



The Book of Ezra

A Priest And A

Great Leader

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Ezra

OVERVIEW:

NAME the truly great men and women of your lifetime. Celebrities, including politicians, war heroes, sports figures, and maybe your parents and special friends come to mind. You remember them because of certain acts or character qualities. Now, name some Biblical heroes—figures etched into your life through countless sermons and church school lessons. This list undoubtedly includes many who served God faithfully and courageously. Does your list include Ezra? Far from being well known, this unheralded man of God deserves to be mentioned in any discussion of greatness.

Ezra was a priest, a scribe, and a great leader. His name means “help,” and his whole life was dedicated to serving God and God’s people. Tradition says that Ezra wrote most of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Psalm 119, and that he led the council of 120 men who formed the Old Testament canon. He centers the narrative of the book of Ezra around God and his promise that the Jews would return to their land, as promised by Jeremiah (see the note on +Ezra 1:1). This message formed the core of Ezra’s life. The last half of the book gives a very personal glimpse of Ezra. His knowledge of Scripture and his God-given wisdom were so obvious to the king that he appointed Ezra to lead the second emigration to Jerusalem, to teach the people God’s Word, and to administer national life (Ezra 7:14-26).

Ezra not only knew God’s Word, he believed and obeyed it. Upon learning of the Israelites’ sins of intermarriage and idolatry, Ezra fell in humility before God and prayed for the nation (Ezra 9:1-15). Their disobedience touched him deeply (Ezra 10:1). His response helped lead the people back to God.

Second Chronicles ends with Cyrus, king of Persia, asking for volunteers to return to Jerusalem to build a house for God. Ezra continues this account (Ezra 1:1-3 is almost identical to 2 Chron. 36:22-23) as two caravans of God’s people were returning to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, the leader of the first trip, was joined by 42,360 pilgrims who journeyed homeward (Ezra 2). After arriving, they began to build the altar and the temple foundations (Ezra 3). But opposition arose from the local inhabitants, and a campaign of accusations and rumors temporarily halted the

project (Ezra 4). During this time, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people (Ezra 5). Finally, Darius decreed that the work should proceed unhindered (Ezra 6).

After a 58-year gap, Ezra led a group of Jews from Persia. Armed with decrees and authority from Artaxerxes I, Ezra's task was to administer the affairs of the land (Ezra 7-8). Upon arriving, he learned of intermarriage between God's people and their pagan neighbors. He wept and prayed for the nation (Ezra 9). Ezra's example of humble confession led to national revival (Ezra 10). Ezra, a man of God and a true hero, was a model for Israel, and he is a fitting model for us.

Read Ezra, the book, and remember Ezra, the man—a humble, obedient helper. Commit yourself to serving God as he did, with your exiles returns to the land

THE BLUEPRINT

A. THE RETURN LED BY ZERUBBABEL (Ezra 1:1-6:22)

Finally given the chance to return to their homeland, the people started to rebuild the temple, only to be stopped by opposition from their enemies. God's work in the world is not without opposition. We must not get discouraged and quit, as the returning people did at first, but continue on boldly in the face of difficulties, as they did later with the encouragement from the prophets.

1. The first group of
2. The people rebuild the temple whole life.

Ezra 1:1-6:22

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy by stirring the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation into writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

[2] "This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem in the land of Judah. [3] All of you who are his people may return to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! [4] Those who live in any place where Jewish survivors are found should contribute toward their expenses by supplying them with silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a freewill offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem."

[5] Then God stirred the hearts of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of the Lord. [6] And all their neighbors assisted by giving them vessels of silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock. They gave them many choice gifts in addition to all the freewill offerings.

[7] King Cyrus himself brought out the valuable items which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods. [8] Cyrus directed Mithredath, the treasurer of Persia, to count these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah.

[9] These were the items Cyrus donated:

gold trays — 30

silver trays — 1,000
silver censers — 29
[10] gold bowls — 30
silver bowls — 410
other items — 1,000

[11] In all, 5,400 gold and silver items were turned over to Sheshbazzar to take back to Jerusalem when the exiles returned there from Babylon.

[2:1] Here is the list of the Jewish exiles of the provinces who returned from their captivity to Jerusalem and to the other towns of Judah. They had been deported to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. [2] Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. This is the number of the men of Israel who returned from exile:

[3] The family of Parosh — 2,172
[4] The family of Shephatiah — 372
[5] The family of Arah — 775
[6] The family of Pahath-moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab) — 2,812
[7] The family of Elam — 1,254
[8] The family of Zattu — 945
[9] The family of Zaccai — 760
[10] The family of Bani — 642
[11] The family of Bebai — 623
[12] The family of Azgad — 1,222
[13] The family of Adonikam — 666
[14] The family of Bigvai — 2,056
[15] The family of Adin — 454
[16] The family of Ater (descendants of Hezekiah) — 98
[17] The family of Bezai — 323
[18] The family of Jorah — 112
[19] The family of Hashum — 223
[20] The family of Gibbar — 95
[21] The people of Bethlehem — 123
[22] The people of Netophah — 56
[23] The people of Anathoth — 128
[24] The people of Beth-azmaveth — 42
[25] The peoples of Kiriath-jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth — 743
[26] The peoples of Ramah and Geba — 621
[27] The people of Micmash — 122
[28] The peoples of Bethel and Ai — 223
[29] The citizens of Nebo — 52
[30] The citizens of Magbish — 156
[31] The citizens of Elam — 1,254
[32] The citizens of Harim — 320
[33] The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono — 725

- [34] The citizens of Jericho — 345
- [35] The citizens of Senaah — 3,630

[36] These are the priests who returned from exile:

- The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua) — 973
- [37] The family of Immer — 1,052
- [38] The family of Pashhur — 1,247
- [39] The family of Harim — 1,017

[40] These are the Levites who returned from exile:

- The families of Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah) — 74
- [41] The singers of the family of Asaph — 128
- [42] The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai — 139

[43] The descendants of the following Temple servants returned from exile:

- Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,
- [44] Keros, Siaha, Padon,
- [45] Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub,
- [46] Hagab, Shalmal, 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 descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned from exile:

- Sotai, Sophereth, Peruda,
- [56] Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel,
- [57] Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-hazzebaim, and Ami.

[58] In all, the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants numbered 392.

[59] Another group returned to Jerusalem at this time from the towns of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel. [60] This group consisted of the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 652 people.

[61] Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned to Jerusalem. (This Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai of Gilead, and he had taken her family name.) [62] But they had lost their genealogical records, so they were not allowed to serve as priests. [63] The governor would not even let them eat the priests' share of

food from the sacrifices until there was a priest who could consult the Lord about the matter by means of sacred lots.

[64] So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, [65] in addition to 7,337 servants and 200 singers, both men and women. [66] They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, [67] 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

[68] When they arrived at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders gave generously toward the rebuilding of God's Temple on its original site, [69] and each leader gave as much as he could. The total of their gifts came to 61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for the priests.

[70] So the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the Temple servants, and some of the common people settled in villages near Jerusalem. The rest of the people returned to the other towns of Judah from which they had come.

[3:1] Now in early autumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled together as one person in Jerusalem. [2] Then Jeshua son of Jehozadak with his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his family began to rebuild the altar of the God of Israel so they could sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed in the law of Moses, the man of God. [3] Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its old site. Then they immediately began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to the Lord. They did this each morning and evening.

[4] They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed in the law of Moses, sacrificing the burnt offerings specified for each day of the festival. [5] They also offered the regular burnt offerings and the offerings required for the new moon celebrations and the other annual festivals to the Lord. Freewill offerings were also sacrificed to the Lord by the people. [6] Fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began, the priests had begun to sacrifice burnt offerings to the Lord. This was also before they had started to lay the foundation of the Lord's Temple.

[7] Then they hired masons and carpenters and bought cedar logs from the people of Tyre and Sidon, paying them with food, wine, and olive oil. The logs were brought down from the Lebanon mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, for King Cyrus had given permission for this.

[8] The construction of the Temple of God began in midspring, during the second year after they arrived in Jerusalem. The work force was made up of everyone who had returned from exile, including Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his fellow priests, and all the Levites. The Levites who were twenty years old or older were put in charge of rebuilding the Lord's Temple. [9] The workers at the Temple of God were supervised by Jeshua with his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons, all descendants of Hodaviah. They were helped in this task by the Levites of the family of Henadad.

[10] When the builders completed the foundation of the Lord's Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise the Lord, just as King David had prescribed. [11] With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the Lord:

"He is so good!

His faithful love for Israel endures forever!"

Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the Lord because the foundation of the Lord's Temple had been laid.

[12] Many of the older priests, Levites, and other leaders remembered the first Temple, and they wept aloud when they saw the new Temple's foundation. The others, however, were shouting for joy. [13] The joyful shouting and weeping mingled together in a loud commotion that could be heard far in the distance.

[4:1] The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were rebuilding a Temple to the Lord, the God of Israel. [2] So they approached Zerubbabel and the other leaders and said, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God just as you do. We have sacrificed to him ever since King Esarhaddon of Assyria brought us here."

[3] But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel replied, "You may have no part in this work, for we have nothing in common. We alone will build the Temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us."

[4] Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work. [5] They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their aims. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne.

[6] Years later when Xerxes began his reign, the enemies of Judah wrote him a letter of accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. [7] And even later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, the enemies of Judah, led by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, sent a letter to Artaxerxes in the Aramaic language, and it was translated for the king. [8] Rehum the governor and Shimshai the court secretary wrote the letter, telling King Artaxerxes about the situation in Jerusalem. [9] They greeted the king for all their colleagues—the judges and local leaders, the people of Tarpel, the Persians, the Babylonians, and the people of Erech and Susa (that is, Elam). [10] They also sent greetings from the rest of the people whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal had deported and relocated in Samaria and throughout the neighboring lands of the province west of the Euphrates River. [11] This is a copy of the letter they sent him:

"To Artaxerxes, from your loyal subjects in the province west of the Euphrates River.

[12] "Please be informed that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation for its walls and will soon complete them. [13] But we wish you to know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you.

[14] "Since we are loyal to you as your subjects and we do not want to see you dishonored in this way, we have sent you this information. [15] We suggest that you search your ancestors' records, where you will discover what a rebellious city this has been in the past. In fact, it was destroyed because of its long history of sedition against the kings and countries who attempted to control it. [16] We declare that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the province west of the Euphrates River will be lost to you."

[17] Then Artaxerxes made this reply:

"To Rehum the governor, Shimshai the court secretary, and their colleagues living in Samaria and throughout the province west of the Euphrates River.

[18] "Greetings. The letter you sent has been translated and read to me. [19] I have ordered a search to be made of the records and have indeed found that Jerusalem has in times past been a hotbed of insurrection against many kings. In fact, rebellion and sedition are normal there! [20] Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and the entire province west of the Euphrates River and have received vast tribute, customs, and tolls. [21] Therefore, issue orders to have these people stop their work. That city must not be rebuilt except at my express command. [22] Do not delay, for we must not permit the situation to get out of control."

[23] When this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem and forced the Jews to stop building.

[24] The work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem had stopped, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

[5:1] At that time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied in the name of the God of Israel to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. [2] Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jehozadak responded by beginning the task of rebuilding the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them and helped them.

[3] But Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues soon arrived in Jerusalem and asked, "Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and restore this structure?" [4] They also asked for a list of the names of all the people who were working on the Temple. [5] But because their God was watching over them, the leaders of the Jews were not prevented from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned his decision.

[6] This is the letter that Tattenai the governor, Shethar-bozenai, and the other officials of the province west of the Euphrates River sent to King Darius:

[7] "Greetings to King Darius. [8] We wish to inform you that we went to the construction site of the Temple of the great God in the province of Judah. It is being rebuilt with specially prepared stones, and timber is being laid in its walls. The work is going forward with great energy and success. [9] We asked the leaders, 'Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and restore this structure?' [10] And we demanded their names so that we could tell you who the leaders were.

[11] "This was their answer: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the Temple that was built here many years ago by a great king of Israel. [12] But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he abandoned them to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who destroyed this Temple and exiled the people to Babylonia. [13] However, King Cyrus of Babylon, during the first year of his reign, issued a decree that the Temple of God should be rebuilt. [14] King Cyrus returned the gold and silver utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of Babylon. These items were taken from that temple and delivered into the safekeeping of a man named

Sheshbazzar, whom King Cyrus appointed as governor of Judah. [15] The king instructed him to return the utensils to their place in Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple of God there as it had been before. [16] So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The people have been working on it ever since, though it is not yet completed.' [17] "So now, if it pleases the king, we request that you search in the royal archives of Babylon to discover whether King Cyrus ever issued a decree to rebuild God's Temple in Jerusalem. And then let the king send us his decision in this matter."

[6:1] So King Darius issued orders that a search be made in the Babylonian archives, where treasures were stored. [2] But it was at the fortress at Ecbatana in the province of Media that a scroll was found. This is what it said:

[3] "Memorandum:

"In the first year of King Cyrus's reign, a decree was sent out concerning the Temple of God at Jerusalem. It must be rebuilt on the site where Jews used to offer their sacrifices, retaining the original foundations. Its height will be ninety feet, and its width will be ninety feet. [4] Every three layers of specially prepared stones will be topped by a layer of timber. All expenses will be paid by the royal treasury. [5] And the gold and silver utensils, which were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, will be taken back to Jerusalem and put into God's Temple as they were before."

[6] So King Darius sent this message:

"To Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, to Shethar-bozenai, and to your colleagues and other officials west of the Euphrates:

"Stay away from there! [7] Do not disturb the construction of the Temple of God. Let it be rebuilt on its former site, and do not hinder the governor of Judah and the leaders of the Jews in their work. [8] Moreover I hereby decree that you are to help these leaders of the Jews as they rebuild this Temple of God. You must pay the full construction costs without delay from my taxes collected in your province so that the work will not be discontinued. [9] Give the priests in Jerusalem whatever is needed in the way of young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings presented to the God of heaven. And without fail, provide them with the wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil that they need each day. [10] Then they will be able to offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for me and my sons.

[11] "Those who violate this decree in any way will have a beam pulled from their house. Then they will be tied to it and flogged, and their house will be reduced to a pile of rubble. [12] May the God who has chosen the city of Jerusalem as the place to honor his name destroy any king or nation that violates this command and destroys this Temple. I, Darius, have issued this decree. Let it be obeyed with all diligence."

[13] Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues complied at once with the command of King Darius. [14] So the Jewish leaders continued their work, and they were greatly encouraged by the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. The Temple was finally finished, as had been commanded by the God

of Israel and decreed by Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, the kings of Persia. [15] The Temple was completed on March 12, during the sixth year of King Darius's reign.

[16] The Temple of God was then dedicated with great joy by the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the people who had returned from exile. [17] During the dedication ceremony for the Temple of God, one hundred young bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs were sacrificed. And twelve male goats were presented as a sin offering for the twelve tribes of Israel. [18] Then the priests and Levites were divided into their various divisions to serve at the Temple of God in Jerusalem, following all the instructions recorded in the Book of Moses.

[19] On April 21 the returned exiles celebrated Passover. [20] The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were ceremonially clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for the other priests, and for themselves. [21] The Passover meal was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile and by the others in the land who had turned from their immoral customs to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. [22] They ate the Passover meal and celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days. There was great joy throughout the land because the Lord had changed the attitude of the king of Assyria toward them, so that he helped them to rebuild the Temple of God, the God of Israel.

B. THE RETURN LED BY EZRA (Ezra 7:1-10:44)

Ezra returned to Jerusalem almost 80 years after Zerubbabel, only to discover that the people had married pagan or foreign spouses. This polluted the religious purity of the people and endangered the future of the nation. Believers today must be careful not to threaten their walk with God by taking on the practices of unbelievers.

1. The second group of exiles returns to the land
2. Ezra opposes intermarriage

Ezra 7:1-10:44

Many years later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, there was a man named Ezra. He was the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiyah, [2] son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, [3] son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, [4] son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, [5] son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the high priest. [6] This Ezra was a scribe, well versed in the law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given to the people of Israel. He came up to Jerusalem from Babylon, and the king gave him everything he asked for, because the gracious hand of the Lord his God was on him. [7] Some of the people of Israel, as well as some of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, traveled up to Jerusalem with him in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes' reign.

[8] Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in August of that year. [9] He had left Babylon on April 8 and came to Jerusalem on August 4, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. [10] This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the law of the Lord and to teach those laws and regulations to the people of Israel.

[11] King Artaxerxes had given a copy of the following letter to Ezra, the priest and scribe who studied and taught the commands and laws of the Lord to Israel:

[12] "Greetings from Artaxerxes, the king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the teacher of the law of the God of heaven.

[13] "I decree that any of the people of Israel in my kingdom, including the priests and Levites, may volunteer to return to Jerusalem with you. [14] I and my Council of Seven hereby instruct you to conduct an inquiry into the situation in Judah and Jerusalem, based on your God's law, which is in your hand. [15] We also commission you to take with you some silver and gold, which we are freely presenting as an offering to the God of Israel who lives in Jerusalem.

[16] "Moreover you are to take any silver and gold which you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and the priests that are presented for the Temple of their God in Jerusalem. [17] These donations are to be used specifically for the purchase of bulls, rams, lambs, and the appropriate grain offerings and drink offerings, all of which will be offered on the altar of the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. [18] Any money that is left over may be used in whatever way you and your colleagues feel is the will of your God. [19] But as for the utensils we are entrusting to you for the service of the Temple of your God, deliver them in full to the God of Jerusalem. [20] If you run short of money for anything necessary for your God's Temple or for any similar needs, you may requisition funds from the royal treasury.

[21] "I, Artaxerxes the king, hereby send this decree to all the treasurers in the province west of the Euphrates River: 'You are to give Ezra whatever he requests of you, for he is a priest and teacher of the law of the God of heaven. [22] You are to give him up to 7,500 pounds of silver, 500 bushels of wheat, 550 gallons of wine, 550 gallons of olive oil, and an unlimited supply of salt. [23] Be careful to provide whatever the God of heaven demands for his Temple, for why should we risk bringing God's anger against the realm of the king and his sons? [24] I also decree that no priest, Levite, singer, gatekeeper, Temple servant, or other worker in this Temple of God will be required to pay taxes of any kind.'

[25] "And you, Ezra, are to use the wisdom God has given you to appoint magistrates and judges who know your God's laws to govern all the people in the province west of the Euphrates River. If the people are not familiar with those laws, you must teach them. [26] Anyone who refuses to obey the law of your God and the law of the king will be punished immediately by death, banishment, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment."

[27] Praise the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who made the king want to beautify the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem! [28] And praise him for demonstrating such unfailing love to me by honoring me before the king, his council, and all his mighty princes! I felt encouraged because the gracious hand of the Lord my God was on me. And I gathered some of the leaders of Israel to return with me to Jerusalem.

[8:1] Here is a list of the family leaders and the genealogies of those who came with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

[2] From the family of Phinehas: Gershom.

From the family of Ithamar: Daniel.

[3] From the family of David: Hattush son of Shecaniah.

From the family of Parosh: Zechariah and 150 other men.

[4] From the family of Pahath-moab: Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah and 200 other men.

[5] From the family of Zattu: Shecaniah son of Jahaziel and 300 other men.

[6] From the family of Adin: Ebed son of Jonathan and 50 other men.

[7] From the family of Elam: Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah and 70 other men.

[8] From the family of Shephatiah: Zebadiah son of Michael and 80 other men.

[9] From the family of Joab: Obadiah son of Jehiel and 218 other men.

[10] From the family of Bani: Shelomith son of Josiphiah and 160 other men.

[11] From the family of Bebai: Zechariah son of Bebai and 28 other men.

[12] From the family of Azgad: Johanan son of Hakkatan and 110 other men.

[13] From the family of Adonikam, who came later: Eliphelet, Jeuel, Shemaiah, and 60 other men.

[14] From the family of Bigvai: Uthai, Zaccur, and 70 other men.

[15] I assembled the exiles at the Ahava Canal, and we camped there for three days while I went over the lists of the people and the priests who had arrived. I found that not one Levite had volunteered to come along. [16] So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders of the people. I also sent for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were very wise men. [17] I sent them to Iddo, the leader of the Levites at Casiphia, to ask him and his relatives and the Temple servants to send us ministers for the Temple of God at Jerusalem. [18] Since the gracious hand of our God was on us, they sent us a man named Sherebiah, along with eighteen of his sons and brothers. He was a very astute man and a descendant of Mahli, who was a descendant of Levi son of Israel. [19] They also sent Hashabiah, together with Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, and twenty of his sons and brothers, [20] and 220 Temple servants. The Temple servants were assistants to the Levites—a group of Temple workers first instituted by King David. They were all listed by name.

[21] And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. [22] For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to accompany us and protect us from enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king, "Our God protects all those who worship him, but his fierce anger rages against those who abandon him." [23] So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer.

[24] I appointed twelve leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten other priests— [25] to be in charge of transporting the silver, the gold, the gold bowls, and the other items that the king, his council, his leaders, and the people of Israel had presented for the Temple of God. [26] I weighed the treasure as I gave it to them and found the totals to be as follows:

24 tons of silver,

7,500 pounds of silver utensils,

7,500 pounds of gold,

[27] 20 gold bowls, equal in value to 1,000 gold coins,

2 fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold.

[28] And I said to these priests, "You and these treasures have been set apart as holy to the Lord. This silver and gold is a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of our ancestors. [29] Guard these treasures well until you present them, without an ounce lost, to the leading priests, the Levites, and the leaders of Israel at the storerooms of the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem." [30] So the priests and the Levites accepted the task of transporting these treasures to the Temple of our God in Jerusalem.

[31] We broke camp at the Ahava Canal on April 19 and started off to Jerusalem. And the gracious hand of our God protected us and saved us from enemies and bandits along the way.

[32] So at last we arrived safely in Jerusalem, where we rested for three days.

[33] On the fourth day after our arrival, the silver, gold, and other valuables were weighed at the Temple of our God and entrusted to Meremoth son of Uriah the priest and to Eleazar son of Phinehas, along with Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui—both of whom were

Levites. [34] Everything was accounted for by number and weight, and the total weight was officially recorded.

[35] Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel. They presented twelve oxen for the people of Israel, as well as ninety-six rams and seventy-seven lambs. They also offered twelve goats as a sin offering. All this was given as a burnt offering to the Lord. [36] The king's decrees were delivered to his lieutenants and the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, who then cooperated by supporting the people and the Temple of God.

[9:1] But then the Jewish leaders came to me and said, "Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land. They have taken up the detestable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. [2] For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons. So the holy race has become polluted by these mixed marriages. To make matters worse, the officials and leaders are some of the worst offenders."

[3] When I heard this, I tore my clothing, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down utterly shocked. [4] Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel came and sat with me because of this unfaithfulness of his people. And I sat there utterly appalled until the time of the evening sacrifice.

[5] At the time of the sacrifice, I stood up from where I had sat in mourning with my clothes torn. I fell to my knees, lifted my hands to the Lord my God. [6] I prayed, "O my God, I am utterly ashamed; I blush to lift up my face to you. For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens. [7] Our whole history has been one of great sin. That is why we and our kings and our priests have been at the mercy of the pagan kings of the land. We have been killed, captured, robbed, and disgraced, just as we are today.

[8] "But now we have been given a brief moment of grace, for the Lord our God has allowed a few of us to survive as a remnant. He has given us security in this holy place. Our God has brightened our eyes and granted us some relief from our slavery. [9] For we were slaves, but in his unfailing love our God did not abandon us in our slavery. Instead, he caused the kings of Persia to treat us favorably. He revived us so that we were able to rebuild the Temple of our God and repair its ruins. He has given us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

[10] "And now, O our God, what can we say after all of this? For once again we have ignored your commands! [11] Your servants the prophets warned us that the land we would possess was totally defiled by the detestable practices of the people living there. From one end to the other, the land is filled with corruption. [12] You told us not to let our daughters marry their sons, and not to let our sons marry their daughters, and not to help those nations in any way. You promised that if we avoided these things, we would become a prosperous nation. You promised that we would enjoy the good produce of the land and leave this prosperity to our children as an inheritance forever.

[13] "Now we are being punished because of our wickedness and our great guilt. But we have actually been punished far less than we deserve, for you, our God, have allowed some of us to survive as a remnant. [14] But now we are again breaking your commands and intermarrying with people who do these detestable things. Surely your anger will destroy us until even this little remnant no longer survives. [15] O Lord, God of Israel, you are just. We stand before you in our

guilt as nothing but an escaped remnant, though in such a condition none of us can stand in your presence."

[10:1] While Ezra prayed and made this confession, weeping and throwing himself to the ground in front of the Temple of God, a large crowd of people from Israel—men, women, and children—gathered and wept bitterly with him. [2] Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, a descendant of Elam, said to Ezra, "We confess that we have been unfaithful to our God, for we have married these pagan women of the land. But there is hope for Israel in spite of this. [3] Let us now make a covenant with our God to divorce our pagan wives and to send them away with their children. We will follow the advice given by you and by the others who respect the commands of our God. We will obey the law of God. [4] Take courage, for it is your duty to tell us how to proceed in setting things straight, and we will cooperate fully."

[5] So Ezra stood up and demanded that the leaders of the priests and the Levites and all the people of Israel swear that they would do as Shecaniah had said. And they all swore a solemn oath. [6] Then Ezra left the front of the Temple of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. He spent the night there, but he did not eat any food or drink. He was still in mourning because of the unfaithfulness of the returned exiles. [7] Then a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all the returned exiles should come to Jerusalem. [8] Those who failed to come within three days would, if the leaders and elders so decided, forfeit all their property and be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

[9] Within three days, all the people of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. This took place on December 19, and all the people were sitting in the square before the Temple of God. They were trembling both because of the seriousness of the matter and because it was raining. [10] Then Ezra the priest stood and said to them: "You have sinned, for you have married pagan women. Now we are even more deeply under condemnation than we were before. [11] Confess your sin to the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do what he demands. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from these pagan women."

[12] Then the whole assembly raised their voices and answered, "Yes, you are right; we must do as you say!" [13] Then they added, "This isn't something that can be done in a day or two, for many of us are involved in this extremely sinful affair. This is the rainy season, so we cannot stay out here much longer. [14] Let our leaders act on behalf of us all. Everyone who has a pagan wife will come at the scheduled time with the leaders and judges of his city, so that the fierce anger of our God may be turned away from us concerning this affair." [15] Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this course of action, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them.

[16] So this was the plan that they followed. Ezra selected leaders to represent their families, designating each of the representatives by name. On December 29, the leaders sat down to investigate the matter. [17] By March 27 of the next year they had finished dealing with all the men who had married pagan wives.

[18] These are the priests who had married pagan wives:

From the family of Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. [19] They vowed to divorce their wives, and they each acknowledged their guilt by offering a ram as a guilt offering.

[20] From the family of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

[21] From the family of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah.

[22] From the family of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

[23] These are the Levites who were guilty: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

[24] This is the singer who was guilty: Eliashib.

These are the gatekeepers who were guilty: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

[25] These are the other people of Israel who were guilty:

From the family of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah.

[26] From the family of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

[27] From the family of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

[28] From the family of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

[29] From the family of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiyah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

[30] From the family of Pahath-moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

[31] From the family of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, [32] Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

[33] From the family of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

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

[38] From the family of Binnui: Shimei, [39] Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiyah, [40] Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, [41] Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, [42] Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

[43] From the family of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

[44] Each of these men had a pagan wife, and some even had children by these wives.

MEGATHEMES

THEME: The Jews return

EXPLANATION:

By returning to the land of Israel from Babylon, the Jews showed their faith in God's promise to restore them as a people. They returned not only to their homeland, but also to the place where their forefathers had promised to follow God.

IMPORTANCE:

God shows his mercy to every generation. He compassionately restores his people. No matter how difficult our present "captivity," we are never far from his love and mercy. He restores us when we return to him.

THEME: Rededication

EXPLANATION:

In 536 B.C., Zerubbabel led the people in rebuilding the altar and laying the temple foundation. They reinstated daily sacrifices and annual feasts, and rededicated themselves to a new spiritual worship of God.

IMPORTANCE:

In rededicating the altar, the people were recommitting themselves to God and his service. To grow spiritually, our commitment must be reviewed and renewed often. As we rededicate ourselves to God, our lives become altars to him.

THEME: Opposition

EXPLANATION:

Opposition came soon after the altar was built and the temple foundation laid. Enemies of the Jews used deceit to hinder the building for over six years. Finally, there was a decree to stop the building altogether. This opposition severely tested their wavering faith.

IMPORTANCE:

There will always be adversaries who oppose God's work. The life of faith is never easy. But God can overrule all opposition to his service. When we face opposition, we must not falter or withdraw, but keep active and patient.

THEME: God's Word

EXPLANATION:

When the people returned to the land, they were also returning to the influence of God's Word. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped encourage them while Ezra's preaching of Scripture built them up. God's Word gave them what they needed to do God's work.

IMPORTANCE:

We also need the encouragement and direction of God's Word. We must make it the basis for our faith and actions to finish God's work and fulfill our obligations. We must never waver in our commitment to hear and obey his Word.

THEME: Faith and action

EXPLANATION:

The urging of Israel's leaders motivated the people to complete the temple. Over the years, they had intermarried with idol-worshippers and adopted their pagan practices. Their faith, tested and revived, also led them to remove these sins from their lives.

IMPORTANCE:

Faith led them to complete the temple and to remove sin from their society. As we trust God with our hearts and minds, we must also act by completing our daily responsibilities. It is not enough to say we believe; we must make the changes God requires.

TIMELINE

Jerusalem destroyed; exiles go to Babylon 586 B.C.
Babylon overthrown by Cyrus 539
Exiles return to Jerusalem 538
Temple construction begins 536
Temple work halted 530
Darius I becomes king of Persia 522
Temple work resumed MESSAGES of Haggai, Zechariah 520
Temple completed 516
Ezra comes to Jerusalem 458
Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem 445

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print