and he ordered them to proclaim it as they went. This is what they proclaimed:

²"I, King Cyrus, rule the Persian Empire, and I say this: Yahweh, the God who is in heaven, has made me ruler over the great kingdoms of this part of the world. Now he has assigned me to {make sure that his people} build a temple for him in {the city of} Jerusalem in {the province of} Judah. ³All you people who belong to God may go up to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this temple for Yahweh. He is the God who is in Jerusalem, the God whom the people of Israel worship. And may God give you success! ⁴There are other people who are living around the Israelites in the places where the Israelites have been living since their ancestors were exiled here. Those people must contribute silver and gold to the Israelites who go. They must also give to the Israelites animals and {any} supplies {that they might need}. They should also give them other gifts that they can use to help build the temple of God in Jerusalem."

⁵Then God motivated some of the priests and Levites and {some of} the clan leaders from {the tribes of} Judah and Benjamin to return to Jerusalem. Those whom God motivated got ready to return to Jerusalem and build the temple for him there. ⁶Many of their neighbors helped them by giving them silver and golden things, animals, and supplies for the journey. They also gave them other valuable gifts, and they gave them money to buy things for building the temple. ⁷King Cyrus also commanded {his servants} to bring out the valuable things that King Nebuchadnezzar {s soldiers} had taken from the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem and had put in the temples of their gods {in Babylon}. ⁸{Specifically,} King Cyrus of Persia commanded Mithredath, his treasurer, {to command his servants} to bring out all of these items and to give each one of them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of {the group that was going to return to} Judah. ⁹This is a list of the items {that Cyrus donated}: 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 knives, ¹⁰30 gold bowls, 410 secondary silver bowls, and 1,000 other utensils. ¹¹All together, Cyrus gave 5, 400 silver and gold items to Sheshbazzar to take with him when he and the others returned from {the kingdom of} Babylon to Jerusalem.

Chapter 2

¹{Many years ago, the army of} King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had captured many Israelite people and taken them away to the kingdom of Babylon. Now, these Israelite people began to return to Judah. Some returned to Jerusalem, and some returned to other places in Judah. Each of them went to the towns where their ancestors had lived. This is a list of the groups who returned. ²The leaders of those people who returned were Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

The groups of people who returned to Judah are listed next.

³2, 172 descendants of Parosh,

⁴372 descendants of Shephatiah,

⁵775 descendants of Arach,

⁶2, 812 descendants of Pahath-Moab, from the families of Jeshua and Joab,

- ⁷1, 254 descendants of Elam,
⁸945 descendants of Zattu,
⁹760 descendants of Zaccai,
¹⁰642 descendants of Bani,
¹¹623 descendants of Bebai,
¹²1, 222 descendants of Azgad,
¹³666 descendants of Adonikam,
¹⁴2, 056 descendants of Bigvai,
¹⁵454 descendants of Adin,
¹⁶98 descendants of Ater, who descended from Hezekiah,
¹⁷323 descendants of Bezai,
¹⁸112 descendants of Jorah,
¹⁹223 descendants of Hashum,
²⁰95 descendants of Gibbar.
²¹{The following is a list of people whose ancestors had lived in these towns in Judah:}
123 from Bethlehem,
²²56 from Netophah,
²³128 from Anathoth,
²⁴42 from Azmaveth,
²⁵743 from Kiriath Arim, Kephirah, and Beeroth,
²⁶621 from Ramah and Geba,
²⁷122 from Michmas,
²⁸223 from Bethel and Ai,
²⁹52 from Nebo,
³⁰156 from Magbish,
³¹1, 254 from the other Elam,
³²320 from Harim,
³³725 from Lod, Hadid, and Ono,
³⁴345 from Jericho,
³⁵3, 630 from Senaah.

³⁶These are the priests who returned:

973 descendants of Jedaiah (that is, those who descended through Jeshua),

³⁷1,052 descendants of Immer,

³⁸1,247 descendants of Pashur,

³⁹1,017 descendants of Harim,

⁴⁰These are the descendants of Levi who returned:

74 descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel, who were from the family of Hodaviah,

⁴¹128 musicians who were descendants of Asaph,

⁴²139 gatekeepers who were descendants of the gatekeepers Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai,

⁴³The following is a list of the temple workers who returned. They were the descendants of these men: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴Keros, Siaha, Padon, ⁴⁵Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, ⁴⁶Hagab, Shalmal, Hanan, ⁴⁷Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, ⁴⁸Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, ⁴⁹Uzza, Paseah, Besai, ⁵⁰Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim, ⁵¹Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵²Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, ⁵³Barkos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁴Neziah, and Hatipha.

⁵⁵The following descendants of King Solomon's servants returned {to Jerusalem}. They were the descendants of these men: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, ⁵⁶Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁷Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth Hazzebaim, and Ami. ⁵⁸Altogether, there were 392 descendants of temple workers and Solomon's servants who returned.

⁵⁹There was another group that returned {to Judah} from {the towns of} Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cerub, Addon, and Immer {in Babylonia}. But they could not prove that they were genuine Israelites. ⁶⁰This group included 652 people who were descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda. ⁶¹The descendants of the priests in this group included people belonging to Habaiah's clan, Hakkoz's clan, and Barzillai's clan. Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai from the region of Gilead. He had taken the name of his father-in-law's clan for himself.

⁶²The people in this group searched in the documents that listed the names {of the descendants} from the {various Israelite} clans, but they did not find {their names there}. So the officials did not permit them to do the work that priests did. ⁶³The governor told these men that they could not eat the shares of the sacrifices that only the priests could eat until a {high} priest could consult Yahweh by using the sacred lots {to determine that they truly were descendants of priestly families. Only if the high priest determined that these men truly were priests could they eat the most sacred food}.

⁶⁴Altogether in this group, 42,360 Israelite people returned to Judah. ⁶⁵The Israelites also brought along with them 7,337 male and female servants and 200 male and female musicians. ⁶⁶The Israelites also brought with them {from Babylonia} 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

⁶⁸When they arrived at {the ruins of} the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, some of the clan leaders gave money for the supplies needed to rebuild the temple in the same place where the old temple had been. ⁶⁹Each one gave as much as he was able to give for the work {on the temple}. Altogether, they gave 61,000 gold coins, 5,000 silver bars, and 100 robes for the priests.

⁷⁰So all of these priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, temple servants, and other people returned to live in the towns and villages {of the province of Judah}. They settled in the places where their ancestors had lived.

Chapter 3

¹After the Israelite people {returned and} began to live in their towns, in the autumn of that year, they all gathered together in Jerusalem. ²Then Joshua son of Jehozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates all began to rebuild the altar of the God of Israel. They did that so that they could sacrifice burnt offerings on it. They wanted to follow what the prophet Moses had written in the laws that God had given to him. ³Even though they were afraid of the people who were already living in that area, they rebuilt the altar at the same place where the previous altar had been. They began to offer sacrifices to Yahweh on it every morning and every evening. ⁴{Fifteen days after they started to offer these sacrifices,} the people celebrated the Festival of Shelters. {Moses had commanded them to do this in the decrees that God had given to him.} Each day the priests offered the sacrifices that were required for that day. ⁵From then on, they presented the regular burnt offerings and the {other required} offerings{. These were} for the New Moon festivals and the other festivals that they celebrated as special times each year to honor Yahweh. They also brought other offerings to Yahweh just because they wanted to{, not because they were required to bring them}. ⁶But even though they started bringing burnt offerings to Yahweh at the beginning of autumn, they had not yet started rebuilding the temple. ⁷So the {leaders of the} Israelites hired stone-cutters and carpenters {to do the construction work}. They also bought logs of cedar trees from the people of {the cities of} Tyre and Sidon. To pay for the logs, the Israelites sent grain, wine, and olive oil to those people. Since King Cyrus had said that the Israelites could buy these things, the people of Tyre and Sidon {agreed. They} brought the logs down from the mountains in Lebanon {to the Mediterranean seacoast} and then floated them along the coast to {the city of} Joppa. {Then they brought the logs inland from Joppa up to Jerusalem.}

⁸The Israelites started to rebuild the temple in the second month of the second year after they had returned to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Joshua the son of Jozadak, their fellow leaders the priests and the Levites, and all the people who had come from where their enemies had taken them to Jerusalem supported this project. The leaders assigned the Levites who were twenty years old and older to supervise this work of rebuilding the temple for Yahweh. ⁹Jeshua, his sons, and his other relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons together helped to supervise those who were doing the work on the temple. They were all descendants of Judah. The sons and grandsons of Henadad along with the rest of their fellow Levites {joined in the work}. ¹⁰When the builders finished laying the foundation of the temple of Yahweh, the priests and the Levites did what King David had told Asaph and the other musicians to do {many years previously} in order to praise Yahweh. The priests put on their robes and stood in their places, blowing their trumpets. Then the Levites who were descendants of Asaph clashed their cymbals. ¹¹Then the Levites praised Yahweh and thanked him by singing this song about him:

“He is very good to us!

He will continue to be faithful and kind to us Israelites {and he will love us} forever.” Then all the people shouted loudly. They praised Yahweh because they had finished laying the foundation of his temple. ¹²Many of the old priests, Levites, and leaders of families remembered seeing the first temple. They cried aloud when they saw the workers lay the foundation of this temple {because they thought that this temple would not be as big or as beautiful as the first temple}. But the other people shouted joyfully in loud voices. ¹³Since the shouting was so loud, no one could tell the difference between the people who were shouting joyfully and the people who were crying sorrowfully. All the noise was so loud that even people far away could hear it.

Chapter 4

¹The enemies of {the people of the tribes of} Judah and Benjamin learned that the Israelites who had returned from Babylon were rebuilding the temple for Yahweh, the God whom the people of Israel worship. ²So they approached Zerubbabel the governor and the other clan leaders and {deceptively} said to them, “We want to help you to build the temple. After all, we also worship your God. We have been offering sacrifices to him since the time that Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria, brought us here.”

³But Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the other Jewish clan leaders replied, "We will not allow you to help us build a temple for our God. No, we alone will build it for Yahweh, the God whom Israel worships, because that is what King Cyrus of Persia told us to do."

⁴Then the people who had been living in that land {before the Israelites returned there} started doing things to make the Jews discouraged and afraid to continue building {the temple}. ⁵They bribed government officials to prevent the Jews from fulfilling their plans {to rebuild the temple and the city}. They did that all during the time that Cyrus was king of Persia, and continued to do it during {the time of the kings after him, including} the time when Darius was king of Persia.

⁶These enemies of the Jews continued to accuse them during the time that {Darius' son} Ahasuerus was king. When Ahasuerus became king, they wrote a letter to him in which they accused the people living in the province of Judah and the city of Jerusalem {of planning to rebel against the government}.

⁷Then again during the time of Artaxerxes, {who was the next} king of Persia, the enemies of the Jews wrote a letter to him. Some men named Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel were the leaders of this group. They had someone write the letter for them in the Aramaic language, using the Aramaic alphabet.

⁸Rehum, the high commissioner, and Shimshai, the provincial secretary, agreed that they could write the letter to King Artaxerxes {with their authority} to protest about what was happening in Jerusalem. This is what they wrote:

⁹From Rehum the high commissioner, Shimshai the provincial secretary, and others with us who are judges and other government officials{. We represent the people} from {the areas of} Persia, Erech, Babylon, and Susa in the district of Elam, ¹⁰as well as the other people groups whom the great and glorious Ashurbanipal had deported and sent to live in cities in Samaria and in the rest of the province west of the {Euphrates} River. Therefore: ¹¹{This is what they wrote in the letter that they sent to him:}

This letter is for King Artaxerxes. It comes from the officials serving you who live in the province west of the Euphrates River. Therefore:

¹²"Your Majesty, we want you to know that the Jews who left from your territories are now living near us. They are rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. These people are wicked and want to rebel against you. Therefore, they are now rebuilding the walls {of that city} and repairing the foundations {of its buildings}. ¹³It is important for you to know that if they rebuild this city and finish building its walls, they will stop paying any taxes. As a result, there will be less money in your treasury.

¹⁴So, because we are loyal to you, and because we do not want anyone to humiliate you, for these reasons we are sending this information to you. ¹⁵We suggest that you {order your officials to} search among the records that your predecessors kept. {If you do that,} you will find out that the people in this city have always rebelled against their rulers. You will find out that these people have withheld taxes from kings and from rulers of provinces. You will find out that from long ago the leaders of this city have started rebellions. That is the reason why {the Babylonian army} destroyed this city. ¹⁶We want you to know that if they rebuild this city and finish building its walls, then you will no longer be able to control {any of the people in} this province west of the {Euphrates} River."

¹⁷{After} the king {read this letter, he} sent this reply to them:

"To you, Rehum, the high commissioner, and Shimshai, the provincial secretary, and your colleagues in Samaria and in other parts of the province that is west of the {Euphrates} River, I send my greetings. Therefore:

¹⁸My officials carefully read out loud to me the letter that you sent to us. ¹⁹Then I ordered my officials to search {the records}. I have found out that {what you said is true.} The people of Jerusalem have repeatedly revolted against their rulers, beginning a long time ago. ²⁰{In the past,} powerful kings ruled in Jerusalem. They also ruled over the whole province west of the {Euphrates} River. They forced the people there to pay them all kinds of taxes.

²¹Therefore, you must command those Jews to stop rebuilding the city. They will only be allowed to resume if I tell them that they may rebuild it. ²²Do this immediately, because I do not want those people to do anything more that will cause me to lose {any territory or income}.”

²³Then King Artaxerxes sent {messengers with} a copy of the letter to Rehum and Shimshai the provincial secretary and their colleagues. As soon as the messengers finished reading it out loud to them, Rehum and Shimshai and their colleagues went quickly to the Jews in Jerusalem, and they forced the Jews to stop rebuilding {the city}.

²⁴{Because the enemies of the Jews kept opposing them so strongly in these ways,} the Jews had stopped rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. They did not do any more work to rebuild the temple until the second year after Darius had become the king of Persia.

Chapter 5

¹At that time two prophets were giving messages from God to the Jews living in Jerusalem and in other cities in Judah{, saying that they should continue rebuilding the temple}. Those prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo. They spoke their messages representing the God whom the people of Israel worshiped, the one who ruled them. ²So Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jozadak led many other people to start rebuilding the temple of God in Jerusalem again. God’s prophets Haggai and Zechariah were with them and helping them.

³But then Tattenai, the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-Bozenai went to Jerusalem together with some of their officials and said to the people, “Who has permitted you to do all this work to rebuild this temple?” ⁴They also asked the Jews to tell them the names of the men who were working on this temple.

⁵However, God was taking care of the Jewish leaders, and their enemies did not make them stop {building the temple}. Instead, the enemies sent King Darius a report and waited for him to send back a decree about it. {The decree would either allow the Jewish leaders to finish their work on the temple, or else it would command them to stop their work completely}.

⁶This is a copy of the report that Tattenai, governor of the province of Beyond-the-River, Shethar-Bozenai, and their associates, {who were} the officials of the province of Beyond-the-River, sent to King Darius. ⁷When they sent the report to him, this is what they wrote in it:

“King Darius, we hope everything is going well for you.

⁸We want you to know that we went to the temple of the great God in the province of Judah. The people are building it with huge stones, and they are putting wooden beams in the walls. They are doing this work very carefully, and they are making good progress.

⁹So we asked the Jewish leaders, ‘Who has permitted you to rebuild this temple?’ ¹⁰We also asked them for the names of their leaders so that we could write them down and so that we could inform you who their leaders were.

¹¹This is what they told us in reply. They said, ‘We serve the God who created heaven and earth. We are rebuilding his temple, which a great king of Israel originally completed many years ago. ¹²But our ancestors did things that caused God, who is in heaven, to become very angry. So God allowed {the armies of} Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, a Chaldean, to conquer them. His armies destroyed that temple, and they took many of the Israelite people to Babylon.

¹³However, during the first year that Cyrus ruled as king of Babylon, he decreed that our people could rebuild the temple for God. ¹⁴There had been a lot of containers made of gold and silver in the temple of God. Nebuchadnezzar took them from the temple in Jerusalem and brought them to a temple {for his god} in Babylon. Later, King Cyrus removed those containers from that temple in Babylon and gave them to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he appointed as governor {of Judah}. ¹⁵King Cyrus told Sheshbazzar to take these containers and put them back in the temple in Jerusalem. He also decreed that the Jews should rebuild the temple at the place

where it had been before. ¹⁶So Sheshbazzar came here to Jerusalem and {supervised the men who} laid the foundation of this temple. And since that time, the people have been working on the temple, but they have not finished it yet.'

¹⁷Therefore, your Majesty, please order your officials to search in the place in Babylon where you keep the royal records. Have them find out whether or not it is true that King Cyrus decreed that the Jews should rebuild this temple of God in Jerusalem. Then please tell us what you would like us to do about this matter."

Chapter 6

¹So King Darius commanded his servants to search in the places where he kept important records there in the kingdom of Babylon. ²They {searched, and they} found a scroll {that contained the information that they wanted to know} in the fortress city of Ecbatana in the province of Media. This is what that scroll said:

³"During the first year that King Cyrus ruled the empire, he sent out a decree concerning the temple of God that was in Jerusalem. He said, 'I command that the Jews shall build a new temple in the same place where they had previously offered sacrifices. They must make the temple 27 meters high and 27 meters wide. ⁴They must build the temple from large stones. {After putting down} three layers of stones, {the workers must put} a layer of new timber {on top of them}. I will pay for this work with money from the royal treasury. ⁵I also give back {to the Jews} the gold and silver containers that had belonged to the temple of God but that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon. The Jews must take these and return them to the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews must put each one back in its original place in the temple of God.'"

⁶{After learning this from the scroll, King Darius had a scribe write that information in a letter that he sent to the leaders of the enemies of the Jews in Jerusalem. He also included this message:} "This is a message for you, Tattenai, the governor of {the province} west of the {Euphrates} River, for you, Shethar-Bozenai, and for all of your associates, who are the officials of that province: Stay away from there! ⁷Allow them to continue the work of rebuilding that temple of God. Allow the governor of the Jews and their elders to lead their people in building this new temple on the same site as the former temple. ⁸Furthermore, I command you to help these leaders of the Jews {in the following ways} as they rebuild this temple of God. You must be sure to give these men funds so that they can continue the building work. Take the money from my treasury, from the tribute you collect in {the province} west of the {Euphrates} River. ⁹The priests in Jerusalem need animals to sacrifice as burnt offerings to the God who is in heaven. This may include young bulls or rams or lambs. They may also need wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil {to go with those sacrifices}. Make sure that you diligently give them whatever they demand of those things every day. ¹⁰When you do that, they will be able to offer sacrifices that please the God who is in heaven, and they will be able to pray that God will bless me and my sons.

¹¹This is what I command about anyone who disobeys this decree. My soldiers will pull a beam from his house {and sharpen one end of it}. Then they will bury the other end of the beam in the ground so that it stands upright. Then they will pick that person up and ram his body onto the {sharpened} beam. Then they will completely destroy that person's house until only a pile of rubble is left, because he disobeyed me. ¹²God himself has chosen that city of Jerusalem as the place where people will honor him. May he get rid of any king or any nation that tries to change this decree or destroy that temple in Jerusalem! I, Darius, make this decree. You must completely obey it."

¹³Tattenai, the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates {read the message from King Darius and} immediately obeyed what the message from King Darius commanded them to do. ¹⁴So the Jewish leaders continued to progress in their work of rebuilding {the temple}. The messages that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo preached encouraged them greatly. The people worked until they completed {the temple}, just as their God had commanded them to do, and just as the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius had decreed, and as the Persian king Artaxerxes {would decree later}. ¹⁵The people finished building this temple on the third day of the month of Adar, during the sixth year that King Darius ruled {the kingdom of Persia}.

¹⁶Then the people of Israel, {that is,} the priests, the Levites, and everyone else who had returned from Babylonia, joyfully dedicated this temple to God. ¹⁷During the ceremony to dedicate this temple to God, they sacrificed 100 young bulls, 200 rams, and 400 lambs. They also sacrificed 12 male goats as an offering so that God would forgive the sins of all the people, because that was how many tribes there were in Israel. ¹⁸Then the Jewish leaders divided the priests and Levites into groups that would take turns serving in the temple of God in Jerusalem. They did this according to what Moses had written {many years previously} in the law.

¹⁹On the fourteenth day of the first month, the Jews who had returned from Babylonia celebrated the Passover Festival. ²⁰{To qualify themselves for offering the sacrifices,} all the priests and Levites had already purified themselves by performing the proper rituals. Then they slaughtered the lambs for the benefit of everyone who had returned from Babylonia, for the other priests, and for themselves. ²¹All of the Israelite people celebrated the Passover. This included the Israelites who had returned from Babylonia and the people who had separated themselves from the people of the area around them who worshiped other gods. They separated themselves from those people and joined the Israelites so that they could worship Yahweh, the God whom the Israelite people worshiped. ²²Then for the next seven days, they joyfully celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They were joyful because Yahweh had caused the king of Assyria to be favorable to them. As a result, the king had helped them to rebuild the temple of God, the God whom Israel worshiped.

Chapter 7

¹Many years later, during the time when Artaxerxes was the king of Persia, {there was a man named} Ezra{. He} was a descendant of Seraiah, who was the son of Azariah, who was the son of Hilkiah. ²Hilkiah was the son of Shallum, who was the son of Zadok, who was a descendant of Ahitub, ³who was a descendant of Amariah, who was the son of Azariah, who was a descendant of Meraioth, ⁴who was the son of Zerariah, who was the son of Uzzi, who was the son of Bukki, ⁵who was the son of Abishua, who was the son of Phinehas, who was the son of Eleazar, who was the son of Aaron, the {first} Supreme Priest. ⁶This man Ezra knew the laws of Moses very well. Those were the laws that Yahweh had given to the people who worship him, the Israelite people. {Ezra asked the king for many things and} the king gave Ezra everything that he asked for because Yahweh, the God whom Ezra worshiped, caused all of it to go well for him. Then Ezra traveled from Babylon {to Jerusalem}.

⁷Many Israelite people came with Ezra to Jerusalem, including some priests, some Levites, some musicians, some gatekeepers, and some {of the descendants of} men who worked in the temple. That was during the seventh year that Artaxerxes was the king of Persia. ⁸Ezra {and the group with him} arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year that Artaxerxes was king.

⁹Consider this: They started out from Babylon on the first day of the first month. They arrived safely in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month of that year. God certainly acted very kindly toward them. ¹⁰{God made Ezra's journey successful} because Ezra had devoted himself to studying the laws of Yahweh and understanding how to obey them. He had also devoted himself to teach everything in those laws to the Israelite people.

¹¹King Artaxerxes gave a letter to Ezra the priest and scribe who studied what Yahweh had commanded in the law that Yahweh had given to Israel. This is what the letter said:

¹²"This letter is from Artaxerxes, the greatest of the kings. I am giving it to Ezra the priest, who has carefully studied the law that the God who is in heaven gave {to the Israelite people}. Greetings. This is what I want you to know:

¹³I am commanding that any of the Israelite people in my kingdom may go with you to Jerusalem if they want to go. That includes priests and Levites.

¹⁴I, the king, and my seven advisors are sending you to investigate whether the people of Judah and Jerusalem are following the law of your God that you carry. ¹⁵We are also telling you to take with you the silver and gold that I and my advisors will give to you. We give it freely to the God of Israel who has a temple in Jerusalem. ¹⁶You should

also take any silver and gold that {the people in} the entire province of Babylonia may give to you. Add that to the money that the Israelite people and the priests freely give for you to use at the temple of their God in Jerusalem.

¹⁷Then carefully use this money to buy the bulls, rams, and lambs that the priests will burn on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem. Also buy the grain and wine that go with these offerings.

¹⁸If there is any silver or gold left over {after you buy all of those things}, you and your companions may use it to buy whatever you think that your God wants you to buy. ¹⁹We have also given to you some {valuable} containers for the priests to use in the temple of your God. Take all of them to your God in Jerusalem. ²⁰If you need to supply any other things for the temple of your God, I permit you to get the money {to pay for those things} from the royal treasury.

²¹And I, King Artaxerxes, personally command this to all the treasurers in the province west of the Euphrates River: Ezra is a priest who has carefully studied the laws of the God who is in heaven. If there is anything that he requests, give it to him quickly. ²²Give him up to three and one-third metric tons of silver, up to 500 bushels of wheat, up to two and one-fifth kiloliters of wine, up to the same amount of olive oil, and all the salt that he requests. ²³Be sure that you provide everything that the God who is in heaven requires for his temple. We certainly do not want this God to be angry with me or with my descendants{, who will later be kings, because I did not provide what he required}. ²⁴By means of this letter, I also prohibit you from collecting tax payments of any kind from any of the priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, or any men who work in the temple. They are exempt from taxes {because} they serve in the temple of this God. ²⁵Now I will address you, Ezra. The God whom you worship has made you wise. Therefore, I want you to appoint men who can settle disputes between people and interpret God's laws for all {of the Jews} in the province west of the Euphrates River. They must do this for all of those who know the laws of this God, and all of you must teach God's laws to those who do not know them. ²⁶{You and the men whom you appoint} must make sure to severely punish everyone who does not obey my law or the law of the God whom you worship. You may decide whether to execute them or to send them out of the country or to take away all of their property or to put them in prison."

²⁷{When I, Ezra, read this letter, I said,} "Praise Yahweh, the God whom our ancestors worshiped! He has caused the king to want to honor his temple in Jerusalem. ²⁸God also acted very kindly to me by causing the king and his advisors and all of his powerful officials to want to help me. When I saw how Yahweh, the God whom I worship, was making all of my plans succeed, I boldly asked some of the Israelite leaders to go {to Jerusalem} with me."

Chapter 8

¹"This is a list of the names of the clan leaders, along with the names of their clans, who traveled {to Jerusalem} with me from Babylonia when Artaxerxes was king {of Persia}:

²Gershom from the clan descended from {Aaron's grandson} Phinehas.

Daniel from the clan descended from {Aaron's son} Ithamar.

Hattush from the clan descended from {King} David. ³{Hattush was also} a descendant of Shecaniah.

Zechariah and 150 other men from the clan descended from Parosh.

⁴Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah and 200 other men from the clan descended from Pahath-Moab.

⁵Shecaniah son of Jahaziel and 300 other men from the clan descended from {Zattu}.

⁶Ebed son of Jonathan and 50 other men from the clan descended from Adin.

⁷Jeshaiah son of Athaliah and 70 other men from the clan descended from Elam.

⁸Zebadiah son of Michael and 80 other men from the clan descended from Shephatiah.

⁹Obadiah son of Jehiel and 218 other men from the clan descended from Joab.

¹⁰Shelomith son of Josiphiah and 160 other men from the clan descended from {Bani}.

¹¹Zechariah son of Bebai and 28 other men from the clan descended from {another man whose name was} Bebai.

¹²Johanan son of Hakkatan and 110 other men from the clan descended from Azgad.

¹³Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah and 60 other men from the clan descended from Adonikam. They were the last three leaders from the clan descended from Adonikam {that had not returned earlier with Zerubbabel}.

¹⁴Uthai and Zaccur and 70 other men from the clan descended from Bigvai.

¹⁵{This is an account of how we traveled to Jerusalem.} I gathered together all of these Israelites at the canal that goes from Babylon to Ahava. We set up our tents and stayed there for three days. {During that time} I interviewed the people and the priests and discovered that there were no Levites among us. ¹⁶So I summoned Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, {another man named} Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were all leaders of the people. I also summoned Joiarib and {a third man named} Elnathan, who were wise. ¹⁷I sent them all to Iddo, a Levite leader who was living in a place called Kasiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and to his fellow Levites, the {descendants of} temple workers whom he oversaw there. I wanted them to send us some men who would {go with us to} work in the temple of our God.

¹⁸Because God acted kindly toward us, they brought us a very wise man named Sherebiah and 18 of his sons and other relatives. He was a descendant of Mahli, who was a grandson of Levi, the son of Israel. ¹⁹{They} also {sent to us} Hashabiah, along with Jeshaiiah, and 20 of his brothers and their sons. Both men were descendants of Merari {the son of Levi}. ²⁰They also sent 220 other men to work in the temple. King David and his officials had appointed the ancestors of these men to assist the Levites. I listed the names of all of these men.

²¹There alongside the Ahava Canal, I announced a time for all of us to abstain from eating food {and to pray}. {I told them that this was a time} to humble ourselves in the presence of our God and to pray that God would protect us, our children, and our possessions while we traveled. ²²Previously we had told the king that our God takes care of all those who truly trust in him, but that he powerfully punishes everyone who refuses to obey him. So I would have been ashamed to ask the king to send soldiers and men riding on horses to protect us from our enemies while we were traveling along the road. ²³So we abstained from eating food and we asked our God to protect us. We prayed to him, and he answered our prayer.

²⁴I chose 12 of the leaders of the priests and brought them together with Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of the other Levites. ²⁵I assigned to each of them a portion of the gifts of silver and gold and the other valuable items {to transport to Jerusalem}. These were the items that the king and his advisors and other officials, and the Israelite people who were living in Babylonia, had contributed for the temple of our God. ²⁶As I gave these various items to those men, I weighed each of the items. This was the total: about 21 and one half metric tons of silver, items made from silver that altogether weighed three and one third metric tons, three and one third metric tons of gold, ²⁷20 gold bowls that altogether weighed about eight and one-half kilograms, and two items made of beautiful polished bronze that were as valuable as ones made of gold. ²⁸I said to those priests and Levites, 'I have set you apart from the others to serve Yahweh in a special way. The people have also set apart these valuable things for only him. The people also gave the silver and the gold voluntarily as an offering to Yahweh, the God whom our ancestors worshiped. ²⁹So guard them carefully. When we arrive in Jerusalem, weigh them out where the leading priests and Levites and the other leaders of the Israelite clans can see them. {They will then put them} in the storerooms in the temple of Yahweh.'

³⁰So these priests and Levites said that they would be responsible to transport all of the {gifts of} silver and gold and other valuable items to the temple of our God in Jerusalem.

³¹On the twelfth day of the first month, we left the Ahava Canal and started to travel to Jerusalem. Our God took care of us, and while we traveled, he prevented any enemies from attacking or robbing us. ³²After we arrived in

Jerusalem, we rested for three days. ³³Then on the fourth day we went to the temple of our God. There the priests and Levites weighed out the silver and gold and the other items and gave them to the leaders there. The leaders there were two priests, Meremoth the son of Uriah and Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and two Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. ³⁴They counted everything, and wrote down how much each item weighed, and wrote a description of each one as they received it.

³⁵The Babylonian soldiers had captured our ancestors and taken them away to Babylon, but now we who are their descendants have safely returned {to Israel}. So we offered sacrifices of burnt offerings to our God: 12 bulls, {one} for {each of the 12 tribes of} the Israelite people, 96 rams, and 77 lambs. We also sacrificed 12 male goats to atone for the sins {that all of the Israelite people had committed}. We offered all of these sacrifices to Yahweh by putting them on the fire {of the altar}.

³⁶Some of us who had returned from Babylonia took the letter that the king had given to us to the governors of the king's provinces and to the officials of the province west of the Euphrates River. {After they read the letter,} they did what the king commanded for us {Israelite} people and for the temple of God."

Chapter 9

¹"After that, {some of} the {Jewish} leaders came to me and said, 'Many Israelites and {even some} priests and Levites have not kept themselves from doing what the other people who are living in this land do. They are doing the same disgusting things that those people do. Those people are from the Canaanite, Hittite, Perizzite, Jebusite, Ammonite, Moabite, Egyptian, and Amorite people groups. ²Specifically, some Israelite men have married women from these groups, and they have allowed their sons to do the same thing. So they are making us, God's sacred people, to be no longer distinct from the other groups that live here. In fact, some of our leaders and officials have been the first ones to betray God in this way!'

³When I heard that, {I was so sad and angry that} I tore my clothes and my robe. I even pulled out some hair from my head and my beard. Then I sat down. I was very dismayed. ⁴Many of the Jews still respected God's commandment {not to marry foreign women}, and they were upset and afraid because some of those who had returned from Babylonia had disobeyed it. They gathered around me as I sat there dismayed until the time of the evening sacrifice.

⁵When it was time to offer the evening sacrifice, I stopped sitting there, silently showing how ashamed and sad I felt. Still wearing those torn clothes, I got on my knees and opened my hands {in prayer} to Yahweh, my God, ⁶and this is what I prayed: 'God, I belong to you. Yet I am very ashamed even to approach you in prayer. This is because the sins that we Israelites have committed are very bad. It is as though our sins are so many that they have risen up in a heap that is higher than our heads. We are so guilty for committing those sins that it is as though the heap of them has risen all the way up to you in heaven. ⁷Since the time of our ancestors until now, we{, the Jewish people,} have been very guilty of sinning {against you}. That is the reason why you, God, allowed {the armies of} the kings of other lands to do whatever they wanted to do with our people and with our kings and our priests. They killed {many of} them, they captured {many of} them, they robbed {many of} them, and they caused them all to be disgraced, just as we are today.

⁸But for just a little while now, Yahweh our God, you have been kind to us. You have allowed some of us to survive. You have given us a secure home in your sacred place. You have made us joyful and given us some freedom, even though the Persian king is still our master. ⁹Yes, we are like slaves, but even so, you have not abandoned us. Instead, you have caused the kings of Persia to act very kindly toward us. They have given us some freedom and allowed us to rebuild your temple, which had been destroyed. They have allowed us to live safely here in the province of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

¹⁰Our God, there is nothing that we can say now to defend ourselves after all {of the sinful things that we have done}. We have continued to disobey your commands. ¹¹They are the commands that you gave to your servants, the prophets, to tell to us. They told us that it was as though the land that we would occupy was a filthy land

because the people who live there do disgusting things. They said that those people continually do shameful things, making it seem like the land is full of filth from one end to the other. ¹²{They said,} ‘Therefore do not allow your daughters to marry their sons! Do not allow your sons to marry their daughters! Do not ever try to cause things to go well for those people! If you obey these instructions, your nation will be strong. You will enjoy the good crops that grow on the land, and the land will belong to your descendants forever.’

¹³But you punished us because we became very guilty for doing wicked things. Still, you, our God, have not punished us as much as we deserve for you to punish us. I say this because you have allowed this group of us to survive. ¹⁴However, some of us are again disobeying your commands. Some of us have married women from the people groups that do those detestable things. If we continue to do that, you will be so angry with us that you will destroy us completely, leaving none of us to survive!

¹⁵Yahweh, God of Israel, you always do the right thing! Because of that, you have continually allowed some of us to survive, just as you have done with this group now. But we acknowledge that we are guilty of disobeying you and so because of what we have done, we do not deserve even to pray to you.”

Chapter 10

¹Ezra prostrated himself on the ground in front of the temple as he cried and prayed {to God}. He was confessing {to God the sins that the people had committed}. While he was doing that, a very large crowd of Israelites gathered around him, consisting of men, women, and children. They all cried very, very much {because they had sinned against God}.

²Then Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel from the clan of Elam, spoke. He said this to Ezra: “We have disobeyed our God. Some of us have married women who are not Israelites. They come from the other people groups that live around us. But we can still hope {that Yahweh will be merciful to} us Israelite people. ³Here is what I suggest. We should do what God told us to do in his laws. We should make an agreement with our God that we will divorce our foreign wives and send them away with their children. We will do everything according to what you, sir, and the others who greatly respect what our God has commanded, tell us to do. ⁴Since you are our leader, get going, and be courageous, and do {what is necessary to fix this problem}. We will do whatever you say.”

⁵So Ezra acted {to fix the problem}. He demanded that all of the Israelite people, including the leaders of the priests and the Levites, solemnly declare that they would do what Shecaniah said that they should do. So they all solemnly promised {to do that}. ⁶Then Ezra went away from in front of the temple and went to the room where Jehohanan the grandson of Eliashib lived. Ezra continued to grieve because some of the Israelites who had returned from Babylonia had not faithfully obeyed God’s laws. So while he was there, he did not eat or drink anything.

⁷Then the leaders sent a message to all the people in the province of Judan and the city of Jerusalem. They told them that all the Jews who had returned from Babylonia had to come to Jerusalem immediately. ⁸The leaders announced the following penalties for anyone who did not arrive within three days. They would take away all the property belonging to that person, and they would banish that person from the community of Israelites. ⁹So within three days, by the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the men from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem. They were sitting in the courtyard in front of the temple. They were trembling because it was raining hard and {because they were worried that they would be punished} for what they had done.

¹⁰Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “Some of you have sinned very badly {against God}. Specifically, you have married women who are not Israelites. By doing that, you have made us Israelite people more guilty than we were before. ¹¹So now, confess your sin to Yahweh, the God whom your ancestors worshiped, and do what he commands. {That is,} separate yourselves from the people of other nations by divorcing your foreign wives.”

¹²The whole group answered, shouting loudly, “Yes, we must do what you have said.” ¹³{Then one of them said,} “But we are a very large group, and it is raining hard. We cannot continue to stand outside in this rain. Also, since

many of us have committed this sin, it will take a long time to make things right again. ¹⁴So please allow our leaders to decide what we should all do. Tell everyone in each city who has married a woman who is not an Israelite to come at a time that you decide. They should each come with the elders and judges from their own city. If we do that, our God will stop being angry with us because of what we have done.”

¹⁵{Within the crowd,} Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah said that they disagreed with this plan. Then Meshullam and Shabbethai, a descendant of Levi, said that they agreed with Jonathan and Jahzeiah. ¹⁶But {they were the only ones who opposed the plan; all of} the others who had returned from Babylonia said that they would do it. So Ezra the priest chose men who were leaders from each of the clans and wrote down their names. On the first day of the tenth month these men met to investigate the matter. ¹⁷By the first day of the first month {of the next year} they had finished determining which men had married women who were not Israelites.

¹⁸They determined that some of the descendants of the priests had married foreign women. These included some descendants of Joshua the son of Jozadak and of his brothers. Their names were Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. ¹⁹They solemnly promised to divorce their wives and they each offered a ram as a sacrifice to atone for their sins.

²⁰In the clan of Immer there were Hanani and Zebadiah.

²¹In the clan of Harim there were Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziyah.

²²In the clan of Pashhur there were Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

²³The Levites who had married foreign women were Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (whose other name was Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

²⁴There was Eliashib the musician. Among the temple guards there were Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

²⁵This is a list of the names of the other Israelites {who had married foreign wives}:

In the clan of Parosh there were Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah.

²⁶In the clan of Elam there were Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

²⁷In the clan of Zattu there were Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

²⁸In the clan of Bebai there were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

²⁹In the clan of Bani there were Meshullam, Malluk, Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal Jeremoth.

³⁰In the clan of Pahath-Moab there were Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

³¹In the clan of Harim there were Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³²Benjamin, Malluk, and Shemariah.

³³In the clan of Hashum there were Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

³⁴In the clan of Bani there were Maadai, Amram, Uel, ³⁵Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, ³⁶Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

³⁸In the clan of Binnui there were Shimei, ³⁹Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, ⁴⁰Maknadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴²Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

⁴³In the clan of Nebo there were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. ⁴⁴All of those men had married women who were not Israelites. Some of those women had borne children{, so when the men sent the women away, they also sent their children with them}.

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