

EZRA

Back From Babylon

AUTHOR	The book does not name its author. Jewish tradition in the Talmud says Ezra wrote it. Ezra tells part of the story himself, I and me, 7:27 to 9:15. Many scholars think the same writer who gave us Chronicles, or a later editor, put Ezra's own memoir together with older records and letters.
EVENTS TOOK PLACE	From Cyrus sending the Jews home, 538 BC, to the temple finished, 515 BC, and then Ezra's trip in 458 BC. Chapter 4 also jumps ahead to about 450 BC.
DATE WRITTEN TO	About 440 to 400 BC, soon after Ezra's time. Some scholars say later. The Jews back in Judah, a small group under Persian rule, wondering if God was still with them.
KEY VERSE	Ezra 7:10. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of Yahweh, to practice it, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.



THE OLDEST COPY OF EZRA

These three small pieces of leather are 4Q117, called 4QEzra, found in Cave 4 at Qumran and copied about 50 to 25 BC. They hold parts of Ezra 4:2 to 6, 4:9 to 11 and 5:17 to 6:5. The biggest piece, in the middle, is in Aramaic. The white strips are modern mounting tissue. It is the only Dead Sea Scroll of Ezra.

You may hear the scrolls hold every book but Esther. That counts Ezra and Nehemiah as one book, as the Hebrew Bible does. No piece of Nehemiah from Qumran has been confirmed. The oldest whole copies are Greek, like Codex Vaticanus, 300s AD. The Aleppo Codex, about 930 AD, lost its pages for Ezra in 1947, so the oldest complete Hebrew copy is the Leningrad Codex, 1008 AD.

Photo Shai Halevi, Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library, Israel Antiquities Authority.

Historical Setting

It starts in Babylon, under the Persian empire, and moves to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. Letters fly back and forth to the Persian kings, and a lost scroll turns up at Ecbatana in Media. Ezra's group camps by the Ahava Canal before the long walk home.

What Was Going Wrong

ENEMIES. The people of the land tried to scare the builders, hired advisers against them and wrote letters to the king 4:4 to 6.

THE WORK STOPPED. A king's order stopped the building, and the house of God sat unfinished for years 4:24.

MIXING WITH OTHER GODS. Many men, even priests and leaders, married women from nations whose worship God had forbidden 9:1 to 2.

The Idiot Proof Summary

Ezra picks up right where 2 Chronicles ended. Cyrus king of Persia tells God's people to go home and rebuild, and about 50,000 do. They build the altar and lay the foundation, but enemies fight them and the work stops for years. Then two prophets stir them up, King Darius backs them, and the temple is finished. Many years later Ezra the scribe comes home with a second group and a love for God's law. He finds the people mixing with nations that worship other gods, and he leads them to turn back. Two trips home, one temple, and one big shake up.

Ezra at a Glance

CH 1 to 2	GO UP Cyrus sends the exiles home.
CH 3	THE ALTAR AND THE FOUNDATION Shouts and tears.
CH 4	ENEMIES Letters to the king, and the work stops.
CH 5 to 6	THE TEMPLE FINISHED Darius finds Cyrus's order.
CH 7 to 8	EZRA COMES HOME A scribe with a king's letter.
CH 9 to 10	THE FOREIGN WIVES Ezra's prayer and a hard choice.

Where Jesus Shows Up

EZRA 3:2 Zerubbabel, who led the rebuilding, was a grandson of King Jehoiachin. He is in Jesus' family line, Matthew 1:12 to 13 and Luke 3:27. God kept David's line alive through the exile.

EZRA 6:15 This is the second temple. Herod later made it bigger, and Jesus taught in it. Hag-gai 2:9 promised its glory would be greater than the first.

EZRA 9:6 Ezra had done nothing wrong, but he prayed our sins, not their sins, and stood with his people before God. Christians see a picture of Jesus, who carried His people's sins.

GOD'S NAMES IN EZRA

Yahweh, the God of Israel, 1:3, the God of heaven, 1:2 and 7:12, the name Persian kings

used, and the God of Jerusalem, 7:19. See Why We Say Yahweh in the Old Testament Introduction.

What to Watch for in Ezra

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE	1:4-5, 1:7-11, 2:1, 2:64-65, 6:14-15, 9:8
THE HEART	6:22, 7:10, 7:27
ARCHAEOLOGY	1:1-3, 4:5-7, 4:10, 5:3
NOTABLE	3:11-13, 8:21-23, 9:6, 9:9
GOD SPEAKING	Words in red are God speaking. Only the words He actually said are red.
BLOODLINE OF CHRIST	Names underlined in red are in the family line of Jesus.

Cool Stuff Most People Miss

PART OF IT IS IN ARAMAIC

Ezra 4:8 to 6:18 and 7:12 to 26 are written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. That was the language of the Persian empire's letters, and later the everyday language Jesus spoke.

ONE BOOK WITH NEHEMIAH

The Hebrew Bible counted Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Christians split them early on, and Hebrew Bibles were printed as two books from the 1500s.

REAL KINGS

Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes are all named on their own monuments, and even the governor Tattenai shows up on a clay tablet. See the Field Notes pages.

How Did It Turn Out?

The temple was finished in 515 BC, and Ezra brought God's law back to the center of the people's life. About 13 years later Nehemiah came to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. The story goes on in Nehemiah.

1

CHAPTER 1 IN 30 SECONDS

Cyrus king of Persia makes an announcement: Any of God's people who want to go home to Jerusalem and rebuild His house, go. The neighbors chip in silver, gold and animals. Cyrus even hands back the temple's gold and silver dishes and bowls that Nebuchadnezzar stole, 5,400 in all, and Sheshbazzar carries them home.

THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS // 2 CHRONICLES 36:22-23; ISAIAH 45:1-25

¹In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfill the word of Yahweh spoken through Jeremiah, Yahweh stirred the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to send a proclamation throughout his kingdom and to put it in writing as follows:

²"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'Yahweh, the God of heaven, who has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, has appointed me to build a house for Him at Jerusalem in Judah.

³Whoever among you belongs to His people, may his God be with him, and may he go to Jerusalem in Judah and build the house of Yahweh, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴And let every survivor, wherever he lives, be assisted by the men of that region with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, along with a freewill offering for the house of God in Jerusalem.'"

■ **EZR 1:1 [FULFILLS]** Even in exile God would not reject Israel but remember His covenant and 9 more ← **LEV 26:44-45; DT 30:1-5; IS 41:25; IS 44:28; IS 46:11; JER 16:14-15; JER 25:11-12; JER 29:10; LAM 4:22; MIC 4:10** p. -

■ **EZR 1:1 [ARCHAEOLOGY]** Records Cyrus's policy of returning exiled peoples and rebuilding temples

■ **EZR 1:1 [NOTE] THE SAME WORDS.** 1:1 to 3 repeats the last words of 2 Chronicles, 36:22 to 23, so the story picks up right where Chronicles ended. Jeremiah had said the exile would last seventy years, Jeremiah 25:11 to 12 and 29:10. See the Big Question pages Why End With Cyrus? and Seventy Years of Rest in 2 Chronicles, p. -

■ **EZR 1:1 [FIELD NOTES]** Cyrus's own clay cylinder says he sent captured peoples home. See The Cyrus Cylinder Field Notes page in 2 Chronicles, p. -

■ **EZR 1:2 [NOTE] CYRUS'S DECREE.** Cyrus says Yahweh gave him the kingdoms of the earth. That is the king's own decree, not God's words, so it stays black, like 2 Chronicles 36:23. Isaiah had named Cyrus long before, Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1.

■ **EZR 1:3 [PROPHECY]** Cyrus let the Jews go home to rebuild, a pattern of return after exile → Many Christians see this in the Jewish return to the land in 1948; others read it differently. - MEDIUM p. -

■ **EZR 1:3 [FULFILLS]** God's people would go out from Babylon ← **IS 48:20** p. -

⁵So the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites—everyone whose spirit God had stirred—prepared to go up and rebuild the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem.

⁶And all their neighbors supported them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuables, in addition to all their freewill offerings.

CYRUS RESTORES THE HOLY VESSELS

⁷King Cyrus also brought out the articles belonging to the house of Yahweh that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the temple of his gods. ⁸Cyrus king of Persia had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. ⁹This was the inventory:

30 gold dishes,
1,000 silver dishes,

29 silver utensils,

¹⁰30 gold bowls,

410 matching silver bowls,
and 1,000 other articles.

¹¹In all, there were 5,400 gold and silver articles. Sheshbazzar brought all these along when the exiles went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

2

CHAPTER 2 IN 30 SECONDS

The guest list. Family by family and town by town, 42,360 people come home, plus servants, singers, horses, mules, camels and a lot of donkeys. A few priests cannot find their family records, so they have to wait. The families give gold and silver for the rebuild.

THE LIST OF RETURNING EXILES // NEHEMIAH 7:4-69

¹Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar its king. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, ²accompanied by Zerubbabel,

■ **EZR 1:7 [FULFILLS]** The temple articles would be carried to Babylon and later brought back ← **JER 27:21-22** p. -

■ **EZR 1:8 [NOTE] SHESHBAZZAR.** The prince of Judah who carried the temple bowls home. See the Big Question pages Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel.

Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

This is the count of the men of Israel:

³ the descendants of Parosh, 2,172;

⁴ the descendants of Shephatiah, 372;

⁵ the descendants of Arah, 775;

⁶ the descendants of Pahath-moab (through the line of Jeshua and Joab), 2,812;

⁷ the descendants of Elam, 1,254;

⁸ the descendants of Zattu, 945;

⁹ the descendants of Zaccai, 760;

¹⁰ the descendants of Bani, 642;

¹¹ the descendants of Bebai, 623;

¹² the descendants of Azgad, 1,222;

¹³ the descendants of Adonikam, 666;

¹⁴ the descendants of Bigvai, 2,056;

¹⁵ the descendants of Adin, 454;

¹⁶ the descendants of Ater (through Hezekiah), 98;

¹⁷ the descendants of Bezai, 323;

¹⁸ the descendants of Jorah, 112;

¹⁹ the descendants of Hashum, 223;

²⁰ the descendants of Gibbar, 95;

²¹ the men of Bethlehem, 123;

²² the men of Netophah, 56;

²³ the men of Anathoth, 128;

²⁴ the descendants of Azmaveth, 42;

²⁵ the men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743;

²⁶ the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;

²⁷ the men of Michmash, 122;

²⁸ the men of Bethel and Ai, 223;

²⁹ the descendants of Nebo, 52;

³⁰ the descendants of Magbish, 156;

³¹ the descendants of the other Elam, 1,254;

³² the descendants of Harim, 320;

³³ the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 725;

³⁴ the men of Jericho, 345;

³⁵ and the descendants of Senaah, 3,630.

³⁶ The priests:

The descendants of Jedaiah (through the house of Jeshua), 973;

³⁷ the descendants of Immer, 1,052;

³⁸ the descendants of Pashhur, 1,247;

³⁹ and the descendants of Harim, 1,017.

⁴⁰ The Levites:

the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel (through the line of Hodaviah), 74.

⁴¹ The singers:

the descendants of Asaph, 128.

⁴² The gatekeepers:

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, 139 in all.

⁴³ The temple servants:

the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha, the descendants of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴ the descendants of Keros, the descendants of Siaha, the descendants of Padon, ⁴⁵ the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah, the descendants of Akkub, ⁴⁶ the descendants of Hagab, the descendants of Shalmai, the descendants of Hanan, ⁴⁷ the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar, the descendants of Reaiah, ⁴⁸ the descendants of Rezin, the descendants of Nekoda, the descendants of Gazzam, ⁴⁹ the descendants of Uzza, the descendants of Paseah, the descendants of Besai, ⁵⁰ the descendants of Asnah, the descendants of Meunim, the descendants of Nephusim, ⁵¹ the descendants of Bakbuk, the descendants of Hakupha, the descendants of Harhur, ⁵² the descendants of Bazluth, the descendants of Mehida, the descendants of Harsha,

■ EZR 2:1 [FULFILLS] God's people would go out from Babylon ← IS 48:20 p.~

■ EZR 2:1 [FULFILLS] A new exodus from the land of the north would outshine the exodus from Egypt ← JER 16:14-15 · MEDIUM p.~

■ EZR 2:2 [NOTE] NOT THOSE TWO. Most think this Nehemiah and this Mordecai are not the famous men of the books of Nehemiah and Esther. Those men lived many years later.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE

⁵³ the descendants of Barkos,
the descendants of Sisera,
the descendants of Temah,
⁵⁴ the descendants of Nezhiah,
and the descendants of Hatipha.
⁵⁵ The descendants of the servants of
Solomon:
the descendants of Sotai,
the descendants of Hassophereth,
the descendants of Peruda,
⁵⁶ the descendants of Jaala,
the descendants of Darkon,
the descendants of Giddel,
⁵⁷ the descendants of Shephatiah,
the descendants of Hattil,
the descendants of Pochereth-hazze-
baim,
and the descendants of Ami.
⁵⁸ The temple servants and descendants
of the servants of Solomon numbered
392 in all.
⁵⁹ The following came up from Tel-melah,
Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer,
but they could not prove that their families
were descended from Israel:
⁶⁰ the descendants of Delaiah,
the descendants of Tobiah,
and the descendants of Nekoda,
652 in all.
⁶¹ And from among the priests: the de-
scendants of Hobaiah,
the descendants of Hakkoz,
and the descendants of Barzillai (who had
married a daughter of Barzillai the
Gileadite and was called by their
name).
⁶² These men searched for their family
records, but they could not find them and
so were excluded from the priesthood as
unclean. ⁶³ The governor ordered them
not to eat the most holy things until there
was a priest to consult the Urim and
Thummim.

■ **EZR 2:63 [NOTE] THE URIM AND THUMMIM.** The priest used them to ask God yes or no questions, Exodus 28:30. The men without records had to wait for a priest who could ask God.

■ **EZR 2:64 [FULFILLS]** Only a remnant of Israel would re-
turn ← IS 10:21–22 p. 11

■ **EZR 2:64 [NOTE] THE TOTAL.** The family counts in this chapter add up to 29,818, but the total is 42,360. Ne-

⁶⁴ The whole assembly numbered 42,360,
⁶⁵ in addition to their 7,337 menservants
and maidservants, as well as their 200
male and female singers. ⁶⁶ They had 736
horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷ 435 camels, and
6,720 donkeys.

OFFERINGS BY THE EXILES // EXODUS 38:21–31;
NEHEMIAH 7:70–73

⁶⁸ When they arrived at the house of Yah-
weh in Jerusalem, some of the heads of
the families gave freewill offerings to re-
build the house of God on its original site.
⁶⁹ According to their ability, they gave to
the treasury for this work 61,000 gold
coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100
priestly garments.

⁷⁰ So the priests, the Levites, the singers,
the gatekeepers, and the temple servants,
along with some of the people, settled in
their own towns; and the rest of the Is-
raelites settled in their towns.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH
FOR THE COINS

PERSIAN GOLD COINS

EZRA 2:69 · 8:27 · NEHEMIAH 7:70 TO 72 · 1 CHRONI-
CLES 29:7



A Persian gold coin showing the king with a bow and a spear, 500 to 400 BC. It is about half an inch across. Erlangen University, Germany. Photo ArchaiOptix, CC BY SA 4.0.

hemiah 7:66 has the same total. Many think the total also counts women, or people whose families are not listed.

■ **EZR 2:69 [FIELD NOTES]** See the Persian Gold Coins Field Notes page.

BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

WHAT IT IS

A small, thick gold coin made by the kings of Persia. On one side a king, down on one knee as if running, holds a bow and a spear. The back has only a rough punch mark. The Greeks called the coins archers, and many think they named them after King Darius.

HOW OLD IT IS

This one was made between 500 and 400 BC. Coins like it were first made under Darius I, about 515 BC, and were used until Alexander the Great beat Persia in 330 BC.

HOW MUCH GOLD

Each coin weighs a little less than a third of an ounce. The 61,000 gold coins in 2:69 would be more than 1,000 pounds of gold.

A WORD FROM A LATER TIME

When the first group came home in 538 BC, these coins may not have been made yet. Many think the writer counted the gift in the coins of his own day, the way we might say an old gift was worth so many dollars. 1 Chronicles 29:7 does the same with David's gift.

WHERE IT IS TODAY

This coin is in the collection of the University of Erlangen in Germany. Many others are in museums around the world.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

This coin was not part of the gift in Ezra. It shows the kind of gold coin Persia made and the writer's readers knew.

3

CHAPTER 3 IN 30 SECONDS

First thing back, they build the altar, even though they are scared of the locals. The next spring they lay the temple's foundation. The young people shout for joy. The old people who remember Solomon's temple cry out loud. It is so noisy nobody can tell which is which.

SACRIFICES RESTORED

¹By the seventh month, the Israelites had settled in their towns, and the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem.

²Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests, along with Zerubbabel son of

Shealtiel and his associates, began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. ³They set up the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to Yahweh—both the morning and evening burnt offerings—even though they feared the people of the land.

⁴They also celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles in accordance with what is written, and they offered burnt offerings daily based on the number prescribed for each day.

⁵After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings and those for New Moons and for all the appointed sacred feasts of Yahweh, as well as all the freewill offerings brought to Yahweh.

⁶On the first day of the seventh month, the Israelites began to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh, although the foundation of the temple of Yahweh had not been laid. ⁷They gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to Joppa by sea, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia.

TEMPLE RESTORATION BEGINS

⁸In the second month of the second year after they had arrived at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jozadak, and the rest of their associates including the priests, the Levites, and all who had returned to Jerusalem from the captivity, began the work. They appointed Levites twenty years of age or older to supervise the construction of the house of Yahweh. ⁹So Jeshua and his sons and brothers, Kadmiel and his sons (descendants of Yehudah), and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers—all Levites—joined together to supervise those working on the house of God.

■ EZR 3:2 [NOTE] ZERUBBABEL. He was a grandson of King Jehoiachin, 1 Chronicles 3:17 to 19, so David's royal line was still alive. He is in Jesus' family line, Matthew 1:12 to 13 and Luke 3:27, so his name is underlined.

NOTABLE BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

¹⁰ When the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of Yahweh, the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their positions to praise Yahweh, as David king of Israel had prescribed. ¹¹ And they sang responsively with praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh:

"For He is good;
for His loving devotion to Israel endures forever."

Then all the people gave a great shout of praise to Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh had been laid.

¹² But many of the older priests, Levites, and family heads who had seen the first temple wept loudly when they saw the foundation of this temple. Still, many others shouted joyfully. ¹³ The people could not distinguish the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people were making so much noise. And the sound was heard from afar.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

WHY DID THE OLD MEN WEEP?

The Scene

EZRA 3:10 TO 13 · HAGGAI 2:1 TO 9

THE SCENE

The builders laid the foundation of the new temple. The priests blew trumpets, the Levites played cymbals, and everyone sang, He is good; His loving devotion endures forever, 3:10 to 11.

TWO SOUNDS

The people gave a great shout of joy. But many of the older priests, Levites and family heads wept out loud. The noise was so mixed that no one could tell the shouting from the crying, 3:12 to 13.

WHO WAS OLD ENOUGH?

Solomon's temple burned in 586 BC, and this foundation was laid about 536 BC.

■ **EZR 3:11 [NOTABLE]** The young people shouted for joy and the old people cried, and it was so loud nobody could tell which was which. See the Big Question pages Why Did the Old Men Weep?

■ **EZR 3:12 [NOTE] WHY THEY WEPT.** See the Big Question pages Why Did the Old Men Weep?

So anyone who remembered the first temple was now at least in his sixties.

WHAT THEY REMEMBERED

Solomon's temple was covered with gold and filled with treasures, 1 Kings 6. The new one had no king, little money, and enemies all around.

WHAT HAGGAI SAID

About 16 years later the prophet Haggai asked, Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem like nothing to you? Haggai 2:3.

THE QUESTION

Why did the old men weep while the young men shouted?

Every View

HAGGAI 2:3 · 2:9 · ZECHARIAH 4:10 · JOHN 2:19 TO 21

VIEW 1: IT WAS SO SMALL

Most say they wept because the new temple looked poor next to Solomon's. Jewish tradition in the Talmud says five things were missing from the second temple, among them the ark and the glory cloud.

VIEW 2: TEARS OF JOY

Some think the old men wept for joy. They never thought they would see a temple again. The two sounds mixed because both were full hearts.

VIEW 3: TEARS OF SORROW FOR SIN

Others think the old men remembered why the first temple burned. Their own generation's sin had brought the exile, 2 Chronicles 36:14 to 16.

THE PROMISE

God answered through Haggai: The glory of this latter house will be greater than the former, Haggai 2:9. Zechariah said, Who has despised the day of small things? Zechariah 4:10.

HOW IT CAME TRUE

Christians believe the promise came true when Jesus walked and taught in this same temple, later made bigger by Herod, John 2:19 to 21. Many Jewish teachers point to Herod's grand rebuild, or to a temple still to come.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

Joy and grief can be in the same room. God was with them even when it looked small.

ARCHAEOLOGY BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

4

CHAPTER 4 IN 30 SECONDS

The neighbors say, Let us help. Zerubbabel says, No thanks. So they spend the next years trying to stop the work, hiring advisers and writing letters to the king. Years later one letter works, and King Artaxerxes stops the building of the city. Back at the start, the temple work had sat still until Darius was king.

ADVERSARIES HINDER THE WORK

¹When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for Yahweh, the God of Israel, ² they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of the families, saying, "Let us build with you because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to Him since the time of King Esar-haddon of Assyria, who brought us here."

³But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other heads of the families of Israel replied, "You have no part with us in building a house for our God, since we alone must build it for Yahweh, the God of Israel, as Cyrus king of Persia has commanded us."

⁴Then the people of the land set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to build. ⁵They hired counselors against them to frustrate their plans throughout the reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

OPPOSITION UNDER XERXES AND ARTAXERXES

⁶At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, an accusation was lodged against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

⁷And in the days of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of his associates wrote a letter to

Artaxerxes. It was written in Aramaic and then translated.

⁸Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote the letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows:

⁹From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates—the judges and officials over Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, ¹⁰and the rest of the peoples whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and elsewhere west of the Euphrates.

¹¹(This is the text of the letter they sent to him.)

To King Artaxerxes,

From your servants, the men west of the Euphrates:

¹²Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came from you to us have returned to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring its walls and repairing its foundations.

¹³Let it now be known to the king that if that city is rebuilt and its walls are restored, they will not pay tribute, duty, or toll, and the royal treasury will suffer.

¹⁴Now because we are in the service of the palace and it is not fitting for us to allow the king to be dishonored, we have sent to inform the king ¹⁵that a search should be made of the record books of your fathers. In these books you will discover and verify that the city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, inciting sedition from ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed.

■ EZR 4:2 [NOTE] ESAR HADDON. The king of Assyria who moved these people into the land, about 150 years earlier. 2 Kings 17:24 to 41 tells how an earlier group of newcomers worshiped Yahweh and their own gods too.

■ EZR 4:5 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Darius the Great of Persia is named on his Behistun Inscription and on thousands of Persepolis tablets, see the Behistun Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.10

■ EZR 4:6 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Xerxes of Persia, called Ahasuerus in Hebrew, is named in his own inscriptions at Persepolis and Van, see the Xerxes Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.11

■ EZR 4:6 [NOTE] XERXES. The Hebrew says Ahasuerus, the same king as in the book of Esther. Chapter 4 jumps ahead in time here. See the Big Question pages Why Does Chapter 4 Jump?

■ EZR 4:7 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Artaxerxes I of Persia is named in his own inscriptions and in dated Elephantine papyri, see the Artaxerxes Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.12

■ EZR 4:8 [NOTE] ARAMAIC. From here to 6:18 the book is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. Aramaic was the language the Persian empire used for its letters, and 4:7 says the letter was written in Aramaic. Jesus spoke Aramaic too.

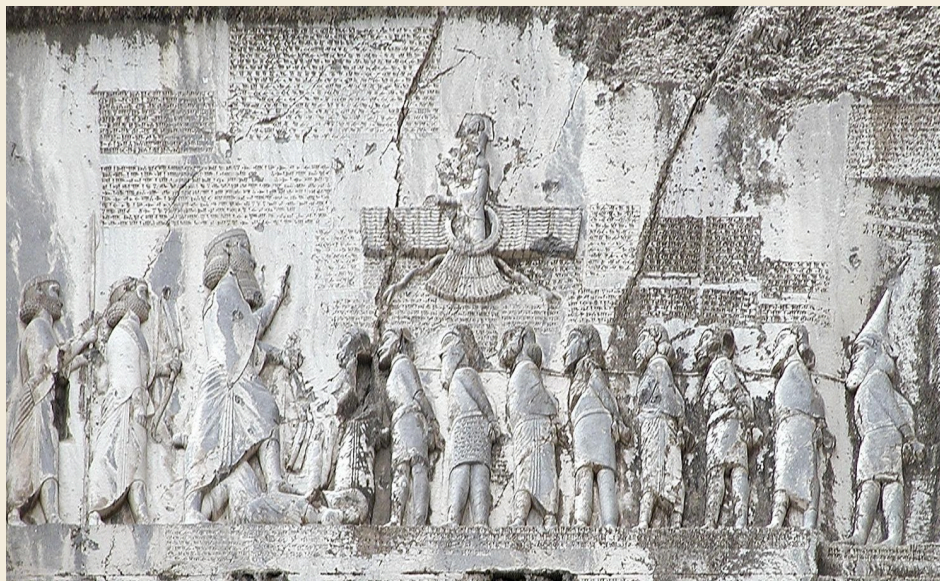
■ EZR 4:10 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Ashurbanipal of Assyria is named on his own prisms, tablets and palace reliefs from Nineveh

■ EZR 4:10 [NOTE] ASHURBANIPAL. The Aramaic says Os-nappar. Most scholars think it is Ashurbanipal, the last great king of Assyria, who ruled after Esar haddon.

FIELD NOTES • ARCHAEOLOGY • CONFIDENCE: HIGH

BEHISTUN

EZRA 4:5 • 4:24 • 5:5 TO 6:15 • HAGGAI 1:1 • ZECHARIAH 1:1



King Darius, left, steps on a rebel, with nine more rebels tied together in front of him. The writing around them tells his story in three languages. Behistun, Iran. Photo Hara1603, public domain.

WHAT IT IS

A giant carving cut into a cliff on Mount Behistun in western Iran, high above the road. It shows King Darius and the rebels he beat. The writing tells how he became king, in three languages: Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian.

HOW OLD IT IS

About 520 BC, in the first years of Darius's reign. That is the same time Haggai and Zechariah were preaching and the temple work started again.

WHERE AND WHEN FOUND

It never moved. Henry Rawlinson, a British officer, climbed the cliff on ropes and ladders and copied it between 1835 and 1847. It is still there today.

THE KEY TO CUNEIFORM

Like the Rosetta Stone did for Egypt, Behistun helped scholars learn to read Babylonian wedge writing. That opened up thousands of Assyrian and Babylonian records that name Bible kings.

DARIUS IN EZRA

The work stopped until his second year, 4:24. Tattenai wrote to him, he searched the archives and found Cyrus's order, and

he paid for the rest of the temple from his taxes, 6:1 to 12. It was finished in his sixth year, 6:15.

HIS WAY WITH REBELS

On this rock Darius says he impaled rebel leaders. His decree in 6:11 warns of the same thing for anyone who changed it.

AN ARAMAIC COPY

A copy of the same story in Aramaic, the language of Ezra 4:8 to 6:18, was found on papyrus at Elephantine, an island in the Nile where Jews served in a Persian fort. Darius sent his story across the empire, just as Persian kings sent letters in Ezra.

OUT OF REACH

The carving is high up the cliff, and many think the path up to it was cut away when it was finished, so no one could climb up and spoil it.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

Behistun never mentions the Jews or the temple. It shows that Darius, his reign and his ways were real, just as Ezra describes.

¹⁶ We advise the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are restored, you will have no dominion west of the Euphrates.

THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES

¹⁷ Then the king sent this reply:

To Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of your associates living in Samaria and elsewhere in the region west of the Euphrates:

Greetings.

¹⁸ The letter you sent us has been translated and read in my presence. ¹⁹ I issued a decree, and a search was conducted. It was discovered that this city has revolted against kings from ancient times, engaging in rebellion and sedition. ²⁰ And mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem and exercised authority over the whole region west of the Euphrates; and tribute, duty, and toll were paid to them.

²¹ Now, therefore, issue an order for these men to stop, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order. ²² See that you do not neglect this matter. Why allow this threat to increase and the royal interests to suffer?

²³ When the text of the letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and forcibly stopped them.

²⁴ Thus the construction of the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH

XERXES

EZRA 4:6 · ESTHER 1:1 TO 2 · DANIEL 11:2



Xerxes's inscription on the cliff at Van, Turkey, in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian. Photo Björn Christian Törresen, CC BY SA 3.0.

WHAT IT IS

A large inscription carved into the rock of the castle hill at Van, in eastern Turkey, in three languages. In it Xerxes says his father Darius had a smooth place cut in the rock but left it empty, so Xerxes had his own words written there.

HOW OLD IT IS

From the reign of Xerxes, 486 to 465 BC.

WHERE IT IS

Still on the cliff at Van. Xerxes's name is also carved on the Gate of All Nations at Persepolis and on stone jars carried as far as the coast of Turkey.

ONE KING, THREE NAMES

In Old Persian he was Xshayarsha. The Greeks wrote Xerxes, and the Hebrew wrote Ahasuerus, the name in the KJV. Most scholars agree they are the same king.

WHO WAS XERXES?

The son of Darius. He invaded Greece in 480 BC and lost at sea at Salamis. The Greek writer Herodotus tells all about him.

IN EZRA

Just one verse, 4:6. At the start of his reign the enemies sent him an accusation against Judah. The book of Esther is all about him and his queen.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

No Persian record mentions the accusation in 4:6. It shows that Xerxes, son of

Darius, ruled where and when Ezra puts him.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH
FOR THE KING, DEBATED FOR EZRA 7

ARTAXERXES

EZRA 4:7 TO 23 · 7:1 TO 26 · NEHEMIAH 2:1 TO 8



A silver bowl with one line of Old Persian around its rim naming Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, son of Darius. National Museum of Asian Art, Washington. Photo Daderot, CC0.

WHAT IT IS

A silver drinking bowl. The line around its rim says it was made in the house of Artaxerxes the great king, son of Xerxes the king, son of Darius the king. Those are the same three kings as Ezra 4:5 to 7: grandson, son and grandfather.

HOW OLD IT IS

From the reign of Artaxerxes I, 465 to 424 BC.

WHERE IT IS

In the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, DC. Where it was found is not known for sure. A few bowls like it are known.

WHO WAS HE?

The son of Xerxes. He ruled 41 years. The Greeks called him Longhand, and Plutarch says his right hand was longer than his left.

IN EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

Enemies wrote him a letter, and he stopped work on the walls, 4:7 to 23. Ezra came home with his letter in his seventh year, 7:7. Nehemiah was his

cupbearer in his twentieth year, Nehemiah 2:1.

MORE FINDS

Letters on papyrus from a Jewish colony at Elephantine in Egypt are dated by his years. One later letter, from 407 BC, names Johanan the high priest and the sons of Sanballat.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

The bowl does not mention the Jews. There were at least three kings named Artaxerxes, and scholars debate which one sent Ezra. See Why Does Chapter 4 Jump?

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

WHY DOES CHAPTER 4 JUMP?

The Puzzle

EZRA 4:1 TO 24 · 6:14 · 7:1

THE PUZZLE

Chapter 4 is about enemies, but it jumps around in time. Then 4:24 goes back to where it started. Here are the kings in order.

CYRUS

4:1 to 5. The enemies try to scare the builders from about 536 BC on, all through Cyrus's reign.

DARIUS

4:5 names Darius, who began to rule in 522 BC. The temple work starts again in his second year, 520 BC, 4:24.

XERXES

4:6. At the start of his reign, 486 BC, the enemies write an accusation.

ARTAXERXES

4:7 to 23. In his reign, after 465 BC, they write a letter about the WALLS of the city, not the temple. The king orders the work stopped.

BACK TO DARIUS

4:24 says the house of God stood still until Darius's second year. That jumps back about 70 years, to the time of 4:5.

THE LANGUAGE

The letter in 4:8 starts the first part of Ezra written in Aramaic. It goes on to 6:18.

ARCHAEOLOGY BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

Every View

EZRA 7:7 TO 8 · NEHEMIAH 2:1 · 8:9 · 12:26

VIEW 1: GROUPED BY TOPIC

Most scholars, and most Bible teachers, say the writer gathered all the opposition into one chapter, like a file folder, to show the enemies kept fighting God's people for nearly 90 years. Then 4:24 picks the main story back up.

VIEW 2: OTHER NAMES

Some older writers kept it in order by saying the kings in 4:6 to 23 are other names for the kings between Cyrus and Darius. Josephus, about 93 AD, calls the king of 4:7 Cambyses. Few hold this today.

WHICH ARTAXERXES SENT EZRA?

Ezra came in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, 7:7. Most say Artaxerxes I, so Ezra came in 458 BC, before Nehemiah in 445 BC. Some say Artaxerxes II, so Ezra came in 398 BC, after Nehemiah. Nehemiah 8:9 and 12:26 put Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem together, which fits the first view.

WHY TELL IT THIS WAY?

The first readers lived after all these kings. Seeing the whole fight in one place told them their own troubles were not new, and that God had carried His people through every one.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

Opposition kept coming, but God's work got done. The temple was finished in 515 BC, and the walls later under Nehemiah.

5

CHAPTER 5 IN 30 SECONDS

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah fire everyone up, and the building starts again. The governor Tattenai shows up and asks, Who said you could do this? The elders tell him the whole story, and he writes to King Darius to check.

TEMPLE REBUILDING RESUMES // HAGGAI 1:1-11

¹Later, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. ²Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua

son of Jozadak rose up and began to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

³At that time Tattenai the governor of the region west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates went to the Jews and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?"

⁴They also asked, "What are the names of the men who are constructing this building?"

⁵But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, so that they were not stopped until a report was sent to Darius and written instructions about this matter were returned.

TATTENAI'S LETTER TO DARIUS

⁶This is the text of the letter that Tattenai the governor of the region west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates, the officials in the region, sent to King Darius. ⁷The report they sent him read as follows:

To King Darius:

All peace.

⁸Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. The people are rebuilding it with large stones and placing timbers in the walls. This work is being carried out diligently and is prospering in their hands.

⁹So we questioned the elders and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?"

¹⁰We also asked for their names, so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information.

¹¹And this is the answer they returned:

"We are servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed.

¹²But since our fathers angered the God

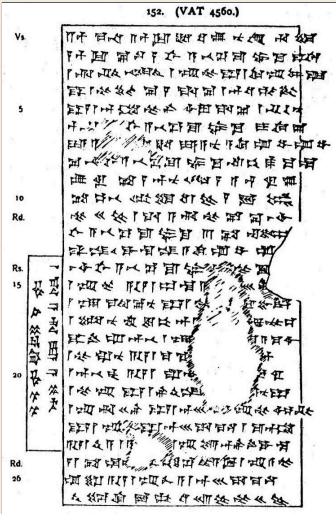
■ **EZR 5:1 [NOTE] HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH.** Their own books are in the Bible. Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1 are dated to the second year of Darius, 520 BC. This verse only says they prophesied, so nothing here prints red.

■ **EZR 5:3 [ARCHAEOLOGY]** A Babylonian tablet from 502 BC names Tattenai, governor of Across the River, see the Tattenai Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.14

FIELD NOTES • ARCHAEOLOGY • CONFIDENCE: HIGH

TATTENAI

EZRA 5:3 TO 6:13



A drawing of the tablet's writing, made by Arthur Ungnad from the tablet itself and printed in 1907. The tablet is in Berlin. Public domain.

WHAT IT IS

A small clay tablet in Babylonian. It is an IOU, a note about money owed. One of the witnesses is called a servant of Tattannu, governor of Across the River. Across the River was the Persian name for the land west of the Euphrates, the same words used in 5:3.

HOW OLD IT IS

It is dated to the twentieth year of Darius, which is June 5, 502 BC. That is about 18 years after Tattenai questioned the builders in Jerusalem.

WHERE IT IS

In the Near East Museum in Berlin. Arthur Ungnad drew its writing in 1907, and the scholar A. T. Olmstead connected it to Ezra in 1944. No free photo of the tablet itself could be found, so the page shows Ungnad's drawing.

WHO WAS TATTENAI?

Not a king, but a Persian governor over a huge region that included Judah. He did not try to stop the work. He asked questions, wrote to the king and waited, 5:5. When Darius answered, he obeyed diligently, 6:13.

of heaven, He delivered them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean who destroyed this temple and carried away the people to Babylon.

¹³In the first year of his reign, however, Cyrus king of Babylon issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. ¹⁴He also removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles belonging to the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken and carried there from the temple in Jerusalem. King Cyrus gave these articles to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he appointed governor ¹⁵and instructed, 'Take these articles, put them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its original site.'

¹⁶So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been under construction, but it has not yet been completed."

¹⁷Now, therefore, if it pleases the king, let a search be made of the royal archives in Babylon to see if King Cyrus did indeed issue a decree to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter.

6

CHAPTER 6 IN 30 SECONDS

Darius has the archives searched, and Cyrus's old order turns up in a scroll at Ecbatana. Darius writes back: Leave them alone, and pay them from my taxes. The temple is finished in his sixth year. They dedicate it with joy and keep the Passover.

THE DECREE OF DARIUS

¹Thus King Darius ordered a search of the archives stored in the treasury of Babylon.

²And a scroll was found in the fortress of Ecbatana, in the province of Media, with the following written on it:

Memorandum:

■ EZR 5:14 [NOTE] GOVERNOR. The elders say Cyrus made Sheshbazzar governor. See the Big Question pages Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel.

■ EZR 6:2 [NOTE] ECBATANA. A Persian capital in the mountains of Media, today Hamadan in Iran. The kings spent the hot summers there, so it makes sense that a copy of Cyrus's order was kept there and not in Babylon.

³In the first year of King Cyrus, he issued a decree concerning the house of God in Jerusalem:

Let the house be rebuilt as a place for offering sacrifices, and let its foundations be firmly laid. It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide, ⁴with three layers of cut stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid from the royal treasury.

⁵Furthermore, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and carried to Babylon, must also be returned to the temple in Jerusalem and deposited in the house of God.

⁶Therefore Darius decreed:

To Tattenai governor of the region west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and your associates and officials in the region:

You must stay away from that place! ⁷

Leave this work on the house of God alone. Let the governor and elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its original site.

⁸I hereby decree what you must do for these elders of the Jews who are rebuilding this house of God:

The cost is to be paid in full to these men from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces west of the Euphrates, so that the work will not be hindered. ⁹Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, and lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, as well as wheat, salt, wine, and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given to them daily without fail. ¹⁰Then they will be able to offer sacrifices of a sweet aroma to the God of heaven and to pray for the lives of the king and his sons.

■ **EZR 6:3 [TEXT] HOW BIG?** In the Aramaic the numbers are 60 and 60, about 90 feet. Solomon's temple was about 45 feet high, 30 in the Hebrew, 1 Kings 6:2. Many think these numbers were the most the king would pay for, not the real size.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

SHESHBAZZAR AND ZERUBBABEL

Two Leaders

EZRA 1:8 TO 11 · 2:2 · 3:8 TO 10 · 5:14 TO 16

SHESHBAZZAR

He is called the prince of Judah, 1:8. Cyrus gave him the temple bowls and made him governor, 5:14. The elders say he laid the foundation of the house of God, 5:16.

ZERUBBABEL

He leads the list of the people who came home, 2:2. He and Jeshua build the altar and lay the foundation, 3:2 and 3:8 to 10. Haggai 1:1 calls him governor of Judah.

THE PUZZLE

Both men lead, both are governors, and both lay the foundation. Sheshbazzar disappears after chapter 1, except for the elders' letter in chapter 5.

TWO BABYLONIAN NAMES

Both names are Babylonian. Zerubbabel probably means seed of Babylon. Jews in exile often had a second name, like Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar.

1 ESDRAS

An old Greek book called 1 Esdras retells 2 Chronicles 35 to Ezra 10 and part of Nehemiah 8. It names both men and adds a story of Zerubbabel winning a contest at the Persian court. It is in Greek Bibles but not in the Hebrew or most Protestant Bibles.

Every View

1 CHRONICLES 3:17 TO 19 · HAGGAI 1:1 · 2:23 · MATTHEW 1:12

VIEW 1: ONE MAN, TWO NAMES

Some say Sheshbazzar was Zerubbabel's Babylonian name. Both lead the return and lay the foundation, so they could be the same man.

VIEW 2: TWO MEN

Most scholars today say they were two men. Sheshbazzar led the first group in 538 BC as Cyrus's official. Zerubbabel came then or soon after and led the real building. The elders named Sheshbazzar in 5:16 because he was the one Cyrus had appointed. Some think Sheshbazzar is Shenazzar, a son of King Jehoiachin

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE THE HEART

and Zerubbabel's uncle, 1 Chronicles 3:18.

WHOSE SON?

Ezra, Haggai, Matthew and Luke call Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel. 1 Chronicles 3:19 calls him the son of Pedaiah, Shealtiel's brother. Some think Shealtiel died without a son, so his brother's son counted as his, Deuteronomy 25:5 to 6. Others think Shealtiel raised him.

THE SIGNET RING

God had said King Jehoiachin, called Coniah, would be pulled off like a signet ring, Jeremiah 22:24. Through Haggai God told Zerubbabel, I will make you like My signet ring, Haggai 2:23. The royal line was back on God's hand, and it led to Jesus, Matthew 1:12.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

God used both names to get His people home and His house rebuilt.

¹¹ I also decree that if any man interferes with this directive, a beam is to be torn from his house and raised up, and he is to be impaled on it. And his own house shall be made a pile of rubble for this offense.

¹² May God, who has caused His Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to alter this decree or to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued the decree. Let it be carried out with diligence.

THE TEMPLE COMPLETED

¹³ In response, Tattenai the governor of the region west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates diligently carried out what King Darius had decreed.

¹⁴ So the Jewish elders built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah son of Iddo.

They finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. ¹⁵ And this temple was

completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

¹⁶ Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.

¹⁷ For the dedication of the house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and a sin offering for all Israel of twelve male goats, one for each tribe of Israel.

¹⁸ They also appointed the priests by their divisions and the Levites by their groups to the service of God in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

THE RETURNED EXILES KEEP THE PASSOVER

¹⁹ On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles kept the Passover. ²⁰ All the priests and Levites had purified themselves and were ceremonially clean.

And the Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their priestly brothers, and for themselves. ²¹ The Israelites who had returned from exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel.

²² For seven days they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread with joy, because Yahweh had made them joyful and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to strengthen their hands in the work on the house of the God of Israel.

■ **EZR 6:11 [NOTE] IMPALED.** Darius meant it. On the Behistun cliff he says he impaled rebel leaders. See the Behistun Field Notes page.

■ **EZR 6:14 [FULFILLS]** My house shall be built in Jerusalem; My cities shall again spread through prosperity ← ZECH 1:16-17 p.---

■ **EZR 6:14 [FULFILLS]** Zerubbabel laid the temple foundation and his hands would also finish it ← ZECH 4:9 p.---

■ **EZR 6:14 [NOTE] ARTAXERXES TOO.** Artaxerxes ruled after the temple was done, but he gave gifts for it later, 7:15 to 24, so his name is listed with the kings who helped.

■ **EZR 6:15 [NOTE] FINISHED.** The month of Adar in Darius's sixth year was early 515 BC. The first temple burned in 586 BC, so the house of God lay in ruins about seventy years.

■ **EZR 6:22 [HEART]** Yahweh made them joyful and turned the king's heart toward them, so he helped with God's house.

■ **EZR 6:22 [NOTE] KING OF ASSYRIA.** This is Darius of Persia. He ruled the old land of Assyria, so the writer gives him the old title.

THE HEART

7

CHAPTER 7 IN 30 SECONDS

Many years later, Ezra the priest and scribe shows up. He had set his heart to study God's law, live it and teach it. King Artaxerxes gives him a letter, money and power to teach the law. Ezra blesses God, who put it in the king's heart.

EZRA ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM

¹Many years later, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra 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 chief priest— ⁶this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses, which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given.

The king had granted Ezra all his requests, for the hand of Yahweh his God was upon him. ⁷So in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, he went up to Jerusalem with some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants.

⁸Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. ⁹He had begun the journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was upon him. ¹⁰For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of Yahweh, to practice it, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

ARTAXERXES' LETTER FOR EZRA

¹¹This is the text of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest and scribe, an expert in the commandments and statutes of Yahweh to Israel:

¹²Artaxerxes, king of kings.

To Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven:

Greetings.

¹³I hereby decree that any volunteers among the Israelites in my kingdom, including the priests and Levites, may go up with you to Jerusalem. ¹⁴You are sent by the king and his seven counselors to evaluate Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.

¹⁵Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶together with all the silver and gold you may find in all the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests to the house of their God in Jerusalem. ¹⁷With this money, therefore, you are to buy as many bulls, rams, and lambs as needed, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and offer them on the altar at the house of your God in Jerusalem. ¹⁸You and your brothers may do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, according to the will of your God.

¹⁹You must deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles given to you for the service of the house of your God. ²⁰And if anything else is needed for the house of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may pay for it from the royal treasury.

²¹I, King Artaxerxes, decree to all the treasurers west of the Euphrates: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it must be provided promptly, ²²up to 7,500 pounds of silver, 600 bushels of wheat, 550 gallons of wine, 550 gallons of olive oil, and salt without limit. ²³Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven must be done diligently for His house. For why should wrath fall on the realm of the king

■ EZR 7:1 [NOTE] MANY YEARS LATER. About 57 years pass between 6:22 and 7:1. The story of Esther happens in this gap. Which Artaxerxes sent Ezra? See the Big Question pages Why Does Chapter 4 Jump?

■ EZR 7:6 [NOTE] A SCRIBE. Not just a man who copied things. Ezra was an expert who studied and taught God's law. Jewish tradition remembers him as a second Moses.

■ EZR 7:10 [HEART] Ezra set his heart to study God's law, to do it, and to teach it. Know it, live it, share it.

■ EZR 7:12 [NOTE] ARAMAIC AGAIN. The king's letter, 7:12 to 26, is in Aramaic. King of kings was the Persian king's title. Revelation 19:16 gives it to Jesus.

THE HEART BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

and his sons? ²⁴ And be advised that you have no authority to impose tribute, duty, or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

²⁵ And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God, which you possess, are to appoint magistrates and judges to judge all the people west of the Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach these laws to anyone who does not know them. ²⁶ If anyone does not keep the law of your God and the law of the king, let a strict judgment be executed against him, whether death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

EZRA BLESSES GOD

²⁷ Blessed be Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who has put into the heart of the king to so honor the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem, ²⁸ and who has shown me favor before the king, his counselors, and all his powerful officials.

And because the hand of Yahweh my God was upon me, I took courage and gathered the leaders of Israel to return with me.

8

CHAPTER 8 IN 30 SECONDS

Ezra gathers a second group to go home and finds no Levites, so he sends for some. He is too embarrassed to ask the king for soldiers, so they fast and pray instead. They carry tons of silver and gold all the way to Jerusalem, and not one coin goes missing.

THE EXILES WHO RETURNED WITH EZRA

¹ These are the family heads and genealogical records of those who returned with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

² from the descendants of Phinehas, Gershon;
from the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel;
from the descendants of David, Hattush ³
of the descendants of Shecaniah;

from the descendants of Parosh,
Zechariah, and with him were registered 150 men;

⁴ from the descendants of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men;

⁵ from the descendants of Zattu, Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men;

⁶ from the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men;

⁷ from the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men;

⁸ from the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men;

⁹ from the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men;

¹⁰ from the descendants of Bani, Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men;

¹¹ from the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men;

¹² from the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men;

¹³ from the later descendants of Adonikam, these were their names: Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men;

¹⁴ and from the descendants of Bigvai, both Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

EZRA SENDS FOR THE LEVITES

¹⁵ Now I assembled these exiles at the canal that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And when I searched among the people and priests, I found no Levites there.

¹⁶ Then I summoned the leaders: Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, as well as the teachers Joiarib and Elnathan.

¹⁷ And I sent them to Iddo, the leader at Casiphia, with a message for him and his kinsmen, the temple servants at Casiphia,

■ EZR 7:27 [HEART] Ezra praised God, who put it into the king's heart to honor His house.

■ EZR 7:27 [NOTE] BACK TO HEBREW. From here to 9:15 Ezra tells the story himself, I and me.

■ EZR 8:15 [NOTE] NO LEVITES. Levites served at the temple. Few of them wanted to leave Babylon, even in the first trip home, 2:40.

NOTABLE BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

that they should bring to us ministers for the house of our God.

¹⁸ And since the gracious hand of our God was upon us, they brought us Sherebiah—a man of insight from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, the son of Israel—along with his sons and brothers, 18 men; ¹⁹ also Hashabiah, together with Jeshaiiah, from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and their sons, 20 men.

²⁰ They also brought 220 of the temple servants, all designated by name. David and the officials had appointed them to assist the Levites.

FASTING FOR PROTECTION

²¹ And there by the Ahava Canal I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask Him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. ²² For I was ashamed to ask the king for an escort of soldiers and horsemen to protect us from our enemies on the road, since we had told him, “The hand of our God is gracious to all who seek Him, but His great anger is against all who forsake Him.”

²³ So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and He granted our request.

PRIESTS TO GUARD THE OFFERINGS

²⁴ Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, together with Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers, ²⁵ and I weighed out to them the contribution of silver and gold and the articles that the king, his counselors, his leaders, and all the Israelites there had offered for the house of our God.

²⁶ I weighed out into their hands 24 tons of silver, silver articles weighing 7,500 pounds, 7,500 pounds of gold, ²⁷ 20 gold bowls valued at 1,000 gold coins, and two articles of fine polished bronze, as precious as gold.

■ **EZR 8:21 [NOTABLE]** Ezra had told the king his God protects His people, so asking for soldiers would look like he did not believe it. He fasted and prayed instead, and they made it with all that gold.

■ **EZR 8:26 [NOTE] THAT MUCH GOLD.** In the Hebrew the numbers are 650, 100 and 100. That is about 24 tons of silver, almost four tons more in silver things, and almost four tons of gold. Some think the numbers grew as the book was copied. Others say the king and his officials were very rich.

²⁸ Then I told them, “You are holy to Yahweh, and these articles are holy. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to Yahweh, the God of your fathers. ²⁹ Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem before the leading priests, Levites, and heads of the Israelite families.”

³⁰ So the priests and Levites took charge of the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the house of our God in Jerusalem.

³¹ On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem, and the hand of our God was upon us to protect us from the hands of the enemies and bandits along the way.

ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

³² So we arrived at Jerusalem and rested there for three days.

³³ On the fourth day, in the house of our God, we weighed out the silver and gold and sacred articles into the hand of Meremoth son of Uriah, the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, along with the Levites Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. ³⁴ Everything was verified by number and weight, and the total weight was recorded at that time.

³⁵ Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: 12 bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, 77 lambs, and a sin offering of 12 male goats. All this was a burnt offering to Yahweh.

³⁶ They also delivered the king's edicts to the royal satraps and governors of the region west of the Euphrates, who proceeded to assist the people and the house of God.

9

CHAPTER 9 IN 30 SECONDS

The leaders tell Ezra that many men, even priests, have married women from the nations who worship other gods. Ezra tears his clothes, pulls out his hair and sits stunned until evening. Then he falls on his knees and prays a long prayer of shame for his people.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE NOTABLE GOD SPEAKING

INTERMARRIAGE WITH NEIGHBORING PEOPLES // NEHEMIAH 13:23-31

¹After these things had been accomplished, the leaders approached me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the surrounding peoples whose abominations are like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. ²Indeed, the Israelites have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed has been mixed with the people of the land. And the leaders and officials have taken the lead in this unfaithfulness!"

³When I heard this report, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled out some hair from my head and beard, and sat down in horror.

⁴Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of the unfaithfulness of the exiles, while I sat there in horror until the evening offering.

EZRA'S PRAYER OF CONFESSION

⁵At the evening offering, I got up from my humiliation with my tunic and cloak torn, and I fell on my knees, spread out my hands to Yahweh my God, ⁶and said:

"O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, because our iniquities are higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached the heavens. ⁷From the days of our fathers to this day, our guilt has been great. Because of our iniquities, we and our kings and priests have been delivered into the hands of the kings of the earth and subjected to the sword and to captivity, to pillage and humiliation, as we are this day.

⁸But now, for a brief moment, grace has come from Yahweh our God to preserve for us a remnant and to give us a stake in

His holy place. Even in our bondage, our God has given us new life and light to our eyes. ⁹Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but He has extended to us grace in the sight of the kings of Persia, giving us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and giving us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

¹⁰And now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commandments ¹¹that You gave through Your servants the prophets, saying: 'The land that you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the impurity of its peoples and the abominations with which they have filled it from end to end. ¹²Now, therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Never seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and may eat the good things of the land, leaving it as an inheritance to your sons forever.'

¹³After all that has come upon us because of our evil deeds and our great guilt (though You, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserve and have given us such a remnant as this), ¹⁴shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not become so angry with us as to wipe us out, leaving no remnant or survivor?

¹⁵O Yahweh, God of Israel, You are righteous! For we remain this day as a remnant. Here we are before You in our guilt, though because of it no one can stand before You."

■ **EZR 9:1 [NOTE]** THE LIST. It echoes Deuteronomy 7:1 to 3 and 23:3 to 7. The problem was their abominations, the worship of other gods, not the color of anyone's skin.

■ **EZR 9:2 [NOTE]** THE FOREIGN WIVES. See the Big Question pages The Foreign Wives.

■ **EZR 9:6 [NOTABLE]** Ezra prays we, not they. He had done nothing wrong, but he stood with his people and owned their sin as his own.

■ **EZR 9:8 [NOTABLE]** Even as slaves of Persia, God gave them a little light and a little new life. Small grace is still grace.

■ **EZR 9:8 [FULFILLS]** A holy remnant would remain like a stump ← IS 6:13 · MEDIUM D. -

■ **EZR 9:11 [NOTE]** QUOTING THE LAW. Ezra quotes the commands God gave, a blend of Leviticus 18:24 to 30, Deuteronomy 7:1 to 3 and 23:6, so God's words print red.

10

CHAPTER 10 IN 30 SECONDS

A crowd gathers, weeping. Shecaniah says, There is still hope. Let us make a covenant to send the foreign wives away. They all meet in the pouring rain, set up a team to look at each case, and the book ends with a list of the men who had married foreign women.

SHECANIAH'S ENCOURAGEMENT

¹ While Ezra prayed and made this confession, weeping and falling facedown before the house of God, a very large assembly of Israelites—men, women, and children—gathered around him, and the people wept bitterly as well.

² Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, an Elamite, said to Ezra: “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the people of the land, yet in spite of this, there is hope for Israel. ³ So now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all the foreign wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the command of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Get up, for this matter is your responsibility, and we will support you. Be strong and take action!”

⁵ So Ezra got up and made the leading priests, Levites, and all Israel take an oath to do what had been said. And they took the oath.

THE PEOPLE'S CONFESSION OF SIN

⁶ Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and walked to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. And while he stayed there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

⁷ And a proclamation was issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all the exiles should gather at Jerusalem. ⁸ Whoever failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, according to the counsel of the leaders and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

⁹ So within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled in

Jerusalem, and on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people sat in the square at the house of God, trembling regarding this matter and because of the heavy rain.

¹⁰ Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful by marrying foreign women, adding to the guilt of Israel. ¹¹ Now, therefore, make a confession to Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and do His will. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from your foreign wives.”

¹² And the whole assembly responded in a loud voice: “Truly we must do as you say!

¹³ But there are many people here, and it is the rainy season. We are not able to stay out in the open. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for we have transgressed greatly in this matter. ¹⁴ Let our leaders represent the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a foreign woman come at an appointed time, together with the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us.”

¹⁵ (Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this plan.)

¹⁶ So the exiles did as proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads, each of them identified by name, to represent their families. On the first day of the tenth month they launched the investigation, ¹⁷ and by the first day of the first month they had dealt with all the men who had married foreign women.

THOSE GUILTY OF INTERMARRIAGE

¹⁸ Among the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women were found these descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers:

Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. ¹⁹ They pledged to send their wives away, and for their guilt they presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering.

■ EZR 10:15 [NOTE] FOUR SAID NO. Only four men opposed the plan. The book does not say why.

²⁰ From the descendants of Immer:
Hanani and Zebadiah.

²¹ From the descendants of Harim:
Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and
Uzziah.

²² From the descendants of Pashhur:
Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel,
Jozabad, and Elasah.

²³ Among the Levites:
Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita),
Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

²⁴ From the singers:
Eliashib.

From the gatekeepers:
Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

²⁵ And among the other Israelites, from the
descendants of Parosh:

Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin,
Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah.

²⁶ From the descendants of Elam:
Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jere-
moth, and Elijah.

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

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

²⁹ From the descendants of Bani:
Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub,
Sheal, and Jeremoth.

³⁰ From the descendants of Pahath-moab:
Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Matta-
niah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

³¹ From the descendants of Harim:
Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah,
Shimeon, ³² Benjamin, Malluch, and She-
mariah.

³³ From the descendants of Hashum:
Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Je-
remai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

³⁴ From the descendants of Bani:
Maadai, Amram, Uel, ³⁵ Benaiah, Bedeiah,
Cheluhi, ³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷
Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

³⁸ From the descendants of Binnui:

Shimei, ³⁹ Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, ⁴⁰
Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹ Azarel,
Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴² Shallum,
Amariah, and Joseph.

⁴³ And from the descendants of Nebo:
Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai,
Joel, and Benaiah.

⁴⁴ All these men had married foreign
women, and some of them had children
by these wives.

■ EZR 10:44 [TEXT] A HARD VERSE. The Hebrew of the end of this verse is hard to read. The old Greek book 1 Esdras, 9:36, says they sent them away with their children.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

THE FOREIGN WIVES

What Happened

EZRA 9:1 TO 10:44 • DEUTERONOMY 7:1 TO 4 • NEHEMIAH 13:23 TO 27

WHAT HAPPENED

The leaders told Ezra that many men, even priests and Levites, had married women from the nations around them, and the leaders had led the way, 9:1 to 2. Ezra tore his clothes and prayed. The people agreed to send away the foreign wives and their children, 10:3. A team looked at each case for three months, and the book ends with a list of about 110 men.

WHY IT MATTERED

God's law said do not marry the nations of the land, because they will turn your sons away from Me to serve other gods, Deuteronomy 7:3 to 4. That is exactly what happened to Solomon, 1 Kings 11:1 to 8. Nehemiah 13:26 points back to him.

NOT ABOUT RACE

The problem was false gods, not skin or blood. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite married into Israel and are in Jesus' family line, because they joined Israel's God. Your God will be my God, Ruth 1:16.

A HARD ENDING

10:44 says some of them had children by these wives. The Hebrew of that verse is hard to read, and the book does not tell us what happened to the women and children next.

not cheer. It shows weeping, fasting and rain, and it does not hide the children.

VIEW 3: TOO FAR

Some scholars think the reform went too far. They point to Ruth and Jonah, books that welcome outsiders, and to the four men who opposed it, 10:15. Some note that the word here for send away is not the usual word for divorce.

WHAT ABOUT MALACHI?

Malachi, from about the same time, says God hates divorce, Malachi 2:16. Most read him as scolding men who left their Jewish wives to marry women who served other gods, 2:11, the same problem Ezra faced.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANS?

Paul says do not be yoked with unbelievers, 2 Corinthians 6:14, and a widow may marry only in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 7:39. But if you are already married to one who wants to stay, do not leave, 1 Corinthians 7:12 to 14.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

God wants hearts that are fully His. Any one of any nation who turns to Him is welcome.

Every View

MALACHI 2:11 TO 16 • RUTH 1:16 • 1 CORINTHIANS 7:12 TO 14 • 7:39 • 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14

VIEW 1: RIGHT AND NEEDED

The traditional view says Ezra did what the law required. The small group back home was about to lose its faith, as Israel had before the exile. Keeping God's people faithful kept the line that led to Jesus. Nehemiah 13 shows the danger was real.

VIEW 2: RIGHT, BUT PAINFUL

Many say it was right for that moment but heartbreaking. The book itself does