


EZRA

This is a genuine WBC production  authored by *Bob Coffey* and may not be reproduced or transmitted in any manner for financial profit

The writer whose name means “help” became the viceroy of Artaxerxes I and returned to Jerusalem with the second group of exiles in 457 B.C. It was said that “The chaff came out of Babylon but the wheat remained behind”. Ezra who “prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD” was both devout and scholarly. He built up daily fire on the altar of the heart and during the captivity he made scripture which he is said to have rendered into Chaldee his peculiar study. Through his labours the first ordered canon of (Old Testament) scripture took shape.

CHAPTER 1

CYRUS DECREE 539 B.C.

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia to bring to fulfilment the promise of Yahweh through the mouth of Jeremiah Yahweh awakened or aroused the spirit of the king of Persia and a herald voice passed through his whole kingdom and it was also written down saying “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia-Yahweh **the God of heaven** gave me all the kingdoms of the earth and He took care over me that I should build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah.” *Immediately upon coming to power Cyrus gave orders to rebuild Jerusalem. It is believed that Daniel pointed out the prophecy of Isaiah 45.1 & 13 to the new ruler “This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour...I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward says the Lord Almighty.”*

CYRUS CALL FOR MEN OF FAITH 2-4

“Who among you from all His people will there be -and his God be with him-who will go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and build the house of Yahweh God of Israel-he is **The God** who is in Jerusalem.” *The passage from Isaiah continued in 45.22 “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other-by myself have I sworn a word that will not be revoked; before me every knee shall bow; by me every tongue will swear.” Cyrus had a healthy respect for the LORD.*

And all the rest **from every place** where he is a stranger or settler shall constantly raise up men for his establishment or to strengthen him with silver and gold and wealth or substance and cattle with liberality of offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem” *As in the case of the departure of Israel from Egypt Cyrus directed that the well-to-do in areas where Jewish exiles lived should give with utmost generosity toward the re-settlement of the Jewish people. The 1948 re-settlement was the only one in which the nations and the world gave nothing at all and the great power then charged with a mandate was Great Britain. The initial terms of settlement in 1923 were “the Jews are re-constituting in their national home as of right and not in sufferance”-though subsequently the terms were varied and the quota of emigrants slashed by Great Britain.*

A SOLID RESPONSE-50,000 LEAVE THEIR SECURITY BEHIND 5

So the heads **of** the fathers **of** Judah and Benjamin rose up and the priests and the Levites-**each** in respect of whom God caused them to be aroused or awakened in his

spirit to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem. *The range of four “possessive prefixes” [1] shows that a solid contingent of Jews was gathered from the Babylonian empire-initially some 50,000 persons in all, who took possession of the re-build that Cyrus laid upon them only 3 years after his edict of 539B.C. Many more must have stayed behind.*

CYRUS FINDS 2500 VESSELS AND CITIZENS ADD AS MANY MORE 6-11

And all those who lived as their neighbours around about continually strengthened their hands with **articles of silver with gold** private property and animals and **precious things** as well on top of all the spontaneous gifts. Also King Cyrus caused the instruments of the house of the LORD which Nebuchadnezzar caused to be brought from Jerusalem and gifted for the house of his god to be brought out. Cyrus king of Persia caused them to be brought under the hand of *Mithredath [This name gives testimony to the Persian religion of Mithra-“the sun” which has its modern equivalent in Baha’ism]* the treasurer and he counted them for Sheshbazzar *[This name is rare especially for a Jew-it means “fire-worshipper”-but it was probably a Babylonian designation applied by Belshazzar to this leading Jew]* the prince of Judah. These were the numbers involved:-

Gold chargers [*l trga* a Hebrew term reflecting “slaughter” and used to hold the blood of slaughtered lambs-the N.T. uses the term for the vessel that held the head of John the Baptist]... 30

Silver chargers ...1000

Silver slaughtering knives ...29

Gold bowls...30

Duplicate silver bowls... 410

Other vessels...1000

All the articles of gold and silver were 5,400.

The whole consignment Sheshbazzar brought up with the going up of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. *The count of 2499 was just half of what finally was retrieved and added by the surrounding wealthy people to the vessels returning with the exiles.*

CHAPTER 2

THE TEN MEN WITH ZERUBBABEL AND THEIR TESTIMONY

So these are the sons of the province *[hndm-the jurisdiction of Babylon]* who came up from the captives of the carrying away *[hlq literally “nakedness” since captives were stripped]* which was the carrying away to Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon. But they returned to Jerusalem and Judah-each man to his city.

Those who came with Zerubbabel were Yeshua (Yahweh saves), Nehemiah (Yahweh comforts), Serajah (Yahweh rules), Reelajah (Yahweh shakes), Mardecia (“little man” or “worshipper of Mars” *The first return was in 536B.C. under Zerubbabel –This person is like to be none other than Mordecia Esther’s uncle who lived in that period After his return to Babylon he gained promotion under Xerxes I or Ahasuerus-thus while he returns with the exiles he subsequently comes back to Babylon-no doubt for family reasons not least of which would be the support of his niece who was to become queen Esther.*), Bilshan (Eloquent “Son of the tongue”), Mispar (“Scribe”), Bigvai (“gardener” or “happy”-Persian idiom), Rehum (Beloved) and Baanah (“suffering” or “answer to prayer”) *The names of these ten men spell out the story of faithful families who believed in the salvation comfort sovereignty and terror of the LORD. There was among them one who would yet achieve greatness and afford*

the Jews worldwide great protection. A scribe and a gardener were among them and two who testified to the “love and mercy” of God and His answer to His people’s prayers. That is apart from the reckoning of the men of the people of Israel:-

(a) LISTING OF 18 FAMILY GROUPS

The sons of Parosh (“Flea”) 3-20	2172
The sons of Shephatiah (“The LORD judges”)	372
The sons of Arah (traveller or merchant)	775
The sons of Pahath -Moab related to the sons of Jeshua Joab	2812
(The “Governor of Moab” of the family of “Yeshua whose father is God”-this suggests a Jew became viceroy of Moab and he was related to Yeshua the first mentioned leader with Zerubbabel. Yeshua’s family prided themselves in God as their “father” or “priest”)	
The sons of Elam (<i>long duration-perhaps a reflection on exile</i>)	1254
The sons of Zattu (<i>ornament Arabic cognate or “tender herb”</i>)	945
The sons of Zaccai (<i>pure or innocent</i>)	760
The sons of Bani (<i>built up</i>)	
The sons of Bebai (<i>Heart of desire of the LORD-cf Netanyahu</i>)	623
The sons of Azgad Strong in Fortune (dq =Jupiter/Baal-provider)	1222
The sons of Adonikam (The LORD has risen)	666
The sons of Bigvai (with happiness or gardener)	2056
The sons of Adin (Tender or vibration as in soft music)	454
The sons of Ater (“bound in the right hand”) by Hezekiah i.e. royal	98
The sons of Bezai (white)	323
The sons of Jorah (early rain)	112
The sons of Hashum (fat or rich or “having many servants”)	223
The sons of Gibbar (mighty or warrior-like)	95

(B) LISTING OF 20 FAMILIES MAINLY BY LOCATION

The Sons of Bethlehem 21-35 (house of bread) cf Davidic line	123
The sons of Netophah (drop or distillation)	
The sons of Anathoth (answers)	
The sons of Azmaveth (strong to death 2Samuel23.31-hero of David)	42
The sons of Kirjath-Jearim, Kephirah, Beeroth (“double city”, “obliterated” or “expiated” [Hivite village] & “wells”)	743
The sons of Ramah & Geba (high & tall)	621
The sons of Micmash (treasure laid up)	122
The sons of Bethel & Ai (House of God & heap of ruins)	223
The sons of Nebo (Mercury or “interpreter of the gods”)	52
The sons of Magbish (gathering or congregating)	156
The sons of the other Elam (duration)	1254
The sons of Harim (flat-nosed or above)	320
The sons of Lod, Hadid & Ono (birth, sharp or acute, his strong pain)	725
The sons of Jericho (moon)	345
The sons of Senaah (exalted or thorny)	3630

(C) LISTING OF FOUR PRIESTLY FAMILIES

The Priests 36-39

The sons of Jedaiah (May the LORD know or care for him) of the house of Yeshua	973
The sons of Immer (word or promise)	1053

The sons of Pashur (prosperity surrounding)	1247
The sons of Harim (flat-nosed)	1017

(D) LISTING OF LEVITES

The Levites 40

Sons of Yeshua and Kadmiel (In God's presence) belonging to the lineage of Hodaviah (Praise the Lord)	74
---	----

(E) LISTING OF SINGERS

The Singers 41

Sons of Asaph (collector)	128
---------------------------	-----

(F) LISTING OF GATEKEEPERS

The Gatekeepers 42

Sons of the gatekeepers of the temple:	
Sons of Shallum, (recompense) Ater, (disabled right hand)	
Talmon, (oppressed) Akkub, (supplanter, insidious)	
Hatita, (digging) & Shobai (a captor)	139

(G) LISTING OF TEMPLE SERVANTS

The Temple servants 43-54

Sons of Ziha (dry, thirsty) sons of Hasupha (esteemed) sons of Tabbaoth (seal rings)	
Sons of Keros (weaver's comb) sons of Siaha (companies) sons of Padon (redemption)	
Sons of Lebanah (moon) sons of Hagabah (locust) sons of Akkub (supplanter)	
Sons of Hagab (locust) sons of Shalmal (God's retribution) sons of Hanan (Received by god's grace)	
Sons of Giddel (a giant-too big) sons of Gahar (Red-haired/retreat) sons of Reaiah (The Lord has seen him)	
Sons of Rezin (Prince) sons of Nekoda (marked) sons of Gazzam (devouring locust)	
Sons of Uzza (strength) sons of Paseah (lame) sons of Besai (contempt)	
Sons of Asnah (thorn bush) sons of Meunim (habitations) sons of Nephusim (expansions)	
Sons of Bakbuk (empty bottle) sons of Hakupha (bowed or bent) sons of Harhur (fever)	
Sons of Bazluth (nakedness) sons of Mehida (Junction-Syriac) sons of Harsha (artificer)	
Sons of Barkos (painter) sons of Sisera (battle array) sons of Temah (desert Arabic)	
Sons of Nezhiah (conquered Syriac) sons of Hatipha (captivity-seizure)	

(H) LISTING OF SOLOMON'S SERVANTS-i.e. families with historic ties

The sons of the servants of Solomon 55-57

Sons of Sotai (departure of the Lord?) sons of Hassophereth (numberings) sons of Peruda (grain or kernel)	
Sons of Jaala (wild she-goat) sons of Darkon (scatterer) sons of Giddel (giant)	
Sons of Shephatiah (whom the Lord judges) sons of Hattil (shaking) sons of Pokereth-Hazzebaim (ahead of the gazelles)	
And Sons of Ami ("workman" or "Amen"-of God's hypostatic wisdom or "Amon Re"-Egyptian god with human form & rams head)	

(I) LISTING OF NETHENIM

The Nethinim 58-59

(Attendants of the Levites) sons of servants of Solomon 392

(J) LISTING OF NON-JEWS

And these came up from Tel-Melah (hill of salt) Tel Harsha (hill of the forest) Kerub (Cherub, divine steed, minister) Addon (sorrow) and Immer (promise) but they were unable to give evidence of the house of their fathers or that their seed with them were from Israel. No number

(J) LISTING OF THREE FAMILIES OF UNCERTAIN HEREDITY

The sons of Delaiah (The Lord delivered) **Tobiah** (The Lord is kind or good) and **Nekoda** (marked) **60-61**

652

(K) LISTING OF PRIESTS WITH LOST FAMILY RECORDS

And from sons of the priests

Sons of Hobaiah (whom the Lord protected) Hakkoz (“the” thorn) and Barzillai (iron)- Who took his wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was named by that name. No number

UNCERTAINTY HANGS OVER 3 LEVITE HOUSEHOLDS 62-63

These kept searching their roll or written record of the man of their family or lineage [*mivjytm*] but could not find them so they were redeemed by payment from among the priests. [*laq* also means “polluted”-but from the construction I prefer the reading “ransomed from”. The story of their ancestry may well have been one of severance for earlier misdemeanour-however that they should follow a life of work and earning it would seem that money passed to redeem them –after the style of NT Corban] The governor [Zerubbabel] said to them that they should not eat from the holy of holies until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim. *Their case was not prejudiced-but when the high priesthood was again constituted a final decision would be made on their status. Of these families one had married into the line of the famous Barzillai but remained*

TRANSPORTATION 64-67

The entire congregation as one total was forty two myriads three hundred and sixty (42360) apart from their men and women who worked as servants which were 7337 and they also had 200 male and female singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6720 donkeys. *To convey the precious vessels, the personal effects of 50,000 Jews and the weaker migrants and children 8136 animals were used-just under one for every six persons. The distance to be covered was approaching 750 miles which at the rate of 30 miles per day would take just over a month. Ezra’s party took 4 months for the journey-probably a more realistic estimate.*

In coming to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem some of the heads of their families gave spontaneous offerings for the house of God to be established upon its own site. According to their **wealth** [*jjk*] they had given to the treasury of the work sixty

myriad and one drachmas [61000-the “drachma” is transliterated from the Greek – and represents a day’s wages] 5000 minas of silver and 100 priest’s vestures. And the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants settled in their towns and all Israel in their towns. *Though many would have lived close to the capital the people returned to the regions which were still remembered and known to the new generation of Jews who retained their evidence of tenure orally.*

CHAPTER 3

WELCOME FEAST

When the seventh month arrived or struck them [[qñ] the sons of Israel had been caused to settle in their towns they gathered **AS ONE MAN** at Jerusalem. *The comparison with the day of Pentecost is hard to resist. Then the disciples were of one heart and one mind and gathered at Jerusalem as the LORD appointed after 50 days. Proposing that their journey was one of a month and that over three weeks they settled in their new surroundings the comparison with Pentecost is apt enough. Even without any time equivalence the command of the LORD was in both cases what drew His people to the city. The month in this case was Tishri not Siwan-the month of the feast of atonement and tabernacles. The nation so recently returned were acutely aware of their tented residence in the desert and though as yet they had not Ezra to teach them they were under the instruction of 4000 priests-roughly one to every 12 persons and doubtless they had kept “tabernacles” and observed “atonement” in Babylon.*

NO WORSHIP WITHOUT THE ALTAR 2

Then Yeshua son of Josadak and his brethren the priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brethren rose up and built the altar of the God of Israel in order to offer on it the offering as written in the Torah of Moses the man of God.

ATONEMENT WITNESS DESPITE FEARS 3

And they established the altar on its own base but in the “house of dread” (i.e. “state of”) that was upon them from the people of the land and they lifted up burnt offerings to the LORD upon it-the morning and evening offering. *The burnt offering is typical of Christ who brings the sinner near to God. It is called the approach offering. The people offered in the open and many would look on-their being no tabernacle of the congregation yet established.*

LIBERALITY ABOUNDS 4-5

And they enacted the feast of Succoth or booths according to what was written and offered day by day according to what was right on a daily basis. After establishing that they offered daily sacrifice and that which belonged to new moon and all the holy festivals of the LORD and in accordance with the freewill offering that had been willed to the Lord [*Hithpael of bdl-this is suggestive of an earlier desire-either before exiles left Babylon or since-preferably planned liberality which was linked to their movement of faith to the land of their fathers. This parallels covenanted giving such as engages the church today*]

A PLAIN STONE ALTAR WOULD BE BUILT-ABRAHAM STYLE

From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offering to the LORD but the foundation of the temple was not yet laid. *It is not the beauty of a*

religious enclosure whether church or monastery that pleases God but the hearts of His people

TEMPLE REBUILD

The work began in year two after their return 535B.C and in the month Iyyar - the dry season. Supplies of cedar were obtained by barter from Tyre and Sidon and the Levites took supervision of the work. At length a day of celebration was set and the younger Jews rejoiced while the older priests and Levites wept to see the diminished building that was under way. This day of such mixed emotion may well have stalled the work and discouraged the builders for the work was halted for many years.

Then they gave silver to the hewers of stone and the timber cutters and food and drink and oil to the Sidonians and Tyrians to bring cedar timber from Lebanon to Joppa on the sea according to the grant of Cyrus king of the Persians to them.

In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Yeshua son of Josadak and the remnant of their brethren the priests and Levites and all who had come back from the captivity of Jerusalem began (the work) and they caused Levites of twenty and upwards to be engaged to preside [*hxn*] literally “to gain victory” God’s work was to go on despite discouragement or fear] over the work of the house of the LORD. Yeshua and his sons and brethren and Kadmiel [*“In God’s presence”*] and his sons (sons of Judah) and the sons of Henadad and their brethren the Levites **UNITED AS ONE** to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. *This is the second notice of corporate unity and it demonstrates that unity in worship gives rise to unity in spiritual activity or work.*

When the builders had laid the foundation of the house of the LORD the priests stood still in their splendid garments with trumpets and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals to praise the LORD according to the authority or direction of David king of Israel. With praise and thanks they celebrated the LORD

Because He is good

Because His covenant love is as long as they live

For Israel

And all the people shouted a great shout of praise to the LORD over the foundation of the house of the LORD. But big numbers of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers-elders who had seen the former house-at the foundation of this house there were tears in their eyes with a great accompanying voice along with the shout of joy of those who uplifted the voice. And none of the people could discriminate [*rk*] the voice of victory celebration of radiant joy associated with the voice of the people weeping for the people raised a great shout and the voice made itself heard to a long distance.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARAB/SAMARITAN PROPOSAL 1-5

So the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the sons of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel. And they drew near to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers and said to them “We will build with you for like you we enquire after Elohim and do we not practice sacrifice from the days Esarhaddon king of Babylon sent us hither?”

But Zerubbabel and Yeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers of Israel said to them “It is not for you to build the house of the LORD our God because we alone will build for the LORD God of Israel in line with what Cyrus King of Persia commanded. Then the people of the land weakened the hand of the people of Judah and terrorised them about building. But they bribed advisers or consultants [*x[y]*] to frustrate or shake [*rrp*] their purpose [*x[y]*] all the days of Cyrus King of Persia and until the monarchy of Darius (son of Hystaspes) the first king of Persia. *This period of agitation and evil counsel ran from 536B.C.when Israel arrived back right till at least 521B.C.-a period of not less than 15 years.*

TWO EARLIER LETTERS REFERENCED-BUT INEFFECTUAL 6-7

And in the reign of Ahasuerus at the start of his rule they wrote an accusation [*Hebrew “A Satan”*] against those who settled Judah and Jerusalem. [*486B.C*]and in the days of Artaxerxes Bishlem Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of them wrote to **Artaxerxes King of Persia** and the written language of the writing was Aramaic and the translation [*mgrt*] is Aramaic.[*The word “translation” is “Targum” in literal Hebrew-so the Targum that now follows is in Aramaic i.e 4.8-6.18 and indeed 7.12-26 is also in Aramaic*] Here the text of the said letter is set out in Aramaic which shares the alphabet of the Hebrew language but has a vocabulary which though cognate to Hebrew varies very considerably from Hebrew word construction.

Note on Ezra

The date of the later letter to Ahasuerus is 486B.C. It was in 457B.C that Ezra joined the returned exiles of the earlier period. Ahasuerus reigned for 18 years so he would have been off the scene in 464-just seven years before Ezra arrived. However the letter with which we are dealing is the earlier one written to Artaxerxes [Some will insist this is Cambyses (529-522B.C.) though-given the time differential between this reign on the one hand and the Jewish migration under Ezra and the commission of Nehemiah on the other this setting is absolutely incongruous.] Artaxerxes was clearly the current monarch Longimanus (465-425B.C.) in whose 7th year [Ezra 7. 1-8] Ezra left Babylon with his party and in whose 20th year (445-444B.C.) [Nehemiah 2.1 & 5.14] Nehemiah was actually sent to Jerusalem by the king himself. Derek Kidner in the Tyndale Commentary agreeably concurs, “Artaxerxes 1 reigned from 464 to 423, and was the king whose reign (in my view) spanned the events of Ezra 7 to the end of Nehemiah.

On the royal name in Kitto’s encyclopaedia John Nicolson takes “Arta” to mean “Great” and “shatr” from “Kshatriyas” to mean “warrior” where “king” and “warrior” are cognates-so “Great king”.

A Note on Authorship

Sara Japheth who wrote “The supposed common authorship of Chronicles and Ezra Nehemiah” concluded that between the two sets of historical narratives differences strongly suggest **diverse authors**. The Talmud Baba Bathra 15a gives Ezra as author of the account under his name.

The theory that Nehemiah came before Ezra was first muted by a man called Hoonacker in 1890 with the suggestion that Nehemiah served Artaxerxes 1 (464-423) and Ezra Artaxerxes 2 (404-359).The idea grew until Charles Cutler Torrey dared to suggest that Ezra was an imaginary figure.

From the text of Ezra and Nehemiah we cannot doubt that these men were friends and though it takes some research to establish I believe that Nehemiah (the author of the

book under his name) followed Ezra the scribe (and author of the book taking his name) and that in an act of faith when Babylonian borders were threatened Ezra left for Jerusalem without a protective cohort to be followed 13 years later [Ezra 7 & Nehemiah 5 boldly states this in as many words]

THE PASSAGE 4.8-6.18 IS IN CHALDEE
THE THIRD LETTER GAINS A REPLY 8-16
(1) APPELANTS 9-10

The letter writers who present their petition to Osnapper (Ashurbanipal) create the effect of a widespread dissatisfaction by stressing that they represent a larger group of repatriated peoples from six provinces and the whole of Samaria and Trans-Jordan. They stress that the “judges” and “officials” support their plea and grievance.

Rehum the Lord of the rolls (who was responsible for the enacting of decrees) and Sheshai the historical or legal scribe wrote one joint letter against Jerusalem to Artahesasta (Artaxerxes) the King as a prayer or petition [tn]

At that time (it was) Rehum master of the rolls and Sheshai the scribe and the remainder of these flattering names [nmhtmk]-the judge-administrators of the Assyrian tribes, those from Tripolis, the Persians, those of Erech, Babylonians and Elamite colonists of Susa and the remaining peoples of the great and noble Osnappar [Ashurbanipal] exiles who are settlers in the city of Samaria and the remainder of those across the Jordan river and in Canaan. This is a transcript of the letter which they sent to him:-

(2) THE CONTENTS OF THE LETTER 11
To Artaxerxes the king

From your servants the men of Trans-Jordan and Canaan,
Concerning this that has been made known [jdy] to the king concerning the Jews that came up who were “borrowers from you” or “joined to you” or even “Levites” [Jt#] they have gone up to Jerusalem that rebellious and hated city or city that is against mankind [atvyab] and they are building the encompassing wall. They will have completed and cause it to be joined with fire sacrifice. *The NIV has “repairing the foundations” but the Chaldee future passive verb for “completion” is a Shaphel of “contempt” (cp. usages in Ezra 4.2 & 6.15). Their completion of the work being built to such a high standard and of a strong sort with sacrifice to Israel’s God was presented as the ultimate in contempt for the gods of the land and the noble Ashurbanipal.*

(3) POOR PROSPECTS FOR TAX FORECAST 13

It has been made known to the King surely that **now** this city continues to be built and the walls will have been caused to be complete there will be tribute [ddm] loss [wl b]. It will become poor and finally it will not be given and finally the realm will suffer damage [qzn]

(4) BREACH OF CONTRACT ALLEGED & LOSS OF REVENUE 14

Now or further all undertakings of covenant [literally “salt”] have been covenanted for the palace and it does not seem fit to us that the king should be destitute. [t#r]. On this account we are sending and causing this to be known to the King.

JEWISH HISTORY DOES SERVICE TO DEROGATION 15-16

That an examination [*rqb*] be made in the record books of your Fathers and when the records have been inspected you will become aware that this city has been a rebellious city damaging to or troublesome for kings and provinces-a place that has been cultivating arrogant uprising from a age or all its days. For that reason this city was destroyed.

We are making the king aware that if this city will have been built [*ambtt*] and its walls should have been completed over against this portion in Trans-Jordan there will be nothing belonging to you.

(5) THE KING'S REPLY

The king sends this epistle:- [*amgtp*]

To Rehum master of the rolls and Sheshi the secretary and the remainder of the titled associates [*hmk*] settled in Samaria and Trans-Jordan He (the King) sends after this fashion [*t[k]*] *This is not so much formalities or greetings but a statement that the King is now persuaded to take action.*

The epistle you sent to us has been spread and read aloud before me. I myself issued a decree so they searched and found that this city from the distant days of time long past has companioned uprising against kings and caused sedition or revolt and been rebellious and there has been vassalage or servitude imposed on it. But powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and they have had dominion over all Trans-Euphrates. So tribute tax and wealth was delivered over to them. Now a decree had to be sent to these men to cease and this city will not have been built until the decree has been sent by me. They have been warned –there have been errors to pass over these things or to remove [*db[m]*] for why should this danger increase to the damage of the kingdom
The above translation brings out these principles from Artaxerxes:-

(1)The King learned much more of the history of Israel-of David and Solomon and Hezekiah. He realised that Israel once ruled well into his own kingdom.

(2)He learned that Israel put up a stout defence against Sennacherib and defeated his army.

(3)He learned that from the time of David Jerusalem received taxes from surrounding nations for a long time.

(4)He decided to caution the Jews against further development of their city-a theme that is repeated by the United Nations even today in respect of Jewish resettlement.

(5)He took no military action but issued a warning to Jerusalem.

(6) IMMEDIATE ACTION BY THE ADVERSARIES 23-24

At that time from when the transcript of the letter of Artaxerxes the King was read before Rehum and Shimshi the scribal secretary and their distinguished associates they departed with an army for Jerusalem to the Jews and they stopped them with a strong arm and force.

So at that time the work of the House of God which was in Jerusalem was at a standstill until the second year of King Darius king of the Persians. *The stress of Haggai and Zechariah on the sovereign authority of Yahweh ultimately put metal into Jewish hearts and the work which was stalled out of fear and heavy handed tactics began again and came to a remarkable speedy and successful conclusion as can be seen from the later part of this Chaldee section(6.13-15)*

CHAPTER 5

TATTENAI SEEK THOSE LEADING THE PROJECT

Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo had prophesied to the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of **the God of Israel in authority over them**. At that time Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Yeshua son of Jozadak the commander –in- chief arose to build the house of God at Jerusalem and the prophets of God beside them to uphold and support them.

At that appointed time Tattenai the governor of Trans-Euphrates and Shethar Boznai and their titled associates spoke thus to them “From where do you have a decree of authority for the house which you are going to build and the straight wall which you will have built. Then *[myd[]* in this (cheeky) manner they said to them “what are the names of these warriors *[rbg]* who are builders of this building *Clearly the action of having a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other took the wind out of the sails of the governor who was not anxious for an engagement with the burly builders.*

But the eye of their God had been over the Jewish captives and they did not cease till a judgment went to Darius and until his returning letter would have been received. The transcript of the letter which Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates and Shehar Boznai and his men with flattering titles sent to Darius the king.

THE REMONSTRANCE

To Darius the king, all peace. Of this the king should know. We went to the province of Judah and to the house of the great God and the people have been building it with great stones and they are setting timbers in the walls and this task is taking on momentum and prospering in their hands. And we questioned the titled persons of these captives and said to them “Who placed on you a mandate to build this house and to cause its wall to be strengthened?”

Also we asked their names writing them down in order that you would know the redoubtable leaders by name. The matter is like this. The builders answered saying “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and we are building this holy building which was great in the past and a great king of Israel built and finished it. Because our fathers angered the God of heaven he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean king of Babylon and he destroyed this house and took the people captive to Babylon.

Nevertheless Cyrus king of Babylon in his first year declared a mandate that this house of God was to be built. Indeed he went further even refusing the gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar brought from the temple in Jerusalem and caused it to be brought to the temple of Babylon and **He brought them out** for one called Sheshbazzar whom he established as governor. And he said to him “I refuse these – take them away from here –you must cause them to be carried for deposit in the temple and house of God which has been built in Jerusalem on its site. And from that day till now it has been in the building and not complete.

And now let it seem good and please the king to plough through a search in the house of the king’s records which is in Babylon to see if there is anything of Cyrus the king establishing a decree for the building of the house of God that is in Jerusalem and may the king rule as a friend on the matter and send a commission for us.

Chapter 6

JUST ONE HISTORICAL RECORD REMAINED 1-2

One wonders with some awe that by providence and provenance only one manuscript scroll remained in the Babylonian treasury but one was sufficient because it contained in great brevity yet total sufficiency the intent force and spirit of Cyrus decree. Another matter of striking relevance is that Sir Henry Rawlinson in 1835 found the key to the Babylonian language on a perpendicular cliff called “the Behistun Rock”-1700 feet above the plain and 400 above the road below. By a series of ladders and swings let down from above he worked on a narrow ledge for 4 years taking impressions of the written inscriptions which took 14 further years to de-code-opening our understanding of all things Babylonian as the 20th century was about to dawn. The matter of note is that the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt in the very same year as this rock was engraved [516B.C.] Compare Ezra 6.15 –the sixth year of Darius (522-486)

*The letter of the governor was presumably written circa 520-19B.C. Haggai tells us the temple was begun in 520B.C. the second year of Darius so it must have been interrupted shortly thereafter. However it was continued and completed in 4 years In the aftermath (of receiving the remonstrance) king Darius issued a decree and they searched in the house where these financial records were deposited in Babylon. And one scroll was found in **Ecbactana** [*atmj a –its capital*] a city of the province of Medina with a **record of foreign nations** [*hmrkd hngb*] and it was written thus:-*

CYRUS DECREE 3-5

In his first year Cyrus the king issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem. Cause the house to be built-a place for **continual sacrifice to have been sacrificed** [*nj bbd nj db*] and cause the foundations to be laid 90 cubits high by 90 cubits wide. There are to be three layers of stones of great size and one layer of timber. And I also refuse the gold and silver which is of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar caused to be **brought out** [*qpn*] from the temple which is in Jerusalem and caused to be carried to Babylon **will have to be returned** [*nbythy*] to the place where they were deposited in the house of God. *The decree entailed the exact manner of building the Jews were executing. The document constituted an immediate confirmation of their rights.*

DARIUS' RESCRIPT AND REPLY 6-12

Now Tattenai Governor of Trans Euphrates and Shethar Boznai and your fellow officers of the Syrian tribe [*ayksrpa*] on the other side of the river – (1) you stay well away from them. You must in future leave the governor of the Jews and the settlers who have returned of the Jews to proceed with the work of this [*Jd*] house of God so it will have been built on its original base. And by me a decree is made concerning what you shall do in co-operation with these “white haired elders” of the Jews to build the house of God. (2) That there be expenses given to these men and this is to come from the wealth of the king of the province of Syrian Trans Euphrates-in order that the work does not come to a standstill or cease [*lfb*] *Darius tied the state revenues to specifics so that the original objective of Cyrus would be now accomplished readily.* (3) And whatever the need [*jvj*] both young bullocks and rams and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven grains of wheat salt wine and oil according to the

appointment of the priests who are in Jerusalem that must be so [future Pael of awhl]-let it be given them day after day. It is not to be in default.

(4) That there will have been [Peal future expressing “there must be”] approach offerings of “rest” for the God of heaven (5) and **cause there to be continual prayer for the life of the king and his sons.** *The king lived on for 30 years on the throne and his son Nothus “Darius the Persian” (Neh. 12.20 from 423 B.C. until 408 B.C.-a further 15 years. It seems this dynasty was still ensconced when Darius 3 Codomanus took up the rule of Persia in 336 B.C. Then in 334 Alexander (with 11 years to live) crossed the Hellespont sieged Tyre in 332 took Gaza after 5 months –and entered Egypt’s delta –threw a causeway seaward of Pharos and left orders for harbour and city-reaching the Euphrates by mid- August 331 B.C. then north of Nineveh over the Tigris with scythe chariots and elephants to face Darius at Gaugamela to become master of the world. Then he sped on to the Indus where in 323 Alexander also died.*

And from me I have sent a decree that any man who changes the letter or sentence that has been changed [j snty] **wood from his house shall be erected and he will have been fastened** to it and his house **will have been made a filthy dung mound** because of this. And the God who put his name there will have cast down every king and people who put forth their hand of authority for the change in order to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have appointed the decree. **It shall have been made law** with immediate effect. [With speed] *Together with 5 distinct ways in which the Governor and others were to help the Jews three solemn threats were made to the people who assayed to change the provisions of Cyrus and defy the decree. With this letter Darius I got the action he required without further question and the matter was settled for some time to come.*

THE COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE AND THE OFFERINGS 13-15

Then Tattenai governor of Trans Euphrates Shehar Boznai and their officials faced with [l bql- “over against”] what Darius the king sent did speedily in accordance with what was said. [ammk] And the white-haired elders built and prospered with good success [j /xm] through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo and they built and completed it from the command of the God of Israel and the command of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Thus this house was brought to completion on the third day of the month of Adar which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. *Ezra remarks that three individual Kings of Persia and Assyria had commanded the rebuild and now Darius joined their ranks to provide for its completion.*

DEDICATION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE 16-18

And the children of Israel priests and Levites and the remainder of the children of the captivity did the religious service (dedication) of this house of God with gladness [hwdj] And they brought approach offerings for the dedication of this house of God- one hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and two and ten strong he goats for a sin offering on behalf of all Israel according to the number of Israel’s tribes. And they caused the priests to rise in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God which is in Jerusalem according to the writing in the book of Moses. (Numbers 3.6 & 8.9)

THE HEBREW TEXT RESUMES

PASSOVER OF FREEDOM AND JOY 19-22

And the children of the captivity made ready the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month for the priests and the Levites were purified as one and they killed the Passover for all the sons of the captivity and for their brethren the priests and for themselves. And the sons of Israel who had come back from the captivity and all who were separate from the contamination of the people of the land to seek the LORD God of Israel ate it. So they prepared and held the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy for the LORD had made them joyous and caused the heart of the king of Assyria to turn around or change[*bbs*] in their favour to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God –the God of Israel.

CHAPTER 7

EZRA'S FAMILY TREE FROM AARON 1-5

So following these things during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia **EZRA** son of Seaiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah who was son of Shallum the son of Zadok son of Ahitub, he being son of Amariah son of Azariah son of Meraioth, son of Zerariah son of Uzi son of Bukki. He in turn was son of Abishua son of Phineas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the high priest. *This genealogy preserves for us the fact that it was sixteen generations since the Exodus generally dated circa 1420B.C. Given that a generation of 55 years these 16 generations would take us to 540B.C.*

EZRA'S JOURNEY AND PURPOSE 6-10

This Ezra came up from Babylon and he was a skilful [*ryhm-apt or rapid*] scribe through the Law of Moses which the LORD God gave Israel and the King was readily acceding to his request as **THE HAND OF GOD WAS UPON HIM(1)**. And in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes some of the children of Israel priests Levites singers porters and Nethinims came up to Jerusalem. He (Ezra) came in the fifth month which was in the seventh year of the king. *The 7th of Artaxerxes equates with 457B.C when Ezra and his group of exiles arrived in Jerusalem.* For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylon and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem for **THE GOOD HAND OF GOD WAS UPON HIM(2)**. *Four months travel covering 700-800 miles was not a particularly rapid passage-in fact if they did roughly 5 days travel each week it was not much more than 10 miles per day. Allowing for the fact that there were many mothers and children in the party this is an easily understood pace. What is relevant is that no incidents or hindrance occurred all along the way.*

For Ezra had caused his heart or purpose to be established to pursue the Law of the LORD and to do it and to teach throughout Israel statute and righteous judgment. *From 2 Esdras 14 we learn that Ezra engaged his helpers the scribes to write 94 scrolls containing the entire Old Testament scriptures. His commitment to promulgating the written scriptures was his life's aim and object. This statement of purpose is fundamental to his impact on Israel. He was not a builder in stone but a man who built up the spiritual life of the people.*

CHALDEE SECTION 11-26

So this is a transcript of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest –the scribe-a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD and of His ordinances for Israel. “Artaxerxes King of Kings to Ezra the priest-a scribe of the law of the God of heaven-according to request it has been recompensed. From myself I

establish a decree that all who are willing in my kingdom from the people of Israel priests Levites he may go [*literally “may have gone”*] to Jerusalem with you. Because from the presence of the King and his seven advisers you have been sent to have examined the matter of the Jews and concerning Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand and **to bring** the silver and gold which the king and his advisers have voluntarily given to the God of Israel that has His home in Jerusalem. And (bring) all the silver and gold which you have looked for in all the province of Babylon with the voluntary offerings of the people and of the priests that are offered freely for the house of God which is in Jerusalem. In order that thus you may *diligently* purchase with this silver bulls rams lambs and their meal offerings and drink offerings and bring them near upon the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. And that which seems to the benefit to you and your brothers to do with the residue of the silver and gold according to the desire or will and companionship of the LORD your God do that religious service. And the vessels which have been given you for the worship of separation [*j / p*] of the house of your God restore these before God in Jerusalem. And the remainder of what you need for the house of God that will have fallen to you to have gifted-you will receive it from the treasury of the King. And from me-Artaxerxes the King I make a decree for all the treasuries which are in Trans-Euphrates that whatever Ezra the priest-scribe of the law of the God of heaven shall have to ask it shall have to be done speedily. Up to a hundred talents of silver and to one hundred measures of wheat and to a hundred baths of wine and a hundred baths of anointing oil and salt with no written limit (shall be given). All that is from the decree of the God of heaven let this religious service be executed *quickly* for the house of the God of heaven for why should there be anger break out on the realm of the King and his sons? *Artaxerxes had clearly done some fundamental thinking about what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and he was understandably anxious to assuage the anger of the LORD. This wise king was rewarded with a reign of 40 years whilst Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) reigned for 45 years.* And we make it clear to you that for all the priests Levites singers, porters Nethinims or servants of the house of God such tribute tax and travel toll shall not be permitted to be appointed over them. *Clearly Ezra was highly esteemed in Babylon and his witness along with that of Nehemiah had lead this heathen king to a deep respect for the God of Israel.* And you Ezra according to the wisdom of your God which is in your authority or hand appoint magistrates and judges who shall be judges of all the people who are in Trans Euphrates so that all may know the law of the LORD thy God and any who does not know cause instruction (to be given). And all who will not be (ready) to do the law of your God and the law of the king let judgment be made on him proportionately [*hmm*] either for death or for exile or a fine from his wealth and that with imprisonments. *We learn that this king believed in fair law and that he demanded the people know the law and that penalties for non-observance of law be proportionate to the nature of the crime.*

RESUMPTION OF THE HEBREW TEXT 27-28

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers who has provided like this in the heart of the king to make beautiful the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem. He has also stretched out the sceptre of mercy to me before the face of the king and he has advised (me) before all the mighty princes of the king and I have been strengthened as **THE HAND OF MY GOD HAS BEEN UPON ME (3)** and I gathered chiefs from Israel to go up (to Jerusalem) with me. *This personal comment of Ezra is full of joy and praise to*

God for His sovereign authority. The picture of Ezra before the king is not unlike that of Esther on an earlier occasion. The sceptre in the king's hand was just as really to be thought of as in the hand of God. This man was sure of the dominion of the LORD over all. The return from exile was away to a flying start and all the laws were in place for an effective re-settlement and best of all a beautiful rebuilt temple which was the dream of Ezra.

CHAPTER 8

THE MAKE UP OF THE GROUP OF RETURNING EXILES 1-14

These are the chief of their fathers and these are the names on family registers of those who went up with me from Babylon in the reign of King Artaxerxes. From the sons of Phineas Gershom; from the sons of Ithamar Daniel; from the sons of David Hattush [*“gathered together”*]. From the sons of Shechaniah descended from Parosh [*Flea*] Zechariah and with him there were on the family register [*cjy*] 150 male descendants. From the sons of Pahath-Moab Elyahoenai [*“my eyes are towards Jehovah”*] From the sons of Jechaniah the son of Jehaziel and with him 300 males. From the sons of Adin Ebed son of Jonathan and 50 males with him. From the sons of Elim [*“strengths”*] Yeshiah [*“Salvation of the LORD”*] son of Athaliah and 70 males with him. From the sons of Shephatiah [*“whom the LORD judges”*] Zebadiah [*“gift of the LORD”*] son of Michael [*“who is like God”*] and with him 80 males. From the sons of Joab Obadiah son of Jehiel and with him 218 males. From the sons of Shelomith [*“peaceable” “prosperity”*] son of Josiphiah [*“may the LORD cause him to settle”*] and with him 160 males. From the sons of Bebai [*“desire of the LORD”*] son of Zechariah 28 males. From the sons of Azgad [*“strong in seed or fortune”*] Johanan son of Hakkatan [*“the younger”*] and 20 males with him. And from the later sons of Adonikam these are their names Eliphelet Jeiel Shemaiah and with them 60 males. From the sons of Bigvai Uttai and Zabud and 70 males with them. A GRAND TOTAL OF 1220 MALE PERSONS ALONG WITH EZRA.

NO LEVITES VOLUNTEER 15-20

And I Kibbutzed them to the river that runs towards Ahava. And I looked still or marked or went between [*nyb*] the people for priests and found there no-one from the sons of Levi. So I sent for Eliezer and Ariel Shemaiah and El-Nathan and Jarib-for both El-Nathan and Nathan for Zechariah and Meshullam-leaders and for Joiarib and El-Nathan because of their understanding. And I gave them commandment to Iddo or over the head of Iddo the leader in the place called “silver” and I set in their mouths words to Iddo to tell his brothers the Nethinims at the place named “Silver” to bring to us zealous ministers for the house of our God. So they brought to us –**THE GOOD HAND OF GOD BEING UPON US(4)** a man of prudence and piety of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi the son of Israel and Sherebiah his sons and brothers-18 in all. Hashabiah and with him Yashaiah from the sons of Merari his brothers and sons-20 in all. And from the Nethinims whom David and the princes gave to serve the Levites-220 Nethinims –all of whom specified their names. *Male numbers of the group rose by 258 to 1478*

EZRA SEEKS DIRECTION BY PRAYER 21-23

Then I called a fast there at the river Ahava (*“running water” possibly Euphrates*) to submit ourselves humbly before the face of our God to seek the right or successful pathway for us and for our little ones and for our wealth. *Ezra was clearly conscious*

of the distance dangers and difficulties of terrain now to be faced. Prayerful fasting and seeking the face of God preceded this 4 month overland trek of 700-800 miles. For I was ashamed to request from the king a band of forces and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way for we had talked to the King saying “**THE HAND OF OUR GOD IS UPON ALL THOSE WHO SEEK HIM FOR GOOD(5)**” but His might and wrath are against all who depart from Him. Then we fasted and made ourselves seek God for this and He was prevailed upon on our account.

THE PRIESTS & LEVITES UNDERTAKE CARRIAGE OF THE GOLD SILVER AND VESSELS FOR THE TEMPLE 24-30

Then I selected twelve of the princes of the priests for *Sherebiah* [*“hot zeal of the LORD”*]-*Hashabiah* [*bvj The LORD imputed value or valued*] and with them ten of their brothers. And I weighed to them the silver and gold and vessels for a heave offering for the house of our God which the king and his advisers and his princes raised and all Israel were the recipients. So I weighed into their hands 650 talents of silver and 100 talents worth of silver vessels and 100 talents of gold. Also 20 bowls of gold of a thousand gold darics value and two of the best brass vessels that shone like gold-and were as desirable as gold. And I said to them “You are holy to the LORD and the vessels are holy and the silver and gold are a freewill offering for the LORD God of our fathers. Watch them sleeplessly and keep them until you weigh them before the princes of the priests and the Levites and the princes of the fathers of Israel in the chambers adjoining the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. Son the priests and Levites took upon themselves the silver and gold and the vessels to bring them to the house of our God in Jerusalem.

SAFE ARRIVAL: TRAVELLING FROM 12TH OF 1ST MONTH TO 1ST DAY OF 5TH MONTH (7.8)

There is a delay of 12 days between the date of departure from the River encampment and the time the main body of people arrived at the River departure point. During that time they fasted and prayed and also awaited the ministering priests and Levites.

Then we struck camp from the river Ahava on the 12th day of the first month to go to Jerusalem and **THE HAND OF OUR GOD (6)** was upon us and He caused us to be delivered from the hand of the enemy and the enemy over the way. **And we came to Jerusalem and stayed there three days.** And on the fourth day the silver and gold and vessels were weighed in the house of our God under the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest and with him Eleazar the son of Phineas and with them was Jozabad son of Yeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui the Levites. All (were reckoned) by number and by weight and the total weight was written down at that time. The sons of the exiles who had come from captivity caused an approach burnt offering to be made to the God of Israel; twelve bulls for all Israel ninety six rams and seventy seven lambs and a sin offering of twelve goats which was the whole burnt offering to the LORD. And they gave the mandates of the King to the chief satraps of the king and to the deputies of Trans Euphrates and they eased the burden of the people and of the house of God.

CHAPTER 9

LEADERS APPROACH EZRA ABOUT A GROWING MALAISE 1-2

When these things were going on to completion the princes **were urgent** [*vgn*] upon me saying “the people of Israel and the priests and Levites have not lived separate or different from the people of the lands according to their abominable practices that go with the Canaanites Hittites Perizzites Jebusites Ammonites Moabites Egyptians and Amorites. For they have received or seduced their daughters for them and their sons and they have intermingled in fellowship their holy seed with the peoples of the lands and the hand of the princes and **deputies** [*ngs* literally “those who shut the gates”] has been the lead in this treacherous or covert **perfidy**. [*l* [*m*]

THE GHOST OF THE PAST SIN IS BACK TO HAUNT ISRAEL 3-6

And as I heard of this affair I rent my cloak and my ankle length tunic and I will make bald a part of the hair of my head and my beard and I will sit desolate –an object of amazement. But everyone that was concerned about or revered the word of the God of Israel gathered to me over the sin of the exiles. *The implication is that Israel had originally been carried into exile for similar reasons-they had joined with the heathen nations in their practices. A multitude of god-fearing Jews resorted to Ezra who gave public notice of his deep disapproval of the practices begun by a number of leaders.* And I sat stunned until the evening sacrifice.

HOPE THROUGH SACRIFICE 5-7

At the evening sacrifice I rose up from my downcast humbling in my rent tunic and coat and I sank down prostrate on my knees and I spread my hands up to the LORD God and I said “O God I am ashamed and I feel hurt and shame [*Niphal of ml k*] to lift up my face to You O my God for our iniquities are increased greatly and our **consequential damage through guilt** [*mva*] is great in relation to heaven. From the days of our fathers we are in massive damaging guilt until this day and through our iniquities we along with our kings and priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, by the sword into captivity through spoil and into guilt written all over our faces as is the case today.

SPACE TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S REVIVAL LIFE 8-9

And now as from a little lull or respite there has been a mark or limit of grace [*hnj t*] from the LORD our God for the remnant of us who escape-and to give us a tent pin (*often used metaphorically of a prince on whom the whole state hangs*) in the place of His holiness that our God may cause our eyes to receive light and give us a little from His life or reviving in our bondage. For we were slaves but our God did not leave us in our bondage but stretched out afar his covenant love before the faces of the kings of Persia to give to us from the life or revival that is His to raise up the house of God cause its desolate places to be raised to endure and to give us a surrounding fortified protective wall or fence [*rdg*] in Judah and in Jerusalem.

EZRA PLEADS THAT EVEN AT THIS LATE HOUR ISRAEL REPENTS 10-12

Ezra is a fundamental believer in God’s “now” like Paul in 2Corinthians 6.2. With this little word his writing began “Now in the first year of Cyrus” The word is a variant of dj a “one only of its kind” and instances a uniqueness of opportunity.

Usages to note are 1.1, 9.8, 9.10, 9.12, 9.13, 10.2, 10.3 & 10.11. The increasing emphasis on the vital importance of what the people do with the window of grace that the LORD gave is expressed by the more frequent occurrence of “this one unique opportunity” in the last two chapters. It is what the Jews and we ourselves in our time do with the extension of time God gives us for repentance ministry and holy living that really matters.

And now what can we say O our God after this for we have forsaken Your commandments. *The contrast is with verse 9 where Ezra is encouraged that the LORD did not forsake His people-but their faithfulness by contrast was short-lived.* Which You commanded by the hand of Your servants the prophets saying “The land where you are going to take as a possession is an impure land by the filthy impurity and incest of idols [דִּנִּי] of the peoples of the lands with their abominations which have filled the land from one end to the other with their contamination. **Now** do not give your daughters to their sons and do not receive or seduce their daughters for your sons and do not seek at their oracle their peace or their prosperity at any future time that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and cause it to be held in possession for your children through future time-or till the age-or during the nations’ life. [מִלְּמָדָם]

THE LORD HAS ALLOWED TIME FOR CHANGE 13-15

And after all that happened to us by reason of our evil acts and through our **great guilt and damage** because **now** O our God You have made us miserable or restrained us less [יָדָה] than our iniquities and given us deliverance like this. Should I turn to break in pieces or violate Your commandments to have mutually contracted marriage with the people of these abominations? Would You not be angry with us till You had made an end of us-until no remnant of us escaped? O LORD God of Israel You are righteous for we are a remnant of escape as at this day. Behold we are before Your face in **our guilt and consequential damage** because we cannot stand to minister before Your face on account of this.

CHAPTER 10

EZRA HUMBLER HIMSELF WITH WEEPING 1-4

And *(on this one special opportune occasion)* as Ezra had prayed and as he had confessed weeping and having cast himself down before the front of the house of God there gathered to him a very large congregation of men women and young people from Israel for the people were weeping in mass lamentation. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel from the sons of Elam answered and said to Ezra “We have acted perversely against our God. We have brought back strange or foreign wives from the people of the land and **now** hope lives on (10.2) in respect to Israel over this. So **now** (10.3) let us cut a covenant with our God to dismiss all the wives and the offspring from them according to the counsel of my lord and those that care for the commandments of our God and it shall be done according to the Torah. *This proposition yielded to the wives the right of re-marriage and would have released the sons of Israel from their entrapment.* Arise for this affair is on your shoulders and we are with you-be strong and take action!

EZRA ARISES (I) –THE CALL FOR AN ASSEMBLY 5

The first action Ezra took was to call for obedience to the word of God and to cause the nation to commit seriously to do what God said.

Then Ezra arose and he caused the princes priests and Levites and all Israel to swear to do according to this direction and they swore on oath.

EZRA ARISES (II)-THE BAN INVOKED 6-8

The second action of Ezra was to consult the elders and call a gathering invoking the ancient law of the “ban” by which a man’s possessions were destroyed for disobedience and his part in Israel revoked as an apostate.

Then Ezra arose from before the house of God and went to the dwelling of Johanan son of Eliashib and when he arrived there he ate no bread and drank no water for he had been lamenting over those who had been carried into an exile [h/m] As expressed previously (9.4) Ezra saw the sin of a piece with that which brought about the exile to Babylon and essentially those who indulged it were cutting themselves off from their people] And they caused it to be proclaimed in Judah and Jerusalem to all the sons of the captivity to gather together at Jerusalem. And any that would not come within three days according to the counsel of the princes and elders all his possessions would be devoted by the law of destruction and he would be put away from the congregation of the exiles.

JUDAH & BENJAMIN GATHER IN THE RAIN 9

The time was in the month of Kislev (December) the month of the feast of Dedication which began in the days of Esther.

Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered to Jerusalem within three days. It was the **twentieth day of the ninth month**. And all the people sat in the space before the house of God causing themselves to shake and tremble over the affair and because of the downpour of rain.

EZRA ARISES (III)

THE PEOPLE CONFESS SIN 10-17

The third thing Ezra did was to bring Israel to face their sin and to enable confession so that the deep guilt and shame attendant might be resolved

Then Ezra the priest rose up and said “You have lost faith [l/m] and caused yourselves to turn to strange wives to increase your guilt by consequence. **Now** therefore give confession and praise[hdt] to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will or what He delights in and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the strange wives.” Thus the whole congregation answered and said with a great voice “Even so as you have spoken it must be done. On the other hand the people were of great number and it is the season of rains and we have not strength to stand in the open and the prescribed detail of the task is not a matter of a day or two days for we are multiplied in this matter touching transgression. Please let our rulers stand to minister for the whole congregation and all who have turned to strange wives in our cities come at agreed times in company with the elders and judges of the city until the burning anger of our God is turned away from us for this affair.” Definitely only Jonathan son of Ashahel and Johanan son of Tikvah administered this matter and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite assisted them. And the sons of the exile did it this way-Ezra the priest-head men of the fathers who (truly) belonged to the house of

their fathers and all of them named-separated themselves and sat down on the first day of the tenth month to consult and visit the affair. *They had taken 10 days to deliberate and get organised and four leaders had set out the way in which the adjudication would occur. Men in responsible leadership positions first exemplified their faithfulness by separating themselves to God. Such separation involved the matter of regulating their marriages. Their task was to hear the appellants from the cities.* Thus they endured and prevailed in the task concerning all who had turned away to strange wives until the first day of the first month. *The matter took three months and some testimony is given in the verb lky “to endure” to the very emotional and draining task that this was. The significance of completing the work on the first day of the first month is that on the 14th day of the same month of Abib they would be able to come as a holy people before God with their Passover sacrifice.*

GUILT AMONGST THE PRIESTS 18-22

And from among the sons of the priests it was found by the priests themselves that some had turned to strange wives. Of the sons of Yeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers Maaseiah Eliezer Jarib and Gedaliah. And they gave their hands to (confirm) they would put away their foreign wives and by **consequence of guilt** they gave a ram of the flock for **their guilt**. Also from the sons of Immer Hanani and Zebadiah. Also from the sons of Harim Maaseiah and Elijah and Shemaiah and Yehiel and Uziah. And from the sons of Pashur Eliyoenai Maaseiah Ishmael Nethaneel Yozabad and Elashah. ***Eighteen priests*** were implicated in marriages to wives whose allegiance was to foreign gods. *Their sin was imputed to the sacrificial ram of atonement and they confirmed their serious purpose of repentance by shaking the hands of those commissioned to deal with the offences as a sign of renewal of fellowship.*

GUILT AMONG THE LEVITES SINGERS & GATE-KEEPERS 23-24

Also from the Levites Yozabad and Shimei and Kelaiah “assembly of the LORD” (He is Kelita “gather together”) Pethahiah Yehudah and Eliezer. From those constantly singing [myrrvm] Eliashib. From the **gate-keepers** [r[v] Shallum Telem and Uri. *It has to be noted that only one of the men who were constantly engaged in the praise of God succumbed to the prevalent conduct and only three gate-keepers and Six Levites were implicated.*

THE GENERAL COUNT OF GUILTY PERSONS AMONG THE TRIBES 25-44

And from Israel of the sons of **Parosh** Ramiah and Yiziah and Malchiah and Mayyamin and Eleazar and Malchiah and Benaiah. *Seven*
 And from the sons of Elam Matthanah Zechariah Yehiel Abdi Yeremoth and Eliah. *Five*
 And from the sons of Zattu Elioeanai Eliashib Mattaniah Yeremoth Zabad and Aziza *Six*
 And from the sons of Bebai Yehohanan Hananiah Zabbai Athlai *four*
 And from the sons of Bani Meshullam Maluch Adaiah Yashub Sheal and Yeramoth *Six*
 And from the sons of Pehath-Moab Adna Chelal Benaiah Maaseiah Mattaniah Bezaleel Binnui and Menasseh *Eight*
 And from the sons of Harim Eliezer Ishiyah [salvation is of the LORD] Malchiah Shemaiah Shimeon [akin to Jeshimon- “desert waste”] Benjamin Malluch Shemariah *eight*

From the sons of Hashum Mattenai [*gift of the LORD*] Mattattah [*gift*] Zabad Elipelet [*My God of escape*] Jeremai Menasseh and Shimei *seven*

From the sons of Bani Maadai Amram and Uel [*strength of God*] Benaiah Bedeiah Cheluhi [*possibly “state before marriage”*] Vanyah [*oppression*] Meremoth Elyashib Mattaniah Mattenai and Jaasau and Bani Binnui Shimei and Shelemiah and Nathan and Adayah Machnedebai Shashai Sharai Azareel and Shelemياهو Shemariah Shallum Amariah Joseph *twenty-seven*

From the sons of Nebo Yeiel Mattithyah Zabad Zebina Yadau Benaiah and Joel *seven*
All these [*85 persons in all in addition to the earlier 22 making a grand total of 107- but scripture helpfully does not account of numbers which tend towards accentuating condemnation but of names which tend to show the joy of forgiveness. The LORD showed no further anger-the “good hand of God” was present and the community proceeded to prosper and grow*] had taken to them strange wives and there were present from these women who had set sons in the world.

It should be made clear for the reader that the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah are welded as a corpus and that the sequel in the book of Nehemiah is essential to putting the whole resettlement of exiles in perspective.

Derek Kidner observes in the Tyndale commentary that nine of the thirty-three families registered among the returning families were affected by the guilt of this affair-noting that a second Bani family and a Binnui family had emerged since settlement.

The final sentence tells the sad story of “brokenness”. Some of these relationships had gone on for a year or more and children had been born who had some Jewish blood and of whose future nothing further is spoken. Clearly the tears of Ezra were not the last of the sorrows and brokenness of these three months-but the wisdom that requested “time” for this series of affairs to be taken apart piece by piece has to be appreciated.

THE END OF EZRA’S ACCOUNT