

Preview of EHV Study Bible:
***Ezra, Nehemiah,
Esther***

The Wartburg Project

Preview of the EHV Study Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

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In the EHV logo, the circle of light or the rainbow radiating from the cross is divided into three parts to symbolize the three *solas* of the Reformation: by grace alone, by faith alone, and by Scripture alone. This semi-circle, together with the base, forms the Latin letter D, which means 500 and honors the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, the year in which the first edition of the EHV was published

Preface

The first printed edition of the complete Bible of the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) is scheduled, God willing, for the summer of 2019. This will be a “vanilla” version of the text with very brief introductions to each book and with the footnotes largely being limited to issues which have a direct effect on the translation.

Work is well along on our first EHV study Bible which will have much more extensive introductions and notes for each biblical book. Perhaps this could be called a “readers edition” since it focuses on providing the linguistic, historical, archaeological, and geographic information that will help readers understand the biblical text by providing the wider context of the text. In addition to the basic EHV translation, it will include more detailed introductions to each book of the Bible as well as supplemental appendices on subjects such as weights and measures, Israel’s neighbors, biblical chronology, and so on. It will include maps and charts. Its additional notes will focus on archaeological, historical, and geographic information about the text, but it will also include doctrinal notes. It is possible that some electronic versions of these notes may be available in late 2019. The following preview versions of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther provide a sample of what this Bible will be like.

See FAQ 43 on our Wartburg Project website for more information.

We hope this is just the first of many study Bibles based on the EHV, some produced by the Wartburg Project and others produced by others who obtain licenses to use the EHV in their publications.

Since study Bible notes are now sometimes published as electronic modules separate from the text of the translation, it will also be possible for people to use our study Bible notes with other translations such as ESV or NKJV. The first versions of these study notes will probably be in various electronic formats because we can get those out much closer to the time when the complete, printed EHV appears next year.

Issues of footnote flow, picture placement, etc., will be addressed after final editing of the text.

Ezra

Brief Introduction to Ezra

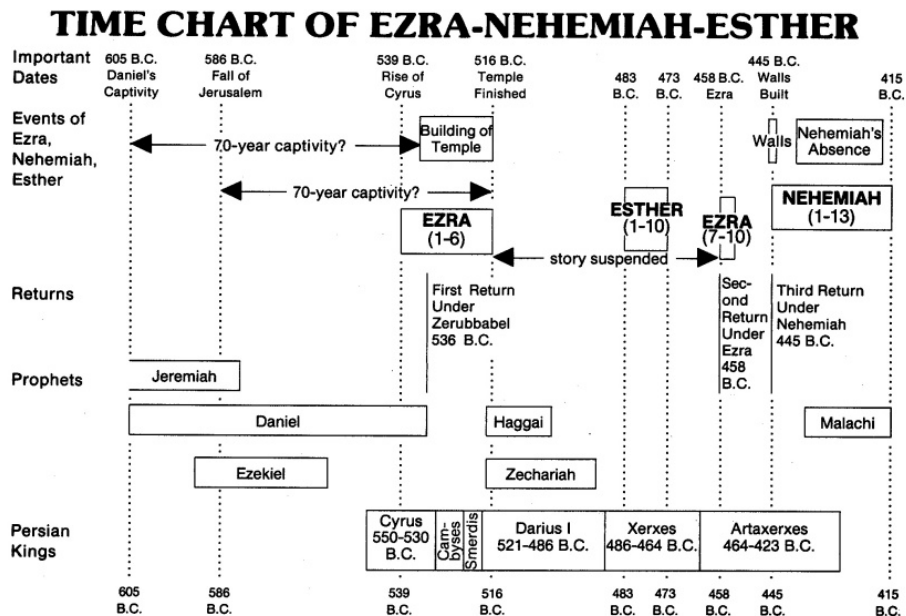
The book of Ezra provides information about two episodes in Israel's history: the return from the Babylonian Captivity, led by Zerubbabel in about 537 BC, and the second return to Jerusalem, led by Ezra in the mid-400s.

The Historical Setting of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

The restoration of the nation of Israel after the Babylonian Exile took place in four steps.

1. Zerubbabel, prince of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, led a return relatively soon after the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. After delay of about twenty years, this group succeeded in rebuilding the Temple, finishing in about 516 BC. Then, for many decades there was little progress and even decline. These events are reported in Ezra 1–6.
2. During the interval between the first return and the return led by Ezra, the people of Israel were threatened with extinction through the plot of Haman sometime after 480 BC. God providentially used Esther and Mordecai to preserve Israel so that the work of restoring the nation could continue. These events are reported in the book of Esther.
3. In about 458 BC, about 80 years after the return under Zerubbabel, the LORD sent Ezra to lead the spiritual rebuilding of the nation. These events are reported in Ezra 7–10.
4. In about 444 BC Nehemiah was sent from Persia to serve as governor of Judah and complete the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. These events are reported in Nehemiah.

The following chart shows the relationship of these events.



Introduction to Ezra

The book of Ezra is a continuation of the history reported in Chronicles. This is indicated by the fact that these books are linked by the same type of overlapping content at the end of one book and the start of another that links the Luke and Acts. Chronicles ends with Cyrus's decree and Ezra begins with it. Luke ends with the ascension and Acts starts with it,

Although the book of Ezra does not specifically name its author, it seems likely that Ezra is the author of the book. Only the second half of the book is written in the first person. The events in Ezra 1–6 happened well before the time of Ezra, but it is likely that Ezra wrote those chapters as well, using sources available to him. This explanation is supported by Jewish tradition which identifies Ezra as the author. Ezra may also have written Chronicles to serve as a review of Israel's history up to his time.

Ezra was a priest descended from Aaron, Eleazer, Phineas, and Zadok (7:5). He was a teacher well versed in God's Word (7:6-10), whose mission was to lead the people back to that Word. He was a scribe, who according to tradition, played a role in gathering the canonical books of the Old Testament together into one collection. He may have brought with him from Babylon the scrolls which were recognized as the best manuscripts of the Old Testament text and which became the foundation of the temple's collection of biblical manuscripts. Tradition also credits him with a role in establishing and solidifying synagogue worship.

Ezra's zeal and love for God and his people are seen in

- 1) how he "applied his heart to seek the Law of the LORD and to obey it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel" (7:10),
- 2) how appalled he was at the people's blatant sin, and
- 3) how he brings them before their God to plead for his mercy and to seek forgiveness (ch 9).

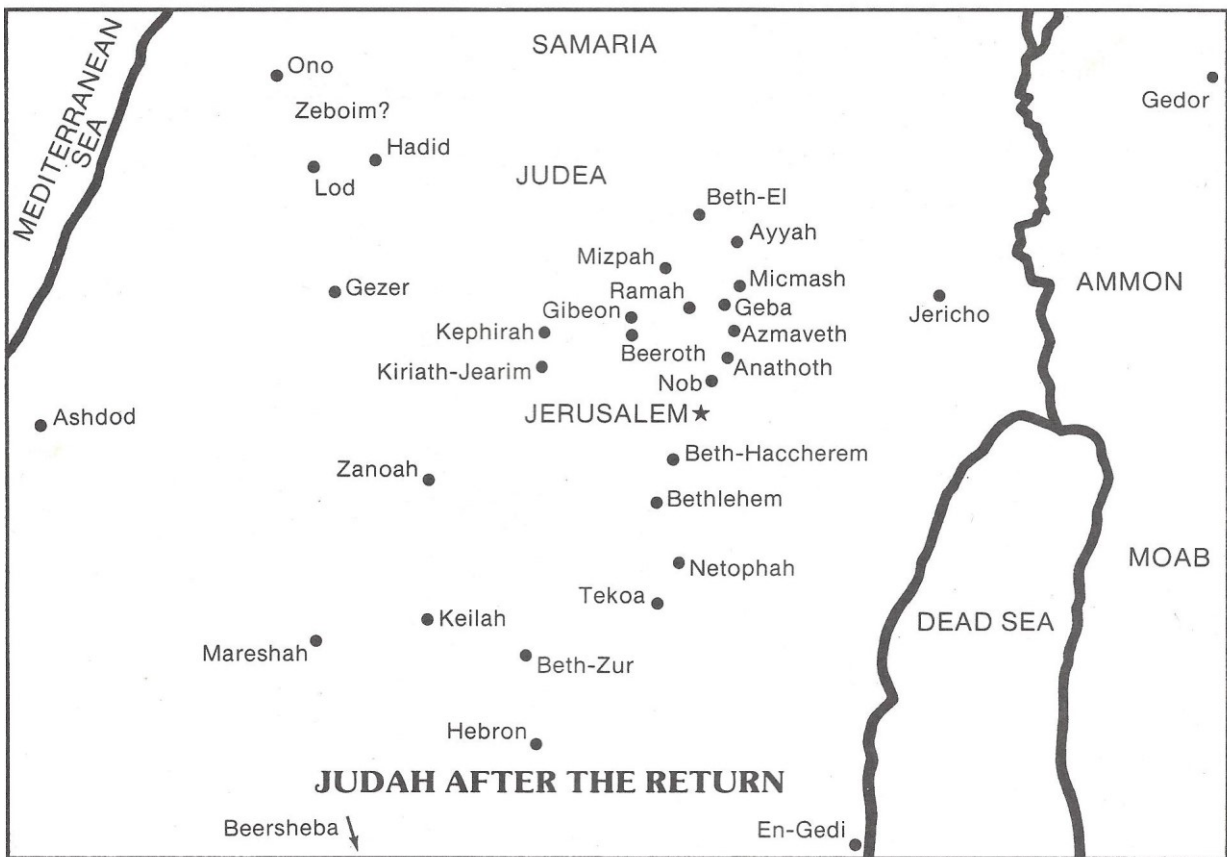
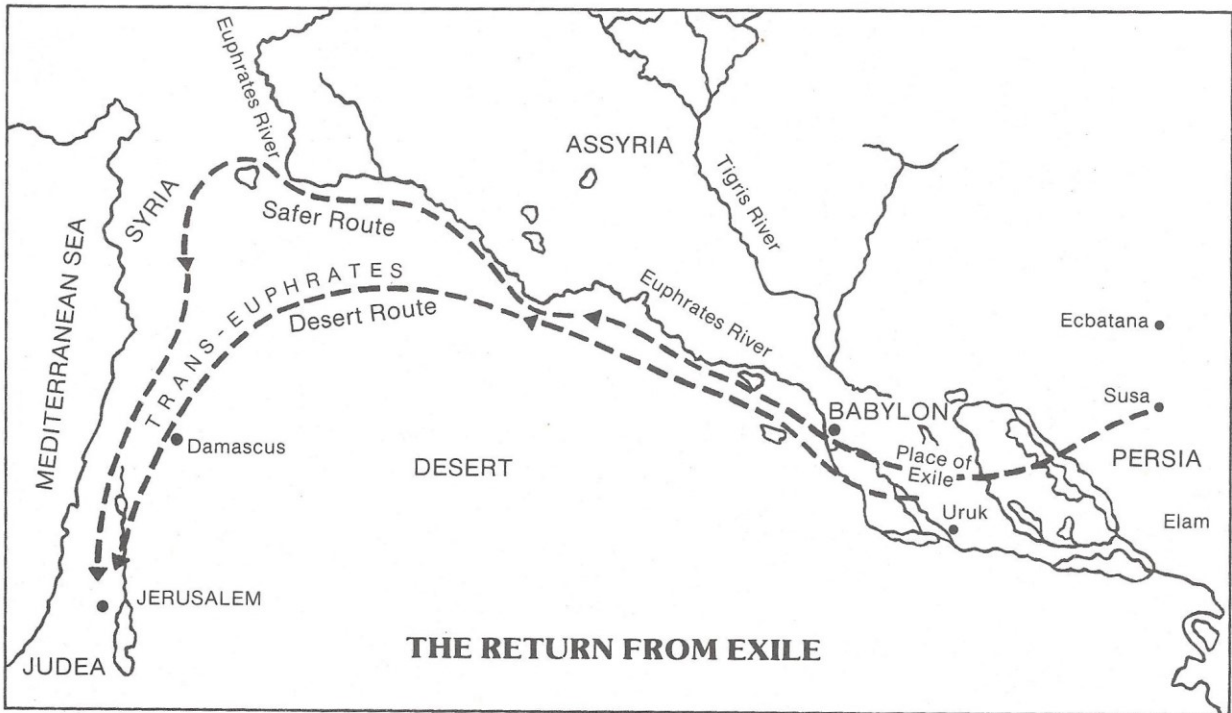
This same heart is seen to an even greater extent in the life and work of Jesus, our great High Priest.

The book of Ezra shows what a struggle it was for the Judeans to restore the temple and to rebuild Jerusalem, in part because of their own negligence, in part because of the opposition of the Samaritans. But by God's grace they accomplished the task.

Outline

One theme of Ezra is the contrast of God's grace with Israel's unfaithfulness. Another theme is Ezra's faithfulness to God and his Word in contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness. In spite of the fact that the LORD restored them to the land of Israel, due to Samaritan opposition and to their own negligence the people were very lax at rebuilding the temple and the nation. Even worse, that same laxness marred their obedience to God's Word. Nevertheless, God in his grace sent them prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them in this work. He also sent a faith-filled and powerful leader like Ezra to teach them by word and example, to intercede for them, and to spur them on in rebuilding the spiritual walls of the nation. All this God graciously did to prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah. This history is told in two parts.

- I. The first return to Jerusalem, led by Joshua and Zerubbabel (ch 1–6)
 - A. The exiles return (1–2)
 1. Cyrus authorizes the return (1)
 2. The list of those who returned (2)
 - B. Opposition halts the rebuilding of the temple (3–4)
 - C. The temple is completed (5–6)
- II. The second return, led by Ezra (ch 7–10)
 - A. Ezra's return (7–8)
 - B. Ezra's reforms (9–10)



Ezra

1

The Decree of Cyrus

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,^a to fulfill the word of the LORD given through the mouth of Jeremiah,^b the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.^c Cyrus circulated a proclamation throughout his kingdom and recorded it in a written document.

²This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

The LORD, the God of Heaven, has given all the kingdoms of the earth to me.^d He has appointed me to build a house^e for him in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³From all his people, whoever among you is willing (may the LORD his God be with him) is permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah. He may build the House of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴Any of the exiles who have survived, in any place where they are living as resident aliens, may receive support from the people of that place: silver, gold, goods, and livestock, along with their voluntary contributions for the House of the God who is in Jerusalem.^f

Preparations for the Return

⁵Then the heads of the families^g of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, and the Levites arose—everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to build the House of the LORD, which is in Jerusalem. ⁶All of their neighbors supported them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with livestock, and with valuables, in addition to all kinds of voluntary contributions.

⁷King Cyrus also brought out the vessels of the House of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put into the house of his gods. ⁸Now Cyrus king of Persia entrusted them to the treasurer Mithredath, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the leader^h of Judah.

⁹This is a tally of several different kinds of vessels:

^a1:1 That is, 539 BC

^b1:1 The return authorized by Cyrus and led by Zerubbabel fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah (Is 44:28; 45:1) and Jeremiah (Je 25:11-13; 29:10) and the expectant hope of Daniel (Dn 9:1-3). The book of Ezra begins with an emphasis on the LORD's fulfillment of his promise of a return.

^c1:1 Cyrus the Great was the founding king of the Persian Empire. Other secular records from the time support the biblical statement that Cyrus was inclined to support local religions, but it is significant that God calls Cyrus his shepherd who would fulfill the LORD's purposes (Isaiah 44:28).

See Appendix 4: *Israel and the Nations*, for more information on the Persian kings who interacted with Israel and for a map of the Persian Empire.

^d1:2 Edicts of the great kings of Persia preserved in cuneiform inscriptions usually begin with the acknowledgment that they owe their power to their god Ahuramazda, the creator of heaven and earth. Significantly Cyrus here calls the true God of Heaven by his Israelite name the LORD (Yahweh). Possibly, this decree was written with the advice of Daniel, who was at the Persian court in 539 BC.

^e1:2 In the historical books, the temple in Jerusalem is frequently called a *house (bayit)* rather than a *temple (hekal)*.

^f1:4 Ezra, who had access to the records of the Persian court, quotes from the decree of Cyrus. At a time when the subjects of empires could not move around or transport money freely, the rights granted in this decree were special privileges.

^g1:5 Literally *the heads of the fathers* or *the leading fathers*. Because Israel's political and social groups were based on ancestry and kinship, *fathers* is a common title for the leaders, and the groups are called *fathers' houses* or *father's houses*.

^h1:8 The title *leader (nasi)* does not necessarily refer to a *prince*, that is, to the son of a king. Sheshbazzar is, however, traditionally called a *prince* because the line of the Messiah was traced through him.

gold dishes	30
silver dishes	1,000
pans ^a	29
¹⁰ gold bowls	30
silver bowls of other kinds	410
other articles	1,000

¹¹The total number of all of the gold and silver vessels was 5,400.^b Sheshbazzar^c brought these things up to Jerusalem along with the exiles who went up to Jerusalem.

2

The List of Those Who Returned^d (Nehemiah 7:6-73)

Now these are the men^e of the province who went up from the captivity of the exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had exiled to Babylon. ²The people who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua,^f Nehemiah, Seraiah, Re'elaiah,^g Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Ba'anah returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each man to his own city.

This is the tally of the men from the people of Israel:^h

³ the male descendants ⁱ of Parosh:	2,172
⁴ the male descendants of Shephatiah:	372
⁵ the male descendants of Arah:	775

^a1:9 The precise identification of some of these objects is uncertain. For example, the term translated *pans* may mean *knives*.

^b1:11 The grand total is far greater than the number of enumerated items. The itemized list is only a sample from the total inventory. It is not known why the author chose this method of reporting the inventory.

^c1:11 There has been much discussion about the identity of Sheshbazzar. The most common explanation is that Sheshbazzar is another name for Zerubbabel, who consistently is named as the leader of the first return. Another idea is that Sheshbazzar was an older relative of Zerubbabel, who led the return but soon faded from view, perhaps Zerubbabel's uncle who is also called Shenazzar (1 Chronicles 3:17-19). The most likely explanation is that Zerubbabel was called Sheshbazzar by the Babylonians and Persians, but he was called Zerubbabel among the Jews. If that is the case, like Daniel and his friends, he had two different names (Daniel 1:7). The name Sheshbazzar consistently occurs in conversations involving Persians.

^d2:1 Chapter 2 consists mostly of the list of returnees. We may find reading such lists about as interesting as reading a telephone book (does anyone remember them?), but we should not rush by such lists too quickly. Like the memorial book of a congregation, such lists serve as a testimony to the lives and the offerings of God's people and to the grace of God that moved them to action. Salvation history is filled with real people like you and me

^e2:1 Literally *sons*. The term *men* is used to make it clear that this refers to multiple generations of descendants.

^f2:2 He is also known as *Joshua*.

^g2:2 The stop mark ' indicates that the double vowel should be pronounced as two syllables, *re-el*, not as one syllable, *reel*.

^h2:2 In this list and the similar list in Nehemiah, there are many variants of names and numbers. The translation provides footnotes only for some of the more important variants. Many of the variants may be due to the authors using different versions or different stages of the same registration.

ⁱ2:3 Literally *sons*. Here the returnees are arranged by ancestry, so the translation uses the term *male descendants* to make it clear that multiple generations are involved. These men are not literal *sons* of the man whose name follows, but may be grandsons or more distant relatives.

⁶ the male descendants of Pahath Moab through the descendants of Jeshua and Joab:	2,812
⁷ the male descendants of Elam:	1,254
⁸ the male descendants of Zattu:	945
⁹ the male descendants of Zakkai:	760
¹⁰ the male descendants of Bani:	642
¹¹ the male descendants of Bebai:	623
¹² the male descendants of Azgad:	1,222
¹³ the male descendants of Adonikam:	666
¹⁴ the male descendants of Bigvai:	2,056
¹⁵ the male descendants of Adin:	454
¹⁶ the male descendants of Ater through Hezekiah:	98
¹⁷ the male descendants of Bezai:	323
¹⁸ the male descendants of Jorah:	112
¹⁹ the male descendants of Hashum:	223
²⁰ the male descendants of Gibbar:	95
²¹ the citizens ^a of Bethlehem:	123
²² the men of Netophah:	56
²³ the men of Anathoth:	128
²⁴ the citizens of Azmaveth:	42
²⁵ the citizens of Kiriath Arim, ^b Kephirah, and Be'eroth:	743
²⁶ the citizens of Ramah and Geba:	621
²⁷ the men of Mikmash:	122
²⁸ the men of Bethel and Ai:	223
²⁹ the citizens of Nebo:	52
³⁰ the citizens of Magbish:	156
³¹ the citizens of the other Elam:	1,254
³² the citizens of Harim:	320
³³ the citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono:	725
³⁴ the citizens of Jericho:	345
³⁵ the citizens of Sena'ah:	3,630
³⁶ The priests: ^c the descendants ^d of Jedaiah through the house of Jeshua:	973
³⁷ the descendants of Immer:	1,052
³⁸ the descendants of Pashhur:	1,247
³⁹ the descendants of Harim:	1,017

^a2:21 Literally *sons*. Here the returnees are listed by place of residence so the translation uses the term *citizens* as the translation of *sons*. The towns in the list are towns in Judah and Benjamin, around Jerusalem.

^b2:25 This is a variant of *Kiriath Jearim*.

^c2:36 Verses 36 through 63 list various class of temple workers: priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants. Some of the servants may be descendants of the Gibeonites, who had entered the menial service of the sanctuary when they were received into Israel as a result of their act of deception (Joshua 9:23). Since service in the priesthood was based on lineage, no one could serve unless he had evidence of this genealogy.

^d2:36 Literally *sons*. Some of these may be several generations removed from their father.

⁴⁰The Levites:
the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel
through the descendants of Hodaviah: 74

⁴¹The singers:
the descendants of Asaph: 128

⁴²The descendants of the gatekeepers:
the descendants of Shallum, the descendants of Ater,
the descendants of Talmon, the descendants of Akkub,
the descendants of Hatita, the descendants of Shobai, in total: 139

⁴³The temple servants:
the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha,
the descendants of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴the descendants of Keros,
the descendants of Siaha, the descendants of Padon,
⁴⁵the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah,
the descendants of Akkub, ⁴⁶the descendants of Hagab,
the descendants of Shamlai, ^athe descendants of Hanan,
⁴⁷the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar,
the descendants of Reaiah, ⁴⁸the descendants of Rezin,
the descendants of Nekoda, the descendants of Gazzam,
⁴⁹the descendants of Uzza, the descendants of Paseah,
the descendants of Besai, ⁵⁰the descendants of Asnah,
the descendants of Meunim, the descendants of Nephusim, ^b
⁵¹the descendants of Bakbuk, the descendants of Hakupha,
the descendants of Harhur, ⁵²the descendants of Bazluth,
the descendants of Mehida, the descendants of Harsha,
⁵³the descendants of Barkos, the descendants of Sisera,
the descendants of Temah, ⁵⁴the descendants of Neziah,
the descendants of Hatipha.

⁵⁵The descendants of the servants of Solomon:
the descendants of Sotai, the descendants of Hassophereth,
the descendants of Peruda, ⁵⁶the descendants of Ja'alah,
the descendants of Darkon, the descendants of Giddel,
⁵⁷the descendants of Shephatiah, the descendants of Hattil,
the descendants of Pokereth Hazzebaim, the descendants of Ami.

⁵⁸The total of the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants was 392. ^c

⁵⁹The following are the people who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. They were not able to prove their ancestry or descent—whether they were from Israel:

⁶⁰the descendants of Delaiah, the descendants of Tobiah, the descendants of Nekoda: 652;

⁶¹and from the descendants of the priests: the descendants of Habaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, the descendants of Barzillai, through a man who married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and so they were called by his family name. ⁶²These people searched for their genealogical records, but they could not find them, so they were disqualified from the priesthood. ⁶³The governor told them

^a2:46 Variant *Shalmal*

^b2:50 Many of the names in these lists, including *Meunim* and *Nephusim*, have variant spellings. The most common variant is between *u* and *i*, which look very much alike in some phases of Hebrew script.

^c2:58 This number is surprisingly small.

that they should not eat from the most holy sacrifices until a priest would arise who could serve with Urim and Thummim.^a

⁶⁴The entire assembly together numbered 42,360, ⁶⁵not counting their male slaves and their female slaves, who numbered 7,337. They also had 200 male and female singers. ⁶⁶Their horses numbered 736, their mules 245, ⁶⁷their camels 435, and their donkeys 6,720.^b

⁶⁸So when the heads of the families came to the House of the LORD in Jerusalem, they gave voluntary contributions for God's house in order to construct it on its site. ⁶⁹On the basis of their wealth, they gave the following amounts to the treasury to support the work: 61,000 gold darics,^c 5,000 silver minas,^d and 100 garments for the priests.

⁷⁰The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the temple servants, and some of the people settled in Jerusalem and its towns,^e and all the rest of Israel settled in their towns.

3

Beginning the Construction of the Second Temple

When the seventh month^f arrived and the Israelites were living in their own cities, the people gathered together in Jerusalem.

²Then Jeshua son of Jozadak with his fellow priests along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his colleagues^g arose and built the altar of the God of Israel in order to offer burnt offerings upon it, as it is written in the Law of Moses, the man of God. ³They set the altar on its foundations, although they were in terror of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings to the LORD upon it—burnt offerings in the evening and in the morning.

⁴They observed the Festival of Shelters^h according to the written directions, and they offered the daily burnt offerings in the number specified for each day of the festival. ⁵After this, they offered the regular burnt offerings, those for the new moons, those for all the appointed assemblies of the LORD, and the offerings for everyone who was bringing a voluntary contribution to offer to the LORD. ⁶From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not yet been laid.

⁷They gave money to the stonemasons and craftsmen, and they gave food, drink, and olive oil to the Sidonians and Tyrians to pay them for bringing cedar logs from Lebanonⁱ to the seaport at Joppa, according to the authorization that had been given to them by Cyrus king of Persia.

^a2:63 Using the Urim and Thummim the priest could get a yes or no answer about whether a man had a valid priestly ancestry. It appears the Urim and Thummim had been lost during the exile.

^b2:67 Conspicuous by its absence is a listing of flocks and herds.

^c2:69 A *daric* is a unit of weight that appears in post-exilic books. It is a Persian term, equal to the Greek *drachma*, perhaps a third of an ounce. It is also the name for the standard gold coin of the Persian Empire. The Persian coins are the first coins mentioned in the Bible. Earlier references to *shekels* refer to weighed-out metal not to coins.

^d2:69 A *mina* weighed about 1¼ pounds or 20 ounces.

^e2:70 The word *Jerusalem* is not in the Hebrew text, but it is present in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and in 1 Esdras 5:45. If the reading *Jerusalem* is accepted, the first group of cities refers to Jerusalem and its environs, and the second group of cities to more distant cities and towns of Judah and Benjamin in which only laypeople lived. See the map following the introduction to Ezra.

^f3:1 The *seventh month* of the religious year, called Tishri, falls in the early autumn. It overlaps our September/October. It is the first month of the civil, agricultural year.

^g3:2 Literally *brothers*

^h3:4 Traditionally, this festival was called *Tabernacles*. Part of the celebration of this festival was to live in temporary shelters as the Israelites had done during the wilderness years. This festival, celebrated from the 15th to 21st of Tishri, also marked the end of the fruit harvest and the start of the rainy season.

ⁱ3:7 The high mountains of Lebanon, just north of Israel, were the only source of large timber beams in the vicinity of Israel. These beams came from the famous cedars of Lebanon. The Sidonians and

⁸In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak, along with the rest of their colleagues, the priests and the Levites, and everyone who returned from the captivity to Jerusalem began the work.

They appointed Levites who were twenty years old and older to supervise the work on the house for the LORD. ⁹Jeshua together with his sons and brothers and Kadmiel with his sons (they were descendants of Judah^a) assumed supervision over those working on the house for God. (The Levites who were descendants of Henadad, along with their sons and brothers, also supervised.)

¹⁰When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests, dressed in their robes, stood by with trumpets, and the Levites, the descendants of Asaph, stood by with cymbals to praise the LORD as prescribed by David king of Israel. ¹¹They sang antiphonally to praise and thank the LORD:

Truly, he is good, because his mercy toward Israel endures forever.

All the people shouted loud praise to the LORD when the foundation of the House of the LORD was laid. ¹²However, when many of the older priests, Levites, and heads of families, who had seen the first house, saw this house being founded, they wept loudly,^b although many also raised their voices in a shout of joy. ¹³The people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful cry from the sound of the people weeping, because the people were shouting loudly, and the sound could be heard far away.^c

4

Opposition to the Construction of the Second Temple

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, ²they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of the families. They said to them, “Let us build with you, because, like you, we seek your God, and we have been sacrificing to him^d since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.”

³Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel said to them, “We will not permit you to join us in building a house for our God, because we ourselves will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us.”

⁴Then the people of the land kept discouraging^e the people of Judah and kept trying to make them too frightened to build. ⁵They kept bribing officials^f against them to try to frustrate their plans. They did this throughout all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, until the reign of Darius king of Persia.^g

Tyrians were surviving Canaanites whom Israel had allowed to remain in the area. They had been allied with David and Solomon and had provided materials for the first temple. We also know them by their Greek name, Phoenicians.

^a3:9 The man *Judah* is also called *Hodaviah* (Ezra 2:40; Nehemiah 7:43). The exact relationship of these groups of people is unclear.

^b3:12 The tears may have been tears of repentance or tears of joy, but Haggai 2:3 suggests that for some they were tears of disappointment.

^c3:13 The work soon falters and halts, and the project remains unfinished for many years. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah make it clear that among the chief reasons for this failure was the laxness and self-centeredness of many of the people, but another reason was the opposition of the surrounding peoples, who did not want to see Israel restored because this would infringe on their own power.

^d4:2 The translation *we have been sacrificing to him* follows the Hebrew reading in the margin, which is supported by a Dead Sea Scroll and the ancient versions. The main Hebrew text reads *we have not been sacrificing*.

^e4:4 Literally *kept causing the hands to droop for*

^f4:5 Or *hiring lobbyists*

^g4:5 A third reason for the opposition to rebuilding the temple was resentment because the Jews would not let the Samaritans join in the rebuilding. The Samaritans were people whom the Assyrians had imported into Israel when they had deported the northern tribes of Israel from the region. The religion of these new settlers was a mixture of their former heathen religions and the worship of the LORD as it had been practiced in the Northern Kingdom. These enemies hired lobbyists at the Persian court to try

⁶During the reign of Xerxes,^a at the beginning of his reign,^b they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

⁷Then in Artaxerxes' days, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabe'el, and the rest of his associates wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia. A document was written in Aramaic and translated.^c What follows is the Aramaic version.^d

⁸Rehum the head of the council and Shimshai the secretary wrote a letter concerning Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows:

⁹Heading: Rehum the head of the council with Shimshai the secretary and the rest of their associates: the judges, the rulers, the officials, the administrators, people from Uruk and Babylon, people from Susa (that is, the Elamites),^e ¹⁰and the rest of the peoples whom the great and glorious Ashurbanipal^f exiled and settled in the city of Samaria and the rest of the province called Trans-Euphrates.^g

¹¹(This is a copy of the letter that they sent to him.)

To King Artaxerxes.

From your servants, men of the Trans-Euphrates.

Message:

¹²The King should know that the Judeans who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. Soon they will have completed the walls, and they are now repairing the foundations.

¹³Now let it be known to the King that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are completed, then taxes, tribute, and revenue will not be paid, and kings certainly will be harmed.

to undermine the plans of the Jews by getting their permission to build the temple and the city revoked. Though the hostility being discussed in this chapter is the lobbying against the rebuilding of the temple during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius from 535 to 520 BC, Ezra quotes from a later document from his own time which had been addressed to his king, Artaxerxes. Very likely he used this letter because he did not have access to court documents about the lobbying efforts from the earlier period. So, in a sense, verses six through twenty-three are a detour from the discussion of opposition to the building of the temple. They speak about the opposition to the rebuilding of the city and its wall, which still continued years after the temple had been rebuilt and continued until shortly before Ezra came to Jerusalem in the mid-400s. Though this document is, so to speak, "out of time," it provides evidence of the venomous spirit of the opposition, who deceitfully pretended they had the Persian king's best interests at heart. Like this complaint to King Artaxerxes shortly before the return of Ezra, the earlier complaints in the days of Zerubbabel were successful, and the work on the temple was halted.

^a4:6 The EHV uses the names of the Persian kings that have become the standard English names. These names derive from the Greek versions of the names rather than directly from the Hebrew or Persian forms of the names. For more about the Persians kings who interacted with Israel, see Appendix 4, *Israel and the Nations*.

^b4:6 About 483 BC, shortly before Esther became queen.

^c4:7 Presumably translated into Persian for the king. See verse 18.

^d4:7 Ezra 4:7–6:18 and 7:12-26 are written in a kind of formal, stylized, bureaucratic Aramaic, which was the international language of diplomacy during this period. They are similar to other extra-biblical letters from the Persian period.

^e4:9 It is unclear which of these terms refer to offices and which refer to ethnic groups. Some translations understand all of them to be names of ethnic groups: *Dinaites and Apharsathkites, Tarpelites, Persians, Urukites, Babylonians, Susanites, Dahavites, Elamites*. If some of the words are names of office holders, it is not clear in all cases which specific offices are referred to.

^f4:10 Ashurbanipal was a king of Assyria from about 668 BC to 627 BC.

^g4:10 That is, the territory west of the Euphrates River, Syria-Palestine

¹⁴Now because we are duty-bound by an oath to the King^a and do not wish to see the King dishonored, for that reason we are sending this letter to inform the King, ¹⁵so that a search may be made in the book containing the memoranda of your predecessors. In this book of memoranda you will discover and come to know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, producing rebellions within it from days of old. For this reason that city was destroyed. ¹⁶We are informing the King that if that city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, then, because of that, you will retain possession of no portion of the Trans-Euphrates.

¹⁷The king sent a reply:

To Rehum the head of the council, to Shimshai the secretary, and to the rest of their associates, who live in Samaria and the rest of the province called Trans-Euphrates.

Peace.

Message:

¹⁸The document that you sent to us was translated and read in my presence. ¹⁹So a decree was issued by me, and they searched and found that from ancient days that city has risen up against kings, and rebellion and insurrection have been made in it. ^b ²⁰Powerful kings were over Jerusalem,^c and they ruled throughout the entire Trans-Euphrates, and taxes, tribute, and revenue were paid to them. ²¹Therefore, issue a decree to stop these men, and this city shall not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me. ²²Moreover, continue to be diligent. Do not neglect to do this. Why should damage increase to harm kings?

²³Then, when a copy of Artaxerxes' document was read in the presence of Rehum, Shimshai the secretary, and their associates, they immediately went to the Judeans in Jerusalem, and they stopped them with armed force. ²⁴In this way,^d the work on the house of God in Jerusalem was stopped. Also, it had previously been stopped until the second year^e of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

5

Completion of the Second Temple

Now the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah grandson^f of Iddo, prophesied to the Judeans who were in Judah^g and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. ²Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak began to build the house of the God who is in Jerusalem,^h and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.ⁱ

³At that time, Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, together with Shethar Bozenai and their associates, came up to them and said this to them: "Who gave you an order to construct this building and

^a4:14 Literally *we eat the salt of the palace*

^b4:19 These charges are true, especially of Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria in 701 BC and the repeated revolts against Babylon between 605 and 586 BC.

^c4:20 Namely, David and Solomon

^d4:24 The hostile letter to the later King Artaxerxes illustrates the method that had been used to stop the work years earlier, during the reign of Darius.

^e4:24 That is, 520 BC. Darius had come to power after a period of instability in the Persian empire and was concerned to have a stable situation in the southwest part of his empire.

^f5:1 Literally *son*. According to Zechariah 1:1, Zechariah was the son of Berekiah and the grandson of Iddo.

^g5:1 *Judah*, which was formerly a tribal name, now becomes the name of a Persian province or sub-province. It is also known as *Yehud*, the Aramaic form of the name.

^h5:2 Or *the house of God in Jerusalem*

ⁱ5:2 The LORD got the work of rebuilding the temple on track again in two ways. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah successfully restored the morale of the people, and the opposition of the Persian court was reversed.

to finish this project?”⁴They^a also said this to them: “What are the names of the men who are building this building?”^b

⁵However, the eye of their God was on the Judean elders, and the officials did not make them stop until the report could go to Darius, and they could respond on the basis of a document concerning this matter.

⁶This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar Bozenai and his associates, officials who are in Trans-Euphrates, sent to King Darius. ⁷They sent him a report, and this is what was written in it:

To King Darius,
All peace.

⁸We want the King to know that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It was being built with large stones, and beams were being laid in the walls. This work was being done thoroughly and was progressing in their hands.

⁹Then we questioned those elders, and we said this to them, “Who gave you an order to build this house and to finish this structure?”¹⁰We also asked them for their names, in order to inform you so that we could write the names of the men who were their leaders.

¹¹Now this was what they replied to us: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago. A great king of Israel built it and finished it. ¹²However, because our ancestors angered the God of Heaven,^c he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean. As a result, he destroyed this house and exiled the people to Babylon. ¹³However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. ¹⁴Also the gold and silver vessels of the house of God that Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon—King Cyrus brought them out of the temple in Babylon, and they were given to a certain Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor. ¹⁵Moreover, he said to him, ‘Take these vessels. Go deposit them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site.’ ¹⁶Then that Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem. So from then until now, it has been under construction but has not been completed.”

¹⁷Now if it seems good to the King, an investigation may be conducted in the royal archives there in Babylon to see whether it is true that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build that house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the King send us his decision in this matter.

6

^a5:4 The translation *they* follows a variant supported by the Greek and Syriac versions. The Aramaic text has *we*.

^b5:4 The builders are challenged by Persian officials who want to see their “building permits.” These officials do not seem to be hostile to Israel but are conscientious bureaucrats doing their job. When the Jews claim to have a valid authorization, and a search of the court records shows that they were telling the truth, their right to build the temple is affirmed, and the opposition is threatened with legal retribution. If the investigation was instigated by the enemies of Judah, their plan certainly backfired on them.

The account stresses the providence of God in this series of events. Chance events (a fair Persian official on duty, finding the old record in an alternate archive) and great kings (Darius, the great preserver and organizer of the empire) all serve the will of the LORD.

^c5:12 *The God of Heaven* is a common name for the LORD in the books from the time of the Exile and the Persian period, especially when identifying the Israelite’s God to non-Judeans.

Then King Darius issued a decree, and they searched the archives which were deposited there at the treasury office in Babylon. ²A scroll was located in Ecbatana, in the citadel that is in the province of Media,^a and this was written on it:

Memorandum:

³In the first year of King Cyrus,^b King Cyrus issued a decree regarding the house of God in Jerusalem.

That house is to be rebuilt at the place where sacrifices were sacrificed, and its foundations are to be laid.^c Its height: ninety feet. Its width: ninety feet.^d ⁴Build with three layers of large stone and one layer of wood.^e The cost will be paid by the royal treasury. ⁵Also the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned, and each vessel is to be taken to the temple that is in Jerusalem, each to its place. You are to deposit them in the house of God.

⁶Now Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their associates, officials who are in Trans-Euphrates: You are to keep away from there. ⁷Leave the work on that house of God alone. Let the governor of the Judeans and the elders of the Judeans rebuild that house of God on its site. ⁸Furthermore, a decree is issued from me concerning what you should do together with the elders of these Judeans in order to rebuild that temple of God: The complete cost will be paid to these men from the royal treasury, out of the taxes of the Trans-Euphrates area, so that the builders will not have to stop. ⁹Whatever they need—bulls, rams, or lambs for burnt offerings to the God of Heaven, wheat, salt, wine, olive oil, according to the request of the priests in Jerusalem—is to be given to them daily without neglect, ¹⁰so that they may offer offerings to the God of Heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

¹¹Furthermore, a decree is issued from me that if any person tries to change this edict, a beam will be pulled out of his house and he will be impaled on it, and his house will be made a pile of rubble.

¹²May the God who caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who take action to change my decree, in order to destroy that house of God that is in Jerusalem.

I, Darius, have issued a decree. Let it be carried out exactly.

¹³Then Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their associates—because King Darius had sent his decree—did exactly what it said. ¹⁴So the elders of the Judeans continued to build and prosper throughout the prophetic ministry of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah grandson of Iddo. They finished building the temple by the decree of the God of Israel and by the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia.^f ¹⁵This house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, during the sixth year^g of the reign of King Darius.

^a6:2 Ecbatana is located in present-day Iran, which was the heartland of the Medes and Persians.

^b6:3 That is, 539 BC

^c6:3 Or *and burnt offerings were offered*

^d6:3 The dimensions authorized are different than those of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6.

^e6:4 The translation *one layer of wood* follows the Greek text. According to 1 Kings 6:36, the ratio of stone to wood layers in the temple construction was 3 to 1. The wood layer may have been intended to give stability in earthquakes. The Aramaic text reads *new wood*. This reading would warn against recycled material. The words for *new* and *one* look very much alike.

^f6:14 In reality, Artaxerxes ruled many years after the temple had been completed, but Ezra is giving acknowledgement to his king, who was the legal successor of those who had approved the building of the temple.

^g6:15 That is, 516 BC. After the work resumed in about 520 BC, the temple was dedicated about four years later in 516 BC, more than twenty years after the return from Babylon. Very likely the authorization of paying the expenses by Darius was a factor in the speedy progress.

¹⁶The Israelites—the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles—dedicated this house of God with joy. ¹⁷For the dedication of this house of God, they offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, as well as twelve male goats for sin offerings for all Israel, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel.^a ¹⁸They appointed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their assigned groups for the service of the God who is in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

The Passover Is Celebrated

¹⁹The exiles celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. ²⁰Because the priests and the Levites together had purified themselves, all of them were ceremonially pure. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lambs for all of the exiles, for their brothers the priests, and for themselves. ²¹The Israelites who had returned from the exile ate the Passover lambs, together with every person who had separated himself from the impurity of the nations of the land in order to join them, in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel. ²²For seven days they celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread joyfully, because the LORD had made them joyful, since he had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to encourage them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.^b

7

Ezra and His Mission

After these things,^c during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, ²the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, ³the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, ⁴the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, ⁵the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the high priest— ⁶this Ezra came up from Babylon.^d

Now he was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given to them. The king granted him his entire request, because the hand of the LORD his God was resting upon him. ⁷Some of the Israelites and some of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month (it was during the king's seventh year). ⁹On the first day of the first month, he began the ascent from

^a6:17 Notice that all twelve tribes of Israel are included in the sacrifices, not just Judah and Benjamin. The return from Babylon is regarded as a restoration of the whole nation of Israel. The reference to the king of Assyria (verse 22) reinforces the point that the concern reaches back to include those who were exiled by the Assyrians. The exile which began with the destruction of the north by the Assyrians is now being reversed by the king of Assyria's successor, the king of Persia.

^b6:22 Book I of Ezra concludes with a happy celebration of the Passover. About sixty years pass before the story of the book of Ezra resumes. During this interval the events recorded in the book of Esther take place. During this interval Israel was threatened with extinction by the plot of Haman to destroy all the Jews. If Haman had succeeded, there would have been no return by Ezra and Nehemiah, Jerusalem would not have been rebuilt, and Israel would not have been restored to await Christ's coming. See the chart in the introduction to Ezra.

^c7:1 These events happen about sixty years later in 458 BC.

^d7:6 Ezra is described as a man who studied the Law, who taught the Law, and who lived the Law. An abbreviated genealogy traces his lineage back to Aaron through the line of the high priests. *Seraiah* is the name of the last high priest before the captivity.

We do not know what Ezra's position was in the Persian government, but he seems to have had access both to the king and to official records.

The political motive of the king in sending Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem was to have trustworthy administrators in the strategic province of Judah at a time when Greek agents and ambitious Persians satraps were stirring up unrest in the very rich province of Egypt.

Babylon.^a On the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem. The good hand of his God was resting upon him,¹⁰ because Ezra had set his heart to seek the Law of the LORD and to obey it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Authorization for Ezra's Mission

¹¹This is a copy of the document that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest and scribe, who was a scribe of the words of the commands of the LORD and of his statutes for Israel:

¹²From Artaxerxes, King of Kings.

To Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of Heaven, etc.^b

Here is the message:

¹³A decree has been issued by me that anyone from among the people of Israel who is living in my kingdom who is willing to go to Jerusalem with you, including its priests and Levites, may go.¹⁴ Since you are being sent from the king and his seven advisors to look after Judah and Jerusalem on the basis of the Law of your God, which is in your possession,¹⁵ you may take along the silver and gold that the king and his advisors have voluntarily contributed to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,¹⁶ and you may also take along all the silver and gold that you collect throughout the province of Babylon as voluntary contributions from the people and the priests, which they are freely giving to the house of their God that is in Jerusalem.

¹⁷Therefore, you are to be careful to use this money to purchase bulls, rams, lambs, and the grain offerings and drink offerings that go with them. You are to offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem.¹⁸ Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, you may do according to the will of your God.¹⁹ Also the vessels that have been given to you for the service of the house of your God, you are to deliver to the God of Jerusalem.²⁰ As for the rest of the needs of the house of your God which you are responsible to pay, you may pay for them from the royal treasury.

²¹From me—I, King Artaxerxes—a decree is issued to all the treasurers who are in the Trans-Euphrates region: Everything that Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of Heaven, asks from you is to be done exactly as specified.²² Give him up to one hundred talents of silver,^c up to six hundred bushels of wheat, up to six hundred gallons of wine, up to six hundred gallons of olive oil, and salt without limit—²³everything that is decreed by the God of Heaven shall be done correctly for the house of the God of Heaven. Why should there be anger against the kingdom of the king and his sons?

²⁴We are informing you concerning all of the priests and Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants, and other servants of this house of God—taxes, tribute, and revenue shall not be imposed on them.^d

²⁵Now you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that you possess, are to appoint magistrates and judges who will judge all the people in the Trans-Euphrates region who know the laws of your God. If anyone does not know them, you will inform him about God's laws.

²⁶Severe judgment will be imposed on everyone who does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, whether death or banishment or fine or imprisonment.^e

^a7:9 The biblical Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120–134) seem to have been arranged, in part, to celebrate the ascent from Babylon to Jerusalem.

^b7:12 The translation attempts to reproduce some of the stiff, formulaic character of these bureaucratic letters. Ezra undoubtedly composed much of the letter for the king to approve.

^c7:22 *One hundred talents* is about seventy-five hundred pounds. The Hebrew terms in the other units of measurement are one hundred *cors* of wheat and one hundred *baths* of wine and oil.

^d7:24 This precedent, along with Joseph's exemption of the priests of Egypt (Genesis 47:26), was the traditional basis for exempting churches from taxation in Western Europe.

^e7:26 The letter from Artaxerxes gave Ezra several important rights:

²⁷Blessed be the LORD, the God of my fathers, who put this desire into the heart of the king—to glorify the House of the LORD, which is in Jerusalem! ²⁸He extended favor to me before the king, his advisors, and all of the king’s powerful officers. I was encouraged, since the hand of the LORD my God was resting on me.^a So I gathered the leaders of Israel to go up with me.

8

The List of Family Heads Who Returned With Ezra

These are the heads of their families who went up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes, listed according to their registration in the genealogy:^b

²from the descendants of Phinehas: Gershom,

from the descendants of Ithamar: Daniel,

from the descendants of David: Hattush ³from the sons of Shekaniah,^c

from the descendants of Parosh: Zechariah, also registered with him in the genealogy were 150 males,

⁴from the descendants of Pahath Moab: Elihoenai son of Zerahiah, and with him were 200 males,

⁵from the descendants of Zattu:^d Shekaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him were 300 males,

⁶and from the descendants of Adin: Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him were 50 males,

⁷and from the descendants of Elam: Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him were 70 males,

⁸and from the descendants of Shephatiah: Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him were 80 males,

⁹from the descendants of Joab: Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him were 218 males,

¹⁰and from the descendants of Bani:^e Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him were 160 males,

¹¹and from the descendants of Bebai: Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him were 28 males,

¹²and from the descendants of Azgad: Jonathan son of Hakkatan, and with him were 110 males,

¹³and from the descendants of Adonikam—they were the last descendants^f— these are their names:

Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them were 60 males,

¹⁴and from the descendants of Bigvai: Uthai and Zakkur,^g and with him were 70 males.^a

-
1. the right to repatriate willing Israelites to their former homeland;
 2. the right to receive and transport offerings for the temple and city;
 3. the right to requisition further resources from the royal treasury (within limits);
 4. the right of the temple staff to exemption from taxes;
 5. the right to govern the religious life of Jews throughout the entire area of Syria-Palestine, not just in Jerusalem.

Under the autocratic Persian Empire, these were significant rights that could not be taken for granted. The decree gave Judah limited autonomy. (This is the point that really irritated Sanballat and other rulers in the province of Trans-Euphrates.)

This credentials document which was supplied to Ezra is very similar to other extant Aramaic letters given to other Persian officials traveling in Trans-Euphrates.

^a7:28 For the third time it is stated that God’s hand was upon Ezra. We are not aware of any direct revelations from God to Ezra. Ezra saw God’s hand in his quiet providence that worked behind the scenes.

^b8:1 Those listed in verses two and three are priests and royalty. The rest of the list is laypeople.

^c8:3 It is uncertain if this phrase completes the previous verse, or if it is a new group with no personal name specified.

^d8:5 *Zattu* is supplied from the Greek text.

^e8:10 *Bani* is supplied from the Greek text.

^f8:13 Or *those who came later*

^g8:14 The translation follows the Hebrew reading from the margin and some ancient versions. The main Hebrew reading is *Zabud*.

The Journey to Jerusalem

¹⁵So I gathered them together at the canal^b that runs to Ahava, and we camped there three days. I looked over the people and the priests who were there, but I did not find any Levites among them. ¹⁶So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were teachers. ¹⁷I sent them to Iddo, the leader serving in the place called Kasiphia, and I gave them a message to speak to Iddo and his brothers, the temple servants in the place called Kasiphia, so that they would bring us ministers for the house of our God.

¹⁸So, since the good hand of our God was resting upon us, they brought us the following people: Sherebiah, a discerning man from the descendants of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, along with his sons and his brothers,^c eighteen men; ¹⁹also Hashabiah and with him Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari and his brothers and their sons, twenty men; ²⁰and from the temple servants whom David and the leaders appointed to the service of the Levites, two hundred twenty temple servants. All of them were registered by name.

²¹Then I proclaimed a fast there at the Ahava Canal in order to humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey—for us, for our children, and for all our possessions. ²²I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and cavalry to help protect us against enemies on the journey, because we had said to the king, “The hand of our God rests upon all who seek him, for their good, but his power and anger are against all who forsake him.” ²³So we fasted and we sought help from our God concerning this, and he granted our request.

²⁴Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests to be with Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of their brothers with them. ²⁵I weighed out for them the silver and the gold and the vessels—the special contribution for the house of our God, which had been contributed by the king and his advisors and officials and by all the Israelites who were present there.^d

²⁶I weighed out and placed into their hands six hundred fifty talents^e of silver, silver vessels worth one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold,²⁷ and twenty gold bowls worth one thousand darics,^f and two finely polished bronze vessels, as precious as gold.

²⁸Then I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy. The silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of our fathers. ²⁹Guard them carefully until you weigh them again in front of the leaders of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the families^g of Israel in Jerusalem, before placing them into the storerooms of the House of the LORD.”

^a8:14 The number of Israelites who returned was quite modest, about 1500 men, but it included representatives of both the priestly and the royal families. The twelve groups of returnees may be intended to remind us of the twelve tribes.

When the small group assembled at one of the irrigation canals in Babylon, Ezra was disappointed by the small turnout of Levites, and he made a special effort to recruit more. Even then, the turnout was modest. Success was greater among the descendants of the non-Israelite Gibeonites who had performed menial work in the temple. Many Israelites were happy with the material security they had achieved in the land of exile and were content to stay there.

^b8:15 Literally *river*. Many of the “rivers of Babylon” were actually canals that ran off the Tigris and Euphrates.

^c8:18 In this list *brothers* may have the wider meanings of *relatives* or *colleagues*.

^d8:25 Ezra takes steps to demonstrate the financial integrity of his administration of the large amount of money the group was transporting (compare 2 Corinthians 8:20-22). Upon arriving, they provide an accounting of the gifts and offer sacrifices on behalf of the twelve tribes.

^e8:26 A talent is about seventy-five pounds, although the value is much disputed.

^f8:27 A *daric* is a unit of weight that appears in post-exilic books. It is a Persian term, equal to the Greek *drachma*, about a third of an ounce. It is also the name of the standard Persian gold coin.

^g8:29 Literally *the officials of the fathers*

³⁰So the priests and the Levites received the full weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels in order to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

³¹Then, on the twelfth day of the first month, we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of enemies and from ambushes on the way. ³²We arrived in Jerusalem and stayed there three days.^a

Ezra Begins His Mission

³³Then on the fourth day, in the house of our God we weighed out the silver and gold and the vessels before handing them over to Meremoth son of Uriah the priest. Also with him was Eleazar son of Phinehas, and with them were Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui, the Levites.

³⁴Everything was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded at that time.

³⁵The exiles 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 goats for a sin offering—all offered as a burnt offering to the LORD.

³⁶They also delivered the king's laws to the king's satraps^b and the governors of Trans-Euphrates, and they supported the people and the house of God.

9

The Sin of Intermarriage^c

Now when these things had been completed, the leaders approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, who live according to their detestable practices—the practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. ²They have taken wives from their daughters for themselves and for their sons. They have thereby mixed the holy seed with the peoples of the lands, and the leaders and officials have taken the lead in this unfaithfulness!”

³Then when I heard about this situation, I tore my clothing and my robe, and I pulled out some of the hair from my head and from my beard and sat down appalled.^d ⁴Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the unfaithfulness of the exiles, was gathered around me as I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. ⁵At the time of the evening sacrifice, I arose from my self-humiliation, and with my clothing and my robe torn, I got down on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God.

Ezra's Prayer^e

⁶I said:

^a8:32 The group arrives in Jerusalem after a four-month journey (8:31 and 7:8-9) covering 900 miles (about 10 miles a day average, allowing for sabbaths).

^b8:36 *Satraps* were the rulers of large provinces or groups of smaller provinces within the Persian Empire. Ezra presents his credentials to the Persian officials in the area so that they will cooperate with him.

^c9:1 Upon his arrival Ezra is shocked and appalled to learn that Israel had returned to their practice of intermarriage with their heathen neighbors, a practice that had brought disaster on them in the days of the judges and the kings. The ceremonial law given through Moses had been designed as a hedge to set Israel apart as a special people for the LORD, but that was unimportant to them, since they wanted to be like all the other nations. Especially shocking is the fact that the leaders of the people are leaders in this sin.

^d9:3 Ezra visibly demonstrates his dismay. “Those who tremble at the words of God” join him in his dismay. For us who live in a society and, to some degree, in a visible church that has lost its capacity to be shocked and appalled by sin, this part of the book of Ezra is a powerful testimony.

^e9:6 Ezra turns to the LORD with a corporate prayer of repentance. Though he had not personally committed the sins that were dragging the nation down, he confesses the truth that the sins of one member hurt the whole body. It was God's grace alone that allowed Ezra to pray with confidence.

My God, I am ashamed and too embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, because our sinful deeds^a have risen above our heads, and our guilt is so great that it reaches to the heavens. ⁷From the days of our ancestors until today, we have been extremely guilty. Because of our sinful deeds, we, our kings, and our priests have been turned over to the kings of the lands—by sword, by captivity, by plunder, and today by humiliation.

⁸Now, for a short time, mercy has been shown to us from the LORD our God, in order to leave us a remnant that has escaped and to give us a stake in his Holy Place, so that our God may give light to our eyes and give us a little relief in our slavery, ⁹because we are slaves. However, even in our slavery our God has not abandoned us but has extended favor to us before the kings of Persia in order to give us relief, to raise up the house of our God and to restore its ruins, and to give us a protective wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

¹⁰Now, what can we say after this, our God? For we have forsaken your commandments, ¹¹which you commanded through your servants the prophets when you said, “The land which you are entering in order to possess it is a land polluted with the filth of the peoples of the lands and with their detestable practices that fill it from end to end with their impurity. ¹²So now, do not give your daughters to their sons, and do not take their daughters as wives for your sons. Never seek their welfare or their prosperity, so that you may be strong and may eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance for your children forever.”

¹³After everything that has come upon us because of our evil acts and our extreme guilt, nevertheless you, our God, have punished us less than we deserved and have given us a remnant that has escaped like this. ¹⁴Should we break your commandments again by intermarrying with the peoples who commit these detestable practices? Wouldn't you remain angry with us until you completely destroyed us and left us without a survivor or a remnant that has escaped?

¹⁵LORD, God of Israel, it is because you are righteous that we are left with a remnant today. Here we are before you in our guilt, but no one can stand before you because of this.

10

Confession Leads to a New Covenant

Now as Ezra prayed and confessed, weeping and throwing himself down in front of the house of God, a very large crowd from Israel gathered to him, including men, women, and children. The people also wept bitterly.

²Then Shekariah son of Jehiel from the descendants of Elam responded to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign wives from the peoples of the land. However, now there is hope for Israel in this matter. ³So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all our wives and the children born to them, according to the advice of my lord and of those who tremble at the command of our God. Let it be done according to the law. ⁴Get up, because the matter is your concern, and we are with you. Be strong and take action.”

⁵Then Ezra got up and required the officials among the priests, the Levites, and all Israel to take an oath that they would deal with this matter. So they took an oath.

⁶Then Ezra got up and left the front of the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib and spent the night^b there. He did not eat any food or drink any water, because he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

⁷Then a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to gather in Jerusalem. ⁸According to the decision of the officials and the elders, anyone who would not come within three days would forfeit all his property, and he would be banished from the community of the exiles.

^a9:6 The Hebrew uses two different words for *guilt* in this prayer. One is rendered *sinful deeds*.

^b10:6 The translation *spent the night* follows the Greek Old Testament, 1 Esdras 9:2, and other ancient versions. The Hebrew text repeats the verb *went* which occurs earlier in the verse.

Investigating the Intermarriages

⁹So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem within three days. (It was in the ninth month,^a on the twentieth day of the month.) All the people were sitting in the public square in front of the house of God, trembling^b because of the situation and as a result of the rains.

¹⁰Ezra the priest arose and said to them, “You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives, thereby adding to the guilt of Israel. ¹¹So now, give praise to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will—separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from your foreign wives.”^c

¹²The entire assembly answered in a loud voice, “It is so! We must do as you have said. ¹³However, there are many people, and it is the rainy season. We can’t stand around outdoors, and the business will take more than a day or two, since we have rebelled greatly in this matter. ¹⁴Let our officers represent the entire assembly, and let everyone in our cities who has married foreign wives come at appointed times. The elders from every city and its judges should come with them, until the fierce anger of our God concerning this matter has been turned away from us.” ¹⁵(Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them.)

¹⁶So the exiles acted according to this decision. Ezra the priest and men who were the leading fathers of the fathers’ houses^d were selected, all of them identified by name. They convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter. ¹⁷On the first day of the first month, they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign wives.^e

The Report of the Investigation

¹⁸From the descendants of the priests who had married foreign wives, these men were identified:

From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers, they were Ma’aseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. ¹⁹They pledged to send away their wives and to offer guilt offerings: a ram from the flock for their guilt.

²⁰From the descendants of Immer, they were Hanani and Zebadiah.

²¹From the descendants of Harim, they were Ma’aseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah.

^a10:9 November/December, during the cold, rainy season

^b10:9 Or *shivering*

^c10:11 Was Ezra commanding these men to add the sin of unscriptural divorce to the sin of intermarriage? It is likely these separations were not viewed as divorce but as an annulment of a relationship that had never been a valid marriage for an Israelite.

The strict enforcement of the marriage laws by Ezra might seem extreme in our eyes (the behavior of a harsh, legalistic zealot, not a loving believer). But we must remember what, or more aptly, who was at stake here – the coming Savior. These men by their disregard of a seemingly “unimportant” law were disregarding God’s gracious promise of a Savior and treating as unimportant God’s gracious desire that they were to have a role in his salvation plan. As a result, they in their unbelief were standing in the way of the Savior’s coming. Such was not to be tolerated. (Note how God dealt with Judah’s son Onan when he did a similar thing in Genesis 38:6-10).

^d10:16 *Fathers* and *fathers’ houses* were common terms for the leaders of units of society in Israel.

^e10:17 All the people were ordered to appear in Jerusalem for the assembly to deal with the situation.

There was no separation of church and state in Israel, and Ezra had specific authority from the king to deal with such matters on the basis of Jewish law. (Similarly, there is no such thing as a separation between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ in a believer’s life)

Because of bad weather and the depth of the problem, the situation could not be remedied in a day. The board appointed to deal with the situation dealt with all the cases within three months after they began their investigation.

Most of the people supported the decisive dealing with the matter. There were only a few objectors (10:15). The text is not explicit about whether the objectors believed that the process was too slow or too fast—the latter seems most likely.

²²From the descendants of Pashhur, they were Elioenai, Ma'aseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

²³From the Levites they identified Jozabad and Shimei and Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

²⁴From the singers: Eliashib.

From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

²⁵From the laypeople of Israel:

From the descendants of Parosh, they were Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah,^a and Benaiah.

²⁶From the descendants of Elam, they were Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

²⁷From the descendants of Zattu, they were Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

²⁸From the descendants of Bebai, they were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

²⁹From the descendants of Bani, they were Meshullam, Malluk, and Adaiah, Jashub and Sheal and Jeremoth.

³⁰From the descendants of Pahath Moab, they were Adna and Kelal, Benaiah, Ma'aseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, and Binnui and Manasseh,³¹ and from the citizens of Harim, they were Eliezer, Isshijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Simeon,³² Benjamin, Malluk, and Shemariah.

³³From the descendants of Hashum, they were Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

³⁴From the descendants of Bani, they were Ma'adai, Amram, and Uel,³⁵ Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhu,³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,³⁷ Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Ja'asai,³⁸ and Bani and Binnui, Shimei,^b and Shelemiah and Nathan and Adaiah,⁴⁰ Maknadebai, Shashai, Sharai,⁴¹ Azarel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,⁴² Shallum, Amariah, Joseph.^c

⁴³From the citizens of Nebo, they were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

⁴⁴All these had taken foreign wives and had children with them.^{d e}

^a10:25 The Greek Old Testament reads *Hashabiah* in place of the second *Malkijah*.

^b10:38 In the Greek Old Testament, verse 38 begins a new section: *and from the sons of Binnui they were Shimei...*

^c10:42 In these lists, the word *and* is distributed in an irregular pattern throughout the lists. It is uncertain if this has significance for distinguishing and marking sub-groups within the larger group. The translation retains this pattern of *ands* so that we do not inadvertently remove significant markers from the text.

^d10:44 These verses provide a list of the guilty or at least of the ringleaders of the guilty. Where sin has caused public offense, there must be an accounting.

^e10:44 The book ends very abruptly, but the author is aware that the story is not over. The book of Nehemiah continues the story.

Nehemiah

Introduction

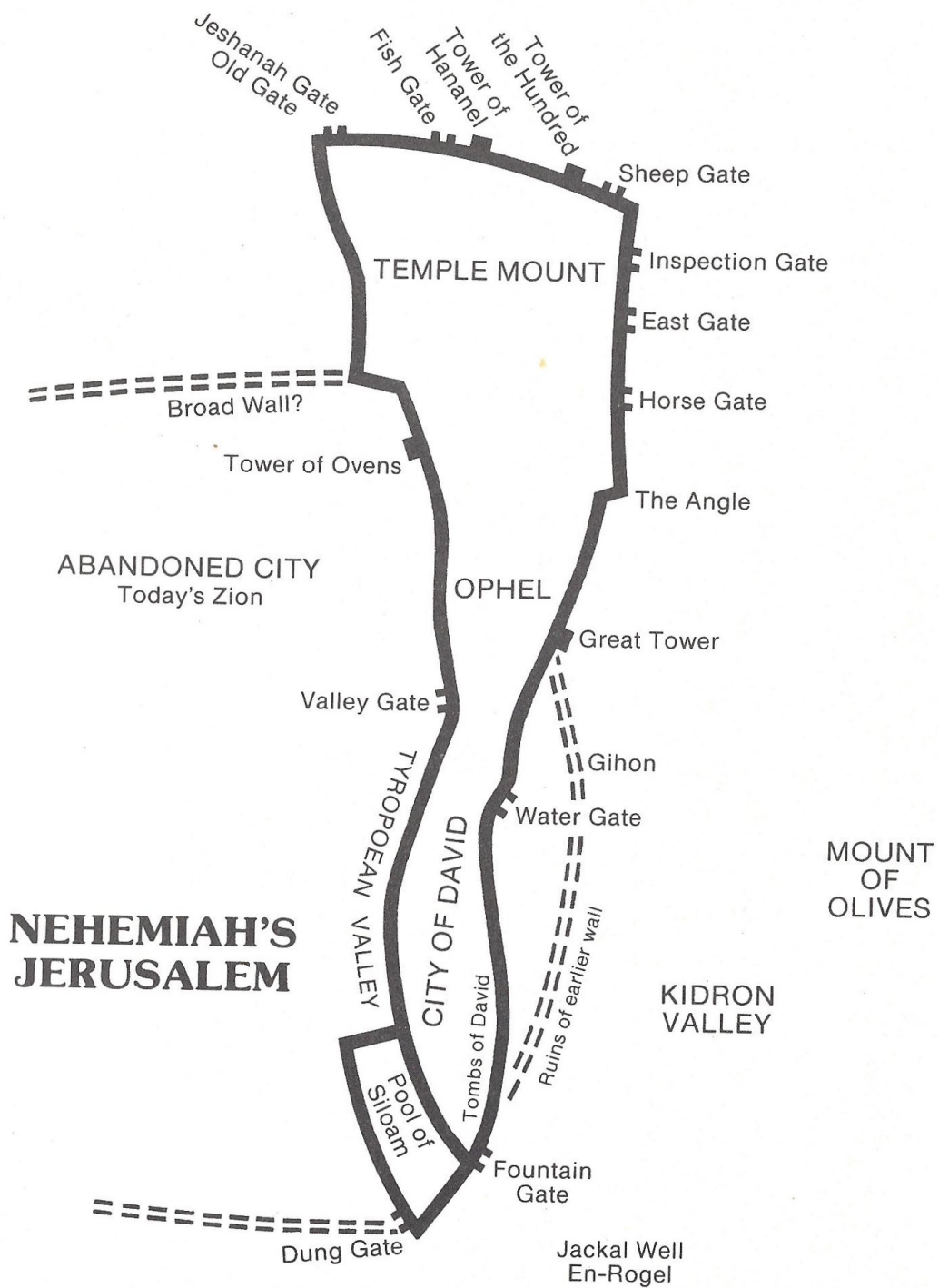
Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem from the home of the exiles in Persia in 445 or 444 BC, about twelve years after Ezra had returned to Jerusalem. Though he was appointed as a secular ruler, Nehemiah understood that a believer's life is not compartmentalized neatly into "the sacred" and "the secular," but that living faith expresses itself in and is intertwined with everything a believer does. Although his main assignment was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which had been in ruins for over one hundred years, Nehemiah joined with Ezra in the even more important spiritual rebuilding of Israel. Nehemiah's living faith is on display in his memoirs, which form the basis for this book. In them he regularly interjects his prayers into the narration, often without introduction. As was the case with Ezra, Nehemiah's love and zeal for the LORD, his House, and his Word, and his concern for the people's spiritual well-being are seen in even greater measure in Jesus.

Though these two books have sometimes been joined together as one, it is best to regard them as two separate compositions since each book focuses on one individual: Ezra 7–10 is told from the first-person perspective of Ezra. The book of Nehemiah is based on the memoirs of Nehemiah.

Outline

The first seven chapters of Nehemiah focus on rebuilding the physical walls of the city. Chapters 8–13 focus on rebuilding the spiritual walls of the nation.

- I. Rebuilding the physical walls of Jerusalem (ch 1–7).
 - A. Nehemiah's prayer for Jerusalem (1)
 - B. Nehemiah is sent to Jerusalem (2:1-10)
 - C. Nehemiah prepares to build the walls (2:11-20)
 - D. The builders and their work (3)
 - E. Opposition to the building (4:1–6:10)
 - F. The wall is completed despite opposition (6:11–7:3)
 - G. The exiles who returned to Jerusalem (7:4-47).
- II. Rebuilding the spiritual walls of Jerusalem (ch 8–13)
 - A. Ezra reads the Law (8:1-11)
 - B. The people celebrate (8:12-18)
 - C. The Israelites make a covenant with the LORD (9 & 10)
 - D. Jerusalem is repopulated (11)
 - E. The Levites' role in rebuilding Jerusalem (12:1-26)
 - F. The dedication of the wall (12:27-47)
 - F. Nehemiah's final reforms (13)



Nehemiah

1

Heading

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah.

The Problem

In the month of Kislev of the twentieth year,^a I was in Susa, the citadel.^b ²Hanani, one of my brothers,^c came to me with men from Judah. I asked them about the remnant of the Jews, who had survived the captivity and had escaped from it, and about Jerusalem.

³They said to me, “The survivors from the captivity who are there in the province are in great misery and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned.”^d

⁴When I heard about these things, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of Heaven.^e ⁵I said:

Please, LORD, the God of Heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God, who preserves the covenant and faithfulness for those who love him and keep his commands:^f ⁶Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open as you hear the prayer of your servant today, which I am now praying before you day and night, concerning the Israelites, who are your servants. I am also confessing the sins of the people of Israel that we committed against you. I and my father’s house have also sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against you, and we have not kept the commands, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances that you commanded Moses your servant.

⁸Please remember the command you gave to Moses your servant when you said, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. ⁹But when you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, even if you have been scattered to the end of heaven, from there I will gather them, and I will bring them to the place where I have chosen to make my name dwell.”^g ¹⁰They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed with your great power and your mighty hand.

^a1:1 The month of Kislev overlaps with our December. If this date is a reference to the twentieth year of the king’s reign in 445 or perhaps 444 BC, Nehemiah must here be dating the king’s reign in terms of a year that began with the autumn month of Tishri, since in Nehemiah 2:1, the spring month of Nisan is still part of the king’s twentieth year. This would be contrary to the usual Persian practice.

Israelites worked with two calendars, one of which began the year in the fall month of Tishri (and served as the civil and agricultural calendar), and one of which began the year in the spring month of Nisan (and served as the religious calendar, the “church year.”). On the complexities of the problems of converting ancient dates into dates in our calendar see the special note in the introduction to Ezekiel and Appendix 3 on chronology.

^b1:1 Or *fortress*. The term often designates royal cities of the Persian Empire. The Persians had several capital cities. Susa was located in what is today southwestern Iran.

^c1:2 In Nehemiah the term *brother* can mean *brother*, *relative*, or *associate*.

^d1:3 It is not certain if this refers to the ruins that went all the way back to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC, or if the Samaritans had recently destroyed a rebuilding of the walls done after the return from Babylon, but in any case, the efforts to restore Jerusalem are back nearly to ground zero.

^e1:4 *The God of Heaven* is a common name for the LORD in the books from the time of the Exile and the Persian period, especially when identifying God to non-Judeans.

^f1:5 Petitionary prayers typically start with a simple invocation, often just with the word “LORD” or “God.” This unusually long invocation brings to remembrance the LORD’s power and his promise to address the situation both for the LORD and for the petitioner.

^g1:9 See Deuteronomy 30:1-5.

¹¹Please, my Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayers of your servants who are delighted to revere your name. Make your servant successful today, and give him mercy in this man's presence.^a

I was cupbearer^b to the king.

2

Nehemiah Receives a Commission From Artaxerxes

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year^c of King Artaxerxes,^d wine was being served to the king, and I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence,²so the king said to me, "Why do you look sad, since you are not sick? This must be sadness of heart."

Then I was very much afraid.³I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why shouldn't I look sad when the city, the place of my ancestors' tombs, lies in ruins, and its gates have been consumed by fire?"

⁴Then the king said to me, "What do you want?"

So I prayed to the God of Heaven,⁵and I said to the king, "If it seems good to the king, and if you look upon your servant with favor, then send me to Judah, to the city where my ancestors' tombs are, and let me rebuild it."

⁶The king said to me, while the queen was sitting next to him, "How long will your journey be and when will you return?"

The king was pleased to send me, so I gave him a definite time.⁷I also said to the king, "If it seems good to the king, please give me letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates,^e so that they will grant me safe passage through that province until I come to Judah,⁸also a letter to Asaph, superintendent of the king's forest, so that he will give me lumber to lay beams for the gates of the citadel of the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." The king gave them to me, because the good hand of my God was upon me.

⁹Then I came to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, and I gave them the king's letters. The king had sent army officers and cavalry with me.

¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official^f heard about this, they were very upset that a man had come to seek the welfare of the Israelites.^a

^a1:11 Characteristically, Nehemiah's first response is prayer. His prayer has three main elements:

1. A plea based on the LORD's faithfulness to his covenant and to his promises;
2. Repentance for Israel's sin and his own sin;
3. A prayer for success with the king.

^b1:11 *Cupbearer* is a high, cabinet-level office, with responsibility for the king's safety. The fact that Nehemiah is granted only a temporary leave of absence from the Persian court suggests that he was a valued, influential advisor.

^c2:1 *Nisan* is March/April. About three or four months had passed since Nehemiah had become aware of the problem at Jerusalem. Nehemiah approaches the king with a quick prayer to the LORD and with a well-thought-out plan. He obtains sweeping governing powers over Judah and is not embarrassed to ask the king for troops. Artaxerxes had previously banned the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21), so Nehemiah has gained a reversal of the king's previous policy. The king's motive in sending Nehemiah probably included a desire to have a reliable man whom he trusted in the strategic land-bridge to the rich satrapy of Egypt, which again was restless.

^d2:1 Hebrew *Artachshasta*. The EHV uses the names of the Persian kings that have become the standard English names. These names are derived from the Greek versions of the names rather than directly from the Hebrew or Persian forms of the names. Artaxerxes I ruled from 464–424 BC.

^e2:7 Trans-Euphrates is the territory west of the Euphrates River, namely, Syria-Palestine.

^f2:10 Literally *servant*. The Hebrew term *servant* here refers to a government official of secondary rank.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Wall

¹¹So I arrived at Jerusalem and was there for three days. ¹²Then I got up in the middle of the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what God had placed into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. ¹³At night I went out through the Valley Gate and went toward the vicinity of the Jackal Well^b and the Dung Gate. I began inspecting the walls of Jerusalem, which had been breached, and its gates, which had been consumed by fire. ¹⁴Then I crossed over to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no place for the animal that I was riding to get through. ¹⁵So I kept going up the valley and inspecting the wall during the night. Then I turned around and went back the same way and came in through the Valley Gate.^c

¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. I had not yet told the Jews—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest of the people who would be doing the work. ¹⁷So I said to them, “You see the very bad situation we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be disgraced.” ¹⁸Then I told them that the hand of my God had been good to me, and I also told them the words the king had said to me.

They said, “Let's get up and rebuild!” Then they encouraged each other for this good work.

¹⁹When Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they ridiculed us and held us in contempt. They said, “What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?”^d

²⁰I responded to them by saying, “The God of Heaven will make us successful. We, his servants, will rise up and rebuild. But you have no portion or right or heritage in Jerusalem.”

3

Leaders of the Work Crews Who Rebuilt Jerusalem's Wall^e

The high priest Eliashib and his fellow priests began to work, and they rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and installed its doors. They rebuilt the wall^f as far as the Tower of the Hundred. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of Hananel.

²Next to him the men of Jericho rebuilt the wall.^g

^a2:10 The opposition is organized even before Nehemiah arrives. The Samaritans and Ammonites fear that a strong leader in Jerusalem will erode their power. Sanballat the Samaritan, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab are all known also from secular extra-biblical sources.

^b2:13 Or *Serpent Well* or *Dragon Well*

^c2:15 Nehemiah makes a secret night inspection of the ruins, beginning in the middle of the western wall of the lower city and finishing at the eastern side of the temple. See the map following the introduction to Nehemiah.

^d2:19 The opposition quickly reveals its strategy. They intend to lobby against Jerusalem on the basis of its past history as a rebellious city, but the fact that Nehemiah is a personal confidant of the king will undercut their strategy. Nehemiah's great strength, however, is not that he has the confidence of the king but that he is supported by the power of God. The LORD's strength will overcome Judah's weakness.

^e3:1 Nehemiah plans to refortify only the lower, eastern hill of the city. Even there, he must leave part of the former city outside of his new city wall because of the great amount of rubble blocking the way. Work will be carried on simultaneously along the whole length of the wall so that it can be completed as quickly as possible. On Nehemiah's tour and the areas of the work, see the map following the introduction to Nehemiah. The work sites listed in verses 1-6 are on the north wall of the city. The work sites in verses 7-14 are on the west wall of the city. The work sites in verses 15-32 are on the east wall of the city.

^f3:1 The words *they rebuilt the wall* are added to the translation to smooth the flow of the verse.

^g3:2 The Hebrew of the list in verses 2-32 alternates between plural and singular pronouns and verbs, sometimes referring to the leader, sometimes to the group working under him. The EHV uses

Next to them Zakkur son of Imri rebuilt the wall.

³The citizens of Sena'ah^a rebuilt the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and hung its doors with their bolts and their bars.

⁴Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the wall.

Next to him Meshullam the son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, repaired the wall.

Next to him Zadok son of Ba'ana repaired the wall.

⁵Next to him the men of Tekoa repaired the wall. However, their important people would not humble themselves in service to their lord.^b

⁶Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate. They laid its beams and installed its doors with their bolts and their bars.

⁷Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite repaired the wall with the men from Gibeon and Mizpah, who lived under the jurisdiction of the governor of Trans-Euphrates.^c

⁸Next to them Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the wall.

Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired the wall. (However, they abandoned the part of Jerusalem that had been enclosed by the Broad Wall.^d)

⁹Next to him Rephaiah son of Hur, administrator of half of the district of Jerusalem, repaired the wall.

¹⁰Next to him Jedaiah son of Harumaph repaired the wall opposite his house.

Next to him Hattush son of Hashabeneiah repaired the wall.

¹¹Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath Moab repaired a second section of the wall, including the Tower of the Ovens.

¹²Next to them Shallum son of Hallohesh, administrator of half of the district of Jerusalem—he and his daughters—repaired the wall.

¹³Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and installed its doors with their bolts and their bars, and they repaired fifteen hundred feet^e of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

¹⁴Also, Malkijah son of Recab, administrator of the district of Beth Hakkerem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and installed its doors with their bolts and their bars.

¹⁵Also, Shallun son of Kol Hozeh, administrator of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and roofed it and installed its doors with their bolts and their bars. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah^f for the King's Garden, as far as the steps that go down from the City of David.

¹⁶Beyond him Nehemiah son of Azbuk, administrator^g of half the district of Beth Zur, repaired the wall up to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the Artificial Pool and as far as the House of the Warriors.

¹⁷Beyond him the Levites repaired the wall: Rehum son of Bani and next to him Hashabiah, administrator of half of the district of Keilah, repaired the wall for his district.

whichever forms sound natural in English with the nearest antecedent. The EHV also adds a direct object to the verb when English usage requires an object.

^a3:3 *Sena'ah* is a town not a person, so the word *sons* is translated *citizens*.

^b3:5 Or *Lord*. It is not clear whether this word refers to Nehemiah the governor or to God.

^c3:7 They were apparently under Sanballat's jurisdiction.

^d3:8 The EHV here translates the Hebrew verb *azav* with its usual meaning *abandon*. Thus the part of Jerusalem on the Western Hill, which had been enclosed by the Broad Wall, was not included in the reconstruction of the city. If, on other hand, *azav* is translated with the rare meaning *rebuild*, and the sentence is translated: *they rebuilt Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall*, this would not fundamentally change the meaning, since it would mean that they rebuilt the wall up to, but not including, the area enclosed by the Broad Wall.

^e3:13 Literally *one thousand cubits*

^f3:15 That is, the Pool of Siloam at the south end of the city

^g3:16 Or *official*

- ¹⁸Beyond them their relatives repaired the wall: Binnui^a son of Henadad, administrator of half the district of Keilah.
- ¹⁹Next to him Ezer son of Jeshua, mayor^b of Mizpah, repaired a second section of the wall opposite the Ascent of the Armory at the Angle.
- ²⁰Beyond him Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired a second section of the wall from the Angle to the door of the house of the high priest Eliashib.
- ²¹Beyond him Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired a second section of the wall from the door of Eliashib's house to the end of Eliashib's house.
- ²²And beyond him, the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired the wall.
- ²³Beyond them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired the wall opposite their house.
Beyond them Azariah the son of Ma'aseiah, the son of Ananiah, repaired the wall beside his house.
- ²⁴Beyond him Binnui son of Henadad repaired a second section of the wall from the house of Azariah to the Angle, that is, to the Corner.^c
- ²⁵Palal son of Uzai repaired the wall from opposite the Angle and the tower that projects from the king's upper house, which belongs to the Courtyard of the Guard.
Beyond him Pedaiah son of Parosh²⁶ and the temple servants who were living on the Ophel Hill repaired the wall as far as the Water Gate toward the east and the Projecting Tower.
- ²⁷Beyond them the men of Tekoa repaired a second length of the wall from opposite the large Projecting Tower to the Ophel Wall.
- ²⁸Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired the wall. Each man repaired the part opposite his own house.
- ²⁹Beyond them Zadok son of Immer repaired the wall opposite his own house.
And beyond him Shemaiah son of Shekaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired the wall.
- ³⁰Beyond him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired a second section of the wall. After him Meshullam son of Berekiah repaired the wall opposite his chamber.
- ³¹Beyond him Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the wall up to the building of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate and to the Upper Room at the Corner.
- ³²Between the Upper Room at the Corner and the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired the wall.^d

4

Opposition and Threats to the Building Project^e

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, it infuriated him, and he became very angry. He ridiculed the Jews² and said in front of his allies^f and the army of Samaria, "What are those pathetic

^a3:18 *Binnui* is the reading of some Hebrew manuscripts and the Greek and Syriac versions. The variant *Bavvi* is supported by most Hebrew manuscripts. The lists of names in Ezra and Nehemiah contain many variant spellings. The translation notes do not list all of them.

^b3:19 Or *official*, but since in English the chief official of a city is usually called the *mayor*, that more specific term is used here.

^c3:24 Or *and to the Corner*. It is not certain whether the Angle and the Corner are two places or one.

^d3:32 The extensive list of those responsible for various parts of the wall provides us with both a memorial to the builders and with one of our most complete descriptions of the layout of Old Testament Jerusalem. The named builders were probably also the financial supporters for that part of the work. Some of the groups are from the neighborhoods near that part of the wall, but some are from outlying villages.

^e4:1 Nehemiah 4:1-6 is 3:33-38 in the Hebrew Bible. Nehemiah 4:7-23 is 4:1-17 in the Hebrew Bible.

^f4:2 Literally *brothers*

Jews doing? Will they restore^a it by themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish in one day? Will they refurbish the stones that came from the piles of rubble that have been burned?”

³Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him. He said, “Whatever they are building, if even a fox climbed on it, it would break apart the wall made from their stones.”^b

⁴Listen, O our God, because we are an object of contempt. Turn their ridicule back on their own heads. Hand them over as plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵Do not cover over their guilt, and may their sin not be blotted out before you, because they have provoked your anger in the presence of the builders.^c

⁶So we built the wall, and the entire wall was completed, up to half its height, because the people were determined to do it.

⁷Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the people of Ashdod heard that the repair of Jerusalem’s walls had progressed and the breaches had begun to be filled, they were infuriated.

⁸So all of them conspired to come to attack Jerusalem and to throw it into confusion. ⁹However, we prayed to our God, and because of the enemies, we posted a guard over the builders day and night.^d

¹⁰Then the people of Judah said, “The strength of those bearing the burden is failing. There is so much rubble. We will not be able to build the wall!”

¹¹Then our adversaries said, “They will not know about it or realize what we are doing, until we come among them and kill them and bring the work to a halt.”

¹²When the Jews who lived near them came, they repeatedly told us, “No matter which way you turn, they will be upon us.”^e ¹³So I stationed people behind the wall at the lowest places, at its open spots. I stationed the people by clans with their swords, spears, and bows. ¹⁴Then I looked and got up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and fearsome. So fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

¹⁵When our enemies heard that their plan was known to us and that God had frustrated their strategy, all of us returned to the wall, each man to his own work. ¹⁶From that day on, half of the young men who were serving under me were doing the work, and half of them were holding shields, spears, and bows and wearing armor. The officers were stationed behind the whole house of Judah. ¹⁷The people who were building the wall and those who were carrying the materials for building were doing their work with one hand, while the other hand held a weapon. ¹⁸As they built, the builders were armed, each man with his sword on his hip. The man who sounded the ram’s horn was next to me.

¹⁹Then I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “There is a lot of work, and it is spread out, and we are separated along the wall—all the people are far away from each other. ²⁰Wherever you hear the sound of the ram’s horn, gather with us at that spot. Our God will fight for us.”

^a4:2 Here the Hebrew word *azav*, which usually means *abandon*, seems to be a rarer synonym meaning *restore* or *rebuild*.

^b4:3 The first tactic of the enemies is to undermine the morale of the workers with mockery. Nehemiah responds with the interjected prayer that is a typical trait of his book.

^c4:4-5 Nehemiah often interjects prayers into the narration without introduction. These prayers are marked in the translation by extra indentation.

^d4:9 The second tactic of the enemies is to threaten attack. Nehemiah responds with prayer, but he also takes measures to provide a defense that will deter attack. The defenders of Jerusalem are motivated by trust in the LORD and love for their families and homes. Nehemiah adopts a prayer-and-a-trowel-and-a-sword approach to the project. The enemies are not interested in taking on well-armed, well-organized defenders.

^e4:12 Or *they said to us repeatedly, you must return to us*. According to this understanding, the verse means that Jews from the countryside were encouraging those in Jerusalem to abandon the city and come out to the country towns. The Hebrew is difficult, and many translations resort to emending the text.

²¹So we continued to work with half of the people holding spears, from the crack of dawn until the stars came out. ²²Also at that time I said to the people, “Let every man and his servant spend the night in Jerusalem. They will serve as a guard for us at night, and in the daytime they will work.”

²³Neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who were behind me—none of us took off our clothes. Each man had his weapon in his hand, even when getting a drink of water.^a ###

5

The Work Is Threatened by Internal Dissension^b

Now there was a great outcry by the people and their wives against their fellow Jews. ²There were those who were saying, “We and our sons and our daughters are many! We need to acquire grain so that we can eat and stay alive.” ³There were others who were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards, and houses so that we can acquire grain during the famine.” ⁴There were others who were saying, “We borrowed money to pay the royal tax on our fields and vineyards. ⁵Although our flesh is the same as the flesh of our countrymen, and our children are as good as their children, we must subject our sons and our daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we have no power to prevent it, since our fields and vineyards belong to others.”

⁶It infuriated me when I heard their outcry and these words. ⁷My heart guided me, and I accused the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “Each of you is loaning money at interest to his brother Israelite.”

I called for a large meeting to deal with them. ⁸I said to them, “As much as possible, we have bought back our fellow Judeans who have been sold to the Gentiles, and yet, you sell your countrymen so that they can be resold to us!” They were silent and could not find a word to say.

⁹So I said, “What you are doing is not good. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God because of the ridicule from the Gentiles, who are our enemies? ¹⁰In addition, I, my brothers, and my servants are lending them money and grain. I urge you. Let’s abandon the practice of charging this interest. ¹¹I urge you. Today give them back their fields, their vineyards, their olive trees, their homes, and the money they were charged as interest, also the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil for which you have been charging them.”

¹²They said, “We will give it back, and we will not seek anything else from them. In this way we will do what you say.”

So I called the priests and made them swear to act according to this promise. ¹³I also shook out the folds of my garment and said, “In this way may God shake out from his home and from his property every man who does not keep this promise. May he be shaken out and emptied in this way.”

The entire assembly said, “Amen,” and they praised the LORD. Then the people kept this promise.

¹⁴In addition, from the day that he appointed me to be the governor of the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes—twelve years—I and my brothers did not eat the governor’s food allowance.^c

^a4:23 The Hebrew has the cryptic statement: *a man, his weapon, the waters*. Some suggest emending the word *waters* to *in his right hand*. The words *in his hand* are not in the Hebrew text. Perhaps the term *the waters* refers to their water containers.

^b5:1-12 Just when it seems that the external opposition is faltering, a new threat emerges. Internal oppression of the poor Judeans by the rich threatens to destroy the cooperative effort of the people. Under the burden of Persian taxes, the cost of the project, and probably also raids by the enemy against their villages, the poor are losing their land and even their families to the rich. The Holy Spirit blessed the use of the Word by Nehemiah, as he strongly rebuked the people’s violations of the Law and called for their repentance. He reminded the rich of their brotherhood with and their responsibilities toward their fellow Judeans as he called them to the fear of God. This powerful proclamation of the Word led to relief for the poor from this oppression.

^c5:14 In a stylistic trait typical of the book, Nehemiah inserts a non-chronological reference into the story. In the story line of the book chapter 5 is still located in the first year of Nehemiah’s governorship when the wall was built, but writing years later, as Nehemiah recalls these events, he comments on his

¹⁵However, the previous governors who served before me had placed a heavy burden on the people. They took food and wine from them—valued at forty silver shekels.^a Even the lower officials lorded over the people. But because of the fear of God, I did not do this. ¹⁶In addition, I dedicated myself to the work on this wall (although we had acquired no land), and all of my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷Moreover, at my table there were one hundred fifty Judeans and officials, and others who came to us from the nations around us. ¹⁸Whatever was prepared for each day was at my expense: one ox, six choice sheep, and some birds, and every ten days plenty of every kind of wine. But even with this, I still did not requisition the governor’s food allowance, because the required service weighed heavily on this people. ¹⁹Remember me, my God, for good, considering all that I have done for this people.

6

The Plot to Kill Nehemiah

When it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and there was no breach left in it (although at that time I had not installed doors in the gates), ²Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me: “Come, let’s meet together in Kephirim^b in the Plain of Ono.”^c (However, they were planning to harm me.)^d

³So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am working on an important project, and I am not able to come down. Why should the project stop while I leave it and come down to you?”^e ⁴They sent messages like this to me four times, and I answered them the same way each time.

⁵Then Sanballat sent his servant to me with a message like this for a fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.^f ⁶In it was written, “It is rumored among the nations, and Gashmu^g also says that you and the Jews are planning to rebel. This is the reason you are building the wall. According to these reports, you will be their king. ⁷You have also set up prophets to make a proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘A king is in Judah.’ Now reports like these will be heard by the king. So now come, let us consult with one another.”

⁸So I sent a reply to him: “These things that you are saying have not been done, since you are simply making them up.”

⁹So all of them were trying to intimidate us, thinking, “Their hands will grow weary of the work, and it will not be finished.”

So now, strengthen my hands!

¹⁰Then I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel. (He was restricted.)^h He said, “Let’s meet at the house of God in the middle of the temple. Let’s close the doors of the temple, since they are coming to kill you—at night they are coming to kill you.”

conduct throughout the twelve or more years of his administration. (He was not necessarily in Jerusalem this whole time).

^a5:15 The translation of this verse is uncertain. Other interpretations of the phrase are *and forty shekels in addition* or *forty shekels per day*.

^b6:2 Or *in one of the villages*

^c6:2 *Ono* is in Benjamin, near the border between Judah and the territory of Sanballat.

^d6:2 Increasingly desperate, the enemies try to lure Nehemiah into an ambush. They try to fuel rumors that he is plotting rebellion. They try to discredit him by frightening him into hiding. They even hire false prophets. Worse yet, the Samaritans are aided by traitors from within Judah, especially by those who are allied with the Samaritans and Ammonites by intermarriage.

^e6:3 Nehemiah wisely is not willing to take away time from the project to deal with the complaints of insincere critics.

^f6:5 Strategic leaks designed to discredit an opponent and spreading baseless rumors are not inventions of modern politics. There is nothing new under the sun.

^g6:6 A variant of *Geshem*

^h6:10 It is not clear what this restriction on Shemaiah was since Shemaiah seems free to meet Nehemiah in the temple courts. It also is not clear exactly what Shemaiah is suggesting, but it seems that Shemaiah

¹¹I said, “Should a man like me flee? Should someone like me go to the temple to save my life? I won’t go!” ¹²I realized that God had not sent him, but he had spoken the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³For this purpose he was hired—to make me afraid so that I would do this and sin. Then they would have given me a bad reputation, so that they could discredit me.

¹⁴My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat in light of these actions and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who were trying to intimidate me.^a

The Wall Is Completed Despite Opposition

¹⁵So the wall was finished in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth of Elul.^b ¹⁶As all our enemies heard about it, all the nations that were around us became afraid and lost their confidence. They knew that this work had been accomplished by our God.^c

¹⁷Furthermore, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and letters from Tobiah were coming to them, ¹⁸because many in Judah were bound to him by oath because he was the son-in-law of Shekariah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. ¹⁹They were also talking about his good deeds in my presence, and they were reporting my words to him. Tobiah was sending letters to try to intimidate me.

7

Gatekeepers Are Appointed for the City

When the wall had been built and I had installed the doors, and when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ²I placed my brother Hanani along with Hananiah, the commander of the citadel, in charge of Jerusalem, because he was a trustworthy man and feared God more than many.^d ³I^e said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem should not be left open until the heat of the day, but while the guards are still on duty, they are to shut the doors and secure them. Appoint guards from the residents of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their houses.”

Repopulating the City (Ezra 2:1-70)

⁴Now the city was wide open and spacious, but there were few people in it, and no houses were being built. ⁵So my God placed into my heart a plan to gather the nobles, the officials, and the people so they could be enrolled by genealogy. I found the genealogical record of those who were the first to come up from Babylon,^f and I found this written in it:

may be suggesting that Nehemiah enter the inner sanctuary of the temple complex, which only priests could enter. Nehemiah, however, does not address that issue, but only the issue of deserting his troops and hiding from danger. The *doors of the temple* could refer to the outer gates of the temple area, rather than to the sanctuary.

^a6:14 Nehemiah frequently interjects prayers into the narration. To make it easier to recognize them, they receive extra indentation.

^b6:15 August/September

^c6:16 Nehemiah thwarts all the enemies’ efforts with prayer and prudent action, and, against all odds, by God’s working, the wall is completed in less than two months.

^d7:1 The appointment of his brother as mayor of Jerusalem is probably due to the fact that Nehemiah himself must regularly return to the royal court in Persia.

^e7:3 *I* is the reading in the margin of the Hebrew text. It is supported by ancient versions. The main Hebrew reading is *he*, which would refer to Hanani, a very plausible reading.

^f7:5 Because of the need to repopulate the city, which was still largely empty, Nehemiah consults the family records of those who had returned from the captivity in Babylon with Zerubbabel nearly one hundred years earlier. This list in Nehemiah is almost the same as the list of Ezra 2, but there are some variations due to issues of textual transmission and to use of variant forms of personal names. The two lists are probably from different stages of the same earlier census.

⁶These are the men^a of the province who went up from the captivity of the exiles, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had exiled. They returned to Jerusalem and to Judah, each man to his city.

⁷These were the people who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Ra'amiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Ba'anh.

This was the number of men from the people of Israel:^b

⁸ the male descendants ^c of Parosh:	2,172
⁹ the male descendants of Shephatiah:	372
¹⁰ the male descendants of Arah:	652
¹¹ the male descendants of Pahath Moab through the descendants of Jeshua and Joab:	2,818
¹² the male descendants of Elam:	1,254
¹³ the male descendants of Zattu:	845
¹⁴ the male descendants of Zakkai:	760
¹⁵ the male descendants of Binnui:	648
¹⁶ the male descendants of Bebai:	628
¹⁷ the male descendants of Azgad:	2,322
¹⁸ the male descendants of Adonikam:	667
¹⁹ the male descendants of Bigvai:	2,067
²⁰ the male descendants of Adin:	655
²¹ the male descendants of Ater through Hezekiah:	98
²² the male descendants of Hashum:	328
²³ the male descendants of Bezai:	324
²⁴ the male descendants of Hariph:	112
²⁵ the citizens ^d of Gibeon:	95
²⁶ the men of Bethlehem and Netophah:	188
²⁷ the men of Anathoth:	128
²⁸ the men of Beth Azmaveth:	42
²⁹ the men of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Be'erother:	743
³⁰ the men of Ramah and Geba:	621
³¹ the men of Mikmash:	122
³² the men of Bethel and Ai:	123
³³ the men of the other Nebo:	52
³⁴ the citizens of the other Elam:	1,254
³⁵ the citizens of Harim:	320
³⁶ the citizens of Jericho:	345
³⁷ the citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono:	721
³⁸ the citizens of Sena'ah:	3,930

³⁹The priests:
the descendants of Jedaiah

^a7:6 Literally *sons*. The term *men* is used to show that these are multiple generations not only direct father/son relationships.

^b7:7 In this list and the parallel list in Ezra there are many variants of names and numbers. The translation provides notes only for some of the more important variants. The two authors may be using different versions or stages of the same basic registration,

^c7:8 Literally *sons*. In this section of the genealogy, the people are grouped by family affiliation so the term *male descendants* is used to indicate multiple generations of men.

^d7:25 Literally *sons*. In this section of the genealogy the people are grouped by hometown so the translation *citizens* correctly expresses the relationship.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| through the house of Jeshua: | 973 |
| ⁴⁰ the descendants of Immer: | 1,052 |
| ⁴¹ the descendants of Pashhur: | 1,247 |
| ⁴² the descendants of Harim: | 1,017 |
- ⁴³The Levites:
- the descendants of Jeshua through Kadmiel through the descendants of Hodaviah: 74
 - ⁴⁴the singers from the descendants of Asaph: 148
 - ⁴⁵the gatekeepers from the descendants of Shallum, the descendants of Ater, the descendants of Talmon, the descendants of Akkub, the descendants of Hatita, and the descendants of Shobai: 138.
- ⁴⁶The temple servants:
- the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha,
 - the descendants of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁷the descendants of Keros,
 - the descendants of Sia, the descendants of Padon,
 - ⁴⁸the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah,^a
 - the descendants of Shalmal,^b ⁴⁹the descendants of Hanan,
 - the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar,
 - ⁵⁰the descendants of Reaiah, the descendants of Rezin,
 - the descendants of Nekoda, ⁵¹the descendants of Gazzam,
 - the descendants of Uzza, the descendants of Paseah,
 - ⁵²the descendants of Besai,^c the descendants of Meunim,
 - the descendants of Nephisim,^d ⁵³the descendants of Bakbuk,
 - the descendants of Hakupha, the descendants of Harhur,
 - ⁵⁴the descendants of Bazlith, the descendants of Mehida,
 - the descendants of Harsha, ⁵⁵the descendants of Barkos,
 - the descendants of Sisera, the descendants of Temah,
 - ⁵⁶the descendants of Neziah, and the descendants of Hatipha.
- ⁵⁷The descendants of the servants of Solomon:
- the descendants of Sotai, the descendants of Sophereth,
 - the descendants of Perida, ⁵⁸the descendants of Ja'alah,
 - the descendants of Darkon, the descendants of Giddel,
 - ⁵⁹the descendants of Shephatiah, the descendants of Hattil,
 - the descendants of Pokereth Hazzebaim, the descendants of Amon.
- ⁶⁰The total of the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants was 392.
- ⁶¹The following are the people who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer. They were not to prove their ancestry or descent—whether they were from Israel:
- ⁶²the descendants of Delaiah, the descendants of Tobiah, the descendants of Nekoda: 642,
 - ⁶³and from the priests: the descendants of Habaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, the descendants of Barzillai, that is, from a man who married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and so was called by their name.
- ⁶⁴These people searched for their genealogical records, but they could not find them, so they were disqualified from the priesthood. ⁶⁵The governor told them that they should not eat from the most holy sacrifices until a priest would arise who could serve with Urim and Thummim.^a

^a7:48 At this point this list is missing two names that are present in Ezra 2:45-46: *Akkub and Hagab*.

^b7:48 Variant *Shamlai*

^c7:52 At this point the list in Nehemiah is missing a name present in Ezra 2:50: *Asnah*.

^d7:52 Many of the names in these lists, including *Nephisim*, have variant spellings. The most common variant is between *i* and *u* (*Nephusim*), which look very much alike in some phases of Hebrew script.

⁶⁶The entire assembly together totaled 42,360, ⁶⁷not counting their male slaves and their female slaves, who numbered 7,337. They also had 245^b male and female singers. ⁶⁸They had 736 horses, 245 mules, ^c435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.^d

⁷⁰Some of the heads of the families gave support for the work.

The governor gave to the treasury:

gold darics: 1,000^e

bowls: 50

garments for the priests: 530.

⁷¹Some of the heads of the families gave this to the treasury for the work:

gold darics: 20,000

silver minas: 2,200.^f

⁷²What the rest of the people gave was this:

gold darics: 20,000

silver minas: 2,000

and garments for the priests: 67.

⁷³The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, and the temple servants, that is, all Israel, settled in their cities.

8

Ezra Reads the Law of Moses

When the seventh month^g came and the Israelites were in their cities,^h ¹all the people gathered together at the public square that is in front of the Water Gate.ⁱ They told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.^j ²So on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the congregation, both men and women and all who were able to understand what they heard. ³From dawn until midday in front of the public square in front of the Water Gate, he read from the scroll, while facing the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. ⁴Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that was made for the occasion. Beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Ma'aseiah on his right, and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

^a7:64 Using the Urim and Thummim the priest could get a yes or no answer about whether a man had a valid priestly ancestry. It appears the Urim and Thummim had been lost during the exile to Babylon.

^b7:67 The corresponding number in Ezra 2:65 is 200.

^c7:68 Many Hebrew manuscripts of Nehemiah do not include the reference to horses and mules. Perhaps the repetition of the number 245 led the Hebrew copyist of Nehemiah to accidentally skip some words.

^d7:69 Conspicuously absent is reference to flocks and herds of sheep, goats, and cattle.

^e7:70 A *daric* is a unit of weight that appears in post-exilic books. It is a Persian term, equal to the Greek *drachma*, about a third of an ounce. It is also the name of a Persian gold coin.

^f7:71 Estimates of the weight of a *mina* vary widely, from twenty to thirty-five ounces.

^g7:73 The seventh month, which occurred in the fall, was the month that included the Festival of Shelters and the Day of Atonement. The first day of that month was the start of the civil year and of the annual agricultural cycle.

^h7:73 All the preceding words are part of verse 7:73 in the Hebrew text.

ⁱ8:1 *The Water Gate* was the gate by the Gihon Spring on the east side of the city.

^j8:1 More than ten years have passed since the reforms of Ezra. Nehemiah apparently calls upon Ezra to renew his reforms. We do not know how it came about that Ezra's reforms concerning intermarriage came to be discarded, but he makes a new effort with the support of Nehemiah. The key to the reform is a return by the people to knowing, understanding, and obeying the Law of the LORD. Assisted by Levites as teaching assistants, Ezra presents the law.

⁵All the people could see Ezra as he opened the scroll, because he was elevated above all the people. As he opened the scroll, all the people stood. ⁶Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen! Amen!” while they lifted up their hands and then knelt and bowed down with their faces to the ground.

⁷Jeshua and Bani and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Ma'aseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the rest of the Levites helped the people understand the Law, while the people remained standing in their places. ⁸So they read from the Book of the Law of God clearly and interpreted it,^a and the people understood what was read.^b

⁹Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who helped the people understand, said to all the people, “Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or cry!” because all the people were crying as they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰Nehemiah said to them, “Go, eat rich food and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, because today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

¹¹Then the Levites silenced all the people, saying, “Hush! Today is holy. Do not grieve.”

¹²All the people went to eat and drink and to send portions to others and to celebrate with great joy, because they understood the words that had been made known to them.

Ezra Leads the Study of the Law of Moses

¹³Now on the second day, the heads of the families of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered around Ezra the scribe to study the words of the Law. ¹⁴They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, that the Israelites should dwell in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month,^c ¹⁵and that they should proclaim this and make this announcement in all their cities and in Jerusalem: “Go out to the mountains and bring branches from olive trees, wild olive trees, myrtle bushes, date palms, and leafy trees to make shelters, as it is written.”

¹⁶So the people went out and brought branches and made shelters for themselves. Each man made a shelter on his roof. They also made shelters in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the house of God, in the square by the Water Gate, and in the square by the Ephraim Gate. ¹⁷The entire congregation that had returned from the captivity made shelters and stayed in the shelters. From the days of Joshua^d son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated in this way, because there was very great joy. ¹⁸Ezra also read from the Book of the Law of God every day, from the first day to the last day of the festival. They celebrated a festival for seven days, and on the eighth day they held an assembly according to the ordinance.

9

Worship and the Reading of the Law

On the twenty-fourth day of this same month, the Israelites gathered together. They were fasting and wearing sackcloth, and they had dirt on their faces.^e ²Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood and confessed their sins and the guilt of their ancestors. ³They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and for another quarter they confessed their sins and worshipped the LORD their God.

^a8:8 The reading likely was in Hebrew and the explanation in Aramaic.

^b8:8 Or *understood the Scriptures*. The Hebrew word, *miqra*, translate *what is read*, is used as the Hebrew name for the Old Testament Scriptures.

^c8:14 For example it is written in Leviticus 23:33-43.

^d8:17 In Nehemiah this name is consistently spelled *Jeshua*, but the translation has retained the usual spelling for the famous Joshua son of Nun.

^e9:1 All these are signs of mourning.

⁴Then Jeshua and Bani,^a Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani stood on the stairs for the Levites and cried out in a loud voice to the LORD their God. ⁵The Levites Jeshua and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah said,

“Stand up! Bless the LORD your God,
who is from eternity to eternity.
May they bless your glorious Name,
which is more exalted than all other blessing and praise.

⁶You are the LORD—you alone.

You made the heavens
—the highest heavens and their entire army,
the earth and everything that is on it,
the seas and all that is in them.
You sustain life in all of them,
and the army of heaven worships you.^b

⁷You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram.
You brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans,
and you gave him the name Abraham.

⁸You found his heart to be faithful before you.

You made the covenant with him
to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites,
the Hittites, the Amorites and the Perizzites,
and the Jebusites and the Girgashites.^c

You kept your word, because you are righteous.^d

⁹You saw the oppression of our ancestors in Egypt.
You heard their cry at the Red Sea.

¹⁰You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,
against all his officials,
and against all the people of his land,
because you knew that they were acting arrogantly against Israel.
You made a name for yourself, as it remains to this day.

¹¹You split the sea in front of them,
and they passed through the middle of it on dry ground.
You threw their pursuers into the depths like a stone into mighty waters.

¹²With a pillar of cloud you led them by day
and with a pillar of fire by night,
which lit up for them the way they were to travel.^e

¹³You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven.
You gave them upright judgments and true laws,

^a9:4 Some emend this name to *Binnui* on the basis of parallel passages like 10:9, but there are many spelling variants of the names in these lists.

^b9:6 Genesis 1 & 2 describe God’s work of creation which is alluded to in this verse.

^c9:8 The Hebrew text divides these peoples into three groups by the two occurrences of the word *and*. It is uncertain whether these groupings have any special significance for identifying relationships or subdivisions among these peoples, but the translation preserves these groupings to avoid removing a significant marker. Perhaps further archaeological discoveries will clarify the distinctions between these peoples, but at present little is known about them.

^d9:7-8 These events are reported in Genesis 12 & 15

^e9:9-12 These events are reported in Exodus 6–15.

good statutes and commandments.

¹⁴You made known to them your holy Sabbath.
You gave them commandments, statutes, and the Law,
by the hand of your servant Moses.^a

¹⁵You gave them bread from heaven^b for their hunger,
and you made water come out of a rock for their thirst.
Then you told them to go and take possession of the land
that you swore to give them.

¹⁶But they and our ancestors acted arrogantly.
They became stiff-necked and would not listen to your commands.

¹⁷So they refused to listen,
and they did not remember your wonders that you did for them.
They became stiff-necked and appointed a leader
in order to return to their slavery in Egypt.^c
But you are a God who is forgiving, merciful, and compassionate,
slow to anger, abounding in mercy.^d

So you did not abandon them.

¹⁸However, they made a cast metal calf for themselves and said,
“This is your god who brought you up from Egypt,”
and they committed great blasphemies.

¹⁹But in your abundant compassion, you did not abandon them in the wilderness.
By day the pillar of cloud did not depart from above them
or stop leading them on their way.

By night the pillar of fire did not stop lighting the way that they should go.

²⁰You gave them your good Spirit to give them insight.
So you did not withhold your manna from their mouth,
and you gave them water for their thirst.

²¹You sustained them for forty years in the wilderness.
They did not lack anything.
Their clothing did not wear out,
and their feet did not swell.^e

²²You gave them kingdoms and peoples,
and you divided their whole territory among them.
They took possession of the land of Sihon, the land of the king of Heshbon,
and also the land of Og, the king of Bashan.

²³You made their children as numerous as the stars of heaven.
You brought them to the land that you had told their ancestors to enter and possess.

²⁴Their children came and possessed the land,
and you subdued the Canaanite inhabitants of the land before them.
You gave their kings and the peoples of the land into their hand

^a9:13-14 This is reported in Exodus 19 & 20

^b9:15 That is, the manna

^c9:15-17 This is reported in Exodus 16 & 17, which set a pattern of rebellion that persists through the wilderness years.

^d9:17 This verse refers to the LORD’s explanation of his special Name in Exodus 34 after the incident of the Golden Calf.

^e9:18-21 The incident of the Golden Calf and its aftermath are reported in Exodus 32–34. Numbers chapters 11–16 report the continued rebellion near the end of the forty years. The whole sad history is reviewed in Deuteronomy.

to do with them as they pleased.
²⁵They captured fortified cities and fertile land.
They possessed houses full of all kinds of good things,
 hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive orchards,
 and fruit trees in abundance.
They ate and were satisfied.
They became fat and delighted in your great goodness.^a

²⁶But they rebelled and revolted against you and rejected your law.
They killed your prophets, who had testified against them
 so that they would return to you.
They also committed great blasphemies.

²⁷So you delivered them into the hand of their oppressors,
 who made them suffer.
But when they cried to you at the time of their distress,
 you heard from heaven,
and according to your great compassion, you gave them deliverers,
 who saved them from the hand of their oppressors.

²⁸However, as soon as they had rest, they returned to doing evil before you.
So you abandoned them into the hand of their enemies,
and they ruled over them.
Then they turned and cried out to you.
You heard from heaven,
and you rescued them many times, according to your great compassion.

²⁹You testified against them to lead them back to your law,
but they acted arrogantly and did not listen to your commands.
They sinned against your judgments
 by which a man will live when he obeys them.
They turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked, and would not listen.

³⁰You were patient with them for many years,
and you testified against them by your Spirit through your prophets.
But they would not listen,
so you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

³¹Nevertheless, in your great compassion you did not put an end to them.
You did not abandon them,
because you are a gracious and compassionate God.^b

³²So now, you our God, the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring God,
 who keeps the covenant of mercy,
do not regard as trivial all the hardships that have found us,
 our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets,
 our ancestors, and all your people,
 from the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.

³³You are righteous in regard to everything that has come upon us,
because you have acted faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.

³⁴Our kings, our officials, our priests, and our ancestors did not follow your law.
They did not pay attention to your commands
or to your testimony that you gave against them.

^a9:22-25 These conquests are reported in Numbers 21 and Joshua 6–11.

^b9:26-31 This sad history is summarized in Judges 2 & 3 and reported throughout, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

³⁵Although they were in their own kingdom,
and they were enjoying your great goodness that you gave to them,
and they were enjoying the spacious and fertile land
that you placed before them,

they still did not serve you,
and they did not repent of their evil deeds.

³⁶As a result, we are slaves today.

We are slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors
so that they could eat its fruit and its good things.

³⁷It is yielding abundant produce to kings
whom you placed over us because of our sins,
and they are ruling our bodies and our livestock as they please,
while we are in great distress.^a

10

The Solemn Agreement

So in all this we are making a solemn agreement and putting it in writing and attaching the seals of our officials, Levites, and priests.^b

These were the men who placed their seals on it:

Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hakaliah,

Zedekiah, ²Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

³Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,

⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluk,

⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

⁸Ma'aziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah.

These are the priests.^c

⁹The Levites were:

Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui from the sons of Henadad, and Kadmiel.

¹⁰Their relatives were Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

¹²Zakkur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

¹⁴The heads of the people were:

Parosh, Pahath Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

¹⁶Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

¹⁸Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

²⁰Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

²²Pelataiah, Hanan, Ananiah, ²³Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

²⁴Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵Rehum, Hashabnah, Ma'aseiah,

²⁶and Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷Malluk, Harim, Ba'anah.

²⁸Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and every person who had separated himself from the peoples of the lands for the sake of the Law of God,

^a9:37 After a detailed review of the history of the LORD's gracious goodness and faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness, the people are ready to make a covenant with the LORD.

^b10:1 Nehemiah 10:1 is 9:38 in the Hebrew Old Testament. All the subsequent verse numbers of chapter 10 are one number higher in the Hebrew text than in the English text.

^c10:8 Surprising is the absence of Ezra's name. Perhaps he was considered to be retired and not an office holder.

with their wives, their sons, and their daughters^a—all the people who have knowledge and understanding—²⁹are making a commitment with their brothers, that is, with the leading people, and they are placing themselves under a curse and under an oath to walk in the Law of God that was given through Moses the servant of God, an oath to keep the law and to obey all the commands of the LORD our God and his judgments and his statutes.

The Terms of the Agreement

³⁰We promise to keep these points:

We will not give our daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land, and we will not take their daughters for marriage to our sons.

³¹We will not buy anything from the peoples of the land who are bringing goods and all kinds of grain to sell on the Sabbath day or on a holy day.

We will leave the land fallow during the seventh year, and we will forgive every loan.

³²We will each assume the responsibility to keep the commands to give a third of a shekel per year for the service of the house of our God, ³³for the Bread of the Presence, for the regular daily grain offerings, the continual burnt offerings, the Sabbath offerings, the New Moon offerings, for the appointed festivals and holy offerings, and for sin offerings to atone for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

³⁴We—the priests, the Levites, and the people—have cast lots to determine our turns for each fathers' house^b to bring the wood offering to the house of our God, at the appointed times each year, to be burned upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.

³⁵We pledge to bring the firstfruits of our land and the firstfruits of every kind of fruit tree to the house of our God for ourselves. ³⁶We also will bring the firstborn of our sons and our animals, as is written in the Law, and we will bring the firstborn of our cattle and flocks to the house of our God for the priests who serve in the house of our God, ³⁷and we will bring the first of our dough and our contributions and the fruit of every tree. We will bring new wine and olive oil to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God, and we will bring the tithe from our land to the Levites. It is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the cities where we work. ³⁸A priest, a descendant of Aaron, will be with the Levites when the Levites collect the tithes. The Levites will bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the chambers of the treasury, ³⁹because the Israelites and the sons of Levi are to bring the contribution from the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are kept, where the priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers serve.

In this way we will not abandon the house of our God.

11

New Residents for Jerusalem

The people's officials lived in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to choose one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine remained in their own cities.^c ²The people blessed all those who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

³This is a listing of the heads of the province who lived in Jerusalem.

^a10:28 Although only the leaders signed the document on behalf of the people, all of the people swore to the covenant.

^b10:34 The societal units of Israel were called *fathers' houses*, because they are usually associated with a specific father who was considered to be the founder of the clan. These units could also be called *ancestral clans*.

^c11:1 After digressing to deal with the internal spiritual problems of Israel, Nehemiah resumes the story about the building of the walls where he had left off in 7:4. He now fulfills the plan to repopulate Jerusalem which was mentioned there. It is a sad commentary on the state of the people that it seems they had to draft some people by lot to get enough inhabitants for the city.

(Meanwhile, in the cities of Judah, each man lived on his own property, including laymen from Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. ⁴But some of the descendants of Judah and some of the descendants of Benjamin also lived in Jerusalem.)

From the descendants of Judah:

Athaiah the son of Uziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, from the descendants of Perez.

⁵Ma'aseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Kol Kozeah, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of the Shilonite.

⁶All the descendants of Perez who dwelt in Jerusalem were 468 able-bodied men.

⁷These are the descendants of Benjamin:

Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Ma'aseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah, ⁸and after him Gabbai and Sallai: 928 in all.

⁹Joel son of Zikri was their overseer, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in command over the city.

¹⁰From the priests:

Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jakin, ¹¹Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, ruler of the house of God, ¹²and their relatives who were doing the work of the house: 822.

Also Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, ¹³and his relatives, heads of families: 242.

Also Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, ¹⁴and their relatives, very capable men: 128.

Their overseer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim.

¹⁵From the Levites:

Shemaiah, who was the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni.

¹⁶Also Shabbethai and Jozabad, who were supervisors over the outside work of the house of God. They were from the heads of the Levites.

¹⁷Also Mattaniah, who was the son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, leader of the praise^a and thanksgiving for the prayer.

Also Bakbukiah, second in rank among his relatives, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.

¹⁸All the Levites in the holy city numbered 284.

¹⁹These are the gatekeepers:

Akkub, Talmon, and their relatives who guarded the gates numbered 172.^b

²⁰The rest of Israel, the priests, and the Levites were in all the cities of Judah, each man in his own inheritance.

²¹The temple servants were dwelling in the Ophel,^c and Ziha and Gishpa were supervisors over the temple servants.

²²The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, from the descendants of Asaph, who were the singers for the service of the house of God, ²³for they were under a royal command—an order concerning the singers' daily duty.

^a11:17 The Latin and some Greek manuscripts read *leader of the praise* rather than the reading of the Hebrew text *leader to begin*.

^b11:1-19 The lists serve as a memorial to the settlers of the city of Jerusalem.

^c11:21 The *Ophel* is the old citadel of Jerusalem, south of the Temple Mount.

²⁴Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, from the descendants of Zerah the son of Judah, served as the hand of the king for every matter concerning the people.

²⁵This is the information about the villages with their fields:

Some of the descendants of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its settlements, in Dibon and its settlements, and in Jekabze'el and its settlements, ²⁶and in Jeshua, in Moladah, and in Beth Pelet, ²⁷and in Hazar Shual, and in Beersheba and its settlements, ²⁸and in Ziklag, and in Mekonah and in its settlements, ²⁹and in En Rimmon, and in Zorah, and in Jarmuth, ³⁰Zanoah and Adullam and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its settlements. So they settled from Beersheba to the Hinnom Valley.^a

³¹Some of the descendants of Benjamin were from Geba, Mikdash, Aijah, and Bethel and its settlements, ³²Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵Lod, and Ono, and the Valley of the Craftsmen. ³⁶Some of the Levite divisions of Judah were assigned to Benjamin.

12

Legitimate Servants for the Temple^b

These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua:

Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, ²Amariah, Malluk, Hattush,

³Shekariah, Rehum, Meremoth, ⁴Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,

⁵Mijamin, Ma'adiah, Bilgah, ⁶Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah,

⁷Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, and Jedaiah.

These were the heads of the priests and their relatives in the days of Jeshua.

⁸These are the Levites:

Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah,

Mattaniah (he and his relatives were in charge of songs of thanksgiving),

⁹and Bakbukiah and Unni (their relatives were stationed opposite them for the services).

The Succession of Priests

¹⁰Now Jeshua was the father of Joiakim,

and Joiakim was the father of Eliashib,

and Eliashib was the father of Joiada,

¹¹and Joiada was the father of Jonathan,

and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

¹²Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests who were the heads of the families were as follows:

the head of Seraiah's family was Meraiah

of Jeremiah's: Hananiah

¹³of Ezra's: Meshullam

of Amariah's: Jehohanan

¹⁴of Malluk's: Jonathan

of Shebaniah's: Joseph

^a11:30 That is, throughout Judah from Beersheba in the south to the Valley of Hinnom in the north. See the map in the introduction to Ezra.

^b12:1 Because of the importance of a pure priesthood, Nehemiah presents the credentials of the priesthood. The first list (v. 1-7) names the twenty-two priestly families that had returned with Joshua and Zerubbabel one hundred years earlier. The second list names Levitical leaders (v. 8-9). The third list gives the line of high priests from the return until the time of Nehemiah (v. 10-11). The fourth list summarizes the priestly families from just before the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (v. 12-21). The concluding verses tell how formal records of the priesthood were established near the end of the administration of Nehemiah.

- ¹⁵of Harim's: Adna
of Meraioth's: Helkai
¹⁶of Iddo's: Zechariah
of Ginnethon's: Meshullam
¹⁷of Abijah's: Zikri
of Miniamin's, of Moadiah's: Piltai
¹⁸of Bilgah's: Shammua
of Shemaiah's: Jehonathan
¹⁹and of Joiarib's: Mattenai
of Jedaiah's: Uzzi
²⁰of Sallai's: Kallai
of Amok's: Eber
²¹of Hilkiah's: Hashabiah
of Jedaiah's: Nethanel.

²²In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, the Levites were recorded by the heads of families,^a as were the priests, until the reign of Darius the Persian.^b ²³The descendants of Levi who were heads of families were recorded in the book of the chronicles, down to the days of Johanan son of Eliashib.

²⁴The heads of the Levites were as follows:

Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua son of Kadmiel and his relatives, who stood opposite them to praise and to give thanks according to the command of David the man of God, one division corresponding to another.

²⁵Mattaniah and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storerooms at the gates. ²⁶These men served in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and Ezra the priest, the scribe.

The Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem

²⁷Now for the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem,^c the Levites had been invited from all their places, in order to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the joyful dedication with both thanksgiving hymns and with songs using cymbals, harps, and lyres. ²⁸The singers had been gathered both from the district around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites, ²⁹from Beth Gilgal, and from the countryside of Geba and Azmaveth, because the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. ³⁰The priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

³¹I brought the officers of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs for the procession.

One group proceeded south on top of the west wall toward the Dung Gate. ³²Behind them went Hoshai and half of the officers of Judah, ³³also Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, ³⁴Judah and Benjamin, and Shemaiah and Jeremiah, ³⁵as well as some of the priests with trumpets, namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zakkur, the son of Asaph, ³⁶and his relatives Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Ma'ai, Nethanel, and Judah, and Hanani with the musical instruments of David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led them. ³⁷From the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps to the City of David, by the ascent to the wall which was above David's house and over the Water Gate on the east.^d

^a12:22 Literally *the heads of fathers*

^b12:22 Probably this refers to Darius II who began to rule in 423 BC.

^c12:27 At last, after many digressions, we come to the account of the dedication of the wall during the first year of Nehemiah's administration. Beginning in the center of the western wall, two processions march around the city in opposite directions and meet at the eastern entrance to the city for the dedication. See the map in the introduction to Nehemiah.

^d12:37 The precise meaning of this part of the route is uncertain.

³⁸The second thanksgiving choir was assigned to go in the opposite direction. I and half of the people were behind it on top of the wall. They went over the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, ³⁹and over the Ephraim Gate (that is, over the Old Gate), and over the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, and up to the Sheep Gate, and they stood at the Guard's Gate.

⁴⁰The two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, as did I and half of the officials with me, ⁴¹as well as the priests: Eliakim, Ma'aseiah, Miniamin, Mikaiiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah with trumpets, ⁴²and Ma'aseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, and Malkijah, and Elam, and Ezer. Then the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. ⁴³That day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard a long way away.

⁴⁴That day men were appointed as supervisors over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, in order to gather the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites from the fields^a of the towns, because Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who carried out their duties.

⁴⁵They and the singers and the gatekeepers continued the service of their God and the service of purification, according to the command of David and his son Solomon, ⁴⁶because formerly in the days of David and Asaph, Asaph was the head of the singers and of songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. ⁴⁷In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah,^b all Israel continued to give the required portions for the singers and the gatekeepers daily. They would set apart that portion which was for the Levites, and the Levites would set apart that portion which was for the descendants of Aaron.

13

Enforcing the Terms of the Covenant

On that day,^c when the Book of Moses was being read in the hearing of the people, it was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite may ever come into the assembled congregation of God,^d ²because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God had turned the curse into a blessing. ³As the people heard the Law, they separated everyone of mixed foreign descent from Israel.

⁴But before this, the priest Eliashib, who had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, ⁵had provided a large storeroom for him.

Previously they had been putting the offerings, the incense, and the vessels, as well as the tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil there. This had been done according to the command concerning the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

^a12:44 The Hebrew text reads *on the basis of the fields*. That is, the assessment is based on the number, size and productivity of the fields surrounding the towns.

^b12:47 This is a time span of about one hundred years.

^c13:1 It does not seem that the term *on the day* refers only to the day of the dedication, though verses 1-3 may refer to that day. In this chapter Nehemiah describes the spiritual negligence of the leaders of Judah that persisted throughout his administration. Even late in his administration Nehemiah finds that the reforms and the covenant are still being ignored by many leaders of Israel, including the high priest. He takes decisive action to enforce the law. The chapter may be arranged topically rather than strictly chronologically. Among his actions are the following:

1. Nehemiah throws the high priest's Ammonite ally, Tobiah, out of the temple.
2. He reinstitutes the offerings to support the Levites.
3. He enforces the Sabbath laws against the merchants.
4. He takes vigorous action against the on-going sin of intermarriage, including expulsion of some priests from office.

^d13:1 Deuteronomy 23:3-6

⁶But when all this was happening, I was not in Jerusalem, because in the thirty-second year^a of King Artaxerxes of Babylon, I had gone to the king. Then sometime later, I asked the king for permission to return,⁷ and I came back to Jerusalem. Then I found out about the evil thing that Eliashib had done for Tobiah by providing a room for him in the courtyards of the house of God.⁸ This was very offensive to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household property out of the storeroom.⁹ I gave orders to purify the storerooms, and I restored the articles of the house of God, the offerings, and the incense.

¹⁰Then I learned that the portions for the Levites had not been distributed and that the Levites and singers who performed the work of God's house all had gone back to their own fields.¹¹ I accused the officials and said, "Why has the house of God been abandoned?" So I gathered them and stationed them at their places.¹² Then all Judah brought the tithes of grain and new wine and olive oil to the storerooms.¹³ I appointed treasurers in charge of the storerooms: the priest Shelemiah, the scribe Zadok, Pedaiah from the Levites, and as their assistant, Hanan the son of Zakkur, the son of Mattaniah, because they were considered to be trustworthy. It was their responsibility to distribute the portions to their relatives.

¹⁴Remember me, my God, because of this, and do not wipe away my faithful deeds, which I have done for the sake of the house of my God and for the sake of its services.^b

¹⁵In those days I saw in Judah some people who were treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, and figs and all kinds of loads, and then bringing them to Jerusalem on the Sabbath. So I warned them on the day when they were selling food.

¹⁶Moreover, some people from Tyre^c lived in the city. They were bringing fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling it on the Sabbath to the Jews—even in Jerusalem!¹⁷ So I accused the Judean nobles and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, by which you are profaning the Sabbath day?¹⁸ Didn't your ancestors do this, and as a result our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? You are adding more to his wrath by profaning the Sabbath."

¹⁹As it began to grow dark within the gates of Jerusalem before the beginning of the Sabbath, I gave orders to close the doors and not to open them until after the Sabbath. I also stationed some of my servants at the gates to ensure that no load would come in on the Sabbath day.²⁰ Once or twice the merchants and those who sell all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside of Jerusalem.²¹ However, I warned them and said to them, "Why are you spending the night next to the wall? If you do this again, I will use force against you." From that time onward they did not come on the Sabbath.²² Then I told the Levites that they should purify themselves and come to guard the gates in order to sanctify the Sabbath day.

Remember this also in my favor, my God, and spare me according to your great faithfulness.

²³Also in those days I saw the Judeans who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.²⁴ Half of their children spoke the dialect of Ashdod or the language of other peoples and were not able to understand how to speak Judean.²⁵ So I accused them and cursed them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. Then I made them take an oath by God: "May God punish us if we give our daughters to their sons or if we take some of their daughters for our sons or for ourselves."

²⁶I said, "Wasn't it because of these foreign wives that King Solomon of Israel sinned, although there was no king like him among the many nations? He was loved by his God, and God placed him as king over all Israel. Yet foreign wives made even him sin.²⁷ Should we listen to you and be led to do all this great evil, so that we end up being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"

^a13:6 That is, about 433 BC. We do not know how often or how long Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem during the dozen or so years after the dedication of the wall.

^b13:14 As is typical for Nehemiah, he intersperses his comments with his prayers. He wants to be remembered for his spiritual reforms and for his purification of the priesthood, even more than for his great work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. (The indentation is to mark the interjected prayers.)

^c13:16 Tyre was a Canaanite/Phoenician city on the coast of Lebanon, north of Israel.

²⁸One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. So I chased him away from me.

²⁹Remember them, my God, because of their defiling of the priesthood and because of the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

³⁰So I purified them of everything foreign, and I established duties for the priests and the Levites—each man had his own work. ³¹I also provided wood for the offerings at the appropriate times and for the offerings of the firstfruits.

Remember me, my God, for good.^a

^a13:31 Now the history of the Old Testament has reached its end. More than four hundred years of prophetic silence will follow. But Jerusalem has been rebuilt, and its inhabitants along with the inhabitants of the nearby village of Bethlehem are waiting for the King who is coming. The story of Israel's history ends as it began: people are looking for the King, the Seed of the Woman. The history from Exodus to Esther has been a contrast of Israel's unfaithfulness with God's grace and faithfulness, but through it all the promise of the Savior was carried on.

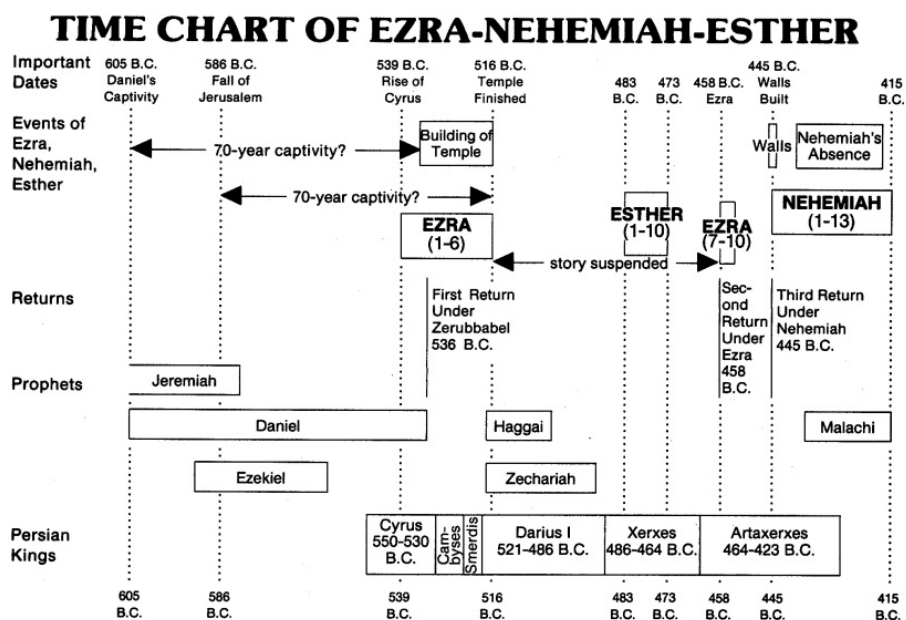
Israel's spiritual history was a tumultuous history characterized by apostasy, and so, as a result, its secular history was also tumultuous. But it would be short-sighted to think that Israel's history had been only a contrast between Israel's unfaithfulness and God's grace and faithfulness. By God's grace, there were many faithful heroes of faith in that history, whom believers do well to emulate, as Hebrews 10:32–12:3 so powerfully points out (see also Romans 15:4). The greatest hero in that history, of course, is God, who was always working throughout that tumultuous history to fulfill his word to Adam and Eve that he would send a Savior, the promised Seed of the Woman (Genesis 3:15).

Esther

Introduction

The events of this historical book take place in the kingdom of Persia in about 480 BC. Esther was one of many Jews living there as exiles from Israel. Her husband, the Persian king Ahashverosh or Ahasuerus (now commonly known to English readers as Xerxes, the Greek form of his name), reigned from 486–465 BC and is most remembered for his unsuccessful war against Greece. While God is never mentioned in this book, his presence is evident everywhere as we see him working through sinful people like you and me. Through his providence he guides and directs history in order to protect his people and prevent their destruction, so that in the fullness of time he might send his Son. By this book the Holy Spirit also invites us to see God at work in the seemingly chance events of our daily lives, making everything work out for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28, Genesis 50:18-20), so we thank and praise him for his gracious acts and guidance in our lives.

The events of Esther occur between the first and second halves of the book of Ezra. See the chart for the positioning of these books.



The Historical Setting

After two decades of effort, the Judean returnees had rebuilt the Temple by about 516 BC. This happened during the reign of Darius, a great administrator and consolidator of the Persian Empire. Darius, however, had one very embarrassing failure. In 490 BC he had invaded Greece to punish the Athenians and other Greeks for their meddling with the Persians' control of the Greeks who lived on what today is the west coast of Turkey. In one of the great upsets of history, Darius suffered defeat at the battle of Marathon (a battle which is still commemorated in the Olympic marathon). To avenge this blot on the Persians' honor Darius's son Xerxes, who came to the throne in 483 BC, launched a massive invasion of Greece with the largest invasion force ever launched up to this point in history. In what can probably be rated as the biggest upset ever, the Greeks held off the massive Persian army at Thermopylae and

smashed the invasion in the great sea battle at Salamis (480 BC). Salamis is considered one of the most decisive battles in history because it preserved Greece, the cradle of Western civilization. Accounts of these events are provided by the Greek historian Herodotus, the so-called “father of history.” In the midst of these world-shaking events which receive headlines in the history books, another even more world-shaking history-changing event was taking place back-stage, almost unnoticed. In the book of Esther we see that the Lord of history was using the intrigues in Xerxes’ palace to preserve his people Israel so Jerusalem could be built and the Messiah could come.

For more information about the Persian Empire and for a map see Appendix 4.

Author

The author is unknown. Mordecai is a plausible suggestion.

Canonicity

The canonicity of Esther has been challenged among Jews and Christians on the following grounds:

1. The divine name is not used in the book.
2. There is not much overtly religious behavior by the main characters in the book.
3. Esther’s behavior:
 - a. What would a nice Jewish girl be doing with a moral degenerate like Xerxes?
 - b. Esther hides her faith.
 - c. Esther is reluctant to help the Jews.
4. The vengeance by the Jews against their enemies seems excessive.
5. Esther and Mordecai are presumptuous enough to add to the festivals instituted by Moses.
6. Esther is not quoted in the New Testament or Dead Sea Scrolls.

Despite these oft-expressed reservations, the canonicity of Esther was never successfully challenged. With good reason! In all of these books (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) God works with quiet providence. Ezra and Nehemiah are much more forthright in expressing their faith than Esther, but this is a difference in the behavior of the chief characters of the books, not a difference in God’s way of operating in the books. God can use the heroic and decisive (Ezra and Nehemiah) and the less heroic and the reluctant (Esther, Gideon, and even Moses at first).

Text

The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) has several additions to the text of Esther. These have the character of being artificial insertions, designed to make the text more religious, and they should not be regarded as original.

Outline

While no outline is really necessary to follow this fast-moving, well-told story, the following indicates the main progression of the plot.

- I. The plot against the Jews (ch 1–4)
 - A. The setting of the plot (1-2)
 - B. Haman’s plot (3–4)
- II. The delivery of the Jews (ch 5–10)
 - A. Esther’s plan (5)
 - B. Mordecai rises; Haman falls (6-7)
 - C. The Jews triumph (8-9)
 - D. The greatness of Xerxes and Mordecai (10)

Esther

1

These events happened during the time of Xerxes,^a when Xerxes was ruling over one hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Cush.^b ²King Xerxes was ruling on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel.^c

³In the third year of his reign^d he gave a banquet^e for all his officials and administrators, for the leaders of the army of Persia and Media, and for the nobles and officials of the provinces. ⁴He displayed the glory and splendor of the riches of his kingdom, the grandeur of his majesty, for many days (one hundred eighty days in all).^f

⁵When this was completed, the king gave a banquet for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the most important to the least significant. It lasted for seven days in the courtyard of the garden in the king's palace.

⁶There were white and blue linen hangings, attached to marble^g pillars with white and purple cords and silver rings.^h There were couches made of gold and silver, standing on a mosaic floor made of purple porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other precious stones. ⁷Drinks were served in gold goblets. Each goblet was unique. The royal wine was plentiful, in keeping with the king's extravagance. ⁸No directions were given about the amount each person was to drink because the king had ordered all the waiters to serve the amount each man desired.

⁹Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Karkas, seven of the eunuchs who served him, ¹¹to bring before him Queen Vashti wearing the crown of the kingdom, in order to show the people and the officials her beauty. She was very good-looking.

¹²Queen Vashti refused to come in response to the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. The king was infuriated and his anger burned within him.ⁱ

¹³So the king spoke to his advisors who understood the times. (It was the king's custom to consult with those who were acquainted with law and legal principles.) ¹⁴His close advisors were Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, seven officials of Persia and Media who were allowed to see the king's face and were ranked first in the kingdom.

¹⁵He asked, "According to the law, what should be done with Queen Vashti since she did not obey the command of the king delivered by the eunuchs?"

^a1:1 *Xerxes* is also known as *Ahasuerus*

^b1:1 *Cush* was located in what is the present-day country of Sudan.

^c1:2 Or *fortress*. The term *citadel* designates cities as royal capitals of the Persian Empire, but at times the term refers only to the palace complex of such a city. Susa, also called Shushan, was located in what is now southwest Iran. It was a winter capital.

^d1:3 That is, 483 BC

^e1:3 The word translated *banquet* refers more to drinking than to eating.

^f1:4 This banquet may well be the very same gathering to plan the invasion of Greece which is reported in the account of the Greek historian Herodotus. Herodotus's description of Xerxes as vain, violent, and hot-tempered, rich in power but poor in judgment, matches the biblical account.

^g1:6 Or *alabaster*

^h1:6 Or *rods*

ⁱ1:12 The curtain of this dramatic story opens to reveal scenes of power and grandeur, spitefulness and intrigue—all the vices of the life-styles of the rich and famous. (Some rabbinic interpreters go so far as to add to the soap-opera atmosphere of the Persian court by reporting that the queen was ordered to appear wearing only her crown.) All of this adds to the atmosphere of the story, but it should not distract us from the main point of the story: How did the God of history direct the affairs of a great empire so that a humble Jewish girl would be in a position to save his people Israel?

¹⁶In the presence of the king and the officials, Memucan said, “Queen Vashti has not only committed an offense against the king, but she has also committed an offense against all the officials and all the people in the provinces of King Xerxes, ¹⁷because the action of the queen, when it is reported to all the women, will cause them to look upon their husbands with contempt. They will say, ‘King Xerxes said to bring Queen Vashti before him, but she did not come.’ ¹⁸Today the noble ladies of Persia and Media, who have heard about the action of the queen, will be talking about it to their husbands, who are the officials of the king. There will be more than enough contempt and anger. ¹⁹If the king agrees, he should issue a royal decree. It should be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it cannot be changed. Vashti shall not come into the presence of King Xerxes. The king will give her status as queen to a different person, one who is better than she is. ²⁰The decree of the king will be heard throughout all of his vast kingdom. Then all the women will give honor to their husbands, both the most important and the least significant.”^a

²¹The advice seemed good to the king and the officials, so the king did as Memucan had said. ²²He sent letters to all the provinces of the kingdom—to each province in its own writing system and to each people in its own language. The letters stated that each man should be lord in his own house. The letters were addressed to every man in his own language.^b

2

When King Xerxes was no longer so angry, he remembered what Vashti had done and what had been decreed about her.^c

²The young men who served as attendants to the king said, “Search for good-looking young virgins for the king. ³Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of the kingdom to do this. Gather all the good-looking young virgins into the citadel at Susa, to the harem under the supervision of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, the overseer of the women. Give them beauty treatments. ⁴The young woman who pleases the king should be queen instead of Vashti.” The king agreed and implemented the plan.

⁵In the citadel at Susa there was a Jew named Mordecai, who was the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish the Benjaminite. ⁶Kish had been taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon with the other captives who were exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah.^d

⁷Mordecai had raised his cousin Hadassah (also called Esther) because she had no father or mother. She was shapely^e and good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his daughter.

⁸When the king’s order and edict had been proclaimed, and many young women had been gathered into the citadel of Susa under the supervision of Hegai, Esther was taken to the king’s palace, to Hegai, who was in charge of the harem. ⁹She pleased Hegai and gained his favor. He quickly provided her with beauty treatments and food. He assigned a good position in the harem to her and to the seven female attendants picked out for her from the king’s palace.

¹⁰Esther had not revealed her nationality or her family background because Mordecai had told her not to do so.^a

^a1:20 Commentators who spend time debating whether Vashti is an arrogant wife or a courageous resister against a chauvinist husband miss the point. Neither Vashti nor Xerxes are being presented as exemplars for marital behavior. If Vashti can be identified with the queen Amestris described by Herodotus, she was as evil and self-centered as her drunken boor of a husband.

^b1:22 Or *the letters stated that he should be lord in his own house, speaking the language of his own people*. This sentence is not present in the Greek Old Testament.

^c2:1 The secular chronology for Persia suggests that the disastrous invasion of Greece occurred between Esther 1 and 2. After a four-year interval (compare 1:3 and 2:16), Xerxes, a notorious womanizer, was looking for a new queen. Esther will be among the candidates.

^d2:6 This deportation had occurred in 597 BC. King Jeconiah was also called Jehoiachin.

^e2:7 Or *had a good figure*. Literally, *beautiful of form or outline*. The Hebrew term is not used exclusively of women as the English *shapely* is.

¹¹Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the harem, to learn about Esther's well-being and about what was going to be done with her.

¹²Every young woman received a turn to go to King Xerxes after she had received the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatments. For six months they used oil of myrrh; for six months perfumes and other beauty treatments for women. ¹³Then the young woman went to the king. Everything she desired was given to her when she went from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴She went to the king in the evening. In the morning she returned to the second harem, under the supervision of Sha'ashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She did not return to the king unless he was delighted with her and she was summoned by name.

¹⁵Esther was the daughter of Abihail, Mordecai's uncle. Mordecai had adopted her.

When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, had advised. Esther won the approval of everyone watching her.

¹⁶Esther was taken to King Xerxes at the royal palace in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, during the seventh year^b of his reign.

¹⁷The king loved Esther more than he loved all the other women. She won his favor and approval more than all the other virgins did. He placed the crown of the kingdom on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.^c

¹⁸The king gave a great banquet in honor of Esther for all his officials and administrators. He declared a tax holiday for the provinces and gave gifts as only the king could give.

¹⁹When the virgins were gathered together for a second time,^d Mordecai was sitting in the gatehouse to the king's palace. (²⁰Esther had not revealed her family or her nationality because when Mordecai had been taking care of her, Mordecai had told her not to do so.)

²¹When Mordecai was sitting in the king's gatehouse, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who controlled access to the entrance to the palace, became very angry and plotted to kill King Xerxes.

²²When Mordecai learned about this, he told Queen Esther. She passed the report along to the king, crediting Mordecai by name. ²³The matter was investigated, and the charges were found to be true, and both of them were hanged.^e This incident was recorded in the daily record book, in the presence of the king.^f

3

After these events King Xerxes honored Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite. He promoted him and placed him over all the officials who served with him. ²All the servants of the king who were at the

^a2:10 Esther is among the candidates who is auditioned for the position of queen. The text does not state whether she volunteered or was drafted. She seems to be a willing participant in the sordid process, but according to Herodotus many unwilling women were forced into Xerxes' net. Esther may be one of them. At any rate Esther agrees to hide her faith. In this regard she is a stark contrast to Daniel and his friends. This is one of the reasons some readers were uncomfortable with the book of Esther. Be that as it may, the LORD will make use of that very secrecy to undo Haman.

^b2:16 That is, about 479 BC

^c2:17 When the one-night auditions have been completed, Esther is the winner and becomes Xerxes' favorite. She is called queen. Whether this means that her child would have been accepted as heir by the Persian nobility is doubtful. It is likely that the next king, Artaxerxes, was the son of Vashti. Esther clearly did not have a close husband-wife relationship with Xerxes and was dependent on his erratic whims.

^d2:19 Or *had been moved to the second harem*. That is, the harem for the women who had been with the king.

^e2:23 Or *impaled on a pole*

^f2:23 By another turn of divine providence Mordecai, who is watching Esther from a distance, uncovers a plot and saves the king's life. The important pattern being established is that a seemingly unconnected string of chance events is setting up the delivery of Israel.

king's gate were bowing down and kneeling in Haman's presence, because the king had commanded that this be done for him, but Mordecai did not bow down and did not kneel.

³So the servants of the king who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you going against the king's command?" ⁴Even though they spoke to him every day, he did not listen to them. They reported this to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's actions would be tolerated. Mordecai had informed them that he was a Jew.

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down and kneeling in his presence, Haman was enraged. ⁶Because the king's servants had made Haman aware of Mordecai's nationality, Haman was not satisfied with laying hands only on Mordecai. Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.^a

⁷During the twelfth year^b of King Xerxes' reign, during the first month, the month of Nisan, a *pur* (which means "a lot") was cast before Haman for every day and every month of the year, until Adar, the twelfth month, was chosen.^c

⁸Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a group of people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of all the other people. They do not keep the laws of the king. It is not good for the king to allow them to get away with this. ⁹If the king agrees, a directive should be written to destroy them. I will weigh out ten thousand talents^d of silver to the treasury of the king for those who carry out this work."

¹⁰The king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the man opposing the Jews. ¹¹The king said to Haman, "The silver will be given to you,^e as well as the people. Do with them whatever seems good to you."

¹²In the first month, on the thirteenth day, the king's scribes were summoned. A decree based on everything Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps,^f to the governors over each province, and to the officials of every people. The decree was sent to each province in its own writing system and to each people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the king's signet ring.

¹³The letters were sent by courier to all the provinces of the king to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, including children and women, and to plunder their goods in one day, on the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month. ¹⁴A copy of the decree was to be proclaimed as a law to all the peoples in every province, so that they could be ready for that day.

¹⁵The couriers went out, spurred on by the word of the king. The law was issued in Susa, the citadel. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink. The city of Susa was perplexed and confused.

4

^a3:6 Mordecai and the Jews fall under the wrath of Haman, the chief official of Xerxes, because of Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. Mordecai's refusal to bow is puzzling because there was no biblical law prohibiting Jews from bowing down to rulers. Israelites do this quite often in the Old Testament. The text offers no judgment on whether Mordecai's refusal was right or wrong. It simply tells how the latent hatred for the Jews was brought to the foreground.

^b3:7 This is about five years after Esther became queen.

^c3:7 Haman relies on casting lots to pick the lucky day for him to kill all the Jews. He then obtains the king's consent to his vicious plan by disguising his own malice as concern for the king's best interests, promising this will produce a big payoff for both of them. After the king signs the death order for millions, the king and Haman callously sit down for a drink or few. But by divine providence the day of death for the Jews has been pushed months in the future. God's providence is still working and has time to work some more.

^d3:9 This is a huge amount, estimated to be more than half the annual income of the empire.

^e3:11 This may mean either *Keep your money* or *It's your money; I'll take it if you are offering*.

^f3:12 *Satrap*s were the rulers of large provinces or groups of smaller provinces within the Persian Empire.

When Mordecai became aware of everything that had happened, he ripped his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, went out into the middle of the city, and let out a loud, bitter cry. ²He went right up to the king's gate, even though no one clothed with sackcloth was allowed to enter it.

³In every single province that was reached by the proclamation of the king and where his decree was posted, there was great mourning, fasting, weeping, and lamenting among the Jews. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴When Esther's female attendants and her eunuchs came and told her what had happened, the queen agonized over it. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai so that he could take off his sackcloth, but he did not accept them. ⁵Esther summoned Hathak, who had been assigned from among the king's eunuchs to attend to her. She then ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why.

⁶Hathak went out to Mordecai in the public square in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai told him everything that had happened and the exact amount of silver that Haman had said he would put into the treasuries of the king to destroy the Jews. ⁸He also gave him a copy of the written decree which had been issued in Susa to destroy the Jews, so that he could show it to Esther. Hathak was to place the responsibility upon her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹So Hathak went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

¹⁰Esther spoke to Hathak and gave him directions to pass on to Mordecai: ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that it is the law that any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned will be put to death, unless the king holds out the golden scepter to him. Then he will live. But I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days."

¹²They told Mordecai what Esther had said.

¹³Mordecai responded, "Take this message to Esther: Do not imagine that of all the Jews, you alone will escape because you are part of the king's household. ¹⁴If at this time you keep totally silent, relief and deliverance for the Jews will spring up from somewhere, but you and the house of your father will perish. Who knows whether you have become queen for a time like this!"^a

¹⁵Esther responded to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go. Gather all the Jews who are found in Susa. Fast on my behalf. Do not eat and drink for three days and nights. I and my young women also will fast in the same way. After that I will go to the king, contrary to the law. And then, if I perish, I perish!"^b

¹⁷Mordecai went away and did everything Esther had ordered him to do.

5

On the third day Esther dressed in the queen's royal clothing and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the quarters of the king. The king was sitting on the throne in the reception hall, opposite the entrance.

²When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she pleased him. So the king held out to Esther the golden scepter, which was in his hand, and Esther approached and touched the head of the scepter.

³The king said to her, "What concerns you, Queen Esther? Whatever you are seeking (up to half of the kingdom) will be given to you."

⁴Esther said, "If it is agreeable to the king, the king and Haman should come today to a banquet that I have made for him."^c

^a4:14 The implicit theme of the book is stated in Mordecai's words, "Who knows whether you have become queen for a time like this!" ¹⁴"If at this time you keep totally silent, relief and deliverance for the Jews will spring up from somewhere." God's will shall be accomplished with Esther or without her.

^b4:16 A desperate Mordecai seeks help from Esther, the last hope for the Jews. She is reluctant to help, realizing she has limited leverage with Xerxes. When she agrees that her intervention is the Jews only chance, she proceeds, but more with resignation than with confidence.

^c5:4 Esther gains an audience with the king and has an opportunity to gain the king's help versus Haman, but for some reason (perhaps fear, perhaps shrewdness) she fails to act and postpones her request. This allows time for another turn of providence.

⁵The king said, “Hurry! Get Haman so that we can do what Esther has said.” So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

⁶While the king was drinking wine, he said to Esther, “What is your request? It will be given to you. What are you seeking? Up to half of the kingdom—it’s yours.”

⁷Esther answered, “This is my request. This is what I seek. ⁸If I have found favor in the eyes of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, let the king and Haman come to a banquet, which I will make for them tomorrow. Then I will give the answers requested by the king.”

⁹Haman went out that day full of joy, with a happy heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai at the king’s gate, and Mordecai did not stand and tremble before him, Haman was filled with rage against Mordecai. ¹⁰But Haman restrained himself from any action.

He went to his house and called together his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹Haman reviewed for them the glory of his wealth, the number of his sons, all the details about how the king had made him great, and how the king had elevated him over all the officials and the king’s administrators. ¹²Haman said, “What’s more, Queen Esther did not invite anyone except me to come with the king to the banquet that she prepared. I have been invited again for her banquet with the king tomorrow. ¹³But none of this means anything to me whenever I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”^a

¹⁴Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, “Make a gallows^b seventy-five feet high. In the morning tell the king that Mordecai should be hanged^c on it. Then go happily with the king to the banquet.” In Haman’s opinion this was good advice, so he had the gallows made.

6

That night the king could not sleep, so he ordered that the chronicles,^d the record of the memorable events of his reign, be brought to him. These accounts were read to the king.^e

²They found the account about the incident when Mordecai had reported Bigthan^f and Teresh, the king’s two eunuchs who had controlled access to the entrance to the palace, who had tried to assassinate King Xerxes.

³The king said, “What honor and recognition has been given to Mordecai for this?”

Then the servants of the king who were attending him said, “Nothing has been done for him.”

⁴The king said, “Who is in the court?” Just then Haman had come to the outer court of the king’s palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

⁵The king’s servants said to him, “Look, Haman is standing in the court.” The king said, “Have him come in.”

⁶When Haman came in, the king said to him, “What should be done to honor the man with whom the king is pleased?”

Haman said in his heart, “Who could there be that the king would be more pleased to honor than me?”

⁷Haman said to the king, “The man whom the king is pleased to honor ⁸should be clothed with garments that the king has worn. He should be given a horse on which the king has ridden, and crowned

^a5:13 Here we see on full display the poisonous fruits of envy. Haman, consumed with envy and bitterness and unable to enjoy all he has, builds the gallows that will become his own.

^b5:14 Or *sharpened pole*

^c5:14 Or *impaled*

^d6:1 Or *annals*

^e6:1 In multiple twists of what we too readily call “fate” (it is really divine providence) the king’s vanity and restlessness lead him to his favorite reading material, the annals about how great he is. In the process, the king is reminded that Mordecai had saved his life. Providentially, Mordecai had not been honored at the time, so the king makes plans to honor Mordecai now, and in a delicious irony, Haman, who just happened to be in court, determines Mordecai’s reward for him. After these events Haman and his family have a premonition of doom.

^f6:2 Here spelled *Bigthana* in Hebrew. Such spelling variants are common in the biblical books.

with a crown that has been on the king's head. ⁹These clothes and this horse should be delivered by one of the highest-ranking noblemen of the king. They should dress up the man whom the king is pleased to honor and let him ride on the horse in the public square of the city. Walking in front of him, they will proclaim, "This is what is done for the man whom the king is pleased to honor."

¹⁰The king said to Haman, "Hurry! Take the clothing and the horse just as you have said, and do this for Mordecai the Jew, who sits in the gatehouse of the king. Do not leave out a thing from whatever you have said."

¹¹Haman took the clothing and the horse, clothed Mordecai, had him ride through the public square of the city, and proclaimed before him, "This is what is done for the man whom the king is pleased to honor."

¹²Mordecai returned to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his home, mourning, with his head covered. ¹³Haman reported all this to Zeresh his wife and to all his friends.

His advisors and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, ^a you will not overcome him. Instead, you will surely fall before him."

¹⁴While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and rushed Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

7

So the king and Haman went to the feast with Queen Esther.

²On the second day, when they were again drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "What is your request, Queen Esther? It will be given to you. What are you seeking? Up to half of the kingdom—it's yours."

³Queen Esther responded, "My King, if I have found favor in your eyes, and if it pleases the king, I am asking that my life be spared, and I am seeking the lives of my people, ⁴because I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we were merely being sold to be male and female slaves, I would have remained silent, because that would not have been bad enough to be a reason to bother the king."

⁵King Xerxes spoke up. He said to Queen Esther, "Who is this, and where is this person who has the audacity to do this?"

⁶Esther said, "This hateful enemy is this evil Haman!" Haman was terrified in the presence of the king and the queen.

⁷The king rose angrily from the place where they were drinking wine^b and went to the palace garden. But Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, because he saw the king was determined to do something bad to him.^c

⁸Just as the king was returning from the palace garden to the hall where they had been drinking wine, Haman was falling onto the couch on which Esther was lying. The king said, "Will he even assault the queen when I am in the building?" As soon as the words left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.^d

⁹In addition, Harbona, one of the eunuchs present with the king, said, "You know, there is a gallows seventy-five feet high standing by the house of Haman, which he made for Mordecai, the person who spoke up for the benefit of the king." The king said, "Hang^e him on it."

¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.^a

^a6:13 Literally *of the seed of the Jews*

^b7:7 The word Hebrew *mishteh*, which is often translated *banquet*, refers primarily to drinking rather than eating. Here that connotation is made explicit by the addition of the word *wine*.

^c7:7 Or *had evil plans for him*

^d7:8 In 6:12 Haman had covered his face in grief and shame. Now, apparently to mark him as a condemned man, his face is covered for him.

^e7:9 Or *impale*

8

That day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai came and appeared before the king, because Esther had told him what Mordecai's relationship to her was.

²The king took off his signet ring that he had taken from Haman and gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of the house of Haman.

³In addition, Esther spoke to the king. She fell at his feet, wept, and requested that he put an end to the evil plan that Haman the Agagite had devised against the Jews.

⁴The king held out the golden scepter to Esther, so Esther rose and stood in the presence of the king.

⁵She said, "If it is acceptable to the king, if I have found favor before him, if this idea seems right to the king, and if I am acceptable to him, a decree should be written to nullify the letters for the plot of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews in all of the provinces of the king. ⁶For how can I watch the disaster that is about to come on my people!? How can I watch the destruction of my relatives!"

⁷King Xerxes said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Look. I have given Haman's house to Esther. They have hanged him on the gallows because he raised his hand against the Jews. ⁸You can write concerning the Jews whatever seems good to you and seal it with the king's signet ring, because a document written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring cannot be changed."^b

⁹The king's scribes were summoned at once, on the twenty-third day of Sivan, the third month. Whatever Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews was written to the satraps, governors, and the officials of the provinces from India to Cush, one hundred twenty-seven provinces in all. They wrote to each province in its own writing system and to each people in its own language (including to the Jews in their writing system and in their language). ¹⁰He wrote in the name of King Xerxes and sealed it with the king's signet ring. He sent letters by messengers mounted on the king's fastest thoroughbreds.^c

The Content and Effect of the Royal Letters

¹¹The king gave the Jews in every city the right to gather together to defend their own lives and to destroy, kill, and annihilate any military force of any people or province that might attack them, along with their children and their wives, and to plunder their goods.

¹²In all the provinces of King Xerxes, ¹³a copy of a writing, which was issued as a law for every province, proclaimed to all the peoples that on one day (the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar), the Jews would be ready to avenge themselves on their enemies.

¹⁴The couriers riding their swift horses went out quickly, spurred on by the word of the king. The decree originated in Susa, the citadel.

¹⁵Mordecai went out from the king's presence, dressed in blue and white royal clothing, with a large gold crown and a purple linen cape. The city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶It was a time of light, gladness, joy, and honor for the Jews.

^a7:10 Chapter 7 reveals the last twist of fate. Esther, after all her delaying, at last exposes Haman's plot, and the king is enraged. Esther is Haman's last chance for mercy. Haman, who has undoubtedly escaped unpunished for many evil deeds, is done in by "bad luck" (a.k.a. divine providence). He lands on top of the queen on the couch just as the king is entering the room (a bad career move in the Persian Empire!). A servant helpfully suggests that there is a nearby gallows available, and Haman dies on the gallows that he made for Mordecai.

^b8:8 Haman is finished, but there is still one more problem to be solved. The royal decree against the Jews still stands. It cannot be undone, or it would look like the king had made a mistake. But because of the lucky roll of the dice, there still is time to ward off the effects of the decree. A new decree gives the Jews time to prepare to defend themselves. Those people in the empire who like to side with the front runner switch to the Jews' side.

^c8:10 The precise meaning of this term is uncertain.

¹⁷In every province and in every city which the message of the king reached, his edict brought gladness and joy to the Jews. There was a feast and a holiday. Many of the peoples of the land declared themselves to be Jews because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

9

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (Adar), the day which the king's proclamation had specified for his decree to be carried out, the day on which the enemies of the Jews hoped to obtain power over them, the situation was reversed so that the Jews would gain power over those who hated them.

²The Jews gathered in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes, to strike against those who were seeking to hurt them. No one opposed them because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon all the people.

³All the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the people who did the work of the king were helping the Jews because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them, ⁴because he was important in the king's house. His reputation was spreading in all the provinces because this man Mordecai was becoming more and more influential.

⁵The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering and destroying them. They did whatever they pleased against their enemies.

⁶In Susa, the citadel, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, ⁷including Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. ¹⁰They killed the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, who had been persecuting the Jews, but they did not seize any plunder.

¹¹On that day the number of those killed in Susa, the citadel, was reported to the king. ¹²The king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa, the citadel, the Jews have killed five hundred men, including the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the provinces of the king? What is your request? It will be granted. What you are still seeking will be done."

¹³Esther said, "If it seems good to the king, let permission be given to the Jews who are in Susa to carry out today's order also tomorrow and that the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows."

¹⁴The king said that this would be done, so the command was given in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged.

¹⁵The Jews in Susa gathered again on the fourteenth of Adar. In Susa they killed three hundred men, but they did not seize any plunder.

¹⁶The rest of the Jews who were in the provinces of the king also gathered and defended themselves, getting relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not seize any plunder. ^a¹⁷This happened on the thirteenth day of Adar. They rested on the fourteenth and had a day of feasting ^b and joyful celebration.

¹⁸But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth and on the fourteenth. They rested on the fifteenth and made it a day of feasting and joyful celebration. ¹⁹Therefore the Jews of the villages, who lived in the unwallied towns of the open countryside, have their day of joyful celebration and feasting on the fourteenth of Adar. It is a holiday, and they send portions of food to their neighbors.

²⁰Mordecai wrote these things down. Then he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Xerxes, both near and far, ²¹to call upon them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar every year, ²²because those were the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies. This was the month which was changed from sorrow to gladness for them and from a day of mourning to a holiday. They were to make those days into days of feasting and joyful celebration, sending portions of food to their neighbors and gifts to the poor.

^a9:16 In two days of fighting and executions the Jews overwhelm their enemies throughout the empire.

The total of 75,000 seems shocking, but it is trivial in comparison with events we have seen in such places as Indonesia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Dafur, and Bosnia. More than that, it is a reminder that God was very serious about sending a Savior, and that he would not let anyone stand in the way of that. "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

^b9:17 The word translated *feasting* emphasizes drinking more than eating.

²³So the Jews completed what they had begun to do and what Mordecai had written to them,
²⁴because Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the one opposed to all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast *pur* (that is, they had cast lots) to crush them and to destroy them.

²⁵However, because Esther came into the presence of the king, he said in writing that Haman's wicked plot, which he had devised against the Jews, was to return on his own head, and they should hang him and his sons on the gallows.

²⁶That is why they called these days Purim (lots) because of the word *pur*. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, because of what they had observed, and because of what had happened to them,
²⁷the Jews established this festival and made a commitment that they, their descendants, and all those associated with them would never fail to observe these two days according to these directions and at their proper time every year.

²⁸These days are to be remembered and preserved in every generation, in every family, province, and city. The Jews should never stop celebrating the days of Purim. Their commemoration should never be set aside by their descendants.

²⁹Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew used their authority to publish this second communication about Purim. ³⁰He sent letters to all the Jews in one hundred twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Xerxes containing words of true peace, ³¹telling them to observe the days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had given them the responsibility to do, and telling them carry out the directions about their fasts and their lamentation just as they and their descendants had agreed to do.

³²The command of Esther established the directions about Purim, and they were written in the book.^a

10

King Xerxes imposed taxes on the land and on the islands and coasts of the sea. ²All his powerful and mighty acts and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king promoted, are they not written in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?

³This was written there because Mordecai the Jew, second in command to King Xerxes, was important for the Jews and popular with large numbers of his brother Israelites, because he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all their descendants.^b

^a9:32 Purim is celebrated in February with costumes (especially hats) and drinking. During the reading of the book of Esther, noise-makers or boos greet every occurrence of Haman's name.

^b10:3 A postscript summarizes the greatness of Xerxes and Mordecai. If Mordecai is the author of the body of the story, this postscript may have been added by another inspired author.