



EZRA

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Ezra

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Chapter 1

Are we available to be used by G-d to fulfil His purposes? When we have a desire to obey G-d, and we want to hear and put into action His plan for our lives, He is going to reveal to us what those plans are. Ezra was a unique man. The name Ezra means 'helper'. Ezra went to Jerusalem to help those who were struggling to fulfil G-d's call in their lives individually but also G-d's call within the wider community (the establishment of G-d's Kingdom).

Note: G-d had done a lot in Jerusalem before Ezra came on the scene. Even now G-d is at work and is preparing and changing things, beforehand, so that they are already prepared for us when we walk into them (Ephesians 2:10).

Verse 1: *"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the L-RD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be completed, the L-RD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,"*

Cyrus: Also called 'The Anointed one' (Isaiah 45:1-7, 13). G-d's anointing only comes upon those who are submitted to the principles and will of G-d. Cyrus was not Jewish. He was a Gentile king. However, Cyrus was committed to doing what G-d had revealed to him, and so G-d used him greatly. **The word of the L-RD by the mouth of Jeremiah:** The majority of the Jewish people, at this time, were not in Jerusalem. There was no temple in Jerusalem and so people were not worshipping in Jerusalem. The people had been rebellious and idolatrous. They had not wanted to do the will of the L-rd, and so G-d had sent His people into exile. Exile is a word of destruction and hardship. Jeremiah had prophesied that the exile that they had gone into would last for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10). Biblically the number 70 is a significant number – 7 tens. Ten is the number related to completion. 7 is a number that has to do with holiness, sanctification and the fulfilment of the purposes of G-d. Israel went into exile for a purpose. G-d wanted to completely prepare them for what He wanted them to do. G-d's purpose was to bring Israel back to Himself. In the book of Ezra, this 70 years of exile was coming to an end. G-d was beginning to take His people back to the land of Israel – back to His purposes. According to prophetic revelation, G-d was moving exactly on time. We need to understand prophecy so that we can understand and be sensitive to what G-d is doing in the world and in Israel today. We need to be people who discern the times that we are living in (1 Chronicles 12:32, Daniel 9:2) so that we are able to pray prophetically (Daniel 9:3-19) and so that we are prepared for what G-d is going to do.

L-RD: The sacred name for G-d is used here - הָנָה!. This name of G-d speaks of the G-d who transcends all things.

The L-RD stirred up: This 'stirring up' has spiritual connotations. Although Cyrus was a Gentile, he was interested in what G-d was up to and he was listening for spiritual revelation. Cyrus desired to be used by G-d.

He made a proclamation: Cyrus was not shy and quiet about what G-d had told him to do. He boldly proclaimed it. He was a man who was excited about hearing G-d's voice.

Throughout all his kingdom: Cyrus, using his kingdom's resources, hired individuals to go throughout his vast kingdom (Esther 1:1 – 127 provinces) and proclaim to the people (in word and in writing) what the L-rd had spoken to him.

Verse 2: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: 'All the kingdoms of the earth the L-RD G-d of heaven has given me. And He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.'"

The L-RD G-d of heaven: This is a radical statement. Cyrus, a Gentile, Persian, king, calls G-d the G-d of the heavens and Cyrus identifies G-d by His unique name – the transcendent name of G-d.

He has charged me to build: Cyrus heard the revelation from G-d, and he was aware of what G-d had called him to do.

House: A temple.

Jerusalem: In this book of Ezra there is an emphasis on Jerusalem. The book of Ezra appears to be prophetic in nature and has implications for the end times. In Ezra's day many of the exiles returned to the land of Israel. This return was in preparation for Messiah's first coming. In these last days the people are again returning to the land of Israel, after a 2000-year exile. This is in preparation for Messiah's second coming.

Verse 3: "Who is among you of all His people? And his G-d will be with His people to go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the L-RD G-d of Israel (He is G-d), which is in Jerusalem."

You: Cyrus was referring to the Jewish people – the sons of Jacob.

His G-d will be with His people: If we obey G-d and submit to Him, going to the places that He has called us to go, we can be assured that G-d will be with us.

Go up: Cyrus is speaking to the people on behalf of G-d. He is reminding them that they had a call to go back to the land.

Build the house of the L-RD G-d of Israel: Israel, in that day, was not just a nation. It was known as an empire. What is interesting to note here is that a Persian king, who ruled over his own Persian empire, was concerned about a different empire - Israel. Cyrus was concerned for this nation that he did not rule over. He wanted it to be reestablished according to the purposes and plans of G-d. This was highly controversial in Cyrus' day, and the establishment of the nation of Israel is still highly controversial in many circles today. G-d supernaturally created Israel (through the barren womb of Sarah), and He created her for a supernatural purpose – to be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3). Many people in this world do not see Israel as a blessing, but they hate her. The world is deceived and does not understand G-d's provision, that could be a blessing to them, if they just accepted it (John 15:18-19).

He is G-d: This was a very bold proclamation for Cyrus to make. The Persian empire was full of idolatry. Cyrus's proclamation cut through this idolatry as he proclaimed that the L-rd G-d, the G-d of Israel (not the gods of Persia), was the only G-d. Cyrus was not looking for the approval of man. He was only seeking to be obedient to G-d. This is the reason why the anointing of G-d was upon him.

Verse 4: "And whoever is left in any place where he has sojourned, let the men of his place lift up with silver and gold, with possessions and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of G-d which is in Jerusalem."

Whoever is left in any place where he has sojourned: Cyrus is now talking to those Jewish individuals who wanted to remain in the land of their exile, those who did not want to go back to the land of Israel.

Lift up: The word used here is a word associated with encouragement. Although they had decided not to go back to the land of Israel, Cyrus was asking them to encourage those who had decided to go back – not only to encourage them verbally, but also financially.

Freewill offerings: Donations

Verse 5: *"Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, all those whom the G-d had stirred up, arose to go up and build the house of the L-RD which is in Jerusalem."*

The heads of the fathers: The leaders of each family in the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Judah and Benjamin: The tribes of Judah and Benjamin had separated themselves from the rest of the tribes. These two tribes had become known as 'Judah' – the other 9 tribes (+ some from the tribe of Levi) being called "Israel" or "Ephraim". The 9.5 tribes (which were also called the northern kingdom of Israel) had been carted off to Assyria long before the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin fell to the Babylonians. Judah and Benjamin were the two primary tribes who had been carted off in the Babylonian exile (an exile which had lasted for 70 years).

The priests and the Levites: There were some Levites who had been serving in the southern kingdom of Judah (the rest of the Levites had been serving in the northern kingdom and had already been exiled to Assyria).

The G-d: The definite article ('the') is present in the Hebrew text. The people were responding because they recognised that there was only ONE G-d. The G-d of Israel is the same G-d that the Christians worship.

Arose to go up and build: There was a response from the people.

Verse 6: *"And all those who were around them strengthened them with articles of silver and gold, with possessions and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered."*

Verse 7: *"King Cyrus also brought out the vessels of the house of the L-RD, which Nebuchadnezzar had bought out from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods;"*

Note: Before the Jewish people went into exile, G-d departed from Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 31:17-19, Hosea 9:12, Ezekiel 10:18). The L-rd has yet to return to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 43:1-12).

The articles of the house of the L-RD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem: Not only did the people go into exile, but the temple vessels also went into exile. The Presence of G-d left Jerusalem, but His articles went into Babylon prior to His people arriving in Babylon. This is a picture that reminds us that even though the people were being judged and punished G-d did not leave them or forsake them. He was there with them in the midst of their exile. Cyrus, in sending these articles of the L-rd back to Jerusalem, reminds us that G-d is restoring things. When G-d redeems He restores.

Put in the temple of his gods: The precious and holy vessels of G-d had been carried away from Jerusalem and had been placed into a pagan shrine.

Verse 8: *"and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath, the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah."*

Them: The vessels

Verse 9: *"This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives,"*

Verse 10: *"thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles."*

Verse 11: *"All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem."*

Took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem: At the right time, according to prophetic truth, G-d moved to bring about a restoration – not only of His people but also of His vessels.

Chapter 2

A very precise record was kept of the numbers (and some names) of those who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

Verse 1: *"Now these are the sons of the nation who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city."*

Returned: There is a play on words here. The word used for ‘return’ is the same word that can be used for ‘repentance’. Because the people returned, because they repented, they experienced restoration. Restoration is a byproduct of repentance.

Jerusalem: The word ‘Jerusalem’ is made up of two Hebrew words – the word for ‘possessing’ or ‘inheriting’ and the word for ‘peace’ (Peace is what we experience when the will of G-d is fulfilled). If we are not interested in G-d’s plans and purposes for our lives (His will) we will never experience peace.

Judah: This is a name that means to “throw praise”, to pour out lavish praise on the L-rd.

Verse 2: *"Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:*

Verse 3: *"The people of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two;"*

Verse 4: *"The people of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two;"*

Verse 5: *"The people of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five;"*

Verse 6: *The people of Pahath-Moab, of the people of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve;"*

Verse 7: *"The people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;"*

Verse 8: *"The people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five;"*

Verse 9: *"The people of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty;"*

Verse 10: *"The people of Bani, six hundred and forty-two;"*

Verse 11: *"The people of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three;"*

Verse 12: *"The people of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two;"*

Verse 13: *"The people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six;"*

Verse 14: *"The people of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six;"*

Verse 15: *"The people of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four;"*

Verse 16: "The people of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight;"

Verse 17: "The people of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three;"

Verse 18: "The people of Jorah, one hundred and twelve;"

Verse 19: "The people of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three;"

Verse 20: "The people of Gibbar, ninety-five;"

Verse 21: "The people of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three;"

Verse 22: "The men of Netophah, fifty-six;"

Verse 23: "The men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;"

Verse 24: "The people of Azmaveth, forty-two;"

Verse 25: "The people of Kirjath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three;"

Verse 26: "The people of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one;"

Verse 27: "The men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two;"

Verse 28: "The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three;"

Verse 29: "The people of Nebo, fifty-two;"

Verse 30: "The people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six;"

Verse 31: "The people of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;"

Verse 32: "The people of Harim, three hundred and twenty;"

Verse 33: "The people of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five;"

Verse 34: "The people of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five;"

Verse 35: "The people of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty."

Verse 36: "The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three;"

Verse 37: "The sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two;"

Verse 38: "The sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven;"

Verse 39: "The sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen."

Verse 40: "The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four."

Verse 41: "The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight."

Verse 42: "The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine in all."

Verse 43: "The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,"

Verse 44: "The sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,"

Verse 45: "The sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,"

Verse 46: "The sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmai, the sons of Hanan,"

Verse 47: "The sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah,"

Verse 48: "The sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam,"

Verse 49: "The sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai,"

Verse 50: "The sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim,"

Verse 51: "The sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,"

Verse 52: "The sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,"

Verse 53: "The sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah,"

Verse 54: "The sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha."

Verse 55: "The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda,"

Verse 56: "The sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,"

Verse 57: "The sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Ami."

Verse 58: "All the Nethinim and the children of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two."

Verse 59: "And these were the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel."

Verse 60: "The sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two;"

Verse 61: "And of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz, and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name."

Verse 62: "These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled."

Verse 63: "And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim."

Verse 64: "The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,"

Verse 65: "Besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers."

Verse 66: "Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five,"

Verse 67: "Their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty."

Verse 68: "Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the L-rd which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of G-d, to erect it in its place:"

Verse 69: "According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments."

Verse 70: "So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities."

Chapter 3

Verse 1: *"And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem."*

The seventh month: This is the month of Tishrei. The High Holy Days happen in the month of Tishrei. These feasts are known as the Feast of Trumpets, Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the Feast of Tabernacles. In a unique way, this month is set aside to worship G-d. It is a month that begins with repentance and ends with rejoicing.

The people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem: It was through worship that G-d revealed to them that they had come to Jerusalem to not only serve G-d but also to hear what He had for them (revelation). These festivals were a source of revelation to the people. Paul tells us in Colossians 2:16-17 that the festivals are a shadow of the things which are to come. The substance of what these festivals point to is revealed in Messiah. Understanding the festivals helps us to understand the work and character of Messiah. The festivals reveal Biblical truth – i.e. they are instruments of revelation which also help us to understand the Kingdom better.

People gathered: 'People' is written in the singular. In Hebrew, a singular noun usually takes on a singular verb. However, this is not the case in this sentence. 'Gathered' is written in the plural. Grammatically this shows a dichotomy. The people were not unified – things were out of order – but because of their obedience to G-d they dropped what they were doing and all went up as ONE to Jerusalem.

As one man: They experienced absolute unity (this is a similar concept to a husband and a wife being two but becoming one flesh) – a holy union.

Verse 2: *"Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers, arose and built the altar of the G-d of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of G-d."*

Jeshua: Yeshua. This name means 'salvation'. Jeshua was a priest.

Jozadak: This is a name which means 'The L-rd is righteous'. Once we have been saved (received salvation) it should lead to righteousness in our lives – not only a declared righteousness, but also a behavioural righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Zerubbabel: Zerubbabel was a leader in Israel. In the book of Zechariah, Zerubbabel is seen as a typology for Messiah (Zechariah 4:6-10).

Built the altar of the G-d of Israel: These men came back to Judah from exile. They gathered in Jerusalem for the festivals. There they built an altar for the G-d of Israel so that they could offer burnt offerings up on it.

The Law of Moses the man of G-d: How G-d thinks of us (or what He thinks in regard to us) is important. What was unique about Moses was that he was considered a servant of G-d, a man of G-d. It is said of Moses that he was the most humble man on the face of the earth at that time (Numbers 12:3). If we are people who want to serve G-d, we need to be humble people (James 4:6).

Verse 3: *"They set the altar on its bases, though fear had come upon them because of the people of those lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the L-RD, both the morning and evening burnt offerings."*

Note: We need to take note of how carefully the Scripture is put together. Not only are the words which are used important, but also the way these words are strung together in a specific order.

Set the altar on its bases...fear had come upon them: When the children of Israel began to worship G-d, and to fall under the conviction of sin, their enemies did not like it. The children began to fear their enemies. But this fear led to them responding in the correct way – getting right with G-d.

Fear had come upon them: In Hebrew there are two primary words for fear – a good fear (i.e. the fear of the L-rd – giving the L-rd priority) and an evil fear (being afraid – usually of an enemy. This second kind of fear does not produce that which is good, but it causes people to flee, to move away from where they were or where they needed to be).

They offered burnt offerings on it to the L-RD: Although these people were afraid, they handled their fear properly.

L-RD: The sacred name of G-d is used here. This is a name that speaks of the only G-d who is all powerful and who is transcendent. The concept here is this: the people are offering up sin offerings because of their sinfulness. G-d transcends all of our sin. There is nothing too problematic for G-d to handle. G-d is able to handle all things.

Morning and evening: The use of these words inform us that the people made daily sacrifices to the L-rd on this altar that they had prepared. We should be worshipping G-d on a daily basis – not just once a week on the Sabbath or Sunday. In fact, Scripturally, worship was even more than once a day – at least three times a day were set aside for worship (Daniel 6:10).

Verse 4: *"They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day."*

Feast of Tabernacles: Also called Sukkot or Feast of Booths. The Feast of Tabernacles lasts for seven days and on the eighth day a solemn assembly is observed. Special, specific, offerings are offered up on each of the days of the Feast of Tabernacles (see Numbers 29). The main message conveyed through the Feast of Tabernacles is that we are entirely dependent upon G-d.

Verse 5: *"Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the L-RD that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the L-RD."*

Everyone who willingly offered: This is referring to those who had a generous spirit. These people did not give out of compulsion, but out of a desire to give to the L-rd.

Verse 6: *"From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the L-RD, although the foundation of the temple of the L-RD had not been laid."*

Verse 7: *"They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia."*

Verse 8: *"Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of G-d at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to supervise the work of the house of the L-RD."*

Second month of the second year: The number 2 is being emphasised here. Scripturally the number 2 speaks about two different (generally opposing) opinions. We are going to see that this is the case here. The opinion of the children of Judah to rebuild the temple receives opposition from those who did not think the temple should be rebuilt. Whenever we get serious about G-d coming into our lives, and ruling over situations, there is going to be opposition.

Began work and appointed: Things are being put back into the order of G-d.

Twenty years old and above: Exodus 30:14, Numbers 1:20, Numbers 14:29, Numbers 32:11.

Verse 9: "Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Kadmiel with his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of G-d: the sons of Henadad with their sons and their brethren the Levites."

Verse 10: "When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the L-RD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the L-RD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel."

Laid the foundation of the temple of the L-RD: The people desired that G-d would once again dwell intimately with them.

The priests stood in their apparel: They were dressed appropriately.

Trumpets: The trumpets spoken of here were NOT the shofars or ram's horns. These were the silver trumpets (Numbers 10:1-10).

Asaph: 1 Chronicles 25:1-7. Asaph was a prominent musician in the reigns of King David and King Solomon. He wrote 12 psalms (Psalm 50, and Psalms 73-83).

Trumpets...with cymbals: These would have made a loud and a joyful noise.

Ordinance of David: King David wrote many Psalms. Many of his Psalms were set to music and used in worship to G-d. G-dly change begins in our lives when we begin to truly worship G-d. The rabbis teach that worship hastens the coming of the son of David – Messiah.

Verse 11: "And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the L-RD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the L-RD, because the foundation of the house of the L-RD was laid."

Mercy: Literally: Grace. The purpose of grace is not only for salvation, but it is also given to us to teach us how to live in a G-dly way once we are saved - living in a way that displays Kingdom character (Titus 2:11-14).

Shouted with a great shout: The blowing of the shofar (the ram's horn) is said to shout with a great shout. The shofar reminds us of the L-rd's provision (Genesis 22:13-14).

The foundation of the house of the L-RD was laid: Usually we are not excited about 'small' things (the laying of a foundation etc), but are only excited about the big things – the completion of the temple etc. This should not be the case with the people of G-d. We need to be excited at the small and big things that G-d is doing in our lives and in the lives of others (Zechariah 4:10). When David took the ark of the L-rd into Jerusalem, he stopped every six steps to praise and worship the L-rd (2 Samuel 6:13). We should rejoice and celebrate every step in our spiritual journey – not only celebrate when we reach the end. The joy (rejoicing and thanksgiving) is in the journey, from start to finish.

Verse 12: "But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,"

Heads of the fathers' houses: Leaders of the tribes.

Old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice: There is a debate among the rabbis as to why these men wept. Haggai 2:3 reveals to us that this second temple was not nearly as glorious as the previous temple. Some say this is why these men wept. Other rabbis say that these men wept because they remembered how they felt when the first temple was destroyed. They had lost hope and did not think the temple would ever be restored. Now they were witnessing the faithfulness of G-d, and it caused them to weep.

Verse 13: “so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.”

Loud shout: The people lifted up a loud shout in acknowledgment of what G-d was doing.

The sound was heard afar off: Those who were far away knew that G-d was working in the lives of His people.

Chapter 4

Verse 1: “Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the L-RD G-d of Israel,”

Enemies: The word in Hebrew used for ‘enemies’ here is not the usual word for enemies but is a unique word. In Hebrew, the word used here is a word that is used in relation to the antichrist.

Heard that the descendants ... were building the temple: When the exiles got right with G-d, and began to worship Him, their enemies heard about it.

Verse 2: “they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers’ houses, and said to them, “Today we will build with you, for, as you, we desire the L-rd your G-d; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.”

They: This (antichrist) enemy.

The heads of the fathers’ houses: The leaders of the tribes.

We desire the L-rd your G-d: This was a lie. The enemy pretended that they wanted to be part of the children of Israel. They pretended to want to do the same things that the children of Israel were doing. 1 John 2:19 alludes to the fact that our enemy is often found to be within our midst – pretending to be like us. In the last days there is going to be a great apostasy – a turning away from that which is good to that which is evil (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Brought us up here: Being “brought...up” is a term that alludes to redemption. These people had their own story of what they considered their redemption from their exile. Esarhaddon was the one who they considered to be their saviour. They assumed that because they had what they considered a similar story to the Israelites (redemption from exile through a saviour) that they had common ground, a common G-d. This is similar to the thinking behind ecumenism today. Ecumenism is broadly defined as: “a movement that promotes worldwide unity among all religions through greater cooperation”.

Verse 3: “But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel said to them, “You may do nothing with us to build a house for our G-d; but we alone will build to the L-RD G-d of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.”

You may do nothing with us to build a house for our G-d: G-d gave the Jewish people the role of building the temple. In the church (and in our families) G-d has given each of us our own specific roles to play. We should not be taking over the roles of other people (because we think that they are doing a bad job etc) but we need to fulfil our own G-d-given roles.

Verse 4: “Then the people of the land wanted to weaken the hand of the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,”

The people of the land: The nations, the Gentiles, who lived in the land of Israel.

Weaken the hand: Those in the nations wanted to cause the Jewish people to let go (forget about or be careless) of what G-d had placed in their (the Jewish people's) hand. They did not want the Jewish people to accomplish the purposes of G-d.

Troubled: Discouraged. They brought fear upon those who were building the temple.

Verse 5: *"and hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."*

Frustrate: Make void.

Verse 6: *"In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against those who dwelt in Judah and Jerusalem."*

Verse 7: *"In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script and translated into the Aramaic language."*

Note: The children of Israel wanted to build a temple so that they were able to worship G-d. They desired to do the will of G-d so that His purposes were fulfilled and so that His blessing would be released. Nothing has changed. G-d still desires for Israel to be used as an instrument of blessing to the nations of the world (Genesis 12:3). However, in order for Israel (and for us as a New Covenant people) to be a blessing, she needs to be doing the will of the L-rd. G-d's Kingdom will not be established on earth until Israel gets right with G-d and accepts the Messiah (Yeshua) that He sent for them (Matthew 23:37-39).

Verse 8: *"Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion:"*

Wrote a letter against: When we commit ourselves to doing the will of G-d, we must prepare ourselves to suffer. Surrendering to G-d causes the enemy to put a target on our back, and our enemy will move to oppose us, to come against us.

Verse 9: *"From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—representatives of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites,"*

Verse 10: *"and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River—and so forth."*

Osnapper: Osnappar is the name given to Ashurbanipal, the last great king of Assyria. He populated Samaria with foreigners (non-Jews) after the fall of Israel in 722BC.

River: The Euphrates River

Note: Babylon was a very wealthy empire. Although the Jewish people had been exiled there, many of them did not live in poverty or in slavery but they lived in great blessing. That is why so many Jewish people chose not to return to the land of Israel. They were happy and comfortable in Babylon. Those in Babylon who chose to go back to Jerusalem were going back to ruined cities. They were turning their backs on wealth and were choosing to return to poverty and few resources. They chose sacrifice over comfort. They chose to obey G-d rather than to give in to the desires/flesh of man.

Verse 11: *"(This is a copy of the letter that they sent him.) To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth."*

The letter: This was a letter of accusation against those in Judah – those who were obeying G-d, and obeying King Cyrus.

They: The enemies of Judah and Benjamin (Israel).

River: The Euphrates River. From Artaxerxes perspective, these men writing to him were 'beyond the River' – i.e. these men were living in the area of Judah and Samaria. These men had first-hand information of what was going on in Jerusalem, and they did not like what they were witnessing.

Verse 12: *"Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations."*

Jews: The enemies of Israel understood exactly who they were going against. The term 'Jew' comes from the name 'Judah', and it is a name that is associated with praising and thanking G-d in a public way (i.e. those who acknowledge G-d).

Jerusalem: There has always been a battle for Jerusalem. There was a battle for Jerusalem in Ezra's day, there is a battle for Jerusalem today (Zechariah 12:3). Jerusalem is the city that bears G-d's name (2 Kings 21:7, 2 Chronicles 33:4). It is the place that G-d chose for people to go into in order to worship Him (Zechariah 14:16-17). The world is against this and rises to oppose this.

Evil: Isaiah 5:20

Building...finishing...repairing: The Jews were doing these things based on G-d's instructions and on the words and financing of Cyrus. The enemies of the Jews did not want Jerusalem restored.

Verse 13: *"Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished."*

Treasury will be diminished: They told the king that his treasury would be injured or damaged; from a financial standpoint what was happening was not going to be good for him. These enemies of Israel did not want the glory of G-d to be manifested, they did not want His blessings.

Verse 14: *"Now because we eat from the salt of the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonour; therefore we have sent and informed the king,"*

We eat from the salt of the palace: This is an idiom. It means that they received financial blessing from the king as he took care of his empire. They framed this letter to the king under the guise of not wanting to see him disgraced.

Verse 15: *"that search may be made in the book of the memorials of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, rebellious in the midst of now and in the past, for which cause this city was destroyed."*

Search may be made in the book of the memorials: They were reminding the king that the history of Jerusalem had not been favourable toward his empire. They did not want Jerusalem to be restored. They wanted it to be left in ruins.

Verse 16: “We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.”

No dominion: No portion or influence. They felt that they needed to warn the king that he was going to suffer loss.

Note: These people had an entirely wrong point of view. G-d created Israel to be a blessing. The restoration of Israel (and the subsequent worship of G-d in Jerusalem) would have turned out to be a blessing to the nations – but the nations resisted (and still resist) this. When Jerusalem is in ruins the nations suffer.

Verse 17: “The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace.”

Verse 18: “The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.”

Clearly read: The king completely understood what they were concerned about.

Verse 19: “And I gave the command that these things be checked, and it was found indeed that this city from the days of old has been rebellious against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it.”

I gave the command that these things be checked: This letter was not checked against the Word of G-d but was checked in the writings of others.

Verse 20: “There have also been strong kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them.”

Verse 21: “Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.”

Give the command to make these men cease: The king gave the command that all building and restoration in Jerusalem should stop.

Verse 22: “Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?”

The hurt of the kings: The king did not want his kingdom to suffer any damage or loss.

Verse 23: “Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes’ letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.”

Scribe: Writer.

Force of arms: They were backed by the military.

Verse 24: “Thus the work of the house of G-d which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”

Darius: Darius the Mede was one of Daniel’s good friends. He only ruled for two years – 538 – 536BC.

Darius King of Persia (as mentioned here, a different Darius) was a king who ruled in Persia from 522-486BC (About 14 years after Darius the Mede). Xerxes (Queen Esther's husbands) ruled after Darius the King of Persia. Xerxes ruled from +-486-465 BC.

Note: The Mordechai mentioned in Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:5-7 is probably not the same Mordechai who was the uncle of Esther. The first return to Jerusalem happened during the reign of Cyrus – about 538BC. By the 2nd year of King Darius of Persia reign, the first return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem would have happened 18 years previously.

Chapter 5

The work in Jerusalem ceased for a number of years due to King Artaxerxes command.

Verse 1: *"Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the G-d of Israel, who was over them."*

Prophets, prophesied: Prophetic revelation helps us to see things from G-d's perspective and brings about change in our lives. Revelation 1:3 reveals to us that when we read, hear and keep the words of prophecy it will bring blessing into our lives. G-d sent Haggai and Zechariah to the Jewish people, at this time, because they had ceased to be faithful to the Word of G-d and were, instead, intimidated by the command of Artaxerxes.

The name of the G-d of Israel: The sacred and transcendent name of the L-rd. This name speaks of the G-d who was, is and ever more will be. It is a name that speaks of the G-d who is without limit. *Who was over them:* Artaxerxes was under G-d. His command should never have trumped G-d's command (Acts 5:29).

Verse 2: *"So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of G-d which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of G-d were with them, helping them."*

Zerubbabel ... Jeshua ... rose up: These two men heard, once again, G-d's prophetic call. Faith comes by hearing. When they heard the word of prophecy, they rose up to fulfil the upward call of G-d for their lives (Philippians 3:14). When we respond to G-d's upward call, we experience a change in perspective. Prophecy, the Word of G-d, gives us a new perspective.

Began to build: We are called to obey our governments and authorities (Romans 13:1-7). However, if they tell us to do something which is contrary to the Word of G-d, G-d's command trumps the government's command.

The house of G-d which is in Jerusalem: The temple can be in no other city. Jerusalem is the only city where G-d wanted the temple to be built.

The prophets of G-d were with them, helping them: These prophets, although they had been entrusted with the Word of G-d, were not above physical labour.

Verse 3: *"At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Bozenai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: 'Who has given you authority to build this house and complete this wall?'"*

Their companions: Other officials in the region.

Verse 4: *"Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building."*

We told them the names: We do not need to be afraid of the enemy. These men of Israel did not try to conceal or hide the names of the people who were doing the job.

We do not need to camouflage or hide our faith. We have the truth and need to be bold about it – having a testimony before others that we obey G-d above man.

Verse 5: *"But the eye of their G-d was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter."*

The eye of their G-d was upon the elders: G-d watched over those who were doing His work and He protected them.

Verse 6: *"This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent: The governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who were in the region beyond the River, to Darius the king."*

Verse 7: *"They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus: To Darius the king: Great peace."*

Verse 8: *"Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judah, to the house of the great G-d, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands."*

Heavy: The word used here, in the Hebrew, is the word for 'rolling'. The stones were so large that they could not be carried into Jerusalem but had to be rolled in.

Note: These enemies are saying that not only are the Jews rebuilding but that they are doing it in a very big way.

Verse 9: *"Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: "Who gave you authority to build this house and to complete these walls?"*

Verse 10: *"We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who were chief among them."*

Chief: They wanted the names of the leaders.

Verse 11: *"And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "We are the servants of the G-d 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."*

Servants of the G-d of heaven: The Jews saw themselves as, first and foremost, servants of G-d. They took their orders from G-d above men.

Verse 12: *"But because our fathers angered the G-d of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the Chaldeans, who destroyed this house and carried the people away to Babylon."*

Verse 13: *"However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of G-d."*

Verse 14: *"Also, the gold and silver vessels of the house of G-d, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon—those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor."*

King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given: Not only did Cyrus give permission for the temple to be built in Jerusalem, but he also wanted to help financially toward the building of it.

Verse 15: *"And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of G-d be rebuilt on its former site.'"*

Rebuilt on its former site: G-d is a G-d who restores. And then G-d is faithful to complete what He has begun (Philippians 1:6).

Verse 16: *"Then the same Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of G-d which is in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished."*

Verse 17: *"Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of G-d at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his desire concerning this matter."*

Let a search be made...whether ... a decree was issued by King Cyrus: These enemies of Israel did not believe that a king of the Medes and Persians would ever issue a decree in regard to the rebuilding of the temple and walls in Jerusalem. These enemies did not know the history of G-d's people. When we do not know, or we forget, what G-d has done for His covenant people in the past we are not going to have the faith or the encouragement to move forward. When we remember what G-d has done in the past, it will prepare us for what He wants to do in the future.

Chapter 6

G-d is a G-d of order. He always moves in such a way as to lay a foundation for the future. According to a law of the Medes and Persians, once an edict was made it was irrevocable (Daniel 6:8, Esther 1:19). The edict that Cyrus had made, therefore, had significant implications for that generation of people who were tasked to build and repair the temple/Jerusalem.

Verse 1: *"Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon."*

Note: Darius wanted to find out if in fact the Jewish leadership were doing this out of obedience to what Cyrus had commanded them to do, or if they had taken this rebuilding upon themselves.

Verse 2: *"And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and written in the midst of it was a memorial."*

Achmetha: Achmetha was a Median/Persian city which housed an archive.

A scroll: One scroll, in amongst all the other legal documents, was found in this location.

A memorial: Some theologians and scholars say that this word is significant. In Biblical language a memorial is a word which reminds us of a covenant. Everything that is happening here is an outcome of G-d's faithfulness to His covenant.

Verse 3: *"In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of G-d at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits,"*

King Cyrus, King Cyrus: Cyrus's name is repeated, therefore emphasising his authority.

Rebuilt: Cyrus wanted this temple to be built exactly where it had once stood – its exact location.

The place where they offered sacrifices: Cyrus desired that offerings would again be given to the G-d of Israel.

Let the foundations of it be firmly laid: This sentence seems to be out of order to our way of thinking – foundations need to be laid first before a house can be built and sacrifices offered. However, here it is speaking of the sacrifices being offered (worship) so that the foundations can be laid well. Through worship, stability is brought about in our lives and the foundations for the future are laid. It is through worship that we are positioned in the place where G-d wants us to be – the location where G-d can continue to bring about the fulfilment of His purposes. Worship leads to the establishment of G-d's will.

Verse 4: *"with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new wood. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury."*

Three: Biblically, this is the number associated with revelation or the revealing of something. The purpose of this temple was for G-d to be revealed. Worship reveals G-d. We will never be effectual witnesses or have anointed testimonies until we are committed to worship.

Heavy: Rolling.

Verse 5: *"Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of G-d, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of G-d"—"*

Note: This is not new revelation (Ezra 5:14-15).

Be restored: Scripture emphasizes that G-d restores. Not only were the Jews restored back to the land of Israel but also the vessels from the temple were restored back to the land of Israel. It is not known where all of these vessels are today, but G-d is able to bring them back and have them restored to their rightful place, when the time is right.

Verse 6: *"Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who are beyond the River, remove yourselves far from there."*

Remove yourselves far from there: King Darius did not want these men to interfere or to get involved with the rebuilding that was going on in Jerusalem. He did not want them to hinder what was going on.

Verse 7: *"Leave the work of this house of G-d alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of G-d on its site."*

Verse 8: *"Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of G-d: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered."*

I issue a decree: King Darius makes this personal.

This is to be given immediately to these men: This plan to stop the building in Jerusalem backfired on Tattenai and his colleagues. Not only were they commanded to stay away from the rebuilding, but they were also commanded to pay for the build from their own resources! Supporting what G-d is doing, from the beginning, is going to cost us far less than it would if we moved against G-d. Moving against G-d costs us – emotionally, financially, physically, spiritually.

Verse 9: *"And whatever they need—young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the G-d of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem—let it be given them day by day without fail,"*

Note: Not only did they have to contribute financially, now they were also commanded to participate in physically supplying and sourcing what was needed for the sacrifices. These enemies were now forced to participate in the things of G-d.

Verse 10: *"that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the G-d of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons."*

Note: Darius understood that his administration, his family, his heritage was going to be blessed by what was going on in Jerusalem (Genesis 12:3). Darius wanted to participate, to be a recipient of the blessings of the L-rd attained through Israel. Offerings in Jerusalem were not going to cause the demise of Darius's empire – they were going to be a blessing to it.

Verse 11: *"Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this."*

Whoever: This is an inclusive term. Any person – man or woman.

Edict: A royal command. If this text was altered in any way, or not carried out to the fullest degree, then those who were found to be in disobedience would be killed – he would experience judgment. Those who alter or ignore G-d's words, His commands, will also face judgment.

Let him be hanged on it: This was not the Biblical (Jewish) way of exercising the death penalty. Stoning was the Biblical death penalty. Hanging was associated with shame. This person would be subjected to public humiliation.

Let his house be made a refuse heap: Refusal to obey the king's command would not only affect the person in disobedience but it would also affect his family.

A refuse heap: There is almost a play on words here. Darius had just been speaking of the offerings to G-d being a sweet aroma. Here it speaks of those who disobeyed becoming like a garbage heap - a stench in the nostrils. We are either going to be people who are offering a sweet aroma to G-d (by our good deeds which produce fruit – 2 Corinthians 2:14-16), or we are going to be a stench in His nostrils (Isaiah 65:5).

Verse 12: *"And may the G-d who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of G-d which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently."*

The G-d: The use of the definite article ('the') makes G-d very specific. This is not speaking about any G-d. This is speaking of the only G-d – the One True G-d.

The G-d who causes His name to dwell there: G-d was, is and forever will be, committed to Jerusalem because He had, in a unique way, caused His name (reputation and character) to dwell there. The reputation of Jerusalem is that it is known as a place for worship. When we worship G-d in the way that He has commanded us to worship Him (worshipping Him according to Scriptural revelation/truth – John 4:21-24), we will be people who are pleasing to G-d. Redemption positions us to worship G-d. Redemption saves us, but worship changes us. Not only does worship lead to us having a reputation of being pleasing to G-d, but worship also changes us into people who display/manifest the character of G-d.

Verse 13: *"Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent."*

Verse 14: *"So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the G-d of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia."*

Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes: Cyrus and Darius had been for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, Artaxerxes had issued a command against the rebuilding. However, G-d's will triumphed in the end. In the last days there will be rulers for and against the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. However, G-d will move rulers to ultimately ensure that His will is performed.

Verse 15: *"Now the house was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius."*

Third: The number 3 is a number that reminds us of something been revealed – revelation.

The month of Adar: This is the last/12th month of the Jewish year (February or March in the Gregorian calendar). This is a name which means “majestic”. It is a word that speaks of glory – that which is very precious to G-d. This temple was completed so that it could manifest the glory/majesty of G-d.

Sixth: Biblically, the number 6 is the number that reminds us of grace.

Verse 16: “*Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the children of the exile, celebrated the dedication of this house of G-d with joy.*”

The rest of the children of the exile: It was not those who had remained in Judah and Jerusalem who took leadership and rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem. Those who had come out of exile were the ones who took this task upon themselves. In the last days, those who are going to complete the work of the temple that Messiah is going to rule from are those who have returned from exile (Zechariah 6:15).

Dedication: This is the Hebrew word for Hanukkah. Hanukkah is a prophetic holiday. The Jews only began to celebrate Hanukkah 200 years BC. This dedication (Hanukkah) happened 500 years BC.

Celebrated ... with joy: Worship leads to gladness.

Verse 17: “*And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of G-d, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.*”

Twelve male goats: There is a connection between goats and atonement. 12 goats were offered up to make atonement – one goat per tribe of Israel.

Verse 18: “*They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of G-d in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.*”

Assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions: G-dly order was restored in the leadership of those who led worship.

Service: Worship

Verse 19: “*And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.*”

Kept the Passover: What brought about this change? The temple had been dedicated (Ezra 6:17), the priests and Levites had purified themselves (Ezra 6:18) and the timing was right for Passover – the 14th day of the first month (Leviticus 23:5-8). Most festivals were not kept in Israel – even in the time of King David (Nehemiah 8:17). A Passover had been observed by King Josiah after the book of the Law had been found (2 Kings 23:21-23), but the Feast of Tabernacles (a festival of joy and gladness) had not been celebrated since the days of Joshua – when the Israelites first entered the land of Canaan.

Verse 20: “*For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the exile, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.*”

All of them were ritually clean: They were in unity (This was not always the case -2 Chronicles 29:34). They had come out of the nations and had separated themselves from impurity (idolatry) so that they could worship G-d. They worshipped G-d within the context of redemption.

Passover: Passover was Preparation Day – Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54. It ushered in the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Passover is foundational. Any rabbi would tell us that Passover is the most significant feast for the Jewish people. This would be the same for us as believers. Passover relates to the work of Messiah (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Verse 21: “Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the L-RD G-d of Israel.”

Separated themselves from the filth of the nations: Purified themselves from idolatry.
In order to seek the L-RD G-d: They wanted to hear from G-d and receive revelation from Him.

Verse 22: “And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the L-RD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of G-d, the G-d of Israel.”

Turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them: This does not seem to make sense. The Assyrian empire had long been subdued (the empires in opposition to Israel, in order, being: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medes and Persians – which were in power at the time of Ezra – Greeks and Romans). This is not a mistake that the king of Assyria is being spoken of here (the Bible is the inerrant Word of G-d – 2 Timothy 3:16). When something in the Bible does not seem to make sense, we need to realise that it is there to give us revelation. The Assyrian Empire was much larger than the empire of the Medes and the Persians. Because Darius had blessed Israel, the empire of the Medes and the Persians expanded. Like the Assyrian empire before them, the Persian empire, under Darius, was blessed with more land, more wealth, more authority.

Chapter 7

G-d's timing is always perfect. Up to this point in the book of Ezra we still have not “seen” Ezra, but G-d has perfectly “set the stage” for Ezra to appear on it.

Verse 1: “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,”

After these things: After G-d has set things in order. This is a term that lets us know that things have been prepared. G-d has gone before and has laid the foundation for what is to follow.

Artaxerxes: This was a name OR a title given to great kings. It was a title given to several kings in Persia. This is possibly referring to Artaxerxes I, who reigned after Xerxes (Queen Esther’s husband).

Note: The names of the Persian kings in the order that they reigned in: Cyrus, Cambyses II, Darius I, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Darius II, Artaxerxes II – also known as Mnemon). It is unclear who the Artaxerxes in Ezra 4 is referring to.

Verse 2: “the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,”

Verse 3: “the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,”

Verse 4: “the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,”

Verse 5: “the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest—”

Verse 6: *"this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the L-RD G-d of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the L-RD his G-d upon him."*

Skilled: Ezra could, in a quick way, cause someone to understand the Word of G-d. He could interpret and explain the Word in such a way that people would be able to quickly grasp what Ezra was able to reveal to them.

A skilled scribe: The job of a scribe was not just to copy the Word of G-d, but to also know, and adhere to, all the laws that governed how the scrolls were to be copied so that accuracy etc could be maintained. Ezra was an expert in interpreting the Scripture.

The king granted him all his request: Ezra found favour in the eyes of the king.

The hand of the L-RD his G-d upon him: Ezra was anointed by G-d. The more we know G-d's Word the more anointing G-d will pour upon our lives.

Verse 7: *"Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes."*

Seventh: The number '7' is a number that speaks of purpose. These people were fulfilling the purposes of G-d.

Verse 8: *"And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king."*

The fifth month: The fifth month, the month of Av, is seen as a tragic month in Jewish history. It was in the fifth month (on the 9th Av), that both the first and second temples were destroyed. It was in this month of weeping, mourning and remembering what had happened that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem.

In the seventh year: Ezra went to Jerusalem to fulfil the purposes of G-d.

Verse 9: *"On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his G-d upon him."*

The first day of the first month: Ezra began his journey in the month of Passover – the month of Nisan. The month of Nisan reminds us of redemption.

Verse 10: *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the L-RD, and to do it, and to teach law and judgments in Israel."*

Prepared his heart to ... teach: It is very difficult to teach if you are not interested in teaching. Ezra set his heart to do and to teach in Israel.

Law and judgments: Ezra wanted to reveal what the law of G-d was, and he wanted to execute justice - he wanted those who were faithful to be blessed, and those who were faithless to be judged. Ezra wanted to see the kingdom of Israel set into G-d's order. He wanted the just to be rewarded and the unjust to receive their punishment.

Note: There had been a lot of progression in Jerusalem. The city had been rebuilt, and the temple had been re-established. Worship of G-d and sacrifices had commenced at the temple. The people had matured to a point. Now G-d supplied the people with Ezra – an expert in the Scripture, who would be able to help the people to grow and mature in faith.

Verse 11: "This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the L-RD, and of His statutes to Israel:"

Verse 12: "Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the G-d of heaven: Great peace, and so forth."

Note: This letter was written in Aramaic in the original – not Hebrew.

Great peace: This is a term of encouragement. 'Great peace' means that Ezra was going to do great things in order to fulfil G-d's will. Peace is always related to the will of G-d.

Verse 13: "I issue a command that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you."

Volunteer: Those who were willing.

May go with you: Not everyone left Babylon and the exile all at once. Groups of people left Babylon sporadically in order to go to Israel. People returned in waves.

Verse 14: "For by the king and his seven counsellors you have been sent to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your G-d which is in your hand;"

Inquire: To check out. Ezra worked in the administration of the king and the king trusted him. He wanted Ezra to go to Jerusalem to make sure that everything was being done properly.

The Law of your G-d which is in your hand: Ezra did not go back to Jerusalem empty-handed. He took the law of the L-rd with him, in his hand.

Note: The people who left from the first exile (i.e. from out of Egypt) were taken to Mount Sinai and were given the laws of the L-rd (Exodus 19-20). They were given these laws while they were in a transitional space – between exile and the Promised Land. These laws were given to them to prepare them for their entrance into the Promised Land. These laws taught them how they were to steward the land, etc. Commandments (laws) have a purpose. They bring us into intimacy with G-d. The laws do not save us. But having been redeemed, the laws teach us how we ought to/ought not to live.

Verse 15: "and carry the silver and gold which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the G-d of Israel, whose tabernacle is in Jerusalem;"

Freely offered: Donated.

G-d of Israel, whose tabernacle is in Jerusalem: Although we can worship G-d anywhere, Jerusalem, in a unique way, still has spiritual significance.

Verse 16: "and all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their G-d in Jerusalem—"

The king, his councillors and many of the people in the provinces of Persia donated money to be used in the temple of G-d in Jerusalem.

Verse 17: "now therefore, with haste buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your G-d in Jerusalem."

Verse 18: “And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your G-d.”

Whatever seems good to you: There were no restrictions placed on some of the silver donated – except that it was to be used according to the will of G-d.

Do it according to the will of your G-d: This pagan king, possibly through the influence of Ezra, underwent a transformation. G-d is able to accomplish multiple purposes. He took the people out of Judah and put them in Babylon not only to punish them but so that they could also be of influence, that they could have an impact on the ones that they were living with.

Verse 19: “Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your G-d, deliver in full before the G-d of Jerusalem.”

The articles ... deliver in full: A restoration of the exiled vessels also taking place.

Verse 20: “And whatever more may be needed for the house of your G-d, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king’s treasury.”

The king was not only expecting other people to donate. He was willing to put his money where his mouth was and also donate/pay for goods needed in the temple.

Verse 21: “And I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the G-d of heaven, may require of you, let it be done quickly.”

Ezra was going to Jerusalem with money, utensils, groups of people as well as a letter from King Artaxerxes. The king instructed Ezra to go to his treasury houses beyond the Euphrates River and show them the letter from the king and funds would be given to Ezra (Exodus 12:35-36, Isaiah 60:10-12). The L-rd’s pattern is that the nations will provide the resources for those who are going to lead worship and for those who are going to do the work of the L-rd.

Verse 22: “up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit.”

Up to: Most of the giving had some limitations attached to it.

Salt without prescribed limit: No limitations were placed on the salt. They could take as much salt as they needed.

Verse 23: “Whatever is commanded by the G-d of heaven, let it be done accordingly and precisely for the house of the G-d of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?”

Accordingly and precisely: Whatever the law of G-d says needs to be done precisely. Some of the Rabbinical commentaries say this means that there should be no moving to the right or to the left. The instructions for the house of the G-d of heaven had to be carried out exactly.

Why should there be wrath: The king did not want G-d to be angry with him or with his household. G-d is holy and hates sin. This was true in the past; it is still true today and it will continue to be true into the future. G-d, in His wrath, deals with sin. However, G-d is also merciful. The clearest example of the wrath and the mercy of G-d, working hand in hand, is the cross. Because of our sins, we should have been the objects of G-d’s wrath. However, He chose to extend mercy to us and the punishment/wrath that should have been ours was placed on His sinless Son.

G-d's wrath was satisfied at the cross, but at the same time His mercy was extended toward us. If we reject this mercy that G-d extended to ALL of mankind at the cross, then we are going to experience the wrath of G-d. If we accept His mercy, we will not be subjected to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Verse 24: *"Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants, or servants of this house of G-d."*

We inform you: Part of what Ezra had to do was to inform everyone that no tax was to be levied against those who worked in the house of G-d.

Not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom: The king did not want to receive anything from the servants of G-d because he did not want to run the risk of taking something that belonged to G-d for himself.

Verse 25: *"And you, Ezra, according to your G-d-given wisdom which is in your hand, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your G-d; and teach those who do not know them."*

G-d-given wisdom which is in your hand: This is referring to the Word of G-d that Ezra had – the laws and commandments of G-d. When we apply the Word of G-d to our lives, when we obediently follow G-d's commandments, we gain supernatural wisdom (words of knowledge, words of instruction, discernment, the ability to make the right decisions in our lives, etc).

Magistrates: The magistrates were able to discern between right and wrong.

Judges: The judges had a different purpose to the magistrates. They were able to discern and mete out the correct punishment in order to deal with the crime committed. They knew how to appropriately discipline people.

All the people: Jews and Gentiles. G-d entrusted His Word to the Jewish people. However, it was not for them themselves. They were called to share and teach this Word to the Gentiles; they were called to be a blessing to the Gentiles (Genesis 12:3). The Word of G-d is not only for the Jewish people, but also for all of humanity.

Verse 26: *"Whoever will not observe the law of your G-d and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment."*

Observe the law of your G-d and the law of the king: This king was wise. He wanted to agree with G-d. He wanted his kingdom and administration to be based upon the Word of Scripture.

Banishment: Being excommunicated or taken away from the land.

Confiscation of goods: Financial punishment.

Verse 27: *"Blessed be the L-RD G-d of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to make glorious the house of the L-RD which is in Jerusalem,"*

In this verse there is a change: it is written in Hebrew and not in Aramaic. This is no longer a part of King Artaxerxes letter.

Fathers: Referring to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When the 'fathers' are mentioned, we should think of two things: faith and promise. The patriarchs were faithful to the promises of G-d. They heard what G-d said, and they responded, in faithfulness, to G-d's Word. G-d is always faithful to keep His promises.

Who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart: G-d can change the heart of the king. He can change our hearts too.

Verse 28: “and upon me He has cast grace before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. So I was strengthened, as the hand of the L-RD my G-d was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.”

Grace: Grace is not just the forgiveness of sin (i.e. mercy). Grace has a second purpose – to bring about a fulfilment of G-d's will (Titus 2:11-14). Ezra was a recipient of G-d's grace. With grace comes responsibility.

The king and his counsellors, and ...all the king’s mighty princes: Ezra witnessed G-d moving in the hearts of these men. Ezra had counselled them, instructed them and discipled them and now he was seeing the fruit of his labour.

I was strengthened: As we pour out our lives into the lives of other people (influencing them to obey the Word of G-d, building up their faith, etc) G-d is going to strengthen us.

I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me: Ezra knew the Word of G-d. He was a recipient of strength, power and knowledge from G-d. G-d had positioned him in a great place of leadership. He had abundant, unlimited, resources linked to this letter that the king had given to him. But Ezra knew that he could not make the journeys he had to make and begin to lead in Israel without a team of people around him. Ezra was not a lone ranger who thought he could accomplish everything on his own. Ezra worked as a team player. He wanted strong people to be around him, to help him, to encourage him, to keep him faithful to the call of G-d, etc.

Chapter 8

Verse 1: *"These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: "*

The heads of their fathers' houses: The leaders of the tribes. Ezra emphasises these leaders that G-d had assembled together with him to make this journey from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Verse 2: *"of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush;"*

Verse 3: *"of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were one hundred and fifty males;"*

Verse 4: *"of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males;"*

Verse 5: *"of the sons of Shechaniah, Ben-Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males;"*

Verse 6: *"of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males;"*

Verse 7: *"of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiyah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males;"*

Verse 8: *"of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males;"*

Verse 9: *"of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males;"*

Verse 10: *"of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josiphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males;"*

Verse 11: *"of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males;"*

Verse 12: *"of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males;"*

Verse 13: *"of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these—Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah—and with them sixty males;"*

Verse 14: *"also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males."*

Verse 15: *"Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there".*

The river: When believing people were in exile or in pagan cities they would go out of the city and down to the rivers to pray and to worship G-d. G-d gave His people revelation when they were praying at the rivers (Daniel 8:2, Ezekiel 1:1, Acts 16:13). People went to the rivers to pray in order to make themselves available to hear G-d. Ezra brought the people to this river so that they might hear from G-d.

Ahava: Although this sounds the same as the Hebrew word for 'love' it is not the same. This is not a Hebrew word. It is the name of a river outside of Israel.

Three: A number associated with revelation. To be successful in the journey that they were about to undertake, and to do what G-d had called them to do, Ezra realized that they were dependent upon G-d's revelation. Ezra knew the Bible well. However, we should never substitute knowledge for revelation. We might really know the Word of G-d well, but if we are not a recipient of the revelation of G-d then all our knowledge will not be as fruitful as it could be.

I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there: None of the Levitical priests and Levites had responded to the call to go back to Jerusalem. This was disastrous. These were the spiritual leaders of Israel, and they were missing.

Verse 16: *"Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding."*

Verse 17: *"And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia—that they should bring us servants for the house of our G-d."*

Nethinim: Temple servants

Verse 18: *"Then, by the good hand of our G-d upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men;"*

Verse 19: *"and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men;"*

Verse 20: *"also of the temple servants, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty temple servants. All of them were designated by name."*

Verse 21: *"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our G-d, to seek from Him the straight way for us and our little ones and all our possessions."*

I proclaimed a fast: From a human perspective this was not a wise thing for Ezra to have done. As they were waiting and praying and fasting at this river, they were giving their enemies the opportunity to locate them and to plan an ambush for them. This is a spiritual principle: when we determine to serve the L-rd, we can expect opposition. The enemy had their eyes upon Ezra and this group. Ezra and these men did not have weapons or a means to defend themselves. They had a call on their lives, and they were transporting a HUGE number of valuable possessions and funds.

We might afflict ourselves: This is a term of repentance. It is a term of confession of sins.

Verse 22: *"For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our G-d is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him."*

Ashamed: Embarrassed.

Escort of soldiers and horsemen: An army

The enemy on the road: This enemy wanted to rob and plunder Ezra's group of travellers.

The hand of our G-d is upon all those for good who seek Him: Ezra had taught the king that the L-rd was able to protect those who were committed to fulfilling His purposes. Ezra now had to trust in G-d and put into practice what he had preached.

Verse 23: “So we fasted and entreated our G-d for this, and He answered our prayer.”

He answered our prayer: G-d moved on their behalf. G-d responded to their prayers. Ezra received assurance from G-d that G-d would be his defence.

Verse 24: “And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers with them—”

I separated twelve: Ezra made a distinction between the leaders of the priests (those who had made a last-minute decision to go to Jerusalem with Ezra).

Verse 25: “and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our G-d which the king and his counsellors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered.”

Weighed out to them: Ezra divided up and distributed all the valuable possessions, going to Jerusalem, between these 12 priests – leaders of G-d’s people, servants of G-d.

Verse 26: “I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold.”

Six hundred and fifty talents of silver: This is a very large sum of money. They had no security, at all, while they were traveling, and they had an enemy that was plotting against them.

Verse 27: “twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold.”

Verse 28: “And I said to them, “You are holy to the L-rd; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the L-rd G-d of your fathers.”

Verse 29: “Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the L-rd.”

Verse 30: “So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our G-d.”

Verse 31: “Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our G-d was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.”

On the twelfth day of the first month: They left this river two days before the start of Passover – the festival of redemption (which started on the 14th day of the first month). When the children of Israel went up from Egypt (out of exile) they also had no weapons but had to rely on the L-rd for their protection. They had also travelled with vast wealth after plundering the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36). In the same way, Ezra’s group of travellers had no provision for defence other than G-d. Their journey lasted for 5 months.

The hand of our G-d was upon us: They travelled under G-d’s authority and they were protected. *Delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road:* G-d frustrated the plans of the enemies.

Verse 32: "So we came to Jerusalem and stayed there three days."

They did not immediately enter into the city with all the treasures and all of the "solutions". They sat and waited for the revelation of G-d before they did anything. They realized that they were dependent upon G-d to reveal to them what He would have them to do (see also Exodus 19:10-11, Nehemiah 2:11-12).

Verse 33: "Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our G-d by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui,"

Verse 34: "with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time."

Verse 35: "The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the G-d of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the L-rd."

Twelve bulls for all Israel: Only 2.5 tribes had come up from exile in Babylon, however, they did not forget that they were part of the whole of Israel – 12 tribes. G-d made Israel to be 12 tribes and so here they are acknowledging the call of G-d on their lives corporately.

Ninety-six: $12 \times 8 = 96$. Twelve relates to the tribes. Eight is the number of redemption, the Kingdom, new beginnings (1 Peter 3:20, Leviticus 12:3 - circumcision is a sign of redemption. The power of redemption is that it brings about, through faith, the death of the flesh). Part of the calling of the children of Israel was to demonstrate the death of the flesh.

Seventy-seven: Seven is the number of perfection. It is a number related to holiness and to the purposes of G-d.

Goats: The goats here are given the same name as the goats which were used specifically for Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement.

Verse 36: "And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of G-d."

They delivered the king's orders: It was a difficult journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. There were great obstacles and crises of faith on the way. Ezra, however, faithfully did what G-d had commanded him to do, and Ezra found success. When we are faithful, we are going to be successful. We, too, have our journeys to make as we pass through this life (1 Chronicles 29:15, Hebrews 11:13-16). We want to be people who go from where we are to the place where G-d wants us to be. We too will face great obstacles and crises of faith. In order to be successful, on this journey that G-d has us on, we need to be faithful to do what G-d has called us to do.

Chapter 9

At this point in the book of Ezra, many of the people are back in Jerusalem after their 70-year exile in Babylon. They are ready to worship G-d. They have a new identity as 'the people of G-d who have come out of exile'. They have their temple, and they have their altar. They have G-dly leadership.

Verse 1: *"When these things were done, the leaders approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites."*

When these things were done: After all the sacrifices made in Ezra 8:35. Ezra was having the time of his life. He was back in Jerusalem. He was recognised as a spiritual leader amongst his people. He was seeing all that he had taught theoretically being practically outworked. And then he gets the worst news of his life...

The leaders: Those who understood truth.

Separated themselves ... with respect to the abominations: This is NOT an indictment against Gentiles. It is a denouncement of idolatry. These nations were not committed to the G-d of Israel. Their idolatry was a stumbling block to the people of Israel. There were idol worshippers among the people of Israel.

Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites: Eight people groups are mentioned here. G-d wanted a new beginning, a holy and righteous beginning. Instead of surrendering to the new beginning that G-d wanted, the people had not separated themselves from the nations surrounding them and they were still being influenced by the lies and deceit of the nations. Idolatry had led them into the Babylonian exile and caused the temple to be destroyed. Idolatry was still leading them and influencing them.

Verse 2: *"For they have taken some of their daughters for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."*

The holy seed is mixed: That which is holy cannot be mixed with that which is unholy (1 Samuel 5). This is a Biblical principle throughout the Scripture. This is not against people who are not Jewish. This is against those who are idol worshippers.

The hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost: The people who should have known better were the biggest violators of this transgression.

Verse 3: *"So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard and sat down astonished."*

I tore my garment: Ezra was committed to the things of G-d. When he heard that there were idol worshipers who were married to some of the children of Israel, he was shocked and grieved. The garment spoken of here is the inner garment – the one closest to his heart. This is the garment that is emphasised.

My robe: His coat or outer garment. Usually only one garment is torn. Ezra, in distress and anguish regarding this sin, tore both his garments.

Plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard: Some things are easier to do than others. Plucking out hair is not nearly as painful as plucking out one's beard. The tradition in Judaism states that once Ezra finished plucking out the hair on his head, he began to pluck out the hair of his beard. This was a completely different kind of pain.

Astonished: Utterly shocked. The word used here is similar to the word used for 'desolation' (i.e. the abomination of desolation – Daniel 12:11).

Verse 4: *"Then unto me everyone who trembled at the words of the G-d of Israel assembled unto me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice."*

Unto me everyone who trembled: The people saw Ezra's grief. The outward manifestation of Ezra's grief allowed them to glimpse what was going on inwardly in Ezra.

Note: It is possible that the sacrifice in Ezra 8:35 was done at sunrise – the morning offering. Ezra then heard this news and so sat all day, in grief – publicly grieving, disfigured and bleeding - until it was time for the evening sacrifice.

Verse 5: *"At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the L-rd my G-d."*

At the evening sacrifice I arose: It was required that this sacrifice would be offered up.

My fasting: Ezra had not eaten the whole day.

My garment and my robe: His inner and outer garment.

Verse 6: *"And I said: "O my G-d, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my G-d; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached up to the heavens."*

Humiliated: Greatly embarrassed

Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads: The people were not taking marriage seriously. They were marrying people who appealed to the desires of their flesh. They were not marrying people who were pleasing to G-d. When we choose a spouse who is pleasing to G-d then that person will be a great blessing in our lives, and that covenant of marriage will be a great source of joy. However, if we make our decision regarding who we marry based upon what we think is best for ourselves we will be making a very foolish decision. When we are careless and casual about our covenant relationships, for selfish reasons marrying who we want to marry, we are going to find faithlessness present in our relationships.

Verse 7: *"Since the days of our fathers we have been very guilty to this day, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day."*

Humiliation: Shame

Verse 8: *"And now for a brief moment favour has been shown from the L-rd our G-d, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a tent peg in His holy place, that our G-d may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of deliverance in our bondage."*

Verse 9: *"For we were slaves. Yet our G-d did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended grace to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our G-d, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem."*

Grace: Grace brings about a G-dly change.

To revive us: To give assistance and life to us.

A wall: (literally: a fence) A security. A defence. Ezra knew that the wall was like a fence around the city – G-d was the true Wall and Protector of this city.

Verse 10: “And now, O our G-d, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,”

Now, O our G-d, what shall we say after this: Ezra is speechless.

We have forsaken Your commandments: The people were not interested in the Word of the L-rd. They were not committed to truth. They wanted to do whatever their flesh desired – and in this case it was to marry a pagan spouse of their own desire.

Verse 11: “which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity.’”

Your servants the prophets: This is a term used frequently in the Old and New Testaments (e.g. see Revelation 11:18). The prophets are the servants of G-d. The prophets give us a vision (a right perspective) of the Kingdom, and, in this way, they prepare us for the Kingdom of G-d. When we have the right perspective of the Kingdom of G-d, we are going to repent and live lives that are pleasing to G-d (bearing fruit worthy of repentance). We will never bear fruit that is worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8) until we know prophetic truth. We need to have a vision and a passion for the Kingdom that is coming. When we live with eternity in mind, we are going to live very differently to the world.

An unclean land: From a physical standpoint, this was a good land – a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8). The prophets saw this land through spiritual, and not physical, eyes. Through their spiritual eyes they saw this land as unclean or impure.

Abominations: Idolatry

Note: Ezra is overwhelmed with the lack of commitment and the lack of understanding of the leaders (particularly) in Israel.

Verse 12: “Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.”

Note: Ezra is quoting from Scripture

Do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons:

Deuteronomy 7:3.

Never seek their peace or prosperity: Deuteronomy 23:6

You may be strong: It is disastrous for people who do not heed the commandments of the L-rd. ALL of G-d's law is still relevant for us today. It still has a purpose for us – it strengthens us (spiritually). It teaches us how to live in a way that is pleasing to G-d. It teaches us what we need to avoid – those things which are displeasing to G-d.

Eat the good of the land: Isaiah 1:19

Leave it as an inheritance to your children forever: Proverbs 13:22

Sons: Whenever the Scripture speaks about the next generation it is anticipating a future Kingdom fulfilment. Deuteronomy 6:7 tells us that we need to diligently teach our children the Word of the L-rd. If we are Kingdom minded, we are going to invest our lives in the next generation.

Forever: This is a Kingdom word, an eternal word.

Verse 13: “And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our G-d have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this.”

Punished us less than our iniquities deserve and have given us such deliverance as this: This is the nature of G-d. He has provided us with a way of escape from our sinful ways.

Verse 14: *“should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?”*

Verse 15: *“O L-RD G-d of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!”*

Chapter 10

Verse 1: “Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and falling down before the house of G-d, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.”

Praying...confessing, weeping, and falling down: Ezra, although he was a great man of G-d, did not presume to have the answers to this dilemma.

Falling down: Prostrating himself – bowing with his face to the ground.

A very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him: They acknowledged Ezra’s leadership. Ezra did not manipulate these people or coerce them into being against these ungodly marriages.

Verse 2: “And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, “We have trespassed against our G-d, and have taken foreign wives from the peoples of the land; yet now is there a (mikvah) for Israel in spite of this.”

Hope: The word used here in Hebrew is not the word for hope. It is a word that speaks of a baptism, a place of immersion (mikvah). Baptism signifies new life. It signifies death, burial and resurrection. These people are asking if there is a way that they can experience new life. New life has its roots in hope. Hope is always based on the Word/promises of G-d. From a Biblical perspective there is nothing unsure about hope (Romans 5:5).

Foreign wives: These women rejected G-d and so had no covenantal relationship with Him.

Verse 3: “Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our G-d to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our G-d; and let it be done according to the law.”

Note 1: This is a very controversial verse. We need to realise that today we are in a very different situation to the situation that these people were in. They only had a typology of redemption (Old Covenant), whereas today we have access to true redemption – through the blood of the perfect Lamb – Messiah Yeshua (New Covenant). The people in Ezra’s day only had access to a physical redemption – moving out of Egypt/Babylon/etc into Israel. We have access to a spiritual redemption through Yeshua. This redemption causes us to become a new creation (IN Messiah). As new creations in Messiah, with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and anointing us, G-d expects a great deal more from us who are New Covenant people (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, etc). In this passage of Scripture, G-d leads the people to put away their pagan spouses (both men and women) and to send away the children conceived with these wives (another example of this kind of thinking can be seen with Abraham and Hagar – Genesis 21:9-21). This “putting away” was an Old Testament reality, but it is NOT a New Testament truth. As believers we should never wilfully marry people who are unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Some of us married our spouses when we were unbelievers, and then we became saved, after the fact, but our spouse did not. G-d continues to recognise this marriage covenant despite the unbelief of one party in this covenant. As the New Covenant believing spouse in this relationship, we are able to overcome (with the aid of the Holy Spirit) this obstacle of the unbelief of our spouse – 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. However, if the unbelieving spouse wishes to depart from the marriage, we should let them depart in peace. We should not encourage them to depart, or initiate their departure, but if they do decide to leave then we need to continue to honour them and to pray for them. As believers we do not have the freedom to divorce our unbelieving spouse. Even if our spouse does not believe, we need to remain faithful to G-d and to our responsibilities in our marriage. Every covenant has a purpose.

The purpose of marriage is to recognise and manifest the glory of G-d. Except in the case of violence, and extreme situations in a marriage, we should not be looking for ways out of our marriages.

Note 2: Ezra was used by G-d in order to bring purity to the people. In this last chapter of Ezra, we, as believers, can glean this principle: there are certain things that can be removed from our marriages. We need to recognise those things in our marriages which are not pleasing to G-d. Once we recognise them, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the strength and courage to remove those things, so that our marriage can become a testimony of being pleasing to G-d. For those who are unmarried: pray (and start to prepare yourselves – spend time in the Word, find out what pleases the L-rd, etc) for a believing spouse.

Note 3: G-d has called us to be a glorious people – not a people who are full of shame. If we trust Him, walk with Him and apply this Biblical truth to our lives we are going to be transformed, and our marriages will also be transformed.

Verse 4: *"Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it."*

Arise: This is a call to take action. The people were calling Ezra to assume a position of authority and responsibility. They desired to be faithful to G-d and wanted Ezra to help their community to be restored to faithfulness.

This matter is your responsibility: G-d always presents us with a choice – life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19). He does not do the choosing for us. We are personally responsible to make our choices, and then we are also personally responsible for the consequences (good or bad) associated with the choices that we made. Leaders are responsible to teach and guide the people, that they are leading, to make good choices. Leaders are tasked with watching out for the souls of those whom they are leading (Hebrews 13:17). Here, the people were recognising Ezra's leadership over them. They were willing to submit to whatever steps Ezra deemed necessary for them to take in order to remedy this displeasing situation in Israel. The people were looking to Ezra's leadership to set things straight.

We also are with you: A leader is encouraged and strengthened in his task (especially unpleasant tasks) when he knows that others are backing him. Leaders have responsibilities but they are not called to work alone. The community of believers is called to stand together, providing strength and encouragement to one another.

Be of good courage: This reminds us of the words in Joshua 1:16-18. Good leaders require strength and courage in order to tackle the difficult tasks that lie ahead of them. It makes a leaders task a lot easier when people are submitted to their **G-dly** leadership (Hebrews 13:7).

Verse 5: *"Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath."*

Then Ezra arose: Ezra was willing to assume leadership within his community. He was ready to address this issue of intermarriage (and subsequent idolatry) within Israel, and he was ready to help the people to restore their covenantal relationship with G-d.

The leaders of the priests, the Levites: The priests and Levites were custodians of the Law and worship. Their involvement in taking this oath was crucial for the spiritual renewal of the nation.

They swore an oath: The community were united in their desire for repentance and reform. Taking an oath signifies a return to covenant faithfulness and a collective resolve to uphold G-d's standards.

Verse 6: *"Then Ezra rose up from before the house of G-d and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity."*

Rose up from: Withdrew from

Went into the chamber: Ezra was no longer in the public eye, but he set time aside for personal communion with G-d – to hear what G-d had to say about this matter, without the influence of other voices around him (Matthew 6:5-8)

Jehohanan: This is a name which means “G-d has been gracious”.

Eliashib: Eliashib means: “G-d restores”.

Ate no bread and drank no water: This is considered a very strict form of fasting and was not a common type of fast. Moses fasted twice in this way (Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:18-19) and the Ninevites also fasted in this way when Jonah confronted them with their sins (Jonah 3:7). Usually it was considered enough just to abstain from eating (1 Samuel 1:7, 1 Samuel 20:34, 2 Samuel 3:35). Daniel’s fast, in Daniel 10:3, was a fast which excluded wine, meat and pleasant food.

Verse 7: *“And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the exiles that they must gather at Jerusalem,”*

Proclamation: A formal and authoritative announcement.

Exiles: Those who had been in captivity in Babylon.

Gather at Jerusalem: This call to assemble in Jerusalem served both a practical as well as a spiritual purpose. Jerusalem was the centre of worship (it was where the temple was – a symbol of G-d’s Presence among His people). The people were required to periodically gather in Jerusalem for religious purposes (the festivals), but this assembly was called for a national purpose. Ezra called for the people to gather in Jerusalem to show their commitment to G-d’s laws and to seek His forgiveness and guidance as a unified community.

Verse 8: *“and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.”*

Whoever would not come: The word used here is a word that implies a deliberate choice not to attend.

Three days: Three is the number of revelation. Failure to appear in Jerusalem after 3 days would reveal to the leaders that those who failed to obey this command were not invested in that which was good for Israel. It would also indicate that they were not in agreement with the steps that were going to be taken to eliminate idolatry (immorality) in Israel.

His property would be confiscated: He would not receive an inheritance in Israel.

He himself would be separated from the assembly: He would not be accepted as a member of the community in Israel (Matthew 18:15-17, see also 1 Corinthians 5:9-13). This separation acted as a punishment/consequence due to a lack of compliance on the part of the offender, but it was also a way to preserve holiness and unity within a community.

Verse 9: *“So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of G-d, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain.”*

Judah and Benjamin: Southern Israel. Judah and Benjamin (and some from the tribe of Levi) were the tribes taken into the Babylonian captivity (Northern Israel, i.e. the rest of the tribes, had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. The Northern tribes did not return to Israel at this time).

The ninth month: Chislev (Zechariah 7:1). Chislev is late autumn, and it is rainy and cold in Israel at this time. Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, begins on the 25th day of Chislev.

Trembling because of this matter: Inwardly the people had a deep sense of conviction and a fear of the L-rd. This trembling was an outward manifestation of their spiritual and emotional distress.

Trembling because of ... heavy rain: They were trembling because, in the natural, they were cold.

Heavy rain: Rain is seen as the provision/blessing of the L-rd, but it is also sometimes used to depict the judgment of G-d (Noah and the Great Flood). In this verse, ‘heavy rain’ reminds us that G-d is at work to judge His people, but He is also at work to provide for them – to give them a solution to the problem that they were facing.

Verse 10: “*Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have transgressed and have taken foreign wives, adding to the guilt of Israel.”*

You have transgressed: The people had violated their covenantal relationship with G-d.

Foreign wives: Historically, intermarrying with the people in the nations (taking ‘foreign wives’) led to foreign gods and foreign practices being introduced into Israel. This was a direct violation of the command to remain separate and holy to G-d (Deuteronomy 7:3-11).

Adding to the guilt: This phrase suggests an accumulation of sin. In this context, this guilt is seen as not only personal guilt but also as communal/national guilt.

Verse 11: “*Now therefore, make confession to the L-rd G-d of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.*”

Now: A word that indicates urgency.

Make confession: After acknowledging that we have sinned, we need to confess our sin and repent of it. The act of confession is a crucial step in the process of repentance and reconciliation with G-d.

Fathers: The patriarchs remind us of faith. They did what they did out of faith. Often they had to do difficult things (difficult in that they were things which were contrary to their fleshly desires), but they hoped in the promises of G-d and threw themselves on His omniscient mercy and grace.

Do His will: G-d’s will for our lives is that we align our actions to His commandments. Sin is anything which is against His commandments. We need to remove from our lives whatever is causing us to sin, and we need to walk according to the commandments of G-d.

Separate: A call to live holy lives, lives which are set apart. The call to separate from these wives was a difficult but necessary step to preserve the spiritual integrity of the community.

Verse 12: “*Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, “Yes! As you have said, so we must do.”*

All the assembly answered: They were in agreement, in unity, about what needed to be done.

As you have said, so we must do: This phrase highlights how important obedience to G-d’s law is. The people were willing to make a difficult decision in order to restore holiness and purity among G-d’s people.

Verse 13: “*But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter.”*

Nor is this the work of one or two days: This issue was not going to be a “quick fix” for Israel. It was going to take time to sort it out.

Verse 14: “*Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our G-d is turned away from us in this matter.”*

Let the leaders of our entire assembly stand: The (nationally recognised) leaders had positions of authority within their communities, and they needed to act on behalf of these communities.

Appointed times: Appointed times, in the Hebrew, often refer to sacred times or festivals. This implies a divinely ordained schedule. It also implies an order in the carrying out of repentance and justice.

The elders and judges: Referring to local governance.

Fierce wrath of our G-d: This phrase conveys the seriousness and urgency of their repentance.

Verse 15: *"Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support."*

The opposition of these two men may indicate a concern for the social and familial upheaval that this proposed solution would have caused.

Opposed this: Although the majority of the congregation were in unity over this decision, there were a couple of dissenting voices.

Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support: The Levites' involvement underscores the complexity of the situation. They were tasked with upholding the law but also with guiding the people spiritually.

Verse 16: *"Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, set apart certain heads of the fathers' households, according to their father's house, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter."*

The priest: Ezra was not only seen as a national (physical) leader in Israel. He was also considered to be a spiritual leader. Priests were mediators between G-d and man.

Set apart certain heads of the fathers' households: These men were chosen because they held positions of influence and respect within their families and tribes.

By name: Biblically a name is associated with a reputation/character. These men had a good character and reputation within their communities.

The first day of the tenth month: This happened ten days after the initial gathering together of the community together. The tenth month is the month of Tevet.

Verse 17: *"By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives."*

Note: There are exactly 3 months between the 1st day of the 10th month and the 1st day of the 1st month. Biblically, 3 is the number that relates to revelation.

The first month: The month of Nisan – i.e. the month of Passover (the festival of redemption).

All the men: The investigation that was undertaken was thorough. No one was exempt from scrutiny.

Verse 18: *"And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah."*

The sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives: The priests, who served in the temple, were expected to uphold the highest standards of the law in both purity and conduct. By marrying pagan women, these priests had violated the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

Were found: What had been hidden was now in the open/made known.

The sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak: This was one of the “elite” (prominent) priestly families. Spiritual heritage does not guarantee personal holiness or obedience.

Verse 19: "And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering."

They gave their promise: A binding oath or pledge.

Being guilty: They recognised that they had sinned, and they knew that they needed to atone for their sin, as there was a breach in their relationship with G-d.

Presented a ram: See Leviticus 5:17-19. A ram symbolises G-d's provision. In this case it reflects G-d's provision to forgive.

Verse 20: "Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah;"

Verse 21: "of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah;"

Verse 22: "of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah."

Verse 23: "Also of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer."

Verse 24: "Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri."

Verse 25: "And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah;"

Verse 26: "of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Eliah;"

Verse 27: "of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza;"

Verse 28: "of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai;"

Verse 29: "of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Ramoth;"

Verse 30: "of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh;"

Verse 31: "of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,"

Verse 32: "Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah;"

Verse 33: "of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei;"

Verse 34: "of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel,"

Verse 35: "Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh,"

Verse 36: "Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,"

Verse 37: "Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai,"

Verse 38: "Bani, Binnui, Shimei,"

Verse 39: "Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah,"

Verse 40: "Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,"

Verse 41: "Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah,"

Verse 42: "Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph;"

Verse 43: "of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah."

Verse 44: "All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children."