

**This book contains the account
of some of the people of Judah
returning to Judah and
rebuilding the temple. We call
this book
Ezra**

Cyrus let the Jews return to Jerusalem

¹ During the first year that Cyrus ruled *the Persian Empire*, he did something that fulfilled what Jeremiah had prophesied. Yahweh motivated Cyrus to write this message, and then Cyrus sent this message throughout his empire:

² "I, King Cyrus, who rule *the Persian Empire*, declare this: 'Yahweh, the God *who is in/rules* from heaven, has caused me to become the ruler of all the kingdoms *that I know about* on the earth. And he has appointed me *to enable his people* to build a temple for him in Jerusalem, in Judah *land*. ³ All you people who belong to God may go up to Jerusalem to rebuild this temple for Yahweh, the God who lives in Jerusalem, the God *who is worshiped by you* Israeli people. I desire/hope that your God will be with you *and help those who go there*. ⁴ Those people who are in places where Israelis are living, whose ancestors were exiled here, should contribute silver and gold to those who go. They should also give them supplies

that they will need for the journey to Jerusalem. They should also give them some livestock, and gifts of money to help build the temple of God in Jerusalem.' "

⁵ Then God motivated some of the priests and ◀Levites/men who did work in the temple▶ and some of the leaders of the tribes that were descended from Judah and Benjamin to return to Jerusalem. Those whom God motivated got ready to return to Jerusalem and build the temple for Yahweh there. ⁶ All of their neighbors helped them by giving them things made of silver and things made of gold, and supplies for the journey, and livestock. They also gave them other valuable gifts, and also gave them money *to buy things for building the temple.* ⁷ King Cyrus brought out the valuable things that King Nebuchadnezzar's *soldiers* had taken from the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem and put in the temple of Nebuchadnezzar's gods *in Babylon.* ⁸ Cyrus commanded Mithredath, the treasurer of *the Persian Empire*, to count all these items and then give 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 large gold dishes

1,000 large silver dishes

29 silver ◀censers/incense burning pans▶

¹⁰ 30 gold bowls

410 silver bowls

1,000 other items.

¹¹ All together, there were 5,400 items made of silver or gold, that *were given to Sheshbazzar to*

take with him when he and the others returned to Jerusalem.

2

The list of groups that returned to Judah

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar's *soldiers* had captured many *Israeli* people and taken them to Babylonia. *Many years later*, some Israeli people returned to Judah. Some returned to Jerusalem, and some returned to *other places in* Judah. They went to the towns where their ancestors had lived. This is a list of the groups who returned.

² The leaders of those groups were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

There were:

³ 2,172	descendants of Parosh
⁴ 372	descendants of Shephathiah
⁵ 775	descendants of Arah
⁶ 2,812	descendants of Pahath-Moab, from the families of
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, whose other name was Hezek
¹⁷ 323	descendants of Bezai
¹⁸ 112	descendants of Jorah
¹⁹ 223	descendants of Hashum
²⁰ 95	descendants of Gibbar.

*People whose ancestors had lived in these towns
in Judah:*

21	123	from Bethlehem
22	56	from Netophah
23	128	from Anathoth
24	42	from Azmaveth
25	743	from Kiriath-Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth
26	621	from Ramah and Geba
27	122	from Micmash
28	223	from Bethel and Ai
29	52	from Nebo
30	156	from Magbish
31	1,254	from Elam
32	320	from Harim
33	725	from Lod, Hadid, and Ono
34	345	from Jericho
35	3,630	from Senaah.

³⁶ Priests who returned:

973	descendants of Jedaiah (that is, those from the family of Immer)
³⁷ 1,052	descendants of Immer
³⁸ 1,247	descendants of Pashhur
³⁹ 1,017	descendants of Harim.

The ones from the *rest of the* tribe of Levi who returned were:

⁴⁰ 74	descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel, who were from the tribe of Levi
⁴¹ 128	singers who were descendants of Asaph
⁴² 139	gatekeepers/men who guarded the gates of the temple

43 The ◀temple workers/men who would work in the temple▶ who were descendants of these men:

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 These descendants of *King* Solomon's servants returned:

Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda,

56 Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel,

57 Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Ami.

58 Altogether, there were 392 temple workers and descendants of Solomon's servants who returned.

59 There was another group who returned *to Judah* from Tel-Melah, Tel-Harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer *towns in Babylonia*. But they could not prove that they were descendants of *people who previously lived in Israel*.

⁶⁰ This group included 652 people who were descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda.

⁶¹ Hobaiah's clan, Hakkoz's clan, and Barzillai's clan also returned. Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai from *the Gilead region*, and he had taken for himself the name of his father-in-law's clan.

⁶² The people in that group searched in the documents that had the names of the ancestors of all the clans, but these men's names were not found. So they were not permitted do the work that priests did. ⁶³ The governor told them that they would need to ask a priest to consult Yahweh by *◀casting/throwing the sacred lots/stones that had been marked▶*, to determine if those men were truly Israelis. When the priests did that, *if the stones showed that those men were Israelis*, they would be permitted to eat the shares of the sacrifices that were given to the priests.

⁶⁴ Altogether 42,360 Israeli people who returned to Judah. ⁶⁵ There were also 7,337 servants and 200 musicians, both men and women, who returned. ⁶⁶ The Israelis brought with them *from Babylonia* 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷ 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

⁶⁸ When they arrived at the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem, some of the clan leaders gave money *for the supplies needed* to rebuild the temple at the place where the temple had been previously.

⁶⁹ They all gave as much money as they were able to give. Altogether they gave 61,000 gold coins,

◀6,250 pounds/3,000 kg.▶ of silver, and 100 robes for the priests.

⁷⁰ Then the priests, the *other* descendants of Levi, the musicians, the temple guards, and some of the *other* people started to live in the towns and villages *near Jerusalem*. The rest of the people went to the other places in Israel where their ancestors had lived.

3

They rebuilt the altar in Jerusalem

¹ After the Israeli people *returned to Israel*, and had begun to live in their towns, ◀in the autumn of/after the hot season ended in▶ that year, they all gathered together in Jerusalem. ² Then Jeshua, the son of Jehozadak, and his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his friends, all began to rebuild the altar of God, the one whom the Israeli people *worshipped*. They did that in order that they could sacrifice burned offerings on it, according to what the prophet Moses had written in the laws *that God gave to him*. ³⁻⁶ 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*. Before they started to lay the foundation of Yahweh's temple, *the priests* started to burn sacrifices to Yahweh *on the altar*. They offered sacrifices every morning and every evening. Fifteen days after *they started to offer these sacrifices*, the people celebrated the Festival of *Living in Temporary Shelters*, as Moses had commanded them to do in the laws *that God gave*

to him. Each day the priests offered the sacrifices *that were required* for that day. In addition, they presented the regular burned offerings and the offerings *that were required* for the New Moon Festivals and the other festivals that they celebrated each year to *honor* Yahweh. They also brought other offerings only because they desired to bring them, *not because they were required to bring them.*

They rebuilt the temple

⁷ Then the Israelis hired masons and carpenters, and they bought *logs from* cedar trees from the people of Tyre and Sidon *cities*, and they gave those people food and wine and olive oil for the logs. They brought the logs down from *the mountains in* Lebanon *to the Mediterranean seacoast and then floated them along the coast of the Sea*, to Joppa. King Cyrus permitted them to do that. *Then the logs were brought from Joppa inland up to Jerusalem.*

⁸ The Israelis started to rebuild the temple in the ◀spring/time before the hot season▶ of the second year after they returned to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel and Jeshua and all the people who had returned to Jerusalem worked on the building. All the ◀Levites/men who did work in the temple▶ supervised this work. ⁹ Jeshua and his sons and his other relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons, who were descendants of Hodaviah, also helped to supervise the work. The family of Henadad, who were also all Levites, joined with them in supervising this work.

¹⁰ When the builders finished laying the foundation of the temple, the priests put on their robes and stood in their places, blowing their trumpets. Then the Levites, who were descendants of Asaph, clashed/banged their cymbals to praise Yahweh, just as King David had *many years previously* told *Asaph and the other musicians* to do. ¹¹ They praised Yahweh and thanked him, and they sang this song about him:

“He is very good *to us!*

He faithfully loves us Israeli people, and he will love us forever.”

Then all the people shouted loudly, praising Yahweh because they had finished laying the foundation of Yahweh’s temple. ¹² Many of the *old* priests, Levites, and leaders of families remembered *what* the first temple *was like*, and they cried aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid *because they knew that the new temple would not be as beautiful as the first temple*. But the other people shouted joyfully. ¹³ The shouting and the crying was very loud; *even people far away* could hear it.

4

Their enemies opposed rebuilding the temple

¹ The enemies of the people of *the tribes of* Judah and Benjamin heard that the *Israeli* people who had returned from Babylonia were rebuilding a temple for Yahweh, the God whom the Israeli people *worshipped*. ² So they went to Zerubbabel

the governor and the other leaders, and said *deceptively*, “We want to help you *build the temple*, because we worship that same God whom you worship, and we have been offering sacrifices to him since Esarhaddon, the King of Assyria, brought us here.”

³ But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other *Israeli* leaders replied, “We will not allow you to help us build a temple for our(exc) God. We will build it ◀ourselves/without your help▶ for Yahweh, the God whom we Israelis worship, like Cyrus, the King of Persia, told us to do.”

⁴ Then the people who had been living in that land *before the Israelis returned* tried to cause the Jews to become discouraged and become afraid, and to cause them to stop building the temple. ⁵ They bribed government officials to oppose what the Israelis were doing *and prevent them from continuing to work on the temple*. They did that all during the time that Cyrus was King of Persia. They continued to do it when Darius became the King of Persia.

Opposition to rebuilding Jerusalem

⁶ During the first year that *Darius’ son Xerxes* was king, the *enemies of the Jews* wrote a note *to the king* saying that the Jews were *planning to rebel against the government*.

⁷ Later, when *Xerxes’ son Artaxerxes* became *the King of Persia*, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and their colleagues/companions wrote a letter to him. They wrote the letter in the Aramaic

language, and it was translated *into another language that the king knew*.

⁸ Rehum, the high commissioner, and Shimshai, the provincial secretary, wrote the letter to King Artaxerxes concerning what was happening in Jerusalem.

⁹ They stated that the letter was from Rehum the high commissioner/governor and Shimshai the provincial secretary and from their associates, the judges, and other government officials, who were from Erech city, Babylon city, and Susa city in Elam district. ¹⁰ They also wrote that they represented the other people-groups whom *the army of the great and glorious/famous King Ashurbanipal had ◀deported/forced to move from their homes▶* and taken to live in Samaria and in other cities in the province west of the Euphrates River.

¹¹ This is what they wrote in the letter:

“To King Artaxerxes,
From the officials who serve you who live in the province west of the Euphrates River:

¹² “Your majesty, we want you to know that the Jews who came here from your territories are rebuilding this city, *Jerusalem*. These people are wicked and want to rebel against you. Now they are repairing the foundations *of the walls/buildings* and building the walls *of the city*.

¹³ “It is important for you to know that if they rebuild the city and finish building the walls, they will stop paying any kind of taxes. As a result, there will be less money in your

treasury. ¹⁴ Now, because we are loyal to [IDM] you, and because we do not want you to be humiliated [IDM], we are sending this information to you. ¹⁵ And, we suggest that you order/tell *your officials* to search the records that your ancestors made/wrote. *If you do that, you will find out that the people in this city have always rebelled against the government. You will also find out that from long ago these people have caused trouble for kings and for rulers of provinces. They have always revolted against those who ruled them. That is the reason that this city was destroyed by the Babylonian army.* ¹⁶ We want you to know that if they rebuild this city and finish building its walls, you will no longer be able to control/rule *the people in* this province west of the Euphrates River.”

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

“To Rehum, the high commissioner, and Shimshai, the provincial secretary, and their colleagues in Samaria and in other parts of the province that is west of the *Euphrates River*: I ◀send you my greetings/wish that things will go well for you▶. ¹⁸ The letter that you sent to me was translated and read to me. ¹⁹ So then I ordered *my officials* to search the records. I have found out that *it is true that the people of that city have always revolted against their rulers, and that the city is full of people who have rebelled and caused trouble.*

²⁰ Powerful kings have ruled in Jerusalem, and they have also ruled over the whole province west of the *Euphrates* River. *The people in that province were* paying all kinds of taxes to those kings. ²¹ So you must command that the people must stop rebuilding the city. Only if I tell them *that they may rebuild it* will they be allowed to continue. ²² Do this immediately [LIT], because I do not want those people to do anything to harm the things/area about which I am concerned.”

²³ *Messengers took* that letter to Rehum and Shimshai and their colleagues and read it to them. Then Rehum and the others went quickly to Jerusalem, and they forced the Jews to stop *rebuilding the city wall*.

²⁴ The result was that the Jews stopped rebuilding the temple. They did not do any more work to rebuild the temple until Darius became the King of Persia.

5

Tattenai's letter to King Darius

¹ At that time two prophets gave messages from God to the Jews in Jerusalem and *other cities in* Judah. The prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, who was a descendant of Iddo. They spoke those messages representing God, whom the Israelis *worshiped/belonged to*, the one who was their true king. ² Then Zerubbabel and Shealtiel *led many other people* as they started *again* to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem. And

God's prophets *Haggai and Zechariah* were with them and helped them.

³ Then Tattenai the governor of the province west of the *Euphrates* River and Shethar-Bozenai his assistant and *some of* their officials went to Jerusalem and said to the people, "Who has permitted you to rebuild this temple and put furnishings in it?" ⁴ They also requested the people to tell them the names of the men who were working *at the temple*. *But the people refused*. ⁵ However, God was taking care of the Jewish leaders, so their enemies were not able to prevent the people from continuing *to rebuild the temple*. *They continued to work while their enemies* sent a report to King Darius, and asked him *what he wanted them to do* about it.

⁶ So Tattenai and Shethar-Bozenai and their officials sent a report to King Darius. ⁷ This is what they wrote:

"King Darius, we hope that things are going well for you!

⁸ "*We want you to know that we went to Judah Province, where the temple of the great God is being rebuilt. The people are building it with huge stones, and they are putting wooden beams in the walls. The work is being done very carefully, and they are progressing well.*

⁹ "*We asked the Jewish leaders, 'Who has permitted you to rebuild this temple and put furnishings in it?'* ¹⁰ *And we requested them to tell us the names of their leaders, in order that we could tell you who they were.*

- 11 “But *instead of telling us their leaders’ names*, what they said was, ‘We serve the God *who created* the heaven and the earth. Many years ago a great king *who ruled* us Israeli people *told our ancestors* to build a temple here, and now we are rebuilding it.
- 12 ““But God, *who rules* in heaven, allowed *the armies of* Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylonia, to destroy that temple, because our ancestors did things that caused God to become very angry. Nebuchadnezzar’s army took *many of* the *Israeli* people to Babylonia.
- 13 ““However, during the first year that Cyrus the King of Babylon started to rule, he decreed that the temple of God should be rebuilt. ¹⁴ Cyrus returned *to the Jewish leaders* all the gold and silver cups that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem and which had been put in the temple in Babylonia. Those cups were given to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom King Cyrus had appointed to be the governor in Judah.
- 15 ““The king instructed him to take the cups back to Jerusalem, to the place *from which they had previously been taken*. He also decreed that they should rebuild the temple at the place where it had been before. So Cyrus appointed Sheshbazzar to be the governor in Judah. He also sent all those things made of gold and silver, for Sheshbazzar to put in the new temple. ¹⁶ So Sheshbazzar did that. He came here to Jerusalem, and *supervised the*

men who laid the foundation of the temple. And since that time, the people have been working on the temple, but it is not finished yet.'

- ¹⁷ “Therefore, your majesty, please order someone to search in the place in Babylon where the important records are kept, to find out whether *it is true that* King Cyrus decreed that God’s temple should be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Then you can tell us what you want us to do about this matter.”

6

What King Darius commanded

¹ *Later Darius became the ruler of the Persian Empire. When the enemies of the Israelis forced them to stop rebuilding the temple, the Persian officials sent a message to King Darius. They asked him to search the records in the ◀archives/government records▶, in the building where the king stored the important documents, to find out whether King Cyrus had authorized that the temple should be rebuilt.* ² *The king commanded someone to search there, but those documents were not there in Babylon. They found a scroll at the fort in Ecbatana, in Media province, that contained the information that they wanted to know.*

This is what was written on that scroll:

- ³ “During the first year that Cyrus ruled the empire, he sent out a decree concerning the temple of God which is at Jerusalem. In the

decree it was stated that a new temple must be built at the same place that *the Israeli people previously* had offered sacrifices, where the *original* foundation of *the first temple* was. The temple must be 90 feet high and 90 feet wide. ⁴ The building must be made from large stones. After putting down three layers of stones, a layer of timber must be put on top of them. This work will be paid for by money from my treasury. ⁵ Also, the gold and silver utensils that King Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple of God in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon must be taken back to Jerusalem. They must be put in God's temple just as they were in the previous temple."

⁶ After reading this, King Darius sent this message *to the leaders of the Israeli people's enemies in Jerusalem*:

"This is a message for Tattenai, the governor of the province west of the *Euphrates* River, and for *his assistant* Shethar-Bozenai, and for all your colleagues: Stay away from that area! ⁷ Do not ◀interfere with/hinder▶ the work of building the temple of God! The temple must be rebuilt at the same place where the former temple was. And do not hinder the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews *while they are doing this work*.

⁸ "Furthermore, I declare that you must help these leaders of the Jews as they rebuild this temple of God *by giving them funds for the building work*.

- 9 “The Jewish priests in Jerusalem need young bulls and rams and lambs to sacrifice as they make burned offerings to the God of heaven. You must give them the animals that they need. Also, you must be certain to give them the wheat, salt, wine, and *olive* oil that they need each day *for those sacrifices*. ¹⁰ If you do that, the Jewish priests will be able to offer sacrifices that please the God who is in heaven, and they will pray that God will bless me and my sons.
- 11 “If anyone disobeys this decree, *my soldiers* will pull a beam from his house. Then *after they sharpen one end of the beam*, they will lift that man up and impale him on that beam. Then they will *completely destroy that man’s house until only a pile of rubble is left*. ¹² God has chosen *that city of Jerusalem* as the place where people will honor him [MTY]. What I desire is that he will get rid of any king or any nation that tries to change this decree or tries to destroy that temple in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have made this decree. It must be obeyed quickly and thoroughly.”

They completed and dedicated the temple

- ¹³ Tattenai, the governor of the province, and *his assistant* Shethar-Bozenai and their colleagues *read the message and* immediately obeyed the decree of King Darius. ¹⁴ So the Jewish leaders continued their work *of rebuilding the temple*. They were greatly encouraged by the messages that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached. The Israelis continued building the

temple, just like God had commanded them to do and like King Cyrus had decreed. ¹⁵ They finished building it on March 12, during the sixth year that King Darius *ruled*.

¹⁶ Then the priests and the Levites and all the other Israeli people who had returned from Babylon very joyfully dedicated the temple.

¹⁷ During *the ceremony* to dedicate the temple, they sacrificed 100 young bulls, 200 rams, and 400 lambs. They also sacrificed twelve male goats as an offering in order that *God would forgive* the sins of the people of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹⁸ Then the priests and Levites were divided into groups that would *take turns* to serve at the temple. They did this according to what Moses had written *many years previously* in the laws *that he wrote*.

They celebrated the Passover Festival

¹⁹ On April 21, the Jews who had returned from Babylon celebrated the Passover Festival. ²⁰ *To qualify themselves for offering the sacrifices*, the priests and Levites had already purified themselves by performing certain rituals. Then they slaughtered the lambs for the benefit of all the people who had returned from Babylon, for the other priests, and for themselves. ²¹ Those who had returned from Babylon and the other people in that land who had turned away from their immoral practices in order to worship Yahweh, the God of the Israeli people, ate the Passover meal. ²² They celebrated the Unleavened Bread Festival of *Eating Unleavened Bread* for seven

days. The Israeli people throughout the land were joyful because Yahweh had changed the attitude of the king of Assyria toward them, and as a result, the king had helped them to rebuild the temple of God, the one whom they *worshipped*.

7

Ezra went to Jerusalem

¹ *Many/Fifty* years later, while Artaxerxes was the king of Persia, I, Ezra came from Babylon here to Jerusalem. I am the son of Seraiah and the grandson of Azariah, and the great-grandson of Hilkiyah. ² Hilkiyah was the son of Shallum, who was the son of Zadok, who was the son of Ahitub, ³ who was the son of Amariah, who was the son of Azariah, who was the son of Meraioth, ⁴ who was the son of Zerariah, 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 I am a man who knows very well the laws that Moses *wrote*. Those were the laws that Yahweh, the God whom we Israeli people ◀*worship/belong to*▶, had given to us Israeli people. When I arrived in Jerusalem, Yahweh my God was kind to me, and as a result the *people* gave me everything that I had requested the king to *tell them to* give to me. ⁷ Some of the priests, some *other* descendants of Levi, *some* singers, *some* ◀gatekeepers/men who guarded the gates of the temple▶, and *some* men who worked in the temple, and some other *Israeli* people came

up with me here to Jerusalem. That was during the seventh year that Artaxerxes was the king of *Persia*.

8-9 We left Babylon on April 8, which was the first day of the Jewish year. Because God was very kind to us, we arrived *safely* in Jerusalem on August 4 of that year. ¹⁰ During my entire life, I devoted myself to studying the laws of Yahweh, and how to obey those laws. I had also taught those laws and all their regulations to the Israeli people *for many years*.

The letter that Artaxerxes gave to Ezra

¹¹ King Artaxerxes *knew that* I am a priest who knows the Jewish laws very well. *He knew that for many years* I had studied those laws and had taught all the rules and regulations of those laws to the Israeli people. *So before I left Babylon to come to Jerusalem*, he wrote a letter, and gave a copy to me. *This is what he wrote:*

¹² *"This letter is from me, Artaxerxes, the greatest of the kings. I am giving it to Ezra the priest, who has studied very well all the rules and regulations that the God who is/rules in heaven gave to the Israeli people.*

¹³ *"Ezra, I command that when you return to Jerusalem, any of the Israeli people in my kingdom who want to are allowed to go with you. That includes any priests and other descendants of Levi who will work in the temple who want to go. ¹⁴ I, along with my seven counselors/advisors, am sending you to*

Jerusalem, in order that you can determine what is happening there and in *other towns in Judah*. You are taking with you [MTY] a copy of God's laws; make sure that the people are doing everything that is written in those laws. ¹⁵ *We are also saying that you should take with you the silver and gold that I and my advisors are wanting to give to you, in order that you will present it to be an offering to the God who rules the Israeli people and who lives in Jerusalem.* ¹⁶ You should also take any silver and gold that the people in the entire Babylonia province give to you, and the money that the priests and *other* Israeli people have happily said that they would give to you to be offerings for building the temple of their God in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ With this money, you should buy the bulls, rams, lambs, and the grain and wine that the priests will burn on the altar *outside* the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

- ¹⁸ "If there is any silver or gold that remains *you have bought all those things*, you and your companions/colleagues are permitted to use it to *buy* whatever you desire, but buy only things that *you know that* God wants you to buy. ¹⁹ We have given to you some valuable items to be used in the temple of your God. Take them also to Jerusalem. ²⁰ If you need any other things for the temple, you are permitted to get the money for those things from the building here where my government's money is kept/stored.

- 21 “And I, King Artaxerxes, command this to all the treasurers in the province west of the *Euphrates* River: ‘Give to Ezra, the priest who has studied very well the laws of the God *who is/rules* in heaven, everything that he requests, and give it to him quickly. 22 The most that you should give to him is ◀7,500 pounds/3,400 kg.▶ of silver, 500 bushels of wheat, 550 gallons of wine, and 550 gallons of *olive* oil, but give to him all the salt that they need. 23 Be sure that you provide whatever their God requires for his temple, because we certainly do not [RHQ] want him to be angry with me or with my descendants who will later be kings. 24 We are also commanding that none of the priests, descendants of Levi, musicians, temple guards, or other men who work in the temple, will be required to pay any kind of taxes.’
- 25 “Ezra, your God has enabled you to become very wise. Using that wisdom, appoint men in the province west of the *Euphrates* River who will judge cases involving the people, and men who will judge cases involving the government. You must appoint men who know the laws of your God. All of you must teach God’s laws to others who do not know them. 26 Everyone who does not obey God’s laws or the laws of my government must be punished severely. Some of them will be executed, some will be put in prison, some will be sent out of the country or have all their property taken away from them.”

Ezra praised Yahweh

²⁷ Because King Artaxerxes was very kind like that, I said, "Praise Yahweh, the God whom our ancestors *worshipped/belonged to!* He has caused the king to want to honor the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. ²⁸ Because God was very kind to me, the king and all his advisors and all his powerful officials have also been kind to me. So, because God has helped me, I have become encouraged, and I have *been able to* persuade some of the Israeli leaders to go up to Jerusalem with me."

8

The clans that returned with Ezra to Jerusalem

¹ This is a list of the names of the leaders of the clans who came with me up to *Jerusalem* from Babylonia when Artaxerxes was the 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, the son of Shecaniah, from the clan descended from King David
- ³ Zechariah and 150 *other* men from the clan descended from Parosh
- ⁴ Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah and 200 other men from the clan descended from Pahath-Moab
- ⁵ Shecaniah the son of Jahaziel and 300 other men from the clan descended from Zattu

- 6 Ebed the son of Jonathan and 50 other men
from the clan descended from Adin
- 7 Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah and 70 other men
from the clan descended from Elam
- 8 Zebadiah the son of Michael and 80 other men
from the clan descended from Shephatiah
- 9 Obadiah the son of Jehiel and 218 other men
from the clan descended from Joab
- 10 Shelomith the son of Josiphiah and 160 other
men from the clan descended from Bani
- 11 Zechariah the son of Bebai and 28 other men
from the clan descended from *another man
whose name was Bebai*
- 12 Johanan the son of Hakkatan and 110 other
men from the clan descended from Azgad
- 13 Also Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, who
returned *here* later with 60 men from the
clan descended from Adonikam
- 14 And Uthai and Zaccur and 70 other men from
the clan descended from Bigvai.

*Ezra and the others prepared to return to
Jerusalem*

15 I gathered all of them together at the canal
that goes *from Babylon* to Ahava town. We set up
our tents there and stayed there for three days.
During that time I checked the lists of names
and found out that there were priests *going with
us*, but no *other* descendants of Levi *who could
help them in the temple*. 16 So I summoned
Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, two men whose names
were Elnathan, and Jarib, Nathan, Zechariah,
and Meshullam, who were all leaders *of the
people*. I also summoned Joiarib and another
Elnathan, who were wise. 17 I sent them all to

Iddo, the leader of the descendants of Levi, who was living in Casiphia *town*, to request that he and his relatives and other men who had worked in the temple send to us some men who would *go/come with us to work in God's new temple in Jerusalem.*

¹⁸ Because God was kind to us, they brought to us a man named Sherebiah and 18 of his sons and other relatives. Sherebiah was a very wise man, a descendant of Mahli, *who was a grandson of Levi.* ¹⁹ They also sent to us Hashabiah, along with Jeshaiiah, descendants of *Levi's son Merari,* and 20 of their relatives. ²⁰ They also sent 220 other men to work in the temple. Those men's ancestors had been appointed by King David to assist the descendants of Levi *who helped the priests in the temple.* I listed/wrote the names of all those men.

²¹ There alongside the Ahava Canal, I told them that we all would ◀fast/abstain from eating food▶ and pray. I also told them that we should humble ourselves in the presence of our God. We prayed that God would protect us while we traveled, and also protect our children and our possessions/belongings. ²² Previously we had told the king that our God takes care of all those who truly trust in him, but that he becomes very angry with those who refuse to obey him. So I would have been ashamed if I had asked 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 ◀fasted/abstained from eating food▶ and requested God

to protect us, and he ◀answered our prayers/did what we requested.▶

The gifts for the temple

²⁴ I chose twelve of the leaders of the priests, Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of their relatives. ²⁵ I appointed them to supervise carrying to Jerusalem the gifts of silver and gold and the other valuable items that the king and his advisors and other officials, and the Israeli people *who were living in Babylonia*, had contributed for the temple of our God. ²⁶ As I gave these various items to those priests, I weighed each of the items. This was the total: 25 tons of silver, 100 items made from silver that altogether weighed 7,500 pounds, ◀7,500 pounds/3,400 kg.▶ of gold, ²⁷ 20 gold bowls that altogether weighed ◀19 pounds/8.6 kg.▶, and two items made of polished bronze that were as valuable as ones made of gold.

²⁸ I said to those priests, “You belong to Yahweh, the God whom our ancestors ◀worshiped/also belonged to▶, and these valuable things also belong to him. The people themselves gave these things to be offerings to Yahweh ◀voluntarily/because they wanted to▶. ²⁹ So guard them carefully, and *when we arrive* in Jerusalem, weigh them in the presence of the priests, the descendants of Levi *who will help the priests*, and the other Israeli leaders there. They will then put them in the storerooms in the new temple.”

³⁰ So the priests and *other* descendants of Levi took from me all the gifts of silver and gold and

the other valuable items, in order to carry them to the temple in Jerusalem.

They returned to Jerusalem

³¹ On April 19, we left the Ahava Canal and started to travel to Jerusalem. Our God took care of us, and while we traveled, he prevented our enemies and bandits from ◀ambushing us/suddenly attacking us▶. ³² After we arrived in Jerusalem, we rested for three days. ³³ Then on the fourth/next day we went to the temple. There the silver and gold and the other items were weighed and given to the priest Meremoth, the son of Uriah. Eleazar the son of Phinehas and two descendants of Levi, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, were with him.

³⁴ They counted everything, and wrote down how much they weighed, and wrote *a description of each item*.

³⁵ We who had returned from Babylonia offered to God sacrifices on the altar. We offered twelve bulls for all us Israeli people. We also offered 96 rams and 27 lambs. We also sacrificed twelve goats *to atone* for the sins that all the people had committed. These were all completely burned on the altar. ³⁶ Some of us who returned *from Babylonia* took to the governors and other officials of the province west of the *Euphrates* River the letter that the king had given to us. *After they read the letter,* they did *all that they were able to do* for us Israeli people and for the temple of God.

9

Ezra prayed about the Israeli people marrying foreign wives

¹ Some time later, the Jewish leaders came to me and said, “Many Israelis, and even some priests and *other men who are* descendants of Levi *who work in the temple*, have not kept themselves from *doing what* the other people who are living in this land *do*. They are practicing the detestable things that the Canaan, Heth, Periz, Jebus, Ammon, and Amor people-groups, and the people from Moab and Egypt do. ² *Specifically, some* Israeli men have married women who are not Israelis, and they have allowed their sons to do the same thing. So we, God’s sacred people, have become ◀contaminated/polluted in God’s sight▶. And some of our leaders and officials have been the first/worst ones to do this.”

³ When I heard that, *I became very angry, with the result that* I tore my clothes and tore some hair from my head and from my beard. Then I sat down, very shocked/dismayed. *The Israelis knew that God had warned us that he would punish us if we disobeyed* what he had said to us *about marrying women who are not Israelis*. ⁴ So many of the Israelis trembled/were afraid when they heard that some of those who had returned from Babylonia had sinned by disobeying the God of us Israelis like that. They came and sat with me until it was time to offer the evening sacrifices *of grain*.

⁵ When it was time to offer those sacrifices, I was still sitting there, wearing those torn clothes and

mourning/sad. I stood up, and then I quickly prostrated myself on the ground. I lifted up my hands to Yahweh, my God, ⁶ and this is what I prayed:

“Yahweh my God, I am very ashamed to raise my head in front of you. The sins that we Israelis have committed *are very great; it is as though they* have risen up higher than our heads, and our guilt *for committing those sins, it is as though it* rises up to the heavens. ⁷ Since the time that our ancestors lived until now, we have been very guilty. That is the reason that we and our kings and our priests have been defeated by *the armies of* the kings of other lands. They killed *some of our people*, they captured *some*, they robbed *some*, and they *caused them all to be* disgraced, just like we are today.

⁸ “But now, Yahweh God, you have been very kind to us. You have allowed some of us to ◀survive/continue to live▶. You have revived our spirits [IDM] and allowed us to escape from being slaves *in Babylonia* and to return safely [IDM] to live in this sacred place. ⁹ We were slaves, but you did not abandon us. Instead, because you faithfully love us, you caused the kings of Persia to be very kind to us. You have allowed us to continue to live and to rebuild your temple which had been completely destroyed. You have allowed us to start to live safely here in Jerusalem and in *other towns in Judah*.

¹⁰ “Our God, what more can we say now [RHQ]?”

In spite of all that *you have done for us*, we have disobeyed your commands. ¹¹ They are commands that you gave to your servants, the prophets, to tell to us. They said that the land that we would occupy was polluted because of the detestable/disgusting things that were done by the people who lived there. They said that in the land there were people from one end to the other who did immoral/shameful things. ¹² They said, ‘Do not allow your daughters to marry their sons! Do not allow your sons to marry their daughters! Do not even try to cause things to go well for those people-groups! If you obey these instructions, your nation will be strong, and you will enjoy the good crops that grow on the land, and the land will belong to your descendants forever.’

- ¹³ “You punished us because we were very guilty for having done wicked things. But you have not punished us as much as we deserve to be punished. *I say this because you, our God, have allowed some of us to survive.* ¹⁴ However, some of us are again disobeying your commands, and we are marrying women who do those detestable things. If we continue to do that, surely you will get rid of all of us [RHQ], with the result that none of us will remain alive. ¹⁵ Yahweh, the God whom we Israelis *worship/belong to*, you are fair/just. We are guilty. We are only a few people who have escaped *from Babylonia*, but we pray to you, even though we do not deserve to stand in your presence.”

10

The men agreed to divorce their foreign wives

¹ While I was kneeling down in front of the temple and praying and crying, I was confessing *the sins that the Israeli people had committed*. Many people, men and women and children, gathered around me and also cried very much.

² Then Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel from the clan of Elam, said this to me: “We have disobeyed God. *Some of us have married women who are not Israelis*. But we can still confidently expect *Yahweh to be merciful to us Israeli people*.

³ We will do what you, and the others who have an awesome respect for what our God has commanded, tell us to do. We will do what God told us in his laws. We will make an agreement with our God, saying that we will divorce our wives who are not Israelis, and we will send them away with their children. ⁴ ◀It is your responsibility to/Because you are our leader, you must▶ *tell us what to do*. So get up, and be courageous, and do *what is necessary*. We will ◀support you/tell people to do what you say▶.”

⁵ So I stood up and demanded that the leaders of the priests, the *other* descendants of Levi, and all *the other* Israeli people solemnly declare that they would do what Shecaniah said that they should do. So they all solemnly promised to do that. ⁶ Then I went away from the front of the temple and went to the room where Jehohanan lived. I stayed there that night, but I did not eat or drink anything. I was still sad because some

of the Israelis who had returned *from Babylonia* had not faithfully obeyed *God's laws*.

⁷ Then we sent a message to all *the people in Jerusalem and in other towns in Judah*, saying that all those who had returned *from Babylonia* should come to Jerusalem immediately. ⁸ We said that if any of them did not arrive within three days, the leaders of the people would order that all the property of those people would be taken from them, and that they would no longer be considered to belong to the Israeli people; *they would be considered to be foreigners*.

⁹ So within three days, on December 19, all the people of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem. They were there, 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 I stood up and said to them, "*Some of you men have committed a very bad sin. You have married women who are not Israelis. By doing that, you have made us Israeli people more guilty than we were before.*" ¹¹ So now you must confess to Yahweh, the God whom your ancestors *worshiped/belonged to*, the sin which you have committed, and you must do what he wants. Separate yourselves from the people of other nations and from the women from those nations whom you have married."

¹² The whole group answered, shouting loudly, "Yes, what you have said is right! We will do what you have said." ¹³ But then *one of them*

said, "But we are a very large group, and it is raining hard. Also, there are many of us who have committed this bad sin. This is something that we cannot ◀take care of/handle▶ in one or two days, and we cannot stand here in this rain.

¹⁴ So allow our leaders to decide for all of us what we should do. Tell everyone who has married a woman who is not Israeli to come at a time that you decide. They should come with the elders and judges from each city. If we do that, our God will stop being angry with us *because of what we have done.*"

¹⁵ Jonathan the son of Asahel, Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah, Meshullam, and Shabbethai, a descendant of Levi, were the only ones who objected to this.

¹⁶ All the others who had returned from Babylonia said that they would do it. So I chose leaders of each of the clans, and I wrote down their names. On December 29, these men came and sat down to investigate the matter. ¹⁷ By March 27 of the next year they finished determining which men had married women who were not Israelis.

The men who had married foreign wives

¹⁸ This is a list of the names of the priests who had married non-Israeli women, and the clans to which they belonged. From the clan of Jeshua and his brothers, who were sons of Jehozadak, there were Maa-seiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. ¹⁹ They solemnly promised to divorce their wives,

- and they each sacrificed a ram to be an offering *to atone* for their sins.
- 20 From the clan of Immer there were Hanani and Zebadiah.
- 21 From the clan of Harim there were Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah.
- 22 From the clan of Pashhur there were Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.
- 23 The *other* descendants of Levi *who had married non-Israeli women* were Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (whose other name was Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.
- 24 There was Eliashib the musician.
From the temple guards there were Shallum, Telem, and Uri.
- 25 This is a list of the names of the other Israelis who had married foreign wives:
From the clan of Parosh there were Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah.
- 26 From the clan of Elam there were Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.
- 27 From the clan of Zattu there were Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.
- 28 From the clan of Bebai there were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.
- 29 From the clan of Bani there were Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.
- 30 From the clan of Pahath-Moab there were Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

- ³¹ From the clan of Harim there were Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³² Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.
- ³³ From the clan of Hashum there were Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.
- ³⁴ From the clan of Bigvai there were Maadai, Amram, Uel, ³⁵ Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, ³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷ Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.
- ³⁸ From the clan of Binnui there were Shimei, ³⁹ Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaijah, ⁴⁰ Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹ Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴² Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.
- ⁴³ From the clan of Nebo there were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.
- ⁴⁴ Each of those men had married a woman who was not an Israeli. *But immediately* they divorced those women and sent them and their children away.

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