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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*.