

unfoldingWord® Simplified Text

v92

Ezra

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Ezra

1 During 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. 3 All
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! 4 There 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."

5 Then 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. 6 Many 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. 7 King 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. 9 This is a list of the items *that Cyrus donated*: 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 knives, 10 30 gold bowls, 410 secondary silver bowls, and 1,000 other utensils. 11 All 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.

2 *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. 2 The 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.

3 2, 172 descendants of Parosh,
4 372 descendants of Shephatiah,
5 775 descendants of Arach,
6 2, 812 descendants of Pahath-Moab, from the families of Jeshua and Joab,
7 1, 254 descendants of Elam,
8 945 descendants of Zattu,
9 760 descendants of Zaccai,
10 642 descendants of Bani,
11 623 descendants of Bebai,
12 1, 222 descendants of Azgad,
13 666 descendants of Adonikam,
14 2, 056 descendants of Bigvai,
15 454 descendants of Adin,
16 98 descendants of Ater, who descended from Hezekiah,
17 323 descendants of Bezai,
18 112 descendants of Jorah,
19 223 descendants of Hashum,
20 95 descendants of Gibbar.
21 *The following is a list of people whose ancestors had lived in these towns in Judah:*
123 from Bethlehem,
22 56 from Netophah,
23 128 from Anathoth,
24 42 from Azmaveth,
25 743 from Kiriath Arim, Kephirah, and Beeroth,
26 621 from Ramah and Geba,
27 122 from Michmas,
28 223 from Bethel and Ai,
29 52 from Nebo,
30 156 from Magbish,
31 1, 254 from the other Elam,
32 320 from Harim,
33 725 from Lod, Hadid, and Ono,
34 345 from Jericho,
35 3, 630 from Senaah.
36 These are the priests who returned:
973 descendants of Jedaiah (that is, those who descended through Jeshua),
37 1, 052 descendants of Immer,
38 1, 247 descendants of Pashur,
39 1, 017 descendants of Harim,
40 These are the descendants of Levi who returned:
74 descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel, who were from the family of Hodaviah,
41 128 musicians who were descendants of Asaph,
42 139 gatekeepers who were descendants of the gatekeepers Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai,
43 The following is a list of the temple workers who returned. They were the descendants of these men: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, 44 Keros, Siaha, Padon, 45 Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, 46 Hagab, Shalmai, Hanan, 47 Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, 48 Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, 49 Uzza, Paseah, Besai, 50 Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim, 51 Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, 52 Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, 53 Barkos, Sisera, Temah, 54 Neziah, and Hatipha.
55 The following descendants of King Solomon's servants returned *to Jerusalem*. They were the descendants of these men: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, 56 Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, 57 Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth Hazzebaim, and Ami.
58 Altogether, there were 392 descendants of temple workers and Solomon's servants who returned.

59 There 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. 60 This group included 652 people who were descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda. 61 The 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. 62 The 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. 63 The 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*.

64 Altogether in this group, 42, 360 Israelite people returned to Judah. 65 The Israelites also brought along with them 7, 337 male and female servants and 200 male and female musicians. 66 The Israelites also brought with them *from Babylonia* 736 horses, 245 mules, 67 435 camels, and 6, 720 donkeys.

68 When 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. 69 Each 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.

70 So 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.

3 After the Israelite people *returned and* began to live in their towns, in the autumn of that year, they all gathered together in Jerusalem. 2 Then 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. 3 Even 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. 5 From 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*. 6 But even though they started bringing burnt offerings to Yahweh at the beginning of autumn, they had not yet started rebuilding the temple. 7 So 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 seashore at Joppa and then floated them along the coast to *the city of* Joppa. *Then they brought the logs inland from Joppa up to Jerusalem.*

8 The 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. 9 Jeshua, 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*. 10 When 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. 11 Then 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. 12 Many 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. 13 Since 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.

4 The 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. 2 So 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."

3 But 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."

4 Then 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*.
5 They 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.

6 These 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*.

7 Then 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.

8 Rehum, 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:

9 From 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, 10 as 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*. 13 It 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.

14 So, 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. 15 We 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. 16 We 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:

18 My officials carefully read out loud to me the letter that you sent to us. 19 Then 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.

21 Therefore, 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. 22 Do this immediately, because I do not want those people to do anything more that will cause me to lose *any territory or income*."

23 Then 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.

5 At 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. 2 So 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.

3 But 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?" 4 They also asked the Jews to tell them the names of the men who were working on this temple.

5 However, 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*.

6 This 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. 7 When they sent the report to him, this is what they wrote in it:

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

8 We 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.

9 So we asked the Jewish leaders, 'Who has permitted you to rebuild this temple?' 10 We 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.

11 This 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. 12 But 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.
13 However, during the first year that Cyrus ruled as king
of Babylon, he decreed that our people could rebuild the
temple for God. 14 There 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*. 15 King 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. 16 So
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.'
17 Therefore, 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."

6 So King Darius commanded his servants to search in
the places where he kept important records there in the
kingdom of Babylon. 2 They *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. 4 They 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. 5 I
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! 7 Allow 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.
8 Furthermore, 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. 9 The 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. 10 When 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.
11 This 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.
12 God 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."
13 Tattenai, 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.
14 So 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*. 15 The
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.
16 Then the people of Israel, *that is,* the priests, the Levites,
and everyone else who had returned from Babylonia, joyfully
dedicated this temple to God. 17 During 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. 18 Then 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.
19 On 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. 21 All 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. 22 Then 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.

7 Many 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. 2 Hilkiah was the son of Shallum,
who was the son of Zadok, who was a descendant of Ahitub,
3 who was a descendant of Amariah, who was the son of
Azariah, who was a descendant of Meraioth, 4 who was the
son of Zerahiah, who was the son of Uzzi, who was the son
of Bukki, 5 who 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. 6 This 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*.

7 Many 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. 8 Ezra *and the group with him* arrived
in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year that
Artaxerxes was king.

9 Consider 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.

11 King 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:

13 I 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.

14 I, 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. 15 We 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. 16 You 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. 17 Then 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.

18 If 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.
19 We 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. 20 If 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.

21 And 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. 22 Give 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. 23 Be 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*. 24 By 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. 25 Now
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. 28 God 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."

8 "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*:

2 Gershom 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 Shelomith son of Josiphiah and 160 other men from
the clan descended from *Bani*.
11 Zechariah son of Bebai and 28 other men from the clan
descended from *another man whose name was* Bebai.
12 Johanan son of Hakkatan and 110 other men from the
clan descended from Azgad.
13 Eliphelet, 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.
14 Uthai 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. 16 So 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. 17 I 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.
18 Because 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 Jeshaiah, and 20 of his brothers and
their sons. Both men were descendants of Merari *the son of*
Levi. 20 They 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.
21 There 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. 22 Previously 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.
23 So we abstained from eating food and we asked our God to
protect us. We prayed to him, and he answered our prayer.
24 I chose 12 of the leaders of the priests and brought
them together with Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of
the other Levites. 25 I 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. 26 As 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, 27 20 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. 28 I 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. 29 So 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.'
30 So 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.
31 On 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. 32 After we arrived in Jerusalem, we
rested for three days. 33 Then 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. 34 They counted everything, and wrote down
how much each item weighed, and wrote a description of
each one as they received it.
35 The 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.
36 Some 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."

9 "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 Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites,
Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites.
2 Specifically, 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!'
3 When 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.
4 Many 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.
5 When 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, 6 and 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. 7 Since 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.

8 But 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. 9 Yes, 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.

10 Our 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. 11 They 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."

13 But 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. 14 However,
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!

15 Yahweh, 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.'"

10 Ezra 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*.

2 Then 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. 3 Here 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. 4 Since you are our
leader, get going, and be courageous, and do *what is necessary
to fix this problem*. We will do whatever you say."

5 So 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
Shekaniah said that they should do. So they all solemnly
promised *to do that*. 6 Then 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.

7 Then 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. 8 The 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. 9 So 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.

10 Then 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. 11 So 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."

12 The 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. 14 So 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. 16 But *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. 17 By

the first day of the first month *of the next year* they had finished determining which men had married women who were not Israelites.

18 They 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. 19 They solemnly promised to divorce their wives and they each offered a ram as a sacrifice to atone for their sins.

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

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

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

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

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

25 This 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

43 In the clan of Nebo there were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. 44 All 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*.