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v88

Nehemiah

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NEHEMIAH

1 1 I am Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah. I am writing this account.

My story begins in the month of Kislev during the twentieth year of the reign of King Artaxerxes over the Persian Empire. I was in the capital city of Susa. 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came to see me, along with some other people from the province of Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and remained in Judah many years earlier when soldiers had forced many Jews to go to Babylon. I also asked about the condition of the city of Jerusalem.

3 They said to me, “The Jews who escaped the exile and remained in the province of Judah are in a desperate situation. The Babylonian soldiers broke down the wall of Jerusalem to get into the city, and they burned down all of its gates. The people living there are defenseless.”

4 When I heard about these things, I sat down and cried. I could not stop mourning for days. I went without food, and I prayed to the God who is in heaven.

5 I said, “O Yahweh, you are the God who is in heaven. You are the great and awesome God. You always keep your promises faithfully to those who love you and obey your commandments. 6 Now please pay careful attention and listen to my prayer that I am praying to you now, as I have been constantly, for the people of Israel, your chosen people. I must confess the sins that we, the people of Israel, have committed against you. Both I and my family have also sinned. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. Many years ago you gave us your Law through your servant Moses. But we have not obeyed your Law.

8 Please call to mind the promise that you made to your servant Moses. You told him, ‘If you Israelites do not obey my commandments, I will take you from your land and make you live among the other nations. 9 But if you become loyal to me again and start obeying my commandments once more, then I will bring you back to your homeland of Judah. That is the place from which I chose to start making myself famous throughout the world. I will do this no matter how far you have been taken away.’

10 We are your chosen people, whom you rescued from slavery in Egypt. You did that easily because you are so very powerful. 11 O my Lord, please pay careful attention to my prayer and to the prayers of my fellow Israelites. We are eager to honor you. Please grant

that the king **will agree to the request that I hope to make soon.**” At that time, I was an important official who served the wine at the king’s table.

2 ¹ I prayed like this for four months. Then one day in the month of Nisan, still in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, something happened. **When it was time to serve the wine**, I took some and gave it to the king. I had never before looked sad in his presence.

2 **No one was supposed to look unhappy in the king’s presence.** But the king noticed that I **did look sad.** So he asked me, “Why are you sad? I can tell that you are not sick. You must be unhappy about something.” This made me very afraid.

3 I replied to the king, “Your Majesty, I hope you will live **a very long time!** I am sorry, but **I cannot help being sad.** I am sad because the city of Jerusalem, the place where my ancestors are buried, lies in ruins. **Our enemies have burned down its gates.**”

4 The king replied to me, “What do you want me to do for you?” Before I answered him, I prayed to the God who is in heaven.

5 Then I replied to the king, “If it seems like a good **idea** to you, and if you are pleased with me, then **please** allow me to go to Judah, to Jerusalem. **I would like to help my people rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.**”

6 I was able to speak freely because this was a private meal, with the queen sitting next to the king. The king asked me, “How long would you be away?” I told him how long I would be gone. That was acceptable to him, and he gave me permission to go. So I told him what day **I wanted to leave.**

7 I also said to the king, “If it seems like a good **idea** to you, **please** give me letters that I can show to the governors of the province Beyond the River. In these letters, **please tell them to give me safe passage through their province to Judah.** ⁸ **Please also write a letter for me to Asaph, the man who takes care of your royal forest in that area. Please tell him to give me timber to make the beams to support the gates of the fortress that is near the temple. Please also tell him to give me timber for the city wall and for the house that I will live in.**”

God was with me and helping me, and so the king agreed to **all of my requests.**

9 When I left to travel to Judah, the king sent along some army officers and soldiers riding on horses **to protect me.** When I reached the province Beyond the River, I went to see its governors. I showed them the letters the king had given me, and **they gave me safe passage.**

10 One of the people I showed my letters to was Sanballat the Horonite. He was the governor of Samaria, the area right next to Judah. He and his deputy, Tobiah the Ammonite, became very upset when they learned that someone had come to help the people of Israel.

They did not want to see Judah become strong again, because that would be a threat to

Samaria. **11** But I made it safely to Jerusalem despite their opposition. I stayed there for three days,

12 I did not say publicly what God was leading me to do for Jerusalem. Instead, I got up secretly in the night to inspect the city walls. I brought only a few other men with me. So that we could work quietly, the only animal I brought with me was the one that I was riding.

13 That night we went out through the Valley Gate and went past the Dragon Well to the Rubbish Gate. We made a careful inspection of the walls of Jerusalem. We noted where our enemies had broken down the walls, and where they had burned up the wooden gates.

14 Then we came to the Fountain Gate and the Royal Pool. The opening there was so narrow that the animal I was riding could not get through. **15** So we followed the path of the Kidron Brook, even though it was night. From there we were able to look up at the wall and see its condition. This route brought us back to where we started. We re-entered the city through the Valley Gate, and I went back home without being seen.

16 The city officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. To that point I had not said anything about it to the Jewish leaders, the priests, the leading citizens, or the city officials. I had not approached anyone about doing the work of rebuilding the walls.

17 But now I said to them, “You see what a desperate situation we are in. You see that Jerusalem lies in ruins, and our enemies have burned down its gates. We need to do something about this! I challenge all of you to join me in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

Then we will not have to feel ashamed any more.” **18** Then I told them how God had been with me and had been helping me. I also told them how the king had given me permission to come.

When they heard this, they said, “Let’s get going and start building!” They encouraged one another and committed themselves to the project.

19 Then Sanballat the Horonite, his deputy Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian heard that we had started to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. They ridiculed us mercilessly. They said, “What you are doing is not going to amount to anything! But you should not be rebelling against the king like that!”

20 But I answered them **firmly**. I said, “The God who is in heaven is the one who will enable us to complete this project. We are his chosen people. We are going to start rebuilding. But you have absolutely nothing to do with what happens in Jerusalem.”

3 1 These are the names of the people who helped to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

Eliashib the Supreme Priest and his fellow priests began by rebuilding the Sheep Gate. They dedicated this gate to God, as a symbolic way of dedicating the entire wall. Then they set the doors of the Sheep Gate in place. They rebuilt the wall as far as the Tower of 100 Soldiers and beyond that to the Tower of Hananel. Then they dedicated that part of the wall to God as well.

2 Next to them, people from Jericho rebuilt **part of the wall**.

Next to them, Zaccur, the son of Imri, rebuilt **part of the wall**.

3 The sons of Hassenaah rebuilt the Fish Gate. They framed it with **wooden beams**, they set its doors in place, and they installed bolts and bars **for locking the gate**.

4 Next to them, Meremoth, the son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz, repaired **part of the wall**.

Next to him, Meshullam, the son of Berekiah and grandson of Meshezabel, repaired **part of the wall**.

Next to him, Zadok the son of Baana repaired **part of the wall**.

5 Next to him, some people from Tekoa repaired **part of the wall**. But the leading citizens of Tekoa were too proud to do the work that the leaders of Judah had asked them to do.

6 Joiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah, repaired the Old Gate. They framed it with **wooden beams**, they set its doors in place, and they installed bolts and bars **for locking the gate**.

7 Next to them, Melatiah from the city of Gibeon, Jadon from the town of Meronoth, and other men from Gibeon and from the city of Mizpah repaired **part of the wall**. They repaired it as far as the residence of the governor of the province Beyond the River.

8 Next to them, Uzziel the son of Harhaiah repaired **part of the wall**. He was one of the goldsmiths, the workers who made jewelry and other objects from gold.

Next to him, Hananiah repaired **part of the wall**. He was one of the workers who made perfumes. They rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

9 Next to them, Rephaiah the son of Hur repaired **part of the wall**. Rephaiah ruled half of the district of Jerusalem.

10 Next to him, Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired **the part of the wall** near his house.

Next to him, Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired **part of the wall**.

11 Malkijah the son of Harim and Hashub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section **of the wall**, along with the Tower of the Ovens.

12 Next to them, Shallum the son of Hallohesch repaired **part of the wall**. Shallum ruled the **other half** of the district of Jerusalem. His daughters worked with him on the repairs.

13 Hanun and some people from **the city of Zanoah** repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt the gate, they set its doors in place, and they installed bolts and bars **for locking the gate**. They also repaired 1500 feet of the wall, as far as the Rubbish Gate.

14 Malkijah. The son of Rechab, repaired the Rubbish Gate. Malkijah ruled the district of Beth-Hakkerem. He rebuilt the gate, he set its doors in place, and he installed bolts and bars **for locking the gate**.

15 Shallun the son of Kol-Hozeh repaired the Fountain Gate. Shallun ruled the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt the gate and put a roof over it, he set its doors in place, and he installed bolts and bars **for locking the gate**. Near the Pool of Siloam he also repaired the wall next to the royal garden, as far as the steps that went down from the City of David.

16 Next to him, Nehemiah the son of Azbuk repaired **the wall** as far as the place opposite the tombs in **the City of David**, to the reservoir that the people had made and the army barracks. Nehemiah ruled half of the district of Beth-Zur.

17 Next to him, some Levites repaired **parts of the wall**. One of them was Rehum the son of Bani. Next to them, Hashabiah, who ruled half of the district of Keilah, repaired **a section of the wall** on behalf of the people of his district.

18 Some other Levites repaired the next **section of the wall**. Next to them, Binnui the son of Henadad, who ruled the other half of the district of Keilah, repaired **more of the wall**.

19 Next to him, Ezer the son of Jeshua repaired another section of the wall. Ezer ruled the city of Mizpah. He started from a place in front of the steps that went up to the building for storing weapons, and he finished at the place where the wall bends slightly.

20 Next to him, Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section with great enthusiasm, from the bend in the wall as far as the door of the house of Eliashib the Supreme Priest.

21 Next to him, Meremoth, the son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of that house.

22 Next to him, some priests from the area around Jerusalem repaired a section of the wall.

23 Next to them, Benjamin and Hasshub repaired a section opposite their house.

Azariah, the son of Maaseiah and grandson of Ananiah, repaired the next section, beside his house.

24 Next to him, Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the bend in the wall as far as the bulwark. **25** Next to him, Palal the son of Uzai repaired a section. He began at the place opposite the bend in the wall where the watchtower is taller than the upper palace that King Solomon built. That is near the courtyard where the guards live. Next to him, Pedaiah the son of Parosh repaired a section.

26 The temple servants who lived on Ophel Hill repaired the wall as far as the eastern side of the Water Gate, where there is a tall tower.

27 Next to them, the people from Tekoa repaired another section, from opposite the very tall watchtower as far as the wall at Ophel Hill.

28 A group of priests repaired the wall starting at the Horse Gate. Each one repaired the section in front of his own house.

29 Next to them, Zadok the son of Immer repaired the section in front of his house.

Then Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, who was the gatekeeper at the East Gate, repaired the next section.

30 Next to him, Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section.

Next to them, Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired **the section** opposite the rooms where he lived.

31 Malkijah, who was **another** one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section, as far as the building used by the temple servants and the merchants. That building was opposite the Appointment Gate. He **rebuilt the wall** as far as the upper apartments **of this building**, which were on the corner.

32 Some of the **other** goldsmiths, along with some merchants, repaired **the last section of the wall** from the corner apartments to the Sheep Gate.

4 **1** When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the **city wall**, he became furious, and he mocked the Jews.

2 He spoke to the **other provincial** officials and army officers. He said, “These weak Jews will not be able to accomplish anything! They will never restore **the city!** Their God will not help them. They do not realize what a long time it would take to repair **that wall.** The only way they can get stones **is** by pulling them out of rubbish heaps. And the Babylonians burned **the city**, so those stones are probably weak **anyway.**”

3 Tobiah the Ammonite was standing beside Sanballat. He made fun of the Jews by saying, “Right! The wall that they are building **is so weak** that if a fox walked across the top **of it**, it would fall down!”

4 When I heard about what they were saying, I prayed to God and said, “O our God, listen to the way they are mocking us! Make them fail in their attempts to stop us, so that **other** people will mock them! Allow their enemies to capture them and force them to go to a foreign land! **5** They are guilty, and they have sinned against you. Do not take away their guilt, and do not ignore their sin! I am asking this because they are also causing others to be angry at the people who are rebuilding the wall!”

6 But we kept building the wall, **and after some time**, we finished the wall around the whole city to about half the necessary height. Everyone was determined to accomplish this.

7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the men from **the land of** Arabia, the men from **the nation of** Ammon, and the men from **the city of** Ashdod heard that we were continuing to repair the wall of Jerusalem and to fill in the gaps, they became furious. **8** All of them together made a plan to come and fight against the people of Jerusalem. They wanted to make the people inside the city confused **and divided.** **9** But we prayed to our God to protect us, and we stationed lookouts **on** the walls at all times to watch out for them.

10 Then the people of Judah started saying, “The people who are carrying the stones are getting worn out. There is too much rubbish. We are not going to be able to finish rebuilding the wall.”

11 Then our enemies started saying, “Before the Jews know we are coming, we will rush down on them and kill them and stop their work on the wall!”

12 And when some of the Jews who lived near our enemies came to Jerusalem, they pleaded with us repeatedly, “Let our men return home so they can defend us!”

13 But I put guards behind the wall at the places where it was low or where there were gaps. I also had people from each family group stand guard with their swords, spears, and bows and arrows. **14** After I had inspected everything, I summoned the leading citizens and the city officials and many of the other people, and I said to them, “Do not be afraid of our enemies! The Lord is great and awesome, so think about what he can do. And fight to protect your families, your sons and daughters, your wives, and your homes!”

15 When our enemies learned that we had found out about their plan, they realized that God had kept them from launching a surprise attack. They decided not to attack us. So we all went back to working on the wall. Each person continued doing the same work as before.

16 But after that, only half of my servants worked on the wall. The other half of them stood guard armed with spears, shields, bows and arrows, and metal armor. Officers stood behind the workers and guards to encourage everyone and to give orders in case there was an attack.

17 Those who were building the wall and those who carried the heavy loads always had their weapons with them so that they would be prepared to fight off an attack. **18** Each builder worked with his sword strapped to his side. I stationed someone next to me who would blow a ram’s horn if we needed a signal.

19 Then I said to the leading citizens, the city officials, and many of the other people, “We are working over a very wide area, and we are far apart from each other along the wall. **20** But wherever you hear the man sounding the ram’s horn, gather around us at that place. Our God will fight for us!”

21 So we continued to work on rebuilding the wall. Half of the men served as guards and kept their weapons ready at all times. **22** At that time, I also said to the people, “Each worker and his servant must spend the night inside Jerusalem and not go home if they live outside the city. That way the city will have plenty of defenders even at night, and they can still work on the wall during the daytime.” **23** During that time none of us took off our clothes. I did not, and my brothers, my servants, and my personal bodyguard did not. Each of us always had our weapons with us, even when we were washing ourselves.

5 ¹ Around this same time, many of the men and their wives complained bitterly about what their fellow Jews were doing to them.

2 Some of them began, “We have many children. We need to get a lot of food to feed them all.”

3 Others added, “We have had to promise to give someone our fields, vineyards, and houses if we do not pay back the money he has loaned us. We had to borrow the money to buy food during this time when food is scarce.”

4 Still others said, “We have had to borrow money to pay the taxes that the king commanded us to pay on our fields and our vineyards. ⁵ This is how bad things have gotten. We are selling our children into slavery. In fact, we have even sold some of our daughters. Our creditors took the fields and vineyards we pledged as security for loans, so there was nothing else we could do. But we are Jews, just like the people who are doing these things to us!”

6 I got very angry when I heard these things that they were complaining about. ⁷ I thought hard about what to do. Then I brought charges against the leading citizens and the city officials. I called together a large group of people to hear the charges against them. I told these leaders, “You are charging interest on loans to your fellow Jews. You know that is forbidden in the Law of Moses.”

8 I said to them, “Whenever our fellow Jews have had to sell themselves into slavery to people from other nations, to the best of our ability we have been buying them back. But you are actually selling your fellow Jews into slavery to get back the money they owe you. These are some of the very people we have been buying back!” They knew that these charges were true, so there was absolutely nothing they could say in response.

9 Then I said to them, “What you are doing is wrong! You certainly ought to obey God and do what is right! Otherwise, our enemies will mock us even more. ¹⁰ I myself, my relatives, and my servants have been lending money and grain to anyone in need without charging interest. All of us should stop charging interest on loans. ¹¹ Give them back their fields, vineyards, olive orchards, and houses. Do it right away! And pay back the 12% annual interest you have been collecting on the money, grain, wine, and olive oil that you have lent them.”

12 These leaders replied, “Yes, we will do what you say. We will give back their fields, vineyards, olive orchards, and houses. And we will stop charging them interest.”

Then I called the priests, and I made the leaders swear to God in front of them that they would do what they had promised.¹³ I also shook out the folds of my robe and said to them, “In this same way, may God fling anyone who does not keep this oath away from everything he owns. Yes, may that person lose everything!”

Then everyone who was there said, “We agree!” And they praised Yahweh. After that none of the Jews took houses or fields to guarantee loans, and none of them charged interest any more.

14 Here is something else I did to help the people. Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, had appointed me to be the governor of the province of Judah during the twentieth year of his reign. During the twelve years from the time that he appointed me until the thirty-second year of his reign, I did not accept the governor’s food allowance, and I did not use it to feed my relatives. I knew that the people were poor and could not afford to pay for it.¹⁵ The governors before me had made life very difficult for the people. They had demanded that the people supply them with bread and wine and forty silver shekels every day. Even their servants oppressed the people. But I respected and honored God, and so I did not oppress them.¹⁶ I devoted myself to the work of rebuilding the wall. My relatives and I did not buy any property, even though we could have gotten it cheaply because the poor were so desperate. I also assigned all of my servants to work on the wall.

17 As governor, I was responsible for feeding 150 Jewish leaders and city officials. I also entertained Jewish visitors who came from nearby countries.¹⁸ Each day I told my servants to prepare for us one ox, six good sheep, and various kinds of poultry. I paid for these myself. Every ten days I also brought in an abundant supply of various kinds of wine. But I knew that the people were struggling to survive, and so I paid for all of these things at my own expense. I did not accept the governor’s food allowance.

19 My God, think of me, and reward me for all the good that I have done for the people of Judah.

6 **1** Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arabian, and our other enemies learned that we had finished rebuilding the wall, and that there were now no more gaps in it. (However, we had not yet put the doors in the gates.)² So Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message that said, “We want to arrange to meet with you in one of the villages in the plain of Ono.” But I knew that they were saying this because they wanted to harm me.

3 So I sent messengers to tell them, “The work I am doing here is very important. I am not able to travel while it is going on. There is no reason for me to stop the work and leave it so that I can meet with you.”

4 They sent me the same message four times, and each time I refused them for this same reason.

5 Then Sanballat sent one of his servants to me bringing the same request for a fifth time. This time the message was written, but it was not sealed. Sanballat left the letter unsealed so that others would find out what it said, because he wanted to pressure me to meet with him. **6** The letter said, “The people in the countries around us are saying, and Geshem confirms that it is true, that you and the Jewish people are planning to rebel against King Artaxerxes. That is why you are rebuilding the wall. They are also saying that you intend to become the king of the Jews yourself. **7** These people are also saying that you have appointed prophets to make a proclamation about you in Jerusalem. They are saying, ‘The Jews now have a king of their own!’ King Artaxerxes will certainly hear these reports, and when he does, he will be very angry with you. So we really should meet together and talk about this.”

8 I sent a message back to him saying, “None of these things that you are saying are true. You are just making them up yourself.”

9 I knew that they were all just trying to frighten us. They thought, “The Jews will become so afraid that they will stop working on the wall, and they will never finish rebuilding it.” So I prayed, “O God, give me courage.”

10 Around this time I went to visit Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel. I went to see him in his home, because he was not leaving his house. He was a priest, and he was trying to show that it was not safe for Jewish leaders to go out in public. He told me, “We are not safe even here. We need to go into the temple and lock the doors, because people are trying to kill you. One night they are going to come and kill you.”

11 I responded, “I am not the kind of man who would run away! Besides, I am the governor, and everyone knows me, so I could not save my life by trying to hide in the temple. I refuse to do it!”

12 All of a sudden I realized that God had not given Shemaiah a prophetic message for me. Instead, he was saying these things because Tobiah and Sanballat had paid him to say them. **13** They had paid him the money specifically to say things that would scare me. They were hoping they could make me sin by abandoning my responsibilities and hiding in the temple. If I had done that, they would have ruined my reputation and discredited me.

14 So I prayed, “My God, treat Tobiah and Sanballat the way they deserve for what they have done. Do the same for the female prophet Noadiah and all the other prophets who are trying to make me afraid.”

15 We finished rebuilding the wall on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, after working on it for 52 days.

16 When all of our enemies learned that we had completed the rebuilding in such a short time, they realized that our God must have helped us. This made the people in the countries around us lose all of their confidence. **17** During this time, the leading citizens of Judah were writing many letters to Tobiah to give him information about me, and he was sending letters back to them with instructions. **18** Tobiah was married to the daughter of a powerful and influential member of the community, Shecaniah the son of Arah. His son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of another powerful and influential man, Meshullam the son of Berechiah. And so, for those reasons, many people in Judah had sworn oaths to be loyal to Tobiah. **19** The people who were loyal to Tobiah would also come and tell me what good things he was doing, and then they would report to him everything I said in response. Tobiah also sent me many letters to try to make me afraid.

7 **1** Once we had finished rebuilding the wall and we had put the doors in the gates, we assigned the gatekeepers and singers and Levites to their tasks. **2** I appointed two men to help me govern Jerusalem, my brother Hanani and Hananiah, the commander of the fortress in Jerusalem. I appointed Hananiah because he was trustworthy, and because he showed God more reverence and respect than most people do.

3 I told them, “Do not open the gates of Jerusalem until broad daylight. That way we will be able to see anything our enemies are doing. Have the gatekeepers close the gates and put the bars across the doors while they are still guarding the gates before they go home for the night.” I also told them, “Have the men who live in Jerusalem take turns keeping watch in their own neighborhoods.”

4 The city of Jerusalem covered a large area, but at that time not many people lived in the city, and they had not yet built houses for themselves. **5** So as a first step towards filling Jerusalem with people again, God led me to gather together the leading citizens and the city officials and the other people living in the city to register them according to their family histories. I also found a book containing the records of the first group of people who had returned to Jerusalem from the exile. This is what those records said.

6 “These are the names of the people from Judah who returned home from exile. Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had taken their ancestors away to Babylon. But they returned to Jerusalem and to other places in Judah. They returned to the same towns where their ancestors had lived.

7 The people who came back were following Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

This is a list of the number of men from each Israelite clan who returned:

8 2172 men from the clan of Parosh;

9 372 men from the clan of Shephatiah;

10 652 men from the clan of Arah;

11 2818 men from the clan of Pahath-Moab, who are descendants of Jeshua and Joab;

12 1254 men from the clan of Elam;

13 845 men from the clan of Zattu;

14 760 men from the clan of Zakkai;

15 648 men from the clan of Binnui;

16 628 men from the clan of Bebai;

17 2322 men from the clan of Azgad;

18 667 men from the clan of Adonikam;

19 2067 men from the clan of Bigvai;

20 655 men from the clan of Adin;

21 98 men from the clan of Ater who were descendants of Hezekiah;

22 328 men from the clan of Hashum;

23 324 men from the clan of Bezai;

24 112 men from the clan of Hariph;

25 95 men from the clan of Gibeon.

26 Some other men also returned, whose ancestors had lived in these towns:

188 men from Bethlehem and Netophah;

27 128 men from Anathoth;

28 42 men from Beth-Azmaveth;

29 743 men from Kiriath-Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth;

30 621 men from Ramah and Geba;

31 122 men from Michmas;

32 123 men from Bethel and Ai;

33 52 men from a small town called Nebo;

34 1254 men from a small town called Elam;

35 320 men from Harim;

36 345 men from Jericho;

37 721 men from Lod, Hadid, and Ono;

38 3930 men from Senaah.

39 These priests also returned:

973 men from the clan of Jedaiah who are descendants of Jeshua;

40 1052 men from the clan of Immer;

41 1247 men from the clan of Pashhur;

42 1017 men from the clan of Harim.

43 These Levites also returned:

74 men from the clan of Jeshua and the clan of Kadmiel, all of them descendants of Hodevah.

44 148 members of the sacred choir also returned. All of them were from the clan of Asaph.

45 138 temple gatekeepers also returned. They were from the clan of Shallum, the clan of Ater, the clan of Talmon, the clan of Akkub, the clan of Hatita, and the clan of Shobai.

46 Some temple workers also returned. They were from the clan of Ziha, the clan of Hasupha, the clan of Tabbaoth, **47** the clan of Keros, the clan of Sia, the clan of Padon, **48** the clan of Lebanah, the clan of Hagabah, the clan of Shalmai, **49** the clan of Hanan, the clan of Giddel, the clan of Gahar, **50** the clan of Reaiah, the clan of Rezin, the clan of Nekoda, **51** the clan of Gazzam, the clan of Uzza, the clan of Paseah, **52** the clan of Besai, the clan of Meunim, the clan of Nephushesim, **53** the clan of Bakbuk, the clan of Hakupha, the clan of Harhur, **54** the clan of Bazlith, the clan of Mehida, the clan of Harsha, **55** the clan of Barkos, the clan of Sisera, the clan of Temah, **56** the clan of Neziah, and the clan of Hatipha.

57 Some descendants of the laborers that King Solomon **first conscripted** also returned.

These were from the clan of Sotai, the clan of Sophereth, the clan of Perida, **58** the clan of Jaalah, the clan of Darkon, the clan of Giddel, **59** the clan of Shephatiah, the clan of Hattil, the clan of Pochereth-Hazzebaim, and the clan of Amon. **60** Altogether, there were 392 descendants of the **temple workers and conscripted laborers who returned**.

61 Another group also returned **that came from the towns of Tel-Melah, Tel-Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer in Babylonia**. But they could not prove that they were descendants of Israelites.

62 These 642 men were from the clan of Delaiah, the clan of Tobiah, and the clan of Nekoda.

63 Some priests **also returned who were** from the clan of Hobaiah, the clan of Hakkoz, and the clan of Barzillai. Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of a man named Barzillai from the region of Gilead. He had taken the family name of his wife.

64 These **priests** searched the records that contained the names of the Israelite ancestors, but they could not find the names of their families. **They did not qualify to be priests because they could not trace their family history**, so they were not allowed to have **the rights and duties of priests**. **65** The governor told them that they must not eat any of the share of food taken from the sacrifices and kept for the priests. They would have to wait until the priest **in charge of the temple** had begun his duties and could ask **God** what to do **about this situation**.

66 Altogether, 42360 people **returned to Judea**.

67 There were also 7337 male servants and female servants, and 245 male singers and female singers.

68 The Israelites also brought back from Babylonia 736 horses, 245 mules, **69** 435 camels, and 6720 donkeys.

70 Some of the leaders of the ancestral clans gave gifts for the work of rebuilding the temple.

The governor gave into the treasury more than 8 kilograms of gold, 50 bowls to be used in the temple, and 530 robes for the priests.

71 Some of the leaders of the ancestral clans also gave into the temple treasury for the work of rebuilding the temple a total of 153 kilograms of gold, and 1460 kilograms of silver.

72 And the remainder of the people gave a total of 153 kilograms of gold, 1330 kilograms of silver, and 67 robes for the priests.” **73** So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple workers, and many ordinary people started to live in the towns and cities of Judea where their ancestors had lived. All these people were Israelites. By the seventh month all of the Israelites had gone to their cities and had started living in them.

8 **1** A huge crowd of people gathered together in the plaza that was near the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the scroll of the law that Moses had written down, and which Yahweh had given to the people of Israel for them to obey its rules and commands. **2** Ezra the priest, who served God by offering sacrifices in the temple, brought out the law and presented it before all the people, to both men and women, and children who were old enough to understand what he read. He did this on the first day of the seventh month of that year. **3** So he read aloud from the book in the plaza that was near the Water Gate throughout the whole morning. He read it in front of all the people, both men and women and children who were old enough to understand what he read. And all the people listened carefully to the laws that were written on the scroll. **4** Ezra the scribe stood on top of a high wooden platform that the people had built for this purpose. At his right side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. At his left side stood Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. **5** Ezra stood on the platform above all the people so that everyone could see him. He opened the scroll, and as he did that all the people stood up.

6 Then Ezra praised Yahweh, the great God, and all the people lifted up their hands to show that they were praying with him. At the end of his prayer they said, “We agree!” Then they all bowed down with their faces touching the ground, and they worshiped Yahweh.

7 Then Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, who were all Levites, explained the meaning of the laws

of Moses to the people who were standing there.⁸ They read clearly from the scroll of the law of God, and they explained what it meant, so that the people understood what Ezra and the others were reading.

9 Then the people began to cry from sadness when they heard what the law said. So Nehemiah (who was the governor), Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining the meaning to the people, said to all the people, “Today is a festival day on which you are supposed to worship Yahweh your God. Do not mourn or cry!”

10 Then Nehemiah said to them, “Now go home, eat some good food, and drink something sweet. And share some of it with those who are not able to afford rich food and drink, because today is a holy day set apart to worship our Lord. So do not grieve, because the joy that Yahweh gives will strengthen you.”

11 The Levites also told the people who were crying to stop, saying, “Today is a holy day! So, shhh. Do not grieve.”

12 So all the people went home to eat and drink and share what they had. And they were very happy, because they understood the meaning of the words that Ezra had read and the others had explained to them.

13 On the next day, the clan leaders of all the people and the priests and the Levites met together with Ezra the scribe. They wanted to study carefully what was written in the law that Yahweh had given to Moses. They wanted to understand it better.¹⁴ They learned that the law said that Yahweh had told Moses to command the Israelite people to live in shelters during a festival in the seventh month. This was so that they would remember that their ancestors had lived in shelters when they walked in the wilderness after leaving Egypt.¹⁵ They also learned that they should publicly proclaim, in all their towns and in Jerusalem, that the people should go into the hills and cut branches. These should be from olive trees, wild olive trees, myrtle trees, palm trees, and shade trees. They must bring these branches and make shelters to live in during the festival. That was what the scroll instructed.

16 So the people went out of the towns and cut branches and brought them to make shelters for themselves. They built shelters on the flat roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the temple, in the plaza near the Water Gate, and in the plaza near the Ephraim Gate.¹⁷ All of the Israelite people who had returned from Babylon built shelters and lived in them for one week. Now the Israelite people had never celebrated that festival like this since Joshua the son of Nun led them into this territory. This was the first time they were doing it. And the people were very happy.¹⁸ Every day during that week Ezra read aloud to the people from the scroll of the law of God. They celebrated the

festival for seven days. On the eighth day, they called for all the people to come together so they could hold a ceremony to bring the festival to an end. That was what the scroll instructed.

9 **1** Two days later, the Israelite people gathered together again. To show that they were sorry for their sins, they went without food, they wore clothes made from rough cloth, and they put dirt on their heads. **2** The descendants of Israel separated themselves away from all the descendants of foreigners. They stood there and confessed their own sins and the wicked things their ancestors had done. **3** They stood in place and listened to someone read from the scroll of the law of Yahweh their God for three hours. Then for another three hours they confessed their sins and bowed down and worshiped Yahweh their God.

4 Some of the Levites stood up on the stairs, including Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, another man named Bani, and Kenani. And they cried out sorrowfully in a loud voice to Yahweh their God. **5** Then some Levites spoke. They were named Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah.

They said, “Stand up and praise Yahweh your God, who has always lived and will live forever! Yahweh, we praise your glorious name! Your name is more important than everything else that is good and wonderful! **6** You are Yahweh, and no one else. You made the heavens that are above everything, and all that lives in the heavens above the earth. You made the earth and everything that is on it, and you made the seas and everything that is in them. You are the one who causes all living things to be alive. Everything that lives in the heavens above the earth worships you.

7 You are Yahweh! You are the God who chose Abram and brought him out of the city of Ur, where the Chaldean people lived. You changed his name to Abraham. **8** You saw that he was faithful to you in his inner being. You made a promise to him pledged with blood, promising that you would give a land to him and to his descendants. This was the land where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Gergashites lived. And you did what you promised, because you always do what is right.

9 You saw how the Egyptians mistreated our ancestors in Egypt. You heard them cry out to you for help when they were beside the Red Sea. **10** You knew that the leaders of Egypt were treating our ancestors very arrogantly. So you performed miracles for Pharaoh and his officials and all the people of Egypt. These proved you are the true God. You made yourself famous, and you are still famous! **11** You divided the sea in front of your people Israel, and they walked through the middle of the sea on dry land. But you drowned the soldiers of the Egyptian army under the waters. They sank as a stone sinks in deep water!

12 During the day you led your people by a cloud that looked like a huge pillar. At night you

led them by a fire that looked like a huge pillar. It shone on the path in front of them to show them where they should walk. ¹³ When our ancestors were at Sinai Mountain, you appeared to them and spoke to them from heaven. You gave them honest instructions and trustworthy laws. You gave them good rules and commands. ¹⁴ You taught them about your Sabbath day of rest. It is set apart from the other days of the week. You gave commands and rules and laws for the people by your servant Moses. ¹⁵ When they were hungry, you gave them bread from heaven. When they were thirsty, you gave them water from a rock. You told them to go and take the land of Canaan, which you had promised with a vow to give them.

¹⁶ But our ancestors were proud and stubborn. They refused to obey what you commanded them to do. ¹⁷ They refused to obey you. They did not consider all the miracles that you had performed for them. They became stubborn and rebelled against you. They appointed a leader to take them back to Egypt, where they would be slaves again! But you are a God who forgives us. You act kindly and mercifully toward us. You do not become angry quickly. Instead, you faithfully love us very much. So you did not leave our ancestors alone in the desert. ¹⁸ Indeed you did not leave them alone, even though they made an idol for themselves that resembled a calf. They said about the idol, ‘This is our god, who brought us up out of Egypt.’ By doing that they insulted you greatly. ¹⁹ But because you always act mercifully, you did not leave them alone in the desert. During the daytime, the cloud that looked like a huge pillar above them continued to lead them in the way you wanted them to go. And during the night, the fire that looked like a huge pillar shone on the path in front of them to show them where to walk. ²⁰ You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them. You continued to give them manna when they were hungry, and you gave them water when they were thirsty. ²¹ For forty years you took care of them in the desert. During all that time, they had everything they needed. Their clothes did not wear out. Their feet did not swell up, even though they were continually walking. ²² You helped our ancestors to defeat the armies of great kings who ruled many people. By doing that, you allowed our ancestors to settle in every part of this land. They took over the land that King Sihon ruled from the city of Heshbon and the land that King Og ruled in the Bashan area. ²³ You gave so many children to our ancestors that they were like the stars in the sky. You brought them into this land, which you had told their parents to enter and take for themselves so that they could live there.

²⁴ Their children went in and took the land. You enabled them to defeat the people who were living there. They were the descendants of Canaan. You enabled them to conquer their kings and all the people who lived there. They were able to do whatever they wanted to those people. ²⁵ Our ancestors captured cities that had walls around them. They took possession of fertile fields. They took possession of houses that were already full of all

kinds of good things, and wells that someone had already dug. They took possession of many vineyards and groves of olive trees and fruit trees. They ate all that they wanted and became fat. They enjoyed all the many good things you did for them.

26 But they turned against you. They rejected your law. They killed the prophets who warned them that they should return to obeying you. They said and did very evil things

against you. **27** So you allowed their enemies to defeat them. But when their enemies caused them to suffer, they called out to you. You heard them from heaven, and because you are very merciful, you sent them people to help them. Those leaders rescued them from their enemies.

28 But when there was a time of peace again, our ancestors again did evil things that you hated. So you allowed their enemies to conquer them and rule over them. But whenever they returned to you and cried out to you again to help them, you heard them from heaven.

You rescued them many times, because you always act mercifully. **29** You warned them that they should return to obeying your laws again. But they became proud and stubborn. They would not listen to your commands. They sinned by disobeying your decrees, even though a person lives by obeying them. They purposely ignored what you commanded them to do. They became stubborn and refused to obey.

30 You were patient with them for a long time. You warned them by the messages your Spirit gave to your prophets. But they did not listen to those messages. So again you allowed the armies of the nations nearby to defeat them. **31** But because you act very mercifully, you did not destroy them completely. You never left them alone. Yes, you are a very gracious and merciful God!

32 Our God, you are great and mighty and awesome! You always fulfill your promises and always faithfully love us! So now we are praying: Do not ignore all our difficulties.

Consider all the troubles that our kings, our leaders, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all of your people have experienced. We have been experiencing these troubles since the armies of the kings of Assyria conquered us until now. We are still experiencing them today. **33** We know that you have acted fairly in letting all these things happen to us. Yes,

you have treated us as we deserve. But we have done evil things. **34** In the past, our kings, our leaders, our priests and our other ancestors did not obey your laws. They did not listen to your commands or the warnings that you gave them. **35** They had their own kings. They enjoyed the many good things that you provided in this large and fertile land that you gave them. But even then, they did not serve you. They would not stop doing evil things.

36 Consider our situation! Today we live like slaves here in this land that you gave to our ancestors. You gave them this land so that they could enjoy all the good things that

grow here. But consider us now! We are like slaves on this land.³⁷ The kings whom you have allowed to rule over us are enjoying all the good things that grow here. This is because we have sinned. They rule over our bodies and our cattle. They do whatever they please. We feel great distress.³⁸ Because of all this, we the Israelite people are making a solemn agreement. We are writing it on a scroll. We will write down the names of our leaders, our Levites, and our priests. Then we will seal the scroll."

10 ¹ These are the names of the people who signed the agreement:

Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah; Zedekiah the scribe.

² The priests who signed the agreement included:

Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluk,⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. Those are the names of the priests who signed the agreement.

⁹ The Levites who signed the agreement were:

Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui from the clan of Henadad, Kadmiel,

¹⁰ Some of their associates also signed the agreement, including: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

Mika, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

¹⁴ The Israelite leaders who signed the agreement were:

Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, and Bani,¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,²⁶ also Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,²⁷ Malluk, Harim, and Baanah.

²⁸ The rest of the people joined in this solemn agreement. This included the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, and the temple workers. It also included everyone who agreed only to worship and obey the God of Israel, along with their wives and their sons and daughters who were old enough to understand what they were doing.²⁹ They all joined with their leaders, who were important people, and together they all made a solemn

agreement to obey **all** the laws that God had given by Moses his servant. They agreed that they would strictly obey everything that Yahweh our God had commanded, yes, **all of his instructions.** **30** This is what **they promised to do:** “We will not give our daughters in marriage to people **who live in this land who do not worship Yahweh.** We will not allow our sons to marry their daughters. **31** People from other groups who live in this land might bring merchandise and all kinds of food to sell on Sabbath days. But we will not buy anything from them on a Sabbath **day** or any other sacred day. Every seventh year, we will let **the fields rest and not plant any crops.** That same year we will not make anyone pay back anything they owe to another person. **32** We each also agreed to a pledge that **every year** we would pay 4 grams of silver for the **supplies** needed for the temple. **33** Here is a list of those supplies. The **sacred** bread that is placed **before God.** The grain that is **burned on the altar** each day. **The animals that are completely burned up on the altar** each day. The **sacred offerings** for the Sabbath days and for celebrating each new moon and other **festivals** that **God told us to celebrate.** **Other offerings** that are dedicated **to God.** **The animals** to be sacrificed to atone for the sins of the Israelite people. Anything else that is needed for the work of **taking care of the temple.**

34 We have cast lots to determine when each clan of the priests, the Levites, and **the rest of the people** will bring an offering of wood to the temple. Each clan will do this at an appointed time every year. **The Levites will use** the wood to burn **the sacrifices** on the altar that belongs to Yahweh our God. He commanded this in the law **he gave through Moses.**

35 We will also bring **an offering** to the temple every year from the first grain that we **harvest** and from all the first fruit that **grows on** all our trees. **36** We will also do something else that God commanded. We will bring our firstborn sons to the temple **for dedication**, and our firstborn calves and lambs and goats **as sacrifices**, to the priests who minister in the temple. **37** We will also bring supplies to the priests that **they can store** in the temple. These will include the first grain that we **harvest**, the first flour we **make**, the first fruit from all **our trees**, and the first wine and olive oil **that we produce.** We will also bring 10 percent of our harvest to the Levites. We will allow them to collect this 10 percent right in all the towns where we work. **38** A priest, one of the descendants of Aaron, will be with the Levites **and supervise** them when they collect that 10 percent. Then the Levites must bring 10 percent of what they have received to the temple. **The priests will put it** in the storerooms and it will **support them.** **39** That is how it will work. The Israelites and the Levites will bring their offerings of grain, wine, and olive oil to those storerooms. That is where **the priests** will store the equipment for the temple. And that is where **they will keep the food supplies** for the priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers who are serving at that time.

We promise that we will keep taking care of the temple.”

11 **1** So the **Israelite** leaders settled in Jerusalem with their families. The rest of the

people cast lots to select one family out of ten to live in Jerusalem. That was the city set apart for God. The remaining nine families lived in the **other** towns. **2** The people asked God to bless all those who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

3 These are the names of the provincial officials who settled in Jerusalem. But in the towns of Judah, everyone lived on his own family property in their towns. This included the Israelites, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of the servants of Solomon. **4** But some of the people of Judah and some of the people of Benjamin stayed and lived in Jerusalem.

Here are the names of the leaders who lived in Jerusalem.

From the descendants of Judah, one of them was Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, a descendant of Perez.

5 Another one was Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Kol-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, who was one of the descendants of Shelah. **6** Altogether 468 men who were descendants of Perez lived in the city of Jerusalem. These men were very brave and skilled in combat.

7 These are the descendants of Benjamin who decided to live in Jerusalem.

One of them was Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah.

8 Two men who assisted him were Gabbai and Sallai. Altogether 928 people from the tribe of Benjamin settled in Jerusalem. **9** Their leader was Joel the son of Zichri. Judah the son of Hassenuah was the official who was second in command in Jerusalem.

10 The priests who settled in Jerusalem included Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, and Jachin.

11 Another priest was Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub. He was in charge of the temple. **12** Another 822 of their associates settled in Jerusalem and performed work for the temple. Another priest who settled in Jerusalem was Adaiah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah. **13** Another 242 of his associates, including the leaders of their ancestral clans, settled in Jerusalem. Another priest who settled there was Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of

Meshillemoth, the son of Immer.¹⁴ Another 128 of their associates who were strong men settled in Jerusalem. Their leader was Zabdiel the son of Haggedolim.

15 One of the Levites who settled in Jerusalem was Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni. **16** Two others were Shabbethai and Jozabad, who supervised the work outside the temple and were leaders of the Levites.

17 Another Levite who settled in Jerusalem was Mattaniah, who directed the temple choir when they sang the prayers to thank God. He was the son of Mika, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph. His assistant choir director was Bakbukiah. Another Levite was Abda, the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. **18** Altogether, 284 Levites settled in Jerusalem, the city set apart for God.

19 The gatekeepers who settled in Jerusalem included Akkub, Talmon, and 172 of their associates who kept watch at the gates.

20 The rest of the Israelite people, including the priests and the Levites, all lived on their own property in all the other towns in Judea. **21** The temple workers lived on Ophel Hill in Jerusalem; and Ziha and Gishpa supervised them.

22 The man who supervised the Levites who lived in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mika. Uzzi was one of the descendants of Asaph. These were the singers responsible for the music in the temple

23 services. Now the king of Persia had said that his kingdom would provide support for the singers. The king had said to give them whatever they needed to maintain the singing in the temple services. **24** Pethahiah was the ambassador to the king of Persia for any matter pertaining to the Israelites. He was the son of Meshezabel, who was one of the descendants of Zerah, the son of Judah.

25 Some of the descendants of Judah did not settle in Jerusalem. They lived in towns and villages near their farms. These included the city of Kiriat-Arba and its neighboring villages, the city of Dibon and its neighboring villages, and the town of Jekabzeel and its neighboring villages. **26** Some descendants of Judah also lived in the town of Jeshua, the

town of Moladah, the town of Beth-Pelet, **27** the town of Hazar-Shual, and the city of Beersheba and its neighboring villages. **28** Some also lived in the town of Ziklag, the town of Mekonah and its neighboring villages, **29** the town of En-Rimmon, the town of Zora, the town of Jarmuth, **30** the towns of Zanoah and Adullam and the nearby villages, the city of Lachish and the nearby farms, and the town of Azekah and the nearby villages.

All of those people settled in the territory of Judah, in the area between Beersheba in the south and the Valley of Hinnom in the north.³¹ Some people who were descendants of Benjamin settled in these cities and towns: Geba, Michmas, Aija, Bethel and its neighboring villages,³² Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,³⁵ Lod, and Ono the Valley of Craftsmen.³⁶ Some Levites who had previously lived in the territory of Judah went and settled in the land that had belonged to the old tribe of Benjamin.

12 ¹ These are the names of the priests and Levites who returned from Babylonia with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and with Joshua the Supreme Priest. The priests included Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,² Amariah, Malluk, Hattush,³ Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,⁴ Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,⁵ Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,⁶ Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah,⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah.

All those men were leaders of the priests, their associates, during the time when Joshua was the Supreme Priest.

⁸ The Levites who returned included Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah. Mattaniah and his associates led the people in singing songs to thank God.

⁹ Their associates Bakbukiah and Unni stood opposite them during the worship services and led a choir that sang responses. ¹⁰ Joshua the Supreme Priest was the father of Joiakim. Joiakim was the father of Eliashib. Eliashib was the father of Joiada. ¹¹ Joiada was the father of Jonathan. Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

¹² When Joiakim was the Supreme Priest, these priests were the leaders of their clans. Meraiah was the leader of the clan of Seraiah. Hananiah was the leader of the clan of Jeremiah.¹³ Meshullam was the leader of the clan of Ezra.

Jehohanan was the leader of the clan of Amariah.

¹⁴ Jonathan was the leader of the clan of Malluchi. Joseph was the leader of the clan of Shecaniah. Adna was the leader of the clan of Harim. Helkai was the leader of the clan of Meraioth. Zechariah was the leader of the clan of Iddo. Meshullam was the leader of the clan of Ginnethon. Zichri was the leader of the clan of Abijah. Piltai was the leader of the clan of Miniamin and the clan of Moadiah. Shammua was the leader of the clan of Bilgah. Jehonathan was the leader of the clan of Shemaiah. Mattenai was the leader of the clan of Joiarib. Uzzi was the leader of the clan of Jedaiah. Kallai was the leader of the clan of Sallai. Eber was the leader of the clan of Amok.

Hashabiah was the leader of the clan of Hilkiah. Nethanel was the leader of the clan of Jedaiah.

22 Some scribes wrote down the names of the clan leaders of the Levites during the time when Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua were Supreme Priests. They wrote down the names of the clan leaders of the priests when Darius was king of Persia.

23 Scribes recorded the names of the clan leaders of the Levites in their record books up until the time when Johanan the descendant of Eliashib was the Supreme Priest.

24 Hashabiah, Serebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel were Levite leaders who directed one choir. Their associates stood opposite them directing another choir. The singers praised God and gave thanks to him, with one group facing the other. This was what King David, the man who served God faithfully, had instructed. **25** Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers. They stood guard at the storerooms near the gates. **26** They did that work during the time when Joiakim, the son of Jeshua and grandson of Jozadak, was the Supreme Priest. They did it again during the time when Nehemiah served as governor and Ezra served as priest and scribe.

27 When we dedicated the wall around Jerusalem, we summoned the Levites from all the places where they were living. We brought them to Jerusalem to assist in dedicating the wall by rejoicing and giving thanks and by singing accompanied by cymbals and harps and other stringed instruments. **28** We summoned the Levites who were used to singing together. They came to Jerusalem from nearby areas where they had settled around the city. They also came from places around the village of Netophah southeast of Jerusalem. **29** They also came from three places northeast of Jerusalem, Beth-Gilgal and the areas around Geba and Azmaveth. We summoned those singers because they had built villages to live in near Jerusalem.

30 The priests and Levites performed rituals to make themselves acceptable to God. Then they performed similar rituals to purify the other people, the gates, and the wall.

31 Then I gathered the leaders of Judah together on top of the wall. I assigned them to lead two large groups that would march around the city on top of the wall, thanking God. As they faced the city, one group walked to the right toward the Rubbish Gate. **32** Hoshaiyah and half of the leaders of Judah marched behind that group. **33** The people who marched with that group included Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, **34** Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah.

35 Some descendants of the priests also marched with that group playing musical instruments. They included Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph. **36** Some associates of Zechariah also marched and played musical instruments. They included Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. They all were playing the same kinds of musical instruments that King David, the man who served God faithfully, had told the

Levite musicians to play many years previously. Ezra the scribe marched in front of this group.³⁷ When the people in this group reached the Fountain Gate, they went up the steps that were in front of them to the area known as the City of David. Then they went along the top of the wall past the location of the royal palace of David, and then to the Water Gate, on the east side of the temple.³⁸ The other group of those who were singing and thanking Yahweh marched to the left on top of the wall. I followed them with half of the people. We marched past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall.³⁹ From there we marched past the Ephraim Gate, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred Soldiers to the Sheep Gate. We finished marching near a gate that leads into the temple area.⁴⁰ Both of the groups reached the temple as they were singing and giving thanks. They stood in their places there. I was there with the half of the city officials who had come with me.⁴¹ My group included the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elionai, Zechariah, and Hananiah. All of them were blowing trumpets.⁴² Others who were blowing trumpets included Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang with Jezrahiah who was their leader.⁴³ The people offered many sacrifices that day. They all rejoiced because God had made them very happy. The women and the children rejoiced along with the men, so the sound of the celebration in Jerusalem was so loud that people far away could hear it.

⁴⁴ On that day we appointed men to be in charge of the storerooms. That was where the priests kept the money and the food and the grain and the tithes. The people brought these things from the fields near the cities into the storerooms for the priests and the Levites, as Moses had commanded in the law. The people of Judah did all this because they were so happy about the priests and the Levites serving in the temple.⁴⁵ The priests and the Levites served God by performing rituals to purify things. The singers and the gatekeepers also did their work as King David and his son Solomon had declared they should.⁴⁶ We did all this because that was how it was in the days of old, when David was king and Asaph was in charge of the temple musicians. There was someone to lead the singers, and they sang songs to praise and thank God.⁴⁷ During the time when Zerubbabel was the governor, the people all contributed the food that the singers and temple gatekeepers needed each day. They did the same during the time when Nehemiah was the governor. They gave a tenth of their crops to the Levites, and the Levites gave a tenth of that to the priests, who were descendants of Aaron, the first Supreme Priest.

13 ¹ Then someone read out loud to the people from a scroll that contained the law that God gave to Moses. They learned that the law said that no Ammonites or Moabites should ever join the Israelite people when they gathered together to worship God.² The law said this because the people of Ammon and the people of Moab did not give any food or water

to the Israelites while they were traveling through their areas after leaving Egypt. Instead, they paid Balaam to get him to curse the Israelites. But our God turned that attempt to curse Israel into a blessing.³ So the people obeyed that law. They sent away all the people whose ancestors had come from other countries.

4 When he became the Supreme Priest, Eliashib got control of the storerooms in the temple. Now he was related to Tobiah.⁵ He allowed Tobiah to have a large room in which the priests used to store supplies. These included the grain offerings and the incense, the equipment for the temple, and the tithes of grain and wine and olive oil. God had commanded the people to bring these to the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers. This room had also held the offerings for the priests.⁶ During that time I was not in Jerusalem, because in the thirty-second year that Artaxerxes was the king of Babylonia, I had gone back to report to the king what I had been doing. After I had been there a while, I asked the king to allow me to return to Jerusalem.

7 When I arrived in Jerusalem, I discovered the evil thing that Eliashib had done for Tobiah by allowing him to use this room in the temple area.⁸ That grieved me very much. I threw everything that belonged to Tobiah out of that room.⁹ Then I commanded the priests to perform a ritual to cleanse that room and make it pure again. I also ordered the equipment for the temple and the grain offerings and incense to be put back in that room where they belonged.

10 I also learned that the singers and the other Levites who were responsible for the temple services had left Jerusalem. They had returned to their own fields because the people had stopped giving them 10 percent of their harvests, since Tobiah had occupied the storeroom.¹¹ So I rebuked the city officials. I told them, “You have neglected the work of the temple!” Then I brought the Levites and the singers back to the temple and told them to do their work again.¹² Then all the people of Judah started bringing their tithes of grain, wine, and olive oil to the temple storerooms once again.¹³ I appointed some men to be in charge of the storerooms. They were Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah the Levite. I also appointed Hanan the son of Zaccur and grandson of Mattaniah to assist them. I appointed these men because everyone knew that they were trustworthy and would distribute the offerings fairly to their associates.

14 “My God, please bless me for this. Yes, bless me for the good things that I have done for your temple and for the temple services!”

15 During that time, I saw some people in Judea who were working on the Sabbath day. Some were pressing grapes to make wine. Others were taking their grain and loading it on donkeys. Others were also loading bags of wine, baskets of grapes, figs, and many other

things onto donkeys and bringing them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. I warned them not to sell **food to the people of Judea** on Sabbath days. ¹⁶ I also saw some people from **the city of Tyre** who were living there in **Jerusalem** bringing fish and other things into Jerusalem to sell to the people of Judah on the Sabbath day. ¹⁷ So I rebuked the Jewish leading citizens. I said to them, “This is a very evil thing that you are doing! You are making the Sabbath day into something **God never wanted** it to be. ¹⁸ You know that your ancestors did these same things, and God **punished our nation** by bringing great trouble to this city! But now you too are breaking **the laws** for the Sabbath day. You are going to cause **God** to be angry with **the nation of Israel** again. **He will punish us even more!**”

¹⁹ So I commanded **the gatekeepers** to shut the doors of the gates of the city when it started to get dark on Friday evening. I commanded them not to open the gates until Saturday evening. I also stationed some of my men at the gates **so they would make sure** that no one brought things to sell into **the city in between those times**, on the Sabbath day. ²⁰ One or two times traders and merchants selling all kinds of things camped outside the city on the night **before the Sabbath day**. **They were hoping to sell something the next day.** ²¹ I warned them. I said to them, “It is useless for you to camp here outside the walls on Friday night. If you do this again, I will arrest you by force!” After that, they did not come on Sabbath days.

²² I also commanded the Levites to perform a ritual to purify themselves and then **take up stations** to guard the city gates. I wanted them to ensure that Sabbath days were kept holy by not allowing merchants to enter the city on that holy day.

“My God, please bless me for doing this too! And be kind to me, because your kindness is so great.”

²³ During that time, I also learned that many of the Jewish men had married women from **the city of Ashdod**, and from the Ammonites and Moabites. ²⁴ So half of their children spoke a foreign language, and they did not know how to speak Hebrew. They spoke whatever language **their foreign parent spoke.** ²⁵ So I rebuked those men. I asked God to curse them. I struck some of them **with my fists**. I pulled out their hair. Then I forced them to make a solemn promise, knowing that God was listening. I made them promise that they would **never** again allow their daughters to marry foreign men. I also made them promise that they and their sons would not marry foreign women. ²⁶ I said to them, “You know that Solomon, the king of Israel, sinned as a result of **marrying foreign women who worshiped idols!** You know that he was greater than any of the kings of other nations. God loved him, and God set him as the king over all **the people of Israel**. But his foreign wives caused even him to sin! ²⁷ I am grieved to hear this about you! You have married foreign wives **who worship idols**. You have committed a great sin against our God!”

28 A man who was a son of Joiada and a grandson of Eliashib the Supreme Priest had married the daughter of **our enemy** Sanballat the Horonite. So I forced this man to leave Jerusalem.

29 “My God, these **men** have brought shame to the priesthood. **They have broken** the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites. Punish them as they deserve!”

30 I took away everything from **the priests** that came from other nations and religions. I also established regulations for the priests and for the Levites **so they would know** what work each of them was supposed to do. **31** I also **arranged** for the people to bring their offerings of wood at the set times **to burn on the altar**, and to bring the first part of what they harvested **of each crop** during the year.

“My God, please consider that I **have done** all these things, and bless me **for doing** them.”