

Book of Ezra

Commentary

By

Father Antonious Fekry

Saint Mary Coptic Orthodox Church

Fagalla, Cairo, Egypt

Saint Mary Coptic Orthodox Church

Vancouver, BC, Canada

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Introduction to the Post-Exilic Historical Books | The Kingdom of Persia

Because of their sins, the people of God fell into the Babylonian captivity. The king of Babylon took the Jewish people and settled them in colonies in the kingdom of Babylon, such as [Tel Abib (Ezekiel 3: 15), Tel Melah and Tel Harsha (Ezra 2: 59), and Casiphia (Ezra 8: 17)]. They had some rest and freedom there, so they built houses and planted gardens (Jeremiah 29: 5) and acquired male and female servants (Ezra 2: 65). Some of them accumulated great wealth (Ezra 2: 65, 69) + (Zechariah 6: 10, 11). But some endured much toil and hardship of slavery, and this was for the majority.

During the time of the captivity, the service of worship stopped because the house of God in Jerusalem was desolate. And the land of Babylon in which they lived was unclean (Amos 7: 17). According to the law, they could not build a temple for God outside Jerusalem. However, they continued to keep the Sabbath and practice circumcision.

+ From the end of the Second Book of Chronicles to the beginning of the Book of Ezra: This is the period from the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem until the return from captivity with the permission of King Cyrus for a period of 50 years.

+ The captivity ended when the Kingdom of Babylon fell at the hands of Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus was a generous and brave king. His appreciation for the Jews and their God YHWH increased because of the incident of Daniel with the lions that did not harm him. It is said that Daniel showed Cyrus the prophecies about him that mentioned him by name (Isaiah 44, 45) and the prophecies of Jeremiah about the duration of the captivity and the fall of the Kingdom of Babylon. Cyrus considered these prophecies a call to him to release the Jews (Ezra 1: 2). One of the benefits of the captivity was that these pagans knew YHWH.

+ Those who returned from captivity did not lose the patronage of the Persian king but remained subject to him. The Persian king appointed a governor to rule Jerusalem and its environs. The conditions of the people in the period after the captivity were very difficult. They were surrounded by opposing enemies who seized every opportunity to complain to the government. They had to pay tribute and taxes to the king (Ezra 7: 24 and Nehemiah 5: 4) in addition to what was required of them to the governor of the place. Most of them were poor, and their land was not fertile, so some of them were obliged to borrow from their brothers (Nehemiah 5: 3, 4).

On the other hand, Cyrus allowed the people religious freedom, so he allowed them to build the Temple, build an altar, and offer sacrifices according to what the law and the commandment of their God required. The worship of the Jews after the captivity was distinguished from before in that they completely abandoned the worship of idols and their regard for the law and religious duties increased, perhaps because their popular union was based on religious duties since they did not have a king. The important thing is that they benefited from the strike of captivity, as their worship of idols and their neglect of worship, even their disdain for it, were the cause of all the pain that befell them.

+ The Jews returned from captivity, but the crown had fallen from their heads, for they returned without a king. Indeed, the yoke of captivity was removed from them, and their condition and general appearance improved from what they were during the captivity, but they were much less than they were before. The dead bones returned but in the form of a servant or slave to the Persian king. The yoke had been removed, but some traces were still on their necks.

+ The prophets after the captivity were few (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). The people did not have a king, and this was in anticipation of the true king and the great prophet, the awaited Messiah.

+ The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther take place during the years of the people's subjection to the rule of the various kings of Persia. Therefore, we must quickly review a brief summary of the kings of Persia to understand the events of the Holy Books.

The Kingdom of Medo-Persia: The Medes are the descendants of Madai, son of Japheth (Genesis 10: 2). The Medes and Persians were united into one kingdom by King Cyrus. The capitals of the kingdom are known as Persepolis (2 Maccabees 9: 2), Shushan (Nehemiah 1: 1 + Esther 1: 2), and Achmetha (Ezra 6: 2). The Kingdom of Medo-Persia ruled the people of Israel for 207 years, from 536 BC when the people returned to Jerusalem until 332 AD when Alexander occupied all the possessions of Media and Persia. The Jews were subject as part of the Transoxiana province to a governor appointed by the King of Persia to rule the Jews/Syria/Palestine/Phoenicia/Cyprus.

The Persian Kings:

1. Cyrus: He is the founder of the Media-Persian state. He issued a call for the people to return to Jerusalem in 536 BC. (Ezra 1: 2) So the people returned and began building the Temple (Ezra 3: 8-13) in 535 BC. The resistance of the enemies began (Ezra 4: 5), and Cyrus died in 529 BC.

2. Cambyses (Artaxerxes): He is Cyrus's son and reigned after Cyrus's death. The informers succeeded in convincing the king to stop the work on building the city and the Temple, so he issued an order to do so (Ezra 4: 17-24). The work stopped throughout the reign of this king, and he died in 522 BC during his war in Egypt.

3. Darius Hystaspes: Cyrus had two sons, Cambyses and Smerdis. Cambyses went to war against Egypt, and his brother Smerdis took over the rule during his absence. An impostor who looked like Smerdis came and ruled in his place for 7 months. Cambyses died while returning from his war in Egypt, so Darius Hystaspes, Cyrus's son-in-law, came and killed this impostor and took over the throne. This king became very rich, and his kingdom extended from India to the African archipelago and even the Danube River. He seized the throne in 521 BC, and during his days, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah began urging the people to work on building the Temple (Ezra 4: 24). He ruled for 36 years and died in 486 BC.

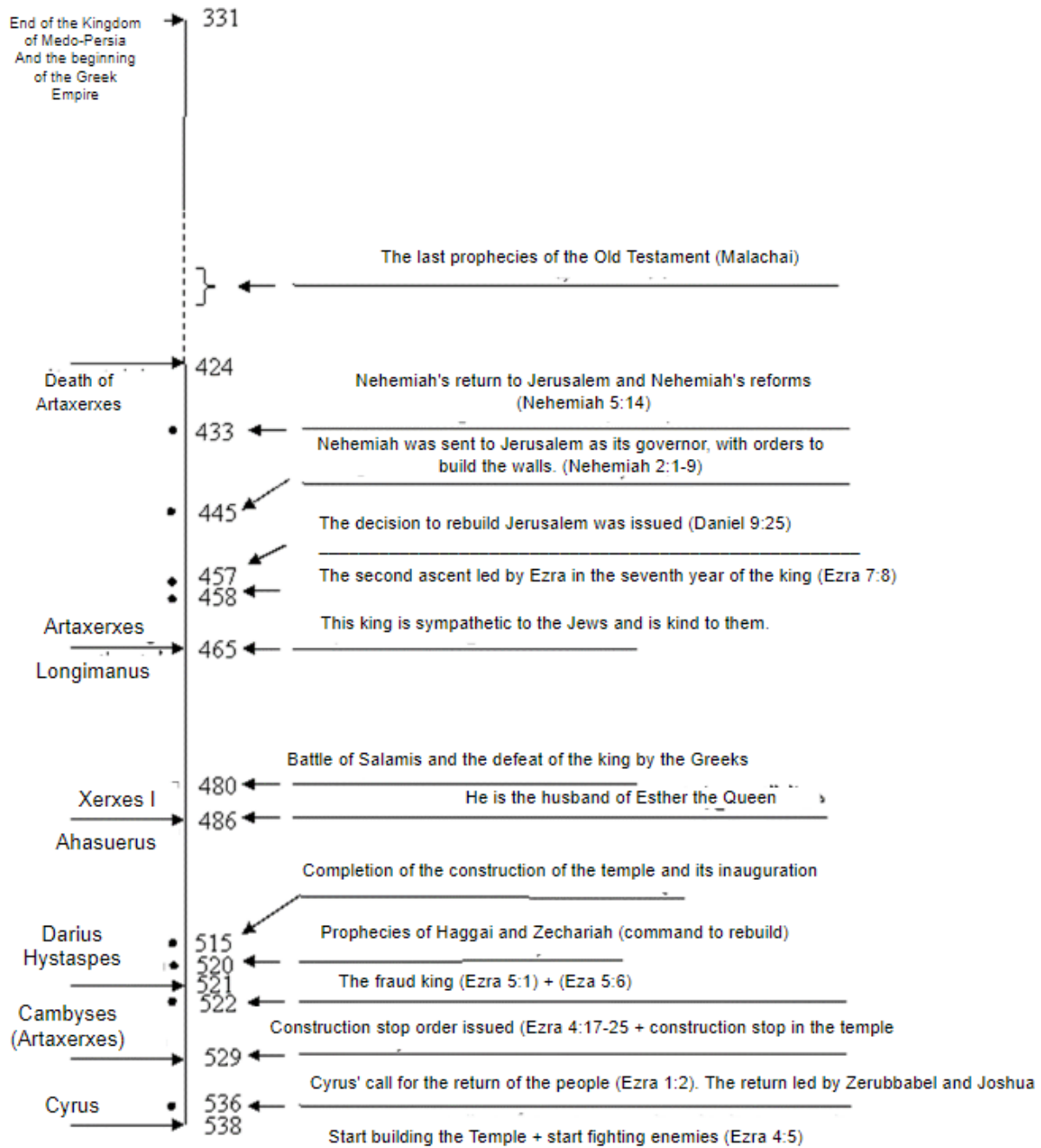
4. Xerxes I (Ahasuerus): He is Esther's husband. He kept gathering an army for four years until it became a great army of about 2 1/2 million soldiers. This huge number was the reason for his defeat when he tried to invade Greece and was defeated in the Battle of Salamis in the year 480 (the reason for the

defeat was that orders did not reach the soldiers easily). He was a reckless king and was assassinated in 465 BC.

5. Artaxerxes Longimanus: meaning long-handed. He was kind to the Jews and allowed Ezra to return with several Jews to Jerusalem and allowed Nehemiah to rebuild the city walls (Ezra 7: 11-13) + (Nehemiah 2: 1-10). He died in 424. During his reign in 457, the order was issued to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9: 25).

6. Then a number of kings succeeded each other on the throne, the last of whom was Darius Gadmanus, who was defeated by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Thus, the Greek Empire began to rule most of the world.

Timeline of Events:



Introduction

1. Who is Ezra?

He is Ezra, son of Seraiah, from the descendants of Aaron, so he is a priest. He is a skilled scribe in the law of the Lord, and his work as a priest who offers sacrifices was idle, because they were in the land of captivity, so he focused on studying the law that he loved with all his heart and prepared himself to teach it to his people. He was called a scribe because of his fame and skill in this service and this work. A scribe does not mean that he only copies the holy books, but rather that he studies them and interprets and explains these books. Thus, the scribes even during the time of Christ, were experts and students of the law, but unfortunately, because of their sins, the name scribe became a bad name "Woe to you, scribes." In ancient times, few people knew how to write, so the scribe was considered a scholar and advanced among the people. Ezra was a skilled scribe (Ezra 7: 6), meaning he copied the law, interpreted it, and taught it [see (2 Samuel 8: 17 + 2 Kings 18: 18)].

2. The main characters in this period are:

A. Zerubbabel or Sheshbazzar: This was the governor of the Jews and he returned with 42,000 of them to Jerusalem with the permission of King Cyrus in 536 BC. Joshua, the priest, returned with him.

B. Joshua the son of Jozadak: The high priest who worked with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple.

C. Ezra the Scribe: He had the mandate to implement the law and punish those who violated the law and had the authority to reform, so he removed the pagans from the people. However, he did not rule as a governor.

D. Nehemiah: He was appointed as governor of the Jews. Nehemiah and Ezra were present simultaneously during the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. However, each of them had his own work.

3. The role of Ezra the Scribe:

A. To restore the Jewish people as a people governed by God's law. He established laws for the people to govern them according to the law of Moses and the prophets. The King of Persia authorized him with special powers to do so. The image that Ezra restored to the people continued until the days of Christ.

B. Arranging and compiling the Holy Books specially after everything was lost during the captivity.

4. Ezra and the Bible:

A. Ezra re-collected the entire Bible (Old Testament), and Jews and Christians attribute this credit to him. This is the opinion of many fathers that Ezra is the one who collected the books of the Old Testament, such as Basil, Tertullian, Irenaeus and others.

B. He compiled the books, deleted what was not canonical, and divided the books into three sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Holy Books (hagiography). The Lord Christ referred to this division when he said the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, so the Psalms were the first book in the section

of the Holy Books and because of the fame of the Psalms, the books were called the Psalms. (Luke 24: 44)

C. Ezra, who wrote his book under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and collected the canonical books under the guidance of the Spirit, also under the guidance of the Holy Spirit added some explanations to what was obscure, such as [the last chapter of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 34)] + (Deuteronomy 2: 12 + 3: 11, 14 + Proverbs 25: 1). There are many additions in parentheses, as he was adding and explaining under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

D. He also changed the names of some places that were known by new names and removed the names that were no longer used for contemporary people to understand; for example (Genesis 14: 14) Laish was the old name of the region that was later called Dan.

E. He collected the holy books that he could collect after the captivity, compared them with the utmost accuracy and adopted the version we have in our hands now. He added the books of Chronicles and the book attributed to him, which is the Book of Ezra.

He became like Athanasius who restored religion to its correctness after Arius distorted it, and Ezra who restored the Holy Bible after much had been lost, and the people had added many forged books.

5. The people loved Ezra for his zeal and piety. They considered him to be in the position of Moses. There is even a Jewish saying that if Moses had not received the law, Ezra would have deserved to receive it.

6. The Book of Ezra is divided into two parts:

A. The return of some Jews from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the establishment of religious services in Jerusalem, and the building of the temple despite the resistance of the Samaritans (Chapters 1-6).

B. The news of the return of a second group of captives under the leadership of Ezra and the separation of the pagan women (Chapters 7-10).

7. Some verses of this book came in Aramaic from (Ezra 4: 8 – 6:18 + 7: 12-26) because these verses contain a summary of legal documents related to the government, and the Aramaic language was the official language in political negotiations between the Persian Kingdom and Transoxiana, i.e. what was to the west of the Euphrates River. The rest of the book was written in Hebrew. This is because the writer of the book preferred that the documents be in their original language, i.e. Aramaic.

8. The book's writer is Ezra, and this is the opinion of the Jews and Christians.

9. There is a similarity between the Book of Ezra and the Book of Chronicles, as it demonstrates religious rituals, order, and religious groups such as the priests' groups (Ezra 6: 18), the observance of the feasts (Ezra 3: 4; 6: 19, 22), and the vessels of the house of the Lord (Ezra 1: 7-11), and the service of the Levites (Ezra 2: 40 + 8: 15-19+ 9: 1 + 10: 5). Ezra is attentive to genealogies as the writer of the Book of

Chronicles is interested in them. Ezra sees the hand of God in history and the Lord's retribution in everything that befalls man. This is proof that the writer of the Book of Ezra and the writer of the Book of Chronicles is the same Ezra. In fact, the last two verses of the Book of Chronicles and the first verses of the Book of Ezra are almost the same. It is as if the Book of Ezra completes the Book of Chronicles.

10. The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are considered the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies about the return from the Babylonian captivity. They explain how God's promise of return was fulfilled. They symbolize the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Book of Revelation about our exit as a church from the Babylon of this world.

11. The language of Ezra is similar to the language of Daniel because they were both in Babylon and at the end of the captivity. Each of them has parts in Aramaic, and both of them have Persian words.

12. The meaning of the name Ezra is help or assistance; this is his role in helping his people by reminding them of the law they had forgotten.

13. We notice that God calls himself "the God of Israel" and not the God of Judah. The division was an exceptional situation, and many of the tribes of Israel (the northern kingdom) returned with Judah, and they returned as one nation.

14- About 42,000 returned with Zerubbabel, and 1,700 returned after about 70 years with Ezra. God always directs His invitation to His children to return to the bosom of the church, but whoever wants to remain outside of it, God does not force him to return. God sends the invitation and whoever wants will return. And whoever returned with Ezra were the people of the eleventh hour.

Chapter 1

(Verses 1-4): **Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.**

Now in the first year: The first year of his reign over Babylon, that is his reign over the Jews. Because the Jews remained subject to Babylon since their captivity, they became subject to Persia after Babylon fell. **Cyrus** = was born in Elam in 590 BC. He reigned in Elam in 558 and conquered Media in 549, Persia in 548, Lud in 540, and Babylon in 538. Because Persia was the most crucial part of his kingdom, he was called the **king of Persia**. He was one of the best ancient kings in terms of morals and ability in war.

that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled: The opening of the Book of Ezra (these verses Ezra 1: 1-4) is the same as the closing of the Book of 2 Chronicles. (At the end of the Book of 2 Chronicles (2 Chronicles 36: 21), it is mentioned that the period of captivity was 70 years. The prophet Jeremiah had previously prophesied that the period of captivity would be 70 years (Jeremiah 25: 1; 29: 10). The prophet Isaiah had prophesied that King Cyrus would do this (Isaiah 44: 26, 27 + Isaiah 45: 1, 2). Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus by name was about 150 years before Cyrus came. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that Daniel brought these prophecies to Cyrus, who was greatly affected by them, **he made a proclamation** = that was in the year 536 BC. The captivity began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, which was the year 606 BC. Therefore, the period of captivity was exactly 70 years. **the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus** = Cyrus was a pagan king, but he was an instrument in the hand of the Lord through whom he carried out his purposes. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was an instrument of discipline, Cyrus was an instrument by which the people were brought back. Note that Cyrus did not know the Lord, but the Lord knew how to use Cyrus to glorify His name. But it is credited to Cyrus that he obeyed the Lord, which doubled the sin of the people of Israel in their disobedience to the Lord, when this pagan king obeyed Him, but they, His people, disobeyed Him. It is historically known that Cyrus respected the gods of Babylon and even served them himself. Still, it is also known that he was religiously tolerant and approved the return of the gods of the peoples to their places. The Babylonian kings seized the gods of the nations they subjugated, which aroused their resentment against the kings of Babylon, so Cyrus came and returned their gods to them. Since the Jewish people were a people who worshipped God and did not have any idols, Cyrus ordered the return of the vessels of the house of God to Jerusalem. A document was found for Cyrus, stating that he ordered the return of the idols of the peoples to their countries. Perhaps the reason for Cyrus' religious tolerance was his sympathy with the Jews after what he saw of the prophecies among them. After he ordered their release, he repeated the same thing with the rest of the captive peoples. **in writing** = meaning a legal call, and writing is

preserved in the government records. **throughout all his kingdom** = Note that Assyria was part of his kingdom, so most likely some of the ten tribes who had been taken captive to Assyria before returned to Jerusalem. **All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me** = Cyrus did not turn to worship the Lord; rather, he honoured and feared Him when he heard about Him. But it is proven from the monuments that he attributed his conquests to Merodach, the god of Babylon. The important thing is to understand that God can use even the pagans for the glory of His name. Cyrus symbolizes Christ, who freed us from the captivity of sin. But while Cyrus has all the kingdoms of the earth, Christ also has all the kingdoms of the earth and heaven too.

And He has commanded me to build Him a house = in this also Cyrus symbolizes Christ because the Father sent Christ to build a house, which is the church. Just as Cyrus called for everyone to return to Jerusalem, Christ calls everyone to return in repentance, opens His house, and frees him from his captivity. His saying **He has commanded me** because he understood this from the prophecies. **God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem** = means the One whose house is in Jerusalem, or he is speaking in the manner of the pagans that each god has a specific area, and he may have thought that God only reigns on Jerusalem.

let the men of his place help him: Either by choice because many of the Jews were loved by the people of Babylon or by recommendation of the king. The men of his place were all pagans or the Jews who remained in Babylon and did not return to Jerusalem. Let us note that in this way, the pagans participate with the Jews in their donations to building the temple of the Lord, just as Solomon involved the pagans in the building as a symbol of the entry of the nations and the Jews into the church of Christ, that is, His body. We note that the name Cyrus means sun, so he symbolizes Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. Cyrus's call to all to donate means that the Jews who do not wish to return must at least donate to build the temple. This act of Cyrus and the donations of the pagans is a kind of land aid for the woman (Revelation 12: 16). In (verse 3) **go up to Jerusalem** = as returning to Jerusalem is an ascent, and by repentance, we ascend and rise, and by sin we descend (Jonah 1: 3, 5)

(Verses 5-6): **Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. 6 And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.**

with all whose spirits God had moved: The decision to return to Jerusalem was difficult for the Jews in Babylon. Why?

Jerusalem is burned with fire, without walls, surrounded by enemies, and the road is difficult, and they have their women and children with them. There are dangers on the way from bandits, and the journey to Jerusalem is long; rather, Jerusalem is now strange to them, as they do not know it. Perhaps many do not remember it or were born in Babylon and have never seen it. Besides this, they now have their interests in Babylon, from lands, money, and servants, and they even have singers, both male and female (Ezra 2: 65). They are settled in Babylon, and there is no need for the dangers of the road, nor for

the troubles of rebuilding a ruined, desolate, and burned city, nor for wars with surrounding enemies. This is the natural feeling within each of them. Still, God awakens their spirit so that they do not care about the hardships of travel or the troubles of building, for He is the One who will manage everything, and the Holy Spirit who awakened Cyrus to release them awakens them now to return (Zechariah 4: 6). He is the one who will compensate them for any loss. We note that all of the above is a description of someone who lives in the sins of the world and finds it difficult to abandon the pleasures of the world, finding it difficult to fight against sin, the lusts of the world, the lusts of the flesh, and the devil. We say that such a person is still in captivity in Babylon, and the Holy Spirit alerts his spirit to leave his sins. An example of this was our father Abraham, who was in Babylon and left everything to follow God, so whoever of the people now ascends from Babylon is like Abraham. Whoever leaves sin now becomes a son of Abraham by faith. Abraham left Babylon with its sins and set out into the unknown. But where is Abraham now? What did he lose, and what did he gain? Let us know that every movement toward Jerusalem, that is, toward repentance, is at the invitation of the Holy Spirit who alerts us. What is important is who responds and does not resist the Holy Spirit. And everyone who continued in Babylon became an example for everyone who loved sin and its slavery. Let us note that whoever leaves sin, that is, Babylon, will not return empty-handed; that is, he will not lose anything but will receive a lot = **And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.**

(Verses 7-11): **King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; 8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9 This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, 10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. 11 All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.**

King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord: These articles were taken by Nebuchadnezzar after he destroyed the temple. These articles were many and precious, but God's care surrounded them, so they did not break, melt down, or reshape them but remained as they were. The articles of the house of God are us, and God can preserve our vessels from destruction, that is, our bodies (2 Timothy 2: 19-21) + (2 Timothy 1: 12). God is even able to restore the dignity of these vessels even after they were used in pagan temples. God can free His servants because He is the victor. Note that these are the vessels from which Belshazzar, king of Babylon, drank wine (Daniel 5), but now they are returning with dignity to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. **Sheshbazzar** = Zerubbabel. The meaning of the name Sheshbazzar = joy in the midst of troubles. This was his name in Babylon, his Hebrew name is Zerubbabel, which means the one born in Babylon or a stranger in Babylon. Cyrus made him governor of the Jews = **the prince of Judah**. There are opinions on this: That Zerubbabel was responsible for the Jews after the death of Jehoiachin, or there is an opinion that says that he was the commander of the private guard of the King of Babylon, and in (Ezra 2: 63) he is called the governor,

which is in a Persian form word that indicates a high position (see Ezra 3: 2, 8; 5: 14; Haggai 1: 1), and Zerubbabel, with Joshua the priest, built the temple.

All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred: By adding the odd numbers, we find the result is 2499. The reason is that there were vessels that were not counted, perhaps because they were small or because they were broken. God is not concerned with the number of vessels but with the number of believers whose names are written in the book of eternal life: "Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition," as the vessels are a symbol of the believers.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, we see who are the golden vessels: those are the people who returned to Jerusalem.

(Verses 1-2): **Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city. 2 Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:**

In this chapter, we find the names of those who returned to Jerusalem and their names are mentioned to honor them "for those who honor Me I will honor." Whoever honours God and returns amidst all the previously mentioned hardships, God honours him by mentioning his name in the Holy Bible. This is a symbol of everyone who returns in repentance to the bosom of the Church; his name will not be blotted out from the book of eternal life (Revelation 3: 5). Mentioning the names also encourages others to follow their example. They were concerned in names and lineages because of the issues of inheritance and determining families. Some could not prove their lineage as Israelites, but out of their longing, they went up, and this puts to shame those who know their lineage and refuse to go up to Jerusalem. As for those who went up, God mentioned their courage and longing for God, their city, Jerusalem, and the temple.

the province = Judah, which was previously a great kingdom with dependencies, became a mere province, i.e. a district that followed the king of Persia, which is always the case with sin. **Zerubbabel** = He is from the lineage of the kings of Judah (1 Chronicles 3: 16-19).

From his descendants came Christ (Matthew 1: 12). **Jeshua** = the high priest. **Nehemiah** and **Mordecai** = are not the ones known in the books of Nehemiah and Esther.

Note:

Zerubbabel means the one born in Babylon, and Babylon is the land of slavery. Zerubbabel is the grandfather of Christ in the flesh, but he symbolizes Christ, who was born in this world. He is the one who built the temple, and he is the one who rules this people.

(Verses 3-19): **the people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; 4 the people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; 5 the people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five; 6 the people of Pahath-Moab, of the people of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve; 7 the people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; 8 the people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five; 9 the people of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty; 10 the people of Bani, six hundred and forty-two; 11 the people of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three; 12 the people of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two; 13 the people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six; 14 the people of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six; 15 the people of Adin, four hundred and**

fifty-four; 16 the people of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; 17 the people of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three; 18 the people of Jorah, one hundred and twelve; 19 the people of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three;

Here, we find the names of clans. **Pahath-Moab** = ruler of Moab; perhaps their father was the ruler of Moab when it was subject to Israel. **the people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six** = Adonikam means the great lord. We note that the number 666 is the number of the beast (Revelation 13) or Satan (for with every return in repentance, we must expect battles from the enemy of good as long as we are still in the flesh). This is because sin still dwells in our bodies (Romans 7: 14-25). This 666 returning among those who returned from captivity to Jerusalem (the Church).

(Verses 20-35): **the people of Gibbar, ninety-five; 21 the people of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three; 22 the men of Netophah, fifty-six; 23 the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight; 24 the people of Azmaveth, forty-two; 25 the people of Kirjath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three; 26 the people of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; 27 the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two; 28 the men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three; 29 the people of Nebo, fifty-two; 30 the people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six; 31 the people of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; 32 the people of Harim, three hundred and twenty; 33 the people of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five; 34 the people of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five; 35 the people of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty.**

These are names of places (perhaps the places took their names from the names of their inhabitants)

Gibbar = is Gibeon (Joshua 9; Nehemiah 7: 25). **Nebo** = is not the mountain that Moses ascended to, but a place in Judah. **the other Elam** = to distinguish them from the Elam mentioned in (verse 7), but the first is the name of a person, and the second is the name of a place.

(Verses 36-39): **The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; 37 the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; 38 the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; 39 the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.**

Joshua mentioned here is different from the one mentioned in (verse 2). We note that the total number of priests is about 4,200 and that the number of returnees is about 42,000; therefore, we find that God has the tithe.

(Verses 40-42): **The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four. 41 The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight. 42 The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine in all.**

The number of Levites is very small, probably because they rejected and despised their job, and now they have property and land.

(Verses 43-54): **The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, 44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon, 45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, 46 the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmal, the sons of Hanan, 47 the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, 48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, 49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, 50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim, 51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, 52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, 53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah, 54 the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha.**

The Nethinim: They were probably descendants of the Gibeonites and were appointed to serve the Levites.

(Verses 55-58): **The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda, 56 the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, 57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Ami. 58 All the Nethinim and the children of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two.**

The sons of Solomon's servants: From the descendants of the Canaanites whom Solomon forced to build the temple (1 Kings 9: 20-21).

(Verses 59-63): **And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel: 60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two; 61 and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. 62 These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. 63 And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.**

Tel Melah, Tel Harsha: Places in Babylon where the captives lived. **they could not identify their father's house** = they were Israelites, but they lost their genealogical lists. Among those who lost their genealogical lists were priests. The priests must be descendants of Aaron = **and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah**. Here, we find an example of them, the sons of Barzillai, who lost the priesthood because they did not deserve it. Why? Because their father was a priest but preferred to be called by the name of a famous man, Barzillai the Gileadite, and foresake his lineage to Aaron. This priest did not understand that serving God is an honour for man, and because he rejected his priestly

lineage, he was rejected from the priesthood. Let us know that God will reject those ashamed to serve Him and be called by His name. The priests who lost their lineage were excluded from the holy things, namely the showbread, the meat of the sin and trespass offerings, and the drink offerings called **the most holy things**. As for the firstfruits, the thanksgiving offerings and the tithes, all the priest's house eats them, and they are called holy things in comparison to the the most holy things, which only the priests eat. **the governor** = In Persian Tershatha referring to the governor and may mean a title such as His Excellency, it is a title of respect. The governor here is Zerubbabel. **till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim**: There were no Urim and Thummim after the captivity (the stones on the high priest's breastplate with which God answered his questions). Zerubbabel's answer meant that the judgment on this matter had been postponed indefinitely. The statement suggests that the Israelites were waiting for a high priest with all the required qualities, i.e. the Messiah.

(Verses 64-67): **The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. 66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.**

forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty: The total of the previously mentioned numbers is 29818. What is the reason for this difference? Especially since Nehemiah, in chapter 7, mentioned the same list with the same total of 42360. If we add the numbers in the Book of Nehemiah, we find a third number, which is 31089. The reason for this is:

1. These two chapters include the names of the prominent Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity to their homelands, and the total number of returnees in both is the same, which is 42360. There is no denying that there was a partial difference between them, which is a natural thing that was expected to happen. Ezra wrote the names of those who wanted to return to their homeland while he was residing in Babylon, while Nehemiah wrote the names of those who returned while he was in Judea after building the walls of Jerusalem. There was a difference in this statement due to the long period, as some must have died during this time, others died during their travel, and others changed their minds about travelling, so their names were omitted from chapter 7 of the Book of Nehemiah.
2. some of those who had previously registered their names to return failed because they were defeated by the sin that resided within them (symbolically, was there no one among those who returned who carried the number 666?) And the one who enters the heavenly Jerusalem is the one who overcomes (Revelation 2: 7, 11, 17, 28 + 3: 5, 12, 21).
3. Others may have travelled other than those whose names were written in Babylon (Ezra's list) and recorded by Nehemiah, so Nehemiah's list increased.

Examples:

(1) **Magbish** was not mentioned in Nehemiah's list, but in Ezra's list (Ezra 2: 30). Magbish changed his mind after recording his name with his family. Ezra lists those who recorded their names in Babylon, while Nehemiah lists those who actually arrived in Jerusalem.

(2) The number of the sons of Adin on Ezra's list is 454, and their number on Nehemiah's list is 655 because more people actually travelled than those who recorded their names.

4. As was the custom of the Jews at that time, they used more than one name (it seems that they had a name, a title and fame) for example [(The sons of Sia (Nehemiah 7: 47) are the sons of Siaha (Ezra 2: 44)].

Verse 65: They went into captivity and had nothing with them, and behold, they have returned with horses, camels, slaves, gold and silver. These are the gifts and mercies of God, so whoever returns to Christ in repentance does not return empty-handed. **men and women singers**, are those who sing at banquets and parties, and those singers are not from the Levites.

(Verses 68-70): **Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: 69 According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments. 70 So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.**

Verse 68: **offered freely** = they offered to the temple of the Lord, so the Lord blessed them.

Verse 69: **drachmas**: a piece of money, the first mention of minted money in the Bible.

minas = the name of the standard of what is weighed, not the name of some minted money. It is equal to 50 shekels.

Chapter 3

(Verses 1-7): **And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening burnt offerings. 4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. 5 Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, although the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. 7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.**

the seventh month: (It corresponds to the last half of September and the first half of October). They probably started their journey in the spring. The journey took about 3-4 months. The seventh month was the month of important feasts (the trumpets/atonement/feast of tabernacles). **Jeshua** = the high priest and the first high priest after the captivity. His name is mentioned here before Zerubbabel. The work here is offering sacrifices, which is a purely priestly work. As for verse (8), we find the name Zerubbabel mentioned before Joshua, so the work here is building the temple, which is the work that King Cyrus ordered and is now being carried out by Zerubbabel. **Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases** = when they felt the strength of their enemies, they took refuge in the strength of God, and if we find that we have many enemies, let God be our friend. "Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain." Let us note that they built the altar before building the wall, as the altar is more important, and they built the altar before the temple to practice their rituals. **They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles** = the Feast of Tabernacles was to remember that they were strangers and to live in the spirit of alienation. Now let us note that those who returned from Babylon (representing the repentant) had to build the altar first (i.e. worship) and live in the spirit of alienation in this world (the Feast of Tabernacles). **offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day** = the Feast of Tabernacles was seven days and then the great feast day and each day had a specific number of sacrifices (Numbers 29: 13,17). **Afterwards** = from that day onwards, they offered sacrifices daily and at the beginning of each month = **New Moons**.

and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated: The appointed holidays. **the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia** = Cyrus did not rule over Lebanon, but he allowed the Israelites to negotiate with them to obtain timber.

(Verses 8-13): **Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. 9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites. 10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.**

to oversee: They appointed the Levites as responsible for the construction and supervision of the workers. **to the house of God** = the place where the house of God was to be built. **Henadad** = not mentioned in (Chapter 2) so he may have come from somewhere other than Babylon, or he was residing in Israel and did not go into captivity. In (verse 10) **in their apparel** = the temple construction was done amidst hymns and songs, and everyone and the priests were in their priestly garments with their trumpets. Therefore, the construction was done amidst hymns of thanksgiving and hope until God blessed and completed the work.

wept with a loud voice = between the destruction of the temple at the hands of the Babylonians and its renovation now about 50 years, it is inevitable that the elderly remember the old temple and when they saw the new temple and that it was not as magnificent as the previous temple, they wept over their old glory that was lost. They despair that a great temple like the previous one would be built, but this is unacceptable because God who established the previous temple can help build the new one. Thus, it is not acceptable for us to despair no matter how big the work ahead of us is, for God is the One who helps, and all we have to do is start, and God rejoices in our beginnings no matter how small they are. Indeed, "For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4: 6-10). We must rejoice, praise, and thank God for the beginnings of His work with us, for if God begins a work with us, He will complete it. If there is sadness and weeping, let it be over our sins, and if we weep over our sins, this will turn into joy (Psalm 30: 5): " Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning."

"Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him." (Psalm 126: 5, 6).

It would have been more appropriate for these weepers to weep over their sins that caused the destruction of the first temple.

Contemplation:

Paul the Apostle says, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

There are some servants who should understand Paul's words, "comfort the fainthearted" and encourage those who start any work, even if it is a weak start, and do not cause them to be discouraged and stop their work. Some do the work of the elderly who wept over the old temple and compare the work of the new servant with the work of the older servants, belittling the work of the young. And God responds to them through the mouth of the Prophet Zechariah: Rather, whoever despises the day of small things: " For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4: 10).

Chapter 4

(Verses 1-5): **Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." 3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." 4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.**

the adversaries of Judah: They are the Samaritans, a mixture of the Israelites (the ten tribes) and the peoples whom the kings of Assyria brought and settled in Israel. They were descendants of those who were brought up by Esarhaddon (verse 2) and Osnapper (verse 10). Their religion was a mixture, in which there was some piety towards the Lord, but most of it was idolatrous vanities. Therefore, they erased the identity of Israel (Isaiah 7: 8). The enmity towards the people of God is a traditional enmity that arose since there was enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The devil will certainly resist the building of the temple and will resist any building of the body of Christ.

Judah and Benjamin = they are the majority of the returnees who were able to know their lineage to their fathers. **the descendants of the captivity were building the temple** = they became descendants of the captivity because they had previously neglected the temple. **for we seek your God as you do** = they wanted to participate to spoil and disrupt the work. Their saying "as you do" is because they imagine that they are worshipping God, but their religion contains a little worship of God and a lot of idolatry.

You may do nothing with us = The Jews refused to unite with them because they knew their goal, but the Jews could not, due to fear of them, say the real reason for their refusal, and they contented themselves with saying that the order to build the temple was from King Cyrus for the Jews only and not for others, so they had to commit to building alone. In (verse 4) **tried to discourage**, and the truth of their intentions became clear that they were not seeking the Lord or building His house. In (verse 5) **hired counselors against them** = in the king's court and palace and from his advisors. And these corrupt advisors were able, in the days of Cambyses, son of Cyrus, to convince him to issue an order to stop the construction, and it actually **until the reign of Darius king of Persia**.

Note:

If these people really wanted to build, they wouldn't have paid bribes to stop the construction.

(Verses 6-10): **In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7 In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the**

scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion: 9 From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—representatives of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River—and so forth.

In verses 5, 6, and 7, the names of three kings other than Cyrus are mentioned:

Verse 7: **Artaxerxes** = He is Cambyses, whom the enemies succeeded in convincing to issue a decree to stop building the temple. The decision to stop building the temple was (529 BC).

Verse 5: **Darius** = Darius Hystaspes, who ordered the rebuilding (he is the king after Artaxerxes).

Verse 6: **Ahasuerus** = (reigned from 486-465 BC) after Darius Hystaspes. They wrote a complaint against the Jews during his days. It is clear that verse (6) is a parenthetical in the middle of the speech, and Ezra places it as another example of the enemies' constant resistance to God's work. Verse (6) most likely refers to the enemies' attempt to stop building the walls, and it seems that they succeeded in this endeavour, and the construction of the walls stopped until Nehemiah obtained permission to build from Ahasuerus' successor, Artaxerxes Longimanus (reigned in 465 BC). Nehemiah was sent by Longimanus in 445 BC to build the walls. (Please see the timeline of events in the introduction.)

Verses 7,8: **Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe:** There were probably two letters in the days of Artaxerxes, the first from Bishlam and his companions, which was not recorded. The second from Rehum and his companions (verse 8), which is mentioned in verses (11-16). Most of the names, such as Bishlam and Mithridates, are foreign names, not Jewish. They were from the nations who lived in Israel. **Rehum the commander** = means the chief of ceremonies or the ruler of the country, and Shimshai his scribe. **the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language** = that is, in Aramaic letters and the Aramaic language, not Persian. Starting from (verse 8) and up to (Ezra 6: 18) is in the Aramaic language. Aramaic is the language of government and the language of foreign trade. It is the language of the Targum (The Old Testament is written in Hebrew language and it was translated to the Aramaic language. The Aramaic translation of the Old Testament is called the Targum). Ezra used Aramaic here because he was citing letters that he preferred to transmit as they were written without translation.

In (verse 9) **the Dinaites:** are different tribes of people that the Assyrians brought up to live in Israel. Note the many races that made up the people of Samaria. In (verse 10) **Osnapper** = He may be Ashurbanipal who reigned in Assyria in 668 - 626 BC. This great king fought his brother, the governor of Babylon, who had disobeyed him and fought Elam. Perhaps he was the king who exiled some of the Babylonians and Shushanites (residents of Shushan) and settled them in the cities of Samaria. He may be Esarhaddon himself or a leader he appointed for this operation:

beyond the River = that is, west of the Euphrates River. Note the many enemies of God's people. **and so forth** = The origin of the phrase in its original language means "May health and peace remain with you as you are now."

(Verses 11-16): **(This is a copy of the letter that they sent him.) To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: 12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations. 13 Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. 16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.**

the Jews: This name was first given to the people of the southern kingdom, i.e. Judah and Benjamin. After returning from captivity, it became a name for all Jews from all tribes. **the Jews who came up from you** = those who returned from captivity. **the rebellious and evil** = a reference to the history of Jerusalem, which rebelled against the kings of Assyria and Babylon in ancient times. Note that the enemies of the Jews in their letter exaggerate and overstate matters to incite the king against them. The Persians were known for their fondness for collecting taxes and tribute to spend on their huge armies. Here, we find that the enemies of the Jews portray to the king that the Jews are building walls to avoid paying tribute, while they are now building the temple and not the walls. However, there is no objection to the enemies repeating lies against the people of God. Inciting kings against the church and against the people of God is a constant trick. The Jews did this against Christ when they accused him of being an enemy of Caesar. **tax** = what is paid to the king. **tribute** = fees on trade and land yields to spend on local courts. **custom** = fees on road users to repair them and pay the salaries of road security personnel. Note the lie: in verse (12), they say they are **finishing its walls**, and in verses (13, 14) **if this city is built and the walls completed**.

we receive support from the palace = that is, they were in the king's service and received salaries from him, so it was not appropriate for them to see **king's dishonor**, and thus they tried to cover up their true goal. We note that whoever receives support from the king's palace finds himself obligated to do this, so how much more are we who took all our good things from God, so the glory of God ought to be our goal.

the book of the records: Government records. **to kings and provinces** = that is, kings and other rulers of the country who were under the authority of King Artaxerxes. **in former times** = a reference to Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.

you will have no dominion beyond the River = this is the serpent's cunning. Even if it is assumed that the Jews built the walls of Jerusalem, would this prevent all the countries west of the Euphrates from paying tribute? This will not happen except by forming a large Jewish state that controls everything west of the river. This is an exaggeration to provoke the king.

(Verses 17-22): **The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. 18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. 19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. 21 Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. 22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?**

until the command is given by me: So he did not close the door completely, but someone came after him and gave the order, and this is the hand of God.

(Verses 23-24): **Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. 24 Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.**

by force of arms: Satan stands with all his might to prevent the work.

Question: Why did the construction stop? Is this due to the strength of the resistance? No, but rather due to the laxity of those who were building. They did not pray or fast and remained lax until the Prophet Haggai stood up and spoke to them harshly.

Chapter 5

(Verses 1-7): **Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. 3 At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" 4 Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. 5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter. 6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent: The governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who were in the region beyond the River, to Darius the king. 7 (They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus.) To Darius the king: All peace.**

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied: We saw in the last verses of the previous chapter that Satan stands with all his might against the construction, and he even succeeded in stopping the work. Does Satan have the power to stop God's work?! Satan certainly has no power to stop God's work unless we allow him to do so. Referring back to the prophecy of the prophet Haggai mentioned here, we find that it was the people who neglected building the house of the Lord, and each one cared about building his own house and even overlaying these houses, that is, caring about their decorations with exaggerated care (Haggai 1: 3). The external prohibition from King Artaxerxes would not have stopped the construction if there had not been laziness and negligence from the people. Then the external attack coincided with internal laziness. However, God did not leave the situation as it was but sent two prophets to prophesy with power = **in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them**. The Spirit of God alerts us to the work "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," Says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4: 6). The two prophets had authority and power from the Spirit of God because their purpose was to glorify the name of God. Therefore, their words strongly strengthened the slack hands, and the work returned to the temple under the leadership of **Zerubbabel** and **Jeshua**. We note the functions of those concerned with construction:

1. Prophets... Haggai and Zechariah.
2. Governor (king)... Zerubbabel son of David.
- 3- High Priest... Jeshua.

Aren't these the functions of Christ, the builder of the true temple, His body, which is greater than the temple of Solomon or the temple of Zerubbabel?

(Haggai 2: 9) Note that the subject of Haggai's prophecy is to rebuke the neglect of the house of the Lord and encourage the restoration of the work. Zerubbabel and Jeshua actually responded.

Tattenai: He was governor of Syria, Cilicia, Arabia, and Samaria. Zerubbabel was his subordinate. Judah was a province of Transoxiana (i.e., west of the Euphrates). **Shethar-Boznai** = perhaps the governor's scribe. **Who has commanded you** = we understand that the people of the country had filed a complaint against the Jews, and the governor came to investigate. **the names of the men** = this is certainly in response to the governor's question asking for the names of those responsible for the work so that he could send a report to the king. **But the eye of their God** = "If the eye of God is upon us, whom shall we fear?" When God is pleased with a man, He surrounds him with his care and protection. He can turn the hearts of unbelieving rulers to do what is according to His purposes. **Then a written answer was returned** = that is, Tattenai and his companions answered the Jews after the king's order reached them. **the Persians** = the origin of the word is not fully understood, but it may be translated as rulers. Indeed, Governor Tattenai's letter was fair. He investigated the complaints that reached him and did not take sides against the Jews. He did not even mention Artaxerxes' order to stop the construction.

(Verses 8-17): **Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. 9 Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" 10 We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who were chief among them. 11 And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. 12 But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. 13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. 14 Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon—those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. 15 And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.' 16 Then the same Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished." 17 Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter.**

the temple of the great God: Tatnai did not know the true God, but God's hand was upon him, so he felt fear of God. Because he feared this God, he did not dare to stop the work and asked the king whether to stop the work or not, meaning he left the responsibility to the king. Because Tatnai worshipped idols, he said the great God because, in his view, there were many gods. We notice that God instilled His fear on the governor because the people began to work and care, so Satan had no authority to stop the work. Therefore, no matter how great the difficulties were, they became smaller and smaller in comparison to the work of God's hand. However, God does not intervene with Zerubbabel and the people if

Zerubbabel and the people do not work (Zechariah 4: 7). Even if the problems caused by the enemies are like a mountain, they become easy when God intervenes. **that was built many years ago** = Solomon's temple was built about 500 years before Darius. **But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven** = meaning that God delivered the people into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar because they provoked Him with their evil deeds. So it is not that the gods of Babylon have triumphed over God, but that God has delivered His people into the hand of the king of Babylon so that God may discipline His people.

Cyrus king of Babylon: He is the king of Persia, and Babylon follows him after it fell into his hands. **the temple of Babylon** = a pagan temple in which Nebuchadnezzar placed the vessels he took from the temple of the Lord. **Sheshbazzar** = is Zerubbabel. **from that time even until now it has been under construction** = the work had previously stopped (Ezra 4: 24), and now they are completing it, meaning that the stoppage was only for a while.

Chapter 6

(Verses 1-5): **Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. 2 And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus: 3 In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, 4 with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. 5 Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of God"—**

in the archives: House for Books where important documents are kept. **Achmetha** = summer residence of kings, and it appears that important ancient writings (dating from the days of Cyrus) were transferred there. Another possibility is that the king's advisers who were bribed (Ezra 4: 5) hid the evidence (Cyrus's decree) in this place, and God wanted to reveal it so that the construction could be completed. **scroll** = In ancient times, they wrote on a piece of linen or parchment with a wooden rod at each end around which the scroll was wrapped.

its height sixty cubits = the height of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, respectively (20, 30 cubits). The fact that the king permits the height to be sixty cubits does not mean that he is interfering with the height of the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, but rather the maximum height of the buildings attached to the temple. **with three rows of heavy stones** = this indicates how the walls were built and the rooms built on them.

(Verses 6-12): **Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who are beyond the River, keep yourselves far from there. 7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. 9 And whatever they need—young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem—let it be given them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. 12 And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.**

Indeed, the king's heart is in the hand of God, and here we find the king issuing an order to the governor to complete the building of the temple. It appears from the language of the speech that the king was inclined towards the Jews, as the Persian religion believes in the existence of one God, and they (and this king is probably among them) are not inclined towards idolatry (and we note the existence of multiple sects, as Cyrus glorified the gods of Babylon, but there were kings like this king who believed in the principle of one God, and they agreed with the Jews in this). **pray for the life of the king** = From this it is clear that the king is convinced of the power of the prayers of God's people for him. Haven't we heard that God's eye was on His people? Can we fear any enemies of the church after this? Here, we see God stopping the work of Satan whenever He wants if sincere people are working hard. Satan was agitated and stopped the work, but the work returned with more blessings than before. God's power is unlimited and available to everyone who wants to do God's work and to all of God's children whose heart moves them. If there is a person who wants to work, then the work is completed, and the power and ability of God are revealed. This is the meaning of God's words to the Apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12: 9). Let us notice the words of the Lord of Glory, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23: 37). This applies here to the situation of the Jews who were slow to build the temple to decorate their homes. God wants the house to be built, and He supports it with strength. Indeed, Satan places obstacles, but "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18: 14).

(Verses 13-15): **Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. 14 So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.**

diligently did: They feared the king's command. But we understand that the Spirit of God moves everyone. **according to the commandment of the God of Israel** = God first commanded, and the king obeyed Him. And the king commanded, and the governors obeyed Him. But the one who started is God, and He is also the one who inclined the hearts of the people to work and build.

Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes = Cyrus and Darius Hystaspes issued orders to build, but Artaxerxes (Cambyses) issued an order to stop building, but the construction continued for months during his reign until the order to stop was issued. Or Artaxerxes is Longimanus and he is mentioned here to honor him because he is the one who issued the order to build the wall.

(Verses 16-18): **Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs,**

and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

twelve male goats: Number 12 indicates that there were numbers from all the tribes, and they returned to the union, so the discipline returned them as one people. Therefore, in verse (16) he said, "**the children of Israel.**" Here, Ezra sees that the people are one people and the priests and Levites are for all.

(Verses 19-22): **And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21 Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel. 22 And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.**

The Old Testament mentions only five Passover feasts:

1. At Mount Sinai (Numbers 9: 5).
2. At Gilgal (Joshua 5: 10).
3. In the time of Hezekiah.
4. In the time of Josiah.
5. And now, in the time of Zerubbabel.

Each of these five feasts indicated the reform of worship and the renewal of the covenant between God and His people. We notice his saying **with joy** in verse (22), for joy accompanies the renewal of the covenant with God through repentance. We only rejoice in the sacrifice of the cross, our true Passover. In (verse 20) **for their brethren the priests, and for themselves** = the Levites slaughtered the Passover for the priests and for themselves so that the priests could devote themselves to their other service. **with all who had separated themselves** = are either:

1. Those who returned from captivity.
2. The Israelites who remained in the country during the time of the captivity and separated from the abominations of the nations of the land.
3. Perhaps they were Samaritans or pagans who repented and separated from their gods and became Jews.

the king of Assyria = Darius was the King of Persia and Assyria followed him, so it is permissible to call him the King of Assyria as he had previously called him the King of Babylon. He calls him the King of Assyria here to remind the reader that what the previous King of Assyria began by dispersing the people was finished by this King of Persia, and here they are gathering again, and this is what makes them happy. They also rejoice that God inclined the heart of the king of Persia toward them and that God strengthened them in building the temple. This is always God's will for His people to be in joy. God created Adam in the Garden of Eden, and Eden (עֵדֶן) is a Hebrew word meaning joy. The Lord of Glory says, "but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." (John 16: 22). Joy is in the presence of Christ among us if our gathering is in love (Psalm 133). Here, the Passover in their midst is a symbol of the presence of Christ among them. If they gather in love, the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts, and the result is love for all and true joy in the hearts. Notice his saying, "**And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy**" = and unleavened bread is without yeast which symbolizes that they lived without sin after Christ, our Passover, was offered as a sacrifice on the cross (1 Corinthians 5: 6-8). Thus, we see the conditions of joy: that we live steadfast in love and holiness, steadfast in Christ, our Passover in the mystery of the Eucharist, an extension of the sacrifice of the cross: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6: 56).

Chapter 7

(Verses 1-5): **Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—**

Now after these things: The book begins in a new era, as the first six chapters were completed during the reign of Darius Hystaspes, Artaxerxes, and Cyrus. Cyrus's permission to begin building the temple was in 536 BC. The temple's construction was completed during the reign of Darius Hystaspes in 515 BC. Now we find Ezra ascending from Babylon to Jerusalem in 458, meaning that about 67 years had passed since the temple's construction. So his saying "after these things" means after the construction of the temple and the resistance they were exposed to. We note that between the end of the events of chapter (6) and the beginning of chapter (7) there were about 67 years.

Ezra the son of Seraiah = His lineage is from Seraiah, who was the high priest and was killed by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (2 Kings 25: 18-21). Ezra was not the high priest, but rather Jeshua, son of Jozadak, Seraiah's firstborn son. Ezra was not from the lineage of Jozadak. The names mentioned here are some of the names, not all of them. He only wanted to prove his priestly lineage, and this is very important for him to perform his function as a priest.

(Verses 6-10): **this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. 7 Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.**

It is said that Ezra held a position in the Persian court as an official in charge of Jewish affairs.

all his request = that is, to be appointed and delegated as detailed in the king's letter (the king's decree in verses 12-26).

The meaning is that Ezra's request and the desire of his heart from God was to implement God's law among the people of Israel, and the king responded to him and issued a decree for this (the letter), and delegated Ezra to implement the law. The king's response was with strong divine assistance that supported Ezra, and this is the meaning of = **according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him** = for the hand of God is the one that helps, protects, and leads.

(Verses 11-23): **This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel: 12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. 13 I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; 15 and whereas you are to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; 16 and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem— 17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. 18 And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. 19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king's treasury. 21 And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, 22 up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?**

his seven counselors: are the king's advisory council. The nations consider the number 7 as it was by the Jews. The seven counselors were heads of houses in the Persian kingdom.

to inquire = about the spiritual and moral conditions of the Jews. The origin of the word inquire in Hebrew came to mean (plow) and also means to emerge. Thus, we understand that what is meant is that Ezra was sent to begin a new era of reforming the condition of the people. It appears from the letter's content that Ezra was authorized to work and not just to inquire, and his work was to establish the law, and he had the authority to punish the transgressor. He came to plow, that is, to clean the land and remove what was in it that hindered God's work. Thus, a new light emerges, or a new light shines. By abstaining from sin, God is pleased with His people.

to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered: It is strange that the kings of Judah impoverished the temple, and the pagan kings of Persia donated to the temple (Isaiah 49: 23) + (Isaiah 60: 4-16). **the freewill offering of the people** = There were donations from the king and his advisors and from the Babylonian people who loved the Jews because of their company, and from the Jews who preferred to remain in Babylon. These donations were to buy animals for the offering, drink offerings, and pay for the rest of the services = **And whatever seems good to you.**

Also the articles that are given to you = These are not articles from the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had previously taken from the temple of Jerusalem. Rather, they are vessels as gifts and donations from the king, his counselors, his leaders, and all the people (the people of Babylon and the people of Israel). **the God of Jerusalem** = an abbreviation for **the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem** (verse 15).

one hundred kors of wheat = 150,000 kg.

one hundred baths of wine = approximately 3,500 liters.

For why should there be wrath: This is the hand of God. Here, we find the king afraid of the wrath of God.

(Verses 24-26): **Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. 25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.**

according to your God-given wisdom: The law of your God is in your hand, and Ezra must execute this law with wisdom and not with severity.

all such as know the laws of your God = Ezra's authority was only over the Jewish people who follow the law of Moses. So, we understand that Ezra was a religious official, but the king of Persia appointed a governor for civil matters. As for Ezra, he had jurisdiction over spiritual matters only. His goal was to teach the people and reform their spiritual affairs.

(Verses 27-28): **Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.**

The above was in Aramaic, and here the speech is in Hebrew again, as Ezra here thanks God and praises Him for His wonderful work. In chapters 7 and 8, Ezra mentions "the hand of God" 6 times, as he attributes all the work to the hand of God and not to himself.

Chapter 8

(Verses 1-14): **These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: 2 of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; 3 of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were one hundred and fifty males; 4 of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males; 5 of the sons of Shechaniah, Ben-Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males; 6 of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; 7 of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; 8 of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males; 9 of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; 10 of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males; 11 of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males; 12 of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males; 13 of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these—Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah—and with them sixty males; 14 also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.**

Here, we find the list of those who went up with Ezra. This is the second list, and it differs from the list (Chapter 2), and the difference between them is 78 years. The first group went up with Zerubbabel and Joshua in 536 BC. This list (the people of the eleventh hour) went up with Ezra in 458, and even the people of the eleventh hour were accepted and had a share in the heavenly Jerusalem. We find that Ezra mentioned the names of the priests first (**the sons of Phinehas, Gershom** son of Aaron + **Daniel** from the sons of Ithamar), and Phinehas is the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron. Then, he places those from the house of King David. From the sons of David **Hattush**. From **the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah** = This is understood as either:

1. Hattush from the sons of David. Zechariah is from the sons of Parosh, and Parosh is from the sons of Shecaniah.
2. Hattush is from the sons of David and from the sons of Shecaniah. Then he mentioned Jehu from the sons of Parosh. What supports this opinion (1 Chronicles 3: 22) is that the sons of Shecaniah were Shemaiah, and the sons of Shemaiah were Hattush. So Shecaniah was from the house of David, then from verse (3) - verse (14) the names of the males of the children of Israel who went up with Ezra. And Shecaniah in verse (5) is not Shecaniah in verse (3). And in verse (13) **the last sons of Adonikam** = this most likely means that the greater number of the sons of Adonikam went up with Zerubbabel in the first ascent and the second or lesser number went up now with Ezra. The remainder of the house of Adonikam consisted of sixty males in three houses: **Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah**.

(Verses 15-23): **Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there. 16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam,**

leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia—that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. 18 Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; 19 and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; 20 also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name. 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

Ahava: The name of a place and the name of the river that flows into it. It is most likely a Babylon canal or a Euphrates River tributary. There was probably a Jewish gathering place or a residential area where the entire group going up with Ezra to Jerusalem gathered for three days to prepare for the journey. **and found none of the sons of Levi there** = In the first ascent with Zerubbabel the number of Levites was small, and here we do not find any of them. The reason is most likely that they obtained jobs and positions in Babylon belittled their position in the temple, and did not want to return. **men of understanding** = They were probably teachers and distinguished themselves from the rest. **Iddo the chief man:** Iddo was probably the head of the school of the Levites and **the Nethinim in Casiphia.**

Casiphia: There are two opinions:

1. The word Casiphia refers to silver. It was said that these Levites were working in the silver mines in the province of Media.
2. Some took the symbolic interpretation and said that Casiphia is a school for the Levites led by Iddo, and in it, they teach the word of God, which is like silver. The head of this school is Iddo. Ezra asked him to send some of the Levites to be servants in the temple. Note that the group of Levites moved to Jerusalem after they received a push from Ezra and Iddo, and many need a push to walk in the way of God. They want God, but they are slow. **a man of understanding** = he is from the sons of Mahli but his name is not mentioned, and this has several interpretations:
 1. The Hebrew word translated as a man of understanding is a proper noun: "Ashkel," so this is his name.
 - 2- Some say it is **Sherebiah** who is the man of understanding.
 3. Some say that the writer intentionally left out the name of the man of understanding.

namely: That is, they called their names to compare them with the lists. Perhaps Ezra did not want to mention their names because they did not come from themselves first. **Then I proclaimed a fast** = it is for repentance and humility so that God may help them with the difficulties of the path so that their path will be **the right way** = without obstacles (Isaiah 40: 3). And on our way to the kingdom of heaven, many difficulties require prayer and fasting. **soldiers and horsemen** = Ezra spoke about his God before the king, saying that He is a God who can protect His people, so how can he now ask for soldiers and horsemen to protect him? Therefore, he relied on God to protect him and did not ask for protection.

We find that Nehemiah had an army to protect him when he ascended. However, Nehemiah did not ask for an army to be sent with him, but he accepted this. And why would he refuse? God has many means to protect his children.

(Verses 24-30): **And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them— 25 and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. 26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, 27 twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. 28 And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord God of your fathers. 29 Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord." 30 So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.**

Honesty is obligatory in all financial matters, especially in the Lord's money. For this reason, Ezra handed over the articles to the priests and the Levites by weight so that they would deliver them into the house of God by weight so that nothing would be lost. More important than the articles are the souls of people, for they are a trust on the necks of the priests and servants.

(Verses 31-36): **Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. 32 So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days. 33 Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, 34 with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time. 35 The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. 36 And they delivered the king's orders to the**

king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.

and He delivered us: God protects our journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. Here God protected them from the enemies on the road: **ambush along the road** = that is, bandits, and they are very widespread, but it is the care of God who pushed the enemies away from them. **on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed** = the articles in the days of Cyrus were delivered by number, and here they were delivered by weight so that nothing was missing. This indicates God's concern for His children and that God's servants must be faithful to every soul, for God's children are His holy articles and He entrusted His servants with them (2 Timothy 2: 2). **Meremoth** = two priests and two Levites received the silver and gold and matched what was sent from Babylon with what they received in Jerusalem. **All the weight was written down** = for control and preservation in the register. **offered burnt offerings** = to thank God for their protection on the road and to dedicate themselves to God. And note the repetition of the number 12 (the number of tribes), for they are now one people. **So they gave support to the people** = the enemies and opponents became helpers who helped the people, and this was by the plan of God, in whose hand are the hearts of kings and rulers (Proverbs 21: 1).

The articles are delivered by weight so that nothing is lost: **with the number and weight of everything.** **All the weight was written down at that time** = Doesn't this refer to Christ's search for the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son... and to determining the number of fish the disciples caught at 153 fish... And doesn't this refer to the words of the Lord of Glory, "Those whom you gave me I have kept, and not one of them is lost except the son of perdition" (John 17: 12)?

Chapter 9

(Verses 1-5): **When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass." 3 So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. 5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God.**

Now, they were in their holy country in love and unity and without any manifestation of idolatry. However, the leaders, guided by the Holy Spirit, discovered that there were marriages between some individuals of the people and pagan women, perhaps for political reasons or for the benefit of one of them or perhaps for the admiration of a man for a pagan woman. But these marriages undoubtedly lead to the people turning back to pagan worship. This is what happened with King Solomon himself. Pagan worship was the cause of God's wrath, for which God had sent them into captivity before. **When these things were done** = the book and the delivery of the articles...etc., the leaders met with Ezra four months after his arrival. He arrived in the fifth month (Ezra 7: 9), and the meeting with the leaders was in the ninth month (Ezra 10: 9). **so that the holy seed is mixed** = that is, the husbands and children would learn the ways and worship of the pagan women. There was an exception to this, "Ruth the Moabitess," but the exception should not be turned into the rule. God's people are holy, that is, dedicated and devoted to the Lord. They are pure people in their lives and the only people in the world who worship God. They had to live isolated from the pagan peoples for their purity to remain and not to merge with the nations and be lost as happened with the people of Samaria. **in this trespass** = their action is called a trespass because they left their God. **I tore my garment** = a Jewish custom as a sign of extreme sorrow and disgust (Genesis 37: 29, 34).

and plucked out some of the hair of my head: Another Jewish custom in mourning. **and sat down** = His action had a great effect on the people. **Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel:** The prohibition of marriage to pagans is stated in (Deuteronomy 7: 1-4). **until the evening sacrifice** = Ezra had sat for a while in sorrow; at the evening sacrifice, he paid attention to the service and lifted up his heart in prayer to God. We notice that the evening offering symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ, who will take away our sins. Perhaps Ezra's eye was on the Messiah, the Savior, so perhaps Ezra understood Daniel's prophecy about the Messiah (Daniel 9: 21, 24). **I fell on my knees** = This is how prayer is done either standing or kneeling on the knees.

But let us notice the great improvement in the people's morals and their fear of God after the captivity. We find them trembling before God (verse 4), while before the captivity, they were in much greater sins,

and the prophecies of the prophets were frightening to them, and they did not care. The treatment that God uses always brings good results.

(Verses 6-15): **And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. 8 And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. 9 For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. 12 Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, 14 should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? 15 O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!"**

Here we find Ezra's prayer, which is not a prayer of requests but rather a confession of guilt from a pure heart that loves God. He places himself on the side of his people. He confesses his sins with them, saying, "**our iniquities ... our guilt... should we again... and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations**" even though he himself did not sin in these matters. But he does not blame others and justify himself, but as a priest who loves his people like Moses and Paul (Exodus 32: 32 + Romans 9: 3), he places himself on behalf of his people as if he were the one who sinned, and this is what Christ did who bore our sins. Ezra's prayers, love for his people, and tears affected the people, so they left their pagan wives. **has grown up to the heavens** = that is, it was very great, like the Tower of Babel, its top in heaven (Genesis 11: 4) and like the cry of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah that reached the ears of the Lord (Genesis 18: 20). **our kings, and our priests** = our civil and spiritual leaders, **the kings of the lands** = especially the kings of Assyria and the kings of Babylon.

for a little while: We deserve punishment and death, but God shines with His mercies for a while, so if we respond, it will be more for us. Now they are free after captivity, and this is from God's mercy upon them, but here they are about to lose their freedom again because of this sin, so their freedom that they

obtained is for a moment, and the reason for the short duration of the mercies is their sins. It is not because God shortened the period.

Note that this moment was about 78 years since Cyrus issued the call to return until now.

to leave us a remnant to escape:

1. From the destruction of Jerusalem.
2. From Babylon and its evils.

a peg = the temple is the peg, and Jerusalem is the place of His holiness. The function of the peg is to fix the tent in the ground and worship in the temple (prayers, repentance, and offering sacrifices) to make God pleased with them and not remove them from the land again, that is, establish them in their land, and they do not return to captivity again.

that our God may enlighten our eyes: The days of captivity were like days of darkness, and the return like days of light. The days of captivity are also likened to death, and the days of return are like a short life. **For we were slaves** = they were slaves in Babylon. They were still slaves to the king of Persia. **to give us a wall** = God's favor and protection were to them like a wall to hide them behind = "For I," says the Lord, "will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst." (Zechariah 2: 5). But God has His tools. The tool here is the king whom God has subjected to protect the people of Israel. However, the wall of Jerusalem began to be built in the days of Ezra. But a wall of stone, no matter how great it is, is ineffective if the Lord does not guard the city. In (verse 10) **after this** = after all God's mercies, they returned and betrayed Him. **commanded by Your servants the prophets** = There is no prophecy of the prophets with these words. However, Moses (Deuteronomy 7: 1-3) forbade marriage to pagans, and what Ezra mentions is the spirit of the legislation. It is the ideology that the prophets called for in isolation from evil.

never seek their peace or prosperity: Do not make peace and treaties or political and military alliances with them so that you do not fall into the trap of their idolatry. **for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day** = (Romans 3: 25). God, out of His mercy, preserved them, so they remained alive even though they deserved death, and if it were not for God's mercy, there would not have been a remnant of them. **Here we are before You** = He entrusted the matter to the Lord and could not say anything in front of God's mercy.

Chapter 10

(Verse 1): **Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.**

Ezra's love and tears for his people affected them greatly, so they wept with him. This weeping of the people is one of the signs of the success of the captivity trial that God allowed to discipline His people.

(Verses 2-4): **And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. 3 Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it."**

Shechaniah the son of Jehiel: He is not Shecaniah in (Ezra 8: 3) and Shecaniah in (Ezra 8: 5). In (verse 26) Jehiel is mentioned from the sons of Elam, who had married foreign women. If he is the Jehiel mentioned in (verse 2), then Shecaniah, his son, suffered from his father's pagan wife, and God used this personal pain for the good of the entire congregation. Shecaniah saw that the people should get rid of pagan women. **yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this** = there is hope if they offer sincere repentance (Deuteronomy 30: 1-10). Therefore, Shecaniah's hope is based on God's promises. **according to the advice of my master** = that is, the matter is left to the wisdom and counsel of Ezra. **according to the law** = (Deuteronomy 7: 1-3).

Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage = Ezra has authority from the king, but the matter seems difficult, so we find the people supporting and encouraging him to work.

(Verses 5-8): **Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. 7 And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, 8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.**

and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath: So that they would not return and throw the responsibility on Ezra alone. Rather, the decision would be collective, and everyone would be obligated to implement it. **And they issued a proclamation** = that is, the leaders.

within three days = the land of the Jews was small, so they could come from the farthest place to Jerusalem in 3 days. **all his property would be confiscated** = Ezra had authority from the king (Ezra 7: 26) so that the wealth and inheritance of Israel would not go to the pagans.

and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity = or cut off; that is, he would be considered a foreigner and a pagan who did not have the promises, rights and privileges that the people of God have and he would have no connection to the temple.

(Verses 9-17): **So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives." 12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 13 But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 14 Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter." 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support. 16 Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives.**

Judah and Benjamin: Because most of the captives were from these two tribes. **the ninth month** = is a rainy month. **the open square of the house of God** = there were no places in Jerusalem to accommodate all of these people, and the days were rainy days, but let us notice the seriousness: they did not postpone reform and repentance until the spring months, and this is evidence of seriousness and true repentance. **separate yourselves from the peoples of the land** = by marrying pagan women, they united with the people of the land in their lives, their work, their pleasures and their ugly worship. When they separated themselves from women, they separated themselves from all those relationships. **Then all the assembly answered** = they believed Ezra's words and agreed with pleasure. **our entire assembly** = Since the work is a lot and needs time, they suggested appointing leaders with the elders of each city to examine, judge and implement the matter. Their decisions would be issued as if they were from the whole congregation. **come at appointed times** = the leaders were in Jerusalem as a court. They

appointed a time for each city to bring those who had taken foreign wives, along with the elders and judges of that city. until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us = Until now nothing had happened to them. Still, they understood that wrath would undoubtedly come if they did not return to God in repentance. The whole congregation was of one opinion, and only two opposed it: **Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah**. They **opposed this** = in another translation they resisted this. The work took three months so they finished in **the first month** and they had started in the ninth month.

(Verses 18-44): **And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering. 20 Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah; 21 of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah; 22 of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah. 23 Also of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24 Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri. 25 And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah; 26 of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elish; 27 of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza; 28 of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai; 29 of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Ramoth; 30 of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh; 31 of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah; 33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei; 34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh, 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai, 38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei, 39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph; 43 of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. 44 All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.**

Here, we find the names of those who took pagan women as a punishment for them and as a lesson for future generations. Let us note that just as there is a record in which the names of those who returned to Jerusalem are recorded, which is a record of honor, there is a record of those who betrayed, and their betrayal is recorded in it, and every sin that is not repented of is stored up for us wrath on the day of wrath (Romans 2: 5). All our sins are recorded against us.

We find that the number of names is 113; 17 of them are priests + 10 of the Levites, singers and gatekeepers + 86 of the common people. At the forefront of these are the sons of Jeshua, the high priest. They offered **a ram of the flock** as a sacrifice for their sin. **And they gave their promise** = a sign of speaking the truth. And in (verse 25) **And others of Israel** = meaning the common people. The women were rejected with their children. Most likely, they sent away the women and children with gifts and

presents, but this was not mentioned, as it is a book of repentance, and the talk here is about repentance. Abraham did this with Hagar and Ishmael as he compensated her and sent her away.

Summary of Ezra's Reforms

"Ezra's Spiritual Method for Reform"

1. Not relying on a human arm: He did not ask for protection from the king and his armies, and God actually preserved them.

2. Fasting: To make their voice heard on high (Isaiah 58: 4). He called for fasting despite the length and difficulty of the road and to humble himself before God. God had mercy on and preserved them, which is what we should do at the beginning of every project.

3. Humbling themselves before God: He cried, prayed, and even confessed that he had sinned, as he felt that the people's sins were his sins against God. So do we pray for our brothers who sin and confess as if we were the ones who sinned, or do we justify ourselves and blame others?

4. Isolation of evil: By isolating pagan wives. True faith in the Lord is affected by extreme mixing (such as marriage) with non-believers. Every believer must isolate evil and sin.

5. Ezra's methodology, i.e. his prayer, humility, love for his people, and confession of their sins, is what moved the hearts of the people, so they repented and wept greatly. We note that if Ezra had asked the people to separate from their wives without praying and humbling themselves before God, they would have refused and rebelled against him, and the joys of returning would have turned into divisions (2 Corinthians 9: 14, 15).

Just as God sent Haggai and Zechariah to the people to move their hearts to build the temple, He sent Ezra to them to move their hearts to repent and to reform their spiritual condition.

The Persian king trusted Ezra and gave him some authority to impose punishments, but when Nehemiah came as governor of the Jews, Ezra was not upset that his authority was taken away from him but rather he cared about compiling the Holy Book. Does every servant understand that if he is deprived of a certain service, God will ask him for another? Do servants understand that they ought not be jealous of another servant's success in his service, but rather, everyone cares about his own service that God has entrusted to him?